

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

***(for the reading of the Gospel, whenever the word “father” was written, I used American Sign Language instead of speaking the word.)***

Do any of you know the children’s book “The Runaway Bunny”? It’s a simple story of a little bunny who wants to run away. A little bunny tells his mother that he is going to run away, becoming variously a fish, a rock on the mountain, a crocus in a hidden garden, a bird, a sailboat, a circus acrobat, and finally a little boy, until he resigns himself to stay where he is and remain her little bunny.

Many years ago I read that book for my mother’s day homily. I wanted to say that God was like that mother bunny who would find us wherever we were hiding. Like Psalm 139. From my mother’s womb you have known me. If I flee from your presence, there you are, before me, behind me, around me, with me, enveloping me in a mother’s love.

I was so happy with myself. I thought, “Who wouldn’t be moved by this tender story of a mother’s love”? Well, sometimes you just can’t win. A parishioner, mother of 5 children, was so upset with me for reading the Runaway Bunny. She told me that her mother had never treated her with care, compassion, understanding. And for me to compare God to her mother? Well, she wanted no part of a God like her mother!

Sometimes you just want to run away. Or just be silent. Say nothing. Because what you say is bound to offend someone. Honestly today I just want to run away from our scriptures. It’s Mother’s day and the Gospel speaks of the “Father” 12 times. Even if we know that Jesus’ Abba is not a male, not a patriarch, not defined my gender, still we hear over and over again “God is Father”.

It’s Mother’s day and when I think of my mother, I think of someone who gave her “all” to love and serve. She was a true “deacon”. She was the one who “set a table” for us every night. She was the one who ministered to my father and the 5 boys. She even waited on tables in Stouffer’s in Garden City so we could have a little extra with the tips she brought home. My mother’s life was “Diakonia”, like Martha, the first deacon we hear about in the scriptures. (thanks to Elizabeth Johnson)

And still women and mothers whose lives are about service cannot have the ministry they do every day be “ordained” in our church. At least on this mother’s day, at the suggestion of one of the women in the parish, we added the first part of the second chapter of the first letter of Peter that refers to “spiritual milk” that we as babes must be nurtured with.

Sometimes you just want to run away. But sometimes you hold on for “dear life” and pray for insight, guidance. And the Holy Spirit helps you. As I struggled with all of the “father” references in the Gospel, I asked if there were another way in which the scripture could be proclaimed that would open us up to the mystery of relationship rather than close us down with words that are positive for some and negative for others. Someone suggested the Aramaic word Abba. But the more I thought about it, the more I realized that what was needed was silence.

A number of parishioners are reading Richard Rohr’s *The Divine Dance: The trinity and your transformation*. (I wish you all were reading it since it really challenges the ways in which we think about and talk about the mystery of God). Rohr speaks of God the Father, or as he says God “for us” and the Unnamed, unspeakable, unfathomable one who is made manifest in Jesus through the Spirit.

He speaks of the two traditions of speaking “about” God, the kataphatic, the way of light, with ideas and concepts and words and the apophatic, when we are reduced to silence, no words, no concepts. So today I searched for a sign language. A silent sign that might free us from words and concepts. I found that the sign for father in ASL is this “open hand touching the forehead and for mother, “this” open hand touching the lips. Interesting isn’t it? Father on the forehead, suggesting mind, Mother on the lips? A gentle kiss, caress. A mother’s tenderness?

So on this Mother’s Day, the fifth Sunday of Easter, let’s just be in awe and wonder of the miracle of life, and the women who have brought each of us to life and the God who is beyond all names.

Sign (Mother/ Father)