

In Praise of Mother-Figures

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Acknowledgement of Land, Seas, Skies and Waterways

I write from the Mother Country of the Gimuy Wallubara and Yidinji peoples, where the land, seas, skies and waterways have been witness to new life and offered nourishment to the First Nations mothers, fathers and babes for millennia. I recognise the wisdom of the ancestors, whose stories, traditions, and memories birthed the identity of their people. Together we can grow our minds and hearts to embrace reconciliation, truth-telling, and healing.



Damien Walker's 'Ko Hāta Maria, te Matua Wahine o te Atua' (Holy Mary, Mother of God) Commemorative Art Piece (2021), connecting New Zealand culture and faith to express Catholic Identity.

Context of Prayer

Glimpses of newborns tightly swaddled and held protectively by proud parents makes the invisible God visible to me. New life begs marvel at the mysteries of the Creator who brings forth human life, such captivating and mesmerising little beings filled with the love of God (Pollefeyt 2020). Nourishing and nurturing young ones into community requires much love and commitment from caregivers, so I turn to a song of David that speaks of peace and comfort in God's motherly embrace.

Scripture

Of one thing I am certain: my soul has become calm, quiet, and contented in You.

Like a weaned child resting upon his mother, I am quiet.

My soul is like this weaned child.

[Psalm 131:2](#)

Reflection

Mothering may be regarded as 'holy work' (McFarlan Miller 2022) - the closest human experience of God's limitless love for another life and a pure enactment of the Jesus' New Commandment of Love (John 13:34). Of course, immense love comes at a cost, not least which is the acute dichotomy of emotions that can be experienced: nervousness before delight, uncertainty before realisation, frustration before pride, heartache before freedom, humility before advocacy...

The role of 'mother' though, need not be confined to realm of biological mothers only; this would diminish the life-giving contributions of the many mother-figures who 'grow' us up. I reflect on the strong women who shaped my worldview through their example of a life lived in faith. On this occasion, my mind settles on Sr Mary, who used to visit my classroom regularly to inspire, and engage with our young learners. Sr Mary - an educator herself in her early years - would bring her abundant gifts of patience and joy with her, such that the children would be moved to beatific smiles and warm embraces when she arrived. They would gather at her feet, gazing upon her with such admiration - and guard her from dozing contentedly for too long!

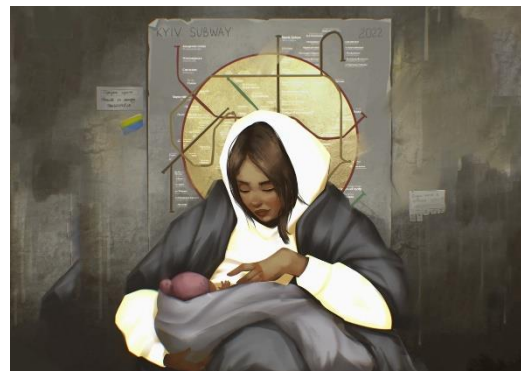
One time, when I was feeling discouraged from the demands of the school day, Sr Mary looked at me and simply said, "Have courage." What I heard was: *have courage...have faith...hold steady to your convictions...and believe that these children will thrive in your love.* How profound! Her wise words resonate with me to this day, especially in those difficult moments when the '*what could have been*' or '*what was*' clouds my thinking. To me, 'have courage' encapsulates what it means 'to mother'.

In the Catholic Church, the month of May is devoted to Mary, the mother of God. Mary knew courage. She accepted God's will, and courageously – steadfastly – held on to her faith. Perhaps Mary in her faithful devotion, reveals an image to us of God as 'mother' - much like the Psalm from the song of David above. I wonder... did Mary find solace in the peace of a feminine God through her suffering? Were her anxieties soothed by God's motherly embrace? Could she have felt God's womanlike touch to ease her burdens?

These maternal images of God are reassuring to me, and an inspiration to continue a journey of courageous service to others (aka mothering). Blessings to all women who nurture young and older persons alike! As you nourish others through your love, may you too find the courage and strength to affirm that, in your labouring, God will bear you too.

Prayer

Loving God,
Bless and care for mother-figures always.
May they always be beloved and cherished.
Help us to be grateful and helpful,
not just on Mother's Day but every day.
We make this prayer in the name of Jesus,
who loved his own mother very much. Amen.



Maryna Solomennykova (2022) "Kyivan Madonna"
Ukrainian Madonna protecting her infant in a subway.

Call to Action

- Hold the memories of the mother-figures who have ‘grown you’, in your heart and mind, and give thanks to God for the gift of their love and wisdom.
- Read the [story behind the Ko Hata Maria, te Matua Wahine o te Atua](#) artwork
- Read Emily McFarlan Miller’s “[Mother’s Day Gift Guide: Something for Everyone Who Mothers](#)”

Inspiration for Reflection...

- The many children who have touched my life and taught me to nurture the human spirit.
- [Gentle, Patient God – a Prayer for Mother’s Day](#)
- Didier Pollefeyt’s [article](#)
- [Words for the Journey for Kids](#)
- [Ukrainian Madonnas and Songs of Peace](#)

