

Mother's day, 2017

May I suggest that we are all travelers who have stopping off places at various moments of life's journey:

We live with our parents, and so often it is our Mothers who take on the task of teaching us about God. And as children we learn to speak a language by listening to our parents and we learn their likes and, unfortunately, their prejudices.

Then we set out on our own with many stopping off places that follow: we go to college or start a career, work on relationships, marry, have children, face the challenges of disappointments, sickness and eventually, old age and death.

There are no guarantees in life—except that as we move through the changing and challenging landscapes of our short journey here on earth, we do so with the assurance that Jesus has gone ahead so take us to the Father.

In today's second reading, Peter calls us to look at the dignity of our vocation, as being living stones of the Church.

These post Easter readings help those newly baptized and us "old timers," to reflect upon the dignity of our call and the community into which we have been baptized. And the sharing of our faith is meant to be a significant part of our Catholic mission.

And so on this Mother's day, I would like to celebrate some of the women of the New Testament, who also brought faith into their family's life as well as sharing their faith with others.

Of course, we know much about Mary, the Mother of Jesus, whose faith lead her to stay by her son, even as his life was threatened by King

Herod whose jealousy of having another king nearby forced her and Joseph and Jesus to become refugees in Egypt; followed by the long trek home to Nazareth; to worry about him as he faced hostile religious authorities and eventually to be with him as he was tortured and crucified.

And we know something about her cousin Elizabeth, who also had a special son, John the Baptist; it must have been difficult for her to watch her son become more and more dissatisfied with urban living and who eventually went into the unforgiving Judean desert in order to prepare a path for his cousin Jesus.

We don't know much about Anna, only that she was a widow of 84 years and who prayed for the Messiah to come. Anna, while not being a physical Mother, was a woman of prayer and an example of a person of faith. It would seem that Anna didn't dwell upon the disappointments of life nor did she allow those disappointments to define who she was.

Among the greatest women of the Bible is, of course, Mary Magdalene; she was a woman from whom Jesus cast out seven demons as we read in Luke 8:2. The name Magdalene indicates that she came from Magdala, a city on the southwest coast of the Sea of Galilee. Since she was known to be from that city, we can assume that she was a woman of high standing in that community. After Jesus cast seven demons from her, she became one of his most ardent disciples.

The truth about Mary Magdalene is that she witnessed most of the events surrounding the crucifixion. She was present at the mock trial of Jesus; she heard Pontius Pilate pronounce the death sentence of Jesus; and she saw Jesus beaten and humiliated by the crowd. She was one of the women who stood near Jesus during the crucifixion.

And so after Jesus' crucifixion and while the Apostles were hiding out of fear for their lives, only Mary Magdalene had the courage on Sunday to face the turbulence in the city in order to wash Jesus' body and to properly prepare it for his burial.

And as the earliest witness to the resurrection of Jesus, she was sent by Jesus to inform the Apostles as we read in John 20:11-18.

Consequently, she was the first person to spread the good news of His Resurrection and that reality gives her a unique position among all the followers of Jesus. Some scholars have even suggested that since she was the first to preach the Resurrection of Jesus and that action made her an Apostle of Jesus Christ as well as the other Apostles. Finally, she was among the women who gathered with the apostles to await the promised coming of the Holy Spirit.

And then who can forget Tryphena and Tryphosa—well the truth be told—I suppose all of us have forgotten them, except St. Paul. These two women were probably sisters, even twins. And even though we don't know much about them, yet their names are mentioned by Paul who calls them hard workers in the work of the Lord. Their help was central to the spreading of the gospel; they were high class Roman citizens and contributed financially to the missionary work among the Romans.

Now we have Claudia who was with Paul in Rome. She also was a high born Roman and was so well thought of Paul that he told Timothy to send Claudia his greetings.

Eunice was the mother of Timothy; she lived in modern day Turkey and was converted to Christianity on Paul's first trip to Lystra and would have consequently been subject to many of the same persecutions and challenges that Paul had to face. We read in 2nd Timothy that she taught her son Timothy from a young age. She, along with her

Timothy's grandmother Lois were the first in their family to convert to Christianity. In speaking to Timothy, Paul writes about the courageous faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your Mother Eunice.

Next we have Tabitha; in the scriptures she is introduced as "a certain disciple tamed Tabitha." Anyway, she fell sick and when Peter heard of this he rushed to her and said: Tabitha arise! She opened her eyes and when she saw Peter, she sat up. She had been known to be a woman full of good works and helping others with her alms giving.

With regards to Phebe, Paul says that she has helped many, himself included. Paul sent his letter to the church in Rome via Phebe.

And lastly, there was Rhoda, which means "rose." She was at the house of Mary, the Mother of John Mark (who wrote the gospel of Mark). She could be found praying with others who were gathered there praying for Peter to be delivered out of prison.

I think that it is interesting that Paul specifically mentions by name so many of the women working with him.

There are so many other Mothers and women mentioned positively in the New Testament. Then and now, many women are responsible for the spreading our Catholic faith. And so on this Mother's Day, we salute all women of faith, those who are Mothers as well as those women who have shared their faith with so many of us.