

A Mother's Love

I recently attended Mass for the first time in months. It was the funeral service for a friend's mother and though I had no real connection to her, it was an encounter of intimate grace. Little did I know or expect its impact, but such is the nature of grace, freely given and received.

The only things I knew about the woman was that she was a mother, and from what I gather from her photo, a woman of small stature. During Mass, I learned that she had arranged flowers for the church. The priest, speaking of her with warm affection, likened this act of service as a participation in God's heavenly beauty. Regardless of whether this woman knew this in herself, hers was, by the nature of its beauty, an interaction between heaven and earth. What spoke to me too, was that it was an act that was shared. It was generative, not a gift that kept to oneself or to a few, but one that reached many. In the quiet work behind-the-scenes, without being named or publicly acknowledged, I found in this woman and mother of my friend, a quality of being, participation and sharing that modelled for me, another way of being Church.

The pandemic has brought about change, and for faithful churchgoers, something much deeper than whether or not we are able to congregate or receive the sacraments, important though these are. When we first went into isolation, there were jokes circulating the Internet about the devil laughing, because all the churches were closed. Thankfully, there were other sentiments realigning the story that yes, while the churches were closed and people could not worship publicly, the domestic church was awakening once again.

It is to this flicker of light that I wish to draw attention. To focus on this small flame, to tend it and care for it, is the duty of parenthood in the place of the home. For the many lamenting the loss of youth presence or even adult (under 50) participation within our parishes, I have no solution to offer or share, other than what I know. In my lived experience as a wife and mother, I am focussed less on what the future holds, and more on what we are doing now to

tend the hearth. The Kingdom is here and at hand, given to us to live and work in the kairos. In a very tangible sense since Covid-19, the propagation of faith has become more-or-less squarely our responsibility: not of the priests or religious among us, nor the schools, but ourselves in our family units and in our homes. Without excessive scheduling and weekend sports to clash with Mass time, we have nothing and no one but ourselves (and God) to answer to, in continuing and carrying on the faith.

As a parent, I feel that the onus is on me. But then again, so it is in a shared economy, in this community of faith: as part of our baptismal promise to bring our children up in the faith. It is in this setting where I see the future of our Church, not necessarily dealing with what is out there, but in our relationships with one another in the sight of God. Often such primary formation of children falls into the realm of parenthood, but as a family under God, it is inevitably a calling to each and every one of us, regardless of paternity or maternity.

Without detracting from the sadness of my friend's mum's passing, her story is now for me, another model of how to be Church: by quietly and tenderly as a selfless mother would, by making space for the beauty and presence of God in our hearts, made flesh and alive in its manifestation of generosity and sharing in how we treat one another and live together. This kind of maternal love, like that of Mary our heavenly Mother, is one we can all embrace and embody, for the Church and for the world.

Geralyn Anderson is a parishioner of St Thomas the Apostle, Blackburn.