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Do not let your hearts be troubled

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Good morning - it is indeed good to be with you on this lovely autumn day on which we celebrate and remember our mothers and everyone who has mothered us, or our gardens, or our houses, or our children, or our animals. I did look up my Australian Macquarie dictionary to see what it had to say about mothers, and, after the first definition, 1. 'a female parent', it also had at point 7. 'the qualities characteristic of a mother, or maternal affection', and at 8. 'something that gives rise to, or exercises protecting care over, something else'.

So really Mother's Day covers all attentive, caring actions by anyone, male or female, who has mothered. We who are biological mothers also remember our children, and our role in their lives, and we contact our own mothers, or if our mothers are no longer alive, we reflect on our relationship with them. Those of us who are mothers, if we are honest, hope for, indeed even expect, a bit of attention, breakfast in bed, or at least a card or flowers or a phone call. All of us are different, all of us have our own stories. There are verses in the bible which speak to us about the joys and heartache of being a parent or anyone who takes on a mothering role. We won't spend much time on them in the midst of this time of self-isolation and the awful deaths of so many people around the world due to the covid virus. Instead we will seek to find words of optimism and encouragement to live life fully and adventurously - or at least as much as we are allowed to do at this time.

The opening words of today's gospel, John 14:1-14 is a good place to start. We read three translations of the text:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. - the New Revised Standard Version

Do not be worried and upset,....Believe in God and believe also in me. - the Good News Bible

Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. - The Message, the bible in contemporary language - Eugene Peterson

They are indeed very encouraging and comforting words for all of us who are, or have been, in a caring, mothering role in our lives.

But just before we venture into areas where we might find that our actions now, and in the past, do need a bit of attention, let me tell you my favourite motherhood joke.

It is funny, a little sharp, and has the ring of truth about it.

Two women who have adult children are having coffee at the O'Connor shops, and catching up with what their children are doing.

"My eldest son, John, who is in his mid-forties, is having a bit of trouble in his marriage, and he is not all that happy at work, so he is seeing a very good psychologist once a week. It's really expensive at \$200.00 an hour, and you know what - all he speaks about is me!"

Now let us turn to just one example in the New Testament about the cost of mothering. In Luke 2: 25-35 we read about Mary and Joseph taking the baby Jesus to the temple about 40 days after his birth.

At that time there was a man named Simeon living in Jerusalem. He was a good, God-fearing man and was waiting for Israel to be saved. The Holy Spirit was with him and had assured him that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's promised Messiah. Led by the Spirit, Simeon went into the Temple. When the parents brought the child Jesus into the Temple to do for him what the Law required, Simeon took the child in his arms and gave thanks to God: "Now, Lord, you have kept your promise, and you may let your servant go in peace"....The child's father and mother were amazed at the things Simeon said about him. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, "This child is chosen by God for the destruction and the salvation of many in Israel. He will be a sign from God which many people will speak against and so reveal their secret thoughts. And sorrow, like a sharp sword, will break your own heart."

As a mother of five children, Simeon's words have sometimes pierced my own heart too. I don't think my experience is unique. We who take on a mothering role glory in our children's strengths and wins, and we take just a little, or a lot, of credit for their successes - at least I know I do. But on the other hand, we often too readily feel inadequate; we wonder if we are doing enough, are we giving them enough love and individual attention, have we done enough for them to develop all their gifts and potential? It is true that being a parent involves a lot of hard, often thankless work, and yet at the same time we do rejoice that we have children. It is

one of the paradoxes of human experience - because we have loved, our hearts can be broken - because we have experienced sorrow, we can truly understand what it is to be joyful.

So what do we gain from this time of personal reflection on our experience of mothering, of caring for those who needed, and continue to need, our guidance and love? Today, and every day, we should take John's gospel words to heart - *we should not be troubled*, instead we should try to understand our own mothers a little better, and forgive them their shortcomings, as we surely hope our own children will forgive ours. We will continue to make mistakes, our intentions will sometimes be misunderstood; but if we continue to love we will be blessed, and we will be a source of blessing to others. We should attend to matters that need our attention, but at the same time we should live our lives more fully and confidently.

Autumn is a very good time for reflection, courage, new ventures, and grace.
Amen.