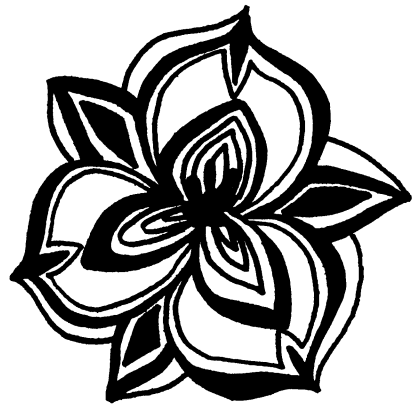


FROM THE PULPIT



MOTHER'S DAY, 1971

Lucybeth Cardon Rampton

This talk was first given on Mother's Day, 11 May 1969, at the Utah State Prison. It was repeated, with an altered introduction — the one given here — on Mother's Day, 9 May 1971, at the Federal Heights Ward, Salt Lake City.

Brothers and sisters, I find this a bittersweet year for me to be participating in a Mother's Day program, for my own mother passed away last November and my husband's mother was buried just two weeks ago. I should like, if I may, to begin by paying tribute to these two ladies. A loving salute, then, to Leah Ivins Cardon, who brought to the business of living a fine intellect, a childlike eagerness, and a creative zest, and who brought grace, dignity, and wit to the hard business of dying. And an equally loving salute to Janet Campbell Rampton, who, left widowed with three children at the bottom of the depression, equipped by neither temperament nor training to become the head of a family, still kept that family strongly together for forty years through her determined love. I should like also to pay tribute to another kind of motherhood — through my lovely daughter Meg, whose sweet article about adoptive parenthood you may have seen in the first issue of *The Ensign*.

I must now make a confession: Mother's Day programs make me uncomfortable. Of course the underlying idea is a lovely one — it is a warm and sweetly sentimental concept, this setting aside of one spring Sunday each year for the honoring of mothers. But for me such recognition is not something to be done on cue, at a prescribed time. The exchange of love and understanding between a mother and her child is a very private and a very spontaneous thing: it is a look, a touch, a private joke, a whispered midnight conference, a note left on a pillow, a guarded secret, a crisis weathered together. Mothers treasure these things far more than they do the presentation of a flower at Sunday School.

There is something else, too. The mother of Mother's Day tends to be too good to be true: a saintly creature who is always gentle, always wise, always noble, and always right. Not one of us measures up to this ideal. Mothers are people, with all the strengths, weaknesses, virtues, and blunders of human beings. Most of us try to do our best, and some do better than others — but we just don't belong on any pedestal.

So I would like to talk a little today about motherhood (or rather, about what might be called the maternal side of human beings) as an abstraction, a great human ideal. To assist myself in doing so, I have drawn two illustrative concepts from my study of prehistory.

The first is the concept of the Mother Goddess. The Heavenly Father whom we today know and love and worship is a masculine God; but it is interesting to know that the oldest deity of whom archaeologists have found evidence is feminine — a Mother Goddess, whose little stone and clay figurines have been found in Upper Paleolithic sites over most of the world. She was the goddess of the fruitfulness of the earth and its creatures, the source of the earth's abundant life, charged with its nurture. She became, as the centuries passed, Ninhursag, the mother-goddess of the Sumerians; the Minoan mother-goddess of ancient Crete; Demeter, the earth goddess among the older Greek gods. Some of her ancient worship was transferred to the beautiful cult of the Virgin Mary which reached its peak during the later Middle Ages. We still remember her today when we speak of Mother Earth.

The second concept, borrowed from Hindu philosophy, recognizes two principles in the universe: a strong aggressive, masculine one and a gentle, nurturing feminine one. The two complement each other. Both are present in all the universe, including ourselves. The feminine principle is what I mean by our maternal side. It is the warm, kind, loving, cherishing part of all of us — the concerned-for-others part of us. It is not an effeminate, "sissy" quality, and it is by no means limited to women. In fact it shows to best advantage when it complements the strength of strong men: it was a central quality of Christ Himself.

This maternal side of all of us is the part which wants to cultivate and nurture young growing things, especially children, and see that they have a chance to grow and mature properly. It takes pride in their maturity, and wants that maturity to be as productive as possible. It respects and values age, and wishes to see it accorded the dignity it deserves. Properly cultivated, this maternal side of us can expand into genuine concern for the well-being and proper care of our good planet Earth and all its creatures, in the best tradition of the ancient Mother Goddess herself. We will want to respect and care for our environment — for our air and our streams and our land, our forests and our seas. We will want to preserve, with discrimination and good sense, the scenic wonders and natural beauties and wild creatures of the earth, of which the astronauts speak so lovingly when they view it from the moon. Most of all, we will want to take better care of each other — of the swelling numbers of human beings who live together on this planet which looks so small in that moon-view. If we really feel maternal about it, we will work not only hard but fiercely to see to it that every human creature has a decent chance to grow and mature and be of value to the best of his ability.

This does not mean that we want to coddle anyone. This age-old, Earth Mother side of us knows too well that any growing thing, plant or child, which is given too much shelter and protection is not going to grow up strong and vigorous — it needs some struggle and some challenge, along with sun and air and nourishment. If it is a human creature, though, it also needs a great deal of love and appreciation. A favorite quotation of mine, which I have kept in my files for twenty years or more, is from the Hindu philosopher and poet Rabindranath Tagore: "Let my love, like sunlight, surround you and yet give you illumined freedom."

This old maternal part of us also knows that young growing things need some control and direction — not enough to stunt them, but enough to keep

them from growing wild. And it knows, too, that the nurturing of young things is not all deadly serious: there is joy and pure fun in caring for growing things, and especially for children. There is fun and pleasure in making sure that the child in ourselves never quite goes away — that we keep our joy in the world and in other people, and our sense of wonder at it all.

It seems to me that the greatest need this earth has ever had for this whole maternal outlook is with us right now. Some parts of our earth are getting very crowded, and the more crowded people get, the more complicated their living together becomes. We need to pray for all the wisdom which the parents of large families must have, in order that we may collectively (that is to say, through our governments and our volunteer groups) deal justly and wisely and compassionately with these crowded parts of our world, especially our great cities everywhere. We need to be profoundly concerned about hunger; indeed, we need to borrow from the masculine side of ourselves enough anger and indignation to demand that the hungry be fed — that ways be devised to bring the earth to produce more food over more of its surface, and that the available food be shared in better fashion with the hungry everywhere. We need to do all we can to replace (within our families and among the people of small and large societies) fear with friendship, hatred with love, suspicion with trust. Fear and hate, disapproval and mistrust, suspicion and contempt, stunt young human beings and distort their growth, and they likewise stunt mankind. Trust and friendship, approval and appreciation, love and kindness, nourish the individual and they can nourish mankind.

If there is a meaning and a message behind the turmoil and the unrest among the young people of today's world (and I am sure there is), perhaps this is it: care more about people; care less about things and about status and about material success, and more about each other. Stop fighting long enough to get acquainted. Spend less on human destruction and more on human need.

May we have as our prayer this Sunday, Mother's Day, morning that we may cultivate (and that is a good, Earth Mother word) — cultivate ourselves, in our families, and in our communities this maternal side, in order that we may do our part toward the development of a warmer, friendlier, less embattled, more loving, and therefore more humanely human world. This I ask in the name of our compassionate Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen.