

On this day in which we give special thanks for our moms, I would like to share with you the following true story: Several years ago, Sarah and Michael, the daughter and son-in-law of a fellow pastor returned from Moscow with twin children they adopted from an orphanage. These children were 10-month-old babies and had been in the orphanage from the day of their birth.

Sarah and Michael spent three weeks in Russia in the process of adoption. During the first week they had a huge amount of legal work to deal with. Yet each day they were able to visit these children. In order to get to the infant section of the orphanage, they had to pass through a play yard where two- and three-year-old children were. They reported that as soon as they entered the gate, the children would line up, give them their biggest smile, and say "hi." It was their biggest hope that maybe, just maybe, they, too, would be adopted into a family. It left Sarah and Michael with heavy hearts. These children, at least for the time-being, would remain orphans, and would need to face all that orphans face in a country like Russia. No one would call them their own or make a fuss over them or make sacrifices for them or share with them their values or help them shape a future or multiply their joys, divide their sorrows, or give them hope.

These children were orphaned through no fault of their own. It could be that their parents loved them very much but just couldn't care for them and with great regret *had* to place them in the orphanage. It could be that their parents did not love them at all and placed them in the orphanage as a way of getting out of the responsibility. The end result was the same. They are orphaned.

Spiritually, we all begin as orphans. In one sense it is no fault of our own. From the moment we are conceived, we are sinners. Sin makes us orphans. As orphans we will need to fend for ourselves. There is no one to call us their own, no one to fuss over us, no one to sacrifice for us, no one to share their values with us, no one to help shape us for the future, no one to multiply our joys, no one to divide our sorrows, no one to give us hope. That's what sin does.

But the great good news for us this day is that we're no longer orphans. Yes, thanks be to God, we are orphans *no more*. Before we could even line up and say "hi," our Lord claimed us; for most of us, that happened through the waters of Baptism. That is when He put His mark on us, when He declared that we would be His very own, His heirs, the ones for whom He would sacrifice. We were the ones who would receive His values and be given a future. He

would multiply our joys, and He would divide our sorrows. He would give us hope!

He did this at great cost. Adoption is hardly ever inexpensive; it costs, and it costs a lot. For our Lord Jesus Christ to adopt us He had to literally give the shirt off of His back and so much more. He had to empty Himself completely. He lived the perfect life of obedience to God, the Father that only He could do. Then He lovingly and sacrificially laid down His perfect life on the cross of Calvary so that through our Baptism we might bear His name- Christian. Because He rose from the dead, we who believe in Jesus; who trust in Him, will now live forever, also. The curse of sin has lost its grip on us. That's how Jesus paid for our adoption! It's truly an amazing and wonderful thing for us to be adopted by Him. We are His heirs. What He has and who He is He joyfully declares is ours!

One of the most powerful, dramatic, and tender ways in which our Lord communicates that we are adopted, that we are orphans no more, that we are His heirs, is through **mothers**. I was blessed with such a mom, maybe you were, too. If so, you know what I mean. From the very beginning, a mother assured us that there was one God who had created us, one God who loved us with steadfast love, one God who gave us saving faith and keeps us in that faith. Throughout our lives, whatever else we learn and experience, above all may we know God's great love for us.

Some of my earliest memories are of my mother reading Bible stories out of an illustrated children's Bible story book to me at home, of her teaching Sunday school to me and other children at church, and in speaking openly of Jesus as the only way of salvation. We who have been blessed by having a mom who taught us about Christ have wonderful stories to tell about their examples and about their resolve that we did not follow a god that had no redeeming value. They were never hesitant to tell us about **their** faith, and they did so with **gentleness** and **sacrifice**.

There are many reasons for honoring mothers today, but the best reasons are for those who helped bring us to the assurance that we are orphans no more. If you have a chance to tell your mom that on this Mother's Day, do it. Don't wait. But I expect that my encouragement is unnecessary. You know its value, and you probably tell them on many other days besides Mother's Day how thankful to God you are for them. You say such things as, "Thanks for loving me, Mom. Thank you for teaching me about Jesus; the Way, the Truth, and the Life. It's because of you that my full and final hope is in Him."

If you're a mom, I know you will treasure all the expressions of love that will be given to you, whether it's with lots of words or few. Enjoy them. Your children will say a lot of nice things in a flattering way, but treasure most of all those evidences you have in the lives of your children that they have heard your gentle encouragement that they are orphans no more, that they know the one true God and cherish their relationship with Him, that they know the heritage that is theirs. It's an answer to their prayers.

Some mothers (and fathers) have done their best to teach their children about the God who wishes to declare them orphans no more, but their children have rejected the teaching and the modeling. Parents, keep praying and keep modeling. There was a wonderful example of that in *The Lutheran Witness* some time ago. A mother kept praying for her son, Gus, who not only rejected the Christian faith, but also ridiculed it with his lifestyle and teaching- only to come to understand the wonderful comfort that comes from our Lord's assurance that he was an orphan no more. He became one of the great early fathers of the Christian church- St. Augustine.

Sadly, we know that not all mothers will have that kind of conversation on this day. Some will not hear from their children at all. Some mothers will have taught their children about many gods- the gods of athletics or music or the arts or of leisure or of being self-serving and even have modeled following after those gods. The urgency of this day is to make sure that as many orphans as possible may come to understand that they are orphans **no more**. For those mothers and fathers and children whose false gods have taken priority in their lives, the good news is that God still wants to embrace them, still will receive them into His family, still will forgive them, still wishes to declare that they are orphans no more!

There are still very many who feel orphaned in our world. They don't know about the God who would claim them as His own children, which is reflected in the way they behave. They follow all sorts of gods—they are very religious, they sacrifice much for these gods, but they have no hope within them. They follow empty gods. They remain orphans.

But by the grace of our God, by His great sacrificial love, He wishes to say to them what He declares to us. I wish to fuss over you. I have sacrificed for you. I wish to share with you my values. I wish to multiply your joys. I wish to divide your sorrows. I wish to give you hope. He declares that we are His—His love for us is steadfast and sure, for we are orphans no more!