

5/11/08 (Pentecost & Mother's Day) John A. Baldwin

We are observing two important days today – Pentecost & Mother's Day. This doesn't happen very often and is attributable to there being a very early Easter this year. Both are of great importance for different reasons but there is, I believe, a significant connecting link

On the Day of Pentecost (50 days after Easter) the disciples experienced the powerful breath of God, overwhelming yet focused. It was not like tornado that touched down in Suffolk two weeks ago which was also powerful & chaotic, yet completely random and very destructive. My spiritual director who lives 3 miles away from the devastation spoke to me about finding roofing tiles on her front lawn and home insulation on her roof. She spoke of her sadness and awe as she remembered that this flotsam and jetsam were part of someone's house. The Holy Spirit on that day 2000 years ago filled the whole room with power, yet no one was blown out of it. Tongues of flame alighted on each one of the disciples, yet none were burned up. They spoke in many languages, but each was recognizable.

Mother's Day was observed for the first time 100 years ago (yesterday) with simple services in Grafton, W.VA & Philadelphia which honored our nation's mothers, setting the stage for a successful bill in the US Senate 6 years later establishing an official Mother's Day. Motherhood ranks as one of the hardest jobs to do, yet one of the easiest to romanticize. Every year at this time I remember my Mother, who died 28 years ago and who taught me the meaning of unconditional love. I also give thanks for my wife Ann who is an awesome mother, and who taught me so much about the art of parenting. This year has special meaning, because my daughter Ashley is expecting in 3 month's time. I used to think that a woman became a mother at the moment of the child's birth, but I now realize that it is much earlier in the process, and indeed we are celebrating Ashley's motherhood today.

So what is the link between these two celebrations? I believe it is to be found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. I don't know many preachers who aren't challenged in trying to present the Trinity without straying into heresy from time to time. But I am venturing forth here with confidence that wherever I may stray from Orthodoxy, Marguerite will clear up in her sermon next week on Trinity Sunday. Stay tuned.

This week I found an interesting study by Hosoda & Stone from 2000 which explored masculine and feminine attributes and put forward 12 “key” masculine attributes, amongst them: tough, courageous, strong, forceful & 9 “key” feminine attributes, amongst them: affectionate, sensitive, appreciative, sympathetic. Let's consider these now in relation to the Holy Trinity. First, God the Creator - tough, strong, forceful, courageous. Courageous certainly in launching Creation on its unfolding throughout the universe. No wonder God has come to be known as Father in many people's thoughts about the divine. Secondly, God the Holy Spirit - affectionate, sensitive, appreciative, and sympathetic. Thirdly, God the Son, Jesus Christ who perfectly synthesizes the masculine

& feminine in his being: strong yet sensitive, forceful yet affectionate, tough yet sympathetic.

Jesus as perfect God and perfect human being points us towards wholeness in his perfect blending of the masculine & feminine. Think about it. A man who is only tough, courageous, strong and forceful, someone like: a macho man, the Marlboro man, a ruthless CEO, a professional football player on the playing field is a limited human being. They may be stellar perhaps in what they do, but emotionally unapproachable and remote. A woman who is only sensitive & sympathetic may be precisely the person we want beside our sickbed, but who may be walked over by others and deficient in toughness to stand up for themselves & others.

Another recent research study (Hackman et al 1992) implied that transformational leadership requires a gender balance of strong masculine & feminine characteristics. Most of the healthy & whole people I know are those who've integrated the masculine & feminine within themselves; who are both emotionally tender, yet tough in their love; who are strong in their beliefs & passions, yet sensitive to the perspectives and values of others.

I've been looking for these combination of qualities in the visits I've made over the past 3 weeks to Missouri, New York & Florida, searching for a leader (male or female) who has courage & toughness, yet sensitivity & openness; the ability to lead with vision, yet listen with understanding to those who disagree. I am encouraged by those I've met on my travels (both candidates & references) that there are indeed many such leaders in our church.

So on this joint celebration of Mother's Day & Pentecost, I leave you with this final thought: Both are celebrations of the feminine in our lives. We give thanks this day for the woman who gave us birth & we give thanks that the powerful, creative force in the universe is also the same gentle, tender touch of the Holy Spirit in our lives.