

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Mar 21st 2014

My mother is an amazing woman. Throughout my lifetime, I have watched how she has brilliantly parented her eight children with love, care and gentle persuasion. Even now that she is in her eighties, her incredible spirit continues to be the heart and soul of our family.

Her family mantra has always been and continues to be embedded in the following wise phrases: I never got over the wonder of my children; family is the foundation of life; always remember that your sisters and brothers are your best friends.

I was the first born and throughout my childhood and teen years, my mother's words were like seeds being planted in my heart. I knew that I loved my young siblings but while changing diapers, it was hard to imagine their future friendship! When I went away to college, the unexpected ache I had for my family astounded me. My mothers' seeds had taken root and I waited with excitement for letters and phone calls from my parents and siblings. It became profoundly apparent to me that the bonds I had with my family were my life force.

As I grew into adulthood, married my college sweetheart, became the parent of three precious sons and began to face the myriad of life happenings and inevitable challenges which come in to a human life, I also began to realize the profound depth of my mother's wisdom. I prayed that I could teach my own children that family is the foundation of life.

Today's first reading from Genesis is a somber scripture story about siblings. The brothers of Joseph were so envious of their father's love for him that they colluded together to hurt and/or destroy Joseph. In the end they did not kill him but they sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty pieces of silver. Somehow, life-giving seeds of family love had not taken root in their hearts.

When I reflect about Israel the father in the Genesis story, I imagine that he loved all of his children and that each one filled him with pride and love. I can also imagine that having a child in his old age must have seemed like a miracle to him. Perhaps he even used words similar to my mother: I never got over the wonder of you. Sadly his other sons thought those words were only for Joseph. Acting on their misunderstanding, they made selfish choices and completely lost sight that Joseph would and should always be part of their life force.

If we are not paying attention, some family relationships may break down or even drift apart. We may even harbor negative feelings and thoughts about other family members. As we move through Lent,

perhaps an act of Lenten love could be to reach out to someone from whom we have slipped away. Let us return to the wisdom of both our loving God and our hearts so that we might reconnect and reestablish those bonds.

God blessed me with five sisters and two brothers. Although we are very different from one another, our mother's family wisdom is in our hearts and rooted there for life. Yes, there are times when we may have a disagreement but somehow we always hear that familiar refrain in our mother's gentle voice: never forget that this is one of your best friends. Those are the times when I whisper: Thanks, Mom.

Susan Naatz