

## Mothers Day and the Days After

One Biblical image of God that appears from time to time gives me particular trouble. It appears in the story of a scribe going through the land marking the foreheads of the few persons who are to be spared, as God shrieks out for Israel to murder all the rest. Even old men, youth and maidens, women and children - wipe them all out screams God! "You shall show no pity." (Ez.9:1-22) The psalmist portrays such a God as the one who flays the nations with a rod of iron to "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. (Ps.2:9) In the New Testament, Revelation hardly makes things better when the Son whom Mary has birthed will "rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (Rev.12:5), "smiting them," and treading "the wine press of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty." (Rev.19:15) One cringes before such a portrait, particularly today when political leaders exercise horrendous violence in the name of a God. Both formerly and now, the marks identifying those to be violated and slaughtered tend to be ethnic, religious, and gender.

There is solace in Julian of Norwich's insistence that there can be no anger in God, for if there were, even for a minute, the universe would no longer be. Thus it is imperative that Christians screen all images of God through the lens disclosed in Jesus Christ. Of all else, Paul says, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." (II Cor.4:7) Since the soul of God so revealed is love, suspect is any characteristic of God not passing this test.

As males wage our macho carnage in war after war, who is it that holds things together through it all? It is the mothers - the women who suckle the infants, rummage through rubbish to feed the elderly, and model gentleness by embracing their children against the spectrum of hatred. This may be why pictures of the Madonna and Child speak to so many of us. In a profound sense, Christianity is a women's thing, a mother thing - on behalf of all humanity. Mary's picture of God is of One who pulls "down the mighty from their thrones and exalts those of low degree," seeing compassionately that "the hungry are filled with good things." Women images for God in scripture are powerful. God is like a woman in labor (Is.42:24), carrying us in the womb and giving us birth (Is.46:3), being betrayed like a wife forsaken (Is.54:6), yet showing us a mother's comfort (Is.66:13), ministering to us as "a nurse carries a sucking child" (Nu.11:12), relating to us as a lover with spouse (Hos.2:16), keeping us "safe upon my mother's breast" (Ps.22:9) - climaxing in a Jesus who yearns to gather us all unto himself "as a hen gathers her brood under her wings. (Lk.13:34)

Mondays were hard for me as a child, trudging off to school "the day after" a weekend of freedom. But mother was always at the door with a departing hug, and waiting with a kiss when I returned, dirty or not. If I got sick at school, I could trust that she would soon be there. What a

fine image for God, that on every "day after" we can trust God to be there - waiting to embrace the household of the world. That is what Mother's Day is to be about, when in 1872 Julia Ward Howe originated it as an antiwar observance, celebrating women's sensitivity to nonviolence and nurturing. So instead of being aghast at the image of a scribe identifying with magic marker those few to escape a murderous God, let us marvel at a "Mother God" marking foreheads with a kiss, nurturing trust that She will always be there. Thanks, Mom, on this your day.

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