HOMILY FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
May 14 (Cycle A)

Yesterday was my dad’s 93rd birthday. I had the good fortune of being able to visit him in Florida a couple weeks ago. Now I love my dad. And because I do, I’ve always felt bad about something that happened at Grandma Damico’s house when I was a child. And knowing that his birthday falls on Mother’s Day weekend this year reminded me of it. We were all seated around the supper table with the usual big bowl of spaghetti in front of us when Grandma Damico, who always had a bit of impishness about her, asked my sister and me a heavily loaded question, “Who do you like more, your mother or your father?” And after squirming a bit before her smiling face, I said, “My mother.” I still feel bad about saying that to this day – especially when I’m with my father.

I’ve often thought about that answer over the years. Why did I like my mother more? And really the answer is pretty simple. As a young child I had spent a lot more time with my mother. She was a stay at home mom. She was always there, and in so many ways she made me feel loved. It was only when I had grown into older childhood and adolescence that I began to spend more time with my dad. And at that point the answer to the question of who I liked more would have taken a bit more thought. But in my early childhood years, it was the daily abiding with a mother who loved me that had fueled my love for her.

This is why we have such a thing as Mother’s Day, isn’t it? It’s a day to express our gratitude to those mothers who have loved us day after day, and by doing so have helped us to grow in the ways of love. And I think it’s a happy coincidence that Mother’s Day falls on this particular Sunday this year because there are some beautiful connections between it and the readings we have just heard. For these readings all have to do with abiding with one who loves us deeply and completely, and with the fruits of that abiding.

Now when it comes to loving mothers, I think that while most of us do appreciate how good it is to have such a mother, many of us really don’t appreciate this as much as we should until we grow older and marry. At least this is true for many of us men, because usually the mother we come to know best in life is not the one who gave birth to us but rather the one who has given birth to our children – those mothers who are our wives. After all, the fullest, truest knowledge of another comes from abiding with them, of being with them in an ongoing relationship of special closeness. And there is no more complete experience of abiding with one who loves us than there is in the married life, where, as the scriptures say, two people become one, and actually begin to live one life together. And I think that any man who truly has given himself to this kind of abiding with the one who is his wife and the mother of his children, will agree that it affects the shaping of one’s life deeply and profoundly.

This is expressed well in a song that a man wrote about the special mother to whom he is married. It’s called Easy Chair and the words go like this:

As I think of my wife sitting there / Close by me in her easy chair
I'm overwhelmed by love so strong / We've been together for so long
In many ways we're worlds apart / Yet still I hold her in my heart
I've wounded her as she has me / But there she still is next to me
I know each little sound she makes / I treasure every breath she takes
She says she's nothing much to see / But she's so beautiful to me
I can't explain the things I feel / Our differences are very real
But thinking of her sitting there / Brings tears that I can hardly bear
Sometimes it seems so strange to me / This love is such a mystery
The ties that bind us are so deep / The beauty of it makes me weep
This binding leads to other ones / First to our daughters and our sons
From there on to their children too / Then to our friends both old and new
As I think of my wife sitting there / Close by me in her easy chair
A prayer of thanks forms in my heart / For I realize this is holy art
The love I feel so ardently / Is the same that God has for me
And more, just like the rays of sun / His love goes out to everyone
As I think of my wife sitting there / Close by me in her easy chair
I'm overwhelmed by love you see / 'Cause I know she's God's gift to me

(by Fr. Rod Damico)

This is the result of abiding with – not just living in the same place -- but really embracing the life of another with one’s own. Love grows deep and strong. Wounds are transformed into deeply rooted connections. A beauty is seen that goes beyond surface appearances. Bonds develop with all who are connected to the one with whom we abide in love. And this all blossoms into gratitude and thankfulness for the beloved and the One whose love has made all this possible. This is the way it is meant to be when it comes to husbands and wives. And it is a beautiful thing when this kind of abiding leads to the fruitfulness of motherhood.

Now as it is when it comes to abiding with loving wives and mothers, so it is when it comes to abiding with Christ. It is no accident that the community of the faithful is called the Bride of Christ and Mother Church. For there is to be an abiding between us and Christ that is something like the abiding between husband and wife. In fact, St. Paul says this very thing in the fifth chapter of Ephesians -- that the union of husband and wife mysteriously reflects the union between Christ and his Church.

What this means is that Christ wants to be a regular part of our lives. As a husband lives one life with his spouse, so Christ wants to live one life with us. That's why his Spirit is imparted to us in baptism as an abiding presence. That’s why he tells us in the gospel that he is going to prepare a place for us in the Father’s house, so that where he is we may be also. The love of Christ for us is so great that he doesn’t want it to last only for a lifetime but for all eternity.

And as the abiding in love between husbands and wives affects the shaping of their lives deeply and profoundly, so does one’s abiding in love with Christ. As we travel through life with Christ and experience his love more and more, we can’t help but grow in love for him. As we journey through life with Christ and are wounded in the process, we grow in understanding, become stronger, and more fruitful precisely because of the wounds we bear together. As we continue to abide with Christ, we come to see more and more how beautiful he really is – beautiful enough to keep us wanting to be with him forever. And so we look forward to sharing life with him in the Father’s house.

Also, as we abide with Christ, we will come more and more to treasure our connections with all those others loved by Christ. We will come to delight in the knowledge that together with them we make up that great spiritual house of which St. Peter spoke in our second reading. And we will find ourselves moved to help our brothers and sisters in need, as the apostles were in our first reading today -- for we will see in them the Christ who has embraced us all with his loving presence.

Today we are given the promise that if we abide with Christ, moving through life with him, we will come to know just how good life can be and we will be forever grateful.

Fr. Rod Damico
May 14, 2017