

Happy Mother's Day with a special prayer for those who have lost children,  
Those who have struggled with not being able to have children...

Edward, a big-game hunter, goes on safari in Kenya with his wife,  
Frances and his mother-in-law, Agnes.  
One evening, while still deep in the jungle,  
Frances awakes to find her mother, Agnes, has disappeared.  
Rushing to Edward, she insists on them both trying to find her mother.  
Sighing heavily, Edward picks up his rifle and starts to search for Agnes.  
Soon, in a clearing not far from the camp,  
they come upon a frightening sight.  
Agnes, the mother-in-law is backed up against a thick, impenetrable bush,  
and a large male lion is standing facing her.  
Frances cries out in panic, Edward, what are we going to do?'  
'Nothing,' explains Edward calmly. 'Absolutely nothing, my dear.  
The lion got himself into this mess, let him get himself out of it.'

The Stages Of Motherhood: Author Unknown

4 Years Of Age - My mommy can do anything.  
8 Years Of Age - My mom knows a lot.  
12 Years Of Age - My mother doesn't really know quite everything.  
15 Years Of Age - Naturally, mother doesn't know that, either.  
18 Years Of Age - Why ask mom? She's hopelessly old-fashioned.  
25 Years Of Age - Well, mom might know a little bit about that.  
35 Years Of Age - Before we decide, let's get mom's opinion.  
50 Years Of Age - Wonder what mom would have thought about it.  
65 Years Of Age - Wish I could talk it over with Mom.

It's true isn't it?

We all pass through stages of understanding about our parents.  
The older we get...the wiser our parents get.  
I think most of us recognize that about our parents...

But what about God?

Has your understanding of God changed as well throughout your life?

The reason I bring this up is that I was reading the other day that a full 25% of Americans, when asked about their religious affiliation, say it is **None of the above**.

This grouping, commonly called the “Nones”, that’s’ N-O-N-E not N-U-N is the fastest growing grouping in all of the religious categories.

These are generally people who have not left belief in God to become atheist, although some have...but these are people who have left the faith of their childhood because they can’t reconcile it with what they experience as adults.

And I would maintain it is because their image of God has not grown up; and their experience and understanding of the world has grown up.

And so I believe that just as our image of our parents should change as we mature, so too should our image of God.

Because all of us grew up with childhood images of God that cannot answer the questions of faith we face as adults.

What are some of the childhood images of God?

Some of us grew up believing in a **Santa Claus** God.

This is the God who responds to our prayers when our prayers are fair. If we ask for something and it is fair and reasonable, God will give it to us. God answers our prayers the way we want. If this is the God you learned about as a child and have never matured in your faith, you will be disappointed because that God doesn’t exist.

Or how about this one: **The Bodyguard God**...

You were taught as a child that if you believe in God, if you have faith, God will always protect you... You can see how that easily translates into believe in God and be good and bad things won’t happen to you. If you grew up with that image of God you won’t be able to reconcile that as an adult because you see bad things happen to good people all the time. In fact , if that is what God was...we wouldn’t be here today.

We are here today because  
a very bad thing happened to a very good man.  
So if that is the God you learned to trust as a child...  
and your image of God doesn't grow...you will be very frustrated in life.

Another image of God that many of us grew up with is the **Policeman God**.  
God is there to watch us and make sure we do good  
and to make us feel guilty when we don't do good.  
Imagine this...you're driving down the highway  
and you see a trooper shooting radar...  
you immediately take your foot off the gas...  
doesn't matter how fast you were going or if you were speeding or not  
you just instinctively do it...  
and if **you were** going too fast, you pass the trooper  
and you start checking your mirror to see if he or she pulls out to stop you.  
That's the policeman God that uses guilt  
to manipulate you into doing what you think God wants you to do.  
And if that image of God is still one that you hang onto today  
you constantly live your life with looking behind you  
seeing if you measure up to God's expectation,  
or worse yet, you just give up trying because you know you can't.

The final image that I want to look at, and this list has not been exhausted,  
is the **Boyfriend/Girlfriend God**...  
For those old enough to have experienced this...  
remember the first time you fell in love...how good it felt.  
He or she was always on your mind...  
and whenever you thought about him/her you felt good.  
Some people grew up believing that that is what God is like.  
God is always comforting  
and you always feel good when you think about God.  
And if you hang onto that image of God what happens to your faith  
when you experience the dark night of the soul.  
I'm always glad St. Theresa of Kolkata (Mother Theresa) grew out of that  
childhood image of God...because in her diaries she writes that for  
almost 40 years she never felt the presence of God...  
and in those 40 years she still answered God's call.

So what does a mature faith in God look like?

I think at least part of the answer to that question is found  
in our gospel reading today.

Jesus invites us to that ultimate level of faith when he says:

Do not let your hearts be troubled...have faith in God and faith in me.

In other words, a mature level of faith involves a level of trust...

Being okay with not having all the answers;

being untroubled while living in the sometimes chaotic and painful unknown.

A mature level of faith is being able to hang on your own cross, as Jesus did,  
and still allowing yourself to trust in God's ways.

In today's Gospel Jesus reminds us that he is the way and the truth and the life  
And that as we come to know him better we come to know God the Father,  
or Mother, or Creator, or whatever you call the first person of the trinity,  
but we come to know God better.

And that is not something we learn once for all...but something that grows  
each day we enter into that deeper search for God in our own lives.

This week I invite you to take some time to reflect on the God of your childhood.

What image of God did you grow up believing in?

The Santa Claus God...the Bodyguard God...the Policemen God...

Or the Boyfriend/Girlfriend God...

And how has that image of God changed?

What image of God is hardest for you to give up today?

Because God invites us to move beyond our childish faith...

into that mature faith...

a faith that follows fully the one who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.