

for CATHOLIC WISDOM
A MOTHER'S HEART



DONNA-MARIE COOPER O'BOYLE



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FOREWORD

I grew up loving and being loved by the world's best mother. The sad truth is that I didn't truly appreciate the many gifts my mother had bestowed upon me until I accepted and embraced my own vocation to motherhood. Somehow, when my son Eric was born, my eyes were opened to the sacrifices my mother had made on my behalf. But even more importantly, I came to full realization of the most prized treasure she had shared with my siblings and me—a true love for my faith and a personal relationship with a God who loves me unconditionally.

Having known my dear friend Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle for many years now, I have often noted the similarities between her and my own mother. Like my mom, who raised five of us, Donna-Marie has always been fully committed to the physical, emotional, and spiritual formation of the three girls and two boys who are at the center of her universe. Now as a grandmother, Donna-Marie's compassion continues to extend to a beautiful new generation.

Although the physical distance that separates us has kept Donna-Marie and me from seeing each other in person often, I "know" my precious friend even more intimately through the gift of her writing. Through her books, columns, and blogs, Donna-Marie has helped me more frequently than she will ever know. Just like my own mother, Donna-Marie's

witness to the mission of motherhood continues to inspire me to embrace my own path daily.

Catholic Wisdom for a Mother's Heart is the book I wish I'd had when my own sons—now both young adults—were toddlers. I spent too many years stressing out over things that don't really matter and missed a lot of opportunities along the way. The good news for me, and for you as well, is that our vocation to motherhood is a lifelong joy. The occasions to grow spiritually along with our children are as fresh and new each day as the morning dew glistening below each lovely sunrise.

Whether you are pregnant or awaiting the adoption of a child, foster-parenting, raising teens, or parenting adult children (as my mother still does every day for her five children and our spouses), the gift of motherhood continues to evolve in new and wonderful ways. The wisdom contained in *Catholic Wisdom for a Mother's Heart* is always relevant. Donna-Marie has done the difficult work of meticulously compiling a treasure trove of resources to guide and instruct us in the sublime responsibilities that accompany our role as mothers.

References to papal encyclicals, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and Holy Scripture are organized and presented to us in a way that complements the "real-world" issues that Donna-Marie discusses in her book. Donna-Marie shares the wisdom of the saints, our daily role models for virtuous living. In addition, we as readers benefit from Donna-Marie's personal relationship and correspondence with two

heroes of our faith, Father John A. Hardon, SJ, and St. Teresa of Calcutta. The cumulative effect of Donna-Marie's work is a book that is at once impeccably researched and endearingly personal.

Each of us, in our own unique ways and with our own special set of circumstances, has been called specially by God to the vocation of motherhood. With *Catholic Wisdom for a Mother's Heart*, Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle reminds us that we are each uniquely equipped to respond to God's trust in us to raise up our families to know and to love Him unceasingly. In the heart of our homes, we have the capacity to change our own little corners of the world through the love, compassion, and spiritual gifts we shower upon our children. Strengthened with prayer, we moms and our families are on the spiritual journey of a lifetime, filled with sacrifices, occasional struggles, and moments of great joy.

As you enjoy the pearls of wisdom and caring that are served up in *Catholic Wisdom for a Mother's Heart*, I hope you will join me in praying for other mothers around the world as we each walk our own unique vocational paths. I also hope that you will consider sharing the gift of *Catholic Wisdom for a Mother's Heart* with a special person in your life who may also be strengthened and encouraged by Donna-Marie's apostolate of love.

I continually give thanks for my own mother, who lives out on a daily basis the precepts that Donna-Marie shares with us in *Catholic Wisdom for a Mother's Heart*. Like my mother,

Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle is the type of mom I can only hope to be someday—happy, holy, and beloved by children who are well on their way to lives that will make a difference in this world. I would like to personally thank Donna-Marie for the ongoing gift of her friendship and for acting as a constant source of inspiration and enlightenment.

—Lisa M. Hendey, founder of CatholicMom.com

INTRODUCTION

Dear St. John Paul II said, "Motherhood is a woman's vocation. It is an eternal vocation, and it is also a contemporary vocation. . . . We must do everything in order that woman may merit love and veneration. We must do everything in order that children, the family and society may see in her that dignity that Christ saw." Motherhood today is not necessarily viewed as a noble or dignified vocation. Unfortunately, in many areas, society continues to value a person simply by the size of their paycheck, and therefore some mothers might not feel very confident in their role of raising their children. Our culture does not acknowledge the invaluable sacrifices and love in raising little saints to heaven. Add to that, today's mothers don't have many opportunities to receive a pat on the back for a job well done. Not that they are looking for any recognition, but a little affirmation here and there would be nice. Pope Francis pointed out, "Every human person owes his or her life to a mother, and almost always owes much of what follows in life, both human and spiritual formation, to her. Yet, despite being highly lauded from a symbolic point of view—many poems, many beautiful things said poetically of her—the mother is rarely listened to or helped in daily life, rarely considered central to society in her role."

The many mixed messages about women's rights and where a woman should find her place in society can make

one dizzy! Additionally, our culture does not often encourage mothers to consider the role that prayer plays in a family's life or that motherhood is a sublime vocation. Moreover, family members may not always express their appreciation for the tireless work and care given from their mother, which may cause a mom to feel a bit neglected and unacknowledged. What's a Catholic mother to do?

First of all, let's keep our chins up and know in our hearts that we Catholic mothers need not feel alone and are—in reality—sisters in Christ on this journey together! We can certainly all benefit from encouragement and praise to aid and uplift us on our pilgrimage throughout the challenging vocation of motherhood. We can extend a hand to help each other along the way. How fortunate we are to have been blessed with leaders in our Church, such as St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, and those before them who have always extolled mothers with their wonderful words of praise, acknowledging a mother's sublime role. Pope Francis underscored a mother's selfless and irreplaceable role when he said, "Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centered individualism. 'Individual' means 'what cannot be divided'. Mothers, instead, 'divide' themselves, from the moment they bear a child to give him to the world and help him grow."

We can all play an important role in our world today to be of assistance to other mothers we meet who are not quite aware of God's plan in their mothering, and we can help them

to discover their God-given gifts and their high dignity in Our Lord's eyes.

Let us ponder St. John Paul II's words:

It is a disservice not only to children but also to women and society itself when a woman is made to feel guilty for wanting to remain in the home and nurture and care for her children. It is also necessary to counter the misconception that the role of motherhood is oppressive to women and that a commitment to her family, particularly to her children, prevents a woman from reaching personal fulfillment and from having an influence in society. No response to women's issues can ignore a woman's role in the family or take lightly the fact that every new life is entrusted to the protection and care of the woman carrying it in the womb.

These are undoubtedly powerful and profound words to call to mind, especially if doubts arise within our own personal journeys and when attempting to help other mothers who have lost their way or are not sure what direction to pursue. Our example speaks volumes, and our kind words in response to women seeking direction in finding and achieving personal fulfillment can be very transforming, by God's grace.

Throughout my ministry to mothers, I have observed that Christian mothers everywhere are looking for strategies to help improve their prayer lives, their understanding of

their Faith, and their role in their home life as well. Like-minded women are feeling a vital and even urgent need to communicate with one another, comparing notes to discover the best approaches to mothering with grace as is very apparent in the many Catholic mothers' blogs that have been popping up all over the Internet and the many mothers' groups that are gathering together in homes, parishes, or online to participate in studies about their Catholic faith. I have also found that even though we mothers are surrounded by many confusing messages targeting women, there is an encouraging authentic resurgence of Christian women who are fighting through it all, thirsting for the truth. This is very heartwarming. God's grace abounds! These women are tomorrow's saints.

Mothering my own five children for the past forty-plus years has given me deep happiness, wisdom from the "trenches," and also plenty of stories to tell! I humbly offer Catholic mothers "recipes" and advice for seeking and finding a deep and enriching spiritual life while remaining attentive to their families. My prayer is that this book will serve mothers well and that they will find encouragement, praise, camaraderie, and direction throughout its pages.

Dear mothers, enjoy reading, reflecting, and pondering on the material in this book. I hope it will be inspiring food for your soul and that you will *feel* your well-deserved pat on the back! Make yourself a steaming cup of tea or coffee, and sit and take a little time to refresh your soul. Allow this

book to serve you, taking in nourishment from its flavorful recipes for faithful mothering. Be at peace so that you may guide your family well with joy and love within your amazing vocation—lighting your family's way to heaven!

Let's be confident, knowing that by loving our families, dedicating our vocations to the Lord, and seeking assistance from the Blessed Mother, as well as intercession from the saints, we will be "making our lives something beautiful for God," as my friend St. Teresa of Calcutta used to say.

St. John Paul II has assured us that "the dignity and responsibility of the Christian family as the domestic Church can be achieved only with God's unceasing aid, which will surely be granted if it is humbly and trustingly petitioned in prayer" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 59). Let's be sure to ask Our Lord for his unceasing aid. Let us sisters in Christ stick together, encourage one another, and continue our prayers for each other and our families within our domestic churches, as we mother our families with grace. May God bless us all!



The hour is coming, indeed has come, in which the vocation of women is being acknowledged in its fullness; the hour in which women acquire in the world an influence, an effect, and a power never hitherto achieved. That is why at this moment, when the human race is undergoing so deep a transformation, women, imbued with the spirit of the Gospel, can do so much to aid mankind in not falling.

—From the Closing Documents of Vatican II



M O T H E R

The Most Important Person on earth is a mother.
She cannot claim the honor of having built Notre
Dame Cathedral.

She need not.

She has built something more magnificent than any
cathedral—

a dwelling for an immortal soul, the tiny perfection
of her baby's body. . . .

The angels have not been blessed with such a
grace.

They cannot share in God's creative miracle to
bring new saints to Heaven.

Only a human mother can.

Mothers are closer to God the Creator than any
other creature;

God joins forces with mothers in performing this
act of creation. . . .

What on God's good earth is more glorious than
this: to be a mother?

—Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty

— 1 —
A MOTHER'S CALL
TO HOLINESS

*Holiness is not a luxury for a few,
but a duty for us all.*

—St. Teresa of Calcutta

A call to holiness for me? Can that be true? What kind of holiness? Catholic mothers may not even be aware that they are indeed called to a life of holiness. Child-rearing for the most part is typically viewed as a secular role rather than a spiritual one in many areas around the globe. After all, a mother's days are overflowing with the very ordinary family activities that keep a mom engrossed with the tasks at hand. Given that her schedule is very demanding, a mother may not have occasion to offer a second thought to the possibility of a call to holiness, being satisfied with just getting her family to Mass on Sundays and holy days. While this is certainly not a bad thing, Our Lord wants more of us. He beckons us to holiness. Yes, that's right—he calls us to be saints! You may laugh, but don't give up on this book just yet! Pope Francis extols us all to a life of holiness and tells us how

to achieve it! He said, "We are all called to be saints. But," he continued, holiness is not "granted only to those who have the opportunity to break away from the ordinary tasks, to devote themselves to prayer." More precisely, everyone is called to holiness in their own state of life. It is within the nitty-gritty details of life—between the pots and pans, diaper changes, and car pools—that we mothers aspire to holiness, asking for graces and responding with love, even in the most difficult moments.

Pope Francis explained, "Indeed, it is by living with love and offering Christian witness in our daily tasks that we are called to become saints. . . . Always and everywhere you can become a saint, that is," he said, "by being receptive to the grace that is working in us and leads us to holiness."

I wholeheartedly recommend beginning your day with a Morning Offering prayer to the Lord. Then you know you have started out on the right foot by giving everything over to God. Here is one that you can pray:

O Jesus, through the Immaculate Heart of Mary,
 I offer you my prayers, works, joys, and sufferings of this day
 for all the intentions of your Sacred Heart,
 in union with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass throughout
 the world,
 for the salvation of souls, the reparation of sins, the reunion
 of all Christians,
 and, in particular, for the intentions of the Holy Father this
 month.
 Amen.

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“IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD!”

In the Gospel of John (4:10) we become aware that the mystery of prayer is revealed by the well where one goes to seek water. This Gospel tells the story of the Samaritan woman meeting her Lord Jesus at Jacob's well. In John 4:7–25 we are told about this ordinary yet extraordinary meeting. The woman wanted to fetch water for her family, and Jesus was there at the well to offer his living water to her specifically. There, beside the well, a conversation between a Samaritan woman and Our Lord Jesus Christ began.

First, we recognize that Jesus was speaking to a woman out in public, something that was unheard of for a man at that time. Second, we see that the woman was a Samaritan, and Samaritans were despised by the Jews. Yet Jesus persisted with his loving confrontation, asking the woman about her husband. The woman tried to beat around the bush and disguise her sinful life. In a matter of time, though, by God's grace, she recognized who she was actually speaking with and suddenly began to understand the deep love of her Savior and his insatiable thirst for mankind through his discourse

with her. The Samaritan woman's heart was immediately transformed, and she became a missionary, running back to her village to bring the incredible holy message of Our Lord's love and living water to her people.

St. Augustine has described this remarkable and historic meeting between the Samaritan woman and Jesus in *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, telling us that Jesus comes to meet every human being and finds us as we are drawing our water. Interpreting this scenario as one that touches us all, not just the Samaritan woman, St. Augustine explains that Jesus is the first to seek us; his request for a drink expresses his thirst for our love. He tells us that the desire that Jesus has for our love "arises from the depths of God's desire for us" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [hereafter called CCC], 2560). St. Augustine has explained that even though we do not realize it, "prayer is the encounter of God's thirst with ours. God thirsts that we may thirst for him" (CCC, 2560). This profound insight from St. Augustine gives us a new way to view prayer—amazingly, God thirsts for us and wants us to thirst for him! He calls us to a union with him. Let us take some time soon to ponder that incredible truth.

St. Teresa of Calcutta often spoke about how Jesus thirsts for our love. She lived her life striving to satiate his thirst by taking care of the poorest of the poor all over this planet. I was often blessed to see this remarkable holy woman in action. I have also observed the deep reverence and understanding of Our Savior's thirst in all the Missionaries of Charity sisters

that I have met. The words "I Thirst" mark every Missionaries of Charity chapel throughout the world. They are painted on the wall beside the tabernacle to remind all who enter the chapel of Jesus's thirst for our love and that we need to thirst for his love in return. Perhaps busy mothers can ponder those two simple yet powerful words soon: "I Thirst."

IS A MOTHER'S CALL TO HOLINESS LOST IN HOUSEWORK?

When a Catholic mother becomes aware in some way that Our Lord is calling her to come closer to him, she may naturally fear that her call to holiness might have been lost at the kitchen sink or in her laundry room. She might even think that it is impossible for her to find any extra time to pray and strive for holiness. As well, a mother may be so busy with the care of her household and children that she may forget or not even realize that God, in his divine plan, has chosen her specifically to mother her children.

Each day brings us many unique challenges, as well as a variety of ordinary routines. Sometimes the routine or monotony of tasks may cause a mother to feel that nothing extraordinary is going on—at all! She's just trying to catch up with household chores and her growing, active children who fill her days to capacity. Keeping up with the many duties in the home, the care of the children, and various activities

with the family usually means that women fall into bed each night thoroughly exhausted, with their next day's "to-do" list spinning around in their brains.

Time itself can seem like a luxury that is meant for others, certainly not mothers. Newborn babies have a way of keeping their mothers up all hours of the night, and toddlers are a constant whirlwind of energy, while older children require supervision and deserve attention too. A mother needs to have the proverbial "eyes at the back of her head" and extra arms and hands to complete all of her tasks, not to mention the need for additional hours in the day! Dust settles everywhere and laundry piles up much too fast, contrary to a mother's wishes. Mothers, who are trying to care for themselves, other family members, and their bustling household, yearn for a little extra sleep if there are ever a few moments to spare, and never mind finding time for extra prayer—there simply isn't any. I vividly remember when my babies were tiny and seeing commercials on television for mattresses and wishing I could just lie down and take a nap! As the family grows, so do the activities, and time becomes even scarcer. I'm sure we all agree that mothers everywhere face the dilemma of the lack of time in their "twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week" role.

With so much responsibility heaped upon a mother's shoulders, we begin to wonder how mothers who are striving for holiness can achieve a closer union with the Lord amid the hectic pace of family life. How can a mom be true to

her commitment to God to raise Christian children when her days are filled to the brim? She cannot possibly neglect her children, but what if she is neglecting God in the care of them? A mother may also feel extremely conflicted trying to figure out where she can find a quiet place and the extra time for the essential prayer needed to keep her heart and soul focused on God, while she knows that her commitment to her family requires her time and effort to focus fully on them.