

Solomon, Saint Monica, and a Prodigal Child's Mother

by Susan Handle Terbay

A dear friend of mine, also the mother of six children, once told me, "When you have six kids, at least one is always in a crisis mode." At the moment I laughed because her children were older than mine. However, I learned there is no assurance for moms when it comes to having all our children content in their life journeys . . . the more children the less assurance.

When I was a young mom with little children, I had to have the wisdom of Solomon in judging and executing the family rules. This in and of itself was a daily occurrence. However, King Solomon does not have to worry about me taking over his status as a wisdom figure in the world. There will be no Queen Susan or her wisdom featured in any book or story. As a parent, my "fairness" always was questioned, and perhaps my execution at times was a bit flawed.

Later, as my children became adults, I prayed more and became like Saint Monica . . . hoping that God heard my plea for any of my children who have strayed or gone onto a wayward path. God hears daily about each child of mine and their life choices. Saint Monica did not give up on her son Augustine, so I'm not giving up on any of my children. Will they reach the status of Saint Augustine? Doubt it: that's not my prayer. My prayer is they reach the status of who they are meant to be to and be content to be so.

Now in my later years I feel more like the mother of the prodigal children. My children have all moved away—only a few stay in touch regularly. The others are on an "as needed" basis. Do I want all six of these six children back home and invading my life? No, of course not. But I do have to say that upon their entering my home with a shout of "I'm home" and a hug, my heart leaps with great joy, and my love for them overflows my heart and soul. It isn't the constant physical presence for which I yearn: it is the presence of their lives and their stories I miss when they choose to remain away.

For these past 40-plus years I am home. I also am Solomon and Saint Monica and yes the mother of prodigal children. It is the part of motherhood that isn't featured in a "How to Be a Mom" book. It is the reality of joy and sorrow and of love and acceptance when saying yes to being a mom. There are no guarantees, no contracts, no provision that our children will live with the hopes and dreams we have for them. For it isn't our lives we want for them; it is theirs and that a part of their lives include us.

Many mothers before me and after me will live this reality. Only one other Being truly understands motherhood—it is the One who created all of us—who created King Solomon, Saint Monica, and the fathers and mothers of prodigal children. The question for us is are we the children who stay in touch regularly, or are we the children who stay in contact on an as needed basis. As with moms, I'm sure God's greatest joy is hearing the words "I'm home!"