

Who Do You Love More: Mom or Dad?

Which do you like better Armenian or America? I would get asked all the time in Armenia. It took me while to answer this correctly, with another question. Who do you like better your mother or your father?

I think back in the 3rd century people were asking the same question about God their father, creator of heaven and earth, all powerful, ever transcendent and their mother church, always near, of this world, tangible, nurturing. Well a saint name Cyprian answered the question of who do you like better God the Father or mother church by saying, *"He cannot have God as father, who has not the Church as his mother."*

Today on Father's day you will probably not see Cyprian's quote on a hallmark card anytime soon. But to understand the full celebration of Father's Day and Mother's Day, we must come to church. In church we recall that fathers and mothers and families, reflect something of the nature of God, not the other way around. And following Cyprian's quote, before we recognize Fathers and God The Father, we must start with Mothers and the church who is The Mother.

Mothers do indeed come first. That's life. Narek could say 'Ma-ma' way before he said 'Da-da'. Mama was the first person he ever saw, and continues to be the last person he says at night and first in the morning. And it is the same in our spiritual life. The first image we see in any Armenian church is Mary the mother of God and the first words that come out of our mouth in worship are to ask our mother Mary to speak well of us to The Father. Mary, the Church is our nurturer. We learn the ABC's of the spiritual life from her in Sunday School and ACYOA. She is our comforter and nurturer, not only when we are little, but nurturing us throughout our lives when pastor and parishioner work together to care and counsel those who are in need. The mother church nurtures and loves her children unconditionally and always, there is nothing you can do to make her stop caring for you.

So mother and mother church are first, but in herself she is not enough. We must start with the love of our mothers, but are incomplete without the love of our Father. Can anyone point to where God our Father is pictured in this church? We very rarely depict him. When you depict someone, they are close to you; on the same level. God the father is more distant, more imposing, more authoritative than Mother Mary who is approachable, always near and loving.

But although you can't see God the father, you should be able to hear him. He is the one who spoke in thunder on Mt. Sinai, giving the 10 commandments, telling us what we should and shouldn't do to live a good life. His voice is also heard through the prophets, telling us that if we don't listen to him, who knows what is best for us, we will stumble and fall hurt ourselves. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." He is heard decisively through his beloved Son Jesus Christ, who says that his Father wishes us to be perfect as He himself is perfect.

Where the Mother Church loves and nurtures, God the Father instructs and transforms. Where we have Mother's love, no matter what we do and how we behave—Our Father asks more of us, holds to something higher in terms of behavior, and challenges a child to become something more than they are. Fathers are givers of love but are also often the giver of the law and enforcer of the rules in the family. Robert Frost said "You don't have to deserve your mother's love. You have to deserve your father's. He's more particular."

And so, in this way, we grow in the spiritual life as in our human life which is its reflection. Our mothers nurture and love and bring their mercy to us and our fathers, move us to be more, to grow stronger to be transformed into something greater than we already are. Who do you love better?

Nonsense you love and need them both. Both are contained in the life of our church and faith, where today we call on Mary the Mother of God, Queen of the Church, as we speak well of our fathers on today their special day and give thanks for our Father in heaven, whom we glorify and praise now and always; amen.