

## Luke 1:46–55

<sup>46</sup>And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, <sup>47</sup>and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, <sup>48</sup>for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; <sup>49</sup>for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. <sup>50</sup>His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. <sup>51</sup>He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. <sup>52</sup>He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; <sup>53</sup>he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. <sup>54</sup>He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, <sup>55</sup>according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

## **Mother's Day Message**

By Charo Cabardo

May 10, 2026

La Habra UMC

Happy Mother's Day to you all.

First of all, please allow me to thank Pastor Soomee for this rare honor to share my story as a mother with you.

I am a mother of six children, two boys and four girls. My first three children are Aya, a writer; Nikki, a musician and Michael, a film maker – already in their 50s. My second batch of children are three daughters – Anna, a visual artist and Lorena and Leia are nurses. All are married and I have 15 grandchildren.

I became a mother at the young age of 19. I was, then, a third-year student at the University of the Philippines, majoring in journalism. The times were unsettling, to say the least. The Philippines then was in turmoil – students were on the streets protesting the corruption and scandals in government with our president wanting to stay in power beyond the term allowed by our constitution. In 1971, the writ of habeas corpus was suspended. Basically, it meant that you have been stripped of your rights. You can be killed or be made to disappear without accountability by any person or group or institution. And it did happen, to so many people. Some were friends that disappeared, we called them desaparecidos.

My husband, who was also a student of civil engineering, and I were both activists, as most of the students then in almost all the universities in the Philippines. We became more active in the youth movement when President Marcos declared martial law in the Philippines in 1972. By the end of 1972, we had already two children and we left them with my parents as we worked full time in the movement.

We published an alternative newspaper then, and by 1974, the military raided many houses including ours. They placed us in a maximum-security detachment because my husband was previously a top cadet at the Philippine Military Academy but

decided to discontinue his schooling. He had been arrested before as an activist and had escaped once, and it embarrassed the military hence our detention at the maximum-security detachment. However, there, he was also able to escape but returned to the camp when he felt deep longings for our children. So, we were brought to the maximum-security unit at Fort Bonifacio in Manila and there we faced solitary confinement and held incommunicado from our family. At first, I was in solitary confinement in a windowless room, but when they learned that I was pregnant with Michael, they placed us together in a detention cell. They called it a detention cell, but all the same, it was a prison for us. The building also detained Senators Benigno Aquino and Jose Diokno, a grandson of a past president of the Philippines and the son of the owner of many big businesses, a media network, etc.

We were detained there for nearly four years. In 1974, my husband was frustrated by our long detention and unkept promise to release us, so he escaped again. I gave birth to Michael a week after his escape, at the Military hospital surrounded by soldiers. I was again placed in solitary confinement and my windows were closed with plywood. My family was allowed to visit me for an hour only, one day in the week. My husband thought that I would be released since I was pregnant as they had promised us. But it did not turn out that way. Realizing the futility of his escape, my husband came back. So, Michael spent his first three years with us in detention.

As a young mother of three, in political detention, it was frustrating, but we tried our best to be loving parents whenever we could be together. Sometimes, the military allowed my two children to stay with for a few days.

We were lucky. So many mothers lost their sons and daughters, abducted by the military and never seen again. They have become desaparecidos. After our release from detention, we resolved to unite our family, raise our children. So, we went back to the university, finished our studies and then found work – me as a magazine writer and my husband as a computer analyst. We raised our children, enrolled them in good schools, became involved parents in their education and other activities. We enrolled them in art, ballet, theater and music classes. We brought them to many places of interest, believing that they will learn not only from school but from outside of the school as well. We engaged them in reading, in

watching movies, listening to music, bringing them to many jazz concerts. When we had our three daughters, I decided to go full time as a mother.

But sometimes, life is not what you had planned it. My husband died of cancer when he was just 37 years old, at the peak of his career ( he was vice-president of a big corporation). I was just 36; my youngest daughter just two years old, Michael was just 13. and my eldest daughter was just 17.

The challenge was enormous and daunting. I could not even go into mourning. I had to find work and raise my children by myself. When my husband died, he left us a letter –

*To my dearest family –*

*When I have accepted the other greater possibilities of this ailment, I HAVE GIVEN MYSELF TO GOD'S HAND. ONLY HE HENCEFORTH WILL GRANT WHAT WE ASK.*

*HAVE FAITH. TRUST THAT WHATEVER ALL OF US DO IN THE GLORY OF HIS KINGDOM SHALL BE BLESSED WITH HIS PROVIDENCE.*

*THEN FIRST AND LAST LET US LIVE IN THE SPIRIT OF LIFE. WE SHALL NEVER GROPE IN DARKNESS. . .*

*This is what I will leave you with for nothing more is worth this testament that God gave me a son's chance to transform into and share with all of who are very dear to me.*

*God is with you always, so rejoice every moment of life.*

*In God Almighty,*

*Tatay*

So, we began again another chapter in our life, work again, raise the children and it was only our faith and our bond as a family that kept us going. I did not allow myself a moment without work for surely it would bring tears. That strengthened me to face the enormous task, ignore the loss of a beloved husband. I worked full time, did additional work as writer and worked full time as a mother and father. I made sure that the older children went to a good school which was U.P. I made sure that they had a passion to nurture – like music, art, writing– so they could not

waste their time in idle pursuits or – my greatest fear then – their friends would tempt them with drugs.

But I did not lose myself totally in work and family. I reserved a day in the week for me. My Saturdays were spent doing archival research, learning the Spanish language, I enrolled in photography, attended workshops.

As my older children were pursuing college studies, I became involved in development work– founded a non-profit civil society organization. I brought my young daughters to the province as our organization was engaged community organization, training the people for livelihood projects, protecting our forests and marine habitats. I was involved in biodiversity conservation with UNDP funding – I would bring my daughters to forests, waterfalls, rivers, to our small islands . . . engaging them also in development and environmental work.

Finally, to a mother’s joy and pride – our hard work paid off – one by one, my children graduated from college, found work and found creative and professional pursuits, and started their own families. When I retired from work and my work as a mother had lessened, so I shifted again to another challenge, another chapter in my life.

I pursued my life-long interest in history and in writing. I made books, coffee table books on history, culture and the environment and my children became my collaborators as writers, artists and editors.

Pastor Soomee asked me, “What are some things you learned because you are a mother.”

I am now 74 years old, with more than half a century of motherhood. When you become a mother, you are holding a miracle in your arms. You marvel at God’s creation. You marvel at the tiny creature in your arms and the challenging task of shaping and raising this baby to be a good person life. And in my case, my Christian faith kept me going, in good and bad times. Motherhood had helped me become a good Christian for how else can you be a good example to your children? Where will you draw strength if not from God? I was raised as a Catholic, raised in deep Catholic traditions but when my children embraced other faiths, it was okay with me as long they believe in God, as long as they are good Christians.

The second lesson I learned is not to abandon yourself, Grow with the children. Try to fulfill your life-long passions in life. When finally, the nest becomes empty, you are not left an empty person. When we are able to become, our children take pride in our accomplishments as we take pride in what they have become. As they become themselves mothers and fathers, motherhood becomes full cycle. They become good mothers if not even better mothers and fathers and to their children, the best mother, the best father. Mothers cannot be mothers without fathers, so  
Happy Mother's Day and Father's Day.