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2014

## Mother and Child

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### Repository Citation

Roche, Fr. Randy, "Mother and Child" (2014). *Spiritual Essays*. 347.

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## Mother and Child

One of the most common artistic images of Christmas portrays the child Jesus with his mother. Most of such scenes are beautiful, conveying the joy and peace of a mother lovingly caring for her child. That the child is also the Creator of all that exists, including his mother, does not change the human associations and feelings that accompany the depictions we view. If we let our imaginations accompany our reflection on what we see, we enter a mystery that connects us in our immediate present with the events that occurred more than two thousand years ago.

All of our experiences of family life are unique to us, whether our own or with those of friends, associates or even people we see but do not personally know. We constantly grow and change through interactions with one another and the world about us. Mothers and fathers live moment-to-moment with newborn children, requiring great amounts of support from others, constant adjustments to the needs of their sons or daughters, and continual inner struggles to balance their many responsibilities in life. A picture is static, but life is ever-changing.

Any Christmas image, for those who are interested and willing to do more than glance at a card, a crèche or their own favorite depiction, can serve as the beginning of an interactive, highly personalized experience that has real effects in the present. Familiar events in our lives become intertwined with those of Jesus and his historical contemporaries in a manner that is quite ordinary and extraordinary at the same time. The difference between this common "spiritual exercise" and spending time with parents and children we can see and hear is not that between fantasy and reality, but that between reality enhanced by faith and reality that is not.

When we relate with any person, whether infant or adult, we are changed, according to how we interact with varying degrees of attention and care. We are never quite the same person after having either given or reserved the fullness of our participation in any personal encounter. If we willingly and consciously engage in an imagined visit with the mother and child of the Christmas Season, we are not limited to a specific scene, but to any living and active part of the ongoing events, including words, gestures and actions, together with our thoughts, feelings and memories. We come as we are with all our life experiences to whatever is happening with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and anyone else whom we might include.

With the help of both memory and imagination we can recall a recent meal that we have shared with someone, probably not in every detail, but in any of the aspects that are now of interest to us, even if we had not been aware

of their significance at the time. In like manner, we can recall in the present, any possible human interchange of mother and child and the people and events in the environment of Bethlehem of Judea. In our minds and hearts, assisted by inspired use of our memory and imagination, we bring together the historical core reality of the events and the familiar details of our own lives, to a soul-satisfying unity.

Any time we wish, we can visit with mother and child or any other scene of God's loving presence among us.