

## **FAMILY RESEMBLANCE**

### ***Sermon for Easter 6A—Jn 14:15-21***

LPC, 5/25/14

This is a little late, because Mothers' Day was two weeks ago, but I'd like to start this sermon by telling you about my mother's mother, my Nana.

None of my grandparents had very easy lives, but my Nana's was uniquely difficult because she was a single mother during the Great Depression.

Nana was the child of working-class English immigrants. She quit school after ninth grade. She worked as a nanny and as a telephone operator before she met, fell in love with, and married my grandfather, a World War I veteran. My grandfather's lungs had been terribly scarred by mustard gas. But he survived the war, married my grandmother and started a family. When Nana was expecting their third child, my grandfather caught a simple cold. Unfortunately, this was more than his ruined lungs could take and he was dead in two weeks. My pregnant grandmother was destitute at the height of the Depression.

She and her children lost their house, and would have been homeless but for the charity of relatives. Still, she absolutely refused to apply for relief. When the church sent a Christmas care package, she blew up at the idea that anybody would think her a woman in poverty. This was a woman with pride, spirit and determination. .

When her youngest child was old enough, Nana went out to work, though with her lack of education and training she had to take some menial jobs. In her fifties, however, with both her daughters married and her youngest child, her son, in the Army, she went back to school, got her high school equivalency diploma and passed a civil service exam. From then until her retirement she worked for the Navy Department.

Nana brooked no nonsense, but she was far from severe. She was always, in my presence, cheerful, pleasant, smiling, uncomplaining. She didn't like to be idle and she was great in a crisis. When she finally, reluctantly, went into Assisted Living, she stayed up on current events, though she disliked spending time in the Day Room with "the old ladies." She was 98.

I guess you can tell how proud I am of my grandmother. You can probably sense how much I loved her. She has been dead now for 17 years. But obviously she lives on in many ways.

She obviously lives on in my mother, who resembles her physically. My mother has the same bright blue eyes, snow-white hair and erect posture. My mother has also inherited her common sense, her determination, her persistently positive outlook and her quiet, gentle dignity. My mother is not a clone of my Nana, but Nana lives in her.

I like to think that Nana also lives in me. Although my eyes are green, they have the same cast as my grandmother's eyes. I can also be determined, and function well in a crisis. Like Nana, I do not suffer fools gladly. I like to think my decision to return to school in my 50's

is an echo of her returning to school in her 50's. Nana lives not only my memory, she lives, in a real way, in my appearance, my behaviors and attitudes, in my very cells.

Now that I am about to become a grandmother myself, I understand how grandchildren also live in their grandparents. You grandparents know what I'm talking about. Once you have grandchildren, not only are you a part of them, since they literally carry a quarter of your DNA, but they quickly become a part of you. I already feel that my grandchild is a part of me, though she (or he) won't be born till August.

This extended discussion of intergenerational relations is inspired by today's lesson from the Gospel of John. The excerpt we heard today is from the so-called "Farewell Discourse," where Jesus preaches to his disciples on the Eve of his arrest and execution.

Some of the language is very circular and difficult in this passage, resembling, as I have often remarked, the language of the Beatles' acid-head song "I am the Walrus." You know the part: "I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together." Be honest. Doesn't that come to mind when you hear Jesus say, "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you"?

What I am trying to convey in all this talk of family members living in one another across generations is something of what Jesus is saying in this passage from John. Jesus lives in the Father and disciples live in Jesus and Jesus lives in the disciples because of a family relationship. This relationship involves both family resemblance and reciprocal love.

It's not hard to see how the Father lives in Jesus and how Jesus lives in the Father. The Father's power and glory are manifest in Jesus, along with the Father's creativity, forgiveness and unconditional love. Jesus and the Father live in each other.

Jesus and the disciples, by which I mean "us," also live in each other. When we truly follow Jesus, his power and glory, his creativity, forgiveness and love are manifest in us. Thus Jesus lives in us.

But there's more. We live in Jesus as I lived in my Nana, as my proleptic grandchild already lives in me. We inspire in Jesus the same passionate, longing love that our children and grandchildren inspire in us. Just think of that. The same feelings we have for our children and grandchildren are the same feelings God has for us. Feelings, no, more than feelings: convictions, like the sudden certitude that once that child began to exist, his or her life is inextricably bound with yours. Like the knowledge that there is nothing in the world you would not do for that child. This is how God relates to us in Jesus.

And that is something to celebrate – Mothers' Day, Fathers' Day, Memorial Day, every day.