

One of the things I'm privileged to be able to do is to visit my family frequently, and it's always a joy to see my sister and my mom in how they interact with my nephew Henry who is going on 5. They fill his life with love, but also when I look at how they relate to him and all they do for him, I'm taken back to my own childhood and recall all that my mom did for me as well. For in doing these things like helping with homework, teaching me right from wrong, and helping me to grow in holiness, in so many actions both my mom and dad have taught me so much about how to become a better person.

In a story he shares about his own mother, Joseph Walker, writing in a collection of stories about mothers and sons, talks about how for him, a key moment came when his mother decided to go to a roller skating party.

He remembers being 8 at the time, and looking back he can't recall just why he was so obsessed with going to this party at the Rustic Rink with his fellow Cubs and lacing on a pair of heavy black rollerskates.

There was just one problem however. It was a Cubs-and-parents affair, which meant he had to invite his mom and dad. Now on the one hand, he loved his parents. But he had long since figured out they were a little different from most of his friends' folks. For one thing, they were older - his dad was 53 at the time and his mom was 47 - and they were physically less active than other parents in the neighborhood. His friend would go skiing and camping with their parents. His let him sit and watch the Mickey Mouse Club nearly every day.

This was why it surprised him a bit when his mom responded so enthusiastically to the skating party when he finally brought it up.

"But I never learned to rollerskate" his dad protested.

"Then it's time you learned" his mom said. "Besides, you used to ice skate."

"Wanda, that was 40 years ago" was her comeback.

"Oh you know how it is with those kinds of things," mom assured him. "Once you learn them, you never forget them." She placed her hands lovingly on her son's shoulders. "It means so much to him, Bud. Don't you think we should at least give it a try?"

Dad looked at Joe with mock frustration.

"All right" he said with a shrug and a chuckle. Then he pointed a finger directly at Joe. "But you better plan on following right behind me so I can land on you when I fall."

The way it worked out, that job fell to Mom. Since she had actually skated when she was a little girl, she was designated the skating expert. It was her task to support dad as he made his herky-jerky, clackety-clacking way around the rink and to go down with him whenever he fell, which was about once every 20 feet or so. They would sit on the floor

for a few seconds after each fall, giggling like teenagers, and then struggle to their feet and begin again.

Clackety clack, with a thud, and a laugh.

But Joe wasn't laughing. Most of the other parents seemed to skate pretty well. Ron and Don's dad could skate backward, for Pete's sake. But there was his roly-poly mom trying to support his nearly white-haired father, who just couldn't grasp the concept of gliding on skates. They went down-again and again-in an embarrassing gale of laughter, making enough noise that you could barely hear the Beach Boys tunes blaring from the rink's loudspeakers.

Joe recalls he didn't even tell his parents "thank you" as they drove home from the party that night. He vaguely remembers hearing his mom joke that her back was a little sore, but mostly he sat solmenly, up to his earlobes in humiliation and self-pity.

His mortification turned to shame of another sort when his mom awoke in the middle of the night in agony. Dad gave her aspirin. He alternated putting a heatin gpad on her back and then massaging it. Mom tried to be brave, but she couldn't keep from moaning in pain, low and guttural, and tears rolled down her cheeks until her pillow glistened with moisutre.

Joe tried to sleep through it, but it was impossible with the remorse that enveloped him. As the first light of day peeked over the mountains, his dad prepared to take his mom to the ER. He heard him sadly tell his sister that it was his fault for being so darn clumsy.

But feeling guilty, Joe blamed himself. When he finally saw his mom in the hospital, he was overwhelmed with guilt. She had slipped a disc in her back and was in traction, which looked to him like something straight out of a torture chamber. Her hadn't was held in place by an ugly assortment of cables and harnesses that kept her looking straight ahead. A stack of weights pulled her feet, like a painful game of tug-of-war.

And he had put her there he thought. For all he knew, she was dying. Because of me he thought. For the first time, he understood how selfless her love had been. And how selfish he had been.

"Mom" he said as he could barely speak.

"Joey? Is that you son? I'm sorry I can't see you." Again she was apologizing for something that wasn't her fault. He figured it was his turn to ask forgiveness.

"Mom, last night, the rollerskating." He couldn't even form the words.

"Oh yes, the rollerskating." She said. Then she beamed a smile as best she could in that contraption she was in. "We did have a wonderful time didn't we?"

Thankfully his mom didn't die from the injuries she suffered at the Rustic Rink, but her back was never the same.

And neither, Joe hoped, was he.

In that experience, in seeing how much his mom loved him and what she was willing to do for him, Joey was transformed. He was changed and his eyes were opened to what true love and sacrifice were all about. And while it's just one story, my suspicion is that it's one of many things that his mom did for him that helped him to see how to live and how to love. And more than likely you have stories like that too.

Today we celebrate the Assumption, a feast we don't find in the Bible, but that goes back centuries in our faith, finally declared a dogma in 1950. Mary is assumed body and soul into heaven, a reward for having this complete trust in God, and for living a life of love for Jesus, Joseph and her heavenly Father.

We hope to be like Mary. We won't likely be assumed body and soul into heaven, but we hope to be with her in heaven. The only problem is much like Joey's dad, we will stumble and fall in the roller rink that is this earth. But the good news is that just as Joey's mom was there for him, our heavenly mother is there for us too. And she assists us in two very important ways.

For one, she intercedes for us. As we pray in the "Hail Mary," we say "Pray for us Sinners." We entrust ourselves to our Blessed Mother. Saint John Paul II said: "through Marian devotion Christians acknowledge the value of Mary's presence on their journey to salvation, having recourse to her for every kind of grace. They especially know that they can count on her motherly intercession to receive from the Lord everything necessary for growing in the divine life and for attaining eternal salvation." God uses people on this earth to help us grow closer to Him, such as He did in the case of Joey's parents, but Mary in a special way brings us closer to Jesus by praying for us, or picking us up when we fall if you will. Mary is in heaven, but she is concerned too with the Church on earth. In heaven she is close to God, and prays for us because she is concerned for us. That's why when we are hurting, battling sin, or just can't seem to overcome something, we can always turn to our mother to be there for us. Sometimes as we grow up we go through phases where we think our mother might not understand us, or we have to hide things from her, but odds are she sees through that, and we come to understand that she will be there for us always. So much more so is this the case with our heavenly mother. Just as she held her Son's dead body, she holds us too in our pains and our struggles. She is there to journey with us and give us strength, and we should never fear reaching out to her.

But so too, as we reach out to her, we can learn so much from her. Joey from that moment in his childhood learned a thing or two about selflessness and love. Seeing what his mother did changed him and made him a better man. And ideally that is what happens too when we look to our Blessed Mother. She is assumed into heaven because she is perfect. Born without sin she was not born without free will; yet she

freely chose to love, to sacrifice, to give. We see this in the Gospel, as she selflessly visits her cousin, Elizabeth and helps her. But there are also so many things that happen in her life. Mary responds by turning to God in prayer; at the wedding in Cana, she prays by asking Jesus' help for the wedding party. She responds to God with trust and faith, for as her cousin Elizabeth said of her, she believed that what God had spoken would be fulfilled. She responds by doing what she can do; she looks for Jesus when he disappears into the Temple as a child, instead of sitting helplessly in worry. And she responds again by going to the foot of the cross, and then with the disciples to the Upper Room. The point is Mary is a woman who loves God completely, and uses that love by bringing it into the world. Heaven is for the perfect, and if we want to become perfect, it's about continually learning how to respond to God's love by being an agent of it in this world, as Joey's parents did for him. So we should look at how Mary responded, and ask ourselves how do we respond when opportunities arise to be a person of love and charity. From doing something for the family like Joey's parents or assisting at Church, volunteering, forgiving, or turning the other cheek, there are so many ways this happens. Mary is great role model for us to look to as we examine our consciences and strive to grow in holiness.

There is no getting around the fact that just as Joey's parents fell many times in the rink, we fall many times in life too. But as they had one another, we have other people too with us every step the way. Among them is our Blessed Mother, who while in heaven with her Son, also like her Son is so very much a part of this world as well to guide the faithful on their journey, and inspire them to become the people they can truly become. As we prepare to look to her Son on the altar as we receive Holy Communion, may we also look to His Mother who, when we open ourselves up to her assistance and intercession, can bring us closer to Him so that like her, we can join her one day in being with Jesus forever in heaven because we learned to love God completely with our hearts and souls. Jesus has prepared a place for us. The Blessed Mother already has that place - so let's look to her to see how we will one day have it too by reaching out to her for her help, and following her example of selfless love for one another.