

One of the things that can be easy to lose sight of are the many little things that happen in life, things that just kind of accumulate as the days, weeks, months and years go by.

Some years ago, a woman by the name of Karen Wilson came to see this as she returned home from college with respect to the love that her mom showed her. She knew all along her mom loved her, but there was a specific moment in time, and that was when she was going through old books.

After she graduated from college and was moving back home, she found she was drowning in books. Her years away at school had led to the accumulation of more and more books, so by the time she came back, her shelves were overflowing and in a state of total chaos. Things had gotten so out of hand that she wasn't even sure how many books she had. And so she set aside her summer to put everything in order.

This turned out to be a much bigger job than she had initially anticipated. She threw her house into an ever greater state of chaos as she meticulously wrote down all the information about every book, placing each

in temporary stacks and shelves, wherever she could find a flat surface. One night she set out to manage one of the more difficult tasks in her inventory madness: cataloging all of the comic books.

As a young child, she read comic books almost exclusively, the kind that were collections of the ones in the paper, such as Calvin and Hobbes, Garfield and every Bloom County book ever made. She sat on her bedroom floor one night flipping through them, getting nostalgic as she knew many of the comics by memory.

But as she did this, she thought of her mom. One of her mom's favorite rules of parenting was "Let a child read whatever they want, because at least they're reading something." It has proven to be a good way of looking at things, since Karen had grown up to become an avid reader of all books from different genres. Reading books had become for Karen her favorite thing to do.

But another thing hit her as she went through all of these books: she had not bought a single one of them. Her mom had.

This fact was so obvious to her that she wondered how she hadn't thought about it until then.

Her family wasn't wealthy, but as she went through the books she was staggered by the amount of money her mom must have spent in her crusade to make her love reading. Out of the 1,164 books she owned, nearly all were bought by her mom. Her mom could not turn her down when she asked for a book, and was always willing to buy whatever title had caught her eye. So much time, so much money and so many stacks of paper and ink, but each one in its own little way changed Karen and made her the woman she is now.

While she sat on the floor surrounded by the printed evidence of her mother's love, she heard her footsteps in the hall. She came in and asked Karen what she'd like for dinner, and then observed how she was surrounded by towers of books. When her mom asked her what she was doing, Karen remarked that "you bought all these books for me." Her mom replied "yeah" as if it were obvious and no big deal.

Karen said to her mom that nearly every book she owned, her mom bought. Her mom said she did so simply because she liked to read them.

Her family was not the most demonstrative group, as they rarely bared their hearts in any way to anyone. But even if her mom never said “I love you” to her a single time out loud for the rest of her life, she knew she was loved. She had 1,164 “I-love-you’s”, all sorted by genre and alphabetized, thousands of pages of evidence to remind her of her love.

So a few months later, she she opened her birthday present and found yet another book, Karen smiled and thought to herself “I love you, too.”

Today, we celebrate the feast of Mary, Mother of God, the feast that ends the Octave of Christmas. Like yesterday’s feast of the Holy Family, today we are invited to think about why it’s important that Jesus enters the world through a human mother and is welcomed into a human family.

Mary brings Jesus into the world, and that’s significant because Jesus does not bring down his body ready made. He also does not just come to us through Mary like water in a pipe; rather he receives from His mother flesh. He enters through her and shares our humanity. Jesus is fully human and

divine. Because of this he's able to heal humanity from our sins and he elevates us to a new dignity as adopted sons and daughters of God. God shares our human nature so that through His body and Blood, we share divine life.

A key point though is that God does not just use Mary's body as an instrument. God chooses Mary out of love, gains her consent, and then loves her as a mother. A relationship between mother and son develops over time. Like God, we too can know and love and are more than just biology alone. But love must be learned. And the first school of love is the family which has as its core our relationship with our parents.

So from this feast, we can learn two things.

The first is that, as Karen came to experience, love must be learned. To be a mother and a father is to enter into an ongoing relationship with their children that develops over time; and the children learn about this love and how to return it. The love has to continually increase. We then learn how to pass that love on, something Jesus did through His ministry. He always had free will, but he chose to remain with Mary and Joseph for 30 years,

and in those 30 years, there must have been so many things that happened every day. For Karen, it was the constant presence of her mom. One by one, those books were symbolic of the deep love that her mom had for her daughter, and how as the years went by, her daughter learned what love meant. All of us can share similar stories to Karen. As I think about my own mom and dad, over the years they were always there for me to help me to learn the faith, and as I said yesterday because of them and the example they set, I was able to learn not just “what” God is based on what our Church tells us, but “who” God is. So we need to challenge ourselves daily to love one another, to pass on that love we have learned by continually doing self-inventory and looking at how we treat one another. Remember, love has no asterisk next to it - so in our prayers, we should think about how we treat one another at home, and how we love one another. How do we grow in love? It can be so easy to be oblivious to the people who are in need in the world, but as God loves us so must we love one another. From the gift of time, to a conversation, to seeing a person in need and doing something about it, there are so many ways we pass on the love we’ve been given.

But as we learn to love one another, we must also remember that we are part of the Body of Christ through our baptism. Jesus shares our humanity, and through that we are able to share in His divine nature. Our Baptism incorporates us into the Body of Christ. And as our early mothers are often an immersion and education into what it means to love others, we can always know that in our relationship with our heavenly mother, we have an education in what it means to love God through Jesus Christ. Mary leads us to her Son. So let's let her help us to find God at a deeper level. We're now at the time of year when the decorations soon come down, we head back to work and school and busyness, and it can be easy to forget about God. As the Holy Spirit came upon Mary, the Holy Spirit comes upon us. So let's let the Spirit into our hearts, and learn how to grow in the faith by making sure we have an ongoing and deepening relationship with our God. Her whole life, Karen received love from her mom. And the whole time, she was a good person. But it took seeing those books to open up her eyes to just how much she was loved. To see how much her mom had done for her year after year. Each one of those books was a sign of love; each action made her better. And it turned her into not just a great reader, but a great human being. God, through His blessed Mother Mary, and through the people he puts into our lives, especially our families does the same thing.

Like Karen, may our eyes be open to appreciate the gift of our Blessed Mother and our earthly families, as we daily grow in the love we have received and pass it on to one another.