

borders and boundaries and lines of demarcation. It pays no heed to fear and welcomes humiliation, for in love's light we are all stripped of pretense and guile and happily surrender the masks we wear.

In this holy encounter of mother and healer – like the one I observed that early morning at Memorial Hospital – we are reminded of our true identity that is too often obscured by our innate desire for self-preservation. We are border jumpers. We are wall-climbers. We are line-crossers. We are the ones who are willing to risk our dignity and reputation if need be, all for the sake of compassion.

I sometimes wonder who Jesus might have been thinking of when he made his way to the Place of the Skull and to his cross that Good Friday. I like to think that he remembered that mother who surrendered herself to humiliation and ridicule, who resigned herself to an ignominious and lonely death, all for the sake of love. Her act of faith saved her child. And as Jesus stretched out his arms and surrendered his body to hammer and nail, as he was lifted up for the whole world to see him as he was: stripped and naked and singing a song of desolation, he knew he was doing this all for the sake of love. His act of faith saved the whole world.

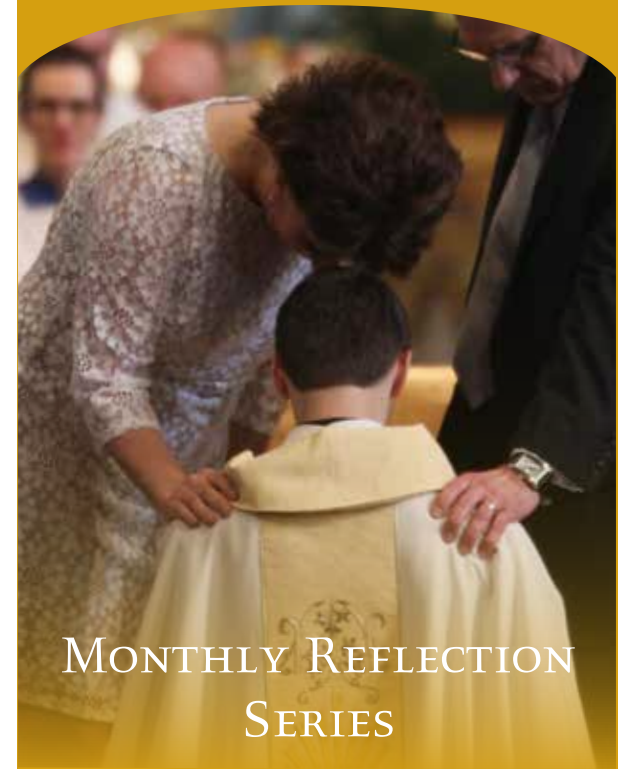
There is nothing stronger in the entire universe than love. Nothing.

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There is Nothing Stronger

by Fr. Patrick Hannon, C.S.C.



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It was around two in the morning. I had been called to Memorial Hospital in Colorado Springs to anoint an elderly man who had come in earlier to the emergency room. I was sitting by the nurse's station for his family to arrive. The room was calm, almost peaceful. Nurses chatted softly at their station. The one doctor attending was trying to look busy. Occasionally you would hear the beeping and humming and sucking sounds of heart monitors and ventilation pumps. Someone was snoring. My sister-in-law Kim, an emergency room nurse, would say that we were on 'auto-pilot', purposely avoiding the word 'quiet' because if you said everything was quiet, all hell would break loose.

Well, all hell did break loose. A young mother came in with her little boy, who was maybe three years old, in her arms. She must have marched past the woman at the intake window, past the security guard, and past a nurse who was apparently coming back from a break.

My baby is sick, she said. Please, my baby is sick, she said again. The boy appeared to be unconscious. One of the nurses sprang from her chair and tried to take the boy from his mother's arms. The woman glared at her and said very calmly, "Take your hands off of my baby. I'll carry him." And so she did. The nurse hurried them to an empty bed and swung the curtains shut. The doctor and several other nurses descended on the

boy. Someone asked the mother kindly to step outside while they tended to her son, which I knew immediately was the wrong thing to say.



"I'm staying right here. There ain't no way I'm leaving my baby," she said clearly from behind the curtain.

The love a mother has for her child: there may be no stronger force in the universe. A parent's love for a child: It's stronger than gravity, stronger than electromagnetism, even stronger than nuclear force, which I discovered, thanks to Ron Wasowski, a Holy Cross priest and physics professor here at the University of Portland, is what keeps the nucleus of all those atoms that make up the universe from falling apart.

There was nothing that mother wouldn't do to save her child. She was like the Syrophoenician mother in the Gospel of Mark who risked her reputation, her

dignity, her own well-being in begging Jesus to save her daughter. Those from her village who were there to witness that encounter must have thought she had lost it. A woman approaching a strange man in public and possibly touching him: scandalous! A Gentile talking to a Jew: unacceptable. A woman openly challenging a man in argument: unheard of. She didn't care. Her little girl was sick, and if Jesus could heal her, she would crawl on broken glass if she had to.

“ **There is nothing stronger in the entire universe than love.** ”

Fine, she must have thought as Jesus rebuffed her, think of me as you will. I am a dog. I'll bark for you if you want. I'll roll over. I'll fetch. But I'm not leaving until you heal my baby. There is nothing stronger in the universe than love. Even Jesus knew this.

Compassion – the greatest expression of love, human or divine – trumps all things. It trumps tradition; it trumps rules of etiquette and propriety and purity. It pays no attention to