

## The Gift of Mothers

by Bishop Victor Galeone

As we approach another Mother's Day, I want to invite you to come back with me to Mother's Day 1970.

I had just sat down to have a light supper with my widowed mother before returning to the rectory. My mother was grieving because in less than a month she would be losing her "bambino." You see, my archbishop had given me permission to serve as a missionary in Peru for five years, and I would be leaving within a month.

The fact that I was 35 years old and a priest for ten years was trumped by my imminent departure for the Peruvian Andes, where I might meet with an untimely end – or so my mother imagined.

While having our soup, mother continued her complaining to the point that I blurted out an unkind remark. She started to cry.

"Mom, I'm sorry. I don't know what possessed me. Please forgive me." – "Oh, I'm not crying about that." – "Well, why are you crying?"

She continued: "I'm going to tell you something that I've told no one except your father. It was during the Depression years. The social worker came by to see how things were going. I told her that everything was fine except that I had missed two of my periods in a row.

" 'Oh that's very bad news, Signora Rita! I'll come back on Thursday afternoon and take you to see this doctor, and he will make your period come.'

"I told her that I could never do that...that I would rather die first.

" 'What! You won't cooperate! Where's your husband?' – He's out looking for work. – 'Over two years without a steady job, and you won't cooperate! Three young mouths to feed already and you won't cooperate! When your husband returns, talk this over with him. If you don't cooperate, we just might take those two cards away from you. I'll see you on Thursday!' "

Two comments: Being the fourth child in the lineup, I was that "period." And the two cards referred to by the social worker were the one that entitled the family to receive a large bag of dried beans every two weeks, and the other was for an occasional delivery of coal during the winter.

My mother continued: "Two hours later, your father came home all frostbitten. As I helped him off with his coat, I told him that the social worker had stopped by. – 'What did she want?' – I told her that I was expecting. She became very upset. She said that she'd be back on Thursday to take me to this doctor, who would make my period come. If I refuse to go, they might take our benefit cards away.



Bishop Victor Galeone with his mother, Rita, January 1976.

SPECIAL

"Your father stood there for the longest while without saying a word. Finally, he spoke: 'Very well, let them! Let them have their cards back! The Lord will provide! "

At that point, my mother got to her feet and knelt down beside me. "Mom," I insisted, "would you please stop this!" – "No, Let me finish!

"O Jesus, forgive me! I didn't want him then because of all our problems. And now I'm afraid of losing him? Forgive me, Jesus, please forgive me! You take him for your poor people in Peru. Thank you, Jesus! Thank you!"