

# “Love Goes Beyond Everything!”

On several occasions, Mother spoke to us of the beauty of motherhood. Expecting a little child provided her with a very understandable happiness. For her, it was much more than waiting for a child; it was also giving a soul to God. That child was loaned to her and she had to raise it by giving it the human, moral and spiritual values she possessed and was already practising.

When she would talk to us of the times she could bend over a cradle, her face and voice expressed all the love that swelled up in her then. She would experience the same emotions as do all mothers at such times, for she was very maternal.

We are also familiar with the very close bond linking a mother and her child. At times, this can cause a mother to feel the difficulties her child is experiencing at a precise moment, even at a distance. One day and on one of the rare occasions when Mother went out for an evening with Father, she recounted that she was in a hurry to return home because she felt that something was not right there. At that moment, my head was stuck between the rungs of the bed and the babysitter had fallen asleep. It would seem that I was nevertheless crying quite loudly.

At other times, Mother would remind us of her happiness to be living in a place where her children could grow up and study while remaining close to her. Like all mothers, she hoped her children would be successful in life, of course. However, her aspirations for her children were more of a moral order than a social one. Diplomas and social or professional success were not as important as the moral value of her children.

I will recall here some of the values Mother passed on to us:

- The love of God. Through the example of her life of prayer and her perseverance at attending Mass, she showed us the path to follow to nourish that love.
- The love of children.
- The love of one's spouse and the importance of marriage.
- The love of neighbor.
- The giving of self to the point of forget-

ting oneself. There you have a necessary and essential value when one is a mother. Developing such an aptitude often turns out to be more difficult for a man, but it also applies to the father.

- Forgiveness. Whether this is between husband and wife or with the children, one must be able to forgive even if this requires heroism, and that is how she always acted.
- Being attentive to providential events. It is possible in fact that certain events will shed light on or determine the future of our children.
- Surrendering oneself to God's will. Regardless of what happens in life, we must be able to accept God's will. Oh! that is not always easy! Mother would repeat that only prayer could help us say our “fiat”. Thanks to prayer, she was able to get through some very difficult periods.
- The acceptance of suffering and offering it up to God. She always found a good reason to encourage us to offer up our sufferings to God.
- The respect of every individual. To not judge one's neighbor.
- And there were many other values too.

Motherhood does not go without fatherhood. The period of expecting a child is not only a time of preparation and joy but also a time of participation on the father's part. He too must prepare to fulfill his role as an educator of that child. All the mother's values must also be his values.

Quite often, we hear parents talk about their hopes for their children. Sometimes, they even set very high and difficult standards of achievement. Some might want their child to become a hockey star, or a famous comedian or an experienced researcher, etc. In some cases, that aspiration takes on such importance that the child's limitations and tastes are no longer respected. And then the child is neglected because the parents' wounded pride has overshadowed the child's welfare. Of course, the child must be motivated to always give the best of himself, but within the limits of his abilities. That is even more so the case if the child suffers from a physical or intellectual handicap.



Pierre Cliche,  
Marie-Paule's  
youngest son and his wife Sylvie

How would Mother have acted in such a situation?

Mother did not have a handicapped child. She even said one day, “I don't think I would have been able to look after a handicapped child.” It would have been impossible for her to fulfill the role she had and also look after a handicapped child. However, that statement shows us all the understanding she had of the difficulties the parents of a handicapped child must face. But the love she always showed assures me that, in such a situation, she would have acted with all the love of her mother's heart. Moreover, many of us could testify to the attention she had for the handicapped children and their parents whom she would meet.

If she herself did not have a handicapped child, some of her children had to deal with such difficulties. For example, my sister Michelle and her husband Gaston had a son, Philippe, who suffered from muscular dystrophy. He had to use a wheelchair from the time he was 8 and he passed away at the age of 20.

My wife Sylvie and I also have a daughter, Virginie, who has had motor function problems since birth and who, in early adolescence, was diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) and a slight intellectual deficiency. Thus, in the family, we understand all the worry and anguish of parents who are confronted with such suffering.

With her maternal heart, Mother was particularly attentive to her grandchildren who had to live with such difficulties in life. How she would have liked to help them, but God's will was always what prevailed. Besides, my mother never changed her values because a child had a handicap; they always remained the same, but then they had to be written in capital letters, given the importance they now had to have.

Instead, Mother always pointed out God's will, encouraged one to pray, in-

sisted upon the graces that could ensue from this suffering, indicated that acceptance brings the couple closer together and that the husband and wife's actions must go in the same direction for the child's benefit. All her life and her teachings lead us to understand the significance of her values. Having a handicapped child is not the end of the world! One must start by accepting this trial and abandoning oneself to God's will. Of course, the entire family is affected, so that love then has to move up several notches.

First of all, the love of God must always take precedence over all the rest. It helps us accept His will and obtain from Him the graces that will help us care for the child.

Secondly, our love for the child leads us to place his needs before our own. We must give up our own hopes for the child's future and replace them with a hope that is within his reach and is suitable for him. Moreover, it must be clearly understood that the child himself will see his own hopes dashed. He will discover that his possibilities are different from those of others. He will suffer from this and only our love and our support can help him.

The love of a child, and especially a handicapped child, presupposes that we will do all we possibly can to help him develop his abilities in accordance with his possibilities. The suffering of the parents must not lead them to forget their child's suffering. They must not add to it by neglecting or abandoning him because their hopes as parents will never be fulfilled. In fact, their aspirations must be set at the level of the child's capabilities, experiencing joy even in the handicapped child's smallest successes. And if, thanks to his efforts, this child succeeds in accomplishing something, even if the result is well below the general average, it is the surpassing of his own limitations which ought to console the parents, and over which they must rejoice with him.

The love of the handicapped child must not make parents forget the other children in the family if there are others, for they too have aspirations and difficulties in life. The trial of a handicapped child also affects them and it is an opportunity for parents to teach them all the attentiveness one must have for others, without neglecting their own needs.

Thirdly, the love between spouses is of major importance in order to accept the difficulties day after day. The peri-

ods of exhaustion, discouragement and anguish are much easier to live through if we support each other. Of course, differences of opinion will inevitably arise some day concerning how best to act with the child. Then, we must love one another tremendously in order to understand each other.



**Marie-Paule, very maternal, always liked to have children around her. She is shown here in 1976, at the baptism of little Louis-Marie, Colette and Pierre Bédard's son, whom she was asked to carry to the baptismal font.**

Moreover, the comments of this one or that one, telling you that they would act differently, add another hardship. Above all, we must not stop to consider those hurtful comments but rather, forgive

these individuals. The love between the husband and wife will be like a boulder against which both can lean in the hardest moments.

The love of SELF which is selfishness must be set aside. Moreover, that has never been a part of my mother's values. It was more the giving of self to the point of forgetting oneself which, for her, was the rule to be followed.

One day, what a parent said at a meeting was repeated to me: "No parent deserves that." I immediately replied: "No child deserves that either." In fact, there is no link between a handicap and the "merit" of the parents or the child itself.

Furthermore, apart from the fact that it may be useful for the child and for the rest of the family to know the cause or the origin of the problem, it is of no importance whether the problem is due to either the man or the woman. There is no guilty party, and there must only be love.

At times, it is also difficult to obtain assistance within our society. Even if many social workers are very attentive and we feel that, in some of them, this is more a vocation than just a job, it is still often necessary "to fight" with government agencies in order to get some help. That is the situation today, but what will it be like in the Kingdom?

"It will be necessary to rethink everything," Mother wrote. Thus, we can hope that assistance to the destitute, to those who have difficulties, to those who suffer will finally be given all the attention it deserves. Therefore, let us pray to the Lady of All Peoples so that the Kingdom may come quickly. Then, the whole of society will say to these children and their parents, the same words my mother would say to them: "I love you!"

**Pierre Cliche**

On February 2, 1994, the day before he died at the age of 20, Philippe (Michelle and Gaston's son) said to Marie-Paule: "Through the trial of muscular dystrophy, my parents opened my soul to the beauties of eternity. Along with my sister, they helped me carry my cross. "It is time for me to go back, and I am ready. I wanted so much to be a priest, but I understood that abandoning oneself to God's will was even better."



**Michelle and her son Philippe at the age of 2.**