

Spiritual boosts for reading moms

Heidi Schlumpf | May. 9, 2013

In our family full of bibliophiles, books are always appropriate presents, no matter the occasion. I wrap up novels and nonfiction at Christmas, give bestsellers for birthdays and, in what's become something of an annual tradition, gift godchildren with bookstore gift cards.

Catholics who would like to give a Mother's Day gift that lasts longer than flowers or chocolate can choose from a plethora of spiritually-themed mom books, including three new releases this month. How to decide which one is best for your mom, grandmother, godmother, aunt, sister, friend or person-who's-been-like-a-mother-to-you? Let me help.

Random MOMents of Grace: Experiencing God in the Adventures of Motherhood (Loyola Press, \$13.95) is by Ginny Kubitz Moyer, a mother of two young boys and a high school English teacher who somehow finds time to write for a number of Catholic publications (including occasionally *NCR*) and to blog regularly at RandomActsOfMomness.com [1]. In this, her second book, Moyer explains how she tries to parent with mindfulness, paying attention to the deeper meaning of everyday experiences, from blowing bubbles on the front lawn to letting out an expletive after stepping on a plastic dinosaur on the floor. Moyer is neither overly saccharine nor holier-than-thou, and her heartfelt stories will resonate without inviting self-critical comparison. Her insights are simple yet profound, and grounded in Catholic spirituality.

In *Catholic Mom's Café: 5-Minute Retreats for Every Day of the Year* (Our Sunday Visitor, \$14.95), Donna-Marie Cooper O'Boyle has written 365 daily devotions for busy moms, with a focus on the virtues of faith, hope and love. O'Boyle, a mother of five, author and EWTN host, also is planning a five-part "Catholic Mom's Café" television series for EWTN based on the book. She blogs at CatholicMomsCafe.blog.spot.com. This book contains more traditional Catholic prayers (the Memorare, Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel, etc), and some of the language is more traditional, as well. But the tidbits to "Ponder," "Offer," "Pray" and "Savor" in each reflection are helpful and uplifting.

Marge Fenelon wrote *Imitating Mary: Ten Marian Virtues for the Modern Mom* (Ave Maria Press, \$14.95) to offer support to moms and moms-to-be who live in "a culture that's trying to convince them that motherhood is either a commodity or an affliction." Arranged around 10 images of Mary (the unwed mother, the young mother, the disciple mother) and corresponding virtues (patience, endurance, joy), the book delves into the life of Jesus' mother and applies her story to the lives of moms today. As the mom of four adult children, Fenelon has plenty of personal stories to tell. My favorite chapter is the last one in which Fenelon encourages readers to "let Mary mother them," with tips including her own tendency to imagine Mary standing next to the priest during Mass.

Imitating Mary is the latest in a series of mom books by Ave Maria, whose editors observed the growing popularity of Catholic "mommy-bloggers," most of whom are more traditional Catholics. "We saw there was a definite market for books for moms that deal with many family issues from a Catholic perspective," says Karey Circosta, director of sales and marketing.

Ave Maria launched the CatholicMom.com Books line last year after the success of *The Handbook for Catholic Moms: Nurturing Your Heart, Mind, Body, and Soul* (\$15.95) by Lisa M. Hendey, who founded the online community CatholicMom.com [2]. Other books in the series have come from that website's contributors, including *A Catholic Mother's Companion to Pregnancy: Walking With Mary From Conception to Baptism* (\$14.95) by Sarah Reinhard and *The Catholic Baby Name Book* (\$15.95) by Patrice Fagnant-MacArthur.

Loyola Press, publisher of Moyer's *Random MOMents of Grace*, also has a history of Catholic mom books, having published in 2001 *My Monastery Is a Minivan: Where the Daily Is Divine and the Routine Becomes Prayer* by Denise Roy, a marriage and family therapist, spiritual director, and mother of five. Although that book is now out of print, her 2007 book, *Momfulness: Mothering with Mindfulness, Compassion, and Grace* (Jossey-Bass, \$14.95) is still available, including in a Kindle version.

Finally, my bookshelves include two popular books about motherhood written by non-Catholic authors: Anne Lamott's classic *Operating Instructions: A Journal of My Son's First Year* (Anchor, \$15.95) and *MOMumental: Adventures in the Messy Art of Raising a Family* (Worthy, \$14.99) by Jennifer Grant, who has written for *Sojourners* magazine and other Christian publications. Both are humorous, poignant and spiritual.

So the only challenge to your Mother's Day shopping is having to choose from so many options, since the vocation of motherhood clearly is valued and considered worthy of reflection, not only by authors but also by publishers who realize that women buy -- and read -- more books than men do.

But where are all the Catholic father books? While some of the marketing materials for these mom books mention that non-moms can enjoy them too, I worry when publishers' editorial choices seem to say that mothering is an important vocation, but fathering? Well, even the word implies providing the materials for conception, rather than parenting.

When I wrote a book about the beginning of my life as a parent, I wrote from my own experience as a woman, but my audience was people of both genders. For a generation in which fathers are more involved in parenting than ever, perhaps future "spirituality of parenting" books will be suitable for both Mother's and Father's Day giving.

[Heidi Schlumpf is the author of *While We Wait: Spiritual and Practical Advice for Those Trying to Adopt* (ACTA Publications).]

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