

Madonna Chapel: Fostering the Dignity of Motherhood

by Kate Williams



uring this season of joy when we celebrate the motherhood of Mary, we reflect upon her highest title—"Mother of God." To honor Mary as "Theotokos"

(CCC no.495) our family traveled to a Madonna Chapel, dedicated to the Nursing Madonna, located at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Annawan, Illinois. The chapel was created by Father Timothy Sauppé, S.T.L., S.T.D. candidate.

As we made our way into the chapel, we knew we were standing on holy ground. Jesus was present in the Tabernacle, making this a sacred place; however, there was an elevated feeling of sanctity present in this chapel due to its sheer focus on the Nursing Madonna. As we genuflected toward the Tabernacle, I thanked the Lord for my motherhood. Here I was kneeling in a chapel that honored the vocation of motherhood. I had found refuge from a world that promotes destructive lies to women. Some of these lies include "Children are an economic liability and burden" and "Contraception and sterilization are

perfectly OK." These worldly deceptions were left behind as the chapel door closed and we were sitting in the rays of Truth and beauty.

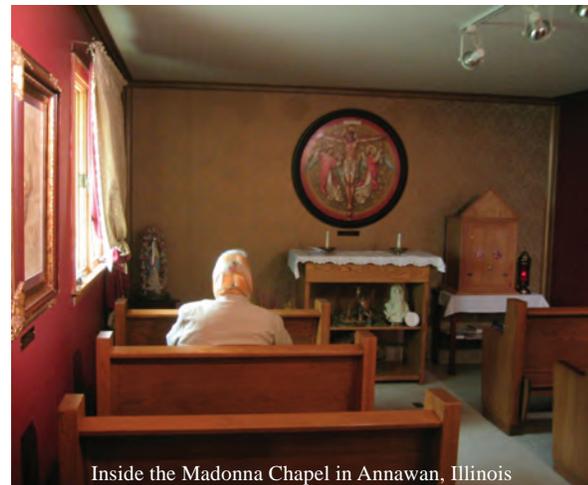
This is exactly what Fr. Sauppé wanted this chapel to do – to appeal to post-modern women through beauty. One might recall a highly quoted passage from the first volume of Fr. Hans Urs von Balthasar's book *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (1982), "Before the beautiful—no, not really before but within the beautiful—the whole person quivers. He not only 'finds' the beautiful moving; rather, he experiences himself as being moved and possessed by it."

In my interview with Father Sauppé he explained the reasons for building this chapel, to counter the use of contraception by introducing parents to the science of breastfeeding, which, according to science, enables them to space their births without the use of artificial means.

"The greatest challenge we have as priests is contraception," Fr. Sauppe said.

"It is killing our parishes left and right. As long as bishops and priests say nothing about contraception we will not grow as a Church or as a society."

He hopes the Madonna Chapel will introduce them to the science behind breastfeeding and the beauty of the mother/child bonding in breastfeeding. To this end,



Inside the Madonna Chapel in Annawan, Illinois

Fr. Sauppé had his bishop approve a new devotional chaplet entitled *Theotükos Chaplet*. This chaplet is recited on each bead of the rosary and the decades are the mysteries of the maternity of Mary. Through the paintings of the Nursing Madonna that adorn the walls of this chapel, one can easily see the magnificence and holiness of the act of a mother breastfeeding her child. This chapel is not intended to force women into a particular way of thinking about motherhood, but instead its purpose is to help women naturally see the beauty of motherhood.

One may wonder what science, breastfeeding, motherhood, and this Madonna Chapel have in common. Some may even think that these terms, particularly breastfeeding, are not an issue of concern to the Catholic Church. However, there are some interesting facts and connections that are helpful in solidifying the relationship between these constructs and also in emphasizing the paramount role the Catholic Church



The Chapel contains several images of the nursing Madonna



Chapel tabernacle

women who have breastfed their babies for an extended period of time. Ecological breastfeeding, as outlined in Kippley's book *The Seven Standards of Ecological Breastfeeding: The Frequency Factor* (2008), can also naturally space babies.

Saints and popes have not shied away from speaking on the issue of breastfeeding. On Friday, May 12, 1995, Pope John

Paul II met with the participants at an international conference on breastfeeding, science and society organized by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and The Royal Society of Great Britain. He not only highlighted the nutritional value of breastfeeding, but also emphasized how invaluable it is to the child in helping him or her to develop feelings of security and worth. "Moreover, in addition to these immunological and nutritional effects," he said, "this natural way of feeding can create a bond of love and security between mother and child, and enable the child to assert its presence as a person through interaction with the mother." As we left the Madonna Chapel, I was struck with the belief that if more women were to fall in love with the splendor of motherhood, the blinders that society places over women's eyes concerning children as burdens will fall and a new reverence for women and the value of motherhood will be born.

For more information regarding the Madonna Chapel or the *Theotükos Chaplet*, email Father Timothy Sauppé at frsaurpe@qconline.com. For more information regarding breastfeeding and the Catholic Church visit NFP International at www.NFPandmore.org.

Katie Williams and her husband, Sean, live with their three boys in Iowa and are expecting their fourth child in January of 2010.

**The Theotokos Chaplet
The Five Divine Mysteries of
the Maternity of Mary
(using the five decades of the
Rosary)**

Decade ends with a Glory Be &
Our Father

First Mystery:

The Quickening: The Blessed Mother feels Jesus' first movements in her womb

Second Mystery:

The First Nursing: The Blessed Mother gives her new infant His first nourishment

Third Mystery:

The First Steps: Jesus takes His first steps toward His destiny- His Passion and Cross

Fourth Mystery:

His First Spoken Words: Jesus speaks His first words

Fifth Mystery:

Jesus is Weaned: The last breastfed bond between Mother and Child

Recited on each bead of the Rosary:

"Hail Mary, Full of Grace, The Lord is With Thee. Blessed Art Thou Among Women, And Blessed is the Fruit Of Thy Womb, Jesus. (Luke 1:28, 42) Holy Mary, Mother of God [Theotükos], Blessed is the Womb that bore Jesus, and the Breasts that Nursed Him. Blessed Are Those who Hear the Word of God, and Keep It." (Luke 11:27-28)

IMPRIMATUR + Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C. Bishop of Peoria, 2 February 2006, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord