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FRIDAY, MAY 14, 2010

### CURRENT EVENTS **Dalai Lama in Bloomington**

Posted by **Julianna Thibodeaux** on Fri, May 14, 2010 at 12:02 PM



• CHRISTIAN DOELLNER

• His Holiness in Bloomington Thursday

I don't write for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* or *The Indianapolis Star*, or file stories for the global media via the Associated Press. I'm not a well-known television personality from WISH-TV 8. But when I finally got up the nerve to raise my hand to ask His Holiness the Dalai Lama a question at the "Meet the Press" event in Bloomington on Thursday afternoon, the moderator didn't call on me. She was too busy calling on reporters from those other news organizations who had been raising their hands all along. And I don't blame them a bit.

I wasn't bothered that I didn't get to ask His Holiness questions like, "What are the parallels between the Tibetans and China and the Palestinians and Israel?" Or, "Why does the Chinese government view Tibetan culture, religion, and identity as a threat?" I think these would have been decent, even relevant questions: and I had thought about asking them before the press meet-and-greet began. But another question, one that I hadn't prepared ahead of time, became far more compelling to me after His Holiness gave his opening statement.

And here is what he said: "As journalists, you have a special responsibility... the promotion of human value." Indeed, he said, we learn that value first through the love of our mothers. "I think the most precious gift from our mother is affection. Our mother provides us with maximum affection, maximum care." That affection, he went on to say, has the potential to bring us inner peace: and "our basic goal, the goal of every human being, is to be peaceful, and happy."

As a mother of three children, I've struggled with the proverbial balancing act between fulfilling my own professional, creative needs and the needs of my children. My kids have always won, often leaving me feeling deflated, defeated, and unfulfilled while simultaneously, and paradoxically, catalyzing feelings of warmth and love the likes of which nothing else has compared. It's an entirely different kind of fulfillment, and one that doesn't make news headlines or earn awards.

The Dalai Lama implied that what I do, the affection I give to my children, however disjointed or flawed, is of value. It's of value not just to my kids but as an act of compassion that women (and men) engage in the world over when they provide loving care to others. Whether we're serving up meals at the local soup kitchen, taking a cancer-stricken neighbor a home-cooked meal, or even wiping your 3-year-old's snotty nose for the trillionth time, there's something uplifting about giving.

And most days I'm a giving machine. As the mother of three children ranging in age from 3 to 15, I often feel like a rubber band stretched so thin, the tension between their needs and my ability to meet them all so great, that I invariably collapse, sometimes in tears, at the end of a day. There's

one of me, and three of them. I am perpetually outnumbered.

Let's just say it was a surprise, and a pleasant one at that, to have His Holiness attach importance to that simple act of nurturing one's children. Sort of like getting a bonus with your emotional paycheck.

So here's the question I would have asked if I'd had the opportunity:

Your Holiness, you talked about the importance of a mother's affection as a means of understanding our human value. Why is it, then, that mothers are so undervalued? Why are women held to such impossible standards of care, but told they can also engage in a rewarding professional life? Do we really believe no one will suffer under this arrangement? Because something, or someone, always does—either it's the career or it's the kids or it's the mother, if not all three.

And these are just the privileged mothers. The underprivileged? They're the welfare moms who are reviled for not working. They're the Tibetan villagers who are considered undereducated, primitive, and therefore without a voice. And yet they—we—provide the most necessary of functions: nurturing.

So Your Holiness, as a Buddhist, as a man of great compassion and wisdom, can you tell me why do we not recognize the world-changing power of a mother's love? If nurture were valued more, would the world be a different place? If mothers, indeed, all caregivers, were supported in their important work and not taken for granted, then maybe, just maybe, would peace be a possibility?

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