Over the last few weeks I have been having some very similar conversations with women, and they revolve around the same issue, though in different variations. And they all come down to the idea that these women have somehow failed in their various responsibilities, most importantly—for many—in their roles as mothers. It is the mom who worked and wondered if all her children’s problems stemmed from her not being present enough in their lives. It is the mom who stayed home and wondered if all the problems arose from not being a better role model of some sort, or being too present. It is the mom who looked back at all her various choices in the raising of her child(ren) and wondered which one messed them up, and what she could have done differently. I believe our culture/country has created an impossible situation for women. We have created unattainable goals and expectations for women to meet and, sadly, they are not rooted in reality. The biggest issues stem from what—a few decades ago—became the idea of what equality is. Equality meant that women can be just like men and therefore should be able to do whatever men can do—and do it in just the same way as men. What this idea of equality misses is the truth that men and women are different. God has created us different for a reason. We have loss the sense of complementarity. Yes...men and women are equal and should be considered equal. They should get paid exactly the same amount of money for doing the same job when all things are equal, such as work history and education. They should have the same opportunities for advancement. They should have an equal voice in the decision-making process. However, at the same time we must recognize and value the ways in which men and women are different.

Men and women simply have different perspectives on the world and what is important. They have different ways of setting priorities and trying to determine what those priorities should be. They have different ways of relating to people, and a different way of processing what is happening in a particular situation. The problem is that we have determined that the way men do things is better than the way women do them and so, for women to be equal, they need to act like men. But... that is not equality! It inherently discriminates against women and devalues their gifts, perspectives, goals and priorities. It automatically puts women in an inferior position because it assumes they need to compete with men according to a set of rules—rules that do not value a woman’s outlook.

If we want true equality, we, as a society, need to adjust what we believe equality should be. We need to recognize that equality is based on understanding that God created all people with different gifts and talents, and all the gifts and talents He has given them should be celebrated, because they all contribute in their own unique way to the proper upbuilding of society. Thus, equality is simply this—everyone having the same opportunity to express the gifts God has given them in the way God intends that to happen. It is recognizing that differences and diversity is a good. It is discerning in those differences how we complement each other, and how each person’s perspective and unique gifts can help create a better understanding or way of doing something.

On this Mother’s Day we should be remembering not simply all the ways our moms loved and sacrificed for us but, just as importantly, how they helped us see the world in a different way. We should be celebrating how women helped to shape the world through their unique gifts and talents. It is about rejoicing in the different ways women have been gifted by God. Let us embrace the true and deepest sense of equality.

In growing up I was fortunate that I was able to see this sense of equality in practice, and lived out by my parents. They were true partners in how they lived their marriage and raised their family. My Mom and Dad were very different from each other, but they complemented each other well. They had their own unique perspectives, and what I saw was two people who worked hard at communicating. It was never about having the other see things the way they did. It was about mutual understanding and respect for the other. There were times when it became more about what my Mom wanted because it was clearly more important to her. There were times when it was about what my Dad wanted because it was clearly more important to
him. But most of the time it was the two of them discerning, through mutual respect, a solution that encompassed both perspectives.

As we celebrate Mother’s Day, let us celebrate what really matters: let us celebrate the wonderful gifts that women bring into the world. They are the gifts that help us to more fully understand and see God in the world.

If you have any questions about anything, please do not hesitate to ask me directly, or send your questions to me at fr.brian@chelmsfordcatholic.org.

Please keep me in your prayers.

In Christ,

Fr. Brian