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Motherhood Builds the Civilization of Love



(Illustration: Eric Sailer)

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Motherhood is one of the most profound political and spiritual acts available to us to affect society.

The singer Chappell Roan recently made headlines for her take on motherhood: “All of my friends who have kids are in hell. I actually don’t know anyone who’s, like, happy and has children at this age.” Roan, along with other social media influencers, would be surprised by research that consistently shows that married mothers are among one of the happiest cohorts in society.

It's all too common that motherhood, when it is not denigrated, is treated as a private matter — personal, sentimental, and peripheral to the “serious” work of the world. Even when celebrated, it is celebrated for rooting the children in the bedrock of a homestead, for ordering a singular cell of society but not its whole.

That mistaken notion misses that motherhood is one of the most profound political and spiritual acts available to us to affect society. Motherhood is a radical gift of love that does not stop at the door of the home. It spills over. It builds. It beautifies. And it transforms society from the ground up. To be a mother, whether biologically or spiritually, is to respond to the deepest call of womanhood: to love in a way that brings others into being and belonging.

Since I was in religious life for some years, I often think of the enormous civilizational impact that women religious, spiritual mothers, had on this great nation. Women religious built an unprecedented network of hospitals, orphanages, and schools. They loved into existence a societal order that prized the children, the wounded, the abandoned as only a mother could. Their love for the singular suffering child led them to build and beautify a whole world for that one person's upbringing.

The same is true with mothers in the home. Their love for their children doesn't stop at the door, it is swept up into the street outside and, ultimately, into the city. My mother-in-law raised every heathen who came to play with her five boys and one girl, exacting the same punishment (laps in the backyard) from all who disobeyed the greater good of order in her home. She wasn't just raising her children, she was weaving together the fabric of a fragmented society.

Mothers are custodians of community. They build homes that welcome, hearts that forgive, and habits that shape character. They create places where people know they matter. And that influence does not end with their own children. It touches neighbors, parishioners, coworkers, even strangers.

Suddenly, too, when children are considered, the investment is not just in the home but in the world the children will inherit. A mother cares about education policy. About local safety. About beauty and order in public spaces. She becomes attentive to injustice, not because of an abstract theory, but because she holds in her arms the future of the world.

This is why the Catholic Church calls the family the “domestic church.” It is not merely a private dwelling; it is the seedbed of society. From it, a civilization of love is born. The key to why and how a mother has this power is precisely in the self-sacrifice that Chappell Roan and the childless influencer class can’t comprehend. We love who and what we sacrifice for, which is why civilization is reborn in the self-sacrifice of a mother. The anxious math of what it might cost — the dreams deferred, the sleepless nights, the freedoms surrendered — is upside down. Those are all fuel to the fire of sacrificial love.

To become a mother is to stand at the frontier of love — where the private becomes public, where the personal becomes political, where the smallest gestures of tenderness renew the entire world.