



In addition to it being Mother's Day, it is also the birthday of Missy Johnson, but the United States and even worldwide audience would know her better as Missy Franklin, who at 17 years young competed in the summer Olympic games in London, winning four gold medals, and becoming the first American female to swim in seven different events, cementing her place as one of the greatest in the pool in recent memory. Four years later didn't turn out so well, though, in Rio de Janeiro, as she failed to reach the finals in her individual events, but did manage to be part of a winning relay team. Soon enough, Missy had to give up her more professional level of swimming career.

But then she transformed her passion into a drive to support others, serving as an ambassador for the USA Swimming Foundation, to not only provide lessons, but to minimize drowning accidents with children. She also works with an international pharmaceutical company, providing access to those dealing with polycystic kidney disease, a genetic condition affecting hundreds of thousands in this country alone, and for which her own father needed a transplant. And yet, in these beneficial ways of using her fame for the good of people she may never meet, it all still paled in comparison to her ultimate dream: to be mom.

Except, that was by no means a guarantee, as her own parents struggled immensely to bring her along. But then, come the summer of 2021, nearly ten years to the day when the Olympic Games concluded that brought her international stardom, Missy's ultimate dream was fulfilled, as she and her husband Hayes, welcomed Sarah Caitlin into the world. Then, last spring, Chase Campbell beautifully joined the family as well. And yet, Missy, this pillar of strength and tremendous athletic talent, who captivated the hearts of many young female swimmers around the country, even Missy was more than open about her immense struggle after having her second child: a part of our calling as the church to remember on this Mother's Day as well. Missy said just before Caitlin turned 7 months:

*Having battled with postpartum depression and anxiety with the sweetest baby in the world, the one I had dreamed of my whole life, and alas, didn't sleep, I felt so much guilt, and I remember feeling so lost when people would tell me, "It gets better, I promise!" Because when was that going to be? And what was I supposed to do in the meantime? As a new mom, I didn't even know what I needed to take care of myself. Sleep? A shower? Getting out of the house? Exercise? All the above? How could I do it all? Caitlin has taught me so much about the strength, resilience, and trust I had in me all along. But in that time, and those moments, I pray, pray, pray that you give yourself grace as you figure out what you need and what is going to keep you healthy and happy for you, and everyone around. And it goes without saying, of course it gets better. I get to spend every day with my mini best friend who is truly one of the best humans I've ever known, and she is the light of our life. But for those currently waiting for the "better", I see you. I recognize everything you are doing to be an incredible parent. The best one for your baby. Take care of you and please, please, please, ask for help when you need it.*

So, it's only rather fitting that the Gospel text includes the powerful word *advocate*, not just as the promised Holy Spirit doing so on behalf of us all, but in recognizing the most vital role of parents to advocate on behalf of their children in so many different circumstances that can often be taken for granted. And then, lest we forget, the importance on advocating for all mothers and even grandparents and all who navigate the joys and chaos of child-raising and shaping, to ensure that all parental figures are cared for in the midst of it all, including the needed compassion from the church as well.

Oddly enough, Missy did not experience much of the organized religion front in her growing up years, until she enrolled in a nearby Jesuit high school, which, yes, may have had some more athletic

intentions in mind, but in due time she grew in her love of God, feeling the almighty Divine abiding in her life, even before she would be known by so many around the world. Along the way, she not only felt acceptance from God, but the very compassion she often struggled to give to herself as she strove for perfection. As if, in spite of all the accolades, Missy's ultimate identity is not 5-time gold medalist, not even mother of 2, but child of God. And being further inspired by that unconditional love of God regardless of what happens in swimming pools and beyond, Missy is even further ignited to bring a glimpse of that relentless love to Sarah and Chase. For even after all that she has achieved and all the advocacy she takes on, Missy has said that her children are "My greatest purpose. I live for this. I live for them. I want to freeze this season forever." And, maybe, just maybe, those words might just give a most precious glimpse into what God says over you, no matter the achievements, or the failures, or the disappointments, or the joys in all facets of life. Jesus still says, "I live for you, too!" So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!