Reflection for May 10, 2026

Mother´s Day/ Asian Heritage Month

Ilaw ng Tahanan (Light of the Home)

Proverbs 31:10-31

In Canada, we celebrate May as Asian Heritage Month. Over the years, I've been grateful to take part in this celebration alongside our former ministers, Sharon Ferguson-Hood, Annette Taylor, and other worship leaders. This year, I felt led to be involved once again, so I volunteered with the Worship and Music Committee to lead this Sunday. Thank you to Harold and my sisters, Jenn and Ruth, for their invaluable help and insights.

We agreed to center our theme this Sunday on mothers, especially because today is Mother's Day. Our Reflection is particularly about Asian mothers. This does not mean we are setting aside other mothers. Rather, it is an invitation to learn more about the kind of mothers who raised us and the lives of many other mothers who may have chosen to approach motherhood in a different way than what's usual.

The scripture read today, Proverbs 31:10–31, has been interpreted in many ways. Some suggest it is not meant to serve as a checklist or job description for women or mothers. Instead, it offers wisdom that both men and women are invited to reflect on and live by. When I read this passage, I see a celebration of a woman's strength and dignity. Yes, it was written within a patriarchal context. That was how the culture of the Old Testament world was. Yet even within that, it portrays a woman whose work surpasses expectations. She is recognized and respected not only for her role within the home but for her own accomplishments. Her husband trusts her fully, giving her the freedom to act with confidence and purpose.

Her work as a mother extends beyond her household. She is generous to the poor and reaches out to those in need. She speaks with wisdom, becoming not only a caregiver, but also a teacher and a leader, someone worthy of honor, recognition, and to be called blessed. In Proverbs 31, she is more than capable and strong. She guides the home and illuminates it.

In elementary and high school, we were taught in Social Studies that the smallest unit of society is the family, often composed of a father, a mother, and children. While this is not true for every household, it is a common structure. In Filipino culture, fathers are often described as the *"Haligi ng*

tahanan" or “Pillar of the home, while mothers are lovingly called the *“Ilaw ng Tahanan,"* or “Light of the Home.”

The father provides strength, security, and stability. The mother brings clarity or light, especially in times of confusion. She helps guide the household toward what truly matters, particularly in moments of uncertainty. This title, *“Light of the Home,"* is deeply rooted in our culture. It reflects a mother’s role as a source of warmth, guidance, and unconditional love. She lights the path for her family through both joyful and difficult seasons.

And this light extends beyond biological mothers. In Filipino families, grandmothers, aunts, and godmothers also share this role. They are part of the community that raises a child; each one provides nurturing and becomes a light in a child´s life. Many Asian mothers eventually become matriarchs, taking on the responsibility of managing the home, overseeing family matters, and making important decisions. At times, they are labeled as “tiger mothers,” a term used to describe a strict, highly disciplined parenting style that emphasizes academic excellence and achievement. Tiger mothers make sure that they equip their children for a better future. They push, guide, and sacrifice because they want their children to succeed. And sacrifice is something many Asian mothers know very well.

Across Asia, countless mothers go above and beyond, often setting aside their own needs and desires for the sake of their families. Many leave their homes, sometimes even their children, to work abroad in search of better opportunities. Their goal is simple yet clear: to provide, sustain, and give their children a future filled with possibilities. Studies suggest that around 40% of migrant women workers have left a child behind to work abroad. In the Philippines alone, an estimated 3 to 6 million children are growing up without one or both parents present due to overseas work. Similar realities exist in countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Indonesia, and China. In fact, labour migration in many Asian countries is largely made up of women. In 2022, the majority of nearly 2 million Filipino workers abroad were women.

Why do they make this choice? The answer is the same: for their families. For the sake of their children. There is a song titled *“Mama,”* composed by Ryan Cayabyab, a Filipino National Artist for Music, and performed by Smokey Mountain, a group of teenage singers that Ryan formed in 1989. “Mama” came out in the early 90s when many Filipino mothers started choosing to work abroad. This song tells the story of a mother’s sacrifices and the deep impact they have on the family, especially the children left behind. As you listen, may you hear not just a song, but a story of love, and

the quiet strength of a mother. Not only Filipino mothers, but also many Asian mothers. (video)

In the video, we saw that, as mothers leave their families in search of better opportunities, there are consequences. The children, according to studies, show emotional and psychological impacts such as loneliness, anxiety, strained relationships, and insecurity. There may also be behavioral challenges, academic struggles, and decreased motivation. And yet, many Asian children in these circumstances also develop resilience and grit. They learn to endure, adapt, and grow, even in the absence of their mothers' physical and emotional presence. Many children in families with this kind of situation would say that they do their best to show how they value the sacrifices their mothers make.

On the other hand, for the mothers themselves, this separation brings its own burden. It takes a deep emotional and mental toll. They face intense pressures, long hours, and difficult working conditions, often pushing themselves beyond their limits to earn and save more. All for a hope: that one day, when they have saved enough, they can return home and stay for good, to be with their families and raise their own children.

There is a Filipino folk dance called ¨Pandanggo sa Ilaw,¨ or the “Dance of the Lights.” In this dance, performers, often women, gracefully balance three oil lamps: one on the head and one on each hand, moving with careful precision. The dance is said to mirror the gentle flicker of fireflies at dusk, symbolizing hope, resilience, and the enduring Filipino spirit. Here is a short clip that will show you how the dance is performed. (video)

Motherhood can be beautifully compared to dancing the Pandanggo sa Ilaw. Like the dancers, mothers carry many responsibilities, carefully balancing the needs of their families while keeping their inner light steady and strong. Through life’s challenges, they continue to shine while guiding, nurturing, and loving without pause.

Today, as we celebrate this special day, we give thanks to God for the gift of our mothers. We honor not only those who gave us life, but also everyone who has loved, guided, and cared for us like a mother. To all the mothers, thank you for dancing each day with grace, carrying the light that brightens our homes and our lives. Amen.