

When I am not enough

My sister is called away for a few minutes, so she places my 3-month-old niece in my arms.

Hurrah, I think. Here's another chance for me to hold this dear little baby girl, my goddaughter.

Still, this sweet baby is not happy, and she starts wriggling and fussing. She's hungry or tired or she just wants to be with her mother. Maybe no one can comfort her. All I know is I'm not the one she wants.

That's OK. I've been here before.

I've held children who didn't want me to hold them. I've sung to them when they didn't know my voice or understand the words. I've been a complete stranger with nothing to offer except warmth and comfort and love.

If there's one thing I learned when I became a mother through adoption, it's that you can offer comfort even when a child doesn't want it. In fact, you need to, even if they don't want it – even if they don't want you. You don't take it personally, and you have faith that in some way the child understands.

So I sing “Toora Loora Loora” to my goddaughter as she cries. I hold her gently but close. I sway as I sing, thinking of another time when I held a crying child in my arms, crying with and for him, wishing I could be more than I was, knowing I didn't have all of the answers, trusting and believing there were sunnier days ahead.

As my niece whimpers and balls up her fists, I know I am not remotely enough for her. I have very little to offer to a nursing infant who isn't mine. She knows that, and so do I. She's frustrated, and I'm sad for her, but I am also at peace. I am giving all I can give. I am holding her. I am keeping her safe. I am singing and rocking.

Even with my inadequacies, I have to believe that somewhere deep inside she feels safe and loved partly because of me. She's not happy, and she is making that known. But a baby who cries is a baby who knows she is loved. And this little one is

treasured, indeed.

As I hold her, I find myself thinking, how often in life do I worry that I am not enough? As a wife, as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister, as a friend, as an employee, as a disciple of Jesus, I am never all our Father in Heaven wants me to be. I fall short so often, in so many ways.

Especially in my parenting journey, as our children grow and the challenges they encounter grow with them, I wonder how I can ever be the mother they need to support them through life. They will come head-to-head with bullies, encounter hatred and pain and questions and problems I am ill-equipped to grapple with myself.

Even for my own children, I am not enough. I know it, and one day they will too - if they haven't figured it out already. But maybe that's all right. After all, I am not in this alone. I am an instrument in God's hands. "Whoever has God lacks nothing," St. Teresa of Avila said. "God alone suffices."

Maybe all I can be is what I am to my baby niece, a pair of arms to hold my children when they're unhappy, a reassuring voice, a listening ear to hear them, a shoulder for their tears, and a safe place for them to come and know they are loved - not just by me, but also by our Lord.

"We are to become vessels of God's compassionate love for others," St. Clare of Assisi said.

On my own I will never be enough for anyone I encounter. But I can try to be a vessel, a container, carrying love to everyone I meet. For now, I'll hold this baby girl and keep singing.