

A meditation for the Fourth Sunday of Lent – Mothering Sunday

This Fourth Sunday of Lent with its various names, *Laetare* (or ‘be joyful’) Sunday, *Refreshment Sunday*, and the name which most of us will recognise, *Mothering Sunday*, traditionally has a less sombre feel to it than the other Sundays of Lent, although I suspect this is both the strangest and the most sombre Mothering Sunday we’ve ever experienced. Today, at this half way point of Lent, we do three things. As well as remembering our own mothers (whether they are living or departed), we remember the motherhood of the Church, our spiritual mother in so far as we are re-born to eternal life through baptism, fed and nurtured by the other Sacraments, and taught by the scriptures and the teachings of the Church. We hear, too, today in St John’s Gospel the dying Jesus commend Mary to John himself (and to all those who seek to be a disciple of Christ as our Mother in the Christian life, the one who both gives us an unparalleled example of faith and trust, and who from the life of heaven prays for us and the whole Church on earth.

We pray, then, today for guidance, light and vision in our own lives and in the life of the Church herself. At this time of crisis and anxiety we are in desperate need of it.

Today we are given three examples: firstly, the spiritual care and grace given us by the Church’s proclamation of the Gospel and its celebration of the sacraments of resurrection and new life. We are given the example of Mary, the first to hear the call of Christ and act upon it in becoming his first and most loyal disciple, and also the example we have had (if we are fortunate, as many of us have been) of the experience of earthly love at a human level in the person of our mothers, a true parental love which also reflects and transmits the love of God for each one of us.

Not everyone has been so fortunate - without being too ‘politically correct,’ as some people say, (although that expression seems to be increasingly used by people who are searching for an excuse to be ghastly to those who are in some way different) we are all these days very well aware of the temptations of over-sentimentalising family life - or any other social institution for that matter - and the Gospel itself never does that.

Jesus himself speaks of love, faith and trust in God and love of our neighbour as the true family values of the kingdom of heaven, We are given in the examples of faith, hope and love, and the continuing prayers of Mary and St Joseph, a sacramental ideal to strive for without pretending that that ideal is ever truly attained by any of us here and now. And, if we’ve been fortunate, we’ve been given a glimpse of that kind of love and care in our own experience. As Lent continues, we pray that the Lord will continue to nurture us in faith and love and holiness and lead us to experience the experience of resurrection and the new life only he can give us.

Today is a kind of turning point in the six weeks of Lent. After today our thoughts and prayers concentrate more and more on the passion and death of Our Lord. Holy Week and Easter are now very much on the horizon, even if our paschal celebrations this year will be very muted and rather private.

We pray that we may have the courage to see and to proclaim (by what we are, and how we treat others, as much as by what we say) what we ourselves experience of Christ in our own lives, that we can grow more and more aware of the great reality of God who surrounds us all and who wishes to lead us ever more fully to experience the mystery of the Kingdom. +