

Year C Lent 4 – Mothering Sunday

Exodus 2: 1-10

2 Cor 1: 3-7

Luke 2: 33-35

Mothering

Today is Mothering Sunday, most definitely not Mother's Day, which is a commercial confection. The origin of Mothering Sunday comes from the English rural custom of visiting the mother church of one's parents on Mid-Lent Sunday, today, the fourth Sunday in Lent.

Just two days ago was the Feast of the Annunciation which commemorates the visit of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, during which he informed her that she was to be the mother of Jesus, son of God. This is also known as Lady Day, which the Mother's Union celebrates so well across the world.

For these reasons it felt right to use the readings assigned for Mothering Sunday instead of the Lent 4 readings today.

On Mothering Sunday we are encouraged to consider the act of mothering, a task that is predominantly carried out by mothers, but of course, an act of mothering can be carried out by many other people too.

Our reading from Exodus is a dispassionate story of the first few months of Moses life. Yet, it must have been such a worrying and traumatic time. The Egyptian authorities ordered that all male Hebrew babies were to be killed at birth by the midwives. We know that two Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and Puah bravely defied the

order, and their courage and bravery led to many male babies surviving.

The mother of Moses had to make a heart-breaking decision in those first three months of Moses' life. How could she enable his survival? What an absolutely awful position to be put in. She chose to trust that by leaving him in a particular spot he would be found and cared for. What an act of 'mothering'! And yet, we know that because of the love of a sister, who stood at a distance to watch what happened and intervene if she possibly could to save Moses life, she also undertook an act of 'mothering'. We know that due to the actions of his sister Moses was returned to his mother's arms, and she was able to safely bring him up and enjoy many years with him.

In the news over the last four weeks we have seen on our television screens any number of tearful and emotional partings of sons from mothers, from fathers from their young children, as those males of fighting age in Ukraine remain to defend their country. It is hard, if not impossible to imagine the emotions and fears of those who have left their sons behind.

This is not a new scenario. Humankind has repeated this scenario so many times over many centuries, as powerful ambitions and egos of leaders of nations send young men to die in battles not of their choosing. As the song says, 'When will we ever learn?'

Our gospel reading reminds us that Simeon, the faithful old man who was assured of seeing the Messiah before he died, foretold the anguish Mary would experience in the future.

Whilst himself suffering on the cross, Jesus looked down at his mother. He saw her suffering – she could do nothing to alleviate her

son's suffering and death, she was powerless and had to watch her son die. What an act of mothering!

Mary, according to Luke's gospel, said to Gabriel, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." In saying 'yes' to God's invitation to be the mother of our Lord, an essential aspect of the annunciation, Mary trusted in God, and let herself become a part of the fulfilment of God's desire to redeem humankind and give them a living example of God's kingdom.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, in some rather typically convoluted sentences, we can come to understand and at a spiritual level, know, that when we ourselves are afflicted or are suffering in some way, Christ walks with us and consoles us. When any one of us is hurting, Christ feels that hurt and seeks to help us heal.

This week, another mother was in the news, with a happy story – the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. At her press conference she showed remarkable grace and composure, given her ordeal over the last six years. One of the many points she made that impressed me was when she made clear that she could not fully rejoice until all other prisoners of conscience and political pawns were released. Her release did not make her complete when others still were suffering.

This points to the truth that when anyone suffers injustice Christ suffers with them and consoles them. However, it also diminishes each one of us. Our neighbour, somewhere in the world, is suffering, is in need, and we are called by Christ to love our neighbour.

We are called by Jesus to feed the hungry, to quench the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to clothe the naked, to care for the sick, and to give relief to the imprisoned. These seem to me to be excellent

descriptions of 'mothering', and a significant challenge for each of us, no matter what our gender.

In the last month we have seen so many people from many nations responding to the Ukrainian refugees, providing for them in all the ways Jesus calls us to do. It has been encouraging and hopeful to see the numbers of people in the UK wanting to provide hospitality – not just a roof over a refugee's head but a wider care for their wellbeing. I have had quite a few conversations in the last week about the practicalities for individuals, or for groups to work together to find a way of making an offer of hospitality.

These are signs of God's kingdom at work; mothering at its best. Let us pray for all those who are mothering today and all those who are reaching out to mother all those made homeless by war.

God acts in partnership with us. Just as Mary said 'yes' to her unique role, so God may be asking each one of us how we may respond to a call to 'mother' in our times. What does that look like for us today?

Loving and gracious God,
We thank you for all who have a mothering role,
For those who know the cost, the grief and pain of mothering,
For those who know the joys and love of mothering.
Help us, as best we can, be involved in mothering,
And pray for those whose mothering roles
Have started or radically changed as a result of conflict.
May we be unsettled and impatient until
All you loved ones are free from harm and safely
Gathered under your sheltering wings.
Amen.

