

Text for Reflection 19 March 2023, Mothering Sunday

1 Samuel 1: 20-28

Colossians 3:12-17

John 19: 25-27

As I was thinking about today's reflection and doing a little preliminary research on the subject of Mothering Sunday, I was struck by three things.

First, that so far as the Bible is concerned there are only two or three texts which specifically refer to Mothers and their role in their sons' lives. Therefore, there are really only two alternative sets of readings for the day. I was very surprised, and you have listened to one of those today.

Secondly, and even more significant to my mind is that Mothers and daughters and their relationship is even more elusive. I suppose I ought to have known, but it was one of those things that had simply not crossed my mind, for which I apologise.

Thirdly, as I pottered around the internet seeing what others had done, it became clear that it was a Sunday sermon that many priests, both male and female found almost as difficult to deal with as Trinity Sunday. I can now see why! To compound all of this there was a report in the **Times** earlier this week, that Oxfam have issued a word use pamphlet to all staff suggesting that, when writing or talking, the words Mother and Father should be dropped in favour of parent. The reason.... because variations in family structure raises the possibility of giving offence to those not in a traditional family structure. I expect the letter columns to have much on this one during then course of next week.

The origins of Mothering Sunday, or Mothers' Day as the commercial element prefer, is in the fact that the 25 March is the feast of the

Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Church Calendar, celebrated in the Middle Ages throughout most of northern Europe, and also New Year's Day. The move to a **Mothering Sunday** is what you might call a protestant compensation. In Scotland the move to 1st January for the New Year change happened in the Reformation Parliament 1570, and in England and Wales in 1752. The financial year in some respects still stays with the old Calendar, and that is why the Budget is traditionally at this time of year and the tax year ends on 5th April. The point I wish to make, is that Mothering Sunday was a reluctantly granted concession to the female part of the world for the loss of worship of the image of the blessed Virgin which existed in virtually all churches large and small pre-Reformation and is still an important facet of Roman Catholic worship. Women could confide their woes and triumphs to Mary and look for comfort, counsel, and consolation. She usually had a side chapel or aisle in the Church devoted to her worship, hence Lady Chapel. For the protestant reformers this worship was part of the idolatry they were trying to eliminate from Christian worship. Since those days it has acquired the sense of the day in which children remote from home returned for a day to attend their 'Mother church'. As populations migrated, I suspect this was something more honoured as an ideal rather than followed in practice.

It seems to me more appropriate to think of today as Mothering Sunday rather than Mother's Day. The latter seems partisan and excludes those who are not Mothers for a multitude of reasons. These may include choice, situation, illness, or the hurtful one of painful miscarriage or infertility. It is therefore discriminatory, which in these sorts of matters should be avoided. Mothering Sunday on the other hand is a positive and active concept, and it implies action not status. It is something we all do to some extent and is associated with some very positive virtues to which we can aspire, without detracting in any way from those we associate with Mothers. Caring,

nurturing, loving, comforting, supporting, and guiding are some of these. Moreover, these are some of the virtues to which we should work towards as caring Christians and embody in our relationships with others. There are other emotions which I feel are probably unique to the process of moving from girl to woman to mother (although I am open to correction on this). The process of giving birth is painful and dangerous and seems to imbue in the woman a fear and anxiety about the newborn, which never really disappears even into adulthood. Following on from what I had to say a few weeks ago 'letting go' of a child voluntarily and thereby reducing dependence is probably the most difficult part of Motherhood. Conversely, having a child torn away from a mother is almost certainly the most traumatic. In history this was often due to illness and death, but equally by war and forcible removal of children, as seems to be happening in the Ukraine at this time. In our own country's recent history, the fate of unmarried mothers forced to give away their children leaves a loss to both mother and child, which they may spend a lifetime regretting and be desperate to bridge.

Even when the mother feels it is necessary to give away a child the scar remains. Our reading this morning of Hannah giving away her son Samuel to God implies that duty prevailed over natural feeling for her promised son.

As the child grows the relationship changes. This is well encapsulated as in this anecdote.

At age 4	My Mummy can do anything
At 12	Mum does not know everything
At 14	Mum does not know anything
At 25	Perhaps Mum has some good ideas
At 45	What would Mum say about this latest fad
At 65+	I wish she was around to chat to.

Some of the treats and pleasures of this day are available to us, thanks to Carol. She has made a number of the traditional posies for the Mothers and Ladies with us.

Let us pray for Mothers and Mothering.....

Amen