



Sunday 30th March

Mothering Sunday

Gospel Reading

Luke 2.33-35

³³And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Other Readings: Exodus 2.1-10 or 1 Samuel 1.20-28

Psalm 34.11-20 or Psalm 127.1-4

2 Corinthians 1.3-7 or Colossians 3.12-17

Homily

What ideas would we get about Mothering Sunday if we looked only at the cards on sale in the shops? There could be any number of answers, but two of them are worth mentioning because they are deeply, perhaps even dangerously, misleading.

The first is that Mothering Sunday is the same thing as Mother's Day. In this country (but not others) it is customary for them to fall on the same day, but they are not the same thing. Mothering Sunday began as a day on which Christian people gave thanks for their 'mother church', by which they meant the church where they were baptised. Later, Mothering Sunday grew to include recognition of the Blessed Mother, of Mother Nature, and of our earthly, human mothers.

In other words, Mothering Sunday is a religious observance, a Christian one, which reflects on and gives thanks for Motherhood of different kinds – those who give birth to life of different kinds and in different ways, if you like. Mother's Day is a secular celebration whose scope is limited to just one of these.

But why might it be misleading, even dangerous, to confuse the two, to think of Mothering Sunday as a celebration only of one kind of motherhood?

Well, it has to do with what we think life is, and where we think it comes from. Because without denying the importance of the life that is given and nurtured by human mothers, the life that God intends for us includes both this and a great deal more. There is the eternal life that we receive as God's gift to us when we are baptised. There is the life of the natural world that sustains us – we are a part of it and it is a part of us so that none can live without the other. And there is the most precious life ever lived, the life of Jesus, which began when the

Blessed Mother consented to the miracle of the incarnation. The life she bore in her womb is the life that we are called to share.

As I say, none of this denies the importance of the life we receive from our earthly mothers. Actually, it enriches it by drawing attention to the deep connections between that life, the life of God and the life of the world. And it's only when we are in proper relationship with *all* these that we experience the fulness of life that God intends.

The second thing we might think about Mothering Sunday, if we only looked at the cards in the shops, is that it is a jolly, cheerful occasion. And this, too, is misleading in ways that can be dangerous.

The truth is that motherhood is not an experience of relentless delight. It is, from its beginning, painful, exhausting and full of fear. Children bring joy, love and fulfilment into our lives – don't misunderstand me. But they also bring needs and demands that we struggle to meet and take risks that we desperately wish they wouldn't! For some mothers, the experience is simply overwhelming and makes them ill.

And surely it is no kindness to mothers, no celebration of motherhood, to fail to acknowledge this. In our gospel reading today, we read that the prophet Simeon foresaw profound suffering and sorrow for the Blessed Mother. That passage reminds us of what Jesus would suffer for our sake, but also of what she suffered for his sake. This is of enormous comfort to all those for whom motherhood is associated with sadness: those who have found being a mother hard; those who have been unable to conceive; those whose relationships with their mothers have been difficult; and those who have lost their mothers.

So I wonder if perhaps the best thing we can do on Mothering Sunday is actually to take the pressure off: to resist the secular pressure to make out that Motherhood is all about pretty flowers and one breakfast in bed each year; to give thanks for all those who give us life, all our many and varied mothers; *and* to admit that being any kind of mother is just a really tough job.

Let's keep this Mothering Sunday as that broader, and yet more deeply rooted and honest, perspective on Motherhood, as we give thanks to all those who have given and nurtured the life that is in us.

Conversation Questions

1. Have you ever thought of the Church as a kind of mother?
2. What can you do today to 'take the pressure off' your mum?
3. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
4. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*God of compassion,
whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself:
strengthen us in our daily living
that in joy and in sorrow
we may know the power of your presence
to bind together and to heal;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

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