

Mothering Sunday 2021

Exodus 2:1-10, 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, John 19:25-27.

Knowing and feeling God's love.

Mothering Sunday was our last public mass in 2020 before the first Covid 19 pandemic lockdown and it is the first for us in yet another reopening for public worship after the third and hopefully final lockdown. Last year I reminded you that the history of Mothering Sunday is a long one in this land. For over a thousand years it has been a day of travel and pilgrimage: Journeying to the mother church the cathedral, priory or minster to give thanks for the life of the church universal; journeying to our earthly mothers or those who have cared and nurtured us and acted as mothers and say thank you, journeying spiritually with our Lady, Mary Mother of Christ given to all Christians as a mother from the cross to pray for us and nurture us by example.

For most physical journeys this last year have been few and far between. Perhaps they have been replaced by virtual and electronic ones. People even the Queen have learnt to use virtual meeting to know what is going on in the life of loved ones and others. But many will say it's not the same. There's a knowing without the feeling – feeling comes not just from touch, important though it is, but physical presence and real being alongside in joy and in sorrow. To know something and someone is good but to feel is deeper, real and lasting.

In a sense mothering Sunday in the church is a breather on the journey of lent to remind us that at the heart of the journey is a love which is shown manifested and demonstrated a love that take us from knowledge to spiritual feeling and experience.

Whilst Mothering Sunday is as I hope you know not just about mums – but about the love of God that nurtures us through God given relationships – do you feel that to be true. Moses was loved and nurtured by a number of women who were not his birth mother, the consolation that St.Paul speaks of comes not from his mother but from God in Christ and the sharing love he speaks of between people in the church is real and heartfelt – not just a hope but a real feeling; and Christ himself refers elsewhere to those who love God and keep his word as being brother, sister, mother. It is an inclusive understanding of Mothering Sunday that is not just of ancient value but modern importance and impact.

Significant women have been in the news this week last from which we can learn much. We mourn and share the grief of the terrible abduction and Murder of Sarah Everard. We know that women are less likely to be killed and attacked on our streets than young men – but that isn't how it feels to them and feeling is everything. We have seen the most extraordinary example of selfless bravery shown on world TV of a women this last week. I refer of course to the nun who knelt in prayer before the soldiers in Myanmar and said "let the young students go if you must kill me not

them.” She survived and the youngsters fled in safety. She did not know them but she felt for them and did something.

If we understand Mothering Sunday fully it is about recognising all that nurtures and builds up community, it is about family being not a term just for mum dad children and grandads and grandmas but for the village town society and definitely for the church – family defined by love not accident of birth, by common humanity not differences of class, wealth race or culture, by empathy not sameness, by unity not enmity and division.

We may draw all this and more from Christ’s words from the cross to his blood mother and the beloved disciple. It is a scene that takes us to the heart of divine empathy divine feeling for us – it is not about self but others. May say this of their experience of human mothers – sadly not all. But it may always be said of the love of Christ and it is for us.

This is what Christ prays for, wills for from the cross and gives his life for. He doesn’t just know the power of God’s love he feels it – he wants you to know and to feel. Mothering Sunday is a call to give thanks for all those people and ways we feel the practical moral spiritual and emotional love of God. It is by our actions, even when rejected ignored belittled that such knowledge is translated into feeling.

You will remember from a few weeks ago when Jesus feels so much for the outcast the leper, you remember the root of the word used – Splagma – guts – he felt for him in the gut.

Our Mothers Union have produced the most charming little booklet of memories of their own mothers – the mothers union is committed to the notion of the family life of the church yes the assistance and helping of ordinary families but in substance the family life that Christ wills from the cross where all may feel the love he has for us.

The booklet is full of details of family life, of joys and also sadness overcome, there is humour and honesty - but what flows through strongly is the feeling of being loved – it cannot be defined by knowledge of all the detail. Sometimes the detail of life is confusing and jarring.

Knowledge is rarely complete, let us turn to Mary again mother of Jesus – she knows not where it’s all going but her feeling for God and for Jesus is sure. The very first sign in the Gospel of John is also the first appearance of his Mother – remember the water that used for purification and to be tossed aside is turned into the best wine. She doesn’t understand their conversation is jarring but she says to the servants – “do whatever he tells you.” Her humility love and feeling for her son flow before the fine wine.

That was her first appearance in the gospel of John this will be her last. There are no words from her but only the flow of amazing love from her son. Action is required to translate notion and knowledge of such love into feeling – she must mother the beloved disciple and indeed all who seek to follow her Son.

A new family is made. It will feel and live a love that death cannot vanquish and Christ's resurrection will vindicate. It is a family of hope, unshaken in suffering and confident in consolation as St. Paul puts it – it is the family we call Mother Church that we belong to through Baptism. I pray that we may all both know and feel such love afresh this coming Holy Week and Easter.