

27th March 2022 – Mothering Sunday

That Gospel cuts straight to the heart of Mother's Day. This is not about breakfast in bed, flowers and a celebration lunch – though those are lovely – and well done those who are celebrating mothers in that way. In the Gospel, as Jesus is dying on the cross, he lifts his head and sees the two people who love him most. His disciple, John, and his mother, Mary, love him so much that they haven't run away and they are still there with him as he is dying. And he gives a gift to his mother and a gift to his disciple. To Mary he gives the gift of a son, John, to look after her and protect her. Jesus knows that when he is dead she will be alone in the world with no one to support her and it was hard to be a woman on your own in those days. So he says to John, 'From now on, Mary is your mother.' And to John, the disciple whom he loves, he gives his mother to be a living connection with him. Mary knows the stories of Jesus which no one else knows. The miracle of water turned into wine at Cana, the Samaritan woman at the well. She will tell John stories that Matthew, Mark and Luke who wrote the other gospels have never heard and which we only read in John's Gospel today.

There is a story that after the resurrection, John and Mary the mother of Jesus went into the hills above Ephesus and lived there quietly until Mary died. The place was revealed in a dream to a nun and I've visited it. It's very quiet and joyful. There's a little spring and some olive trees and nothing much else. Even if it isn't the exact place, it reminds us that John the beloved disciple and Mary the mother of Jesus mother lived together somewhere quietly and with great joy because they more than anyone else knew and loved Jesus.

Some of us – I hope many of us – know or knew and loved our mothers. To love one's mother is a gift, not all of us are able to. Some, like John, love a different person in place of their mother as John loved Jesus' mother. It may not be even a woman who mothers us. Those who mother us come in all shape and sizes. The young people had some ideas: fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers, older brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, godparents, step-parents, adoptive parents, friends.

Today we are saying thank you for all those people and for the love they have showed us so that we could learn how to love. Even if some of us may not remember a loving, parent figure, not a single one of us would be alive today without people who clothed and fed and protected us when we were helpless babies – who acted with love.

So some thoughts from the young people about what mothers are:

Motherhood is tough:

"If you just want a wonderful little creature to love, you can get a puppy."

The expectations are high:

"A mother is not a person to lean on, but a person to make leaning unnecessary."

"Being a mother means being completely and totally overwhelmed by love, joy, responsibility, and selflessness. Being a mother means sleepless nights, big laughs, caterpillars on the coffee table, finger-painting in the kitchen, stubbed toes, and gap toothed grins. Being a mother means I have two little people who walk around with my heart and soul in the palms of their hands."

Maya Angelou writes:

“To describe my mother would be to write about a hurricane in its perfect power. Or the climbing, falling colours of a rainbow.”

The training is non-existent:

“Mothers don't take a course or pass an exam – you're thrown into motherhood and learn from experience.”

Mothers are always busy:

“If evolution really works, how come mothers only have two hands?”

Sometimes mothers have to be fierce:

When your mother asks, “Do you want a piece of advice?” it doesn't matter if you answer is yes or no. You're going to get it anyway.

They are for you at the very beginning:

Mary Ann Evans, who wrote as George Elliot said, “Life began with waking up and loving my mother's face.”

But the final word goes to E. M. Forster:

“If the mothers of all the nations could meet, there would be no more wars.”

Thank you to all the young people, and to all of you for the nurturing that all of you do for each other. That love and nurturing comes from the love and nurturing of God that is shown to us in Jesus as, dying on the cross, he raises his head and gives mother and son to each other.