



22 March, 2020

I prepared a message for our worship today Mothers' Day (Mothering Sunday). Below is a precis of the message, covering the salient points. May our great God bless your reading of His message and enrich your life as you live to glorify Him, before you set out to serve Him.

When I entered Regent's Park College in 2007 to start my Pastoral Studies and Ministerial Formation programme, I had no idea, a national health calamity would compel us to shut the Church's doors.

A Church's character is seen by its doors: wide open says **WELCOME!**, and shut tight says, **CAN'T WELCOME YOU NOW.**

We have no alternative but to obey the directives of our elected Government, and it is our prayer, this pandemic will not debilitate us for long. Included with this letter is a prayer our daughter Nureen prayed at her womens' prayer group; please use this to focus your prayers for our city, our nation and our world.

On this Mothering Sunday (also Mothers' Day many women celebrate being a mother, but **ALL** of us, all men and all women, can celebrate having a Mother, whoever she was in our lives! In the midst of the solemnness of Lent, Mothering Sunday celebrates God's creation of the first man and woman to whom He said, *Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it.*

I need not remind mothers that they shoulder a significant emotional load; not that father's don't have emotions, but mothers carry all the emotions of childbirth and the emotions of releasing their adult child into the world. I selected the passage John 19:25-27 for our meditation this Mothering Sunday, in which these two emotions come together, quite powerfully.

The scene: A dying son. A bewildered disciple. An unconsolable mother whose heart is breaking apart.

Suffering was not new to Mary; she suffered the fright of indignity of a pregnancy out of wedlock (from which God delivered her by allowing Quirinius to organise a census, for which she and Joseph had to travel to Bethlehem); she

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suffered on hearing Simeon say “a sword would pierce her heart”; she suffered with heart-wrenching panic, almost losing her 12-year old Son on the return journey from Jerusalem after the passover that year; she suffered becoming a widow sometime between her Son’s 12th and 30th birthdays; she suffered watching her Son travel the length and breadth of the land, teaching, preaching and healing, yet insulted for blasphemy, and now, she stood within ear-shot distance from the cross watching Him die, not for a crime, but for speaking Truth which offended people.

As parents, we experience anguish over our children, not once but many times throughout our lives. Mary is an important figure of compassion and solidarity, as one who identifies with that deep pain, for those who have “lost” their own children, physically, emotionally or even spiritually to another faith framework.

At the cross, Mary gazes at her Son in agony; from the cross, Jesus gazes at His mother in agony. Watching her pain was torment enough, beside everything else He was going through in those moments. He who sat by His Father when He dictated to Moses, Holy Instruction No. 5, *Honour your Father and Mother*, was about to do exactly that!

‘*Obedience*’ in Scripture is much more than doing what you are told. In Greek ‘*obedience*’ is to ‘*listen intently*’. Jesus modelled this attitude for us when He was 12 years old, *Jesus journeyed back to Nazareth with his parents, where he (lived) in obedience to them (Luke 2:51)*. Listening intently to our parents conveys an attitude of love and affection, gratitude and respect.

There at the cross, Jesus is concerned for His mother. John tells us quite emphatically, *Not even his brothers believed in Him (John 7:5)*, so who would look after His mother after His death? Jesus knew Mary, unlike all other mothers, would not have a physical graveside where she could visit and “remember” her firstborn Son.

Standing beside His mother at the Cross was, *The Disciple whom Jesus loved (John)*. At Pentecost, the Church was given a voice and a mandate, but at the

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cross, the family of the Church was born. To His mother Jesus said, *He is your son*, and to His disciple (John) He said, *She is your mother*. From that time, the disciple took her to live in his home. A grieving mother accepts her dying Son's best friend as her son, and the dying Man's best friend reaches out to His mother as his own.

An elderly lady recently told me, one of the greatest, soulful tragedies for a mother to experience is the death of one of her children. *"Its not the order of life! A parent being older should die first!"*

Mothers' Day Sunday is so much deeper than we might at first imagine. It is a time to celebrate the love of our Mothers, our carer throughout our years. It is also a time to give thanks for the family of the Church, born at the foot of the cross, when a grieving mother accepts a stranger to be her Son, in the role of the first-born.

The Church is distinctive by the Love, Comfort, Support and Hospitality with which it welcomes "strangers" into its midst and into its homes. The doors of our Church are temporarily shut (a sign explains this) but we the Church continue to offer **AND** to accept, comfort, support, encouragement, love and hospitality, all of which God has gifted and equipped us, to build His Church here in Botley, a new community, a new fellowship, a new Family! *Wishing you a happy and joy-filled Mother's Day!*

AMEN.