

St Nicholas Church, Sighthill 14th March 2021 Mothering Sunday

This fourth Sunday in Lent is known as Laetare Sunday – traditionally a day of celebration during Lent. It is also Mothering Sunday in the UK – which ties in with the celebratory theme of recognising all who have brought maternal influences into our lives, not least into our life of faith. There is a temporary relief from the penitential nature of Lent and, perhaps this year more than ever, that is something we will all appreciate – whether we are still separated physically or not.

Opening Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCBjxVP6GWE>

Happy Mothering Sunday

Today is Mothering Sunday, a day when traditionally all went back to their mother church, to the place where they were nurtured, loved and formed into the ways of God. Today of course we often also celebrate Mothers' day, a day to thank those who have mothered us in all the ways we can be cared for. It is usually a day of celebration, when we draw together with family and loved ones.

And so this day is a strange one for those of us here in the United Kingdom and in many parts of the world, when we are torn between our need to keep life going, to celebrate relationship and kindness, and the fear and imposed isolation that we face. It is the day when many of us are still not able to be with those whom we love or care for; loved ones considered to be vulnerable or at risk. Maybe this means this is a good Sunday for us to call our churches and our nation to prayer and action.

At difficult times, we have a choice to focus on fear, on ourselves, or on what we cannot do. Or we can turn to God and let Him lead us into praying for the world and letting our prayers flow into creative action. This is what we want to do today - to pray and to remind ourselves that, although we are separated in space, we are joined together in worship. Also, life goes on and we have many reasons to celebrate and to give thanks to God including,

- His love for all His people,
- the voice of God's caring love for us,
- God's encouragement to turn ourselves towards others around us in need of love, care and support.

Opening Prayer

Dear Jesus, we thank you for Mothers everywhere, for all who care for us day by day. Let us not forget that you were a child and your mother was Mary. We bring before you all the women around, asking in prayer that you grant them;

The strength to persevere
The courage to speak out
The faith to hold hope that lies beyond all systems and institutions

Loving and nurturing God, we thank you for mothers, for all they mean or have meant to us. We thank you for the love they have shown and the care they have given. We remember the holy and courageous women in our lives, church and society. May we be given the grace and vision to follow in their footsteps, as we work together for the recognition and encouragement of women as witnesses to the joy of the gospel.

We pray for those who have never known their mothers, for those who grieve loss of their mothers or mother figures, and for those for whom, for various reasons, Mother's Day brings heartache rather than celebration.

Lord God, as a mother protects her children, you watch over us day by day. We thank you for your mothering heart and tender love which nurtures all who feel abandoned, broken or lost. We thank you for your arms which always encircle and protect us. Your hands shield and deliver us from harm. Loving God, Lord in your mercy, mother us all with your love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done in earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever. Amen.*

Bible Reading: Luke 2:33-35

The child's father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

All age talk: 'Happy Times, Hard Times

As I read the today's talk (based on our Bible reading) I invite you if you are happy and able, at the appropriate point, to say 'happy times' or to put your thumbs up, or, again at the appropriate point, to say 'hard times' or to put your 'thumbs down'.

We remember the story of Jesus – how he was born to the world (happy times), but born in a rough stable (hard times) and laid in a feeding trough called a manger (hard times). His parents, father Joseph and mother Mary, looked after him (happy times), and visitors came to see him after his birth and when he was older (happy times).

Mary and Joseph took their son to the temple to give thanks to God for him (happy times), and an old priest called Simeon knew that this baby was special (happy times) – he was the promised Son of God (happy times). Simeon said to his parents, who really cared for Jesus, that he was special (happy times) and that many people would be challenged and changed by him (happy times). But then Simeon said that Mary’s heart would be hurt too (hard times). Mary cared for Jesus, and she and Joseph had no idea what Simeon meant. They were amazed by his words (happy times), but a little scared by them too (hard times).

The Bible tells us that after this Jesus was in danger (hard times) and Joseph was warned in a dream to travel to safety somewhere else (hard times). Joseph, Mary and their precious son were refugees, travelling to another country to try to find safety (hard times). We know that Mary really cared for her son (happy times), but saw what he suffered and went through, even standing and watching Jesus die on the cross (hard times). Those who care for us, like our mothers, carers, and lots of others, would love to see us safe and happy (happy times), but know that life isn’t always like that (hard times). When we have sad times and difficult times they suffer too (hard times), they feel our pain and upset (hard times), just like when things are going well (happy times) they can share in our joy (happy times). Just like Jesus’ mother Mary, those who care for us know how we feel in the good times (happy times) and tough times (hard times), and Jesus knows how we feel too.

Prayer

We remember Mary, the mother of Jesus, as we worship today. We think of her example to all those who care for others. We remember her willingness to obey and her thoughtfulness. We remember her risk-taking, and her confusion. We remember her deep concern, and her painful sorrow. Help us to learn from the mother of Jesus. We again give thanks for all who care for us.

God of all, you care for us as a mother and a father. We are created by you and we are special to you, yet we have not appreciated that relationship. We are made to follow your ways and we are special to you, yet we have chosen to ignore you. We are loved without conditions and we are special to you, yet we have not learned to love others. We have the hope that you give us and we are special to you, yet we have failed to share your hope with others. God of all, you care for us as a mother and a father, and we are special to you. Forgive us all our failings and renew us. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.

The all-age talk and prayer was copied, with permission from ‘The Children’s Society’ – an organisation that exists to fight for hope for children and young people.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Hidden and mysterious God, we seek you in darkness and unknowing, and you come to us with tender love. Today we pray for women who suffer because what

should be uncovered is covered up; women who have been humiliated, harassed and stigmatised and dare not tell; women who have been beaten, tortured, threatened, and cannot tell. Forgive us, and your church, our complicity in silence and concealment. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

And we give thanks for the witness of women, most of them unnamed and unsung, who have refused to be shamed or silenced, who have stood up and stood out for justice and truth. We pray for women whose bodies have been violated by rape and degradation, women whose bodies are bought and sold as commodities, women whose cultures reflect them as inferior, as stereotypes, as less valuable than men. Forgive us, and your church, our failure to proclaim the true personhood of all people, regardless of race, gender or sexuality. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

And we give thanks, for the persistence of those who struggle for equal rights for women, for an end to sexual violence, trafficking and discrimination, and for the power of human dignity. God of power and presence, midwife of our lives, you encourage and calm us into creativity. We pray for women who must give birth in dangerous or squalid conditions, women who are in anguish because they do not have the resources to care for their children adequately, women whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change. Forgive us, and your church, our failure to overcome poverty, and to resist the assault on the poor Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

And we give thanks, for women across the world, whose leadership, resilience and resourcefulness, in raising families, resisting despair, embracing new livelihoods, is transforming their communities to challenge poverty. We give thanks, for women who have confronted warring powers, challenged violence, and whose lives, directed by necessity, are moved by compassion. Wounded God, you took defenceless flesh and died on a cross. Today we pray for women who are casualties of war and the arms trade, women who mourn the violent deaths of loved ones, women whose potential dies a little more every day. Forgive us, and your church, our failure to confront the forces of death. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer. Amen.**

Part of this prayer is copied from a prayer written by Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart

You’re your hearts with joy and gladness

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1jMihP_S-E

Final blessings

Let us go from here rejoicing that we are precious to God. May we, as the family of God, shine as precious stones reflecting His love to the world.

