

Sunday 22nd March 2020: Mothering Sunday

First Reading: Exodus 2:1-10: The Birth of Moses

2 Now a man of the tribe of Levi married a Levite woman, ² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. ³ But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of the Nile. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

⁵ Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her female slave to get it. ⁶ She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

⁷ Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

⁸ "Yes, go," she answered. So the girl went and got the baby's mother. ⁹ Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

Gospel Reading: John 19:25-27 (NIV)

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, "Woman, here is your son," ²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

Reflection:

They say 'a week is a long time in Politics' and surely so much has changed this past 7 days. The crisis we have watched from a safe distance on our TV screens has inched itself across the developed world with alarming speed, to arrive in our green and pleasant (or somewhat brown and muddy) land. We have all been forcefully reminded of our own mortality.

The readings set for Mothering Sunday, which usually sound a bit melodramatic for a pink flowery occasion, are this year more apt. In our first reading Moses' mother tries to save him from certain death in a land where Pharaoh has ruled that all young Hebrew males be killed. In our second reading, Jesus mother is unable to save her dying son, but stands 'at a distance' watching and waiting for the inevitable. How many relatives will be doing this from behind glass screens in hospital Isolation wards, unable to touch, but unwilling to leave them on their own? Such is the bond of motherly love, which desires to nurture, protect, accompany on life's journey... to the end.

Then we have Jesus' words from the cross, seeing his mother and the disciple he loved (which the reader takes to be John, the writer of this Gospel). As death approaches, he seeks to make provision for his mother. As eldest son, he would have had responsibility for her on the death of his earthly

father; Joseph. His own brothers are nowhere to be seen. In chapter 7, John tells us they did not believe in him, but his mother has faithfully followed from Galilee to Jerusalem. Looking down from the cross, Jesus entrusts her to the care of his disciple, John....And the disciple took her into his home.

Over this past week, many people have had to make difficult and sacrificial decisions, from choosing to isolate themselves and forgo events, to postponing weddings and restricting funerals. Always the overriding motivation to do so was NOT adhering to endless rules and regulations, but protecting those they love – their nearest and dearest. This is – as Jesus told his followers at the last supper – the royal commandment ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself’. This comes naturally with close family, but Jesus challenged us to extend it to our neighbour, or even our enemy. Pharaoh’s daughter drew the Hebrew baby from the water and raised him as her own. John took Mary into his home to care for her. In the coming months we will be challenged to provide for, to care for anyone in need. Elderly people living at a distance from their own family, who may be feeling isolated or vulnerable or young families who will lose income and livelihoods and come to rely on foodbanks.... To love them as we love ourselves.

Over the last few days many encouraging e-mails have hit my inbox, but this one I would like to share with you:

Coronavirus has changed the world, and it will continue to change it. But love has not changed. Our God has not changed. The hope we have in him has not changed.

These are uncertain times, yet surely as Christians we ought to be a people of certainty? A people who know that we are held in the arms of God? A people who can shine brightly as the shadow of fear descends?

If our faith cannot be relevant in a time such as this, then it cannot be relevant.

The world needs the love of Christ right now. You are his hands and feet. You are the vessel through which divine compassion enters the world.

Let us pray:

Jesus in our changed and challenged world, may we find ways of loving which are radical but not reckless. Ways of protecting and providing for the vulnerable and the poor, whether they be known or unknown to us. May we dare to love our neighbour as we love ourselves..... guided and strengthened by your Holy Spirit and in obedience to Jesus, our master and our friend.

Amen