



CAVERSHAM THAMESIDE
AND MAPLEDURHAM
ST PETER | ST MARGARET | ST JOHN

HOMILY for Mothering Sunday, 22/03/2020

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"And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'" (Luke 2:33-35, NRSV)

We find ourselves in interesting and challenging times. Most of us perhaps cannot think of another time when society has been transformed in this way, our work and social lives curtailed, children off school indefinitely, and our churches not allowed to host worship.

We are finding ourselves having to conduct our relationships in new ways. Thank heavens for modern electronic communication via the telephone, computer and video link. Some of us may even rediscover letter writing! I wonder if you are, like me, rejoicing that a sense of community is being rediscovered (from the privacy of inside our own homes) as people reach out to one another, to help and reassure one another. Such relationship building is never easy - putting the needs of others alongside our own, sometimes before our own, can be extremely challenging.

As we witness some of our friends and neighbours really struggling - as people lose their jobs, their income, and as some people will struggle to hold their lives together - the words of Simeon to Mary "and a sword will pierce your own souls too" take on a new meaning.

Mary and Joseph were doing the right and expected thing: they had travelled to the Temple in Jerusalem to perform the ceremonies required after birth. Women were expected to offer a sacrifice for their purification. In addition, because Jesus was Mary's firstborn son, parents were required to present an offering of five shekels because such a child was believed to belong to God.

At the Temple they came across a holy man called Simeon, who had been told by God that he would not die before he saw the Messiah. The Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that this child, Jesus, was the much-longed-for saviour. He approached the family and, holding baby Jesus in his arms, declared that this little one would be a blessing to both Jew and non-Jew alike. However, he had unwelcome news too –

not everyone would accept Jesus. He would divide opinion and Simeon recognised that this would have grave implications for his mother, who would suffer as a result, most tragically through her son's death.

No wonder Simeon uses such emotive language to explain the pain that Mary would face through her relationship with her Son. The Greek word for sword used here describes a long, large blade and the "soul" was understood to represent the centre of emotions and feelings. Simeon, then, recognises that, despite knowing the joy and privilege of bringing such a wonderful baby into the world, Mary's experience of motherhood will also involve intense emotional pain.

Mothering Sunday comes in these early days of being confined at home or restricted where we can go outside. It might today even seem a bit novel and enjoyable. But the shine will soon wear off. We will have that effect of a sword piercing our souls too, and we undergo the emotional and mental struggle ahead.

Mothering Sunday has always been the day when Mother Church calls us back into relationship with one another and with God. If your mother is alive, make sure you give her a call and tell her you love her. If she isn't alive, or your relationship with her isn't that good, or your experience of motherhood is not positive, then Mothering Sunday is also for you - knowing that we stand with you in your memories, pain and struggle.

But perhaps this year more than every, Mothering Sunday is a time for building relationships on the phone, computer, in letters with those we love, and our neighbours around us. Mother Sunday is a Christian day of hope - for we Christians have a profound offer for our world. To place our hope and trust in Jesus who offers us a new life, borne out of the suffering of this world. As Mary discovered that she could not avoid suffering, so do we. But she witnessed first hand the promise of God - that suffering will not have the last laugh. Jesus is saving us, and Easter is coming!

Mothering Sunday asks us to focus, in the midst of struggle and suffering, on our need for one another in relationship, that 'we' is more important than 'I'.

Let us pray especially for all those struggling with loss on this Mothering Sunday, and for all those struggling with their health because of Coronavirus. Most of all, let us turn to God in Jesus Christ - bring him our hopes and our fears. Let us find in God the source of our care and our hope, and may that inspire us in caring and supporting one another.

Happy Mothering Sunday!