

READING: 2 Corinthians 1.3-7

A reading from the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

This is the word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL READING: Luke 2.33-35

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

The Lord is a great God,

O that today you would listen to his voice.

Harden not your hearts.

Praise to you, O Christ, King of eternal glory.

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke.

Glory to you, O Lord.

The child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Jesus. 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.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon 10.04.2024 Mothering Sunday

If you've got a Tesco Clubcard you might well have received an email asking if you want to optout of Mothers' Day marketing promotions. I expect other commercial enterprises have done the same. The cynic in me says that this is just another clever marketing gimmick to make Tesco look as if they are sympathetic to the difficult emotions a day celebrating mothers can bring to the surface for some people. We didn't all have good experiences.

More seriously I wonder what Mothering Sunday is going to be like for the mums of Barnaby Webber and Grace O'Malley-Kumar. I read about the deep pain that was inflicted on them in the Times this week-end. The tragedy of losing children in our city will still be very raw for those two mothers and we might think of Brianna Ghey's mum and the mothers of her murderers, the two young people Scarlett Jenkinson and Eddie Ratcliffe. And we might bring to mind Alexei Navalny's mother in Russia.

The line from the Gospel to Mary 'and a sword will pierce your soul too' has a horrible resonance today.

This is all a bit gloomy/serious/stark – but Lent is a time for contemplating serious things – our Christian faith is not all froth and bubbles. As we move towards Good Friday we move towards Mary watching helpless as her son is tortured and executed by the Roman State.

If we can feel in our guts the pain of separation that people feel on this day, then we would do well to also feel the importance of having people around us who care for us like family does – and I use that phrase 'people who care for us like family does' because not all of us have an actual genetic family close by – but I would suggest that all of us need people who care for us like family does.

Family life is important for all sorts of reasons. It is to be valued and cherished because generally speaking it does us good, though it can also be the source of a lot of problems – believe me I know from first-hand experience. However we know that being with people who care about us, look after us and for whom we are concerned is really important for our flourishing, our wellbeing, our happiness.

Reflect on how, following the death of Dave Myers, the Hairy Biker, time and again we have heard of the deep value Si King has placed on a friendship which went as deeper than being the best of brothers.

The foundational text for me is from the book of Genesis – when the ancient scribes of Judaism were collecting together the creation myths of their faith they recorded that God looked on the man, Adam, that he had made and all the animals and creatures that he had made, and saw that it was not good for man to be alone. In God's eyes it seems that women and men are incomplete without other women and men to be alongside them.

Whether we have family or not, we need others.

And those others need to be found in real proximity, where we are.

Out on the road with his disciples Jesus would have left behind his family in Nazareth but clearly he saw that raggle taggle band of blokes he was travelling with as a family. When his mum and brothers pitch up while he is teaching he is told that his family are outside waiting for him. He replies 'Aren't these people here in front of me my family? Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother.'

It doesn't mean he has abandoned Mary, his Mum and his family – quite the opposite, he needed, you need, people who care for you like family, here where you are.

If you bring to mind the events of Good Friday you will recall how Jesus was nailed to the cross and died at the hands of the Roman state. In that extreme situation you might recall that one of the acts of compassion that Jesus undertook, despite the torture he was suffering, was an act of deep loving concern. Aware of the real need we have for other people to share our lives in a more than superficial way, as he hangs there in his death throes he commends his mother, Mary, into his best friend John's safe keeping; and he entrusts his best friend John into the love and care of Mary, who will become his surrogate mother. We need other people – we need family – we need to be looked after and we need to look after each other. We need love and to be loved.

And now for us. By us I mean us here in Church this morning.

There is a very deep truth here that we might need to take home with us, ponder, work on and turn into new action and new understanding and new attitudes.

Sometimes on a Sunday morning we have a Baptism in Church. It is a lovely occasion. I think the whole celebration of children coming into a family in our community is heart-warming. I think the admittance of an adult into the life of the Christian church is staggeringly wonderful. I think that we, together, joining in that celebration as Father Wayne pours water and anoints with oil is really moving.

Towards the end of the baptismal rite there is this little bit of liturgy:

Fr Wayne: There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism: by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body.

All We welcome you into the fellowship of faith; we are children of the same heavenly Father; we welcome you.

We are children of the same heavenly Father
We are sisters and brothers
We belong together

If you have been baptised, if you are a disciple of Christ, if you have chosen to follow Jesus, we are family. We need each other. We have been given to each other to support, love, encourage, be with each other.

God looked at a solitary person and despite having set that person in the perfect garden God recognised that it is not good to be alone. Tesco may be right to acknowledge that family life is not easy for everyone, but we are right to acknowledge our interdependence - our need for each other – the fact that we have been given to each other as family because it is not good to be alone.