

Mothing Sunday – March 2020

May I speak in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Earlier this year, when on holiday in Spain, an icon in one of the cathedrals really captured my imagination. It was a picture of Mary holding the infant Jesus. She was cradling him in her arms gazing adoringly at the child and the child was reaching out to her and gazing back; an image of tenderness and inter-dependence; and an image of compassion and unconditional love. I was also struck by the fact that Mary was depicted with a very thick neck; an image of a woman, not of weakness but of considerable strength.

And, indeed, she had to be strong, not only did she give birth to the Christ child and nurtured Jesus through his childhood, as any other person responsible for 'mothering' a child would do, but Mary was to experience much more than most as Simeon first blesses both Joseph and Mary, and then foretells the future for both Jesus and Mary – "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel ... *and a sword will pierce your own soul too*". This is a vivid image that can be associated both with romantic love as well as an agonising wound, yet it is a pain we can bear if we look to God to give us the strength to carry on and trust in His compassion and love. And this is exactly how Mary responded.

Compassion and love safely and gently nurture life. By showing kindness, caring, and a willingness to help others, we show compassion and love. Compassion and love involve putting yourself in someone else's shoes and really feeling for them and, in doing so, we become a real blessing to them.

Today of course is Mothering Sunday and our readings are all about the caring for and nurturing of others. It is a time when we reflect on the Mothering Love of God, the Church and of Mary, and naturally think of and ask God's blessing on all those who 'mother' us, parents, grandparents, carers, guardians alike, male or female, But, this is no ordinary Mothering Sunday. This Church would normally be attended by people of all ages coming together in Word and Sacrament and giving thanks for the love that surrounds us. But, today, all public worship in Churches is suspended as we face very challenging times. This is not an image; this is reality here and now. And now is the time for us to be strong and to nurture inter-dependency in a self-giving and generous way, following the ways and teachings of Christ, and showing true compassion for one another in the strength and love of God, by allowing God to pierce our own hearts and souls.

Although the church building is closed to public worship, we will continue to be 'church'; the people of God, the body of Christ, who show God's compassion and love to those around us. Today, I am encouraging each and every one of us to support those in our community by praying for each other; by using the resources we will post on our website; by making a phone call or sending a note or a card to someone who may be lonely, housebound, vulnerable, anxious or in need; by becoming part of a team of volunteers to help with practical matters; by supporting others in any way we can.

Compassion comes from the wellspring that flows from the very heart of God and makes a loving space for others. In this time so full of anxiety and uncertainty, compassion and love can make a world of difference. Each small act of kindness enacted in our care for one another reminds us that nothing can extinguish the light of God's love. As a mother tends her child and, in the words of today's Collect:

'God of Love, passionate and strong, tender and careful: watch over us and hold us all the days of our life; through Jesus Christ our Lord'.

Let God pierce your souls and hearts. Be a blessing to others; be strong and faithful in prayer and loving service; and join together as 'church' in the love of God. **Amen.**