

Mothering Sunday: 14th March 2021.

Dear Church Congregation, Choir, and all Friends,

With a bit of good fortune, this may well be my last 'reflection', or 'talk' sent out by email. That is not to say that I want to stop communicating with you all, but that, as from next Sunday, the 21st, the plan is to open All Saints' once again, for Church services.

Social distancing will still have to be in place, so that everyone is as safe as possible. Christine will receive requests for those wishing to attend, as she did before the latest 'lockdown'.

Come the 28th, I shall hope to be taking the Palm Sunday Service, which I am very excited about.

Today, is Mothering Sunday. The Bible readings set for today, do not reflect that theme, so I would like to take the liberty of talking a little about the human parental condition and connect it to our relationship with God, the Divine.

The medieval female Mystic, Julian of Norwich, said in the fourteenth century: "As truly as God is our Father, so also is God our Mother." People sometimes think that feminine imagery for God is a modern idea, but in fact it goes back to some of the earliest books in the Bible. In Deuteronomy we read: "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." And the prophet Hosea described the way God cared for His people in a very maternal way. "It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with the bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them." (Hosea 11. 3-4.)

St Anselm said: “Gather your little ones to You, O God, as a hen gathers her brood to protect them.”

We don't have to start calling God 'Mother', that isn't necessarily any more appropriate than 'Father'. But it is worth noting that there is this element in the biblical tradition, and it has been picked up by people in the centuries since.

Jesus Himself cemented the idea of God as our Father, as that was the loving way in which He Himself addressed His Divine parent. We should never forget the great love Jesus also had for his Mother, whom He thought of, even as he was dying His hideous death on the Cross. And in spite of His unimaginable pain, He looked down, and asked His disciple John, to care for her.

There are many stories told about the sacrificial love shown by mothers towards their children; I remember reading some 'memories', printed a few years ago, in a newspaper, on a Mothering Sunday, and one stayed with me.

This is what Janice wrote;

“We are collecting mushrooms; me with my basket, Mum in her red spotted skirt—a princess, with pink velvety cheeks and a beautiful smile. Her face goes white and her eyes lose their twinkle, when the bull comes. She grabs me and tries to run, but I am going nowhere without my beloved basket... She snatches it, and helps me through the fencing. The bull is so close I can see the steam from his snorty nose. Mum hauls herself through a gap in the fence, but her leg is caught. It's ripped apart, red and raw. Her blood seeps out like Ribena. I know it's my fault that it's happened; but still she smiles and, in that moment, I know that no one will ever love me more, my whole life through, than this beautiful lady in the red spotted skirt.”

Most deep love has an element of the sacrificial about it, and we can relate our own experiences of sacrificial love to the amazing human sacrifice made by Jesus, on Good Friday, over two thousand years ago. This last year has been full of sacrifices, made by many during the Covid epidemic.

We think primarily of the medical staff working round the clock in hospitals, caring for the sick, and the dying in ICU. Others have worked tirelessly to keep certain schools open and public services available. There are hundreds, even thousands of families, who have been traumatized by the loss of their loved ones; who, in a sense, have been sacrificed to the pandemic.

We can only pray that all who suffer may feel the compassionate, and unconditional love of Jesus Christ, and the Divine support of the 'everlasting arms'.

I should like to end with something sent to me, by a friend, last year: A baby asked God, 'They tell me that you are sending me to earth tomorrow, but how am I going to live there, being so small and helpless?'

God said, 'Your angel will take care of you.' The baby asked, 'Who will protect me?'

God said, 'Your angel will protect you, even if it means risking her life.'

The baby said, 'God, please tell me my angel's name.'

God said, 'You will simply call her Mummy.'

I look forward so much to seeing some of you on the 28th. In the meantime, I send you my love and the prayer that God's blessing may be with us all.

All my best wishes, always, Sarah.

