

Sermon 16 May 2021 'Mothers'

John 17:9-17

I want to speak a little about mothers for two reasons. Firstly, because I didn't get a chance to do that last Sunday and also because our Gospel reading really does lend itself to a reflection on the role of mothers.

In this passage we see Jesus praying for his disciples. One of the things that comes through is the love and care Jesus has for his disciples. It is a love and care that invites comparisons with the love and care a mother has for her children. It is also interesting to note that this theme of love underpins all of John's writings.

A couple of interesting points to note in this prayer Jesus makes on behalf of his disciples. Firstly, he prays for unity of his disciples. There is undoubtedly a message for us all. A church that is not united cannot worship together effectively, nor can it spread the gospel. Who is going to be attracted to a congregation, a church where there is conflict of personalities or vision? Where criticism of one another is apparent? For a church to be effective a sense of harmony, mutual respect and care must prevail.

In the same way, a family that is divided and fractured is unable to provide support and succour to its members. This, after all, is probably the prime function of a family. And who do we usually look to in order to provide the glue that holds a family together? Invariably mum. Perhaps not in every case, but usually.

Back to Jesus's prayer. The second point I want to draw our attention to is that Jesus did not pray that his disciples should be taken out of the world. *'I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one.'* Verse 15. In other words, they are called upon to get involved, to challenge both themselves and the people. Serving Christ does not mean that we will be spared the rigours of life, but rather that we will be equipped to deal with those rigours.

It is in the rough and tumble of life that both our faith and we ourselves grow. James put it so well when he said, *'Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy. For when your faith is tested, your endurance is fully developed, you will be strong in character and ready for everything.'* James 1:2-4. It is a well-known fact of life that we are shaped and moulded by the challenges that we have to deal with as we journey through life.

The last point I want to draw our attention to is contained in verse 15 that I have already alluded to – *'to keep them safe from the evil one.'* The word that springs to mind is 'protect'. We all need protection. It doesn't mean that we need to be shielded from trials and tribulations, on the contrary, but rather we feel a sense of security, of care, of love as we combat the slings and arrows, the rough and tumble of life. God certainly provides us with

that sense of security, a sense that with him on our side we are equipped to deal with whatever comes our way. *'Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about what happens to you.'* 1 Peter 5:7.

Once again, we see a comparison with the role mothers play. Their unique relationship with their children means that they are invariably the ones who project a sense of security and care for their young. I do notice that even though I have a very good relationship with my boys, that if there are tears it will probably be their mother whom they run to for comfort. That is the special nature of mums, and nothing will change that. It is said that 'a father becomes concerned when his child breaks a bone, a mother when her child shins a knee.' A bit tough on fathers but you get the point.

We do learn a lot from mums. There is no doubt that the concept of unconditional love sits fairly and squarely with the love of a mother for her children. We learn about patience as mess after mess after mess is cleaned up – it's all part of the job. Though mums are human. A young boy was telling the pastor that his mother said his prayers for him each night. 'What do you mean, your mother says your prayers for you?' the minister asked. The boy replied, 'When my mum tucks me up in bed she always says, 'Thank God he's in bed.'

Then there is the mother's resolution. *'I will always be a good, fair and loving parent to my children. I will provide them with enriching experiences and opportunities. I will give them a solid foundation on which to build a useful life. After all, they may eventually be responsible for choosing the nursing home for me to live out my final days.'*

I want to conclude by referring to a movement initiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Reverend Justin Welby. It is called 'Thy Kingdom Come' and it is a call to prayer for evangelisation. It takes place during the 11 days between Ascension (last Thursday) and Pentecost (next Sunday). During this period people are encouraged to pray for 5 friends or family members to develop a relationship with Christ. Our Gospel reading records Jesus praying for his disciples. In the same way, we can pray for those close to us. Please give this your consideration.

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