

## Sermon 12 May 2024 Mothers Day

**James 1:2-8 John 17:9-17**

I want to speak a little about mothers 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 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 here 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 support and provide succour to its members. This, after all, is probably the prime function of a family. And whom do we usually look to in order to provide the glue that holds a family together? Invariably the mother. Not always, but often.

Back to Jesus' 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 puts it so very well, as I quote from our first reading: *'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 only way to grow is to face challenges that seem beyond your strength.

I would like to expand on that for a moment. Not only are we shaped and moulded by the trials of life, but invariably if we are to achieve anything of significance, we will more than likely have to experience adversity and challenges in order to get there. Again, I quote James: *'Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown.'* James 1:12.

Life can be hard at times. Life can be challenging. Life can be unfair, but if we are to prevail, if we are to attain our goals, if we are to reach the destination we have set out for, then we need to persevere. As Winston Churchill said, *'If you're going through hell, keep going!'* Someone said, *'Difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations.'*

It goes without saying that a faith and trust in God can play a huge part in overcoming the odds and realising our goals. The odds of David defeating Goliath were not that great, but David had faith. And look at what he achieved!

I quote from last Monday's Word for Today: *'When you believe God wants you to succeed, and you persevere, you move from failure to success.'* We need to take heed of Paul's words in Philippians 4:13, *'For I can do everything with the help of Christ who gives me the strength I need.'*

I think this theme, these words are very befitting in terms of the journey we have been on with our build. We have yet to reach our destination but there is no doubt that it has been a challenging journey to date and that it has been so very important that we retain that faith that we are carrying out God's mission. I am continually sustained by those wonderful words as expressed in Isaiah 41:10: *'Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen and help you.'* They are words we can all draw upon as we encounter and deal with life's challenges.

The last point I want to draw our attention to is contained in verse 15 that I have already alluded to. As part of Jesus' prayer on behalf of his disciples, he says, *'...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 that we feel a sense of security, of care, of love as we combat the slings and arrows, the rough and tumble of everyday 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 cares and worries 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 children, if there are tears it will probably be their mother to whom they run for comfort. That is the special nature of mums, of women, and nothing will change that. It is said that 'a mother becomes concerned when her child skins a knee, a father when his child breaks a bone.' A bit tough on fathers, but you get the point.

We do learn a lot from the nature of mums and women in general. There is a very protective side to their nature. 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 every night. 'What do you mean, your mother says your prayers for you?' asked the minister. 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.'