

Mothing ('Refreshment') Sunday 27th March 2022 (Lent 4) 'Can we be truly refreshed?'
from Fr. Mike.

Exodus 2.1-10; Psalm 34.11-20; 2 Corinthians 1.3-7; **Luke 2.33-35**

Why does this day hold so many sensitive pressure points?

A police recruit was asked during an exam: 'What would you do if you had to arrest your own mother?' He answered, 'Call for backup.'

Bad Mothers in the Bible

Athaliah was the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, her 22-year-old son. Within a year he was murdered and succeeded by his mother, who tried to murder her whole family to guarantee her reign. One grandson escaped.

Athaliah encouraged the worship of false gods, pulled down some of the temple and used the materials for a temple to Baal. She reigned for six years until she was stabbed to death and succeeded by the grandson (Josiah) she failed to murder. This was all taking place in about 840 B.C. (2 Kings 8.11,12 & 2Chronicles 22-24).

In 2016 A.D. there was a horrendous news report of a 21-month-old girl being stamped to death by one of her parents. Sadly, this year there have been equally brutal cases. Cruelty has seemingly not diminished over time...

Herodias hated John the Baptist because he criticised her marriage to King Herod Antipas. (She has been the wife of his half-brother, Philip) Her daughter's seductive dance pleased the king so much that he promised to give her anything she wished. Herodias told her daughter to request the head of John the Baptist on a platter! (Matthew 14)

Mothers today

On this 'Mothing' Sunday there will be people with a mother who fell well short of what they expected. That pain can be offered up to God, who, in Christ, knew all too well what it

was to be betrayed, abandoned and rejected. As those who have received forgiveness for our shortcomings, it is salient to remember that forgiveness can also be given.

Some mothers may feel that motherhood is difficult, and they are not 'good enough.' They may need practical support and our prayers, together with the prayers for those who support families in relentlessly challenging situations.

Mother of a baby that dies

King David had an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, had her husband killed in battle, married her, and fathered a son. 2 Samuel 12 features the death of the child after only a week.

Although the infant mortality rate is (thankfully) low in this country, women still have miscarriages, still births, and some infants or older children will die. Even *one* such death is a tragedy. Let us remember them, and those who professionally and personally support them.

Childless women

The Bible names many women who were temporarily childless. **Sarah** (Abraham's wife) and **Elizabeth** (Mother of John the Baptist) are perhaps the most famous.

Michal (wife of King David) is the only biblical example of a permanently infertile woman.

When David danced before the Ark of the Covenant (traditionally a gold-plated chest that houses the two tablets bearing the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God) as he brought the sacred box to Jerusalem, Michal was enraged, and criticised King David to his face. As punishment, she was never allowed to bear children (2 Samuel 6.16-23).

Today, about one in eight couples experience infertility.

Common misunderstandings

For weeks a six-year-old lad kept telling his teacher about the baby brother or sister that was expected at his house. One day the mother allowed the boy to feel the movements of the unborn child. The boy was obviously impressed but made no comment. Furthermore, he stopped telling his teacher about the impending event. The teacher was concerned at the little boy's sudden silence, and said, "Tommy, whatever has become of that baby brother or sister you were expecting at home?" Tommy burst into tears and confessed, "I think mummy ate it!"

Sometimes adults can also misinterpret their experiences. People who cannot have children are not being punished by God. There would be little point or indeed value in worshipping a God who was capable of such cruelty. We are not in control and are not destined to be.

Mary – the mother of Jesus

Mary was young and unmarried when Jesus was conceived. She stands, not as an unrealistic ('Hollywood') icon of perfection, but rather as a very human and attainable example of faith and perseverance in difficulty. As such, she was a 'good' mother. There are many like her.

Soon after Jesus was born her family were refugees in Egypt, fleeing from Herod who was trying to murder many. She endured much. People gossiped about her when she was adult because of the manner of conception. She did not fit the paradigm.

Mary naturally worried about what Jesus was doing at the start of his ministry, thinking that he was perhaps losing his mind (Mark 3.20-35). When the wine ran out at the wedding in Galilee, Jesus rejected her implication that now was the time to show his glory, although he quietly helped the wedding couple by his first miracle (turning water into wine) to save the day.

Mary had great faith in God and Jesus. She willingly accepted the conception. It appears that her understanding of her son's ministry and person developed as she reflected upon things (Luke 2.51). As the ministry of Jesus developed, she supported and followed throughout,

even to the foot of the Cross. This aspect was what Simeon was referring to in his prophesy featured in today's Gospel, which happened when Jesus was only forty days old.

Mary then, is a great example of the qualities to be found in a good mother. She was full of God's spirit and grace, trusted in God, worshipped him, prayed, and persevered when things were difficult. Let us thank God for her, and the part she played in bringing up our Lord.

Praise God that there are so many like her! Today we pray for mothers (good and bad) for those who wish to be mothers, for bereaved mothers, and those who support mothers in many different areas.

BUT: although all the above aspects are important, these are NOT the only focus for today.

Mary *and* Joseph were amazed at Simeon's words. They did not simply nod their heads and say, "That fits what we expected." Like all parents, they knew that their precious baby was unique, but were only gradually discovering what that might truly mean, in his life and in theirs. Savour the scene. This passage records what happened at the first appearance of Jesus in the Temple, the centre of Jewish worship. Before blessing the parents, Simeon had taken the child in his arms. The verb used to describe this action of the holy old man was also that of the priestly action of accepting a sacrificial offering in the Temple. The obvious implication is that the child Jesus is destined to be a sacrifice.

The reference '**a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also**' revealed to Mary *how* she would be involved in this sacrifice of her Son. The only other use of 'sword' is in Genesis 3:24 '*He banished the man, and in front of the garden of Eden he posted the great winged creatures and the flashing fiery sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.*' As we stand in spirit beside the 'tree of new life' on Calvary, we are invited to go to Jesus, *through* Mary, and '**Mother Church**' who consistently nurtures all humanity according to their needs.