

MOTHERING SUNDAY TALK AT BSJ: 10 MARCH 2024 (based on Col. 3:12-14 & John 19:25-27) The complexities of mothering.

Mothering brings to mind looking after, caring, even putting up with. The mothering role, whoever undertakes it, may be filled with immense pride and joy, but can also be fraught with worry and frustration, not to mention the multi-tasking involved! But that is what it means to love. Among the numerous tasks are those of nurse and cook, chastiser and consoler, lender of a patient but not intrusive ear, example-setter and taxi-driver, to name but a very few.

There's a wonderful passage in that amusing book 'The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole aged 13 and three quarters', where Adrian's mum goes on an assertiveness training course. She returns with a promise that things are going to be very different, as she creates a task list to allocate chores, in order to break out of what she sees as her prison. Young Adrian notes in his diary: "Women are let out every day to go to the shops and stuff, and quite a lot go to work. I think my mum is being melodramatic ". It's a wonderful illustration of a child's perspective.....I wonder how much of that they'll remember when they become parents themselves.....

Over the years, we have heard many a Bible story about mothering: for example, Ruth, who refused to let her mother-in-law, Naomi, go alone to another land; and Moses' mother, who saved her baby son's life by effectively giving him up for adoption. It's a role that demands love and sacrifice, themes we have come across in today's readings. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, writes of how love is made up of a number of attributes - compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Where, you might ask, are the feelings of frustration and irritation, the straw that breaks the camel's back, resulting in an outburst of irritation? Implicit in Paul's letter is that we're none of us perfect. Our loving God knows that and forgives us, and we in turn forgive those we love.

The reading from John comes at the end of Jesus' life on earth, as he prepares to make the ultimate sacrifice to bring us closer to God. He looks down from the cross and sees his mother, Mary. Thinking back over the relatively few occasions in the Bible where we are given a glimpse of this mother and son relationship, we can see how devoted Mary was, both to her child and to the role she was given in God's plan. She knew Jesus was

special, reinforced by that visit to the Temple when Jesus was only 12, and he astounded the priests with his wisdom. Years later, at the Cana wedding feast, she understood what his role was to be, so she forced his hand, as it were, by getting him to change the water into wine. She also lived with the painful knowledge that she would need to share him with all the faithful. At his crucifixion, she is there with him, as we suspect she was throughout his brief life. Most of his disciples have gone, but Mary remains at the foot of the cross, with the other women, and the disciple Jesus loved, who we take to be John. Even in his hour of pain, Jesus acknowledges his mother - 'woman' was not a derogatory way of addressing someone in those days - and he ensures she is looked after.

Recently, I came across a wonderful re-interpretation of the passage in Genesis where God lovingly creates the first mother, Eve.

When the good Lord was creating mothers, he was into his sixth day of overtime. An angel appeared and remarked that it looked like quite a task. The Lord replied: "have you seen the specification? Not only must she have countless moveable parts, but also run on black coffee and leftovers, be able to give a hug that can cure everything from a broken leg to a broken relationship, and have at least six pairs of hands". The angel shook her head: "Six pairs of hands? No way...". "The hands aren't so much the problem", said the Lord, "it's the three pairs of eyes that mothers need". "Do they come as standard?" asked the angel in surprise. The Lord nodded. "One pair to see through closed doors when she asks what the children are doing, but already knows; another in the back of her head that sees what she isn't meant to, but what she needs to be aware of; and one pair in front that can look at a child in trouble and convey the message of love and understanding without uttering a word."

The angel responded: "Lord, this is all too much - finish off tomorrow". "But I'm so close now", said the Lord. The angel touched the model of the mother: "It's too soft", she sighed. "But tough", said the Lord animatedly. "You cannot imagine what this mother can do or endure". "But can she think?" asked the angel. "Absolutely", replied the Lord, "and also reason and compromise". The angel bent over and gently ran her finger across the cheek. "Oh, there's a leak", she said. "It must be a tear", responded the Lord. "What's it for?". "I think it's an outward sign of the emotions I have given to her - joy, sadness,

empathy, hurt, and delight”. “You’re a genius!”, said the angel. The Lord looked puzzled. “But I didn’t put it there...” And with that his work was done.

Mothering love - a self-sacrificing and very complex emotion.