

Mothering Sunday

John 19 v25-27

*Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. * When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, "Woman, behold your son!" * Then He said to the disciple, "Behold your mother!" And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home.*

+ I write in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this strangest of all Mothering Sundays, when we should be handing out cards and flowers and celebrating the spring that is all around us, there is an eerie quiet. When we walk out last thing at night the quiet of the streets is only emphasised by the lack of lights illuminating the homes and apartments of the people of Monaco. All is dark. People have left and the lone dog walkers skirt past each other on their way.

The Coronavirus as we know is not particular to whom it infects. Nearly a 1,000 deaths in Italy in two days is quite literally a staggering amount and now we hear that Prince Albert himself has contracted the deadly disease and is being treated in Monaco. In Bergamo at The Papa Giovanni XXII hospital, one of the most advanced hospitals in Europe, this gleaming mega hospital is on its knees. It is less than four hours drive from here. The chronic pneumonia that results from the virus is what is most commonly killing those who wait and are plugged into ventilators. Every corridor is a makeshift intensive care unit. The Bergamo crematorium is working flat out 24hrs a day to deal with the demand and relatives at the hospital wave goodbye at the doors of the hospital and are then reunited with their loved ones after the cremation has happened. It's a ghoulish scene. Those who wait, wait quietly in small groups not wanting to interrupt the emergency work that is being carried out around the clock as 60 new patients arrive each 24hrs...and this is just one hospital. Waiting, helpless, characters in a scene still being played out.

It's a desperately sad scene...

Standing by the cross...

There's four women and one man. Why weren't there more? And why isn't Mary, the Mother of Our Lord even named? She is silent. Almost air brushed out of the moment. She to whom Simeon uttered the prophetic words "...and a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (Lk 2 v35) before he kisses the child and then fades into history. Mary is crushed by agonising pain into silence. As God leads us all along unexpected paths that sometimes lead to unexpected acts of kindness and selfless giving, devotion and love, these paths can be paths of tremendous pain and agony.

I have buried many people during my ministry. None are more poignant and stilling to the soul than burying children or babies. One lasting memory I have is standing by a wet grave in Cheltenham holding a damp white coffin of the recently born child of two teenagers whose pain and grief was too much to bear that they didn't even turn up to the funeral. Just the undertaker and myself. A small insignificant group. The coffin the brightest thing in the day.

And yet the Gospel that we read today on Mothering Sunday tell us something else. At the darkest moments of our lives when it seems that there can be no more pain, no more suffering, another unexpected thing happens. At the moment of our lowest ebb, when no more can be taken from us...God speaks words of love, joy and mercy.

"Woman behold your Son!" Then He said to the disciple "Behold your Mother" and from that dark hour that disciple took her to his own home. Three feet away from her dying Son, unable to speak and without hysteria or crying or uncontrollable anguish as she watches her boy die, Jesus, in His dying breath takes care of His mother's needs by providing for her care from John the Disciple.

This profound moment of care and comfort, of pure love, is repeated all around us when heroic deeds are witnessed in times of national or international disaster. As we read, listen and wait with increasing caution to the stories that seem to get ever closer to our own lives, let us pray on this Mothering Sunday for those who work on the frontline of care and comfort. Let us pray for those who dedicate their lives in caring for the sick in often brutal situations, often lacking resources but giving of themselves until it hurts. Let us pray for each other as we seek to care for those around us and any who are alone or frightened. Let us seek the face of Jesus in each other as through the face of others he indeed seeks us...**Amen**

Fr. Lawrence