

A short study of Mary the mother of Jesus for Mothering Sunday 22.03.20.
Also for the Festival of 'The Annunciation of our Lord to the Blessed Virgin Mary'.
25.03.20. by Revd Bernard Hughes

The appointed lesson for Mothering Sunday is Luke 2.vv33-35.

This reading from St. Luke chapter 2 refers to the time when the baby Jesus, as a first-born son, was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem by Mary and Joseph, to be presented to the Lord and to consecrate him to the service of God. While they were in the Temple an elderly man named Simeon, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit came into the Temple, took the child Jesus in his arms and praised God for the redemption of the world by God incarnate in this child. "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace...for mine eyes have seen your salvation". (2.29f).

Having blessed Mary and Joseph, Simeon then warned Mary of the effect her child would have on many people for no one will be able to take up a neutral attitude towards him. The resistance of the people to Jesus would be so frightful that Mary would be overtaken by the deepest sorrows. She will experience ever increasing grief for as Simeon said "...a sword will pierce through your own soul also".

This special reading about Mary and her future sufferings may not seem suitable for the celebration and thanksgiving for our own mothers. There are other aspects about Mary that give a balanced understanding of the kind of person she was which in many ways makes her an example of motherhood. We learn from the Bible that Mary was to give birth to other children, mainly sons as far as we know, and no doubt their would be family tensions that Mary was to experience, because of our Lord's popularity.

Mary was a deeply spiritual person, and we have only to look at her hymn of praise when she first experienced the call of God to be the mother of the promised Messiah. She shared her joy with Elizabeth her cousin. In St. Luke's Gospel chapter 1 vv46-56 we have the Song of Mary known as the Magnificat.

Her words in this song have been thought of as the most revolutionary document in the world.

"God scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts" – a moral revolution.

"He puts down the mighty...he exalts the humble" – a social revolution.

"He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent empty away" – an economic revolution.

But let us think more of Mary at the time when Jesus, twelve years of age (possibly his Bar Mitzvah) was lost in Jerusalem (Lk2.41-51). Mary and Joseph eventually found him in the Temple among the doctors of the Law, and Mary reproved him. Jesus answered "Why did you search for me? Did you not know I must be in my Father's house"? Mary and Joseph did not understand this saying but Mary kept all these things in her heart.

Then there was the incident when Jesus, later in his ministry, was teaching in a house and his mother and brothers came looking for him, and because of the crowd they sent a message to him saying "Your mother and your brothers are outside asking for you". Mary was obviously concerned for Jesus for she knew that certain Scribes were

accusing him of evil possession. Said Jesus “Who are my mother and my brothers!... Whoever does the will of God is my brother, and sister, and mother”. (Mark3.22-35). The Lord was not rejecting his family even though his brothers at first did not believe in him. (Jn7.5).

We may understand the tensions of family life for Mary that is not uncommon in most families.

Mary waited at the foot of the cross when her son offered himself as a sacrifice for sin. Even then our Lord was careful to place Mary in the care of his disciple John, (Jn19.26f) and we learn from the Acts of the Apostles how Mary and our Lord’s brothers were gathered together with the disciples in the Upper Room where she witnessed the origin and growth of the infant church. Tradition tells us that John the Apostle cared for Mary until the day she died. That tradition continues to say that when Mary died she was taken up directly into the glory of heaven as it was for Moses and for Elijah.

The Church owes an enormous debt to Mary for her faithfulness and not least for the information she no doubt gave to St. Luke and possibly others in the writing of the Gospels. “Mary kept all these things in her heart”. We are indebted to Mary for the birth narratives, the story of the shepherds, the Presentation in the Temple and these very words of Simeon to Mary “...a sword will pierce through your own soul also”.

Mary was to know the joys and the sorrows of motherhood and for this reason she is truly representative of motherhood, and at this time of Mothering Sunday and the Annunciation we give thanks to God for Mary and for our mothers, remembering, of course that Mary is an example of faithfulness for us all.

A Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, who in your home at Nazareth loved and honoured your mother Mary and was subject to her in your upbringing. Grant that we may ever be mindful of her grace and virtue, and also follow the example of her love and humility; to the glory of thy name, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen.