

Those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The readings which we have set for today puzzled me for a while. Relating them to Mothering Sunday, to the celebration and thanksgiving for motherhood which brings us here today, seemed, initially, to be a tricky task indeed.

Then I realised that in the Old Testament lesson, we had one of the most relatable scenes for any mother who has ever dealt with children. Let us examine the stages of what the Israelites get up to in our first reading:

First they go on a journey, and spend the entirety of it complaining about the distance and saying that they want to go back home.

Then they moan that they're hungry. However, when eventually they are provided with food they moan about not liking it and demand to be given something else.

They then, through their own stupidity and- crucially- having failed to listen to the very simple instructions which they'd been given, they then complain that somehow they've managed to hurt themselves.

All that, I'm sure, sounds very familiar indeed to the mothers amongst you. In fact, as I look back on the trials and tribulations I and my siblings inflicted on my mother I could hardly have a better encapsulation of the regular experience than that run of moaning, more moaning and disobedience.

Of course, that is only one side to motherhood. At the very heart of it is love. The love of a mother towards a child. The moving knowledge that there is another person who had, quite literally, a role in your creation. The bond that engenders, the joy that can bring. There can be humorous sides to that relationship, painful sides, loving ones and moving ones. There are as many models of motherhood as there are mother child relationships and so the obvious question arises: what does a mother mean to you?

Here it is important to acknowledge that for some people today will be difficult- those who have lost a mother, those who have lost a child, those who have never been able to be mothers, those for whom their relationship with their mother is difficult.

Mothering Sunday therefore is not an uncomplicated celebration because motherhood is not an uncomplicated concept. It is fraught with expectation. And that is difficult.

Because know that we sometimes fail to live up to expectation, whether it is as parents or children or friends or neighbours or, even, as Christians. When it comes to faith, sometimes we- whatever age we might be at- are like the Israelites in our relationship with God. We sometimes don't or won't see what he is doing for us, we sometimes don't listen, we sometimes refuse to let him love and help us.

Acknowledging this begs the question: how might we be good- or rather- better children of God? That is surely what we want, surely what we must aim for. To live more closely according to God's purposes, because, as it was long ago with the children of Israel and so it remains with each of us today, God generally has a better idea of what is good for us than we do. How we achieve that is where our second, New Testament reading comes in.

Jesus's instructions in it, his teaching, are clear. That it is our job to spread light. He doesn't say that there will not be darkness, he doesn't say that it will happen instantaneously. He doesn't say that there won't be pain: indeed he makes clear to us that he will need to be 'lifted up', will need to suffer the ignominy of the cross, will need to die in order for there to be the triumph of the light.

And the light will triumph. That is what we are asked to believe, as we journey through Lent and indeed as we journey through life. Our calling is to look to Jesus, who is the very source of light, and to put our faith in him. The good news is that even though there will be times when we moan or are disobedient, times when we are riven with hunger in our souls or hurt in our hearts or our bodies: his light, Jesus's light remains in the midst of any darkness we might suffer.

And knowing that he is always there for us, our calling is then to follow his example. To do what is true. That is easier said than done. As we have said all through Lent: to do what is true means first acknowledging what is wrong. Put another way, only by admitting there is darkness can we possibly hope to bring light.

But by bringing the light, we make known God. Jesus tells us that those deeds of truth done in light are deeds done in God and for God and are of God. And our God is love. That is how we might be better children: by doing deeds of light, deeds of truth and deeds of love. Think- what light can you bring to the world this Lent and beyond?

Today, Mothering Sunday, we celebrate all the specific love of mothers, thanking God for it. We also offer to God those aspects of motherhood which bring pain or grief or danger. We mark the idea of the Church as mother: this is the place after all, which welcomes new children, which is present at the key moments of their lives, coming of age and marriage and other moments, and also the place, the institution which grieves when those same children she once welcomed, pass on.

But what all these things point to, and what we give thanks for above all else, is the bringing of light. And with it the bringing of a love, God's love, which is above all other and into which we might hope to be drawn, led and moulded now, and forever more.

In the name etc.