

Mothering Sunday

(Fourth Sunday of Lent)

Principal Service readings

Exodus 2.1-10	Moses in the papyrus basket
<i>or</i> 1 Samuel 1.20-28	The birth of Samuel
Psalm 34.11-20	Learning that the Lord delivers the righteous
<i>or</i> Psalm 127.1-4	Children are a heritage from the Lord
2 Corinthians 1.3-7	We share suffering and encouragement through Christ
<i>or</i> Colossians 3.12-17	Put on love and let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly
Luke 2.33-35	Simeon's words to Mary in the Temple
<i>or</i> John 19.25b-27	Mary stands by the cross of Jesus

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus and his mother

²⁵Standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' ²⁷Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19.25b-27 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

The final act of Jesus before he declares that everything is fulfilled (19.30) is to form a community of his mother and the Beloved Disciple, representing the future community. The unusual term 'mother' (cf. 2.4) may suggest the new Eve, mother of all the faithful.

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

The scene of Jesus and his mother is the third of five scenes at the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus, lifted up on the cross, speaks to the woman who was the first person to commit herself unconditionally to his word (cf. 2.3-5). He instructs her to see the Beloved Disciple and regard him as her son. He then turns to the Beloved Disciple, unnamed, but clearly the model disciple, who has been close to Jesus (e.g. at the meal table, 13.23), and tells him to see the Mother of Jesus and regard her as his mother. The narrator comments that, 'the disciple took her into his own home', indicating obedience to the word of Jesus.

From this moment, a new family of Jesus has been created. The Mother of Jesus, a model of faith, and the Beloved Disciple, a model of discipleship, form a bond in the unconditional acceptance of the word of Jesus. The promise of 'gathering' emerging from the closing scenes of Jesus' ministry (cf. 10.16; 11.49-52; 12.11, 19, 20-24, 32-33) has been achieved.

Traditionally, the fourth Sunday of Lent (also called *Laetare* or Refreshment Sunday) was allowed as a day of relief from the rigours of Lent. This is the background to the modern observance of Mothering Sunday on this day.

Quotations

1

Mary was the first person to take the 'way' to enter the Kingdom of God that Christ opened, a way which is accessible to the humble, to all who trust in the word of God and endeavour to put it into practice.

Pope Benedict XVI, 1927–2022

2

The world being unworthy to receive the son of God directly from the hands of the Father, he gave his son to Mary for the world to receive him from her.

Saint Augustine of Hippo. 354–430

Related topics

For further study:

Mary, Mother of the Church; the church, the family of God

Closing Prayer

God of steadfast love,
you cradle us at birth,
embrace us at our life's end
and welcome us into your eternal dwelling.
Let such a tenderness move us
to love you in return
and draw others into the circle of your care.
We ask this through Jesus Christ,
who is one with you and the Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.

Celebrating the Christian Year · Mothering Sunday²

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² *Celebrating the Christian year : prayers and resources for Sundays, holy days and festivals, years A, B and C / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.*