

Mothering Sunday

(The Fourth Sunday of Lent)

Principal Service readings

Exodus 2.1-10	The birth of Moses
<i>or</i> 1 Samuel 1.20-28	The birth of Samuel
Psalm 34.11-20	The Lord hears the upright
<i>or</i> Psalm 127.1-4	Trust in God's provision
2 Corinthians 1.3-7	Thanksgiving to God who gives encouragement and support
<i>or</i> Colossians 3.12-17	Put on love and may Christ's peace reign in your hearts
Luke 2.33-35	Simeon's prophecy in the Temple
<i>or</i> John 19.25-27	Jesus entrusts his mother to the beloved disciple

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

³³The child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about Jesus. ³⁴Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed ³⁵so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

Luke 2,33-35 NRSV¹

Comments and Questions

This is the second of Simeon's prophecies uttered when the infant Jesus is brought to the temple for his presentation. In an otherwise positive story (contrast with the infancy narrative in Matthew), it introduces a word of warning.

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 previous prophetic word – the Nunc Dimittis – has predicted that the glory of God will be seen, both in Israel and in the ‘nations’, i.e. gentiles. Here is envisaged a disturbance or clash, using the image of a stone to stumble over, as in Isaiah 8.14-15 (see also Luke 20.17-18). The falling and rising image is also present in the Magnificat (1.51-53). The prophetic image suggests Jesus as a cause of people stumbling, a sign to create opposition, and in response to him. A people divided, some rising, some falling.

The positive picture appropriate to a prayer of blessing is modified in the abrupt declaration to Jesus’ mother, interrupting the broader and more general message: ‘a sword will pierce your own soul too’ (2.35). As with the Magnificat. Mary is portrayed as the personification of the people of Israel. Israel will be divided and so will Mary’s life be run through as with a sword.

The word is not developed any further, but perhaps we can trace the journey of Mary through the life of Jesus, that ends up accompanying him at the cross, among the ‘Daughters of Jerusalem’ (23.28) – see also John 19.25.

On Mothering Sunday the church gives thanks for mothers, for the Mother Church. and for Mary, Mother of us all.

Quotations

1

The Son of God became man for our salvation but only in Mary and through Mary.

Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort, 1673–1716

2

Even while living in the world, the heart of Mary was so filled with motherly tenderness and compassion for men that no-one ever suffered so much for their own pains, as Mary suffered for the pains of her children.

Saint Jerome, d.420

3

The veneration of the Virgin Mary has accompanied the path of the Church from the beginning; Marian feast days began to appear already in the fourth century: in some the role of the Virgin in the history of salvation is exalted; in others the principal moments of her earthly life are celebrated.

Pope Benedict XVI, 1927–2022

Related topics

For further study:

The Blessed Virgin Mary ; the Church

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.

Collect for Mothering Sunday²

CPL • LBC Year B Mothering Sunday.odt • 2023-03-09

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.*