

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 disciples

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 19.25-27 NRSV¹

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.

Comments and Questions

The presence of Jesus' mother near the cross is mentioned only by John among the gospel writers (v.25). John also mentions that she is present when Jesus first reveals his glory at the wedding at Cana (John 2.1). John never mentions the name of the mother of Jesus.

His 'mother's sister' is possibly Salome, mother of the sons of Zebedee (cf Matthew 27.56), or perhaps refers to the following phrase, 'Mary the wife of Clopas'. Why should these women be mentioned here? Depending on how the phrasing is interpreted there could be two, three or four women here. Could the presence of four women be set as a contrast to the four soldiers who divide Jesus' clothing between them (v.23)?

The disciple whom Jesus loved (v.26) is perhaps a clue to the identity of the writer of the gospel, which has no named author. The beloved disciple is present at the last supper, and so is probably one of the Twelve, and it has been suggested that he is John the son of Zebedee, but there is no conclusive evidence.

The unusual form of address, 'Woman', is not disrespectful; Jesus has similarly used it at the wedding at Cana (John 2.4). It can be taken to be an allusion to Genesis 3.15,20 and to indicate that Mary is the new Eve: 'mother of the living'. Does the Old Testament allusion indicate that Jesus' gesture is more than that of a dutiful son, declaring Mary to be the spiritual mother of all the faithful, of whom the beloved disciple is the type and representative? Perhaps the new mother/son relationship demonstrates that the future of Israel (mother) is henceforth to be found in the Christian church (beloved disciple), and also that the church should not forget its Judaic origins.

Is Jesus asking the 'beloved disciple' to take his place in leadership among the disciples, as he entrusts him with his mother?

Quotations

1

The loveliest masterpiece of the heart of God is the heart of a mother.
St Thérèse of Lisieux 1873–97

2

What Mary wants throughout the ages of the Church is not that we should venerate her as an individual but that we should recognise the depth of God's love in the work of his incarnation and redemption. Since she lived in the house of the beloved disciple, it would be

astonishing if the gospel of the love of the triune God made manifest in Christ had not been inspired also by her presence and what she had to say.

Hans Urs von Balthasar 1905–88

3

We cannot but be touched that, even in his dying moments, Jesus is concerned for the welfare of his mother, showing his filial affection. This surface reading again invites a symbolic and ecclesial reading of John's rich narrative. These last commands of Jesus before he dies reveal an understanding beyond their primary reference to Mary and "the beloved disciple" as individuals. The reciprocal roles of the 'woman' and the 'disciple' are related to the identity of the Church. Elsewhere in John, the beloved disciple is presented as the model disciple of Jesus, the one closest to him who never deserted him, the object of Jesus' love, and the ever-faithful witness (13:25, 19:26, 20:1-10, 21:20-25). Understood in terms of discipleship, Jesus' dying words give Mary a motherly role in the Church and encourage the community of disciples to embrace her as a spiritual mother.

Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ, para. 26.²

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 Sunday³

² *Mary, Grace and Hope in Christ : the Seattle Statement* / of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission. – The text with commentaries and study guide. – London: Continuum, 2006.

³ *Celebrating the Christian Year : Prayers and Resources for Sunday, Holy Days and Festivals : Years A, B and C* / compiled by Alan Griffiths. – 3 vols. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 2004-5.