

St Stephen's

Mothering Sunday 26 March 2017

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Mothering Sunday is the day when we thank God for mother church but now people think of Mother's Day. For some Mothering Sunday can bring sadness rather than joy. Some women who would love to be mothers cannot have children. Some people mourn their mother's death. There are some whose mothers have been far from ideal, and some have abandoned their children. Some people think that hate is the opposite of love. I don't. Hate is a powerful emotion just as love is. To me the opposite of love is indifference. The mother who cares nothing for her children I would say is one whose children are most to be pitied.

But today I want to focus on good mothers and the example we have from our readings. Mothers who love their children make sacrifices for them and they suffer when they see their child suffering, especially when they feel helpless to do anything for that child. Think how terrible it must have been for Moses' mother when the command of Pharaoh was to drown her child in the Nile. After his birth she hid him for three months. How many times did she worry about him being discovered when he cried. After three months she could hide him no longer. She couldn't bring herself to throw him into the Nile to drown. She put him in a basket which would float. She could do nothing else to save his life. No doubt as she pushed him in the basket onto the Nile she would've prayed for God to save him. She saw her prayers answered when pharaoh's daughter took her son out of the water. Then, what joy she must've had to nurse Moses and, albeit from a distance, see him grow to manhood. Moses was destined to lead God's people from slavery to freedom in the Promised Land.

Like Moses, Jesus had the destiny of leading people from bondage to sin into the glorious liberty of the children of God. When Simeon picked up baby Jesus at the Temple he said to Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel and to be a sign who will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed - and the sword will pierce your own soul too. Jesus faced opposition throughout his ministry. Eventually those opposed to him caused him to be crucified. His mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, was a witness to his suffering and suffered greatly herself. Her heart of love for Jesus was indeed pierced with the sword of sorrow and suffering. Mary is now a focus for prayer for many mothers, especially Roman Catholics, who see their own children suffering. They pray to Mary.

They don't worship her. I believe that not only Mary but all the saints in Heaven are more alive than we are. So I have no problem in asking for the prayer of the saints. Another Saint to whom mothers pray is St Monica. She was the mother of St Augustine. He was a pagan and lived a non-Christian life for many years, but his mother Monica, a faithful Christian, never stopped praying for him. Eventually, not only was Augustine converted to the Christian faith, but he became a bishop and a great theologian whose writings are still valued today. Mary and St Monica's prayers resulted in joy for them both. Monica saw her son become a Christian. Mary saw her son, who she had seen crucified, risen from the dead and alive.

A good friend of mine has a son who is now in prison. He committed crimes mainly because of being a heroin addict, and needing to fund the habit. My friend has prayed for him for many years. She has had the sword pierce her heart too so she identifies both with Mary and Monica, and asks them to reinforce her own prayers for the Lord to transform her son's life. Although he is in prison, he is safe in there, free from drugs, and more secure than he would've been if he had continued to take drugs. God willing, he will come to repentance in prison and turn to Christ. That is what my friend hopes for and prays for. I believe that she will have joy when God answers those prayers in ways even beyond her imagining. My prayer is that he will not only become a witness to Christ but instrumental in leading other drug addicts and prisoners from a life of crime and drug addiction into a life of joy in Christ.

So today, I encourage mothers to rejoice in the gift of children. I urge you to never cease to pray for them. And I urge you, if you suffer for your children, to pray to the God of compassion. Perhaps you could also ask the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary who can sympathise with any mother's love and pain.

Amen.