

Welcome to this short service of prayer and reflection from St Mary's Church, Ross on Wye.

Today is the 4th Sunday in Lent and also Mothering Sunday, and so I would like to say a big hello to all mums who are watching. Right now, all our lives are overshadowed by concerns about the coronavirus and so we will also pray for God to be with us all at this difficult time.

One of the advantages of a liturgical tradition is that familiar prayers settle in our hearts and minds, and allow us to give expression to our praise. We begin our service with the well-known prayer:

**Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Our reading today is taken from the Gospel according to St John 19:25-27

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

Our first thought after hearing this reading might be that it is a very dark, very painful reading for Mothering Sunday. And yet it is filled with themes that every mother is familiar with: love, pain, and caring.

Mothering Sunday has its origins in the ancient tradition of people return to their 'mother' church or Cathedral each year in the middle of Lent. This journey became an occasion for family reunions when children who were working away as domestic servants, or as apprentices, returned home to

visit their mothers and families. As they walked along the country lanes, children would pick wild spring flowers or violets to take to church or give to their mother as a small gift. It is from this practice that the tradition of handing out posies on Mothering Sunday came.

We give thanks to God for all mothers today, and we thank mothers for their love. But the Church also acknowledges those who have wanted to be mothers and couldn't; those who have lost children, those who have difficult relationships, those who mourn the loss of their mothers. Today can be a difficult day for some, and we pray that God's healing love might come into those places of pain.

Mothering Sunday is a day that reminds us that Jesus had a mother whose name was Mary. This church is dedicated to her. Mary is a wonderful example of living in faith and hope and love – she trusted God even when she didn't quite understand what he wanted her to do; she believed in Jesus her son, and her love for her son kept her with him, even to the foot of the cross on which he was being executed. Any mum who has watched a child die will understand what she felt. The rest of us can only imagine the heartbreak.

In the bible reading we see Mary's love, and Jesus' love for her. He knew that she would need a son to look after her, and so he entrusts her to into the care and protection of his disciple and friend, John. This reminds us how people who are not blood relatives can sometimes become as family to us; it is a picture of how a church as a spiritual family might provide care and nurture when a biological family is not able to do so.

Let us quietly and prayerfully call to mind the thoughts, emotions and memories that Mothering Sunday evokes in us.

We praise you, our God, for all mothers who have loved and laughed and laboured as they cared for their children.

We praise you, our God, for all mothers who have wept in sorrow and joy for their children.

We praise you, our God, for Jesus, born of a woman and nurtured in her love, and for Mary, a reminder of your patient, waiting love.

We thank you God

For the care of mothers;

For their patience when tested;

For their love when tired;

For their hope when despairing;

For their service without limit;

We pray, O God

For those unable to have children;

For those who have lost children

For those experiencing broken relationships;

For those who mourn the loss of their mothers;

For those who find this day difficult;

Comfort them O God.

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow we may know the power of your presence to bind together and to heal; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Archbishops of Canterbury and York have asked us all to observe today as a day of prayer and action: to pray for those who are sick or anxious, and all involved in our Health Service; and to engage in some action, some activity, that will bring God's light into someone's darkness. It might be phoning someone who is isolated and vulnerable, or buying an extra item and donating it to your Food Bank; your action might be volunteering to practically help someone who is self-isolating. As a symbol of solidarity and hope in the light of Christ that can never be extinguished, the Archbishops have called on everyone to place a lighted candle in their window at 7.00 p.m. tonight. I will light one then, but also now as we pray.

If you would like to join in this prayer and make it your own, after the words, “Lord, hear us” you can respond “Lord graciously hear us.”

Let us pray to God,
who alone makes us dwell in safety:
For all who are affected by coronavirus,
through illness or isolation or anxiety,
that they may find relief and recovery:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For those who are guiding our nation at this time,
and shaping national policies,
that they may make wise decisions:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For doctors, nurses and medical researchers,
that through their skill and insights
many will be restored to health:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For the vulnerable and the fearful,
for the gravely ill and the dying,
that they may know your comfort and peace:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we pray,
to the mercy and protection of God.
Merciful Father,
accept these prayers

**for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ**

Who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Our service has come to an end. Thank you for being part of it, and wherever you are watching this may God bless you, protect you, and keep you in the palm of his hand.

We go out into the world to love and serve the Lord
In the name of Christ, Amen.