

Lent 4_Mothering Sunday (A)

Summary: Jerusalem means tough love

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast. (Cf. Is 66: 10-11)

Laetare or 'rejoice' Sunday comes from the opening antiphon for today's mass. In England, to celebrate the middle of Lent and the approach of Lady Day, servants were allowed time to go home. Home is a place which, if we are blessed, we experience through the love of earthly parents. Today we celebrate our heavenly home - the strength and inclusive love of the heavenly Jerusalem which is God's holy Church throughout time and space. And discover its outlines, its strength and its guidance through the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Love like this isn't chocolate and roses. In today's first reading my heart breaks when Hannah tells Eli 'I have lent him to the Lord'. You hear in her words that if Eli were to tire of the boy she would swoop back in and take him up again: at 7, 17 or 47. We are blessed indeed if we have experienced that sort of fierce, enduring love in our lives.



We are blessed indeed to be receiving at St George's the gift of an icon of 3 figures: St Anne, Our Lady and the Christ Child. Some representations have them sitting on one another's laps to emphasise that Mary was once a child, receiving her life, education and faith, from her mother. When I look at St Anne (who is an entirely legendary figure) I think of the patient, fierce, determined love of grandparents especially in our contemporary society. Grandparents are at a remove from the daily struggles of parenting ('eat up', 'get dressed', 'do your homework') but are still people who can give direction and guidance exemplifying that real, enduring love comes in all sorts of guises.

I don't suppose that Our Lady would have expected much from her Son as he struggled for breath on the cross. But she received from him – in the form of a new family – both the practical care of St John and emotional support to face her grief and the bewildering joy of the Resurrection. The 20th century Swiss Jesuit, Hans Urs von Balthasar, suggested that the Church was formed not at Pentecost but there, at the foot of the Cross, where the Church was formed in loving relationship, in relationship with each other, but always in and through relationship with Jesus.

Celebrating the new Jerusalem, our heavenly parent, isn't just flowers, chocolates and hugs for earthly mothers (if we're lucky enough in normal circumstances to be able to do) it's a celebration of the love that bears all things and is able to hold, inspire and challenge in our growth in holiness; especially in this time of separation, aloneness and anxiety.

468 words