

Imagine yourself (pre-covid days now) visiting an elderly relative in a care home just observing the scene in the lounge before entering to greet your loved one. It would be a familiar scene with some residents watching television, a few asleep or dozing, and others happily chatting away to those around where they're sitting. Other than in age & numbers, not much different really from many a family living room! Through circumstances, they have become - as it were - a new family.

Hopefully not dozing off or gazing discreetly at hidden screens, if we look around ourselves now here, we ourselves are very much part of a family in this church: sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, neighbours, acquaintances - however we may connected.

We might imagine Jesus looking down on us, as those in the care home, saying 'Behold, your family!'

Today is an opportunity for the Church to be clear that Mothering Sunday is not just about the biological family. Not just about mothers who bear a child and give birth, and their amazing role that we also celebrate today with flowers and gifts and special acts of kindness - important as these are. Today - deliberately 'Mothering Sunday' and not just 'Mothers' Day' - is about a **wider** appreciation of 'mothering', in the **wider** context of 'family' and 'community'. A day specifically to recognise the family we are **as a Church** (with a capital 'C' **and** a small 'c'), through the nurturing love we are all called to give - following both the example of Jesus himself, and his mother - often described as 'the mother of us all'.

You may noticed, unusually, I deliberately chose the King James Version for our gospel reading with Jesus saying '*Woman, behold thy son!*' and, addressing the beloved disciple, '**Behold thy mother!**'. 'Behold' is not a common word these days but it implies more than just to see. When we talk about 'being beholden to someone' it's about our responsibilities to that person. The pew sheet version of the reading from the New Revised Standard Version) has a rather lightweight '**Here is you mother, here is your son**' that doesn't seem to me to convey this sense of familial responsibility.

Mary is standing at the foot of the cross in the agonising situation of seeing her son helplessly in the throes of death, & aged just 33. How can we possibly imagine her grief? How will she now survive - mentally and materially? The other women with her and the beloved disciple are indeed with her, but she must have felt so alone, so abandoned. How significant - that one of the very last things Jesus does is to commend the people he so loves to one another... and so a new family is formed. And is this not what we are called to, as well?

'From that hour the disciple took her into his own home' – what resonance this has right now, as many people in many countries, so moved with compassion, are doing just this with those having to flee Ukraine. And as Jesus right now looks down in the agony of all that he sees.

The response to the most dreadful tragedy which has befallen Ukraine has prompted us all to 'Behold our son, our daughter, our mother, our father, our grandmother, our grandfather, our cousins, our nephews, our nieces, in those poor blighted people caught up in the terrible mess. Not only to see them, but to **behold** them, to be '**beholden**' to them, opening our wallets, opening our homes, opening our hearts in prayer, and – if only it were much more so – opening our country.

Jesus, by his life and sacrifice, calls us to live in a way that brings life to others. And it begins with a commitment TO LOVE, as he first loved us, and as set out so eloquently in that memorable passage from St Paul's letter to the Colossians. Please – take home your pew sheet and read it again, and again, and again! **Be clothed** with – compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, and all those other qualities listed for living life to the full. For it is in giving ourselves to others, that we find fulness of life.

Let us look around, and 'behold' one another – wherever they may be... At the bus stop, at the shops, in a care home or hospital, in our families, in the workplace, in church, on the train, anywhere and everywhere! And how well practised we have been doing this over the long months of the pandemic! Now that things are reverting a little to how they were before, pray passionately that we may hold on to this sense of community and extended family, beholding our responsibilities to one another, and respecting and appreciating one another, as Jesus wants for us all.

Of course what makes the Church different from any other caring family or community is not just the *common faith* we share within the 'Mother Church', and our *common purpose* deeply rooted in living in community with one other – as did our Jewish forbears; but as Christians we are centred crucially, upon the living, loving God whose very being speaks of **fellowship, relationship, community and interdependence** – as Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the Holy and undivided Trinity.

The Saviour who looked down from the cross in love, binding together those whom he loved on earth, and whose life and sacrifice shows us how to be, calls us to own OUR responsibilities of living as family: 'beholding' not just our blood families, but all those wider circles of 'family' however they may be drawn. Are we not – all interdependent? all one family? all God's children? and born to love? Amen.