



*Chaplaincy of All Saints' Marseille
with Aix-En-Provence
and the Luberon*

22nd March 2020

4th Sunday Of Lent – Mothering Sunday

Reflection

by Jane Quarmby, Reader

Mother's Day conjures up pictures of children giving their mothers little bunches of flowers, and a hand-drawn card. It's a lovely image but this year sadly it won't be the reality, as our churches close for public worship, and travel restrictions make it positively dangerous to see our mothers, especially if they are elderly. It's a worrying time for everyone, and hard to understand that we have to keep our distance from loved ones. No family lunches, no taking Mum out for a treat. The best we can do is phone or Skype. Technology does help at times like these, to keep in touch with our friends and families and let us see each other, albeit on a screen. But it's not the same!

Mothers have a special place in all our hearts. They bring us into the world and keep us safe –as far as they can. Not all can of course and it's not just today that the world can be a dangerous place for children – see Exodus 2 from verse 1 to 10. Moses only survived the Egyptian ruler's decree that all Hebrew male babies should be killed at birth because his mother was a clever lady who knew where Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile and deliberately left her perfect little son there in a tiny boat for her to find. She knew that to the Egyptians, the Nile was a goddess, who had life-giving and healing properties. Pharaoh's

daughter wasn't just coming to bathe in the river, she was also completing her morning devotions. So to find a baby floating in the river, carried by the Nile goddess, would mean a great deal to her. And who wouldn't feel sorry for a 3 month old baby who was crying? So she does an extra-ordinary and courageous thing – she adopts this child whom she knew to be a Hebrew who should have been killed at birth. She gave him not only his life, but saw to it that he had the best of everything including the best education in administration, leadership and the military. She named him Moses which in the Egyptian meant “to give birth” – perhaps because in her mind, the river Nile which was revered as a source of life, had given birth to the child. The Israelites had a different meaning to his name – “to lift out”.

And so in a sense Moses had two mothers – his birth mother who had left him there in the river, with his older sister handily nearby to offer the services of a wet nurse who just happened to be his natural mother, and his adopted mother. Those two women must have known, must have understood each other, to make such a happy outcome. Both, in their own way, made Moses into the man God wanted him to be, to be able to rescue his people from slavery. Both mothers, whether they knew it or not, were doing God's will.

There are many examples of mothers in the Bible, examples of them being blessed with children miraculously, or risking their lives to protect them. It must have broken Jesus's mother's heart to watch what happened to him on the cross. I can't imagine how she got through that experience. But she was there for her son, to do what little she could to comfort him by her presence. She showed great courage and love.

When we celebrate Mothering Sunday, we are honouring our mothers who brought us into the world. We may not always be with them when they need us, or vice versa, but they gave us a precious gift. It's up to us how we use it. We should remember that mothers are people too and they don't always get it right, any more than we do, which can come as a shock when we in our turn grow up!

Today we are all worried and anxious about the Coronavirus which stalks the world. It's not something we have experienced in our lives and it brings with it great challenges, not least to care for each other. It's particularly hard for those of us who are not allowed to leave our homes apart from essential trips, cooped up with our families or feeling very isolated if we are alone. We all know how ragged people's tempers can become on holiday or at Christmas, when we share extra time with our loved ones. St Paul has some good advice for us in Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 to 17 which is one of the readings for today: “clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.”

So this Mothering Sunday, wherever we are, let's give thanks to God for His love, his patience with us, and His constant care of us. Make sure we contact our families and friends as the

crisis deepens, reach out to the lonely and the afraid, the housebound and the neighbour. It doesn't take long to send an e mail or make a quick phone call. And above all, as we all turn into anchorites, let's not forget the power of prayer. We may feel helpless and alone, but prayer speaks directly to God – and as Psalm 34, verse 17 says “The Lord hears his people when they call to Him for help. He rescues them from all their troubles.”

The chaplaincy ministry team are all available if you need help – ring the chaplaincy number on 07 66 01 71 50 or e mail anglican.marseille@gmail.com .

Just because we can't have public services doesn't mean we're closed as a chaplaincy!

Keep safe.

Jane

Photograph: *Croix camarguaise*, Notre-Dame de la Garde, Marseille.
The traditional Camargue Cross, seen across the area of the chaplaincy, combines three symbols: a cross, an anchor and a heart, representing faith, hope and love.