

Mothering Sunday 2020

I Samuel 16 vv 1-13 p287, Ephesians 5 vv 8-14 p1176, John 9 vv 1-41 p1075

It is frustrating not to be able to hold our normal services, especially on a day like Mothering Sunday. The fifth of the Ten Commandments which God gave Moses is *Honour thy father and thy mother*. As S Paul points out, it is the first commandment to which a promise is attached – *that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee*. Our parents do give us our start in life, looking after us as babies and children, feeding us, clothing us, educating us and caring for us when we are sick, teaching us about Jesus. No parent is perfect as most parents are only too well aware and some people have unhappy childhoods. Mothering Sunday may be difficult for those who did not have good mothers and for those whose mothers have died, leaving a big hole in their lives. Nevertheless we honour motherhood and most of us must love our own mothers, whether they are here with us or whether they are now in a better place. Mothers continue to be important to us long after we are grown up. There may come a time when their increasing frailty requires us to care for them as they cared for us when we were babies, but we still love them and honour them for always.

Mothers take great care of us and, generally speaking, love us unconditionally, perhaps more so than fathers. However badly a young man behaves, normally his mother can be said still to love him. In that respect, a mother's love gives an insight into the love of God. God cares for us. Indeed, He provides us with everything that we have. It is He Who gives us the gift of life itself. And God's love is unconditional. He loves us just as we are. Indeed, the love of God is even more wonderful than the love of our parents. The psalmist's experience (Psalm 27¹²) is even this: *When my father and my mother forsake me : the Lord taketh me up*. Or, as the hymn writer envisages these words on the lips of Jesus: *Can a woman's tender care cease towards the child she bare? Yes, she may forgetful be, Yet will I remember thee*. In Isaiah 49¹⁵, God Himself says to His people: *Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee*.

Today, we have reached *And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil*, in our series on the Lord's Prayer. I don't think it's appropriate here to go into all the complexities of what it might mean about God leading us into temptation. *And do not bring us to the time of trial* is an alternative translation of our Lord's words which might help us to understand them better. *Deliver us from evil*. Save us from everything which is bad. Save us from Satan, the evil one. As we heard last week in our reading from Romans 5, God does use the trials and temptations, the troubles we go through, to make us better people. *We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us*. He does not, however, allow us to be tested beyond what we can bear (I Corinthians 10¹³). We can see the Hand of God in the corona virus epidemic. Nothing happens outside of His Providence. We can, therefore, trust Him. We may be preserved from catching the virus. We might suffer an infection. It might even be that this is the means through which we shall end our time on earth and begin our time in heaven. It is an opportunity to deepen our relationship with God and also an opportunity to show our care for other people. We don't have to be afraid, certainly not to panic. Thank God for doctors and nurses and for modern medicine. Pray for ourselves and

our families. Pray for those who are sick or who may have lost loved ones. Pray for all carers – both professional carers and family, friends and neighbours. Pray for research into a vaccination and better treatment of the disease. Pray for those in government who have huge responsibilities at this time. Above all, trust in God.

These words of S Paul really speak to us now. It wouldn't hurt to learn them by heart!

Phil. 4. 4.

REJOICE in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.