

**MOTHERING SUNDAY**  
**31st March 2019 LENT 4**  
**“LOVE IN THE LETTING GO”**

Readings:

1 Samuel 1: 20-28 – *For this child I prayed... I have lent him to the Lord.*

John 19: 25-27 – *Son behold your mother; woman behold your son.*

**Well on this Mothering Sunday, what does it mean to be a wife and mother these days? It's not so long since Good Housekeeping magazine seriously put forward the following for young women as what they called “The Good Wife's Guide”. This was quoted in a Sunday a few years ago:**

- 1. Have dinner ready. Most men are hungry when they come home and the prospect of a good meal is part of the welcome needed.**
- 2. Prepare yourself. Touch up your make-up. Put a ribbon in your hair.**
- 3. Light a fire. Your husband will feel that he has reached a haven of rest and order. After all, catering for his comfort will provide you with immense personal satisfaction.**
- 4. At the time of his arrival eliminate all noise of the washer, dryer or vacuum. Encourage the children to keep quiet.**
- 5. Greet him with a warm smile. Let him talk first. Remember, his topics of conversation are much more important than yours.**
- 6. Don't complain if he's late, or even if he stays out all night.**
- 7. Arrange his pillow and take off his shoes. Speak in a low soothing voice.**
- 8. Don't question his judgement or integrity. Remember, he is master of the house. You have no right to question him.**
- 9. A good wife always knows her place.**

**And the paper concluded with a final 21<sup>st</sup> century a word of advice for men: Don't try this at home.**

**It's not so unbelievable when I come to remember how my grandmother treated my grandfather: dinner on the table the minute he appeared home from work and he probably never cooked a meal or lifted a duster in his life. But there was a mutuality about their life together. He worked six days a week as most men did, long hours of hard physical work. They complemented each other. And the nurturing wasn't just one sided either. My grandfather made wooden toys for his grandchildren, including me; he**

kept a garden that was a delight for the whole neighbourhood, told us stories and taught me to draw sitting on his knee.

Women and men are both equally called to nurture, to care and to send children into the world believing in their gifts, and an absolute loveableness that nothing can take away.

This motherly, fatherly love of God, was revealed to Mother Julian of Norwich in her hermit's cell in 1373. "As surely as God is our Father, so also he is our Mother. Therefore he needs must feed us. The mother may give her child to suck her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus, he may feed us with himself, and does full courteously and full tenderly with the blessed sacrament of his body and blood that is precious food of very life. For he in all this uses the true office of a kind nurse, that has nothing else to do, but to attend about the salvation of her child".

This is the love Jesus means when he says: Jerusalem, O Jerusalem, how often would I have taken you under my wings as a mother hen with her chicks and you would not let me.

Motherly, fatherly love, God's and ours embraces the pain as well as the joy of this kind of loving. We see this in Hannah. Imagine wanting a child so desperately, and then in faith and trust handing him over to some old priest of the Temple for the rest of his life. How much trust to think that God's love might be even greater than her own and let him go?

And Mary shows the same trust. She watches her Jesus, this miracle child, leave her to walk into a world which will receive him not. She doesn't always understand. Like all Mums she suffers some horrendous put-downs from her wayward boy: Lost in the Temple – "Know you not that I must be about my Father's business?" (precocious or what?); at the wedding at Cana when she wants him to do something about the wine problem – "Woman, my time has not yet come." (but he does it anyway); when she sends a posse of relatives to save him from himself because the family, quote, thinks he is out of his tiny mind – "Who are my mother, my brothers, my sisters? Those who hear the Word of God and do it!"

But whether she gets it or not, her love stays the course and when all the macho men with the swords are vanished (Peter with all his bluster and all the rest), there she is at the foot of the Cross. From the crib to the Cross,

there's no shaking off this mother. She's there for the long haul, through life or death, whatever God sends.

This is the wonder of this kind of loving. Like holding a butterfly in your hands you daren't hold it too tightly or you'll bruise its wings and crush it, and sooner or later you have to release it. The poet C. Day Lewis catches this in a moment of bitter sweet insight watching his son go off to school one day:

It is eighteen years ago, almost to the day –  
 A sunny day with leaves just turning,  
 The touch-lines new-ruled – since I watched you play  
 Your first game of football, then, like a satellite  
 Wrenched from its orbit, go drifting away

Behind a scatter of boys. I can see  
 You walking away from me towards the school  
 With the pathos of a half-fledged thing set free  
 Into a wilderness, the gait of one  
 Who finds no path where the path should be.

That hesitant figure, eddying away  
 Like a winged seed loosened from its parent stem,  
 Has something I never quite grasp to convey  
 About nature's give-and-take – the small, the scorching  
 Ordeals which fire one's irresolute clay.

I have had worse partings, but none that so  
 Gnaws at my mind still. Perhaps it is roughly  
 Saying what God alone could perfectly show –  
 How selfhood begins with a walking away,  
 And love is proved in the letting go.

He's right. This is Godly love. This is the Father who lets his Son leave his side to enter a world like ours to embrace his suffering, his adventure, his destiny. This is Hannah, with her heart almost standing still, letting go of Samuel, child of her dreams and her prayers. This is Mary letting go of her son, and her Son, from the very Cross letting go of his mother into the arms of his friend. The last act of Jesus is to create a new family: Son behold your mother, woman behold your son. This is the love we know that breaks our

**hearts, empties our bank balances and fills us with the joy of love, human and divine. May God bless all the families of the earth and your family today.**