

A Mothering Sunday Give-Away!

1 Samuel 1^{20-end}; Psalm 127¹⁻⁴; Colossians 3¹²⁻¹⁷; John 19^{25b-27}

She left him there for the Lord. [1 Samuel 1²⁸]

It is very good to have St James's people with us today - the ancient tradition on Mothering Sunday was to visit your Mother Church - and that it precisely what you are doing (and if you look back to the Handsworth Rectory Act of 1895 you could make a case for you being our favourite child: where every other daughter Parish receive £180 per annum in the settlement, St James alone receive £250!).

Not for the first time I am left wondering what on earth the compilers of the Lectionary are thinning about. We have followed the readings set for Mothering Sunday and we have used the second options in each case. If there was ever a set of readings set to make the case for Mothering Sunday and against the saccharine-coated Mothers' Day, these are they! Can you see why?

- ✦ The Old Testament readings tells the story of Hannah - a favourite wife embarrassed into bargaining with God to deal with the stigma of barrenness. The passage ends, **she left him there for the Lord!**
- ✦ The Gospel is that very moving scene at the cross - the exchange between Jesus and his mother and John is touching: **Woman, here is your son** and then **here is your mother**.

In so far as the readings today relate to children - it is about giving them away!

But that, too, is at the heart of what Paul is saying to the Colossians: as Christians we have to learn to let things go, to give them away!

- ✦ **Forgive each other** - we give away our right or even our will to hold grudges. We have been forgiven so therefore we forgive. We repeat it every time we say the Lord's Prayer so it should be something seared into our consciousness and our actions.

- ✦ **Cloth yourselves with love** - we give away our right to choose whom we do and do not love. We do it because we are loved by God and held in the love of our Christian family: we are loved and that gives us the strength to overcome any distaste at loving others.
- ✦ **Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts** - we give away our right to create disharmony. When there is something or someone that makes us want to stir things up remember you are **God's chosen ones** and that you are challenged to make the decision to **cloth yourselves**, for that is always a decision, with **compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience**. When we all do that **harmony is achieved**.
- ✦ **Be Thankful** - we give away our right to ingratitude. How often we can catch ourselves being less than thankful. Paul's advice to overcome this is fairly straightforward: **let the word of Christ dwell in you** - when we live by the Gospels we know how fortunate we are; **teach and admonish each other** - we are not in this alone, it is a partnership where we help each other to be the best we can become in God's strength; **sing** - how important it is to sing our faith and to sing out so that others are blessed.
- ✦ **Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus** - we give away our right to do what we like and choose to do only what can be associated with Jesus.

However much a child is received as a gift of God, any responsible parent knows that the task of parenting is so that they grow up to be confident and independent. The more we give them the resources to be all they can be and to be free the greater the likelihood that our relationships will grow and mature. In letting them go, we manage to keep them.

God, as our Father, has given us the freedom to do what we will, and the greatest exercise of that freedom is to restrict our choices to be what God calls us to be - in letting go we grasp hold of life.