

FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

19th -25th March 2023

Fourth Week of Lent

Reflection – Mothering Sunday

Rejoice, Jerusalem, and all who love her. Be joyful, all who were in mourning; exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast. *cf Is 66:10-11 (Introit for Lent 4)*

THE subject of Jerusalem is put in front of us today in the Introit. The link between Jerusalem and our own mothers gave this Sunday the title 'Mothering Sunday' or, in the land of Motherhood and Apple Pie (and on another date), 'Mother's Day'. This theme has now become much less obvious with the disappearance of Galatians 4 as the first reading. Read at Mass invariably on Lent 4 until 1970, Galatians 4 speaks of Abraham's two women - the slave woman and the free. These two women correspond to two Jerusalems. The first corresponds to the earthly Jerusalem, in slavery with her children, the second to the Jerusalem above who is free and our mother (Galatians 4:25f), the Church Triumphant in the Communion of Saints. So, on this mid-Lent Sunday, we look ahead to the victory which is brought about by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, a time of judgment for the world. As today's Gospel tells us,

'the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil...' [but whoever] 'does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God. (Jn 3:19, 21)

The Gospel also includes the most well-known verse in the Bible, at least amongst Evangelicals. 'John 3:16' is so readily recognisable a Bible reference, that it is apparently a common 'bumper sticker'.

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

It is a wonderful promise but must be seen in its context – light and darkness, and the vital choice each one of us must make. In the Passion and Death of Christ we are confronted by a supreme act of love but also with a crisis of judgment. Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother: heaven is our mother. We must choose between light and darkness. We follow the light and insofar as we place our faith and trust in the cross, we shall inherit eternal life. Figuratively, just as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, the Son of Man has been lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. Those are the themes as we move closer to Passiontide and the chance once more to walk the way of the cross and share a glimpse of the glory of the resurrection.

Fr Andrew

ST JOSEPH

Monday 20th March (transferred from 19th March)

Reading

Heb 11:1-16

The Meaning of Faith

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. **2** For by it the men of old received divine approval. **3** By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

The Examples of Abel, Enoch, and Noah

4 By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking. **5** By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God. **6** And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.^[a] **7** By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

The Faith of Abraham

⁸ By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. ⁹ By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. ¹¹ By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

¹³ These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Reflection

TODAY'S reading comes from the Office of Readings in the Divine Office, the daily prayer of the Church. As time goes on, more and more people are drawn into the saying of the Office, especially where public Mass is scarce. The Office is a large and varied tapestry of readings and prayer, so different bits of it will suit different dispositions and needs.

In this passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, St Joseph comes at the end of a very long list of faithful people in the Old Testament who trusted in God's promises. Under the New Covenant, we play our part in that continuing task of faithfulness - trusting in God's promises. We too are strangers and exiles on the earth, seeking a homeland.

Collect for the Fourth Week of Lent

O GOD, who through your Word reconcile the human race to yourself in a wonderful way, grant, we pray, that with prompt devotion and eager faith the Christian people may hasten toward the solemn celebrations to come. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Monday in the Fourth Week of Lent

(displaced at Mass by the Solemnity of St Joseph)

Reading

Is 65:17-21

The Glorious New Creation

17 For behold, I create new heavens
and the former things shall not be remembered
or come into mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice for ever
in that which I create;
for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing,
and her people a joy.

19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,
and be glad in my people;
no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping
and the cry of distress.

20 No more shall there be in it
an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old man who does not fill out his days,
for the child shall die a hundred years old,
and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

Reflection

THE LAST couple of chapters of the Book of Isaiah give us a vision of a new world, a world where a just social and moral order will prevail over mere temple ritual. So the prophecies take us beyond the local to the

universal, beyond a religious system to the way the whole world is ordered. Heaven is God's throne and the earth his footstool: he cannot be contained or defined by any temple. Jerusalem ceases to be the domain of a group of adherents but, reconfigured, becomes the mother to all believers. As the old Epistle for Mothering Sunday reminded us, 'the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother'. (Gal 4:26) In our journey through life, we are heading for the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven (Rev. 21:1-3), and God's New Creation, a place of houses and vineyards. Houses are the place of secure homes. Vineyards are the place where a settled community grows and flourishes. Talk of 'the new heavens and the new earth' is a reminder to the Church under persecution – whether from hostile forces or from plague – that our homeland is indeed in heaven (Phil 3:20) that 'here we have no lasting city' for 'we seek the city which is to come.' (Heb 13:14)

Tuesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Reading

Ezek 47:1-9, 12

The Stream of Water Flowing from the Temple

47 Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and behold, water was issuing from below the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east); and the water was flowing down from below the south end of the threshold of the temple, south of the altar. **2** Then he brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me round on the outside to the outer gate, that faces toward the east;^[a] and the water was coming out on the south side.

3 Going on eastward with a line in his hand, the man measured a thousand cubits, and then led me through the water; and it was ankle-deep. **4** Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water; and it was knee-deep. Again he measured a thousand, and led me through the water; and it was up to the loins. **5** Again he measured a thousand, and it was a river that I could not pass through, for the water had risen; it was deep enough to swim in, a river that could not be passed through. **6** And he said to me, 'Son of man, have you seen this?'

Then he led me back along the bank of the river. **7** As I went back, I saw upon the bank of the river very many trees on the one side and on the other. **8** And he said to me, 'This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah; and when it enters the stagnant waters of the sea, the water will become fresh. **9** And wherever the river^[a] goes every

living creature which swarms will live, and there will be very many fish; for this water goes there, that the waters of the sea may become fresh; so everything will live where the river goes..... ¹² And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month, because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.'

Reflection

WHEN we come across the passage from Ezekiel 47, about the stream of water flowing out from the temple, and irrigating a wide area, so that fruit trees and medicinal plants may grow by the riverside, we are reminded of a similar passage at the end of the Book of Revelation. Here the river of the Water of Life flows not from the threshold of the temple – as it does in Ezekiel – but from the throne of God and of the Lamb. We are also reminded of the *Vidi aquam* sung in Eastertide: 'I saw water flowing from the Temple.' The Paschal Mystery is when the prophecy of Ezekiel is fulfilled. Christ is the Water of Life, which we encounter in the miracle at Cana, where water from the purification jars becomes the new wine of the marriage feast. We encounter it too in the story of Jesus and the woman of Samaria, as they meet and draw water at the well. The Water of Life is not only fresh water, enabling things to grow and thrive, but water which quenches our spiritual thirst. As we journey on through Lent, towards Passiontide and Easter, we seek, through Christ, to grow and thrive, and we seek, in Christ, to encounter him who quenches our thirst.

Wednesday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Reading

John 5:17-30 (RSV)

The Authority of the Son

Jesus said to the Jews, 'My Father is working still, and I am working.'¹⁸ This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. ²¹ For as the Father raises the dead and gives

them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. ²² The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

²⁵ 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, ²⁷ and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. ²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.

³⁰ 'I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Reflection

JESUS is in dispute with the Jewish leaders for most of John 5. The chapter begins with Jesus healing in Jerusalem on the Sabbath Day, a day on which no work should be done. The man healed has been ill for thirty-eight years so - no question - the healing could have waited until another day. Jesus therefore is deliberately choosing a feast day – we are not quite sure which one – and a Sabbath Day. His explanation is that since, in accordance with rabbinical teaching, only God works on the Sabbath, he is showing himself to be one with the Father. Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working still, and I am working.' (*John 5:17*)

Thursday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Reading

John 5:31-47 (RSV)

The Father who sent Jesus has himself borne witness to him.

³¹ If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true; ³² there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true. ³³ You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the

truth. ³⁴ Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. ³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. ³⁶ But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear me witness that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from men. ⁴² But I know that you have not the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me; if another comes in his own name, him you will receive. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, who receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you set your hope. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?'

Reflection

AS WE continue with John 5, the dispute between Jesus and the Jewish leaders, we should notice that, from verse 19 to verse 47, Jesus is the only one speaking. Today's reading, starting at verse 31, gives us simply what Jesus says to them. Though the passage begins with Jesus standing accused of wrong-doing – breaking the Sabbath – it is the Jewish leaders by the end of the chapter who stand accused. As with any trial – though this is an informal one – witnesses are called. In his defence Jesus has cited, in the first place, John the Baptist and then, more significantly the works that he performs which bear witness that it is the Father who has sent him. Only the source of Good – the Father – could be the author of the self-evidently good work of healing which Jesus accomplishes. In today's Gospel reading – the last part of the chapter – Jesus turns the tables on the Jewish leaders by saying that it is they who are accused and the witness to the charge against them is Moses – the Law of Moses, which for them is the ultimate authority. They stand accused by Moses and, if they do not accept his witness, how will they ever believe the words of Jesus?

Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent

Reading

Wisdom 2:1, 12-22 (RSV)

Let us lie in wait for the righteous man

2 For they reasoned unsoundly, saying to themselves,
'Short and sorrowful is our life,
and there is no remedy when a man comes to his end,
and no one has been known to return from Hades.

....

12 'Let us lie in wait for the righteous man,
because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions;
he reproaches us for sins against the law,
and accuses us of sins against our training.

13 He professes to have knowledge of God,
and calls himself a child of the Lord.

14 He became to us a reproof of our thoughts;

15 the very sight of him is a burden to us,
because his manner of life is unlike that of others,
and his ways are strange.

16 We are considered by him as something base,
and he avoids our ways as unclean;
he calls the last end of the righteous happy,
and boasts that God is his father.

17 Let us see if his words are true,
and let us test what will happen at the end of his life;

18 for if the righteous man is God's son, he will help him,
and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.

19 Let us test him with insult and torture,
that we may find out how gentle he is,
and make trial of his forbearance.

20 Let us condemn him to a shameful death,
for, according to what he says, he will be protected.'

21 Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray,
for their wickedness blinded them,

22 and they did not know the secret purposes of God,
nor hope for the wages of holiness,
nor discern the prize for blameless souls.

Reflection

IN THE Book of Wisdom we find ourselves with two worlds, contrasted with one another. One world is that of the righteous and the other is the world of the wicked. The righteous believe in the very things the wicked reject and the wicked therefore attack the righteous to see whether reliance on God for help and deliverance is of any use or not. We hear their reasoning in the reading today. For us, the relevance of the Passion and Death of Jesus to what is described here is more than obvious: 'Let us condemn him to a shameful death' puts us in mind of the events of Holy Week. There is a more general application of the 'two worlds' to our own day. Obvious oppositions are there between communities and countries which live in peace with others and those which attack and destroy others. Less obvious but perhaps more insidious is the rivalry between ways of life, the one seeking the fundamental well-being of others and working for the advancement of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation, the other simply seeking its own pleasure at the expense of and regardless of the needs of others. The challenge for Christians in Lent is that these two worlds are not the world of the Church and the outside world. Sin abounds in the Church and in the lives of individual Christians and quite evidently there is plenty of goodness and unselfish service of others in the lives of many who do not subscribe to the Christian Faith.

ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

Saturday 25th March

Collect

O GOD, who willed that your Word should take on the reality of human flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary: grant, we pray, that we, who confess our Redeemer to be God and Man, may merit to become partakers in his divine nature. Who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

Reading

Luke 1:26-38 (RSV)

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you!' ²⁹ But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and considered in her mind what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. ³¹ And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.

³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I have no husband?' ³⁵ And the angel said to her,

'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God.

³⁶ And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.' ³⁸ And Mary said, 'Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her.

Reflection

THE ANNUNCIATION of the Lord is the celebration of the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel to Our Lady that she would conceive and become the Mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Gabriel told Mary to name her son Yehoshua ('Jesus') meaning 'YHWH is salvation'. This event, marking the beginning of the Incarnation, occurred in the sixth month of St Elizabeth's pregnancy with St John the Baptist (Luke 1:26). Since the second century, the Annunciation has been observed on 25th March and gives us a date for Christmas, the birth of Christ, nine months after his conception.

St Irenæus of Lyon reckoned that this date, approximately the Vernal Equinox, co-incident with the date of the Passion of Christ. Others regarded it as the date not only of the Crucifixion but also of the Creation of the world. Thus Lady Day, as it was called in England, marked the New Year until the change to the Gregorian Calendar in 1752 (a change which necessitated a new date, 5th April, for the purposes of calculating the financial year).

St Ephraim, teaching that the Annunciation fell on 10 Nisan, in the Hebrew Calendar, noted that this was the day on which the Passover Lamb is selected (Exodus 12) and not infrequently 10 Nisan coincides with 25th March. In the West, when 25th March falls during Holy Week or the Easter Octave, the Annunciation is transferred to a later date. In the East, however, the co-incident of the Annunciation with either Good Friday or Easter Sunday is regarded as a special blessing. On Good Friday the Divine Liturgy is not normally celebrated but it is when the Annunciation falls on that date. On Easter Sunday, the coincidence with the Annunciation is called ***Kyriopascha*** and the rubrics governing the celebration of Annunciation and Easter alongside each other are particularly complicated.

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