

Dear all,

Mothering Sunday

This morning every woman received a potted primrose, and afterwards with our coffee we enjoyed some rather lovely cake - thank you Lillah for both!

The reading from the Hebrew Scriptures was about the birth of the prophet Samuel, but the more I look at the story it is actually more about the redemption of Hannah in a time when barrenness was seen as a curse from God. The depth of her despair on her earlier visit to the temple (she was in such a state that the priest Eli thought she was drunk) is mirrored in the joyful extravagance of the response to conceiving a child - the greatest gesture being the offering back of said child "to God". In her culture both in her body and spiritually, she was made whole. As I proceeded to say this morning, 3000 years later, although outwardly so much has *seemed* to change, particularly in the western world, in relation to women, you just need to scratch the surface to see that those same pressures and attitudes (though more subtle nowadays), from both within and without, are still active and exert a great influence in society - particularly when it comes to motherhood.

And in the afternoon....

our young confirmation candidates met in church for our next instalment. Today we looked at our worldview that underpins our faith. In the simplest forms we could find we came to a working definition of Sin, salvation, Grace, and the role of Jesus. Some of the definitions came from the children themselves so I was especially pleased about that.

Sin = the gap between mankind and God

Salvation = closing that gap - "putting us back together" (I liked that one), peace, healing.

Jesus = He closed the gap - fully God and fully man.

Grace = the reason he did it. He wanted to because he loves us. Pure and simple. Love is a gift, not something we have to earn.

We went to note that those of us who call God "our Father" meet together and when we do we are called the church and that we are all saints - witnesses to that love - and because we are all brothers and sisters - one family with one Father - we meet together for the special Sunday meal of bread and wine and say thank you. So there! Christianity in a nutshell. We finished by saying the Lord's prayer in English which for all of the children is a second language, - I take my hat off to them ...

After all that hard work we had to let off a little steam -(I'll try and make sure all the kneelers are gathered up and back in their places before next Sunday)

Next Sunday

Holy Communion (our special family meal) **at 10am** with Sunday school. After this we will have a quick cup of coffee and then we will hold our **Annual General meeting**. For all those who have yet to fill out an enrolment form, you can still do so between the end of the service and the AGM. There are also of course a few people who have either been away on extended breaks or on business out of Romania. If you

have been unavoidably away during March but do want to be on the electoral roll please let me know by email

Web site

Jo Kinberger, still working tirelessly on our behalf, though now of course living in Germany, has just added another new page to the website on the "picture gallery" button which consists of lots of pictures of our church from within and without - why not take a look. Don't forget that there is also the on-line diary, my missives are stored there as well to incriminate me later, and bags of other information - everything from how to contribute to the church to what goes on in the Sunday school. The address is <http://www.churchoftheresurrection.eu>

Thought for the day

There were three things that have affected me this week. First, there was the Pope restating the catholic church's opposition to all forms of contraception. I will not dwell on this. I believe him to be profoundly wrong. In fact all evidence suggests that most practicing Catholics also believe him to be profoundly wrong - but let's not go there. Secondly, and much more important than that for me, I was particularly touched by a letter from an old friend in a church I used to attend who after a lifetime of illness and suffering has just had it confirmed that her cancer has now spread throughout her body. She has decided to refuse chemotherapy because the chances of success were so slim but also because it would have inhibited her attendance at her local church (which used to be my local church). She wanted to be able to go to communion on Sundays and be with her extended church family at St. Paul's - the quality of her last weeks being more important to her than extending her time on earth. Wynne has never married - in fact she was once a nun, and although she has always suffered ill health for as long as we have known her, she was always so kind and her eyes always sparkled, and she never dwelt on her ailments. Hers is a life of faithful service to others in whatever ways she could. An ardent traditionalist in all things liturgical, everything was nevertheless done with love and with that same sparkle in her eyes. When I think about all the people who have influenced me down the years, it is people like Wynne that I will remember when I am old and grey (She is worth a cartload of theologians with German names) because the relationship was personal. It is particularly humbling that even in what might be her last letter to us she says that *she* continues to pray *for me*. It is a reminder of what I was telling the children on Sunday afternoon, that we are all Saints and can witness to the faith

Thirdly, when I got home on Sunday evening I put on the news and heard that Jade Goody had died in her sleep on mothering Sunday, leaving two young children. I don't care what people think of her - God loves her - and I think that in what I have read of the manner of her death - her preparation for it, in her getting married, and in having her children baptised in a private ceremony by her local vicar, Jade Goody, amongst many other things, has probably done far more to normalise relations between the church and a huge swathe of the British public than any church leader could ever have done. Jade Goody has been an example to many people who the church never reaches - and if we are being brutally honest doesn't particularly want to reach. Lasagne and red wine and an Alpha course might be just fine for middle class suburbia, but in this instance Jade will I'm sure, have managed to reach people we ordinarily never could. And in the brutally open way she faced death she reached places deep inside us that many fear to go. These deep, inner, hidden places should

be meat and drink to the church but unfortunately in the day to day scheme of things we somehow often manage to be just as superficial as the society that surrounds us. People like Wynne, people like Jade, outwardly products of completely different worlds, but in their own ways and to their own constituency able to speak to people through their lives and by the way they have faced death.

The **prayer for today** is not a prayer in the accepted form we may be used to in church services but to my mind is true prayer nonetheless and a profound one at that. It is written by the late lamented catholic priest Henri Nouwen and speaks of mourning, but mourning in the widest sense, in fact in the sense that Jesus meant in the sermon on the mount "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Mourning the state of how things are and how they should be.

Mourn my people mourn.

Let your pain rise up in your heart and burst forth in you with sobs and cries.

Mourn for the silence that exists between you and your spouse.

Mourn for the way you were robbed of your innocence.

Mourn for the absence of a soft embrace, an intimate friendship, a life-giving sexuality.

Mourn for the abuse of your body, your mind, your heart.

Mourn for the bitterness of your children, the indifference of your friends, your colleague's hardness of heart.

***Mourn for those whose hunger for love brought them AIDS,
whose desire for freedom brought them to refugee camps,
whose hunger for justice brought them to prisons.***

Cry for the millions who die from lack of food, lack of care, lack of love.

Don't think of this as normal, something to be taken for granted, something to accept....

***Think of it as the dark force of evil that has penetrated every human heart, every family, every community, every nation,
and keeps you imprisoned.***

Cry for freedom, for salvation, for redemption.

***Cry loudly and deeply, and trust that your tears will make your eyes see that the kingdom is close at hand,
yes, at your fingertips.***

Love and peace

Martin