

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH LENT 4 MOTHERING SUNDAY YEAR C 31 MARCH 2019

Today we're thinking about mothers, though a lot of what I'm going to say is true of fathers as well. Fathers, consider yourselves included! The same goes for guardians, carers of children etc.

Think of what mothers do. The list is endless. Let's start with two basic things. First, mothers feed their children. Babies are breast fed or bottle fed. After a while they progress to more solid food, but they are spoon-fed for quite some time. I remember playing games, pretending the spoon is a plane coming in to land, waiting for that mouth to open. Most children eventually learn to eat, first with their fingers, then with knife, fork and spoon, but someone, maybe Mum, still has to prepare the food.

A second thing mothers do is dress their children. Again, as time goes by, children will learn to do more of it themselves. And they can be quite excited if they are dressed for some special occasion – a party, for example.

Feeding and dressing play a part in the parable we've just heard. A parable is a story told by Jesus with a message for us. It's a father rather than a mother who's involved. The father tells his slaves to bring out the best robe and put it on his younger son, together with rings and sandals. Then he tells them to kill the fatted calf. "Let us eat and celebrate," he declares. "Let's have a party, and dress for it."

We know why, in the parable, this happened. The younger son had left his family and got into a mess. His money (originally his father's money) ran out, and nobody fed him. But he 'came to himself' – came to his senses – and went back home, willing to become a servant. He must have been overwhelmed when his father treated him as someone special and threw a party.

This parable has a depth of meaning – in fact, if you try to explain parables too much you lose some of their impact. But let's think about one or two things. Jesus teaches that God is like the father. Some of us, perhaps all of us in a way, may be like the younger son. We may think we know what we want to do with our lives, something that doesn't involve God. But God wants us to return to him. If we come to our senses, that's what we'll do. We'll find a God who rejoices that we have come to him. He doesn't punish; he forgives. He invites us to celebrate with him. He gives us a new status – puts a new robe on us – rather like children being given a new uniform when they go to a new school. S. Paul tells us that 'if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old

has passed away; see, everything has become new!’ He explains that this happens because God has reconciled us to himself: that is, has brought us back and welcomed us.

And God feeds us – gives us the strength we need for life. It’s the strength we need for doing what is right as we live in our families and live as members of human society. Often we will find God’s strength comes through other people. That’s why Christians meet together, for worship, for friendship, and to work together for some good purpose. We do many things together, but the most important is a meal we share: the Mass. It’s what we’re doing today, and every week. It is a family meal, where we are fed by hearing scripture and by receiving the body and blood of Christ. We’re celebrating mothers – and fathers – today, and accepting the love that God gives us through them. Let’s come back to him whenever we’ve wandered away. Let’s accept a new, forgiven life, and strength for the future.