

Happy Mother's Day.

How we initially react to me saying that today reveals that we are meeting with God just as we really are, deep down today, even the bits that we put a brave face onto, those things we may hide from even those closest to us.

We can't know what every individual is going through today or about everyone's experiences that deem it a happy day or not. But God can, and God does. I don't need to list all the examples of why this day can be challenging, even painful, as well as being a happy one. But we unite in faith and trust that God does know us all.

He reveals this in Jesus who did not have a set rigid way, a one size fits all action with all he met. He served them all in a different way, serving and tending to their individual needs.

We unite as individuals today, gathered as one family, in faith, in worship, in love. We bring together all that may have happened to us that deems this day a 'happy' one or not.

God sent our human inspiration, in Jesus, so that we can, no matter how many thousands of years go by, or how old or culturally different today's two biblical readings become, we can continue to try our best to make the world a more compassionate, kinder, gentler place, when we do continue to unite in the love that God has for us. And continue to try our best as a church to reflect that love to others.

In doing this, we can continue to grow and mature spiritually in what a difference Jesus' Good Friday sacrifice makes in transforming our hearts and minds, in every aspect of our lives.

If we do choose to be absent from the foot of Jesus' cross, to leave Jesus at Christmas and then seek him again on Easter Day, forgetting Holy Week, we will be the weaker for it.

Jean Varnier, who I had come across during essay writing, entitled one of his books "The Gospel of John. The Gospel of Relationship". Our reading today from John chapter 19 is full of relationships. Mother and Son being the most obvious.

We are encouraged and invited to read the whole chapter, to read the whole bible, to remind us what happened before and what happened afterwards. It reveals our church, our journey, relationship, Father and Son, the Holy Spirit, speaking to us anew today, and every day.

Jesus, in pain and dying, is our example of humility, as he is concerned for his Mother, who was presumably a widow and so relied on her eldest son to take care of her, and so Jesus formed a whole new relationship by joining his disciple John and his Mother Mary together, saying 'Here is your son' and 'here is your Mother'.

Reading Vanier reminded me that Mary helps us see the connection between both of our readings today. In Colossians chapter 3 verse 12, St. Paul reminds us that we are to clothe ourselves with, to 'put on' humility and compassion.

Mary is the embodiment of compassion.

Mary now knows that Jesus' hour *has* come, the 'liberation of humanity from the forces of evil has come'. She has always known the weakness of Jesus as a baby, she does not fear the vulnerable Messiah now dying, humiliated, excluded, deemed finished, a failure, as the others who followed him do, and so could not face being there at the cross to witness it.

Even with their previous witness to miracles, healings, and obvious teachings from Jesus' example in revealing God as his Father. They were steeped in the ideology of their own Messiah who was supposed to come how they wanted, in violence and war if that is what is took, to save only them.

They still did not reach a spiritual maturity in understanding of what he had told them about his death, his rising and his ascension and why it had to happen that way. A Messiah sent by God himself. They still only understood it to be the end of following Jesus, not the beginning.

So, we are to enter into the whole journey, to remind ourselves that even for the disciples who had Jesus in the flesh in front of them, once he was crucified, they lost sight of his eternal presence in their lives. It was to take Jesus, risen again after human death, appearing to them, for them to mature in spiritual faith in God, through Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit.

We find him in each other, in prayer, worship, and unity, to continue to grow in spiritual maturity and continued awareness of his presence always with us.

Mary is simply there at the cross with all her being, all her love, to sustain him and to help him, to be with him. She is saying 'I am with you. I trust you'. It is as if Mary represents all of humanity in front of Jesus, who came to love and save all of humanity. Her presence says, 'I am with you and I love you'.

As Vanier tells us, 'compassion-competence is 'where there is suffering, it is necessary to alleviate it; when someone is hungry, it is important that food be provided. When there are issues that can be resolved socially, politically, medically people do act in truth and in justice', needing to do all we can practically, to a level of competence, to ensure that people do not become engulfed needlessly in a world of suffering. We must help them to rise up.'

There is also compassion-presence. When a mother loses a child, or discovers her child has a severe disability and she is grieving, there is nothing we can do but be with her.

'To be with', is the compassion of presence. It says: 'You are not alone; I am with you'. This suffering is not a punishment or an infliction. I am with you, in you, to help you rise up'.

St. Paul tells us in our reading in chapter 14 that 'over all these virtues put on love, which binds them, (all the other virtues he lists) all together in perfect unity.'

Peter was not able to do what Mary did, to bring all he was to Jesus at the foot of the cross. He denies even knowing Jesus three times when confronted with fear that admitting it threatened his human life. Still misunderstanding Jesus' teaching about eternal life in faith.

I fell asleep with my headphones on as I was listening to a meditation I have. It takes you through the whole journey from Jesus' call of the disciples to follow him, to the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I remember hearing the calling part, but then woke up to John 21! I had slept through the whole of Jesus' journey, did not spend time with him on Good Friday or Easter Day.

The resurrected Jesus appears to the disciples again, on the shore. He had supplied them with more fish than they could haul in. They shared breakfast together of fish and bread, at Jesus' invitation.

After they finish eating Jesus asks Peter 'do you love me?'
To which Peter replies, 'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.'
Jesus said, 'feed my lambs.'

Again, Jesus asks, 'do you love me?'
Peter again answers 'Yes Lord, you know that I love you.'
Jesus then said, 'Take care of my sheep.'

Peter then becomes hurt because Jesus asks him a third time 'do you love me?'
Peter replies 'Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.'
Jesus said, 'feed my sheep'.

Psalms 95, verse 7 says 'for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Today, if only we would hear his voice.'

As lambs we show our immaturity, our vulnerability, and our need of care. We need one another. Jesus tells us we are to 'take care of his sheep' which shows we are to also show pastoral, supervisory care, in spiritual and physical maturity.

1 Peter, chapter 5, verse 2, is clearly led by Jesus' example, it says 'be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers.'

As Peter did, we confess our failures in living and serving as Jesus intends us to. We are all reinstated, in forgiveness, as Peter was, as God's children, in continuing to unite, to clothe ourselves in love, and reflectors of God's grace.

Let us pray,
Lord, help us to accept your eternal invitation to bring our true selves to you, to prepare ourselves during Lent, to accept your invitation to bring all that we are in penitence and in faith, to the foot of your cross this Good Friday and every day. Help us to mature in spirituality to know what it is to truly celebrate Easter Day and every day, in your grace, forgiveness, love, peace, strength and hope.
Amen