

## **Mothering Sunday 2015**

### **St Marylebone 8.30 am and 11 am**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.*

I learned during this past week that, very soon, Benjamin West's great painting of the Holy Family will be back here in Church with us.

The painting, along with its frame, has, at last, been restored to something of its former glory and the dirt and the grime of nearly two hundred years has been removed along with the great cross-shaped gash, so badly patched up in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Mothering Sunday, the Fourth Sunday of Lent, reminds us that, together, we make up a Holy Family: a bit grimy perhaps, more than a bit damaged certainly, in need of repair and restoration constantly, but, nevertheless, a Holy Family made up of disparate brothers and sisters who have been birthed into a this family through baptism with the Church as our mother.

Like all families, the family that is the Church is not an amalgam of identical clones (how dull that would be, unless of course, all the clones were of me!), but a family in which there is a gloriously rich and colourful amalgam

of peoples; some of whom are wealthy and others are poor; some of whom speak English whilst others speak Mandarin or one of the 2,500 other languages spoken on our planet.

The Holy Family that is the Church, is a family in which people young and old, sick and healthy; gay and straight, all gather to be fed and nourished by word and sacrament; all gather to be built up in fellowship, sustained by the proclamation of the Gospel and enriched and encouraged through prayer.

A single family of 2.2 billion men, women and children from every race, united through a common baptism in the name of the God who has been revealed as a dynamic relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Like every family, the Christian family has more than its fair share of problems!

Some parts of the family are not very comfortable with other branches of the family, with the way that they behave or the things that they say.

One bit of the family might focus on one thing, whilst another chooses to focus on something completely different.

One part of the family worships in one way, whilst another worships properly – like us at St Marylebone!

As in every family, in the Holy Family of the Church there are spectacular misunderstandings and some pretty stubborn intransigencies; some arguments between different family members have already lasted for more than a thousand years!

But this weird and wonderful, patched up, and sometimes very publicly broken family, is the family to which we belong<sup>i</sup> ; is the family into which we have been birthed by God through baptism; and from which God sends us out to draw in more brothers and sisters, not for the family's sake, but for the sake of the world in whose midst the family is called to live and move and have its day-to-day being.

The Church, the Holy Family of God, militant here on earth and triumphant in heaven, is not just something to which we go week by week, nor is it a set of beliefs which we are asked to affirm; the Church, the Holy Family of God is a community of belonging, which exists not for itself but for others.

On this Fourth Sunday of Lent, this Mothering Sunday, yes, we thank God for our mothers, living or departed; but above all we thank God for our mother, the Church, that

wonderful and sacred mystery in which, as St Paul reminds us, we are “joined together, and through which we give glory to God the Father”<sup>ii</sup>.

Let us pray

*O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on thy whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; and by the tranquil operation of thy perpetual providence, carry out the work of man’s salvation, and let the whole world feel and see that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and all things are returning to perfection through him from whom they took their origin, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*<sup>iii</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> Rick Warren, *God’s Family Is The Church*, May 21<sup>st</sup> 201, [www.rickwarren.com](http://www.rickwarren.com)

<sup>ii</sup> cf Romans 15:6-7

<sup>iii</sup> Collect concluding the Second Shorter Litany in the Scottish Book of Common Prayer 1929