

A 96 year old mother was being interviewed about her long life and how she felt about being a Mother all those years.

‘I feel just wonderful,’ was her reply. ‘For the first time since I became a Mother, I no longer have to worry about my children.’

‘How is that?’

‘They’re both in nursing homes’.

In many places around the world these days, the Fourth Sunday in Lent is observed "Holy Humour Sunday" or "Lighten Up Sunday". It may not be listed among the feast days observed by the major liturgical denominations, and there is no mention of it in the "Revised Common Lectionary", but *Laughter Sunday, Hilarity Sunday, Bright Sunday* or *Holy Fools Sunday* has its roots in a number of different Christian traditions.

Early Orthodox churches gathered on the Monday after Easter to tell stories, jokes and anecdotes. To this day apparently, in Slavic regions, Christians gather the day after Easter for folk dancing and feasting in the churchyard: a time of celebrating the big joke that God pulled on Satan. It is known as *Bright Monday, White Monday, Dyngus Day, and Emmaus Day* in various countries.

To Catholics it was known as ‘*Risus Paschalis*’ - God's Joke, the Easter Laugh. Churches in 15th century Bavaria used to celebrate the Sunday after Easter as *Risus Paschalis*. Priests would deliberately include amusing stories and jokes in their sermons to make the faithful laugh. After the service, people would gather together to play practical jokes on one another and tell funny stories. It was their way of celebrating God’s supreme joke - resurrection of Christ! The observance of *Risus Paschalis* was officially outlawed by Pope Clement X in the 17th century. Perhaps people were having too much fun!

But, as G.K. Chesterton once wrote:

“Angels can fly because they take themselves lightly.

Never forget that the devil fell by force of gravity.

He who has the faith has the fun.”

The American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr summed it up:

Using the imagery of the ancient Jewish temple, he insisted that laughter should be found in the outer courts of the temple, but then, as we approach the Holy of Holies, *"laughter is swallowed up in prayer."*

Other traditions celebrate *Laetare Sunday* (also known as 'Mothering Sunday') on the fourth Sunday in Lent. "*Laetare*" simply means 'rejoice,' and comes from an ancient collect for that day: '*Rejoice with joy, you that have been in sorrow.*' On this Sunday, in some places more affluent than ours (!"), Lenten purple vestments and altar cloths are replaced by rose-coloured ones instead. Flowers (not normally present during Lent) are brought into church, and special kind of fruit cake was often served on this Sunday, thus modestly breaking the Lenten Fast. In older times those in service were allowed time to visit their mothers and worship in their Mother Church.

So let us consider Mothering Sunday:

From *Exodus* we learn that Moses was blessed with the love of three motherly women: his birth mother, his extraordinarily brave and resourceful sister and the warm-hearted Egyptian princess. These three women together saved him and played a significant part not only his life but in laying foundations for his leadership of the Hebrews. It is a heart-warming story of great courage, wisdom, quick wit and passionate concern.

The story of Moses and his three mothers reminds us on Mothering Sunday to reflect on maternal feelings and how, at their very best, they can tell us about how God loves us.

Isaiah the prophet wrote

"As a mother comforts a child so will I comfort you, says the Lord."

(Isaiah 66.13)

This view of God as being tenderly aware of our needs is a good counter-balance to the portrait of God as angry, vengeful and stern, as described in many places by the psalmist and the prophets.

And then there was Mary! Motherhood was not easy for her: she was young, inexperienced and unmarried, and her pregnancy was viewed with suspicion. Her baby was born far from home in difficult and dangerous

surroundings. When she took her son to the temple, only days old, Simeon's prophecy for his future was both ominous and exciting. Finally, she suffered the worst thing that can happen to a mother, she had to watch her son die a tortured death. But she clearly had a significant influence on the young Jesus coming to know and understand his destiny. As Thomas Aquinas one said:

As sailors are guided by a star to the port, so Christians are guided to heaven by Mary

The author Honore de Balzac wrote:

"The heart of a mother is a deep abyss at the bottom of which you will always find forgiveness." Now, that is never without pain.

The influence of mothers and motherhood on the development faith, religion, spirituality, creativity, and intuition, cannot be denied and should never be underplayed.

As a man, I obviously have no first-hand experience as a mother. That said, I was raised by one, a mother who was a complex mix of temperament and emotion but (or maybe consequentially) great fun. I have had the enormous privilege of watching my wife grow into the role of mother and provide strong foundations for 3 hooligans. Those experiences have shaped my impressions of motherhood. To me, motherhood means being kind, but honest; being gentle, but strong; being nurturing, but encouraging independence. Motherhood is about creating a sense of wellbeing and safety for your kids, and, when the time comes, motherhood is letting go of the reins to see where the kids go on their own. Motherhood is not for wimps.

The artist [Sarah Walker](#) who calls her work *"tools for recalibrating perception... with which to experience simultaneous, interwoven, contradictory spaces and states of being"*, once described becoming a mother as like discovering the existence of a strange new room in the house where you already live. Everything changes, from joy and attachment to anxiety and protectiveness. They are stark, intimate and emotional changes upon which creative relationships and stability depend.

A child is going to be messy and too loud sometimes. There will be fights and name calling, and an assortment of other things that challenge your patience. But that is childhood. Failures and misbehaviour are part of growing up. You don't love your child any less, just because your child acts like a child -- but what you do is discipline your child.

We are God's children. He doesn't love us less because of our human frailties. But he does discipline us. And that kind of relationship does not require fear and terror, but love and enjoyment.

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4)

We are to glorify God in our lives: simply, enjoying our relationship with the true Lover of our souls, which is best presented to us in the motherhood of God.

Erma Bombeck: is credited with the following journal entry for Mother's Day 12th May 1974:

"When the Good Lord was creating mothers, He was into his sixth day of 'overtime', when an angel appeared and said, "You're doing a lot of fiddling around on this one."

And the Lord said, "Have you read the specs on this order?"

She has to be completely washable, but not plastic; have 180 movable parts... all replaceable; run on black coffee and leftovers;

have a lap that disappears when she stands up; a kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to a disappointed love affair; and six pairs of hands."

The angel shook her head slowly and said, "Six pairs of hands... no way."

"It's not the hands that are causing me problems," said the Lord, "it's the three pairs of eyes that mothers have to have."

"That's on the standard model?" asked the angel.

The Lord nodded. "One pair that sees through closed doors when she asks, 'What are you kids doing in there?' when she already knows. Another here in the back of her head that sees what she shouldn't but what she has to know, and of course the ones here in front that can look at a child when he goofs up and say, 'I understand and I love you' without so much as uttering a word."

Mothering Sunday 2017

Exodus 2. 1-10, 2Corinthians 1. 3-7, Luke 2.33ff

“Lord,” said the angel, touching His sleeve gently, “Go to bed”.

“I can’t,” said the Lord, “I’m so close to creating something so close to myself. Already I have one who heals herself when she is sick... can feed a family of six on one pound of hamburger... and can get a nine-year-old to stand under a shower.”

The angel circled the model of a mother very slowly. “It’s too soft,” she sighed.

“But she’s tough!” said the Lord excitedly. “You cannot imagine what this mother can do or endure.”

“Can it think?”

“Not only can it think, but it can reason and compromise,” said the Creator.

Finally, the angel bent over and ran her finger across the cheek. “There’s a leak,” she pronounced. “I told you, you were trying to push too much into this model.”

“It’s not a leak,” said the Lord. “It’s a tear.”

“What’s it for?”

“It’s for joy, sadness, disappointment, pain, loneliness, and pride.”

“You are a genius,” said the angel.

The Lord looked sombre. ‘I didn’t put it there,’ He said.”

I wonder!

Do you think that was when God discovered HERSELF!!