

From the Chaplain...

The Fourth Sunday of Lent, which falls this weekend, has long been known in the Church as Refreshment or Laetare Sunday. Coming not long after the halfway point in Lent, it was an occasion in medieval times when fasting and other disciplines were relaxed and the penitential mood of the season was lifted. In keeping with this mini-celebration, Christians also developed the practice of returning to their 'mother church', usually the church in which they had received the sacrament of baptism. This practice of 'mothering' persisted after the English Reformation, with people making their way either to the church of their baptism or even to the nearest cathedral, the 'mother church' of the diocese. Latterly, domestic servants were given the day off on Refreshment Sunday, so that they might visit their mother church, as well as their human mothers and other family members.

In more recent times, this Sunday has become commonly known as Mothering Sunday. This is the result of efforts by Constance Adelaide Smith, a devout laywoman in the early twentieth century who campaigned to promote the idea of Christian motherhood in various forms: 'Mother Church', human mothers, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and Mother Nature. And while there is no denying that Mothering Sunday has become highly secularized, in the Church we continue to recognise that motherhood is not just a biological fact but a theological reality. For alongside those who carried us in their wombs are the other 'mothers' in our lives: those who have loved us, nourished us, and encouraged us in the faith. This is surely a day to celebrate them as well.

Please be assured that you all remain in my prayers, and I am always pleased to hear from you. I send you my very best wishes and look forward to seeing you again soon.

Yours faithfully,
Robert

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