

Reflection for Saturday 13 March.

Tomorrow is the Fourth Sunday in Lent. It has various titles: Laetare Sunday , Refreshment Sunday, Mid-Lent Sunday and in many non Catholic Churches, Mothering Sunday. “Laetare” is the Latin for “Rejoice” and is so called, because the opening sentence of the Mass on Sunday begins with “Rejoice Jerusalem.....” A passage from Isaiah.

Many mums will be receiving Mothers’ Day cards and flowers from their children old and young. Mothers’ Day is different from Mothering Sunday. It originated in America and came popular here. In the secular world it has replaced Mothering Sunday. Mothers’ Day is an opportunity for children to show their love and appreciation for their mothers.

But Mothering Sunday goes back a lot further than Mothers’ Day. Something similar to Mothering Sunday may have been observed Roman times. In Christian times we first hear of it in the 16th century. Then it was more to do with the church than with mothers. People would make a journey to their “mother church” once a year on the fourth Sunday in Lent. This might be their home church, their nearest cathedral or major parish church. The Mass that took place at the mother church symbolised the coming together of families.

A later tradition that grew up about the fourth Sunday in Lent was landowners used to allow those working in the fields of wealthy farms and estates in England to have a day off and the young people would go to visit their mothers and go to church. It became a pilgrimage known as “going a – mothering” and became something of a holiday event.

Eventually Mothering Sunday became an opportunity for those with mothers to give them a card and small present normally flowers as thank you.

When I was an Anglican parish priest I used to focus my teaching at the Mass on Mothering Sunday on three mothers. Our Lady as the Mother of the Church and our spiritual Mother, the Church as our mother, and our own mothers. All the children used to receive a posy of flowers to give to their mothers and all the ladies in church were also given a posy so that those who weren’t mothers or whose children were no longer living near them were not left out. In one of my parishes a lady would make a large simnel cake, part of the Mothering Sunday tradition, and we would all have a small piece after the Mass with our coffee.

Fr Naz will be wearing rose-pink vestments at Mass instead of the purple or violet ones, reminding us we can relax our Lenten rule slightly before we go into the Passiontide part of Lent. Enjoy your Laetare Sunday.

Roger Watson