

Sermon for Mothering Sunday 22nd March 2020

Readings: Ephesians 5: 8-14 and John 9: 1-41

Celtic Saint: Brigid of Kildare



In normal times, **Mothering Sunday** is a real festival of family. It's a time for families to get together, to say thank you to mums for all their too-often taken-for-granted work, and to celebrate together across the generations. These are not normal times, of course, and there are huge limitations on the amount of getting together we can do. Isolation has become both a virtue and a necessity, and it's really painful to think that usual expressions of affection bring potential for harm and disease. Many face stressful dilemmas about how best to care for elderly or infirm parents, or how to look after children released from school without putting grandparents in harm's way. In other years on Mothering Sunday, I have stressed it's originally about mother church, and emphasised the church family and how we care for one another. Today, we are still one church family; we have to find ways of being church without meeting together. We continue to care, through phone calls, through offers of help, through our prayers in our homes and through our continuing quest to follow God's ways in challenging times.

We chose **Brigid of Kildare** as our 'Celtic saint of the day' for Mothering Sunday because she was legendary for her compassion, her generosity and her hospitality.

'Legendary' may be the right word: historically we only know she was born around 450 and died in 525, and she was abbess of the monastery of Kildare. Other stories are more legend than fact. One of my favourites is that, when she asked for a bishop's blessing when she became a nun, he was so

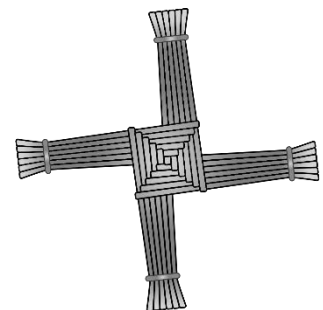
overwhelmed by her saintliness he accidentally used instead the words of consecration of a bishop. So – a first woman bishop in Ireland! Her feast day of 1st February, is traditionally marked in Ireland by making crosses out of rushes and placing them around the home, in the doorways, and especially in outhouses and other places coming back into use after the winter. The crosses and associated prayers are to bless the home, to ward off evil and to keep the home safe, both spiritually and physically. Here's one such prayer:

Circle this place by day and by night.

Keep far from it all that harms, bring to it all that is good.

May this place be fragrant with the presence of the Lord.

God's peace be always here, and in those who dwell here.



Remember there are no no-go areas for God – no physical places where he is excluded, and no areas of our lives where he cannot be found. It's worth consciously bringing him in: it's remarkable how easy it is, sub-consciously, to think God can't go there, God isn't interested here, or this is beyond God's capacity to redeem. As we remember St Brigid, welcome God's love in the whole of your home and the whole of your life, and turn away all evil.

That sense of the pervasiveness of God's presence comes across in our two readings today. St Paul appeals to the Christians in Ephesus to let **the light of Christ** into their whole lives and to live in that light. At home, when the sun finally comes out, all the dust on the floor and the smears on the windows reveal how long it is since I last did any house work! In the same way, Christ's light exposes everything – you can't keep secrets or pretences when that light shines; so make sure what's revealed is good! In the Gospel, Jesus cleans out a blind-man's eyes and admits the light. But the Pharisees are shown up for their prejudices, their grudging desire to find fault, and their complete lack of spiritual insight. They remain mired in sin because of they will not open their eyes: they think they can see already. For the man born blind, on the other hand, spiritual vision emerges as he learns about and responds to the man who has healed him. He believes. He worships. His life is transformed.

These are dark days for ourselves, our country and the world – there's no denying it. Nevertheless, Christ's followers are called to **walk in the light**. And Christ's light does not flicker or gutter or fade. As individuals, as church, and as society, the crisis and our response to it will show us up – whether we respond at our best or at our worst. Will we sink into selfishness, small-mindedness, and negativity? Will we be consumed with our own problems or will we really look to the wider good? Will we keep the discipline of saying thank you and being thankful, or succumb to grumpiness? Will we be creative in finding ways to share love without sharing infection? Whilst we cannot simply wish the difficulties away, can we remain hope-filled people, knowing the future is in the hands of the Lord who loves us? Will we as the church sink under the weight of problems, or will we rise and be good news in this community and across the land?

We have seen the light of Christ. May we walk in that light and live as children of the light, at this time, and always.

