

Mothers' Pain

I saw two television interviews recently in which mothers told of their heartbreak at the actions of their sons. In both cases the men were radicalised and joined terrorist groups. Both committed terrible atrocities and were killed. One came from a normal white British family and joined El-Shabaab in Kenya. The other, from Georgia, joined ISIS in Syria. His mother even went to Syria to try to persuade him to return, but without success; and to make matters worse his brother joined him and was also killed.

Both mothers could not understand how their sons could have changed so dramatically. For that was not how they were brought up. As mothers they still loved their sons but could never condone their actions. They will continue to live with the pain but speak out in the hope that other mothers will not have to go through the same ordeal.

These are of course extreme cases, though sadly not uncommon. Many more mothers experience pain in other ways that affect their children: illness, disability, death. Today the Church celebrates the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the supreme mother. And she too experienced pain.

The Gospels tell us nothing of her birth or childhood. Yet she is chosen to be the mother of Jesus, the Son of God. Despite her young age she accepts that task willingly and faithfully. Her feelings must surely have been a mixture of joy and trepidation.

In our Bible reading just now (Luke 2.22, 25-35) we heard of Mary and Joseph bringing Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem to be presented. There they meet Simeon who utters great hope for the child. Yet he also includes a note of foreboding: Jesus will be "a sign that will be opposed" and then, addressing Mary: "a sword will pierce your own soul too".

Mary will feel the full weight of those words as she stands by the cross, seeing her son die a painful, cruel and humiliating death. Apart from John his disciples desert him, but Mary and the other women are faithful to the end. And her faithfulness is soon rewarded with the knowledge of her son and Lord's resurrection.

Mothers suffer at the bad actions of their children. As in the case of Mary they can also suffer when their children do good but are injured or die as a result. We see here human love at its strongest – a reflection of God's love. The idea of redemption through suffering is not an easy one to comprehend but it is one that gives us hope.

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