

## Console

18 3 12

God of compassion,  
whose Son, Jesus Christ, the child of Mary,  
shared the life of a home in Nazareth,  
and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself:  
strengthen us in our daily living  
that in joy and in sorrow  
we may know the power of your presence  
to bind together and to heal.

Today's text may be found in the Paul's Second Letter to the church at Corinth, chapter 1 verse 7: 'as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.'

It's great to be back. I love being in Dinard as the Priest-in-charge of St Bartholomew's but it's also good to be here with you, my church family in Potters Bar. Today is Mothering Sunday and I want to touch briefly on our three mothers, a trinity of mothers in fact: our mum who is/was married to our dad; the Blessed Virgin Mary who was married to St Joseph; and our Mother the Church who is married to Christ. And to help me explore a little of the truth about our three mothers, I have chosen as a text the last verse from today's Epistle from 2 Corinthians: 'as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.'

Paul is writing to a community that he helped found and spent time nurturing. Even though they are now apart, the members of the church at Corinth are not far from Paul's thoughts. And one of the thoughts Paul wants to share with them, and by extension with us, is the bond which binds all of us all as Christians together. That bond is the fact of sharing: we share in the suffering and in the joy that comes from a faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour; that he loves us; that we are loved by him; and that the cost and the measure of that love is his crucifixion on Good Friday. So at the heart of our faith is a recognition that living, being alive and being awake, will involve us all in a degree of pain and sorrow and suffering. But at the same time, we are not alone: he is with us and the consolation of our faith in an ever-present, always-loving God is the best encouragement anyone can have.

So let me turn to our three mothers and apply that thought: that they 'share in our suffering' and 'in our consolation'.

The great thing about our mothers in the flesh is that they really know who we are and what we are. They have spent quality time with us in a way no other person can. To them, we are someone who grew in their womb. They fed and clothed and nurtured us as children and as young adults they let us go to grow up as individuals and grow away from them. But they felt for us when we hurt ourselves or fell ill and they consoled us with a hug or with their wisdom when life got tough or difficult.

The great thing about the BVM is not whether or not her conception was immaculate or her assumption into heaven immediate but that she was a young woman, a person, a real human being who said yes to God. She was pregnant by the power of God overshadowing her and she gave birth to the boy Jesus. In his life and through his death, Mary suffered with and for her son. On reflection, it must have been consoling, a source of some comfort, that at the foot of the cross, Jesus should entrust her to his beloved disciple, John. But Simeon's words in the Temple when Jesus was a 40-day-old baby were an accurate prophecy of her suffering: a sword indeed pierced her heart as she watches her boy die naked in public and as she cradles his dead body one last time in her arms. That Mary knew suffering and consolation makes her as the Mother of God, Theotokos, the God-bearer, as someone we as Christians can turn to as any child might turn, to his mother because as human being like us she knows where we are coming from.

The great thing about our Mother the Church is not the fact that it is an institution, a remote structure of Bishops and Archbishops, synods and diocesan offices somewhere near the Abbey but that Mother Church is made up of people like ourselves. Together, we are there for each other. We are all human beings. We all know about pain and suffering and the joy of being together. And together we are there for each other supporting each other when and where necessary.

I hope that helps. It helps me. It helps to know our faith is real not wishful thinking or a fairy story. True we will all live happily ever after but in the process of getting there, there will be tears and pain among the smiles, laughter and joy.

There is consolation knowing we are not suffering alone or without a purpose.  
Thank God, then, for our trinity of mothers.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Parish Eucharist*

*St Mary the Virgin and All Saints', Potters Bar*

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H: Sermon 25: Console

