

# I O U

10 3 13

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.

Our text is from today's gospel and is John chapter 19 and verses 25 and 26:  
When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her,  
he said to his mother, 'Woman here is your son'. Then he said to the disciple  
'Here is your mother.'

It's good to be back 'home'. In fact, it's great to be back here at St Mary's on Mothers' Day, on Mothering Sunday. And I'd like to start by asking you a question. Have you ever played cards? Okay – but have you ever played cards for money? Have you ever played cards for money and lost? And have you ever had to write an IOU because you didn't have enough money on you and you were now in debt? And it's through the idea of being in debt that I'd like to look at Mothers' Day today.

Today's gospel is a famous passage from John's account of the crucifixion. Even though Jesus is in pain and is clearly suffering, he actually makes a real effort and takes the time and trouble to think of other people, two other people, both of whom he loves. One is his mother, Mary; one is his friend, John, who's writing this gospel. He wants them to look after each other when he's gone so he gets Mary to adopt John as her son and gets John to adopt Mary as his mum – now is that sweet or what? And it is through this relationship of mother and son, parent and child, that I'd like to explore the question of debt, of what we owe each other.

What do we owe our mum's? Simple – only the most important thing ever – our lives, the fact that we are alive. Nine months they carried us in their womb and, thereafter, they have fed and clothed us, kept us warm and given us a loving home where we can feel cherished and wanted. They have helped us to be the people we are meant to be. Now I'm not sure what that costs in terms of cash but it is a gift from them to us which I guess we can never directly repay.

What do our mum's owe us? Interesting question that, the thought our parents are also in debt to us. I know it sounds odd but I think in a way we their children help them to grow up, to be real adults and to find fulfilment as fully rounded individuals. Through us, they meet one of the prime reasons for being alive: to give life to others and then to nurture that life in a family. Without us, their children, they can't be parents so we are a gift to them as they are a gift to us – our love is mutual.

And that's what we have here with Mary and John – a mutually loving relationship in which the young man is going to look after the older woman and she in turn is going to look after him. Jesus loved them both and now both of them can love him through their love of each other. That is what life is all about, our debt to each other, our IOUs of love.

Okay, so we all know we all owe our mums so much as children – and our dads too ! But surprisingly, they are equally grateful to us and for us, their children, whom they love and want to cherish. It's nice to know what we owe because then we know just how much we are worth in someone else's eyes.

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

*Preached at the Family Eucharist*

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

*17<sup>th</sup> March, 2013*

G: Sermon 27 : re I O U

