

“BEHOLD YOUR SON, BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER”

“While the soldiers were looking after themselves, Jesus’ mother, his aunt, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene stood at the foot of the cross. Jesus saw his mother and the disciple he loved standing near her. He said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” Then to the disciple, “here is your mother.” From that moment the disciple accepted her as his own mother.” *John 19:24-27*

These simple words can be thought of on so many different levels. I like to think of those words as a loving gesture by Jesus to his Mother and to the disciple. It is Jesus saying “My human existence may be ending, but love and loving relationships go on.” His words remind us of the importance of family, even if it is a family created by love and not by blood. Jesus is reminding us from the cross of the human need for togetherness. We are family – without loving relationships we have no existence.

Like many of you I suspect, I was raised on rugged individualism, with just a tad of community responsibility thrown in. The mottos of my childhood were “there is no such thing as a free lunch, you got yourself into this mess, now get yourself out of it, no one owes you anything, clean up after yourself, it’s your responsibility, you have a problem – you figure it out, don’t expect other people to do your work – and on and on. I believed them all and, to some extent, still do. My Presbyterian Church up-bringing bolstered this outlook. The saved and the damned were predestined by God and by our lives we showed to which group we belonged. God had set the stage, there was nothing I could do about it – or needed to do about it! As John D. Rockefeller said in an often-quoted Presbyterian Sunday school class which he taught: A rose is a beautiful flower, but to bring it to perfection the other buds have to be sacrificed.” There was never any doubt about who was the rose and who might be the sacrificial and inferior buds!

But here we have Jesus, on the cross, establishing a new relationship based on love and necessity. By extension, Jesus is telling us, from the cross, what he often said in his ministry, we humans are all family. A difficult and cantankerous family, sometimes a murderous one, but a family none the less. We are not alone. In Christendom, we are bound to one another by our common faith, no matter how dissimilar our practices. To be Christian is to be in a community. Not even a priest may celebrate the mass alone – there must be others present and participating.

And what of those outside our faith? They too are members of the human family. Just as the Jew Paul presented to the gentiles the love of Christ, so we are charged to bring that love to all who share our fragile island home. Through love and prayer – words and actions, we are today’s missionaries. I sometimes look in the mirror and say “God save the church.”

From the cross Jesus said: “Behold your son, behold your mother.” We are all sons – we are all mothers. Amen.