

Easter 7 Sun (B)

13<sup>th</sup> May 2018

“Mary, Mother of the Church”

*Acts 1: a witness to the resurrection ... Matthias*

*1Jn 4: we can know that we are living in him because He lets us share His Spirit*

*Jn 17: 11–19: As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world ...*

This is the first time for about 12 years that we have been celebrating the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter at all! Because from 2007 onwards, until last year, we were in the habit of transferring the Ascension away from its proper day, Thursday (the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Easter), to the following Sunday. But in fact, I want to speak today about Mary — to mark, on one Sunday of May, the importance of our devotion to the Blessed Mother. Not that this is disconnected with the present season. We know, from the Acts of the Apostles, that Our Lady was there in Jerusalem with the Apostles, united in prayer with them after the Ascension in those days leading up to Pentecost. She was, in effect, Mother to the Apostolic Church, just as Our Lord indicated to St John from the Cross: “Behold your Mother!” Not just in the physical or emotional sense of being close to them, but in the strongest sense also spiritually: she was, and is, a tangible link to the very humanity of the Son of God made

man. It was truly from her that Our Lord took human flesh, and so her place in the plan of God is unique and irreplaceable! But far more than being His mother, of course, she was also Jesus’s first and more faithful disciple. In this sense, then, one cannot imagine her being anywhere other than at the very heart of the early Church of the apostles, as they choose Matthias to replace Judas as the new 12<sup>th</sup> apostle, and as they await the coming of the Holy Spirit in power from Jesus on high.

So significant is the idea of Our Lady at the heart of the Church at its beginnings that Pope Francis has instituted a new feast for the Church for the day after Pentecost: ‘Mary, Mother of the Church.’ It’ll be nice to celebrate that for the first time on Monday 21<sup>st</sup>. Most artistic representations of Pentecost depict Our Lady right at the centre, when the Holy Spirit comes in power to bring the Church to birth. The connection between Pentecost and her new feast, Mother of the Church, is quite clear.

As Mother of the Church, Mary is also the mother of each and every Christian, our blessed mother in heaven.

The Catholic Church, as well as the Orthodox Churches of the East, have always held Our Lady in high regard throughout history, and encouraged the faithful to align themselves closely with the Mother of God. And although the Christian denominations arising from the Reformation have historically downplayed Our Lady's role, yet in fact in the Anglican tradition there remain some keen strands of Marian devotion, which provide wonderful opportunities for ecumenical initiatives. For example, in the shrine village of Mary in Walsingham there is close collaboration between Anglicans and Catholics; a sign of hope! And when I was in Chichester a couple of months ago, I saw the Anglican cathedral there: the Lady Chapel was just beautiful, and a most prayerful space. Likewise, in St Albans Anglican cathedral, it's been in the Lady Chapel that they've allowed a weekly Catholic Mass to be celebrated for over 20yrs now. Mary, 'Mother of the Church,' is, as any mother, keen to reconcile her children to one another, so maybe it's no surprise that where the tenderness of Marian devotion flourishes expressions of unity also exist.

We should pay attention to our honour and prayer to Mary, especially in her months of May and October. It was so beautiful, on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of May, in the sunshine, to be able to pray the rosary in the courtyard of St Cross school with some of the children, led by their Chaplaincy team. Prayer to/with Mary should indeed be a beautiful and uplifting, consoling thing. She is our heavenly mother, sharing already in all the blessings of eternal life. But that doesn't stop her being also a flesh-and-blood, human, mother, who had more than her fair share of sufferings. That's surely why we feel drawn to turn to her in our necessities, and our sadnesses. She shared in the horror of the Cross as she stood by Jesus her Son as he died. So, she understands what faith it demands to stay close to Christ. But she knows, better than any other human being, that the rewards outweigh the pain. Mary urges us to unite our prayers with her to the Father and the Son, that the trials of life be overcome by His grace, and the blessings we need from heaven be implored. *Mary, heavenly Mother of every Christian, pray for us now and at the hour of our death.*