

Dear friends,

Tropical rainforests, cool and damp cloud forests, porcupines, sloths, capuchin monkeys, snakes, crocodiles, caimans, kayaking through mangrove swamps, zip-lining through the jungle canopy, tubing down the Rio Celeste, swimming in the warm Pacific ocean – this was a great way to combine my 61st birthday and ninth wedding anniversary together. I kept healthy all the way through until the very last day and I don't recommend a ten hour flight with an upset stomach to anyone I can assure you. Still, back in the U.K. we were greeted with re-assuring rain, a doctor's strike and a row about impartiality at the BBC – nothing much changed while we were away. So now, after my first taste of the Americas we are striving to catch up as we all do after a holiday of any kind and getting to grips with the job in hand!

Lent course

Our Lent course got off to a great start last night and we listened to Fr. Richard giving a great overview of the Franciscan "alternative orthodoxy" within the catholic tradition. The course is not always on the same night every week – a mixture of Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The course is based on Richard Rohr's book "The Universal Christ". Fr. Richard comes from a radical Mystical and contemplative school of catholic theology in the same vein and stable as Julian of Norwich, William Blake and Thomas Merton and while you don't need to have necessarily read the book, it would give a solid background to the course and is £9.55 for a paperback copy or under a Fiver for a Kindle version. The dates are as follows.

Lent Course. – The Universal Christ

Everything is sacred

4 session course. All sessions start at 7pm.

Tuesday 14th March – The four worldviews

Wednesday 22nd March – Spiritual transformation.

Tuesday 28th March – Christ is everywhere

Wednesday 5th April – Contemplation

Sunday 19th March – Mothering Sunday

I will be presiding at both services at St. Peter's and Canon Mike Williams will be presiding at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30am and 11am respectively. We have a guest speaker at the 10am service at St. Peter's this morning from Interserve who sponsor our mission partners in Cambodia and the children from Funfaith will distribute flowers to all the women in the congregation today.

Exodus 2: 1-10. This story serves the function of explaining how Moses, a Hebrew child grew up in Pharaoh's court, but also serves as a story of maternal care and female love and care for a child that transcends ethnic rivalry (All Hebrew males had been ordered to be killed remember) and this aspect is why it is a favourite to be used for Mothering Sunday.

Colossians 3: 12-17. An uncomplicated list of virtues that include humility and patience but all subservient to Love. It is an open question as to whether the word of Christ refers to his teaching or whether "giving thanks to God the Father through him" refers to the Eucharist.

Luke 2: 33-35. The famous prophesy of Simeon that foretells the pain and anguish that lies ahead for Mary. Luke is the origin of the cult of Mary and the many medieval works of art that centre on her suffering. Chosen for Mothering Sunday it injects a note of realism and a counterpoint of suffering and death to the day.

Thought for the day – Pura Vida

Many people know that Bhutan, the tiny Himalayan kingdom measures its success not in terms of economics – GDP (Gross Domestic product) – but in terms of national well-being – Gross domestic happiness. Costa Rica has a similar concept known as Pura Vida – Pure Life. Pura Vida is a state of mind and you'll hear it said umpteen times in greetings, departures, or just as a general comment. Costa Rica has no army, it was abolished many years ago and all the money saved put into health care and education. They are self sufficient in clean energy and amongst the most bio-diverse countries in the world. Relatively prosperous and democratic, eco-tourism is now their biggest international earner. In terms of economics of course they would probably be characterised as 3rd or second world, but in terms of national well-being they rate as high or higher as any first world country. It is an old adage that money can't buy happiness, but that doesn't stop us continually

trying to prove the adage wrong. Looking at the UK and Costa Rica side by side in terms of economics it is plain that we are much better off than them. In terms of well-being and happiness it is much more debatable. It makes you re-think your priorities.

The prayer for Today.

One of the dangers of Mothering Sunday is that that everything becomes too saccharine and real hurts and problems with relationships are ignored or glossed over. These intercessions composed by Katharine Smith sets that record straight.

Loving God, our heavenly Father, in our worship today we say thank you for all that our mothers are to us and for all that they do for us.

But we also know that for some people this is a difficult day holding hurt, grief and perhaps anger. We pray that you will draw alongside those who are hurting today to comfort them and surround them with your tender care.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We pray:

- for women who grieve because they are unable to have the children they so long to hold and love.
- for mothers who grieve because, like Mary, they have had to see their child die too soon.
- for mothers who grieve because they are cut off from their children by disappointment, anger or bitterness.
- for mothers who are worried or afraid for their child's well-being or safety.

We ask you, heavenly Father, to bring healing, comfort, forgiveness and peace into the hearts and minds of hurting mothers.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We pray:

- for children who grieve because they have lost their mother through illness, accident or violence.
- for children whose mothers have been unable to give them the love and care they need so that they now live in families and homes which are not their own.
- for children who are still living in homes that are unsafe and with adults who cannot put the child's needs before their own.
- for children who through hardship and poverty are not being provided with an adequate diet or basic medical care.

We ask you, heavenly Father, to bring love and security, courage and hope into the lives of hurting children today.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

We ask you heavenly Father, to bring healing and forgiveness into the lives of all those for whom today brings back painful memories of broken relationships and loss.

Help us all to find in the brothers and sisters of Christ a loving family with whom we may show your love and tender care for all your hurting children.

Lord, in your mercy
hear our prayer.

Loving God, trusting in your promise to hear us when we pray in faith, we ask you to bless all our relationships in the families of our homes, our church and our communities so that through our lives your loving will for us may be done.

Merciful Father,
**accept these prayers
for the sake of your Son,
our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Love and peace,
Martin