

Today is Mothering Sunday – giving thanks for our mothers, and praying for our mothers, living and departed – and yet the readings all seem to be about men – fathers and sons, younger brothers and older brothers, God reconciling the world to himself in the man Jesus Christ, and in the psalm, a poor man calling “*from all my terrors set me free*”.

Is the Church irredeemably patriarchal? Or, worse still, is the Church a bit like the elder son refusing to have anything to do with the new-fangled ideas of gender and sexual identity, standing in judgement over all those whose relationships don't seem to match up to the full teaching of the Catholic Church?

The core message surely is reconciliation – the father, the parent, seeing the errant son *a long way off*, running to him, *clasping him in his arms and kissing him tenderly. This son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.* This is the Gospel, God in his infinite love and mercy reconciling everybody and everything to Himself.

But we are *a long way off*. Our lifestyles, our attitudes, our motivations are all *a long way off*, our personal relationships, our commitment to family, to church, to humanity, all need reconciliation and healing.

The Church is *a long way off* too, a long way off from the God who loves us, and a long way off from a humanity that is so often crying out in distress, a humanity that has lost its moorings, a humanity for which religious observance is no longer the norm.

So, let's move beyond gender and sexuality, beyond mothering and fathering. God is running towards us, whoever we are and wherever we are.

God wants to throw his arms around us, to clasp us to his or her bosom, to kiss us tenderly. God wants the Church to be reconciled within itself. God wants the Church to be open and welcoming to all. No one is excluded. God is literally dying to bring humanity back.

But we do need to make the first move.

Are we prepared to make the first move, to *come to our senses*? Can we see how blind we have been, how foolish we have been, trying to feed off the husks in the pigsty, how closed in on ourselves we have been?

“Father”/parent/mother, “*I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called*” your child.

God is already running towards us.

*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*

We are with Joshua and the people of Israel on the very cusp of the Promised Land. The fatted calf has been slaughtered. *We are going to have a feast, a celebration.* The milk and honey, and wine, will be flowing. *Exult and be satisfied at her consoling breast.*