

Today, in case you have not noticed it, is Mothering Sunday, or as the commercial world has rebranded it, Mothers Day. On this day in our thoughts and prayers we thank God for those who brought us to birth, who watched over us as we grew, absorbed the temper tantrums of our childhood and adolescence, who offered words of advice, comfort and encouragement. While gratitude should be an all the year affair, this is a day for showing particular gratitude and affection.

But mothers and motherhood is not the whole story of Mothering Sunday, In the early days of the Church, there was a custom on this 4th Sunday in Lent for Christians to visit the church in which they were baptised. It was more than just a matter of nostalgia; it was a return to their roots. So in our prayers this morning we will be thinking of our own mother church, the church in which we were baptised. We will be thinking of not just the building but the community that gathers there to worship. We will be thinking of the people who were important to us in those early formative years; Sunday School teachers, those who lead the organisations we may have belonged to, the clergy, those who encouraged us, who welcomed us. I still remember with huge affection one particular couple in St Lawrence's in Northfield in Birmingham, where I was baptised and to which I returned many years later as a tentative seeker. I invite you to be still and recall the people and places in your early Christian life.

Today we are baptising Emma Rose Sweetman – so this Church, St Mary's in the Parish of Howth will be Emma's mother Church. This will be the community within which, along with her sister Lucy, she will have her first

experience of Christian community, as their Mum and Dad, Colm and Hazel, bring them Sunday by Sunday. You and I will be the people she will remember, the welcome we give, the encouragement, the fellowship we offer.

In the course of the service, Linda will baptise her, as we were baptised in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. She will sign Emma with the sign of the Cross, as we were signed at our own Baptism.

Today, on this Mothering Sunday, as we think back to our mother Church, the place of our Baptism; (as we witness Emma's Baptism) this is a day to reflect on the Cross imprinted on our foreheads and the promises to be made on Emma's behalf, the promises made on our behalf, the promises we make our own at Confirmation.

Do you reject the devil and all rebellion against God?

I reject them.

Do you renounce the deceit and corruption of evil?

I renounce them.

Do you repent of the sins that separate us from God and neighbour?

I repent of them.

Do you turn to Christ as Saviour?

I turn to Christ.

Do you submit to Christ as Lord?

I submit to Christ.

Do you come to Christ, the way, the truth and the life?

I come to Christ.

Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury as I was growing up, used to talk of his life being lived in response to his Baptism, of these questions being a yardstick for life – he would ask himself his baptismal questions from time to time, questions touching upon his loyalty to Christ, his rejection of evil.

Receive the sign of the Cross. Cast your mind back to that time before you could remember, when you were marked with the sign of the cross, the symbol of our redemption.

Do not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified.

***All* Fight valiantly as a disciple of Christ
against sin, the world and the devil,
and remain faithful to Christ to the end of your life.**

May this be a day for reflection on our own Christian pilgrimage – whether it began in Howth or Sutton, in Athy or Drogheda, in Rosenallis, in Birmingham or wherever. There will have been highs and lows along that road, times of trial, of sadness and failure, times of great joy – God has been with us, in his Spirit or in those who have touched our lives.

This day you remember the people who were special to you, who encouraged you, who still encourage you – in their presence or in your memory. In years to come, how will Emma look back on this her mother Church? May her memories be of a community of welcome, of encouragement – where she has encountered Christ in worship and in one another and so be empowered to go out herself and show Christ to the world in which she lives.