

Friends

The other day I was asked why Mothers' Day is during Lent. It's a very good question because it is somewhat odd that after four weeks of Lenten abstinence, we should suddenly call a halt in order to give flowers and chocolates to our mothers, or wrestle with all the complexity of feeling around the day based on our own experiences. It's not an easy day for some, so why do we have it? Why is it marked in the Church in a far more significant way than Fathers' Day is? Why do we have it in Lent?

When I first came to Windsor there were still two of our members who remembered the days when it was usual for young teens to go out to service. They would go to the local big house, or sometimes further afield, and they would start work as a live in scullery maid or gardener's lad. They would continue in this path, gaining increasing mastery in their tasks and eventually, if they were lucky, working their way up to Housekeeper or Cook, Butler or Chief Gardener. If they ended up in a good house, with kind people, it was a steady and secure life. However, they didn't get to go home often, and the big feast days were "all hands on deck" occasions. Originating in the 16th century, on the fourth Sunday of Lent, people were given the day off to return to their mother church – the church in which they were baptised. It allowed for family reunions, a break in the harshness of Lent, and a small holiday to prepare for the solemnity of Holy Week and the big celebrations of Easter.

The idea of having a thanksgiving for mothers was an American idea following a campaign by Anna Jarvis, whose own mother had founded "Mother's Day Work Clubs" to promote public health. After her mother's death, Anna wanted to commemorate her mother's work in some way and held the first official "Mother's Day Service" in 1908. By 1914, she had persuaded President Woodrow Wilson to make it an official holiday. It rapidly became extremely commercial, greatly upsetting Anna. However, the idea of honouring mothers was picked up in the UK at a time when the need for "Mothering Sunday" was dying out with the big family houses, and so we kept the date, but the tradition changed.

God bless, Vicci