

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

This week we celebrated the patronal feast of the parish. Our parish is dedicated to Our Lady and our parish church houses a beautiful small shrine which not only enjoys the devotion of the people of Caversham but which attracts pilgrims from further away. On Thursday last it was the altar on the right hand aisle on which our attention was focused: it is dedicated to St. Anne and has a touching wood carving of Mary being taught by her mother. Thursday was the feast of SS. Joachim and Anne, parents of the Virgin Mary. Our church is dedicated to daughter and mother in that order. Our reflection on Thursday, in the light of the scripture readings the Church put before us on this feast, was more on the way in which mother may have influenced daughter and shaped her own worldview. Joachim hardly gets a look in!

We frequently think about the religious and social vision which Mary of Nazareth may have passed on to her son. There are strong traces of the aspirations and longings articulated by Mary in the *Magnificat* (Lk. 1, 46 - 56) in the proclamation of the kingdom of God central to the teaching of her adult son (Mk. 4, 16 - 22). We know nothing about Mary's home life, and the names Joachim and Anne given by tradition to her parents have no historical support. We can presume that Mary was born in Galilee, that she had siblings and that her family was devout in its practice of the Jewish faith. [Mary and/or Joseph coming from large families might explain (Mt. 12, 46 - 50) *his mother and his brothers standing outside*]). The statues we possess of Anne and Mary depict the mother teaching her daughter out of a book they are both perusing: the assumption, a questionable one historically, is that both women were literate. The charming paintings of Anne and Mary by Eugene Delacroix and Jean Jouvenet portray mother teaching her daughter, devoutly kneeling, to read from what look like parchment rolls of scripture.

The feast of SS. Joachim and Anne incites us to reflect on how much of a child's formation, moral, intellectual and religious, takes place in the family home. It also reminds us of the vocation of parents: the nourishment and education of their children. In the case of Mary, her son Jesus was the indirect beneficiary of the education her parents had provided their daughter and the home in which she had grown up. And given that cross-generational solidarity is a value we promote and cherish in this parish where so many children attend our liturgies, and especially those of Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation [the Sacraments of Initiation], accompanied by parents and grandparents, the significance of our patronal feast is particularly important. It was nice to see so many people at Mass on Thursday evening, it was lovely to find the choir in such good form, but it was above all the way our patron saints enabled us to reflect on the family values we strive to bolster, and the separate vocation to family which each generation uniquely possesses, that was most important.

Father Patrick