

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

5th May 2021

Traditionally within the Church, May is 'Mary's month'. The practice of special devotions during this month to Mary, mother of Jesus, originated in the thirteenth century possibly as an attempt to give a Christian perspective to various long-standing customs such as crowning a May Queen.

Today we come from a variety of traditions and our thoughts about Mary may be similarly diverse. Nevertheless we possibly all agree with the title of a series of lectures at the Cathedral some years ago that there is 'Something about Mary'.

There is very little about Mary in the Bible. Of the Gospel writers, St Luke tells us the most. It is his Gospel that we find accounts of the Annunciation, of Mary's visit to her cousin Elizabeth, of the Presentation in the temple (Candlemas) and of the twelve year-old Jesus being found in the temple by his anxious parents. After that she more or less drops out of the story. Luke doesn't name her as being present at the crucifixion. However, significantly, he tells us in Acts that she was with the disciples at Pentecost.

Elisabeth Frink's sculpture 'The Walking Madonna' stands outside Salisbury Cathedral facing away from it and towards the city. Frink described Mary as 'walking with purposeful compassion as a member of the Community of the Risen Christ to bring love where love is absent'. When the sculpture was installed in 1981, the Dean of Salisbury at the time wrote: 'This figure symbolises ... human dignity and creativity over militarism and totalitarian disregard for human dignity and rights.'



Frink's figure is strong and full of determination. It may challenge how we normally imagine Mary indicating that we may need to overcome some preconceptions or even prejudices before we can discover what Mary might mean to us.

The American theologian, Bonnie Thurston, begins her poem, *Mater Misericordiae*, with these words:

I came to our Lady late
thoroughly put off
by a protestant childhood,
and ages of bad art;
rich Renaissance drapery,
fat, satisfied looking
low country burgers wives,
cherubly gilded Madonnas,
modern blonds
in blue nightgowns.

At the end of the poem she writes:

I came to our Lady late
and lively love her.

For Bonnie Thurston it is the realisation that Mary would not recognise herself in any of the those pictures that brings about this change of heart. Instead Mary would see herself as a refugee, a mother worn down by care, anxious about her child. For Thurston as for Frink it is the identification of Mary with the suffering of the world which is important. This is one way to see Mary. There are many others.

Perhaps this May we might spend some time pondering what that 'something about Mary' might be for each one of us.

With love and prayers

Camilla