

## **Views from the Pews: Biblical mothers**

In ancient times, mothers were thought of as only the fields in which men planted their seeds, and the primary function of a mother was to provide the soil needed for a child to grow in. There was no suggestion that a mother's own characteristics might be passed on to the child. Wars in Biblical times were exercises in selective extermination; the conquered were simply wiped out, and their culture erased. The victors were likely to be the side with the largest army, which added urgency to the ancient struggle for the production of sons. In Num. 31:17-18, after a victory over the Midianites in which every male was killed and their women and children taken captive, Moses commanded that all the adult women and boys among the defeated Midianites should be killed. "But all the young girls who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves". The young girls were spared because they could contribute to the number of children sired by the victors, without contaminating Israel with the characters or cultural traditions of their own people.

Hebrew society believed that 'Abraham's seed' passed only down the male line. The Old Testament writers had clearly made the connection between what they euphemistically referred to as "the loins" of their men and the inheritance of a father's particular characters. In Hebrews 7: 9-10, the author refers to Abraham as being "still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him". For fathers, the ultimate blessing was a large brood of sons brought up as strong young men ready to join the army. For mothers, what mattered most was the survival and welfare of all their children. Hebrew mothers would do anything to protect them, even at the cost of their own motherhood. So, the Levite woman stood back and allowed Pharaoh's daughter to adopt her baby son Moses, and Hannah gave up her longed-for son Samuel for Temple training. During Lent, we especially remember and give thanks for Mary the mother of Jesus, who carried him through his childhood, supported his ministry, and eventually, stoically, stood with him at the foot of his cross.

That same spirit of patient, costly dedication to their children has animated mothers throughout the ages. Mothering Sunday is an old tradition of the Church by which we can joyfully and thankfully recognise what we all owe to our own mothers.

*Kim King*