

Mothering Sunday



Mums are traditionally given flowers

Mothering Sunday is the fourth Sunday of **Lent**. Although it's often called Mothers' Day it has no connection with the American festival of that name. Traditionally, it was a day when children, mainly daughters, who had gone to work as domestic servants were given a day off to visit their mother and family. Today it is a day when children give presents, flowers, and home-made cards to their mothers.

History of Mothering Sunday

Most Sundays in the year churchgoers in England worship at their nearest parish or 'daughter church'. Centuries ago it was considered important for people to return to their home or 'mother' church once a year. So each year in the middle of Lent, everyone would visit their 'mother' church - the main church or Cathedral of the area.

Inevitably the return to the 'mother' church became an occasion for family reunions when children who were working away returned home. (It was quite common in those days for children to leave home for work once they were ten years old.)

And most historians think that it was the return to the 'Mother' church which led to the tradition of children, particularly those working as domestic servants, or as apprentices, being given the day off to visit their mother and family. As they walked along the country lanes, children would pick wild flowers or violets to take to church or give to their mother as a small gift.

Children of the Gospel

Another thought is that the name comes from one of the Bible readings for that day, which refers to motherhood in a different way.

But the Jerusalem which is above is free,
which is the mother of us all,
Galatians 4:26

The writer of the text wanted to explain to the Galatian community what their relationship as Christians was to the Jewish Law. In the full passage (Galatians 4:21-31), the two children born by Hagar and Sarah to Abraham are seen as symbolising two promises from God. One is the Law (or Torah), which is restraining and earthly. The other is the Gospel, which is spiritual and liberating. The Galatians are told to regard themselves as children of Gospel. The attitude that the passage displays to Judaism is uncomfortable to modern readers, but made perfect sense to its intended audience at the time it was written.

Traditional foods

Mothering Sunday was also known as Refreshment Sunday because the fasting rules for Lent were relaxed that day. Originally, both Old and New Testament lessons on mid-lent Sunday made a point of food. The Gospel reading from the New Testament told the story of how Jesus fed five thousand people with only five small barley loaves and two small fish.

Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down,
in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves,
and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated;
so also the fish, as much as they wanted.
John 6:10-12



Simnel cake

The food item specially associated with Mothering Sunday is the Simnel cake.

A Simnel cake is a fruit cake with two layers of almond paste, one on top and one in the middle.

The cake is made with 11 balls of marzipan icing on top representing the 11 disciples. (Judas is not included.) Traditionally, sugar violets would also be added.

Why Simnel?

The name Simnel probably comes from the Latin word *simila* which means a fine wheat flour usually used for baking a cake.

There's a legend that a man called Simon and his wife Nell argued over whether the cake for Mothering Sunday should be baked or boiled. In the end they did both, so the cake was named after both of them: SIM-NELL.

From the BBC Religions website