

Monday December 7th, Monday in the Second Week of Advent

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Well booking has started for the Christmas Masses, but please note that **5pm mass is now full**, so options are 8pm on Christmas Eve and 10am on Christmas Morning, with a children's Mass at 12noon on Christmas Eve. Who'd've thought last Christmas that we would be doing this. At least we are open for Christmas, unlike last Easter.

All this week Isaiah gives great messages of comfort and hope. Isaiah 35:1-10 tell us to rejoice, have courage, and do not be afraid, your God is coming - he is coming to save you. The eyes of the blind shall be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, the lame shall leap like deer. There will be joy and gladness - sorrow and lament will be ended. Perhaps we can seek solace in his words in this time of Tier 3 with Christmas approaching.

The people witnessing the healing of the paralytic reflect the awe of the first reading; *'They were all astounded and praised God, and we filled with awe, "We have seen great things today."*' Jesus carries out his mission of healing, and the lame do indeed leap, but faith is prerequisite for such a miracle – and the paralytic and his friends show great faith and determination to reach Jesus, for which they are suitable praised.

Almighty God,

you are the only source of health and healing.

In you there is calm, and the only true peace in the universe.

Grant to each one of us your children an awareness of your presence,

and give us perfect confidence in you.

In all pain and weariness and anxiety teach us to yield ourselves to your never-failing care,

knowing that your love and power surround us,

trusting in your wisdom and providence

to give us health and strength and peace when your time is best;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

'Lay Your Hands Gently Upon Us.' I think would be a very fitting hymn for today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYRTRKZgU3w>

And today is the memorial of St. Ambrose, a fourth century Bishop and Doctor of the Church, who has a most intriguing story. He was born in Trier, which is now in Germany but back then was the Roman capital of the Gaul region. He worked as a lawyer, and was then appointed a governor of two cities, but he lived in Milan. And during this time he was chosen to be Bishop of Milan – which surprised him, as not only was he a lay man, but he wasn't even baptised, though he was preparing for baptism. The people chose well – he turned out to be an outstanding Bishop, never afraid to challenge the decisions or actions of the Emperor. He was also uncompromising in his battle against the heresy of Arianism, which held that Jesus was the Son of God, but created by God the Father, and therefore not co-eternal – basically an anti-trinity philosophy. He also received St. Augustine of Hippo into the Church. St. Ambrose was also a great preacher: legend has it that when he was a child a swarm of bees flew into his mouth, a signal that he would be a great orator, and that all his words would be as sweet as honey. For this reason he is one of the Patron Saints of bees and beekeepers (along with St. Bernard and St. Benedict)! In his iconography, he is often depicted with bees or a beehive - symbols that also indicate wisdom. St Ambrose is still referenced today by modern beekeepers, using the term ambrosia to describe the mixture of nectar and pollen prepared by worker bees to feed bee larvae.

*O God,
who made the Bishop Saint Ambrose
a teacher of the Catholic faith
and a model of apostolic courage,
raise up in your Church men after your own heart
to govern her with courage and wisdom.
May all people be strengthened
so as to profit from the teaching of St. Ambrose,
that, hastening fearlessly along your paths,
we may be prepared for the delights of the eternal banquet.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Talking of bees, do you fancy a hot drink? One drink I love on a cold winter's day is hot milk, poured over a spoonful of honey, with a dusting of cinnamon on top. Absolutely delicious, and very good for you, as honey has many healing properties; it's good for certain allergies, it is a natural energy booster, it helps intellectual development, and, as I'm sure you know, is very good for coughs. It can also help you to get to sleep at night, so before you say your night prayers Dr. P. recommends a glass of milk and honey. And perhaps we might say the official Benedictine Blessing of the Bees:

*O Lord, God almighty,
who hast created heaven and earth and every animal existing
over them and in them for the use of men,
and who hast commanded through the ministers of holy Church*

*that candles made from the products of bees
be lit in church during the carrying out of the sacred office
in which the most holy Body and Blood of Jesus Christ thy Son
is made present and is received;
may thy holy blessing descend upon bees and their hives,
so that they may multiply, be fruitful and be preserved from all ills
and that the fruits coming forth from them
may be distributed for thy praise and that of thy Son
and the Holy Spirit and of the most blessed Virgin Mary.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

In other news, over in Australia, covid restrictions haven't stopped my niece and nephew continuing their artistic endeavours. Here's Paddy, who having played the euphonium and sousaphone is now emulating his Uncle Peter in taking up the tuba, which I played in my school band in my teens and as part of my Music A level. And here is Antonia, on the left, performing in a covid safe ballet performance in her dance studio, which my sister tells me was amazing. Bravissimi!

What buzzes, is black and yellow and flies at 30,000 feet? A bee on an airplane. What buzzes, is black and yellow and goes along the bottom of the sea? A bee in a submarine. I'll buzz off now, and get on with the rest of Monday. Have a great day, y'all!

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.