

Tuesday December 8th, The Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

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.

Oooh, bit of a damp start to the morning, and it does feel unusually dark. Thank heavens we have a beautiful Feast to lighten our day, as in this Advent run up to Christmas we celebrate the beautiful Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

It was always believed from early times that Our Lady was given the unique privilege of being spared the stain of Original Sin - she wasn't under the influence of sin like we are. It would not have been fitting for the mother of our God to have been tainted in any way. It was celebrated as the feast of the conception of Mary in the east as far back as 750. The present feast was established in the last century after the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined in 1854 by Blessed Pius XI. It is of relevance that the tradition states that Mary was free from sin from the first moment of her conception, the very moment her life began. St. John Henry Newman wrote that, *'there is no difference in kind between her and us, through an inconceivable difference of degree. She and we are both simply saved by the grace of Christ.'* And of course, when St. Bernadette asked the name of the lady in the grotto at Massabielle, she replied, *'I am the Immaculate Conception.'*

*O God,
who by the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin
prepared a worthy dwelling for your Son,
grant, we pray,
that, as you preserved her from every stain
by virtue of the Death of your Son which you foresaw,
so, through her intercession,
we, too, may be cleansed and admitted to your presence.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

The readings today are very beautiful. The first reading, Genesis 3:9-15.20 shows the Fall of Man, as Adam eats from the forbidden tree and blames Eve, who in turn blames the serpent. *'I will make you enemies of each other - you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring.'* We have here a reference to Mary, who will crush the serpent, the symbol of evil. In the second reading, Ephesians 1:3-6.11-12, we have a beautiful passage in which Paul praises God, the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who blessed us, chose us before the world was made, chose us in Christ to be holy, spotless

and to live in his presence. The first to experience this was Mary. It is a beautiful canticle. And our Gospel, of course, is the Annunciation to Mary by Gabriel of the coming of Jesus, Luke 1:26-38. Mary's commitment to the will of God is unparalleled in the history of the Church, *'I am the handmaid of the Lord,'* said Mary, *'let what you have said be done to me.'* Let us pray for such commitment to God ourselves, especially during these trying times, and, through the intercession of Mary, may many people throughout the world commit themselves to a joyful future for our Church, not least the thousands of children who will be hearing those words in their nativity plays and presentations over the next couple of weeks.

For a hymn today let us sing 'I'll Sing A Hymn To Mary.'

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzfe464v_8A

So, have you written your Christmas cards yet? I've just about finished. It's always quite a mammoth operation, and I turn it into a mini production line. First of all I label all the envelopes (fortunately I do have all the addresses on the computer to print out). I then put my address on a label on the inside of each card – somebody once explained to me that they always wait to receive my card before they send one to me, in case the Bishop has moved me. And then I sit down to write them. I always have a glass of sherry beside me (which I don't like very much, it's just part of the tradition), and I always put on some Christmas music. This year I was listening to the latest Dolly Parton Christmas Album, which, as you can imagine from an album called 'A Holly Dolly Christmas' was cheesier than a whole camembert – and, to be honest, that's no bad thing at the moment. Very cheesy, until it came to the final track, which is a song I'd never heard before called 'Mary, Did You Know?' It's not a new song, but it's eluded me, and it's an absolute stunner; the words and music are so incredibly beautiful. Whoever came up with the line 'This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you,' is a genius. I'm trying to find the music for it. Here are the words:

*Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would save our sons and daughters?
Did you know that your baby boy
Has come to make you new?
This child that you delivered, will soon deliver you
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would give sight to a blind man?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would calm the storm with his hand?
Did you know that your baby boy*

*Has walked where angels trod?
When you kiss your little baby
You kiss the face of God
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
Is heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're
Holding is the great I Am
Mary, did you know?
Mary, did you know?*

And here is Dolly Parton singing the song <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1EQYhBiyY4>
Absolutely beautiful. And here's me with my treasured signed photograph of the great woman herself
which reads, 'To Father Peter. God Bless. Dolly Parton 2014.' Well, it always puts a cheesy grin on
my face.

Don't forget to book in for Christmas mass: 12noon for the children, with spaces available at 8pm
Mass, on Christmas Eve, and 10am Christmas Morning.

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Frank Anthony Davies, whose funeral I will be celebrating at
Carleton this morning. *May he rest in the peace and love of Christ.*

And make sure you enjoy this beautiful feast.

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.