

Thursday January 14th, Thursday of Week 1 in Ordinary Time Year 1.

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.

Another dark and damp morning, so let's all do something to try and brighten up the day however best we can!

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews has been trying to prove the unique supremacy of Jesus Christ. In Hebrews 3:7-14 he stops and exhorts his readers that they must not harden their hearts like the roving Jews in the desert. They must not refuse to give Jesus their obedient trust. But this is all so much easier in communion with one another; *'Every day, as long as this "today" lasts, keep encouraging one another... we shall remain co-heirs with Christ.'*

Today we see Jesus healing the leper - it was almost unheard of that a leper could be cured. Miracles always need faith, and this is demonstrated as the leper says to Jesus, *'If you want to, you can cure me.'* In Mark 1:4-45 Jesus is clearly delighted in the man's faith, *'Of course I want to.'* Jesus tried to keep a low profile, wanting people to come to knowledge and understanding of him in their own time, but his listeners would not let him. The writer William Barclay wrote a lovely explanation of the prayer of the leper, saying that it shows traits which should apply to all our prayers:

'The leper prayed with confidence. Leprosy was incurable, but this man was absolutely sure that Jesus could cure the incurable. We must be sure that God can do whatever He wants to do.'

The leper prayed with humility. The leper did not boast before the Lord, as some do in their prayers. Rather, he humbly acknowledged his need before God, as we must. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3).'

The leper prayed with reverence. The leper knelt before Jesus, because he knew that to be in the presence of Jesus was to be in the presence of great power. We must pray in recognition that God is greater than we.'

And so let us pray with confidence, with humility, and with reverence, especially for those who are sick:

Lord Jesus, remove my fears and inhibitions.

*Give me the strength to reach out and comfort the isolated;
to stop, talk and pray for them.*

Remind me to do to others that which I would like others to do for me.

*Father, your Son accepted our sufferings,
teaching us the virtue of patience in human illness.
Hear the prayers we offer for our sick brothers and sisters.
May all who suffer pain, illness or disease
realise that they are chosen to be Saints,
and know that they are joined to Christ
in his suffering for the salvation of the world.*

And today we remember a Saint who was Grandmother to two Saints. St. Macrina the elder was a native of Cappadocia, in what is now eastern Turkey towards the end of the third century. Early in the next century, during the persecution of the Emperor Galerius, Macrina and her husband were forced to leave their home and to live in the wooded hills of Pontus for seven years, during which they suffered much. They were often without food. Later, during another persecution, their property was seized by agents of the emperor, and they lived in almost total destitution. When the persecution ended, they were honoured as confessors of the faith, a much revered title among the Christians of that time.

It was at their grandmother's knee that St. Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa received their first instructions in the Christian faith, and it was from her that their family was nourished in that Christian discipline that made them saints. St. Macrina was known to have treasured and read the writings of Gregory the Wonderworker, and it was the fire and zeal of his writings that was passed on to Basil and Gregory. The exact date of St. Macrina's death is not known. She is revered as a saint in the calendars of both the Eastern and Western Churches. This is an excerpt from the beautiful prayer that she wrote as she was dying:

*Thou, O Lord, hast freed us from the fear of death.
Thou hast made the end of this life the beginning to us of true life.
O God eternal, to Whom I have been attached from my mother's womb,
Whom my soul has loved with all its strength,
to Whom I have dedicated both my flesh and my soul from my youth up until now:
Do Thou give me an angel of light to conduct me to the place of refreshment,
where is the water of rest, in the bosom of the holy Fathers.
O Thou Who hast power on earth to forgive sins,
forgive me, that I may be refreshed
and may be found before Thee when I put off my body,
without defilement on my soul.
But may my soul be received into Thy hands
spotless and undefiled, as an offering before Thee.*

With regard to the 'Tech Fund' yesterday a wrong sort code was sent out in the Message. The paragraph should have read: *'Many thanks for the contributions I have already received for the 'Tech Fund' to help our children with their online learning in these difficult times, they are most gratefully received. If you wish to make a contribution directly into the Parish Account you can do so to 'Parish of St. Bernadette – Blackpool, Account no 41334581, Sort Code 40-27-02. Please use the reference 'School Laptops'. Huge thanks in anticipation.'* Apologies for any confusion (it was my brother in Hong Kong who pointed it out when he tried to send some money!).

And, as every fashion-conscious priest should be, I am now able to wear liturgical correct face masks for our services. As you can see in the attached pic!

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Brian Payne whose requiem I will be celebrating this morning. *May he rest in the peace and love of Christ.* Please keep Veronica and all Brian's family in your prayers.

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.