

Sunday January 17th, Second Sunday 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.

And what a beautiful morning it would seem to be! Lovely to see people at mass, but the message remains stay home if you should, although attending Church is one of the permissible reasons for leaving your home. As yet the Bishop has not made a decision on the closing of Churches.

In the readings today we see a Prophet and the first Apostles each being called to follow the Lord, but both finding the calling somewhat unexpected, and so simple.

The call of Samuel (Samuel 3:3-10-19) is such that, at first, he doesn't even recognise it to be the call of God. He assumes it is his master Eli, and only at the fourth call, under the instructions of Eli, is he able to respond positively to God. We are then simply told that Samuel grew up in the presence of the Lord. It is similar with the call of the first of Jesus' twelve Apostles. Two of them simply leave John the Baptist, and go and see where Jesus lived, staying with him the whole day. Andrew, one of the followers introduces Jesus to his brother, Jesus renames him Cephas, Rock. And that's that. So simple. So unelaborated. And yet for Samuel, and for Simon Peter the other Apostles these were truly life changing, momentous events.

As Christians each of us believes that we have been personally called by the Lord. And this is true, by nature of our baptism, our confirmation, and the graces we have received throughout the whole of our Sacramental life within the Church. Each of us has been through the momentous, life changing event of being called by the Lord to follow him. We may have been very young, perhaps just a few days old at our baptism. We have not fully understood the rite of confirmation. And at times we may have withdrawn or been cut off from other Sacraments. But each of us has been called. Each of us has been chosen.

And in being called, amazingly, we can place ourselves in the illustrious company of Samuel and these first Apostles. For them being chosen by God, whilst being momentous and life-changing, was also something which slowly they had to come to terms with. Samuel needed help to hear the Lord's call, and then spent years growing up in God's presence before he began his prophetic ministry. The first Apostles spent time with Jesus, spending the whole day with him, as St. Mark records. By spending time in the presence of the Lord, these Apostles would come to know Jesus in a complete

and intimate way. Learning how to act as he did, speak as he did, judge situations as he did, see as he did, thus deepening the whole experience of their calling and developing fully and wholly their relationship with the God who had called them. Only then were they truly ready to take upon themselves their true role as prophet and Apostles.

We all have different roles within the Church, and indeed we have may have found some new roles during the present pandemic, but for each and every one of us, it is only when we find ourselves truly serving God, through our prayers and actions; acting like Christ did, can we say that are truly taking our calling from God seriously. Our calling by Christ is something that we have to live out daily, but also discover anew daily, as, in our changing situations of life we discover different ways and are called to different ministries in which we can serve God and one another.

For Samuel and the Apostles, and for us, the moment of our calling to become children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ was truly one life changing moment; but living out that call, and trying to understand its implications takes, well, a lifetime - perhaps an eternal lifetime.

Once again Eileen has helpfully provided us with a knitted version of the calling of the Apostles. Let us listen to the gentle calling of the Lord 'with them who heard beside the Syrian sea' as we sing possibly my favourite hymn, 'Dear Lord And Father Of Mankind.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAxIN0egN-I>

So, on Friday a group of chaps from the army arrived to do covid tests for all the school employees. On groups of eight at a certain time, we were led into the hall and given strict instructions as to how to test ourselves, with the results coming back half an hour later. If anyone was given a positive reading they were then asked to book a further, more accurate test. Fortunately everyone was negative. In a couple of weeks' time four of us are going to get taught how to lead weekly testing of the whole school staff, so it's great that we are all keeping as safe as possible. They did allow me to take a photo, but I have to wait for permission from the MOD before I can post it on this message, and I think they probably have more pressing things to do than decide whether I can post a pic!

And it was a wonderful day for a walk on the prom yesterday, and it was hard for me not to sing along as I was listening to 'Brigadoon' by Lerner and Loewe. It's a beautiful story. Americans Jeff and Tommy, hunting in Scotland, stumble upon a village - Brigadoon. They soon learn that the town appears only once every 100 years in order to preserve its peace and special beauty. The citizens go to bed at night and when they wake up, it's 100 years later. For many it is a blessing, but for one inhabitant it is a curse, and is killed as he tries to leave. Tommy falls in love with a beautiful young woman, Fiona, and is torn between staying or, as Jeff is encouraging him, going back to his hectic life

in New York. He returns to New York but can't get Brigadoon out of his mind. He goes back but the village has disappeared. He declares his love for the now gone Fiona, and suddenly the old Parson from the village appears to him, and as the village slowly appears to allow Tommy to be with Fiona again Tommy asks how it could have happened, to which the wise old Parson replies, 'When you're in love anything can happen. Even miracles.' I was listening to the New York City Centre Encores production, and you can see a glimpse of it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQ9M7OF0WRU>

Enjoy the rest of the weekend.

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.