

Sunday January 31st, Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

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 I hope you are making the best of the weekend. Doesn't look too bad a day, so I may see you on the prom this afternoon!

It's well documented throughout the Scriptures that the Scribes and the Pharisees do not recognize who Jesus is, don't recognize the fact that he is the Messiah. Given their in depth knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures, the Old or Original Testament this seems somewhat surprising. But no, the Scribes and the Pharisees just don't get it. They do not see Jesus as the Messiah, the fulfilment of the Scriptures they know so well.

Other people, though, perhaps not so expert in Scriptures as the Scribes do recognise something special about Jesus. They listen to him as a teacher, as they have listened to countless official Jewish teachers of the law and the scriptures, as well as probably countless people who had claimed to be the Messiah at one time or another. But Jesus is different. And as today's Gospel, Mark 1:21-28, points out, the teaching of Jesus makes a lasting impression on those who are prepared to listen to him because he teaches, with authority, not the authority of the Jewish religious leaders, but with the authority of God, a somewhat higher jurisdiction. They also marvel at his command over unclean spirits, and the miracles and wonders he works. Yet they do not all come to immediate knowledge of who he is. This takes time as his reputation grows, and individuals gradually come to realise that Jesus is the Christ. This slow, dawning realisation of who Jesus is, coupled with the fact that Jesus often tells people he has cured not to say anything about it, is sometimes referred to as the Messianic Secret, something which is not forced on people, but which they can joyfully discover for themselves.

And then there are the evil spirits, knowing exactly who Jesus is and what he can do, what he can do to them, hence their loathing and fear of the Holy One of God.

Three different stages, then, not so much of faith in Christ Jesus, but of knowledge, of recognition of him.

There is knowledge of exactly who he is, but no humility and no acceptance of Jesus as their Lord, by the evil spirits who seek only to exert their own power over people.

There is knowledge of the written word of God by the Scribes and Pharisees, but no knowledge and faith in the Incarnate Word, Jesus, present among them.

And by the people who do listen to Jesus, with open hearts and minds, wondering at the authority of his teaching, glorying at the miracles he performs, stunned by his power over evil, there is the stirrings of knowledge and faith in Jesus, not as a powerful enemy or another itinerant preacher, but as the Son of God, as the one to whom all Scripture points, as a personal Lord and Saviour.

For such a dramatic Gospel there seems little drama in actually coming to full knowledge and faith in Jesus. Jesus allows people, allows us, to take our time in coming, gradually, steadily, so that when we do finally accept Jesus to be our Lord and Saviour, our knowledge and faith and, most importantly, our love of him, is something genuine, something real, something which is the focal point for the whole of our lives. Perhaps if, as St. Paul encourages, we can all give our undivided attention to the Lord, then, just as knowledge of Jesus spread throughout Galilee, so may faith and love of Jesus deepen and spread throughout our parish, our lives, and our hearts.

*Loving Lord, I come to You with a thankful heart
and just want to lift up my hand to praise Your glorious name
for all Your goodness and loving-kindness to me.
Thank You for Jesus and my eternal salvation.
Thank You for my life and all the joys that You have given me,
my friends and my family, my home and my daily provision.
How precious to know that Your mercies are new every morning,
great is Your faithfulness, Father.
Thank You for the Bible and all the many precious promises it contains
and for the many promises that have been fulfilled in my life day by day.
Praise Your name, for no matter what comes my way,
You have gone ahead to prepare the way.
Accept my thanks and my love.
Through your Son, Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

And let's sing a lovely hymn of thanksgiving and adoration: 'Praise My Soul The King Of Heaven'
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

If you are at a loose end this afternoon, why not follow in my footsteps with a little origami, and as it is a Sunday, how about making a simple Prayer Chatterbox with the children?

Create a square from a sheet of A4 Paper. Alternatively you may be able to print out the photo which can act as a template.

Fold the square in half point to point to make a triangle and then unfold. If using the photo, fold so the design is on the outside.

Fold each of the corners in to the centre to create a smaller square.

Fold this smaller square in half to create a rectangle and then open back out.

Flip the square over to the opposite side.

Fold each of the corners in to the centre to create another smaller square.

Flip the square over and it's time to create your prayers

Using a pen write the names of 4 different colours on each of the 4 quarters.

Flip the square over again and underneath each flap you can write your prayer intention.

On the top of your flap write in the numbers 1 to 8 making sure there is one number on each half of the flap.

With the numbers facing up, fold the square in half to make a rectangle.

Unfold, spin the square 90 degrees, and then fold in half again to create a rectangle.

Now the folds have been made, hold the rectangle with your left hand and slide your thumb and pointer finger up and underneath the two flaps on the right side. Wiggle your fingers and the paper should bend inwards.

Do the same thing with your left hand on the left hand side of the rectangle. Your prayer chatterbox is now ready to use! Choose a colour, then a number, then lift up the flap, and say a prayer in accordance with what the prayer intention under the flap is.

If you are getting in a flap, this video might help:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33dNfGqh9L8>

Or for something a little more taxing and adult, how about trying making a praying person?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UNFWTFWKj8&feature=youtu.be>

Did you hear the joke about Origami? It would have you in creases. I'll get my coat.

Enjoy Sunday!

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.