

Saturday February 6th, Saturday in the Fourth Week 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.

Well, I had a lovely walk on the prom yesterday, and it was lovely to bump into (socially distanced of course) several parishioners who were out enjoying the sunshine. For a change when I got to the top of Red Bank Road I turned right and walked to Cleveleys, whereas normally I turn left and go down to Gynns Roundabout. I definitely meet more Parishioners when I turn right, which is something worth thinking about when we talk about the future of our parishes and the deanery! Given the weather today I won't be going either way, though!

We finish The Letter to the Hebrews with a prayer in Hebrews 13:15-17.20-21. Let us offer to God an unending sacrifice of praise and keep doing good works. *'I pray that the God of peace, who brought our Lord Jesus back from the dead to become the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood that sealed an eternal covenant, may make you ready to do his will in any kind of good action; and turn us all into whatever is acceptable to himself through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever, Amen.'*

In Mark 6:30-34 the apostles tried to get away to a quiet place to reflect after the death of John, but the crowds followed them. Jesus took pity on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd - they were hungry for knowledge of his word.

Father,

through the prophet Isaiah's words,

we are reminded that Your Word does not return void

but accomplishes that which You desire.

It is a lamp unto our feet and a light for our path.

Your Word is divinely inspired and is always there for us

teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness

so that we are thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Help us to receive daily through faithfully reading and applying Scripture to our lives

The guidance that comes from every Word you give us.

Through the living Word, Christ our Lord. Amen.

So why don't we sing 'Love Is His Word, Love Is His Way.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FB0jlj7Wbs>

And today we celebrate the Japanese Martyrs, Saints Paul Miki & Companions. St Frances Xavier planted Christianity in Japan after he arrived there in 1549. By 1587 there were said to be over two hundred thousand Christians. At this stage the regent Hideyoshi ordered all Missionaries out of his dominions, but many stayed behind in disguise. Paul Miki was a high-born Japanese and an eminent Jesuit preacher. He was arrested and jailed with his fellow Catholics, who were later forced to march 600 miles from Kyoto to Nagasaki; all the while singing the Te Deum. On arriving in Nagasaki - which today has the largest Catholic population in Japan - Miki had his chest pierced with a lance while tied to a cross on 5 February 1597. He preached his last sermon from the cross, and it is maintained that he forgave his executioners, stating that he himself was Japanese. 26 Christians, mostly Japanese, were crucified in different ways over a period of time, though the executioners were astounded upon seeing their joy at being thus associated with the Passion of Christ. Their blood-stained clothes were treasured by the Christian community and miracles happened through their intercession. They were the first martyrs of the Far East to be canonised. Let us seek their intercession and fearlessness through these challenging and frightening times:

*Dear Lord, source of strength for all your saints,
you led Paul Miki and his companions through the suffering of the cross
to the joy of eternal life
See us through these hard times.
In these troubling times, we are filled with unspeakable fears.
We reach out our hand to you now, and ask you to walk beside us.
When we feel we cannot carry all our burdens, let us trust that you can and will.
Please help us hold strong, through the trials and storms.
Help us to hold on to our faith, in even the darkest hour.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Last Monday we celebrated the Feast of St. Brigid of Ireland, and the following day one of our parishioners brought their St. Brigid's cross to mass to show me – and here it is. The story of its making tells us that there was an old pagan Chieftain who lay delirious on his deathbed in Kildare (some believe this was her father) and his servants summoned Brigid to his bedside in the hope that the saintly woman may calm his restless spirit. Brigid is said to have sat by his bed, consoling and calming him and it is here that she picked up the rushes from the floor and began weaving them into the distinctive cross pattern. Whilst she weaved, she explained the meaning of the cross to the sick Chieftain and it is thought her calming words brought peace to his soul. He was so enamoured by her words that the old Chieftain requested he be baptized as a Christian just before he died. This cross is thought to keep evil, fire and hunger from the home in which it is displayed.

Don't forget we are live streaming at five this evening and ten tomorrow morning. Have a great day, and do whatever you can to make it through the rain!

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.