

Saturday February 13th, Saturday in the Fifth 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.

End of the week, and the beginning of half term for our school – and what a term it has been, just one day with everyone in, and then it's back to online and home learning. Everyone has done so well, and hopefully things are on track for the whole school to come back together on March 8th.

Genesis 3:1-8 tells us the story of the Fall. Humankind has always been subjected to evil - and that evil came about of our own doing. We inherited that evilness in the form of original sin. This occurred because we misused our freedom and disobeyed God - we thought we knew better than God. The fall is sometimes been referred to as 'the Happy Fault' as it led to Christ bringing us his ultimate salvation. In the words of the great 'Exultet' sung at the Easter Vigil:

*Our birth would have been no gain,
had we not been redeemed.
O wonder of your humble care for us!
O love, O charity beyond all telling,
to ransom a slave you gave away your Son!
O truly necessary sin of Adam,
destroyed completely by the Death of Christ!
O happy fault
That earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!*

In Mark 7:31-37 Jesus uses word and gesture to carry out his healing miracle, 'Ephphatha', 'be opened'. This would go to add to the many what became understood as sacramental gestures in the Scriptures. Let us say Psalm 43:

*Judge me, God, defend my cause against a people who have no faithful love;
from those who are treacherous and unjust, rescue me.
For you are the God of my strength; why abandon me?
Why must I go around in mourning, harassed by the enemy?
Send out your light and your truth; they shall be my guide,
to lead me to your holy mountain to the place where you dwell.
Then I shall go to the altar of God, to the God of my joy.
I will rejoice and praise you on the harp, O God, my God.*

Why so downcast, why all these sighs?

Hope in God! I will praise him still, my Saviour, my God.

The word 'Ephphatha' used in this miracle story is the only time it is found in the New Testament. Mark, more than the other gospel writers, included the exact words Jesus spoke. The recording of Jesus' exact expressions shows the influence of Peter, an eyewitness, on Mark's writing. Jesus was traveling through the region of Decapolis when some people brought to Him a man *'who was deaf and could hardly talk'* (Mark 7:31). Jesus took the man aside, *'away from the crowd,'* and put His fingers into the man's ears (verse 33). Then Jesus spit and touched the man's tongue with the moisture. He did not have to go through such physical actions, and in other miracles of healing, Jesus simply spoke a word (e.g., Matthew 8:8, 13), but in this case, He chose to. After touching the man's ears and tongue, Jesus *'looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!'* (Mark 7:34). The posture of prayer signified Jesus' connection to the Father, in whose name He acted. The deep sigh was a sign of Jesus' commiseration with the man's plight and of His sorrow over the sin in the world and its lamentable fallout. *'At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly.'* Jesus then commanded the man not to tell anyone about the healing, but the man used his newfound speech to spread the news anyway. People were *'completely amazed'*, and they praised the Lord, saying, *'He has done everything well... He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'* All of the healing miracles are very different; some use touch, some gesture, and some words. They all point forward to the sacraments and the various gestures used in them. The 'Ephphatha' ritual is part of baptisms in some parts of the world. The priest touches the child's ears and mouth with his thumb saying *'The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the dumb speak. May he soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen.'*

'The King of Love My Shepherd Is', the beautiful setting of the 23rd Psalm, would be a lovely hymn to sing today; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iu83WQdQ7-Y>

And Happy New Year, as today is Chinese New Year. I'll let my brother tell you about it.

'Lunar New Year is Christmas, Easter and everything else all rolled into one. The festival lasts 4 days but the holiday goes on for much longer. Traditionally people travel to visit family, and in a normal year about 1m people leave Hong Kong for the Mainland. Some temples here can get over 70,000 visitors over a couple of days, and Victoria Harbour is lit up with a huge firework display. Not this year, sadly, as all of these are cancelled or drastically scaled down.

But the main theme of the festival is family, with lots of dinners and delicious food (vegetarian on the first day); packets of 'lai see' lucky money for kids; flowers and decorations everywhere; and lion dances to bring luck to houses and businesses. The must-haves are cumquat trees, narcissus,

decorations in red and gold, and lots of sweets and treats, as you can see from these pictures of our house.

Kung Hei Fa Choi! (Happy New Year!)

And Happy New Year to you all over there, praying that's a safe and healthy one for us all.

Enjoy the day as well as you can.

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.