

Sunday February 21st, 2021, The First Sunday in Lent 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 having a great weekend. Don't forget as well as yesterday evening's mass, we also have a set of Stations of the Cross filmed in Church on the YouTube site. And the Church is open for private prayer and exposition from 12noon till 1pm, and I will be in the sacristy should anyone want the sacrament of Confession.

Each of the three year Sunday reading cycles always begins on the first Sunday of Lent with the passages from Matthew, Mark and Luke about Jesus being led by the Spirit into the Wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew and Luke give us great detailed accounts of the temptations – what the devil said, where he took Jesus, and what Jesus' response were. Mark's account, of which Eileen has helpfully provided a knitted scene, Mark 1:12-15, though, couldn't be shorter. Jesus was in the wilderness, surrounded by beasts, was tempted, and then began his public ministry. That's that. But in all the accounts, great or small, we see Jesus coming to terms with himself, confronting his person, his Messiahship, working out the kind of Messiah he is to be. And a great deal of this seems to be confronting these temptations and fears.

To the people of his day, the wilderness, the desert, was a huge symbol for loneliness and danger. And so in going into the wilderness – and the absence of the details of the temptations in Mark's Gospel makes this stand out all the more – in going into the wilderness Jesus is directly confronting death and loneliness, the vulnerability of loneliness and the inevitability of death. And it was dying a lonely death – on the cross on Good Friday - that Jesus was going to experience, and confront, loneliness and death again. Through the confronting of these painful experiences in the wilderness came the public ministry and the message of the Gospel, Repent, and believe the Good News. And through the cross came resurrection and redemption.

Confronting our fears, and the many forms of testing that life brings, and gosh we have known testing over the past year, can be for many people a shattering experience, leaving them cold and bitter, but it can also be a turning point, a cleansing experience that leads to a newness of life, and growth.

That's what it should be for Christians. If in our darkest moments we can, like Jesus, remember that we are beloved by the Father who is with us at every stage on life's journey, then we have a light to guide us. If we can remember that Christ has experienced the pain and loneliness and suffering that

we may be going through, then our relationship with the Godhead may be strengthened and deepened. Maybe easy to say, but it can be achieved if throughout the good times we actively make efforts to deepen our faith which may be knocked by the bad.

In this time of Lent, the Church asks us to spend time looking within ourselves. During the coming weeks we are to confront our fears and temptations, so that we might be brought into a fuller relationship with Christ. Today's Gospel reminds us that the Father who strengthens his son in the desert is the same God who renews the promises to an unfaithful people and is bound with them forever. This is the good news that we all need to hear, and are all called to share, the good news that transforms people, it makes them turn around, repent, and start again. It gives hope; it drives away fear; it promotes true peace; it is concerned for others; it is concerned with building up what is good, and destroying what is evil. In a sense the Good News is everything that is opposite the loneliness and death-filled fearfulness of the wilderness. The Good News is *life*.

Dear Lord Jesus,

I try hard not to stumble in my walk of faith, but you know the temptations that I face today.

Sometimes the temptation seems too strong for me.

Fill me with the power of your Holy Spirit to give me strength.

Your Word promises that I will not be tempted beyond what I can bear.

Help me to stay awake spiritually so that temptation won't catch me by surprise.

Help me keep my spirit well fed with your Holy Word

so that I remember you are living in me.

Lord, you overcame Satan's temptations. You understand my struggle.

So I ask for the strength you had when facing Satan's attacks in the wilderness.

Thank you, Lord, that you are a faithful deliverer

and that I can count on your help in my time of need.

Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

'God's Spirit Is In My Heart' is always a jolly 'pick me up' hymn for today:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JS3oTdmDobU>

Were today not the First Sunday of Lent we would be celebrating the Feast of St. Peter Damian, and I mention him especially because he's my Patron saint – my middle name is Damian. Peter was born in Italy in 1007. When his parents died, he went to live with one of his older brothers, who treated him cruelly. Sometimes Peter was forbidden to eat any of his brother's food. Another brother helped solve the problem by giving Peter money so that he could afford to go away to school. Peter did so well in school that he became a professor when he was only 25. After the school day was finished, Peter often invited students and poor people to his home for dinners that he served himself. He remembered what it felt like to be hungry. Peter became a priest and then a Benedictine monk. He spent his days in

prayer and study. After a short time Peter was elected abbot, or superior, of the community. Although this new responsibility took Peter away from his quiet life, he was an excellent leader, and established five new monasteries. He was ordained the bishop of Ostia, a diocese near Rome. As bishop, Peter worked to solve problems in his diocese and to remind his priests of their mission.

As a monk, a bishop, and a saint, Peter Damian lived one of the Benedictine Rules completely: *'Do not prefer anything to the love of Christ.'* He died in 1072 and was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1828. St. Peter Damian helps us to remember that if we put Jesus first in our lives, the Lord will always guide us in living as his faithful disciples.

*Grant, we pray, almighty God,
That we may so follow the teaching and example
Of the Bishop Saint Peter Damian,
That, putting nothing before Christ
And always ardent in the service of your Church
We may be led to the joys of eternal light.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

All that talk of Chinese food yesterday made me want to celebrate Chinese New Year, but ordering a Chinese banquet is not the same when you can't have a group of people round your table to enjoy it. So my celebrations were somewhat curtailed – as you can see in the attached pic! Maybe next year?

Hope you have a great day.

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.