

Monday March 8th, 2021, Monday of the Third Week in Lent

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 yey! All the children are back to school today! Bravo to the teachers, the parents and caregivers, and the children themselves for coping with an extraordinary couple of months since Christmas. Onward and upward! Shame about the rainy morning to come back to!

And so we begin the third week of Lent with the great story of Naaman, the leper, which prefigures baptism. II Kings:5:1-5 tells of Naaman who was a commander of the army of Syria. He was a good commander and was held in favour because of the victory that God brought him. Yet Naaman was a leper. Naaman's wife had a servant girl from Israel who said that a prophet there would be able to heal him. Naaman tells his lord this and he is sent to Israel with a letter to the king. The king of Israel didn't know what to do, yet Elisha sent a message to the King, advising that the King tell Naaman to come to see him. Elisha then told Naaman to go bathe in the Jordan seven times and he would be clean. Naaman was angry as he expected to be cured immediately and would have left, but his servant asked him to try it and he was healed. *'Now I know', he said, that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel.'* In the early Church this story was used to prepare the catechumens on their way to their baptism at Easter, reminding them of God's power and mercy, and the great gift of washing their sins away in the waters of baptism.

Luke 4:24-30 recounts one of the stories Jesus refers to when he tells his own people in Nazareth that no prophet is without honour except in his own country. He makes reference to the Naaman, enraging the people telling them that, *'In the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of them were cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.'* Even though this is very early in the Gospel of Luke, the people are so enraged by Jesus they want to throw him off a cliff. Being a prophet in one's own land even today may be difficult, especially, say, with members of our family who do not accept our practise of the faith or the rules of the Church. However, if we learn to trust in God's love for the people around us and we remain faithful to what we believe, the path forward may in time become easier than we first realized. Let's say a prayer for our families:

Father God,

we come before You today to ask for your protection over our families.

Let no trouble fall on them today.

Keep them away from accidents.

*Allow no evil to influence their hearts.
Cover them with the precious blood of Christ.
Take charge over them so that they do not strike their foot against a stone.
We may not be with our families all the time these days,
but we trust that You, Lord, are always with them.
Keep them safe today and allow them to give glory to You by their actions.
Give them peace of mind so that they may not worry about anything.
Guard their hearts so that they may only display love,
Through your Son, Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Grateful for our Church and the Sacraments let us sing 'Sweet Sacrament Divine.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dIYY3tComqY>

It's also the memorial of St. John of God today. He was born in Portugal in 1495 and had various jobs, including a shepherd, a soldier, and a bookseller, before experiencing a change of heart, through the encouragement of St. John of Avila, at the age of forty-two. He started serving the sick in Granada in Spain, and to this end he founded a religious order, the Brothers Hospitallers, or Brothers of St. John of God. He is Patron Saint of the sick and hospitals, very appropriate at the moment, and also of Booksellers. This is prayer to St. John of God for those in need:

*Saint John of God,
We honour you as the Patron of the Sick,
We ask you to be our patron and protector in this present pandemic.
To you we entrust the sick throughout the world.
Keep our hearts and minds filled with compassion for those in need.
Bring us all to healthy and safety.
Through the intercession of our Bless Mother,
And through Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

And I was sent the attached photo of a Church that does indeed look like a confused chicken.

Have a great start to the week.

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.