

Sunday March 21st, 2021, The Fifth Sunday of 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.

Well it was an exhausting but exhilarating day of study in the hall for me yesterday. I'm assured that all went well with Fr. Tom at mass last night, and I'm sure it will again, as I have the final day of my Diploma.

In the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the agony in the garden is a simple prayer of Jesus that he might be spared the suffering, but only if it be the Father's will, for, above all, Jesus wishes that God's will may be done. Here in our Gospel today, John 12:20-30, the corresponding event becomes a marvellous meditation on how and why Jesus must endure the agony of the cross; for the glorification of the Father, and the drawing of all men to Christ.

Firstly, Jesus describes the coming events of his passion as a moment of glorification, 'Now the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified'. His suffering will lead to glory, the passing of his life in this world, leading to the resurrection and a new, eternal life, not just for Jesus, but for us all; the one death yields a rich harvest. The plea that Jesus' suffering might pass, here in John's Gospel, is a rhetorical question 'Shall I say, "Save me from this hour?"', for Jesus' knows his suffering is necessary for the greater glory and is conscious of the fact that his whole life on earth has been leading to this moment. As at his baptism, the voice of God is once again heard, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again' confirming Jesus in his truth, and reminding the hearer, as Jesus goes on to tell them, that the crucifixion, when he is lifted up from the earth as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, is the moment of our healing, our gateway to the resurrection with Jesus. As St. Paul says, the crucifixion is not folly or defeat, but in fact a moment of triumph, as Christ, and humankind, passes from suffering to glory.

With all this talk of glorification and rich harvests and eternal life there is a danger that the suffering of Jesus might almost be overlooked. But as all the Gospels, including St. John's, make clear, the road to the cross, the road to glory, was an agonising journey. Only by deepening our understanding and knowledge of the sufferings of Christ, can we hope to understand our own human sufferings and the sufferings of this world. The saving death of Christ clearly did not remove all human suffering; hardship and persecution, and even death are still a part of fallen man's human condition. But the sufferings of Christ give us hope to understand that our sufferings too may be a part of our individual

journey to new life with Christ, if only we can join our suffering to that endured by Jesus in his passion and death. By keeping our eyes and hearts on the Christ who was lifted up on the cross, then with him we too may be lifted up to the resurrection.

We, the Church, are an Easter People. In Lent, Advent, Christmastide or, yes, Eastertide, we are an Easter people. We live and breathe, and celebrate in our prayers and sacraments, the Resurrection of Christ. But as we approach Holy Week let us remember and celebrate, too, the suffering and death of Christ, and thus, as Jesus prayed, may the Son of Man, and the Father's name, be glorified. Let us pray Psalm 95 together:

Come, ring out our joy to the Lord;

hail the rock who saves us.

Let us come before him, giving thanks,

with songs let us hail the Lord.

A mighty God is the Lord,

A great king above all gods.

In his hands are the depths of the earth;

the heights of the mountains are his.

To him belongs the sea, for he made it

and the dry land shaped by his hands.

Come in; let us bow and bend low;

let us kneel before the God who made us

for he is our God and we

the people who belong to his pasture,

the flock that is led by his hand.

O that today you would listen to his voice!

“Harden not your hearts as at Meribah,

as on that day at Massah in the desert

when your fathers put me to the test;

when they tried me, though they saw my work.

For forty years I was wearied of these people and I said:

‘Their hearts are astray, these people do not know my ways.’

Then I took an oath in my anger:

‘Never shall they enter my rest.’”

And how about ‘To God Be the Glory, Great Things He Has Done’ for our hymn today.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

When I was looking for a prayer to glorify God, I came across this:

Dear God,

It's Your name that is honoured from generation to generation.

You alone are worthy of all glory and praise.

And You are not shocked by the state of the world right now.

Your ways are not our ways, and You are not at a loss about what to do.

Nothing is impossible for You.

So today, we are proclaiming that You will be glorified through this pandemic.

That Your name will be known and praised throughout the earth.

Pierce the darkness with Your light.

Shine brighter than the fear of death, economic ruin, or a long quarantine.

When we look back on this moment in history,

would we be filled with joy as we remember the revival, hope,

and peace that came out of this season.

Continue to draw this hurting world back to You.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

A salutary reminder that whatever the past year has brought us, our lives and our futures are in God's hands. And safe.

So, plans for Easter, following the guidelines given to us by the Bishops' Conference are slowly falling into place, and although it won't be our usually amazing Triduum, it will be better than last year when I was virtually alone. All services, apart from the extra 11:30am Mass on Easter Sunday will be streamed live and available on the YouTube. Please note that there are only spaces at the 11:30 Mass as all the others are booked up.

And here's another selection of the jolly Church Bulletin Bloopers

The class on prophecy has been cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances.

Illiterate? Write to the church office for help.

The peace-making meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.

The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

Let us join David and Lisa in the celebration of their wedding and bring their happiness to a conclusion.

Please place your donation in the envelope along with the deceased person(s) you want remembered.

Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.

Announcement to the Women Who Care group: There will be no women who care this week.

This afternoon there will be a meeting in the north and south ends of the church. Children will be baptized at both ends.

And Happy Birthday to 'The Message' which is exactly one year old today! Who'd've thought I'd still be writing them now?

I've been asked to remind you all to complete your census forms today, if you haven't already, and Blackpool Tower is being lit up tonight as a reminder, apparently.

And over in Hong Kong my brother is happy to have had his vaccination against covid, and even got a sticker to prove it! I hope I get a sticker. When I was doing the flow testing I gave everyone a lollipop.

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.