

Sunday May 2nd, 2021, The Fifth Sunday of Eastertide

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 hasn't been the soggy bank holiday predicted so far, so let's make the most of it!

So last week we had Jesus give himself the title of 'Good Shepherd' and today we receive another of his self -titles when, in John 15:1-8 he says, I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.'

Throughout the history of salvation, the Church has been portrayed as a tree or plant. Not only do we have the mustard seed as mentioned above, but in the Old Testament we also have the Jesse Tree, which tells of the Kings and Prophets leading to Christ at the top of the tree. In today's Gospel, though, Jesus does more than just refer to himself and the Church, the body of Christ, as a vine. He gives a whole theological interpretation of the metaphor that is both uplifting with regards to our role in the ministry of Christ, but also brutally honest as to the obligations of being part of this vine, of being a member of the body of Christ.

The image of the Church as a vine is a wonderful image. By nature of our baptism each of us is part of this vine, which God gently cares and looks after, but also prunes so that the best fruit can come of it. Only if such care is taken over the Church can any good come. The blessings of the love and care of God ensure this, as God cares for each individual person, ensuring that they may bear fruit that can be used for the good of all. Using this image, Christ is inviting us to take part in his ministry; we have a role to play, to bear good fruit, to produce good works, as members of his body. A wonderful invitation, and a wonderful image, then; but remember, that which produces no fruit, and worse, hinders the growth and good works of others, is cut off and thrown away. To truly be a part of the vine we have to have a use, we have to produce fruit, otherwise we are worthless.

To be a Christian is, as Christ says, to bear fruit; to carry out good works, to do, rather than just to be. St. John points out in the second reading that faith must lead to action. It is no good just to speak of our faith or love or whatever if no good comes from it. We cannot focus all our love on God and neglect our relationship with our neighbour, with those around us. So, faith implies action. And whilst, as I say, our faith implies action, it is also very important that we look at what actions our faith is leading to. Many of 'actions' we were taking in the past came to a standstill over the past fourteen months, and as we gradually come out of lockdown we are really entering a new era in the life of the

Church, and yes, this Parish. There's no 'back to normality' but we ourselves can shape what the 'new normality' is going to be. The Bishop's Conference have provided us with a letter about returning to worship, and copies are available in Church. I would ask everyone to think and pray about how our parish should grow and learn from what we have experienced when we come back fully together, and ask us all to look closely at what we are doing, what we could and should do, what we have learnt, what good things we could take from our enforced changes, and see how we might best as individuals, with individual special talents and gifts nurtured by God, serve the Church, the vine, and thus live lives pleasing to the vinedresser.

Like last week's image of the Good Shepherd, the image of God as a Vinedresser, and ourselves as branches of the vine that is the body of Christ, is incredibly rich and thought provoking. But let us ensure that our thinking and praying over these wonderful pieces of Scripture, also leads us to act and to produce that good fruit. It is to the glory of God the Father that we should bear much fruit, and then we will be Christ's disciples...

Father, I pray that I may bear much fruit to Your praise and glory.

Take away all in my life that is not good and fruitful

and do such a work in me that I may bear even more fruit.

Heavenly Father, thank You for Christ Jesus the true and living Vine.

Thank You that You have called me to be a branch on that living Vine.

Thank You that by grace through faith in Him,

I have heard the gospel of grace and have been saved by the cleansing power of Your Word.

I pray that I may grow in grace, day by day, and live and work to Your praise and glory.

I pray that I would continue to be cleansed with every passing day

as I abide in You and You in me.

To Your praise and glory, Amen.

'This Is My Body, broken for you, bring you wholeness, making you free' would be a lovely hymn for us to sing today. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCuA_ixkZOW

So how are you enjoying the bank holiday weekend? Bank holidays were first introduced by a man named Sir John Lubbock who was a scientific writer, banker and politician, and the first Baron of Avebury. (He is also reported to have studied ants and tried to teach his poodle how to read!) In 1871, he drafted the Bank Holiday Bill. When it became law, he created the first official bank holidays. Initially, it was just banks and financial buildings that would close, which is where the name comes from. But as time went on, businesses, shops, schools and the government all joined in.

The Early May Bank Holiday, tomorrow, traditionally marks the arrival of spring, and the celebration can be traced back to the 14th century, but in 2011, changing the date of the May Day Bank Holiday

was considered by the British parliament. According to a pre-consultation document from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, May Day was chosen because *'when Easter is late, as it has been [in 2011], it can lead to three bank holidays (four in 2011 due to the Royal Wedding) in a space of a short amount of time, with another bank holiday at the end of May'*. It added that the concentration *'of bank holidays will have an effect on the economy*, and that moving the May Day Bank Holiday therefore would dilute this concentration. Ultimately, it was decided that the date of the May Day Bank Holiday would be left alone. And I think we are all ready for a day off!

Here's a poem entitled 'Spring' by the religious poet Gerard Manley Hopkins SJ, which makes reference to Mayday:

*Nothing is so beautiful as spring -
When weeds in wheels shoot long and lovely lush;
Thrushes' eggs look little low heavens, and thrush
Through the echoing timber does so rinse and wring
The ear, it strikes like lightning to hear him sing;
The glassy peartree leaves and blooms, they brush
The descending blue; that blue is all in a rush
With richness; the racing lambs too have fair their fling.
What is all this juice and all this joy?
A strain of the earth's sweet being in the beginning
In Eden garden? Have, get, before it cloy,
Before it cloud, Christ, lord, and sour with sinning,
Innocent mind and Mayday in girl and boy,
Most, O maid's child, thy choice and worthy the winning.*

So what are you doing for the Bank Holiday? A weekend at your caravan? I'm determined to get out somewhere this afternoon, whether the weather is for it or not! My sister sent me this photo she found in the Guardian about seaside resorts many years ago. It's a photo of Bishop Lodge Holiday Camp, Norbreck. I can't quite grasp where it is. Anyone have memories of the place? The photo was taken in 1946.

By the way, I have been a week early with my dates regarding Ascension Thursday and Pentecost. Ascension Thursday is on May 13th, but we will celebrate it on the following weekend and our public masses that week, which will take us to Pentecost weekend on 15th and 16th. Hope that's clear (and if it is, please explain it to me!) Apologies for any confusion.

So enjoy the rest of the Bank Holiday Weekend – whatever the forecast tomorrow!

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.