

Sunday July 4th, 2021, The Fourteenth Sunday in ordinary Time 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 – as it is certainly was on the football field of Rome yesterday evening! Well done to the English Team!

On with today's Gospel! There seems a lot to be said for Jesus' statement in today's Gospel, Mark 6:1-6, '*A prophet is only despised in his own country.*' This was indeed true for many of the great Old Testament prophets, many of whom had to travel far from their homeland to get a hearing, even if their words were not always accepted. And well-known Jewish Fathers and leaders, such as Abraham and Moses, for example, had trouble with their people and their descendants when things were not going as smoothly as they wanted. It was certainly the case for Jesus that he was rejected by his own people. But here, in this passage from the Gospel of St. Mark, when people refuse to listen to him, not because of what he says, but of *who* he is. He's a local. He's somebody they know. They know his parents, his extended family, his 'broughtings' as they say in Blackpool, where and how he was brought up. And for this, they refuse to accept him. They have heard of the miracles he has performed. They have heard of the wisdom he has spoken. But still they refuse to accept him. This prophet is indeed despised in his own country.

Many people today who have doubts about organised religion say it is because of the hypocrisy of Church members. That those in Church are as bigger sinners as anyone outside. And who has a right to stand up and preach to anyone else? Perhaps the arguments against religion today are not, perhaps, much of change from those directed at Jesus. It's sad that this should be the case, but perhaps not surprising. It certainly suggests that looking around at one another there is perhaps a tendency to look at people's faults, at people's weaknesses. But all have us, with regards to religion or not, often perhaps have a leaning towards an inability to look at the good in people, and instead concentrate only on the bad things. Like the people in today's Gospel, we perhaps concentrate only on the earthly, and fail to see the heavenly, we concentrate on the humanity and not on the divinity.

The other readings today provide a dry counterpoint to the Gospel. Ezekial is told when the Spirit comes down upon up that he must preach to his people whether they listen or not. And St. Paul speaks of how prepared he is, in fact how happy he is to accept the criticisms and insults of others for the sake of the Gospel

If people who constantly criticised the Church took a look and a listen at the good this body of Christ in the world today is attempting then, while I'll admit it is hardly exempt from criticism, it might be somewhat harder to blindly criticise it. If people listened to what was being preached, listened to the Scriptures that are so regularly proclaimed, rather than focusing on the individual or individuals trying to put across this message, whether the preacher is a saint or a sinner, they may, perhaps for the first time, actually hear the Word of God. But then perhaps if we all tried to concentrate on the good in one another and on this earth a bit more, we might have more a chance of seeing the heavenly shining through. This very day the Word of God is being preached to us, miracles are taking place, and the Holy Spirit is there to be our friend and guide. But how many are truly listening? How many are truly looking? And how many are truly believing?

My heavenly Father, praise You that faith does not come from the wisdom or understanding of humans but through the power of Your Spirit. As Your servant Paul preached, his words were not his wisdom, but a demonstration of Your power through him. Lord, I need Your strength to speak wise words to others so their faith will grow in You. Give me the words to share the work You have done in me with those who need hope. Like those hearing Paul, they will know faith in the Lord.

Father, even the disciples that walked with Jesus needed to strengthen their faith. Jesus told them if their faith was only the size of a mustard seed, they could uproot trees and crumble mountains. Lord, I need more faith like the disciples. Increase my faith and make me a mover of mountains. Grow my belief in You alone so that I would be strong in the Lord and ready to battle against the doubts planted by the enemy. Lord, increase my faith!

Father God, You shower the lilies of the field with beauty and feed the birds of the air. Build my faith to depend on You entirely for every need and not on the things of this world or my strength and abilities. Not one day can be added to my life through worry. As my heavenly Father, You know what I need and You provide for all my cares. Help me to trust You to care for me. Amen.

How about a hymn to our Blessed Mother Nary today –it seems a while since we had one, and who was more faith-filled than Mary? Let's go for 'Holy Virgin, by God's Decree.'

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

So why was there a picture of on Origami Crane on yesterday's message? Introducing 'The Great 1000 Crane Challenge', To raise funds for those in need in the Autumn and Winter term. It's about time I had another Challenge (last year's August juniper-free challenge seems a long way away), and funds will be needs this coming Autumn for those vulnerable and in need. So why 1000 Cranes? In Christian Art, the crane bird is a symbol of vigilance, loyalty, good life and works, and good order in the monastic life. The crane became the symbol of vigilance, and God's constant, loving, watching over us at all times, as the crane keeps watch over its children all night while standing on one leg so

that if they fell asleep, they would immediately be woken up. In Japanese Origami (paper folding) there is a tradition that if you make 1000 Origami Cranes, your prayer will be granted. To that end, over the summer, I would invite sponsorship for me to make 1000 paper cranes. Each will be individually numbered, and many will be at the back of Church as bookmarks, notelets, and napkins, which you are free to take and make an offering for if you wish. Bulletins and Messages will keep you posted as to how I am doing. So, sponsorship is invited for 'Fr. P.'s 1000 Crane Challenge' to raise money for those in need. Over to you! All donations welcome in the usual ways: in envelopes clearly marked in the collection or through the Parish Bank Account (please mark your donation Cranes or Challenge). Many thanks in anticipation. And Psalm 121 seems to sum up the Christian meaning of the beautiful bird that is the Crane:

*I lift up my eyes to the mountains-
where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot slip-
he who watches over you will not slumber;
indeed, he who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord watches over you-
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;
the sun will not harm you by day
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm-
he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.*

I attach a picture of some of the Crane Notecards and Napkins, and the Cranes themselves, which you are welcome to take from the back of the Church. I was hoping to have a pile at the back of Church this weekend, but the sticky numbers have only just arrived so that I know where I am in the 1000! Next week they will be there for sure!

I'll get my fingers busy, and you have a great Sunday!

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.