

Sunday July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Fifteenth 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.

Good morning – the morning before the evening after, or something like that!

If you were to invent a proverb to sum up today's Gospel it might well be 'If at first you don't succeed – give up,' because that's what Christ seems to be saying the apostles as he sends them off for the first time, preaching repentance, casting our devils and anointing sick people. Seriously? Mark 6:7-13 seems to focus on what the Apostles are to do if they are not welcomed and rejected. If people won't listen to them they should walk away, shaking the dust from their feet as they go as a sign to them. If at first you don't succeed, and your words fall on deaf ears, give up. Now, I don't know about you, but to me, this seems a very strange thing for Christ to be saying. Wouldn't you expect Christ to want us to stay and persevere with these people? Shouldn't we be spending more time with these people who are obviously in greater need of repentance and healing?

Well, yes we should. Because in these instructions, Jesus isn't saying If at first you don't succeed, give up. He is actually saying If at first you don't succeed go back and try again. The act of shaking the dust from your feet, actually taking your sandals off, clicking them together and getting rid of all accumulated dirt and stones and dust had a specific meaning for the Jewish world. It actually meant: it is as though we've never met, we've never spoken, we've never known one another at all. Now all that might seem incredibly drastic, but in annulling the meeting, removing it from memory and almost existence, it means in fact that you can try again, that you can go back to these people who first rejected you, with no pre-conceived ideas about them, and bearing no grudges or ill will at all for your previous treatment. It also means that when you go back to these people, you yourself have greater experience, and may now be in a more understanding position, and perhaps now be able to put across the Christian message in a way in which these people will listen, will sit up and take notice, will understand and take to heart. Having shaken the dust from your feet, the opportunity to return, anew and afresh is there. And the onus is on you.

And the advice that Jesus gives today is not just for those of us who go about preaching. Jesus' advice strikes at the very heart of our Christian lives. It's very easy to get despondent and downcast when, in trying to live our lives according to the injunctions of Christ and his Church, we experience rejection and a lack of understanding from those around us, perhaps members of our family, our children or

whoever. And a sense of failure can seriously undermine any personal Christian growth. Perhaps what we need to do is look again at how our lives as Christians appears to others, and whether what we do and what we say really communicates the message of Christ and his forgiveness that we are all called to share with others. Sometimes it is not the fault of people for not listening to the scriptures or the Words of God. It's our fault, for not proclaiming them, for not putting them across in a way that is accessible, for not living them out ourselves, for failing to provide a good example of Christian life for people to follow. If people, considering everything, resolutely refuse to listen or accept, then still our example to them of what we say and mean, must never falter.

Until we have heard and understood and live out the Gospel of Christ, it is unlikely that anyone else is going to be able to hear and understand it and allow it to become a part of their lives, through us. So if we are not succeeding, let us take stock of what we should be doing, what the message is, and what we must do to allow it to be heard and understood by all. As St. Paul says, '*God the Father... has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in Christ.*' So in turn let us do everything we ourselves can to make sure that we share those blessings with the world.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for your great love and blessing over our lives.*

*Thank you that your favour has no end, but it lasts for our entire lifetime and eternal lifetime.*

*We ask for your guidance so that we might walk fully in your blessing and goodness today.*

*We ask that your face would shine on us.*

*That you would open the right doors for our lives and for our loved ones,*

*that you would close the wrong doors and protect us from our adversaries*

*Establish the work of our hands and bring to fulfilment all that you have given us to.*

*Help us to share our blessings with those around us.*

*May they see in us the light of your faith, and the warmth of your love.*

*Give us a heart of wisdom to hear your voice, and to proclaim your voice,*

*and make us strong by your huge favour and grace,*

*and your many, many blessings.*

*Through Christ our Lord.*

With all this talk of blessings, how about 'Blessed Be the Lord, the God of Mercy, the God who Saves.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BW5DHXIU43Y>

Well, I'm sure everyone is ready with their snacks and beverages for tonight's Football Final, (I hope a four cheese pizza does not seem too disloyal), so it seems only appropriate that we should have a bit of a football quiz (it's a while since we had a Sunday quiz, actually). Answers at the end of The Message. So here goes! Grab your coffee and cake and...

1. Which Liverpool star also played for Southampton and Celtic? A. Sadio Mane B. Adam Lallana C. Virgil van Dijk
2. Which team has won the most FA Cup trophies? A. Arsenal B. Man United C. Chelsea
3. Where in France was the 2019 Women's World Cup final played? A. Stade De Lyon B. Parc Des Princes C. Allianz Riviera
4. Which club did Manchester United sign Anthony Martial from? A. Monaco B. Marseille C. Lille
5. Which country do Orlando Pirates play in? A. USA B. South Africa C. Poland
6. At which club did Aaron Ramsey begin his career? A. Blackburn B. Swansea C. Cardiff
7. Which Match of the Day pundit did NOT play for Liverpool and Spurs? A. Ian Wright B. Peter Crouch C. Danny Murphy
8. What do the initials VAR mean in football? A. Very Awful Reaction B. Video Assistant Referee C. Video Action Replay
9. Which trophy is contested between the Premier League and FA Cup winners? A. Club World Cup B. Community Shield C. EFL Trophy
10. What is AFC Bournemouth's nickname? A. The Berries B. The Nuts C. The Cherries

And this is a Footballer's Prayer, to be Prayed Before a Game. Perhaps we might say it for our team tonight? And it holds good for any sporting fixture – and not just sporting fixtures if you think about it...!

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for this new day.*

*It is such a privilege and a blessing to play football.*

*Please fill us with energy and passion as we push ourselves to do well.*

*Help us all to compete with fairness in our hearts and minds and give us the grace to accept success or defeat.*

*Protect our health and bodies as we challenge, tackle and run today.*

*Watch over all those present, the spectators young and old, and our nearest and dearest families.*

*May this game celebrate sport, and be enjoyable for everyone.*

*Amen.*

And whilst we are on the subject of all things football, here is a very rare photo of yours truly in a football kit – from 1979/80 modelling my new secondary school sports kit for my Nanna (my dad's mother). Probably the first time I wore one. And probably just about the last as well...

Have a great day, a great evening, and hopefully not too sore a head tomorrow morning!

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.

Answers: 1.C, 2.A, 3.A, 4.A, 5.B, 6.C, 7.A, 8.B, 9.B, 10.C