

Sunday July 25th, 2021, The Seventeenth 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 all well went well at our first less restricted Mass last night, although I forgot to provide people with words for the hymns, but hopefully that will be sorted this morning!

In today's Gospel, John 6:1-15, the Apostles presented hundreds, in fact thousands of followers, all wanting something to eat, and having no food. While the Gospel tells us that Jesus knew what he was going to do, Philip is being a pure curmudgeon. They've not enough money to buy food, and when some food turns up, it's not enough for everybody. But Jesus quietly takes the food, blesses it and gives thanks, and miraculously allows this tiny amount to be distributed among over five thousand people. Just as God allowed Elisha to multiply bread for the hungry, just as God fed the Israelites with manna in the desert, so quietly, unfazed and without fuss, Jesus responds to the hunger of the people set before him.

The hunger of the people both physical *and* spiritual. Do you remember last week Jesus was aware of the physical needs of the disciples who needed rest and the spiritual needs of the people who need his words and healing? For Jesus, the distribution of food is hardly the most important task. Jesus immediately achieves this, simply and easily. What is important for Jesus is that the people come to understand who he is, through listening to his Word, perhaps through experiencing his miracles, but coming to know him in a personal way. For Jesus, what's important is allowing people to come to hear and understand the Word of God, his preaching, the Scriptures, and strive to follow it for themselves. It's the spiritual starvation that Jesus focuses; his greatest desire is to give them spiritual nourishment.

Later, on the night before he died, Christ gave us that spiritual nourishment in a completely new and everlasting way, as he gave us himself, in the Eucharist. From that first Mass of the Last Supper, through to the meal at Emmaeus after Jesus had risen from the dead, through to all our masses worldwide and online today, we all have so many opportunities to receive the nourishment of Christ's body and blood, and to hear and understand Christ's nourishing Word in the Scriptures.

From a physical point of view most of us are very lucky; there is more than enough for food than most of us would ever want to eat. Not everyone in the world is so lucky. And if we truly have received the

nourishment of Christ, then, as I've intimated, our spiritual strength should be there to make sure we do something about that, in our prayer, in our charitable actions, and in our political and social inclinations. And that's something we very much do here at St. Bernadette's – and thanks to you all have continued to do throughout the pandemic. It's a huge challenge, as is the whole call to living out a Christian life. But just as whenever we are hungry we can always grab whatever we need, so we must remember that the answer to all our challenges in life lies in the Eucharist and the Scriptures. If we can grow in our desire for this nourishment; if we can be so filled by Christ and his Word, that we live out the Word and Food of God in every aspect of lives; if we can go on to draw others, hundreds, thousands, well over five thousand, to come to this table of our Lord, then together, we will, with the help of God, the nourishment of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, indeed have fulfilled all our starvation. And most importantly, we'll have fulfilled others, too.

Lord Jesus:

I give you my hands to do your work

I give you my feet to go your way

I give you my eyes to see as you do

I give you my tongue to speak your words

I give you my mind that you may think in me

I give you my spirit that you may pray in me

Above all:

*I give you my heart that you may love in me,
your Father and all humankind.*

I give you my whole self that you may grow in me,

So that it is you, Lord Jesus,

who live and work and pray in me.

Lord Jesus, King of Heaven and Earth, you fed five thousand with five small loaves and two fish. Accept my small prayer offerings and, in your mercy, great things will be miraculously accomplished.

Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

And 'I Give My Hands.' Would seem to be a most suitable hymn after that prayer (even though as they recorded the soundtrack of this mini video someone seems to have a coughing fit).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BAMR-tlfm0>

And so the Paper Crane Challenge continues, and I am now almost at the 300 mark. It's actually quite a peaceful and mindful thing to do, as has been learning a little more about the culture of 1000 Cranes and the Japanese legend that folding 1000 cranes (senbazuru) so pleases God that the folder is granted a wish.

One famous story which has entered modern history is that of Sadako Sasaki. In 1945 after the first atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima, Japan, many people became very sick years later with leukaemia and other cancers, and one such girl was named Sadako Sasaki. When she found out that she had the disease in 1955, she began to fold paper cranes. Sadako wished to get well. So, after hearing the legend, Sadako decided to fold 1,000 cranes. When she died she had folded 644 cranes. Her story had such a profound impact on her friends and classmates that they completed her thousand cranes and raised enough money to build a statue to honour Sadako and all the children affected by the bomb. Today, in Hiroshima's Peace Park, there is a statue of Sadako standing on top of a granite pedestal holding a golden crane in her outstretched arms. At its base a plaque reads: *'This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the world.'* Sadako wrote in her journal: *'I will write Peace on your wings and you will fly all around the world.'* Every year, children from around the world fold cranes and send them to Hiroshima where they are placed around the statue. And because of Sadako, the paper crane has become an international symbol of peace, and a reminder of the events of 1945.

And last week a parishioner emailed (huge thanks, by the way) saying that in Bispham library she had seen a copy of a children's book called 'The Last Paper Crane' and thought of me and my challenge, sending me a picture of the book. I did a bit of judicious googling, and read up on the book which sounded interesting, and downloaded it. And what a beautiful book it is. Here's the blurb: *'1945, Hiroshima: Ichiro is a teenage boy relaxing at home with his friend Hiro. Moments later there is a blinding flash as the horrific bomb is dropped. With great bravery the two boys find Hiro's five year-old sister Keiko in the devastated and blasted landscape. With Hiro succumbing to his wounds, Ichiro is now the only one who can take care of Keiko. But in the chaos Ichiro loses her when he sets off to find help. Seventy years later, after the death of his wife, the loss of Keiko and his broken promise to his dying friend are haunting the old man's fading years. Mizuki, his granddaughter, is determined to help him. As the Japanese legend goes, if you have the patience to fold 1,000 paper cranes, you will find your heart's desire; and it turns out her grandfather has only one more origami crane to fold...'*

The book is unusually written in that modern-day scenes of the story are told in verse, whilst the grandfather's story is told in prose, and there are some truly haunting illustrations. It's not a book about war or politics or blame, but tells of the experience of the bomb through the eyes of unknowing and uncomprehending children; it's about childhood promises, compassion, guilt, and whether or not there is a possibility of redemption. I sat and read the book in one sitting (it's *that* kind of a book). It is such a beautiful, heart-breaking read, and I can thoroughly recommend it (I'd like to say that everybody *should* read it), although, be warned, have the Kleenex ready for the ending. A whole box. Possibly two.

we are here by grace

we are meant to love

we will walk with hope

we will live for peace

I'm off to make a few more cranes – and perhaps take a little walk, so may see you on the Prom in the afternoon sunshine.

Be glad to be able to enjoy what's left of this beautiful weekend.

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.

The Amazon link for the 'The Last Paper Crane' https://www.amazon.co.uk/Last-Paper-Crane-Kerry-Drewery/dp/1471408477/ref=sr_1_1?dchild=1&hvadid=80264453915450&hvbmt=bp&hvdev=c&hvqmt=p&keywords=last+paper+crane&qid=1627199863&sr=8-1