

Saturday November 21<sup>st</sup>, The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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 today we celebrate the memorial of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Presentation of Mary in the Temple, by her parents Joachim and Anne as young girl is not based on any event in the New Testament, although it is recorded in a document of the time of the New Testament, which the Church did not approve of for admittance into the Bible. The lack of textual support is, nevertheless, no reason to doubt the ancient tradition, especially preserved in Eastern Orthodoxy, that Joachim and Anne consecrated their daughter, Mary, to God at the age of three in the Jerusalem Temple. This feast goes back to 543, when a church, built near the Temple of Jerusalem, was dedicated to Our Lady. With the Eastern Christians we celebrate the dedication of herself which Mary made to God from her childhood under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The readings for today are particularly beautiful. The first reading from the prophet Zechariah 2:14-17 foretells the coming of Jesus, with Mary, in every way, being the first to receive him: '*Sing, rejoice, daughter of Zion; for I am coming to dwell in the middle of you.*' The Psalm is Mary's own Magnificat, the song of joy she proclaimed when greeted by her cousin Elizabeth; '*He looks on his servant in her nothingness; henceforth all ages will call me blessed,*' and indeed we do. The Gospel, Matthew 12:46-50, invites us to be a member of God's family with the closeness of Mary, if we can do the will of the Father – and no human being has followed the Father's will more closely than our Blessed Mother Mary.

*As we venerate the glorious memory  
of the most Holy Virgin Mary,  
grant, we pray, o Lord, through her intercession,  
that we, too, merit to receive  
from the fullness of your grace.  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

This is a prayer to Our Lady to celebrate the Feast of her Presentation in the Temple, by St Alphonsus Liguori (who wrote the traditional Stations of the Cross that we use regularly in Lent):

*Oh holy Lady know that already through thy prayers the Son of God is hastening to come and redeem the world, and know that thou art the blessed one chosen to be the Mother of God, most holy Child, thou prayest for all, pray also for me.*

*Thou hast consecrated thyself wholly even from infancy to the love of thy God. Obtain for me at least during the remaining years of my life that I may live for God alone.*

*Today, together with thee, I renounce all creatures, and consecrate myself to the love of my Lord. I also offer myself to thee, oh my queen to serve thee forever. Accept me for thy special servant and obtain for me the grace to be faithful to thee and to thy Son, so that I may come one day to praise thee and love thee in paradise. Amen.*

Tonight we have the first of our live streamed masses at 5pm, but this will only be a test, so feel free to join with us, but also bear with us in the face of any technical difficulties, and hopefully we will be sorted for mass at 10am tomorrow. Google 'YouTube St. Bernadette's Bispham' and we should pop up. If we can say that anything positive has come out of the last nine months it is the way we have had to do things differently and find new and inventive ways to keep together as a community and continue to share the message of God amongst ourselves and the wider community. This Message, for example, or the daily prayer videos for the children, and of course the proliferation of videoed or live streamed masses and services everywhere. The schools in the deanery have shared a mass, all being edited together and linked, and they will be doing the same for their advent service, with every school contributing. Here at St. Bernadette's I have written a nativity, with each class separately acting and praying their part of the story, which will then be edited together so that each class can watch a whole school nativity, even though the whole school could not come together to make it. In these dark, dreary, depressing times, let us do everything we can to accentuate the positive, and do our best to use this time to find ways to reinvigorate our church and worship, however difficult it may be.

*Dear Lord,*

*thank you for blessing me with your word,*

*I yield my whole life to you,*

*and declare that your perfect will is fulfilled in me today.*

*Lord, I rely on you alone for a better day,*

*I believe you have a better plan for me and that's why I have a positive expectation.*

*All things work together for those that love you,*

*I love you Lord and I rely only on you for a positive result in all I do today, and every day.*

*Amen.*

Perhaps we all need a holiday. And just to prove that even on holiday I say Mass, here's me and Ed in our cabin on the Marella Discovery celebrating Mass for our Parishioners. Incidentally, the silver coloured stoles we wear were both made by Maria Poyner for our respective twenty-fifth anniversaries of ordination. And beautiful they are.

Sunday's Bereavement Mass was recorded and is available on the YouTube at

<https://youtu.be/vz7JvyVr6mQ> Texts for Mass each day can be found at <http://www.universalis.com/>

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.