

Sunday November 22nd, The Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of The Universe.

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.

It looks like it's going to be a lovely day, so let's make the most of it.

We tried our first streamed Mass last night, which seemed to go well, though I believe there were some sound problems, so we'll see how it goes at 10am this morning. Don't forget the Church is open from 12noon till 1pm with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

And so we come to the Last Sunday in the Church's Liturgical Year, and The Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of The Universe. Who'd've thought in March we'd be spending this and next Sunday's First Sunday of Advent in Lockdown. As I said yesterday, let's do our best to accentuate the positive, and celebrate today's great Feast.

For years – from my Roman days – I've been a fan of the works of the Irish author Maeve Binchy. She writes a lot about growing up as a Catholic in Ireland in the 1950's. And generally she writes very fondly about it, the traditions, the faith, the convent education by nuns whom she regarded – and still regards - very highly. And yet it's very sad to note that Maeve Binchy lost her faith in her early twenties, and it came about rather strangely. She was actually in the Holy Land, and she visited the Upper Room where the Last Supper had taken place. And when she saw that it was just a small ordinary room in an ordinary Jerusalem street, she found herself unable to believe that the Church, her faith, the Eucharist, Christ and everything she believed and had been brought up to believe could have begun here in a small, tatty room. And that was that. She still got a massive Catholic Requiem Mass.

And yet for me, far from being a source of disbelief, this is one of the greatest miracles. That events taking place in a country thousands of miles away, thousands of years ago; that an itinerant preacher who shared supper with his friends, before being led off to be crucified as a criminal; that these events led to the resurrection and ultimately our resurrection. For me it's a huge source of wonderment and joy, that seemingly small familial and friendly events that went unknown or uncared about – and certainly misunderstood - to many people at the time, should stand as the most important events in the whole of history. And for me it is a great source of faith that today millions of people gather in prayer to the figure at the centre of these events and places, and make that figure, Jesus Christ, the King and centre of our lives.

The full title of today's feast Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of The Universe. That means that Jesus is the King, not of his believers, not of the world, but of the whole of creation, the whole of the universe. Powerful and heady stuff. And certainly the power of Jesus the King is amply demonstrated in the parable we hear in the Gospel, where some are given an eternal reward, and others are not. For if we are to follow the invitation of Christ, and proclaim ourselves on the side of truth, listening to his voice and bearing witness to his testimony, then we too must enter his Kingdom. And no, it's not a kingdom of power and might. It's not a kingdom of pomp and circumstance. It is not a kingdom of this world. For his Kingdom is indeed the heaven to which each of us aspires and which each of us enters, whenever we serve others less fortunate, whenever we give of ourselves for our fellow human beings, whenever we speak to him in prayer, and whenever we receive him the Eucharist. If Christ is living in us, then we are living in his Kingdom. True, we shall only see the fullness of this Kingdom in the eternal life – but we have only admittance to the eternal life, through the demonstration of Kingship which Christ showed in his passion and cross.

Next week we begin a new year in the life of the Church with the First Sunday of Advent, as we prepare for our celebrations of the coming of Christ at Christmas – a child who was laid in a manger, who was brought up a carpenter, preached from place to place never having a home, and borrowing a room, even for his last supper. This is our King. Much more inspiring, believable and faith-fulfilling than any power ridden, rich, castle owning, worldly demagogue. And much more what a King should be.

*God, our heavenly Father,
You anointed your Only Begotten Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
with the oil of gladness
as eternal Priest and King of all creation,
so that, by offering himself on the cross
as a spotless sacrifice to bring us peace,
he might accomplish the mysteries of human redemption
and, making all created things subject to his rule,
he might present to the immensity of your majesty
an eternal and universal Kingdom,
a kingdom of truth and life,
a kingdom of holiness and grace,
a kingdom of justice, love and peace.
Grant us to live with him eternally
in his heavenly Kingdom.*

Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.

And what else could we sing today other than ‘Hail Redeemer, King Divine’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMV7737SdiY>

Was that version of ‘Hail Redeemer’ filmed at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester? The last time I was there I saw Liza Minnelli in concert, but she didn’t sing that, though it was an incredible concert, with a three piece jazz combo led by Billy Stritch. I didn’t meet Liza after the concert as she wasn’t doing the stage door thing, but over the years I have met quite a few stars, especially in my days as a ‘stage door johnny’ when after the show I would hang around the stage door for an autograph, and latterly a photo. The majority were unfailing kind and pleasant – in all my years there were only two who were really grumpy; Jason Donovan, who had just given a terrible performance as Baron Von Trapp in the ‘Sound of Music’ in Manchester, and Harry Connick Jnr, who had just given a vacant performance in ‘On A Clear Day You Can See Forever’ on Broadway. I guess even stars have their off days. I’ve mentioned how great Elaine Paige, but one of the other nicest was Bonnie Langford, checking to see if the photo was ok or did I want a re-take. Michael Ball was another absolute gent. Over in Australia my sister got into the act too – on my behalf. She met the actor Geoffrey Rush after a performance of ‘A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to The Forum’ and he signed the programme ‘To Peter, Happy Christmas, Geoffrey Rush – from Margaret.’ And several years ago she met our very own Poirot, David Suchet after playing the confessor of John Paul I in a production of ‘The Last Confession’ (I won’t spoil it by telling you the twist at the end). He signed the programme to me ‘Father Peter’ and then posed for a photo with my niece and nephew as you can see. What a gentleman.

Anyway, make the most of this lovely Sunday – and who knows, I may see you on the prom this afternoon.

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.