

Monday November 23rd, Monday in the Thirty-Fourth Week of Ordinary Time, Year II.

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.

Well, our streamed mass went ahead again yesterday morning, and we are still having teething problems with the sound, but hopefully we'll get there. The plan is to stream both the 5pm Mass and the 10am Mass, so you can join in with either, and you will be able to access them for the week. Many thanks for the lovely responses to it. One parishioner told me they were very impressed – until they got to the end and realised they'd watched last week's recorded mass. Next week I'll be streaming the blessing of the Advent Wreath and the lighting of the first candle at the start of mass.

For this last week of the Church's year we continue reading from the fantastical Book of Revelation, including some more visions of heaven. Today in Revelations 14:1-5 we see the Lamb, or Christ, with a huge number of people around him, all stamped with the name of the Father. This indicated that they were his, that they were loyal, that they had security and were safe. The sound they made was like the sound of many waters, of thunder, of harpists, and they sang the song of praise to the Lord, because they were without blemish; *'They never allowed a lie to pass their lips and no fault can be found in them.'*

And our Gospel, Luke 21:1-4, is the story of the so called 'Widow's Mite.' The woman is praised because she gave all she had to live on, whereas the rich people may have given more, but only money they had over. It's a lesson that our charitable giving should affect us, and not be half-hearted. One of the things I like about Food Sunday is that it's not just about throwing a few coins in a bowl, but actively having to remember when you're walking around Aldi that there are people in need and we have to feed them.

O God,

let me be large in thought, in word, in deed.

May I never be hasty in judgment and always generous.

Let me take time for all things and all peoples.

Make me grow calm, serene and gentle.

Teach me to put into action my better impulses, straightforward and unafraid.

Grant that I may realize it is the little things of life

that create differences and that in the big things of life we are One.

Through Christ our Lord.

And today is the memorial in England and Feast in Ireland of St Columbanus. Columbanus was born somewhere in Leinster and from an early age wished to become a monk. He went to Bangor and worked there for many years. Eventually he was given permission to go abroad and set up monasteries in France, where religion was at a low ebb. His main foundation was at Luxeuil in Burgundy. He ran into many problems with the civil authorities and was eventually banned. He ended up in Italy where he founded the monastery at Bobbio in Northern Italy. Many did not like his brand of Celtic Christian discipline - his monastic rule was similar to that of the East, and much more severe than that of Benedict, whose rule was the one most followed in Europe. He died in 615. His followers set up monasteries in France, Germany, Switzerland and Italy. This is one of Columbanus' own prayers. It's rather beautiful, and makes me think it could be inspired by the Irish countryside.

*I beseech you, merciful God,
to allow me to drink from the stream that flows from your fountain of life.
May I taste the sweet beauty of its waters,
which spring from the very depths of your truth.
O Lord, you are that fountain from which I desire with all my heart to drink.
Give me, Lord Jesus, this water that it may quench the burning spiritual thirst within my soul.
I know, King of Glory, that I am asking from you a great gift,
but you give to your faithful people without counting the cost,
and you promise even greater things in the future.
Indeed, nothing is greater than yourself,
and you have given yourself to mankind on the cross.
Therefore, in praying for the waters of life,
I am praying that you, the source of those waters, will give yourself to me.
You are my light, my salvation, my food, my drink, my God.*

Thinking of the waters of Ireland reminds me of a week's boating trip down the Shannon I took with my parents eighteen years ago. It was a beautiful week, travelling from Carrick-on-Shannon and travelling south. The weather was very Irish which made for some hairy crossing of the loughs, but it was all good fun – as you can see in the attached pic. You'll see it is pre-beard, but Ireland was actually responsible for me growing my whiskers. I was on a mini break to Dublin - lovely city but jolly expensive - and so we were travelling hand luggage only on Ryanair, which of course meant I couldn't take a razor or shaving cream (as it was in a pressurised aerosol). There was no way I was paying twelve Euros for the said items and then have to leave them there, so I didn't shave for the three days I was there — and the rest is hairy history. I haven't shaved since! (Although the beard got a heavy trim yesterday evening after I saw myself on the YouTube mass yesterday!)

Make it the best day you can, and maybe have a drink of something Irish...

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.