

Saturday December 26th, The Feast of St. Stephen.

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.

I hope you all had the best Christmas day possible, given the circumstances we are all going through at the moment. It was lovely to see so many people at our socially distanced Christmas Masses, great to see all the children at noon, as well as hear some wonderful music from our organist and singers upstairs, which gave our services such a wonderful atmosphere. Thanks to the stewards, the servers, the readers and ministers, the flower arrangers, the seating planner, the videographer, all our musicians, and everyone who helped make Christmas the best we possibly could. And thank you to everyone who turned up to the services, and those who watched online. I had a lovely day, first of all delivering six Christmas lunches to StreetLife (which I most certainly did not cook), and then enjoying Ian's excellent cooking of the most delicious Christmas lunch... as you can see!

And today is the Feast of St. Stephen. Stephen was a Jewish Christian and probably spoke Greek. He was one of the first deacons, and taught and preached with great wisdom and a strong faith. He infuriated the Jews because he preached that Jesus had superseded the Jewish law, as was foretold in scripture. False witnesses were brought against him and he was eventually stoned to death, the Church's very first martyr. Today's first reading gives us the account of Stephen's martyrdom as recorded in Acts of the Apostles 6:8-10. 7:54-59, with Stephen *praying* 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them,' for his murderers. It ends with the chilling words 'And Saul entirely approved of the killing,' which goes on to show how great St. Paul's conversion was.

In Matthew 10:17-22 Jesus tells his disciples that many will attack them because they are his followers, essentially prophesying the many, many martyrdoms over the history of the Church. The Holy Spirit will enlighten them when necessary.

*Grant, O Lord,
that in all our sufferings here upon earth,
for the testimony of thy truth,
we may steadfastly look up to heaven,
and by faith behold the glory that shall be revealed;
and, being filled with the Holy Ghost,
may learn to love and bless our persecutors
by the example of thy first Martyr Saint Stephen,*

*who prayed for his murderers to thee, O blessed Jesus,
who standest at the right hand of God to succour all those that suffer for thee,
our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.*

Let's have a good hearty sing of 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing.'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICt1s44cfMM>

St. Stephen is also Patron Saint of Altar Servers, and the Guild of Altar Servers bears his name. Hopefully when all this coronavirus malarkey leads us to a new normality we will once again be enabled to enlist young (and not so young) people to serve Christ in this important ministry. Here is the Guild of St. Stephen's Altar Servers' Prayer:

*Lord Jesus Christ,
thank you for allowing me to share in the service of your Altar.
Help me to think of you more often
and have a deep respect for you in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar.
Give me the grace to follow you always
and to be generous in serving you.
Holy Mother of God, help me to serve your son faithfully;
and help me to discover what he wants of me in my life
and to have the courage to undertake it. Amen*

Of course we all know that Good King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen. On the Feast of King Wenceslas himself I told the children in their morning prayer video about the song 'Good King Wenceslas' and what a great king he was, but I kept getting interrupted by my Italian Puppet of a Monk who insisted that the words of the song were:

*Good King Wences last cooked out
Sunday Roast for Stephen,
Onion rings and boiled sprouts,
Chunky chips cut even.
Orange carrots glowing bright,
Wine to make you merry.
And if you have any room...
...scoops of Ben and Je-e-rry.*

Perhaps we should listen to the proper version <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQVUMG6LZGM>

As usual there is a five o'clock Mass this Saturday evening and tomorrow morning at ten, for the Feast of the Holy Family. Also please note that there is an extra twelve o'clock noon mass next Friday for New Years Day, the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God.

Continue to enjoy Christmastide – which we are going to celebrate right up until February 2nd!

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.