

Sunday November 29th, The First Sunday of Advent, 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 a very Happy New Year, as we begin a New Year in the life of the Church today, on this the First Sunday of Advent, the beginning of our four weeks of especial preparation to celebrate the birth of Jesus on December 25th. Our streamed Saturday night and Sunday morning masses are up and running, and available on the YouTube, and we'll continue streaming and recording when we start Public Masses next week, at the new times of 5pm Saturday Night, 10am Sunday morning, and 12noon on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Over the past year we have all done a lot of waiting: waiting for lockdowns to end, waiting to see friends and family again, waiting for our Churches to open, waiting for our public masses to begin again. The theme of waiting is found in each of the readings for this Sunday. In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah writes to the Jewish people in exile in Babylon. Babylon is like a wilderness for them as they long for their homeland. He offers them hope that God, who seems distant, will save them once more and lead them to freedom. The words of the prophet – in effect the word's of God – show that he understands everything they have been going through; he has guarded them closely and watched over them. Their waiting in exile would come to an end with the reign of a new king.

When St Paul wrote to the Christian Church at Corinth, there was an expectation that the Second Coming was imminent. Having rejoiced in the resurrection, the Christian community expected Jesus to return very shortly as he had promised. As the early Christians waited, they could easily become distracted, tend to lose heart and fail to trust in God. Paul (Corinthians 3:1-9) reminds them that the Lord will keep them steady and guiltless as they wait in hope. He encourages them to continue to trust in God and that God will provide for them during their waiting.

The theme of waiting dominates the gospel as well and will do for much of the scripturally rich season of Advent. Jesus encourages his followers to stay alert and awake as they wait for Christ to return. The people to whom St Mark wrote needed to be sustained in their faith as they faced adversity and persecution.

The wonderful season of Advent is a time of waiting, waiting for Christmas. But hopefully it is a time of great, deep and serious preparations for our great religious festival. It is a great opportunity to focus

our minds on Christ, who should be at the centre of our Christmas. As we await the celebration of Christ's birth, this season is an opportunity to focus once more on Christ, who is the deepest meaning of Christmas. He is the gift that can bring true hope and joy to those who long for new life. Not just now, or in four weeks' time, but at the end of our time on earth, and at the end of time itself. Because Advent is not just about preparing for Christmas and waiting for our great celebrations on the twenty-fifth of December. Advent is also reminder that as Christians we are waiting for the Second Coming of Christ.

Taken as a whole, in today's liturgy of the Word the scriptures offer hope for the experience of waiting. God will intervene in the lives of those who are waiting - waiting in exile or in sickness, waiting to joyfully and meaningfully celebrate Christmas, waiting in hope of the coming of Christ, and waiting to see God face to face. Today's Mass offers a message of hope that waiting is not in vain. God will sustain us, for the next four weeks, and for the rest of our lives, if we are waiting and trusting in Him.

*Ever-present God, source of all love, hope and life -
God with us and God still to come -
We lift to you all who are waiting today.
We rejoice with all those who are joyfully expectant of change or breakthrough
And mourn with all those for whom it seems distant,
Or who are coping with the fear of bad news.
God with us and God still to come,
Very-present help in trouble, delay and pain,
May your love and mercy be close - and active - for all who wait for you,
And all who simply wait.
Lord Jesus please come.
Amen.*

And our hymn today has to be classic Advent song, 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.' Here's a lovely version from the annual 'Carols from Kings' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qcIIZpnZPgo>
Or if you fancy something a bit more ethereal, check out Enya's version here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=01BcaggibDw>

So what are you having for Sunday dinner? I have no idea what I'll be having, but on a Sunday I don't have to look in the freezer or schlepp over to Tesco, because for the past month or so a wonderful family in the Parish have been delivering me a Sunday dinner every Sunday afternoon. I say Sunday dinner but it is actually Sunday dinnerS as the portions are so great that I am able to make two meals out of it, and have a second meal on Monday evening. The food is absolutely delicious, with loads of

wonderful veggies and meat accompanied by a flask of yummy gravy. Huge thanks to this wonderful family, it really is the best meal, or meals, of the week. I'm a very lucky Parish Priest. And just check out the attached photo to see how lucky I am!

O God, when I have food, help me to remember the hungry.

When I have work, help me to remember the jobless.

When I have a home, help me to remember those who have no home at all.

When I am without pain, help me to remember those who suffer.

*And remembering, help me to destroy my complacency, bestir my compassion,
and be concerned enough to help, by word and deed,*

those who cry out for what I take for granted. Amen.

And if you find that Grace Before Meals a tad serious, why not try saying this one which I found for one of the children's morning prayer videos:

Thank you for teaching me gratitude with this delicious bread and meat.

Thank you for teaching me patience, while waiting 'til time to eat.

Thank you for teaching me faith, expecting food and never having doubts.

Thank you for teaching me suffering, by inventing brussel sprouts.

Thank you for giving me friends, and family to sit with and share

Thank you for giving us Jesus, and for all your love and care.

Although I actually love brussel sprouts.

Don't forget to start booking in for our Christmas Masses, the children's oriented service at 12noon, and candlelit masses at 5pm and 8pm on Christmas Eve, and 10am Mass on Christmas morning. You will be able to do it when you come to Mass, or send in an email. We'll have the best Christmas Services we possible can under the circumstances. Many thanks for the board games and selection boxes that have been brought in so far, and many thanks in anticipation for everything that will come in for our families in need over the Christmas season.

So Advent has begun! Time to start on the Christmas cards. Let's properly prepare for Christmas **together**.

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.