

Monday November 30<sup>th</sup>, Monday in the First Week of Advent Year B, The Feast of St. Andrew

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.

Early morning message again – dentists! I'm told there were still some sound and vision problems with the live streaming, but I'm sure with some tinkering or equipment we will get there! Please be patient in bearing with us. At least from next Saturday you will have the option of attending Mass 'live in person'!

The readings for Advent are my favourites in the whole liturgical year. In this season we try to get into the spirit of the people of old waiting for the expected arrival of the Messiah. For the first few days we try to take on the spirit of the prophets who waited and longed for the Messiah, because he would free them from evil. Then, in the middle of next week, we go along with John the Baptist – 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.' Finally, from 17 December, we get into the heart and mind of our blessed Mother Mary, as she looked forward to the birth of her son, along with the other protagonists in the Christmas story.

For the first nine days we follow the very ancient custom of using special extracts from the prophet Isaiah. He really longed for the time of the Messiah. Today, Isaiah 2:1-5, we look forward with him as he tells of his great vision of universal peace. The Lord has washed away the evil from us and has covered us with his glory.

For these first nine days the gospel readings have the same theme as the extracts from Isaiah, with Christ fulfilling Isaiah's ancient prophecies. Christ came to establish the new world of peace. If we could but have faith, all the evils in us would be healed. We are asked to contemplate on the great faith of the centurion with the paralysed servant, 'Sir, I am not worthy to have you under my roof; just give the word and my servant will be cured,' to which Jesus replies, '*Nowhere in Israel have I found faith like this.*'

*Keep us alert, we pray, O Lord our God,  
as we await the advent of Christ your Son,  
so that, when he comes and knocks  
he may find us watchful in prayer,  
active in his mission,  
filled with faith in him,*

*and exultant in his praise,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.*

And today is the Feast of the Apostle St. Andrew, Patron Saint of Scotland. Andrew was one of the original twelve apostles of Christ, the brother of another apostle, Simon Peter, and actually the first to be called by Christ, as he was at first a disciple of John the Baptist. Both lived and worked as fishermen in Galilee. Very little else is known about Andrew's life, but traditions tells us that he travelled to Greece to preach Christianity, where he was crucified at Patras in Greece on an X-shaped cross. This is represented by the diagonal cross, or 'saltire', on Scotland's flag. Andrew's connection with Scotland relates to the legend that some of his remains were kept at the site that is now the town of St Andrews. A chapel was built to house the remains and became a place of pilgrimage. St Andrew is also the patron saint of Greece and Russia. The pic I attach is one I took of the Old Town in Edinburgh a couple of years ago.

*Loving God,  
We think of Andrew, called first among your disciples,  
Leaving his nets to follow Jesus, leaving his life behind to answer your call,  
We think of Andrew, spreading the gospel in times of persecution and hostility  
When the church was young and regarded with suspicion  
We think of Andrew, remembered on his cross, tortured and put to death for his faith,  
Confessing Jesus in pain and fear, trusting in him to the end,  
We think of Andrew, whose message travelled to the farthest corners of the world,  
Whose message is heard in Scotland, whom we remember when we lift up our prayers.  
We thank you for Andrew whose message is heard all over the world  
To make disciples of all nations, to make us all follow the Prince of Peace  
God of all nations, you have sent us Andrew the apostle,  
inspired by your Spirit to spread your news,  
let us find his courage to follow you, let us find his passion to be your witness,  
let us be called, in name and fact, your disciples.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Although it's not actually Scottish, 'Amazing Grace' always feels Scottish, and I've walked behind a bagpiper playing it at many a funeral, so why don't we make that our hymn this morning?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tU6GWeBY3qw>

'Amazing Grace' is probably one of the most popular hymns of all, and in 2015 there was musical on Broadway about its author, John Newton, and how he came to write the words of the hymn. Born the son of a slave trader in 1725. Newton was pressed into service in the Royal Navy. After leaving the

service, he became involved in the Atlantic slave trade. In 1748, a violent storm battered his vessel off the coast of County Donegal, Ireland, so severely that he called out to God for mercy. This moment marked his spiritual conversion but he continued slave trading until 1754 or 1755, when he ended his seafaring altogether. He began studying Christian theology. Ordained in the Church of England in 1764, Newton became curate of Olney, Buckinghamshire, where he began to write hymns with poet William Cowper. 'Amazing Grace' was written to illustrate a sermon on New Year's Day of 1773. It became hugely popular, and sung to many different tunes in the United States in the early 19th century. In 1835, American composer William Walker set it to the tune known as 'New Britain', the version we generally sing today. Newton wrote, *'By the grace of God I am what I am, I am not what I ought to be. How imperfect and deficient I am! I am not what I wish to be. Though I am not what I ought to be, I can truly say that I am not what I once was, a slave to sin and Satan. I can heartily say with Paul: By the grace of God I am what I am!'* If you want to see a smidgen of the musical, check out [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J\\_N1AuE0veY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_N1AuE0veY)

Booking in for the Christmas services has now started, but please keep the 12noon service for families and children only. And remember, it's fifty bubbles or so a mass, so if you are coming with your support bubble, please let us know names and numbers, for track and trace.

And now I'm off to Preston to see the dental hygienist. She's quite tough. Believe me, the World Wrestling Federation lost a good one when she changed careers...

Have a lovely day, and maybe a sip of something Scottish?

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.