

Saturday May 2nd Saturday in the Third Week of Eastertide, the Feast of St. Athanasius

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the advice from the government and the medics about what we should be doing in this time of crisis.

And I hope everyone is praying together for our all our intentions in this time of need.

Well at least the weather improved somewhat yesterday, and I was able to put in a walk on the prom (appropriately enough listening to 'Bernadette,' a musical about St. Bernadette and Lourdes), before popping in to school and having a light lunch with Mrs. Satterthwaite. Our school continues to do a sterling job, looking after the workers of key children, and keeping everybody's spirits up, as well as supporting and encouraging children who are working at home, as well as ensuring families who need a little extra support at this time receive the help they need. Bravo to all our school staff. After that I went to B&Q, or rather 'B and Queue' as it should be called... as you can see from the attached pic of me. Yes, that is me...

Today's readings both feature St Peter. In the First Reading (Acts 9:31-42) he heals Aeneas through the name of Jesus Christ and in the Gospel Reading (John 6:60-69) he professes his faith in Jesus, *'Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God.'* This comes just after a lot of Jesus' followers leave him because they don't understand his words about the Bread of Life.' Jesus asks the Twelve *'Do you want to go too?'* Peter's reply that there is nowhere to go, as they know Jesus to be the Christ must have been hugely comforting to Jesus, that the Apostles now have a true understanding of who he is. We should remember that faith is a gift, and we should ask Our Lord, especially in these most difficult times, to allow our faith, maybe our shaken faith, to be strengthened and depend. But we should also remember that the Apostles had come to this knowledge through time spent listening and praying with Jesus. If we do the same then our knowledge that Jesus is indeed the Holy One of God will grow.

Almighty God, I pray that I will be taken into a deeper, more meaningful relationship with You, where I will grow in faith and hear the still small voice within my soul. Help me to be attentive to Your call, that will cause me to walk in Your righteousness. Open the eyes of my heart. May I see the many blessings you bestow on me, especially the very small ones that I sometimes take for granted. Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

I'm sure there are lots of things that we take for granted that at the moment that have been taken away from us, from Mass on Sunday followed by Tea and Chat, from seeing our relatives, not being able to

hug or pop round for a coffee, and so much more. So much more that we must not take for granted when all this is over. And if we are asking Our lord to ‘increase our faith’ then what better to sing than a rousing ‘Faith Of Our Fathers’. It was actually quite difficult to find a video with the tune that we use. A lot of choirs sing to it to the tune of ‘O Bread of Heaven’, but I’ve found a couple that use ‘our tune’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvnCNpDg430> or alternatively <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfxDyNZazOY>

Today is the Feast of St. Athanasius. Athanasius was born in 297 at Alexandria. He lived during very troubled times, both politically and within the Church. He was secretary to the archbishop when he attended the Council of Nicaea - we get the Nicene Creed, the first Creed that we say at Mass, the longer one, from this. This Council condemned the priest Arius, who taught that Jesus was not divine. After Athanasius became bishop of the city, he had great trouble with the followers of Arius. At times the political leaders supported him, but often they supported his opponents. In all he was banished from his city five times and lived for seventeen years in exile - where he probably got to know St Anthony, the Hermit (not Anthony, Patron Saint of Finding Lost Things). His last seven years were quiet and he wrote a life of St Anthony. He died in 373. His life is indicative of the great strength and grace we must exhibit when faced with pressures of any kind – so perhaps praying for his intercession today would be a good thing.

*Almighty ever-living God,
who raised up the Bishop St. Athanasius
as an outstanding champion of your Son’s divinity,
mercifully grant, that rejoicing in his teaching and his protection,
we may never cease to grow in knowledge and love of you.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
you Son, who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

So, whilst you have been in Lockdown, what have you been watching on TV (apart from the streamed masses and services from around the world)? I’ve enjoyed the new ‘Beat The Chasers’ this week, as you might have expected, knowing I love a Quiz Show (though I found some of the contestants a bit annoying!). I’ve also turned to my DVDs of the nineteen-eighties drama ‘Tenko’ which I know you’ll have heard me mention in the odd sermon before, about female Japanese Prisoners of War in Sumatra during the Second World War. It may seem strange to watch a programme about a group of people in captivity at this time, but it’s about the indomitability and great strength of the human spirit, and coming together to overcome adversity. Now, please do not think I am in any way comparing these

times with the suffering and torment which those incredible women underwent for years, but it's interesting throughout the drama that phrases such as 'When this is all over...' 'What this is finished...' 'After we get through this...' and so on are often said, phrases which I know we have been using, in fact I note that I've used such a phrase earlier in this message. The drama 'Tenko' came about because its eventual writer, Lavinia Warner, was a researcher for 'This Is Your Life' and was looking into the life of Dame Margot Turner, who had been a Japanese Prisoner of War. It's made clear in books about the time (and if you are at all interested I strongly recommend the book 'Women Behind The Wire') that the internees' faith in God was paramount to their surviving as human beings and getting through the torment, and deaths of their fellow prisoners. At the end of the show, before being presented with the big red book, other women who had been in the camp with Dame Margot all came forward to sing 'The Captives Hymn' composed by Margaret Dryburgh. The hymn was sung every Sunday at their Church services, and spread to different camps, and I believe there are places it is still sung, not least on VJ day. The words are very beautiful, and while I don't compare our suffering with theirs, perhaps we can learn something from their prayer for strength and faith.

Father in captivity

We would lift our prayers to Thee,

Keep us ever in Thy Love.

Grant that daily we may prove

Those who place their trust in Thee

More than conquerors may be

Give us patience to endure

Keep our hearts serene and pure,

Grant us courage, charity,

Greater faith, humility,

Readiness to own Thy Will,

Be we free or captive still

For our country we would pray

In this hour be Thou her stay.

Pride and selfishness forgive,

Teach her, by Thy Laws, to live,

By Thy Grace may all men see,

That true greatness comes from Thee.

For our loved ones we would pray

Be their guardians, night and day,

From all dangers, keep them free,

Banish all anxiety.

May they trust us to Thy care,

*Know that Thou our pains dost share.
May the day of freedom dawn
Peace and justice be reborn,
Grant that nations loving Thee
O'er the world may brothers be,
Cleansed by suffering, know rebirth,
See Thy Kingdom come on earth.*

Check out <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHJurply0wg> if you'd like to more about the hymn, and hear it sung.

Continued thanks for all the sponsorship which still comes in for the 26,000 steps, and also your words of congratulations and support. Thank you very much! I hope to be able to reveal the total tomorrow. Your enthusiasm and generosity has been quite amazing, and far from just short term helping some families, we might have to think about something more long term. More about that anon.

I attach this week's newsletter, again, little news, but you can see the mass intentions I'll be saying and pray for those who have gone before us, as well as Bidding Prayers which you may like to say whilst watching a streamed mass.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. 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, though the building is; 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.