

Sunday May 3<sup>rd</sup> Fourth Sunday in Eastertide, Good Shepherd Sunday

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.

At least the weather cleared up yesterday, and once again, I was able to have a healthy walk on the prom (listening to the 1986 Broadway Cast of 'Sweet Charity'). This time I turned left at the top of Redbank Road, and after walking down the prom, wandered back through the streets and avenues to the Bispham Roundabout, and I'm glad I did, as I bumped into Fred, Barbara and Jack who were in their front garden. Jack was telling me that every morning he takes his cup of tea and biscuit into the camper van on the drive and goes somewhere different every day – Bournemouth, Great Yarmouth, Skegness – without ever leaving the drive. What a great idea. Cheers Jack, and thank you for the packet of Chocolate Limes.

Today, the fourth Sunday of Eastertide, is Good Shepherd Sunday. In the Gospel (John 10:1-10) Jesus tells us that *'The one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of his flock... the sheep hear his voice, and the sheep follow because they know his voice.'* We tend to think of the image of the Good Shepherd as gentle and caring, and this is indeed one aspect for this title that Jesus gives himself. But we should remember that at the time of Jesus being a Shepherd in Palestine was not an easy job. Thieves and brigands roamed on the mountainsides, hence the need to guard the sheep twenty-four seven. Similarly the teaching and actions of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, brought Him into danger, leading to his crucifixion, because he cared for us so much. The image of the Good Shepherd is, primarily, one of a loving, caring man, seeking to look after his flock and lead them to the truth. And that is a most wonderful and beautiful image to hold before us. But we should never forget what the Good Shepherd had to endure to share and live out that truth with us. It's also a reminder that living out these teachings ourselves in the world today may bring us into discord with others who disagree or want to water down our faith. And firstly, we have to have listened and recognized the voice of the Good Shepherd in the first place, to have that faith to share.

*Good Shepherd of the flock,  
you tend and feed and protect your chosen people  
and only ask us to put our trust in your loving care.  
As host you entertain us at your welcome table  
and anoint us with your Holy Spirit.*

*Make us ever thankful for all your blessings,  
O Saviour of the world, living and reigning with the Father and the Holy Spirit,  
now and for ever. Amen.*

So let us all now sing today's psalm, the hymn 'The Lord's My Shepherd'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qZnj8yifvsw> and, once again, Eileen has helpfully provided us with a knitted version of the scene.

Attached to this message we also have a letter for Good Shepherd Sunday from Bishop Paul. Let's keep Bishop Paul firmly in our prayers at this time. Being a Bishop is a difficult job, and perhaps especially at this time, with a very unknown future for our Parishes and the Diocese. The Bishop is doing a great job, keeping us informed of what's happening, and making phone calls to every priest to make sure that we are ok in our presbyteries. We are truly blessed to have him as the Shepherd of the flock that is the Diocese of Lancaster. Let us pray that he is staying safe and well too.

*Jesus, Good Shepherd, You sent us the Holy Spirit to guide Your Church and lead her faithful to You through the ministry of the successors of Your Apostles, the bishops.*

*Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, grant to Bishop Paul wisdom in leading, faithfulness in teaching, and holiness in guarding Your sacred Mysteries.*

*As he cries out with all the faithful of this Diocese of Lancaster "Our Father!" may Bishop Paul be ever more closely identified with You in Your divine Sonship and continue to offer his own life to the service of You, the one saving Victim.*

*Renew in our Bishop deeper faith, greater trust in You, childlike reliance on our Mother Mary, and unwavering fidelity to the Holy Father.*

*Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Incidentally, talking of the Good Shepherd, a lovely musical setting of the twenty-third Psalm was used for the opening credits of 'The Vicar of Dibley' by the composer Howard Goodall – a full choral version of it can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDPf1oyFn-A> People often ask 'Is being a Catholic priest like being in 'Father Ted'?'. My stock answer is well, no, it's not, but it *is* often like being in the Vicar of Dibley. Talking of Craggy Island, however, I did pop into St. Winifrede's the other day when I was called out to the Hospice – well, I didn't so much pop in as stand at the patio doors and have a chat with some of the resident priests there. They are well, and doing their best to follow the lockdown rules. The other week Barbara who looks after them, and her husband, organized a socially distancing barbecue in the grounds, which they all enjoyed. Please pray for them – and for dear Barbara who looks after them, and does a great job doing so!

The other day I opened the presbytery door to find the biggest Teddy Bear I had ever seen – complete with a St. Bernadette's School Tie. The accompanying letter from one of our young parishioners explained that this Sunday was Family Sunday, and as the children were not able to be in Church on the Sanctuary she would like the Teddy to be put in Church to represent the children! What a lovely thought, and as you can see from the attached picture, I have done just that. He's now at the back of the Church, greeting people who come in to pick up a newsletter. I guess he is now Fr. Ted! Bless our amazing families and children at this time. And bless you for all the food that has been brought to the Church and Presbytery for Food Sunday. Some of it has already been distributed to callers at the door, and we'll get the rest out this week. Thank you.

And finally, huge thanks to everyone who sponsored the 26,000 Step Marathon last Sunday to raise money for families in our schools. Incidentally we must thank Peter Brennan for inspiring the idea when he emailed and asked if I was doing the London Marathon. There's still a little more money to come in but the total to date is a staggering

**£3083**

Once again, bless you for your incredible generosity at this time. Huge blessings to you all. I will get the money to our schools for distribution over the next weeks as soon as possible. Any more challenges you'd like to put me up for?

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.