

Monday May 4<sup>th</sup>, Monday in Fourth Week in Eastertide, Feast of the English Martyrs

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 I managed a lovely healthy walk yesterday afternoon, including a stop off at Sainsbury, having spent the morning after Mass writing The Message, and then compiling some of the funeral services for next week. I listened to 'Romeo et Juliette: de la Haine a l'Amour' on the iPod, a terrible French Rock Musical from 2001. Shakespeare would be turning in his grave. It was lovely to bump into Kath Swarbrick and her daughter at the Bispham roundabout and have a catch up, and a lovely chat about counting our blessings! Her daughters are in the teaching and medical professions, and working hard for their communities, so let's continue to keep all our workers - and their families - firmly at the forefront of our prayers.

Today is the Feast of the English Martyrs. Perhaps sometimes when we think for the word 'martyr' we imagine the early Church martyrs, in Rome or Jerusalem. Perhaps we think of many of the Saints who led extraordinary lives around the world and endured gruesome executions because of their faith-filled actions. But this feast celebrates the many men and women who suffered for the Faith in England between 1535 and 1680 and have subsequently been recognised by the Church. These martyrs included people from all aspects of life, priests, both secular (diocesan priests) and religious, as well as the incredible lay persons who were prepared to shelter them, to arrange secret Masses, and who witness to the faith by their lives and by their deaths. They came from all ages and backgrounds, and their heroic witness helps us have a greater love for the Church, the Mass, and the sacred priesthood.

*Almighty God,  
who in our country raised up martyrs  
from every walk of life  
to vindicate the authority of your Church  
in teaching and worship,  
grant through their intercession, we pray,  
that all our people may be gathered once again  
to celebrate the same sacraments  
under the one Shepherd, Jesus Christ your Son,*

*who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

Once again, the times we are living in now, for me, gives that prayer a whole new meaning. Obviously it is a prayer for Christian unity in England, but the phrase '*grant through their intercession, we pray, that all our people may be gathered once again to celebrate the same sacraments*' also in this pandemic can refer to our own individual community that is St. Bernadette's. Soon, please God (and I say that as a real prayer, not merely a linguistic expression), please God may be gathered together once again. For a hymn today let's sing along with the Martyrs 'I Vow To thee My Country' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6ZvyIOSy5A>

The eighty-five English Martyrs were beatified in 1987 by Pope St. John Paul II. This was my first year in Rome as a Student for the Priesthood, and it was the most extraordinary week of celebrations, and a real privilege for me, just eighteen years old, to take part in the amazing celebrations, including singing with the College Choir at the actual beatification in St. Peter's Basilica. We met many pilgrim groups from various dioceses, who came for the celebrations, and they included a group from our very own St. Bernadette's, led by Canon Carey and Canon Cochran from St. Wulstan's, God rest them both. The pilgrims very kindly offered to take the Lancaster Students (which included myself and Fr. Luiz Ruscillo) out for a meal, which they did, and we had a lovely evening. I remember at the end of the night there was much consternation and hilarity as Canon Carey wanted to pay in pounds sterling (this was the days of Lira, before the Euro), and so someone was sent out to buy a newspaper to check the current exchange rate, so that it could all be sorted out. Before we went out for the meal, we students served the Pilgrims drinks, actually in my room, and I still have a photo from that evening. I'm not sure who the lady in the middle of the picture is, sitting on my bed enjoying a cocktail, but she was definitely game for anything. I seem to recall at the end of the evening she was on a table regaling the restaurant with hits from her cabaret career – and she had a pretty good voice, I've got to say. Perhaps some of you will be able to identify her from the attached pic? Is she still singing?

And if you don't get a message tomorrow, it will probably because she has killed me.

Many thanks for your congratulations and the great amount of sponsorship money. It's not me who deserves the congratulations; it's **YOU** for your amazing generosity. I'm still up for more challenges and things to do to keep us together and to support those in need, so please, mail me your suggestions.

Today, please pray the eternal rest for the repose of the souls of Sylvia Marjorie Mostyn-Reece, whose funeral I celebrated at Carleton at 9am, and the double funeral of Anselmo and Jessie Storrie Garcia, who died just days apart, and whose funeral I will be celebrating at Carleton at 10:30am this

morning. *May they rest in the peace and joy of Christ.* That last couple were a lovely married couple in their eighties. I'm fortunate when preparing such a service that there are beautiful prayers in the Order of Funerals that I can use on such an occasion, and I share one with you that I prayed in the service, and that you might like to pray for them:

*Lord God, giver of all that is true and lovely and gracious, you created in marriage a sign of your covenant. Look with mercy upon Anselmo and Jessie. As their love for each other united them on earth, so let your love join them together in heaven. You blessed them in their companionship, and in their joys and sorrows you bound them together. Lead them into eternal peace, and bring them to the table where the Saints feast together in your heavenly home. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

In other news, Tobias, the Presbytery Cat, decided to get off his paws and help me with doing the laundry. Although I'm not sure 'helping' is the right word, as you can see in the attached picture...

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.