

Friday May 7th, Friday in the Fifth Week of Eastertide: VE Day

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.

The Gospel reading today (John 14:1-6) is a hugely beautiful and comforting Gospel, and one of my favourite Gospels to use at Funeral services.

Jesus said "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

As we hear or read it today we are reminded of the circumstances in which Jesus uttered those words, at the Last Supper just after foretelling the betrayal of Judas and the denial of Peter. His disciples would have needed those words of reassurance at that moment more than ever. Today the words give us comfort regarding eternal life. Jesus tells the disciples, and tells each one of us, why he is going to die the following day; to see us through the passage of death to a place prepared for us in the mansions of the Saints in heaven.

Today as a country we mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe (VE Day). I've been invited to go over to Denebank, opposite the Presbytery for a socially distant drink and sing song with the residents from the flats there. Some of our parishioners will have personal memories of this day, but for the majority WW2 is something we will have learnt about from our parents, grandparents, and school teachers. There are many incredible war time stories of survival and many of these stories are also stories of faith, how people had that 'trust in God' of which Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel reading and allowed that to guide their steps towards safety and life. Of course our thoughts will turn to those who have lost their lives, whether in the war, or through Coronavirus, or sometime in between. No doubt at some point today we will hear the song 'We'll Meet Again', and when we do so we can be reminded of the promise of Jesus that 'there are many rooms in my Father's house' and that Jesus himself is the Way, the Truth, and the Life which will enable us to reach there.

Eternal God,

*your Son Jesus Christ
is the way, the truth and the life for all creation;
grant us grace to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God now and for ever.
Amen.*

So let us have faith, and never be afraid, for if Christ is leading us, and we follow him with all our hearts, the destination is bound to be heavenly. So let today's hymn be a beautiful 'Do Not Be Afraid': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psgn0tAp6IE>

I'm sure there will be various socially distanced celebrations of VE Day around the country, with, as I said, vivid memories for some people. However one place where there will no memories is Freckleton where I was Parish Priest for four years. Until I was sent there in 2004 I didn't know the history of the village, which the then Parish Priest told me of when I went to visit the Parish for the first time. 'You always have to remember,' he said, 'Freckleton is a village in mourning.' On 23 August 1944 an American aeroplane from the airbase in Warton took off in bad weather, and crashed into the centre of the village of Freckleton, into Holy Trinity Church of England School, demolishing three houses and the Sad Sack Snack Bar. The death toll was 61, including 38 children. I was present for the sixtieth anniversary of the disaster and got to know people who had lost brothers and sisters whom they never knew, people who still felt guilty that they were not at school that day, and also families of the American airmen, who were still in touch with families in the village. Somebody once said to me on VE day that he didn't know why he had no memories of VE Day, until it occurred to him that there had been no celebrations in Freckleton, there was too much to mourn. Each year after the 'Club Day' procession, everyone goes to the children's grave to say a prayer. On the sixtieth anniversary I led the prayers:

*God our heavenly Father,
Source and destiny of our lives,
In your loving providence you give us life, children and generations,
To grow in wisdom, age and grace.
Sixty years ago, you called these children to yourself,
When they were suddenly, and violently taken from us.
As we continue to grieve the loss of ones so young,
We seek to understand your purpose.
Having drawn these children to yourself,
We are confident you have given them full stature in Jesus Christ.*

May they stand with the all the angels and the saints,

Who know you love and praise your saving will.

Through the same Christ Our Lord. Amen.

It was huge privilege to be a part of the anniversary, and Freckleton was, and still, is a lovely village and community. I attach a photo of the Lourdes Grotto in the grounds of the Holy Family Church, Freckleton, where I spent four very happy years, and made friends with whom I'm still in contact, and love popping down there occasionally.

Well, I'm getting closer to recording a Sunday Mass. I'm doing a test record later today, and it will be going on the YouTube I think. If it works the plan is that I will record Sunday's Mass on Saturday afternoon, then mail everyone the link. Mass texts and a hymn sheet will also be mailed. Let's see how it goes!

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.