

Saturday April 11th, Holy Saturday.

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. I know it's a glorious Easter Weekend, but please, unless for necessities and exercise, please stay home and stay safe.

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

Yesterday afternoon at three I celebrated the beautiful Good Friday Service as best I could, and despite the sadness of having no congregation, there was still a stark beauty, reading the long passion from St. John, praying the Universal Prayers of the Church, including the extra prayer for us all during the pandemic, and then receiving Holy Communion from the Tabernacle, changing the crucifix light to blood red, before leaving the church alone and silent.

*His cross stands empty in a world grown silent
Through hours of anguish and of dread;
In stillness, earth awaits the resurrection,
While Christ goes down to wake the dead*

*He summons Adam and his generations,
Brings light where darkness endless seemed;
He frees and claims His own, so long held captive,
Who, with the living, are redeemed.*

*With God the Father and the Holy Spirit,
Give praise to Christ the crucified,
Who, through the ages, seeks to save his lost ones:
The sinful men for whom he died.*

The Office of Readings, passages from Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, which, as a Priest, I promised to pray every day, is particularly beautiful for Holy Saturday. It contains an anonymous Homily, part of which is imagined words of Jesus to Adam. It's powerful and beautiful:

*For you, I your God became your son; for you, I the Master took on your form; that of slave;
for you, I who am above the heavens came on earth and under the earth; for you, man, I became as a*

man without help, free among the dead; for you, who left a garden, I was betrayed in a garden and crucified in a garden.

Look at the spittle on my face, which I received because of you, in order to restore you to that first divine inbreathing at creation. See the blows on my cheeks, which I accepted in order to refashion your distorted form to my own image.

See the scourging of my back, which I accepted in order to disperse the load of your sins which was laid upon your back. See my hands nailed to the tree for a good purpose, for you, who stretched out your hand to the tree for an evil one.

I slept on the cross and a sword pierced my side, for you, who slept in paradise and brought forth Eve from your side. My side healed the pain of your side; my sleep will release you from your sleep in Hades; my sword has checked the sword which was turned against you.

But arise, let us go hence. The enemy brought you out of the land of paradise; I will reinstate you, no longer in paradise, but on the throne of heaven.

For many people Holy Saturday doesn't seem that important, it's just like a pause between the Solemnity of Good Friday and our Joyful Easter Vigil and Morning Mass. But the silence of this day – no other masses, no other Sacraments except in dire need – gives us a chance to reflect on how Mary, the others who witnessed the crucifixion, and the Apostles and Disciples were really feeling. When we meet the two disciples on the road to Emmaus they feel downcast and hopeless. Despite the fact that Jesus had told the Apostles about the resurrection at least three times, it seems they had totally failed to understand, or don't reflect on his word after his death. The silence of Holy Saturday, without any hope of resurrection must have been totally bleak for these people. All their hopes and dreams had been dashed, and doubts beginning to set in. What had the last three years of following the man they believed to be the Messiah all been for? What do they do now? Go back to fishing and tax collecting? All they could do was wait. And with a silent Church building, all we can do is wait until we are able to come together physically to celebrate the presence of Christ amongst us in our community. But we can be sure that the joy of Easter Sunday will ring through our Church once again. Till then let us wait, pray, never give up hope, and support each other the best way we can.

In the stillness of Holy Saturday let's make today's hymn 'Be Still For the Presence Of The Lord' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZugvUQ4m90U> As we cannot be in Church, this Easter weekend we have to make our own homes the 'holy ground', we have to make our hearts places where his glory is 'shining all around,' and we have to allow 'the power of the Lord' to move in our souls.

Despite Holy Saturday being a quiet day, there is usually a lot of preparation going on in Church, not least the hard work of our flower arrangers who do so much throughout the year to decorate our

Church, but especially at Easter when the Church always looks truly stunning. Let's pray they'll be providing us with more colour and beauty to help lift our minds to God soon, and thank them for all their hard work.

I have had some emails from people offering to shop or collect medicines for people. If you need anything like that, or you know someone who does, please let me know. And thank you for your continued donations to the Church and to the Food and Voucher collections. To have so many people thinking of others at this time is truly awe inspiring.

Tonight in Church I will be preparing and blessing the Paschal Candle, and saying the First Mass of Easter, but I'll keep our Alleluia's and Easter Blessings until tomorrow. Although I'll be alone, I know you'll be praying the same words as you follow in your missals or on the many streamed services from around the diocese and the world. And I attach a picture of me preparing last years' Paschal Candle.

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.