

Thursday June 11th, Memorial of St. Barnabas.

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 trust we are all praying for each other's needs at this very strange time.

And so it is that today we celebrate the Memorial of Barnabas, whose original name was Joseph. He was not one of the original twelve apostles, but has always been called an apostle because of the work he did for the early Church. He was a Jew, born in Cyprus, and became one of the early converts living at Jerusalem, and was present at the first Council of Jerusalem. It was he who first welcomed Paul into the community. He worked in Antioch, where he brought Paul - it was there that the followers were first named 'Christians.' They stayed in the community there for a year before going with Paul on his first missionary journey. Later he went back to work in Cyprus with Mark. He is said to have been stoned to death at Salamis, an ancient Greek city-state on the east coast of Cyprus .

Our first reading today, from Acts 11:21-26, 13:1-3, tells us the story of Barnabas being sent to Antioch, where he takes Paul under his care and instructs him for the year. When Paul was ready, both were called by the Lord to go out on their first missionary journey. Our Gospel reading, Matthew 10:7-13, sees Jesus commissioning his disciples to go out and preach about the kingdom of God, giving them instructions and advice, and reminds them to do this important ministry without counting the cost. This was most definitely Barnabas' attitude.

*O God, who decreed that Saint Barnabas,
a man filled with faith and the Holy Spirit,
should be set apart to convert the nations,
grant that the Gospel of Christ,
which he strenuously preached,
may be faithfully proclaimed by word and by deed.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity
of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.*

Acts 4 tells us that 'Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement')', and that is really appropriate as Barnabas gave such encouragement to

Paul, one of the greatest Saints of all time. Perhaps we should invoke St. Barnabas as I think we all need some encouragement in these difficult days.

God, so often in different situations I stand and can't make first steps and decisions I should make. I stuck in such circumstances for a long time, so I ask your encouragement and help. Lord, please encourage me through all my life journey. Please make that I never felt fear or uncertainty. Let all my decisions will be according to your will. Don't let me give up in any situation I face, but teach me to find the right way and right decision. Let I always feel your love and grace, your caring hand and encouraging support. Lord, encourage and guide me in all actions I take in my life. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

How about for an encouraging hymn today we all sing 'How Lovely On The Mountains.' and pledge ourselves to bring the encouraging Good News of Jesus to all:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMqQJzRQBJU>

Oh, and St. Barnabas is also invoked when in danger of Hailstorms. And for Trivia Fans, the Church in 'The Vicar of Dibley' is dedicated to 'St. Barnabas of Wolverhampton' (who doesn't exist).

Yesterday we received advice about opening Churches. Many dioceses are not opening all their Churches instead focusing on town centres, or having one Church open in each deanery. We have been given permission to think about opening our churches for a limited time, but there are very strict rules. We have to make a risk assessment, and send this to the Deans and the Diocesan Property Office, with our plans, and they must give us permission before we are allowed to open our doors. After a discussion, I am hoping that we will be able to open the Church on Sunday Afternoons from 1pm to 4pm, and see how that goes at first. We have a lot to put in place first. Our Health and Safety representative, Warren, is working on the risk assessment (cheers Warren, many thanks for all your work in this area for the parish), and we are awaiting our supplies of hand sanitizers and cleaning equipment. We have to have two stewards, so thank you for those who have volunteered, and if you could give an hour on Sunday afternoons, please let myself or Eileen know, and we can draw up a rota. Only ten people will be allowed in the Church at any one time, and this will be in the rear benches, and this is for private prayer only – no recitation of the Rosary, for example. I think this will be good preparation for whenever we are actually allowed to have services. This may all seem completely over-the-top, but we are just going to have to work with it. Hopefully the Diocese will approve of our preparations and you will be given the opportunity to pop in and say a prayer. As my old mate Phil always used to say:

*Every time I see a Church I pay a little visit,
So when at last I'm carried in, the Lord won't say, 'Who is it?'*

Any suggestions for how we can manage the situation would be most welcome. Is there a better time to open up? Are midweek days better than Sunday? Or Saturday afternoon?

Some Good News! A national charity which usual gives money to support Church Buildings, decided that this year they should support Church projects which are giving food to needy people at this time. We were invited to submit applications, and I applied for £3,500 to match the money you raised from my 26,000 steps-round-the-church for needy families in the Parish which could be delivered via the School. Happily our application has been accepted, and soon we should be in receipt of the donation. Good News indeed!

So what about the challenge? This is to raise money for a statue of St. Bernadette, to be placed in the Peace Memorial Garden in School, just to the left of the front gates. One suggestion is for me to do my walk along the prom from The Tram Stop to Little Bispham (my usual walk) for five days, each time dressed as a character from a show, starting with The Phantom of The Opera. With photographic evidence. Another suggestion was that I had to wear a clerical shirt for a whole week (I'd have to find one first). What do you think?

Finally, Happy Birthday to Chris Morris who celebrated his birthday this week with a fancy dress party – with, as you can see in the attached picture, himself going as Pope Francis!

Cadbury's Crème Eggs are still available in the porch, in return for a picture of Tobias, which will be judged by him. I've been asked to keep this running for another week, so the result will be announced next Sunday, 14th June! If you are passing the Church check out the pictures already there!

Mass for the Feast of the Holy Trinity is available all week at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g6QctJirdk4&feature=youtu.be>

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). 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, though hopefully not for long. 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.