

Saturday July 11th, The Feast of St. Benedict, Patron of Europe

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 did manage to get to Preston yesterday to meet up with Fr. Paul Embery, the Vicar General. Face coverings were mandatory on the train (although this was certainly not being adhered to on the journey back), and we did have our lunch in Wetherspoons. When I told Fr. Paul that, as I said yesterday, I was looking forward to the meat feast pizza until I realised it was a Friday, he informed me that meat-free Friday had been dispensed with for the moment, as it was not possible for everyone to go and get fresh fish. I guess that's why he is a vicar general. And so with no guilt whatsoever I demolished a delicious pizza! And jolly good it was.

Today is the Feast of St. Benedict, one of the patrons of Europe. He was born in Norcia, the twin brother of St. Scholastica, and was sent to Rome to be educated. In Rome he discovered that his fellow students had everything, education, wealth, youth, and they spent all of it in the pursuit of pleasure, not truth. He was appalled by the lack of morals of his companions he left there and disappeared to Subiaco in the mountains, living life as a hermit. After three years of solitude some disciples began to gather and he set up a number of monasteries there. Later he went down south of Rome to Monte Cassino, where he established his principal monastery. His beliefs and instructions on religious life were collected in what is now known as the Rule of Saint Benedict, which still directs religious life after 15 centuries. As well as looking after the monks, he ministered to the sick and poor of the area. In one story of Benedict's life, a poor man came to the monastery begging for a little oil. Although Benedict commanded that the oil be given, the cellarer refused, because there was only a tiny bit of oil left. If the cellarer gave any oil as alms there would be none for the monastery. Angry at this distrust of God's providence, Benedict knelt down to pray. As he prayed a bubbling sound came from inside the oil jar. The monks watched in fascination as oil from God filled the vessel so completely that it overflowed, leaked out beneath the lid and finally pushed the cover off, cascading out on to the floor. Benedict died on 21 March 543, not long after his sister. It is said he died with high fever on the very day God told him he would. He was proclaimed Patron of Europe by Pope Paul VI *'because of his essential influence in the formation of Christendom.'*

*O God, who made the Abbot Saint Benedict
an outstanding master in the school of divine service,
grant, we pray,
that, putting nothing before love of you,*

*we may hasten with a loving heart
in the way of your commands.
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.*

You can listen to the Hymn to St. Benedict at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NH1 - GG-4>

I also found this short prayer to St. Benedict, which seems curiously prescient given the present state of affairs:

Admirable Saint and Doctor of Humility, Benedict, you practiced what you taught, assiduously praying for God's glory and lovingly fulfilling all work for God and the benefit of all human beings. You know the many physical dangers that surround us today often caused or occasioned by human inventions. Guard us against poisoning of the body as well as of mind and soul, and thus be truly a "Blessed" one for us. Amen.

For our own hymn today let's sing 'Servant King', 'From heav'n you came, Helpless babe' purely because it's a beautiful hymn, and a reminder of the service Benedict gave, and which we are called to give to God and to one another <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCADWs-ZyEk>

Today is also the twenty-seventh anniversary of my Ordination to the Diaconate, at Palazzola, the English College Villa north of Rome, overlooking Lake Albano. Training for the priesthood, you go through various stages, 'Orders' as you progress. After a year or so you become a 'Lector', which enables you to read at Mass, then a year later an official 'Candidate', which in Rome entitled you to wear a clerical shirt for the first time. After that you become an 'Acolyte' which entitled you to minister Holy Communion. The final Order before priesthood is Diaconate, which allows you to read the Gospel and Minister at the Altar with the priest, perform marriages and baptisms and funerals, and preach homilies, usually given about a year before you become a priest. At The English College the Diaconate Ordination always takes place on the last day of the year up at the Villa (which I was informed, after mentioning it on the Feast of Maria Goretti, is to reopen for Holidaymakers very shortly). I attach a couple of pics of that beautiful day, July 11th 1993.

Our present Mass timetable will continue, after a great first week. So Mass this evening at 5pm, tomorrow at 10am, and then Tuesday and Thursday at noon. Everyone is welcome to all masses, and social distancing is being observed really well. If you have felt nervous or think there may not be space, don't worry at all. And huge thanks to all the volunteers who making this possible. Things are changing all the time – we had some more instructions come through just yesterday, but they are all

their to make things safer and easier for us all. You are more than free to wear a face covering in Church. Please note that Church will be open just twenty minutes before Mass.

Tonight's 5pm mass will be videoed and available on the YouTube after it has been uploaded tomorrow.

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, most of the time. 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.