

Monday July 13th, Monday in the Fifteenth Week in Ordinary Time Year II

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.

Very early start this morning, as firstly my car is being picked up to be taken for its annual service, and I'm told the pick-up time is anywhere between 6am and 9am, and secondly, I am being picked up to be taken down to Lytham for a funeral service. Whenever I have a funeral at Lytham I always ask to be taken by the undertaker, then if there are difficulties with the traffic they can phone on ahead or whatever. The undertakers always insist on leaving an hour to get there, so it's pickup at 8:30am for the 9:30am service. So hopefully I'll get you this message top you before I set off, so apologies if it seems somewhat jet lagged!

In our scripture readings this week we turn to one of the major prophets (if not *the* major prophet) Isaiah. Again and again we hear the prophets condemn the sacrifices, the rituals, and the external prayers of people who do not practice justice or take care of the orphan and widow. Here in Isaiah 1:11-17 at the very beginning of his writings Isaiah calls out to the local leaders, princes of Sodom, the city that was destroyed because of its corruption. The same fate awaits them again. If their hands are full of blood they cannot offer true worship to God. Ritual is only as good as the intentions it expresses. And that three thousand year old message is just as true for us. Lately we have not been able to carry out many of our 'rituals' but the importance of acting and doing what we can from the heart is more than ever necessary. As the Lord, through Isaiah, says, *'Take your wrong doing out of my sight. Cease to do evil. Learn to do good, search for justice, help the oppressed, be just to the orphan, plead for the widow.'* A very New Testament message at the heart of the Old Testament – almost a paraphrase of the Beatitudes.

In today's Gospel, from Matthew 10:34-11:1, Jesus reminds us that being a follower of Christ involves much hardship as many will not accept his teachings, indeed this may cause division, even among families, something some of us might well have experienced. Jesus goes on to speak of the great rewards in welcoming him and his message, and it's worth remembering that when we seek to serve and welcome those in need – we are serving Jesus. It neatly reflects the first reading from Isaiah. Remember that the Parable of the Good Samaritan was told in response to the question 'Who is my neighbour,' and I think that this time of Pandemic has brought out the 'good neighbour' in so many people. When we welcome our neighbours, we welcome Christ.

Bless the good neighbours, Lord,

*who call to check that all is well,
and share a cup of tea and chat
with those who struggle to get out,
and whose gentle act of service
brings a ray of light into a day
that would otherwise be cheerless.
Bless them, and all who likewise
give of their time for others
in following your good example,
that this might become a better
and more caring world in which to live.
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

So for today's hymn let us sing 'When I needed A Neighbour Were You There?' in a very good rendition from Songs of Praise <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fExR7eOhJ00>

And we have a Saint for today – Saint Henry. I was expecting someone English, but actually he was a tenth century Duke of Bavaria. Apparently he was known as 'Henry the Exuberant', and took over from his father who was known as 'Henry the Quarrelsome' who sounds like a bundle of laughs. In 1002 he was elected as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, and on all accounts was a just ruler, a defender of the Church, and a real friend to the poor and those in need. After the death of his wife, Cunegunde, who is also a saint, he considered becoming a monk, but the Pope persuaded him to stay on as Emperor, arguing that we all have different vocations and stations in life, and should try and serve God the best way we can, and that he could do more for God as Emperor than locked away in a monastery. He is the patron saint of the childless, of Dukes, of the handicapped and those rejected by Religious Orders.

*O God, whose abundant grace prepared St. Henry
to be raised by you in a wonderful way,
from the cares of earthly rule to heavenly realms,
grant, we pray, through his intercession,
that amid the uncertainties of this world,
we may hasten towards you with minds made pure.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ,
you Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever and ever. Amen.*

As many of you have said, that was an extraordinary picture of me meeting a Saint yesterday, but actually I was not the first member of my family to be introduced to Pope Saint John Paul II. I know

that many of you will recall his visit to England in 1981, and I hear stories of you camping out overnight in Manchester at Heyton Park. One of the Pope's last ports of call on that visit was Ninian Park in Wales, home of Cardiff City F.C., where he met with approximately 33,000 young people, with representatives from all the dioceses of England and Wales. My sister was one of the representatives from our diocese, presenting the Pope with a plaque made of Lakeland slate, which now hangs up (or it did) in the foyer of Castlerigg Manor, our Diocesan Youth Centre in Keswick. We never had any photographs of this, until years later when I was in Rome I went to the office of the Osservatore Romano, the official Vatican Newspaper, to order pictures of my first papal audience. They had files and files of various papal visits from around the world, and I asked to look at the file from 1981, and lo and behold found a picture of my sister. In the attached pic she is second from the right, wearing a round badge on her scarf. An amazing picture.

Please pray for the repose of the soul of Joyce Arthur whose funeral I am celebrating this morning at Lytham. *May she rest in the peace and love of Christ.*

As it's so early I have no idea what the day is going to be like, and but whatever you do, make it a good one – maybe doing something for your neighbour, and for Christ.

Saturday night's Mass is on the YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgz-obCrZJc&feature=youtu.be> beginning with the hymn 'Dear Lord and Father Of Mankind'. I'm beginning Mass with a hymn to get us into an atmosphere of prayer, and am happy to take requests!

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.