

Monday April 18th, Monday in the Sixth Week of Eastertide.

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.

In today's first reading from Acts of the Apostles (Acts 16:11-15) Paul, on his second missionary journey, reaches Macedonia and goes to a town called Philippi, where they meet Lydia. This devout woman, who worked in the expensive purple dye trade, looked after them during their stay there. In the Gospel (John 15:26-16:4) Jesus gives the disciples some more details about the Holy Spirit, telling them that the Spirit will be a witness, and that the disciples, too, must be witness to all Jesus has done, He foretells the disciple's martyrdoms, saying that *'the hour is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is doing a holy duty for God.'*

Almighty God

I pray today for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are being oppressed, persecuted and abused for their faith just as Jesus and the Apostles were.

Comfort and give courage to Christians in countries such as Nigeria, Eritrea, Pakistan, Egypt and India where many are experiencing physical harm, intimidation and unjust imprisonment at the hands of their oppressors.

Our heavenly Father, thank you for welcoming into your arms all Christian martyrs who have given their lives because they refused to stop sharing the gospel and living out their faith.

Heal the hearts and minds of those who have lost loved ones because of persecution and restore them to full physical and spiritual health.

For those who persecute my brothers and sisters in Christ, I pray that their hearts will be touched by the wonderful faith of those they attack.

I pray also that they will open their hearts to your love.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The character of Lydia in the first reading is fascinating. She was a Greek Macedonian living in the Roman city of Philippi. She is named after the place she was probably born and at the time it was the tradition that slaves were given their names like this. It would appear then that she began her life in poverty but then, tradition tells us, that through her business acumen, became a dyer of purple cloth, which was a lucrative job as only the wealthiest could afford it. In ancient Rome, purple was the colour of royalty showing your status in society. Expensive purple cloth was made using a costly dye

extracted from sea snails, collected by the thousands then boiled for days in giant lead vats. Although she was sympathetic to Judaism, she was not Jewish, so when St. Paul and Timothy came to preach in her city, her heart was open to the Holy Spirit and she and all her household became baptized. Afterwards, she begged, well insisted, that Paul and Timothy stay in her house, which eventually became a meeting place for the Christians of Philippi, and when St. Paul was released from prison he went immediately to her home. She is sometimes referred to as the first European convert. She is, as you might expect, Patron Saint of cloth dyers.

*St. Lydia, you exercised the virtue of hospitality
and generously offered your home for the needs of the early Church.*

*Pray that we may welcome the stranger in our own homes,
as we may be entertaining an angel unawares.*

*St. Lydia, you are an example of how receptive women were to the Word
and how much we owe to your openness and trusting acceptance of that Word.*

*Pray that all women may continue to draw people into the Church
by their warmth, fervour, and holiness.*

*St. Lydia, you are now joined with Christ in heaven forever;
pray that we may persevere in our journey towards everlasting life. Amen*

As Lydia opened her door to Paul and Timothy, let us ‘open our doors, let Jesus return,’ as we sing together ‘Colours of Day’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4kFVUfM3PA> and why not read Jenny Joseph’s poem ‘Warning’ about how she intends to act when she gets older, with the opening line ‘When I am old I shall wear purple’ <https://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poem/warning/>

Many thanks for all your kind comments regarding the YouTube Mass, and it’s heart-warming to know that you have been sending the link to friends and relatives around the world. Anyone who does this is really evangelising, and it’s good that we have found a way to do this whilst in lockdown. On Wednesday I will be recording a mass for the Feast of the Ascension, which would have been a HolyDay of Obligation on Thursday, and will hopefully be uploaded by Wednesday afternoon. I’ll hopefully have some accompaniment for the hymns, too.

Several people have asked about the Memorial Garden at school. This has recently been renovated and is just to the right of the front gates on Devonshire Road. It is designated as a little haven of peace, in memory of young pupils who have died. A statue of St. Bernadette would really complete the peaceful space and be most appropriate. Thank you for suggestions of fund-raising, several of which involved singing, and one which is so ludicrous it might be a brilliant idea. Please keep suggestions coming in.

In other news, I attach a picture of Tobias the very first day I met him, and he consented to come and live with me, four years ago.

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.