

Thursday April 21<sup>st</sup>, The Feast of the Ascension of Our Lord.

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.

And so as our Eastertide journey to Pentecost continues, we stop off at The Feast of The Ascension of Our Lord. He was lifted up and now sits at the right hand of God so that he may be present everywhere, not only in this age but also in the age to come. Today we gather to give praise and to glorify the name of Jesus. As we are in the Liturgical Year 'A', the Year of Matthew, we have our reading of the Ascension from his Gospel, Matthew 28:18-20.

*Jesus came up and spoke to his disciples. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'*

You'll notice that there is no actual description of the Ascension, as there is in the other Gospels, and also at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, which gives us our first reading today, Acts 1:1-11, which tells us that Jesus chose his disciples through the Holy Spirit and promised to send the Holy Spirit. While they looked on he was lifted up and a cloud took him from their sight. Instead in the Gospel of Matthew Jesus gives the disciples his final instructions – to go out, to baptise, and to teach everything he has made known to them. Sometimes we think of the Ascension as a very static scene, a group of people looking up into the sky as Jesus ascends to his Father. But it is also very much a Gospel of action. The Apostles have not to have their eyes fixed on the sky, but at the people all around them who need to hear the message of Christ, which they have been entrusted with and are now to go out and share with the world. It would take them until Pentecost before they received the fullness of God's Holy Spirit to empower them to do so, but the final instructions of Jesus could not be clearer.

The final line of the Gospel, '*And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time*, is a beautiful reminder that this Feast does not mean that the Lord has departed to some place far from people and from the world, but that he is now, thanks to his being with the Father, closer to each one of us for ever.

*O God, whose Son today ascended to the heavens,*

*as the Apostles looked on,  
grant, we pray, that in accordance with his promise,  
we may be worthy for him to live with us always on earth,  
and we with him in heaven.  
Who lives and reigns with you  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God for ever and ever. Amen.*

Eileen has helpfully provided us with a knitted Ascension, so as we ponder the image together let us sing 'Alleluia! Sing to Jesus.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56a4w7XxvfY>

And here is a beautiful Ascension Poem.

*Up through endless ranks of angels, cries of triumph in his ears,  
to his heavenly throne ascending, having vanquished all their fears,  
Christ looks down upon his faithful, leaving them in happy tears.  
Death-destroying, life-restoring, proven equal to our need,  
now for us before the Father as our brother intercede:  
flesh that for our world was wounded, living, for the wounded plead.  
To our lives of wanton wandering send your promised Spirit-Guide,  
through our lives of fear and failure with your power and love abide:  
welcome us, as you were welcomed, to an endless Eastertide.  
Alleluia, alleluia, oh, to breathe the Spirit's grace!  
Alleluia, alleluia, oh, to see the Father's face!  
Alleluia, alleluia, oh, to feel the Son's embrace*

I particularly love the final verse of the poem, as the Trinity is once again united. What total joy there must have been in heaven on Ascension Thursday!

The Mass of the Ascension here at St. Bernadette's can still be accessed on the YouTube, or via this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BgsthYNOrho&feature=youtu.be>

A Parishioner called in yesterday with some of the first spring flowers of her garden, which she always used to place on the Lady Altar in Church. I have done so for her, and they do indeed look very beautiful, as you can see from the attached picture. I still fail to understand why the Church cannot be open for individual private prayer, with all precautions and sensible social distancing, but

hey ho. If you haven't already, please sign the petition to allow our Churches to open, with all necessary safety precautions:

<https://citizengo.org/en-gb/rf/179408-open-our-churches-and-restore-worship>

and continue to use your email accounts and FaceBook pages to spread the word. I was chatting with a priest yesterday about how we would manage if, say, we were only allowed forty people in Church for a service. One suggestion is that, for example 10am mass would be for people with surnames from A-F, and you could have another mass for people with surnames G-Q, working out from the last parish census appropriate numbers. Or people would sign up for a mass until it was full, and then another could be put on at a later time. Or Weekday Mass could allowed to take the place of Sunday Obligation. I've a feeling we are going to have to be very creative, and open to new ideas and times or circumstances regarding our liturgies. I am sure we will receive some guidelines from the Diocese about what we are allowed to do – certainly our School has put a lot of thought and action into gradual easing up of lockdown, and we could learn a lot from them.

As I write it has just started to rain, but the forecast is much better for the rest of the day, so hopefully we can get out for a nice walk this afternoon. I had a lovely walk on the prom yesterday – I didn't realise it was so hot. I listened to 'Carrie', a Rock Musical based on the Stephen King horror novel as I walked along, though why I really don't know – it was terrible!

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.