

Thurssday April 23<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of Second Week of Easter, Feast of St. George

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 today is the feast of St. George, Patron Saint of England. Very little is known about St. George, and most of what we do know is from a biography written by St. Peter Damian (my Patron Saint!). It's said that he was born in Turkey in the third century, though after his father died his mother took him to the Middle East. Like St. Sebastian he became a Roman soldier but was unhappy with the way the soldiers were treating the Christians, and for this was tortured and executed, but refused to give up his faith. One story that is well known about him, is that of his slaying of a dragon in the city of Silene in Libya. Legend says that the city was being attacked by the dragon, which they were pacifying by feeding it sheep. When they ran out of sheep, the King's daughter was to be sacrificed, but George slayed (or in some re-tellings captured and pacified) the dragon, and told the people to have faith, at which the whole town converted to Christianity. Kind Edward III made George Patron of England in the fourteenth century, having being inspired about stories of his life. For many countries, George has been a symbol of triumphing over adversity, and bravery in the face of terrible suffering. How appropriate that we should celebrate his feast in the midst of these trying times when we need his faith and constancy:

*God of hosts, who so kindled the first of charity  
in the heart of St. George your martyr  
that he bore witness to the risen Lord by both his life and his death,  
grant us, through his intercession, we pray,  
the same **faith and power** of his love,  
that we who rejoice in his triumph  
may be led to share with him in the fullness of the resurrection.  
Though 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.*

So for today's hymn let's sing a rousing 'Jerusalem'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DsmkpgOL2w>

and I attach a picture from Paul of a wonderful stained glass window of our Patron Saint.

I've mentioned in a sermon before that when I'm on holiday I don't advertise the fact that I'm a Catholic priest unless necessary (if someone is taken ill, or being airlifted from a ship), though if anyone asks me what I do, I'm always open and honest, and it often leads to interesting discussions about the faith, or about what the job entails. The only time I've ever gone up to some people and told that I'm a priest was on a bus back from Jerusalem. We'd just been on a whistle stop two day tour of the Holy Land, beginning in Nazareth, going on through Cana (where I bought a bottle of wine – though by the time I'd got back to the coach it had turned into water), before stopping for lunch at the River Jordan, where Jesus was baptized. After this, driving past the Sea of Galilee, we made for Jerusalem where we stayed the night. The following day we followed Holy Week, through Gethsemane (which was beautiful), walking along the Via Dolorosa, to the Basilicas of the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, before heading on to Bethlehem and the Church of The Nativity. Before heading back to the Ship we stopped at the Dead Sea, and it was incredible just to float in the heavily salted water.

In the minibus on the way back to the ship two couples were talking about everything we'd seen, and they began a discussion about whether Jesus had ever visited England. I couldn't help but join in, and told them that there is a legend that Jesus visited England, accompanied by Mary and Jesus when he was a young boy, and they travelled to Glastonbury, an ancient sacred site. After Jesus' death it is said that Joseph of Arimathea came to England and buried the Holy Grail, the utensils used at the Last Supper, at Glastonbury Tor. The legend of the Holy Family coming to England is reflected in two hymns, the first of course being 'Jerusalem', with the opening line 'And did those feet in ancient time walk upon England's mountains green...', and the second being the lovely folk song 'Loaves and Fishes' which I ended up singing to them! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HL5nuCWUrWs>

*As I went a walking one morning in spring*

*I met with some travellers in an old country lane.*

*One was an old man, the second a maid*

*The third was a young boy who smiled as he said;*

*CHORUS: With the wind in the willows and the birds in the sky*

*We've a bright sun to warm us wherever we lie.*

*We have bread and fishes and a jug of red wine*

*to share on our journey with all of mankind*

*I sat down beside them the flowers all around*

*and we ate on a mantel spread out on the ground.*

*They told me of prophets and princes and kings*

*and they spoke of the one God who knows everything CHORUS*

*"I asked them to tell me their name and their race  
So I might remember their kindness and grace  
'My name it is Joseph, This is Mary my wife  
and this is our young son our pride and delight." CHORUS*

*"We're travelling to Glaston' over England's green lanes  
to hear of folk's troubles to hear of their pains  
We travel the wide world over land and the sea  
To tell all the people how they can be free." CHORUS*

*So sadly I left them on that old country lane  
For I knew that I never would see them again  
One was an old man the second a maid  
The third was a young boy who smiled as he said; CHORUS*

As I mailed yesterday, there is a possibility that BBC Radio Lancashire will be interviewing me about what we've all been up to during Lockdown, so I'll keep you posted as to what happens.

Continued thanks to everyone who has said they would sponsor me for the mini marathon 26,000 steps which I'll be doing on Sunday afternoon in church, to raise money for food and vouchers for those in need – and there is a lot of need. Many blessings to you all.

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.

