

Friday June 26th, Friday of Week 12 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.

And I trust everyone continues to pray for all our needs at this time.

It's a hot sultry morning, and we are due a thunderstorm this afternoon, so let's hope it cools things down a bit. I don't think I'll get my walk on the prom this morning, so it might be a few laps of the Church saying the traditional Friday Rosary of the Sorrowful Mysteries.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the deportation to Babylon happened in two stages. The first stage was described in yesterday's First Reading, II Kings 24:8-17 and seems to have been relatively peaceful, the second stage is described today II Kings 25:1-12 and is very violent and cruel, with King Nebuchadnezzar and his soldiers carrying out all sorts of gruesome atrocities. The people now being taken to exile want to remember their happy past, and the responsorial psalm, Palm 136 reflects as *'By the rivers of Babylon, we sat and wept, remembering Zion'* unable to sing their old songs in their sadness and dejectedness. It's such a beautiful, reflective psalm, and has received many musical settings, not least by Boney M in the 1970s, as well as being one of the psalms in the musical Godspell;

On the willows, there, we hung up our lyres

For our captors there required of us songs, and our tormentors mirth

On the willows, there, we hung up our lyres

For our captors there required of us songs, and our tormentor's mirth

Saying 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion, sing us one of the songs of Zion.'

But how can we sing? Sing the Lord's songs? In a foreign land?

In many ways the past few months have been like an exile. We were suddenly taken away from a life that we took for granted and now we are having to adjust to a 'new normal'. Along with the People of God in exile we cannot express our experience through communal singing as this has been identified as a particularly risky activity in spreading the virus, so when we do come together for Mass, there will, alas, be no singing. That doesn't mean we cannot sing in our homes, though, so let us sing together 'Alleluia! Sing to Jesus!' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56a4w7XxvfY> and perhaps as an encore, sing along with Boney M 'By The Rovers of Babylon'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vYK9iCRb7S4>

With the Sermon on the Mount now completed, Jesus comes down from the Mountain, Matthew 8:1-4, and immediately a leper comes to him, *'If you want to, you can cure me.'* Jesus' immediate answer is *'Of course I want to,'* and in saying that Jesus is telling us all that of course he wants to answer all our prayers. It's one of many invitations Jesus gives to us to come to him with all our needs. And, my goodness, we all have so many personal needs in these strange times, as well as considering the needs of others. Let us thank our Lord for inviting us to pray, and turn to him in prayer.

Heavenly Father, as You have told us,

You are near to the brokenhearted and save those who are crushed in spirit.

Thank you for Your love, grace and mercy.

Today, we pray that our discomforts will turn to comforts,

our deprivations to more blessings

our tears to smiles, our sorrows to pleasures, our illness to wellness.

We place all our trust in you

because 'of course' you want to hear us, heal us, and answer all our prayers.

through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

I often say that, lovely as the Liturgical Calendar is, with its celebrations and feasts and Saints days which punctuate the year, it can also be a bit like working out your income tax, as it can get very complicated, knowing which readings, which colour, which prayers and so on, and I have to confess that I got it wrong this week. Yesterday I was talking about Cyril of Alexandria, and his optional memorial is actually tomorrow, the 27th. The 28th would be Saint Irenaeus, but he has been superseded by Saints Peter and Paul on Sunday, whose Feast is being transferred to the Sunday because it is on Monday 29th and is a HolyDay of Obligation. Is that clear?

Anyway, yesterday was actually A Lancaster Diocesan Optional Memorial of Our Lady of Fernhalgh (I told you things get complicated). Fernyhalgh is our southern part of the Diocese Shrine to Our Lady, just off the A6 at Broughton. Fernyhalgh or Ladyewell has been a place of pilgrimage and devotion for many centuries with continuity through times of persecution right through to the present day. Pilgrimages from Salford, Liverpool and Lancaster take place each year, along with a Diocesan Altar Servers gathering, as well as many other gatherings of prayer. An undated legend tells of an Irish merchant swearing to build a chapel in thanks for surviving a storm at sea, and being directed here by a dream. The well was a pool of water retained within its present walls until in 1905 the nuns occupying the house paved it, constructed steps down to the new well-head, and added a statue. Today it is a special place for the memory of our local martyrs as well as the devotion to Our Blessed Lady. There is a beautiful open chapel, which the names of all the Diocesan Martyrs named on it. As we

think about this place of pilgrimage we should give thanks for the witness of faith which has been handed down to us to be live with faithfulness and love.

*Almighty God and Father,
the legend of the well has carried over centuries
devotion to Our Lady of Fernyhalgh
even when to be faithful was a call to martyrdom.
In contemplating the passion of your Son
our forefathers called upon Mary as Our Lady of Pity.
May we today confront the more subtle challenges of the world to our faith
as we renew or prayers for your protection
through the intercession of Mary, mother of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

This Church will be open for private prayer this Sunday from 1-4pm and on Wednesday from 12-1pm, but all that will cease as we have now received guidelines for opening the Church for the public worship of Mass! Very good news, indeed, though things will be very different. It will be more like a quiet weekday Mass, but communion will be given. I'll give you more details throughout the week, but I propose the following times for Mass: Saturday 5pm (which enables time for cleaning afterwards), Sunday 10am, Tuesday 12noon, and Thursday 12noon. Sunday obligation is still lifted, so you can attend any Mass. We aim to have provision for fifty people at each mass, so social distancing can be observed. It's all happened so quickly, but that has been the case for a lot of walks of life. It's another small step to the new normality. Let's pray for our community of St. Bernadette's as we begin our new future – the future isn't what it used to be!

In other news, I have finally made an appointment for the official post coronavirus lock down haircut, so I'll be down at the Brass Moustache in a couple of weeks' time for a trim - although given how my hair looks against Tobias' in the attached pic, I think a bottle of Grecian 2000 is in order...

Mass for the Twelfth Sunday of the Year is available on the YouTube at

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PN0e_G6n4AE&feature=youtu.be

The official link for the Mass Sheet is

https://www.rpbooks.co.uk/uploads/www.rpbooks.co.uk/14_12inOrdinaryTimeA.pdf

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.