

Tuesday April 28th Tuesday in the Third 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.

Today's first reading (Acts 7:51-8:1) recounts the martyrdom of St. Stephen. As the Council he attack him he says' *'I can see heaven thrown open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'* He dies crying, *'Lord, do not hold this sin against him.'* And thus the Church gained its first martyr. Let's all pray the prayer for the Intercession of St. Stephen:

O glorious Saint Stephen, faithful imitator of Jesus Christ, martyr in will and in reality, so full of charity, zeal, love, and purity, deign to intercede for us poor exiles; you who are so high in the favour of God, we do entreat you to procure for us a little spark of that divine love which animated your heart, that we too one day may have the happiness of seeing our God face to face.

At the very end of the account of Stephen's martyrdom we are told that *'Saul (as St. Paul was called before his conversion) entirely approved of the killing'* which the author Evelyn Waugh described as the most chilling six words in the whole of Scripture. You imagine Saul grimly smiling his approval as Stephen becomes the first Christian to be murdered for their fate. It goes to demonstrate just how great the conversion of St. Paul was on his way to Damascus, and from being a person who set out to destroy Christians became one of the greatest preachers to the Gentiles in the whole of Church history. Out of the darkest things God can create light, power and strength. Worth remembering at this time, as the psalm this morning puts it:

*Be a rock of refuge for me,
a might stronghold to save me,
for you are my rock, my stronghold,
for you name's sake lead me and guide me.*

Incidentally, in this time of Pandemic, it's worth asking Stephen to help us as the name 'Stephen' means 'crowned' and coronavirus is named because of its crown like shape. Incidentally there is also a St. Corona, who was born in France in the second century, and was the wife of St. Victor. After being forced to witness his martyrdom, she suffered questioning and a gruesome martyrdom herself. Her relics ended up in Germany, and before lockdown, the relics were going to be rehoused to be venerated. Whatever you read on the internet she is *not* patron Saint of Pandemics (as you know, we

seek the intercession of St. Sebastian and St. Roch, as I discussed in a previous message). She is however the Patron Saint of Treasure Hunters and things to do with Money, and earlier this year it was suggested that her name should be invoked with regard to economic recessions.

Talking of money, continued huge thanks for the sponsorship money which has been coming in, or which can be transferred into the Parish Bank account (and if you need the details just email). Your support has been quite overwhelming. As funds still come in, I will give you the total on Sunday, but already it has far exceeded what I expected. Many blessings – and thank you to two of our youngest Parishioners who sent me congratulations cards, a picture of which I attach.

Please pray for the repose of the souls of Graham Hopkins, whose funeral I celebrated at Carleton at 8:30am this morning, Barbara Agnes Brindle, whose funeral I will be celebrating at the graveside in Layton Cemetery at 11:30am this morning, and Margaret Sintes, whose funeral I will be celebrating at Carleton at 3:30pm this afternoon. *Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.*

We will hopefully be celebrating a Requiem Mass for Margaret in the not too distant future when lockdown on Churches is lifted, but until then Margaret's family have kindly allowed to pass on to you the little eulogy that Margaret wrote herself:

Margaret was born in Royton, Oldham, growing up in wartime, which had a big effect on her. She once gave me a prayer card of prayer to be said during a national crisis of war, and we had it reproduced and made a prayer card for the congregation for Remembrance Sunday. She trained as a radiographer and worked in various hospitals.

In 1961 she went to Majorca on holiday, and it was there she met Pedro, staying on after the holiday, working in Majorca for a year. They returned to England together – Margaret saying that Pedro was her ultimate holiday souvenir. In 1962 they were married at Holy Family Church, with four children then coming along.

Margaret retrained in Social Services, to fit in with family life, and worked with physically handicapped adults, mainly deaf and blind people. When she retired she enjoyed gardening, and had a great interest in researching family history. She was also a long time member of 3Ls ('Life Long Learning') or, as she liked to call it 'Life Long Laughing' where she enjoyed the company and fun of like-minded people. She was a parishioner of St. Bernadette's Parish since 1963, a member of the Help the Hungry group, and always attended the SVP coffee mornings. But she lived for her children and grandchildren.

The second hymn Margaret chose for her requiem was 'Vaster Far Than Any Ocean' which is sung to the tune of 'The Carnival Is Over,' which itself is based on a Russian folk song, so let us sing that hymn for her today <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G4SLW9K9t14>

I attach a picture which I took at the SVP Coffee Morning when I was teaching everyone how to make origami cranes, and you can see the fun Margaret is having. Special love to all of the Coffee Morning crowd, and let's hope and pray that we'll soon be having tea, coffee and chit-chat together again – and one of Maria's cakes!

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.