

Wednesday April 29th Wednesday 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.

As our reading of Acts of the Apostles continues, today (Acts 8:1-8) we see the Apostles scatter after the martyrdom of St. Stephen and the following persecutions. It is this scattering which will eventually take the Church from Jerusalem to Rome. And in today's Gospel (John 6:35-40) Jesus tells us *'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never be hungry, he who believes in me will never thirst.'* At this time when people can only make a spiritual communion let us continue to pray for an increase in faith and devotion to the Eucharist. And for today's hymn let's sing 'I Am the Bread of Life' in a particularly bouncy version <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX4uC3a7RC8>

Last week we were thinking about Venice, whose Patron is St. Mark, and we are back in Italy today for the Feast of St. Catherine of Sienna. Catherine was an unusual woman. She was the youngest of twenty-five children (which means her mother must have been with child for nineteen years) and from her early years wished to become a nun. Her father opposed this for a long time, but eventually she joined the Dominicans. Throughout her short life she had a number of very significant visions. These gave her the courage to act as intermediary in many ecclesiastical and political disputes. Her holiness was renowned and she was responsible for the conversion of many people. Her great achievement was persuading the Popes to return to Rome after their seventy-four-year exile in Avignon, France. She wrote a number of books and died in 1378, when she was only thirty-three. She was proclaimed patroness of Italy in 1939, a Doctor of the Church in 1970, and one of the six Patrons of Europe in 1999 (can you name the other five?). After her death her body was laid to rest in Rome, but, as the Church did in those days, her head was taken to Sienna, and can actually be seen and revered in the Cathedral of St. Catherine in Sienna. Sienna is the most beautiful city, which I was fortunate to visit many times in Rome, as it was just the right distance for a mini weekend away, and I still have some little clay animals made by a blind potter from there. Italy has been particularly hard hit by the coronavirus, so please remember the country in your prayers. Appropriately enough at this time Catherine is one of the Patron Saints of Nurses, so let us pray her prayer:

*O merciful Father, we pray for our nurses
and all those whom you have called to the arts of healing the sick
and the prevention of disease and pain.*

*Strengthen them in body and soul,
and bless their work,
that they may give comfort to those for whose salvation your Son became Man,
lived on this earth, healed the sick, and suffered and died on the Cross. Amen*

I love the phrase ‘arts of healing the sick.’ Let us commend all our medics for their great artistry, and don’t forget to clap for the NHS tomorrow night at 8pm.

Some people have been kindly asking about my family, and how they are getting on in Australia (my sister Margaret) and in Hong Kong (my brother Martin). I’m glad to say that everyone is keeping safe and well. My brother has been in semi-lockdown in Hong Kong since before Christmas. He’s a teacher and they have been doing full day real-time teaching by video link every day. He’s been in Hong Kong thirty-three years now, and he and his wife, Liza, have been together for over thirty-five years. For them still Friday night is always ‘Date Night’ (aww) and though they’ve had to make some modifications, they still keep up the ritual. You can see how they’ve had to adapt in the attached photo...!

I know a lot of you have been going around the country and around the world watching streamed masses. If you fancy a trip to Lincoln, my mate Fr. Ed has managed to get his internet up and running, and you may like to join him for today’s mass: <https://youtu.be/kJrTqfFMbco> Apparently he tried it yesterday, but he pressed the wrong button and his parishioners were treated to a still photograph of him for half an hour.

Continued thanks to everyone who has dropped sponsorship money in the letterbox by the porch – every time I check it there seems to be another envelope in there, and thanks to those who’ve deposited money straight into the parish account. The total is much more than I was expecting, but I’ll save it till the weekend. Thanks also to the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Cerebral Palsy Association who have donated £100 to St. Bernadette’s School, Holy Family School, and Christ the King School, as they feel their donations should be shared at this time of crisis. Many blessings to you all.

Please say the Eternal Rest for Mary Bernadette McNamara, whose funeral I will be celebrating today at Lytham Park Crematorium at 3pm. From the eulogy she sounds a delightful lady, and I have got to know her nieces who are organizing the funeral well. They are both head teachers of inner-city schools in Manchester, and they will be playing and singing ‘Bring Flowers of the Rarest’ for their Aunt this afternoon. Although it is not May till Friday, let’s have an extra hymn today and join in with them for Mary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ld4FNjK4IEQ>

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.