

Friday May 29th, Friday in Week Seven 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.

Another beautiful day for queueing, or perhaps, getting out into our gardens if we are lucky enough to have one, perhaps saying our prayers there in the sun. I remember seeing a garden bench somewhere which said 'You are nearer God's heart in a garden.' This 'Quiet Garden Prayer' comes from a twelfth century Cistercian monk:

*Oh Lord Jesus
true gardener
work in us what you want of us,
For you are indeed the true gardener
at once, maker and tiller
and keeper of your garden
you who plant with the word,
water with the spirit
and give your increase
with your power.
Amen.*

Following on from yesterday's Gospel, we see the long thread that the Lord is weaving to get Paul to what is to be the new centre of the Church in Rome. In Acts 25:13-21 we see the Jews continue to conspire against Paul and he is moved to Caesarea and later appeals his case to Rome. Felix, the Roman governor, told king Agrippa about Paul, and about the dispute he has had with the Jews, and told him how determined he was to get him to Rome. In this way Paul would fulfil the prophecy that he must bear witness to Jesus in the capital city. This is one of many moments in Acts of the Apostles when God truly does work in mysterious ways. So even at a time such as this look out for God's hands, working in and through people perhaps in the most extraordinary of circumstances.

Today and tomorrow we read the very end of John's Gospel, and are asked to reflect on different ways in which God's word is to be spread through Peter and the author of the Gospel, John himself. Their lives are to be very different. In today's extract, John 21:15-19, Peter's threefold denial of Jesus

is confronted, with Peter repeating three times his love for Jesus. He repents and is forgiven, and is told to 'follow me'. Jesus words to Peter, 'I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go,' refer to the work that Peter will do for God and his Church which will lead to his martyrdom.

*Lord, so great is our love for you
That even though we walk in a world
where, for some, speaking your name can mean certain death
Your faithful still speak it
And speak it all the louder.
Help us work for a world where all may speak their creeds
And pray their prayers
Without fear of violence.
Hear the prayers of those who abide with you
in dangerous times
and in dark valleys,
And who die with your name on their lips.
Draw them quickly to your side
Where they might know eternal peace.
Amen.*

As we'll see tomorrow, it is a different story for the evangelist John. Incidentally, since we have been reading John's Gospel throughout Eastertide, the name John derives from the Hebrew for 'God has been gracious', and if you see any depiction of the disciples together you can always tell which is John because he is the one without a beard. Seriously, check it out.

To think that most of Lent and what will be all of Eastertide has been spent in lockdown. I know many of you have missed our liturgies and gatherings. Many of you continue to ask when will the Church be open again, and when and how will be able to resume services. There seems to be a gradual lifting of lockdown, but still very little word regarding the Church. The only advice we have had from the diocese is to make sure we are stocked up with cleaning and sanitizing products, as there is so little information coming our way. The Bishops of England and Wales have made the following statement:

'The timing and the manner of the opening of churches touches profound sensitivities and spiritual needs. The Government's document and statements fail to recognise this. The Government's position, includes these steps aimed at opening churches as soon as possible: the establishment of a task force for places of worship, to work closely with 'stakeholders' in ensuring that premises are

COVID-19 secure; and heeding the experience of other countries in which churches are already open for worship. In dialogue with the Government, the Catholic Church will continue its engagement in this process and has already submitted a detailed plan, in full accordance with public health guidelines, for churches to be opened for private prayer. The Church is ready to play its full part in the task force, understanding that this includes the possible earlier use of churches for private prayer, as a first safe step towards their use for public worship.'

We are encouraged to write to our MPs with regard to this, so please do so, and 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>

I mentioned yesterday that we are all asked to join in with a world over recitation of the Rosary with Pope Francis, who will be streaming from the Lourdes Grotto in the Vatican gardens. He will be praying at 5:30pm in Rome, which is 4:30pm here in the UK (I think I may have got my times mixed up yesterday). As well as praying with the Pope on Saturday the Churches in England and Wales are calling for a Pentecost Prayer Rally on Sunday. Monsignor John Armitage, the Rector at the National Shrine of Our Lady at Walsingham, has invited each Diocese to take part in a simple initiative – a Rosary Relay on 31 May 2020. Each Diocese has been asked to encourage their people to pray the Rosary either individually, or where possible in groups, during a designated hour. The Diocese of Lancaster has been asked to pray the Rosary at 5pm on Sunday afternoon. Bishop Paul will lead the Rosary, from St Peter's Cathedral that evening. The focus will be on promoting the praying of the Rosary at Home, although it would be very nice to pray it in our gardens in these beautiful days. So we can have a Pentecost weekend of prayer to the Holy Spirit with our Blessed Mother, who stayed and prayed with the Apostles from the time of the Ascension to the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, that same Spirit which had already come down upon Our Lady at the Annunciation.

Christ said, 'When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.' Spirit of truth, guide me always, I pray.

Christ said, 'He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you.' Holy Spirit, help me to glorify The Father and to declare with my life that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Christ said, 'The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit will teach you all things and brings to your remembrance all that I have said to you.' Divine Counsellor, please enlighten my mind to the teachings of Christ, and help me to recall His words that are spirit and truth.

Holy Spirit, please come anew; fill me with your love, life, joy, peace, and wisdom as I pray for my personal Pentecost through the intercession of your beloved spouse, the Virgin Mary. Amen.

And let's sing today, 'God's Spirit is in my heart.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-ibXHqsUTw>

Don't forget, if you are passing the Church, there are still some Miraculous medals left, and I will also be putting some prayer cards there, which depict the Holy Spirit window in St. Peter's Rome, which you are welcome to take for yourself, and friends and family. I have also left some sealed bottles of Holy Water which I have blessed, on the table opposite the R.I.P board.

And in other news, in lockdown, as well as knitting all our favourite Biblical scenes (and I've had a preview of Pentecost), Eileen has also knitted me a cushion, decorated with one of my most favourite things – a pepperoni pizza! It looks good enough to eat! I believe she's working on a knitted bottle of Gordons now.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost. 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.