

FROM THE PASTOR

February 4, 2024

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

SAINT BLAISE DAY BLESSING OF THROATS

On February 3rd, we celebrate the feast of St. Blaise. He was an Armenian Bishop and Martyr who gave his life for Our Lord in the Third Century and immediately after his death was invoked to be a helper and intercessor in ailments of the throat. He is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, and we invoke his blessing to help us with throat and respiratory illness particularly during these days of Covid.

After all the Masses this weekend the blessing of the throats will be administered to all who would like to receive it.

THE APPARITION OF OUR LADY AT LOURDES

Next Sunday, February 11th will commemorate the 166th anniversary of Our Blessed Mother's apparition to St. Bernadette Soubirous at Lourdes. The late Pope Saint John Paul II also proclaimed that day would forever be the World Day of the Sick. For our meditation for today I would like to speak about both topics.

At the time of the apparition of Our Lady in 1858, Bernadette was 14 years old. She could neither read nor write nor had she made her First Holy Communion. She had already been confirmed. It is only recent practice in the Western Church that First Communion precedes Confirmation. She was from a destitute family and suffered terribly from asthma. But before time began, God had chosen her to be his instrument to make known His great love and mercy for all the world, particularly for those ensnared in the bonds of sin. God always chooses the weak things of the world to shame the wise.

Our Lady appeared in a dirty, dank hole, a stone grotto which the locals called the *pigs' shelter*. Our Lady was clothed in a dazzling white dress girded in blue. On her feet there were yellow roses. On March 25, 1858, the Feast of the Annunciation, the Lady revealed herself by telling Bernadette, *I am the Immaculate Conception (que soy era immaculada concepciou)*. That would be the last time that Bernadette would see Our Lady in this world. Only four years previously Blessed Pope Pius IX had proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception which taught that Our Lady had been immaculately conceived in the womb of her mother, receiving the saving

grace of her Son in anticipation of her divine motherhood. Interestingly, Our Lady did not speak French during the apparitions but the dialect proper to the border region of France and Spain. This dialect is no longer widely spoken. When heard, the dialect resembles modern Portuguese, but is part of the Gascon family of languages which includes modern Catalan. St. Bernadette was unable to speak or understand French and so Our Lady spoke her dialect.

During the apparitions (of which there were 15 lasting from February 11, 1858, through March 25, 1858) Our Lady made known that she wished a Church to be built at the place where she appeared where the people could come in procession. She also revealed the little stream which became a flowing torrent of which she said the people should drink the water. (As we know many not only drink of the water but they even bathe in the waters at Lourdes). She told Bernadette that she would make her happy, *not in this world but in the next*.

Today over six million people come to Lourdes each year to find healing in mind, body, and soul. In the grotto at Lourdes where Our Lady appeared is a lovely statue of the Virgin Mary based upon St. Bernadette's description. Many years after the apparition, St. Bernadette was permitted to return to the grotto (although her identity was unknown) and when asked if the statue resembled Our Lady, St. Bernadette responded, *not in the least. The Lady was much more beautiful*. The statue is a magnificent piece of artwork executed by the famous sculptor from Lyons, Jean Fabisch. Nevertheless St. Bernadette was profoundly disappointed in the work for she said Our Lady was both younger and much more beautiful than the statue makes her out to be.

Because so many of the sick have visited Lourdes it is good for us today to consider sickness in the life of the Christian. The sick person is called in a unique way to give witness to the Crucified. In other words, the sick person is someone who knows that the world is filled with suffering, who knows that Love has triumphed over everything, over all absurdity and every assault from death. The sick person is one who knows, in the Light of the Resurrection, that glory radiates from the place of suffering, of agony accepted with Christ. The sick person is invited by Our Lord to join Him in the redemption of the world. When suffering is accepted for the sake of Christ it brings many graces to the suffering person and to the world. No wonder the saints tell us that the prayers of the Sick are the most powerful. It is because the Sick are united to Our Lord in a special way.

At Lourdes the Sick are treated with great love and respect. They are all *VIPs* in a manner of speaking. And so, to our sick parishioners, may ask you to offer your sufferings to Our Lord for the sake of your families and for the needs of the Universal Church and for the parish.

Here at St. Paul, we have the blessing of the Sick after the 9.00AM Mass each First Saturday. It

is not the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, but rather a special blessing for all suffering in mind, body, or soul.

WINTER

Winter is a difficult time, but particularly for the elderly. Please remember that our parish is limited in resources and personnel. Unlike Kennedy airport or the MTA we do not have snow removal departments standing ready to plow. We have a snow removal company that services us well, but in bad weather there will always be danger. Please do not come to Church when the weather is bad. The law itself dispenses the obligation. This is especially true for those using walkers, canes, and wheelchairs. There is no need to alert the clergy and staff as to how dangerous the parking lot or walkways may be. We are aware of the danger. Please do not verbally abuse the clergy and staff with concerns about weather. Behavior of this kind will not be tolerated. Adult children should care for their parents and not let them go out in bad weather.

PEWS

Many may be aware that our Church recently underwent a renovation. Part of this was the refurbishing of the oak pews and kneelers. Upholstery was placed on the kneelers and pews. May I ask that when one puts the kneelers down, that one do so gently with the hand. Please do not kick the kneelers down so that they may be damaged and cause a great deal of noise. We want to use our new furnishings, not abuse them.

In Jesus and Mary,
Monsignor James F. Pereda