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# The Irish Catholic

## MARY KENNY

I've earned every wrinkle and every grey hair – even if the grey is now dyed purple! Page 5



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# Bishop warns criminalising Mass-goers and priests sets a 'worrying precedent'

Ruadhán Jones and Jason Osborne

Bishop of Meath Tom Deenihan has described the Government's decision to criminalise people attending Mass as "foolish" and warned that it sets a "worrying precedent".

It comes as politicians from all sides have stepped up pressure on the Government in the Republic to permit people to return to Mass as soon as current restrictions are eased.

The *Irish Catholic* revealed at the weekend that the Government now considers either a priest celebrating Mass at which parishioners can attend or worshippers are present to be committing an offence punishable by the law.

The revelation came in correspondence to Declan Ganley who is taking a High Court challenge against the ban on Mass.

Bishop Deenihan told *The Irish Catholic* that while he had not seen the response made by the State to Mr Ganley, "what was reported was of grave concern".

He said it "establishes a worrying precedent with regards to religious freedom and religious worship".

» Continued on Page 2

## Hosanna in the Highest!



A couple show off their crosses made of palm as they leave Clonard Monastery in Belfast following Palm Sunday Mass, March 28, after restrictions were lifted in the North. See page 15. Photo: Hugh Russell.



## Pope Francis: Climate change 'causing immense hardship for the most vulnerable among us'

Widespread droughts and floods destroying crops and food supplies in world's most vulnerable countries.

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Covid-19 has further exacerbated an already dreadful situation.

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## Inside this week

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Michael Kelly's Editor's Comment will return next week

# Every crisis can be an opportunity to learn



It would be a shame if after all the sacrifices of Covid-19 we went back to where we were beforehand, writes **Archbishop Eamon Martin**

The first performances of Handel's *Messiah* were in Fishamble Street, Dublin, in 1742 and so many people wanted tickets that the organisers asked the ladies to come without hoops in their skirts and the men not to bring their swords. *Messiah* is perhaps the best-known choral work of all time. It tells the greatest story ever told – the story of our salvation – from the Old Testament prophecies to the resurrection and looking forward to the second coming of Christ at the end of time.

Many people tend to think of Christmas when they hear about Handel's *Messiah*. Others like to listen to it during Holy Week – especially to hear those stirring words: "He was despised, rejected – a man

of sorrows, acquainted with grief". My favourite time to listen to Handel's *Messiah* is during Easter Week, because especially at Easter time the whole Christian story makes sense and reaches its climax. I particularly like to celebrate the resurrection by turning up the volume and letting rip the great Hallelujah chorus – "For the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; King of Kings and Lord of Lords! Hallelujah!"

Asking which is the most appropriate time to listen to Handel's *Messiah* is like asking whether Christmas or Easter is the greatest Christian feast. You can't have one without the other. Our creed, or profession of faith, makes that clear: We believe in the only Son of God, who was born of the Virgin Mary, who suffered under Pontius Pilate, who was crucified died and was buried, and who rose again on the third day.

**"If the story of salvation had ended on Good Friday, we would be a people of despair crying out as Jesus did on the Cross"**

The central message of our faith is that God loved us so much that he was prepared to come into this world as one like us, to experience the terrible darkness of evil that is in our world and then, having experienced the worst that our world could do, to conquer that evil by rising from the dead.

Although we are an Easter people, it is important for us always to keep in mind the whole story of our salvation:

to know that our God understands suffering. Because for so many people in our world, it is as if they are caught in the grief of Calvary. In our troubled world the cross of Good Friday casts a long shadow – from the hungry lands of Yemen and northern Nigeria, to those caught up in conflict and violence in South Sudan and Myanmar, to those struggling to cope with the ravages of Covid-19 throughout the world.

### Salvation

If the story of salvation had ended on Good Friday, we would be a people of despair crying out as Jesus did on the Cross: "my God, my God why have you abandoned us?" The Gospel tells us that at the moment of the crucifixion a darkness came over the whole land. When Mary, Peter and John came to the tomb on Easter morning, it was still dark, for they had not yet experienced the resurrection. Mary seems abandoned as she came running to Peter saying "They have taken my Lord out of the tomb and I don't know where they have put him."

For so many people today, that feeling of darkness, abandonment and emptiness is very real. It is comforting for them to know that Jesus also felt rejected, abandoned, almost swallowed up by evil before the victory of Easter destroyed

death and restored life. But we are an Easter people. We believe in the resurrection.

**"Although we are an Easter people, it is important for us always to keep in mind the whole story of our salvation"**

It would be such a shame if, after all the sacrifices and restrictions of Covid-19, we went straight back to where we were beforehand. If we look at things as Easter people, with eyes of hope and faith, then every crisis can be an opportunity to learn about ourselves, about others and the world. God is constantly at work in history, and God's Word shines light on all the experiences of our lives – good and bad. God is constantly inviting us, though suffering, to change for the better.

We pray that our faith can be strengthened by the special grace of this season, and that we can find hope in meditating on the whole story of our salvation – the story of *Messiah*, the Lord of Lords, the King of kings who conquered suffering, sin and death by rising from the dead. Christ is truly risen. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

## Bishop warns criminalising Mass-goers sets 'worrying precedent'

» Continued from Page 1

"Will future Governments also criminalise religious worship?" Bishop Deenihan asked.

"It might be more prudent of the Government to acknowledge the sacrifice and loss of these Catholics who have been unable to attend Mass for nine of the past thirteen months than to seek to criminalise them," Dr Deenihan added. "No other country," he added, "has suffered such restrictions on religious worship for so long and courts throughout the world have thrown out such attempts as being unconstitutional or in contravention of human rights."

The Government's position contradicts earlier assurances by Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly who insisted that Mass was not a penal offence.

Independent TD Michael McNamara said he now believes the minister "misled

the Dáil and either hadn't read the regulations or was misled by his officials or both". "That in itself is very serious given that it's the minister who makes the regulations," Mr McNamara told *The Irish Catholic*. "A minister who doesn't know what he's doing when he's interfering with fundamental rights is a very serious proposition in a democracy." Tipperary TD Mattie McGrath joined Mr McNamara in criticising the legislation, calling the penalising of public worship "outrageous" and "totally anti-Christian".

Meanwhile, Independent TD Carol Nolan has written to the minister asking him to correct the record.

TDs and senators also pressed the Taoiseach and Tánaiste on public worship at their respective parliamentary party meetings.

See page 10.



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# Dante's divine contribution celebrated on 7th centenary of his death

Jason Osborne

Famed Italian poet Dante Alighieri's contribution to Christendom is "insurmountable" and cannot be underestimated as a renewed appreciation of his work commemorates the 700th anniversary of his death.

Fr John Harris OP of Newbridge told *The Irish Catholic* that the role his works have played in art and literature was to "open up the visage of Christian imagination".

"His belief in the world beyond this one. The victory, ultimately, of goodness over evil and things like that. He does open up the mind to imagination of the truth of the Gospel. I think his contribution to that openness of humanity to the truth of the Gospel really – we owe an awful lot to Dante," Fr Harris said.

## Letter

Pope Francis penned an apostolic letter to celebrate the occasion, in which he said he appreciated the poet's work for the "enduring warnings and insights it contains

for humanity as a whole, not simply believers".

"On this anniversary, the voice of the Church can hardly be absent from the universal commemoration of the man and poet Dante Alighieri. Better than most, Dante knew how to express with poetic beauty the depth of the mystery of God and love. His poem, one of the highest expressions of human genius, was the fruit of a new and deeper inspiration," the Pope wrote, continuing, "I wish to join my predecessors who honoured and extolled the poet Dante... and to propose him anew for the consideration of the Church, the great body of the Faithful, literary scholars, theologians and artists".

The Pope concluded his letter: "At this particular moment in history, overclouded by situations of profound inhumanity and a lack of confidence and prospects for the future, the figure of Dante, prophet of hope and witness to the human desire for happiness, can still provide us with words and examples that encourage us on our journey.

"Dante can help us to advance with serenity and courage on the pilgrimage of life and faith that each of us is called to make, until our hearts find true peace and true joy, until we arrive at the ultimate goal of all humanity".

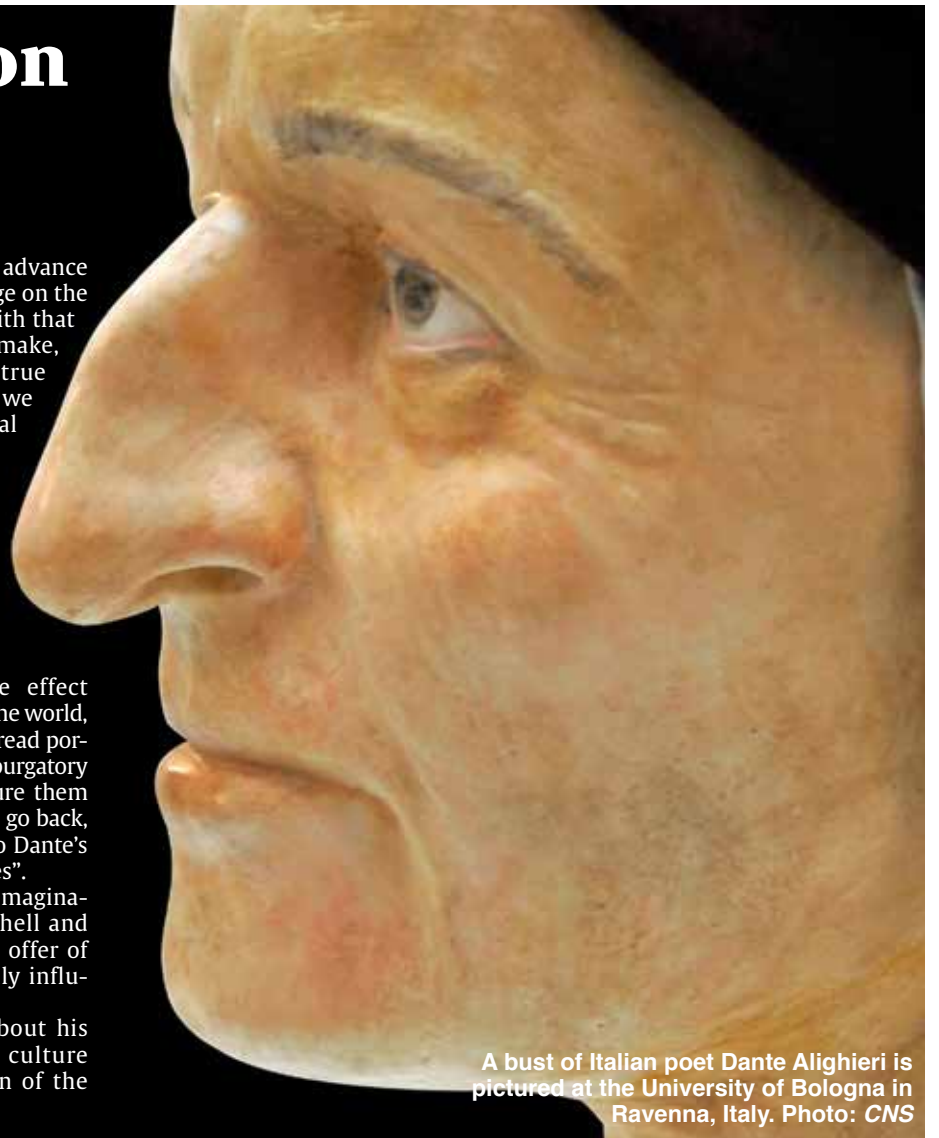
## Ultimate goal

The "ultimate goal" of all humanity, the Pope says quoting Dante himself is, "The Love which moves the sun and the other stars".

Commenting on the effect Dante's work has had on the world, Fr Harris said the widespread portrayal of heaven, hell and purgatory in art and how we picture them more generally "all really go back, I think to some extent, to Dante's description of these places".

"So much of our own imagination about heaven and hell and everything else and the offer of the Christian life is really influenced by Dante.

"There's no doubt about his influence on western culture and the Christianisation of the imagination," he said.



A bust of Italian poet Dante Alighieri is pictured at the University of Bologna in Ravenna, Italy. Photo: CNS

# Belfast priest 'disappointed' after sectarian flag put at girls' school



A crying schoolgirl is escorted to the Holy Cross Primary School in the republican Ardoyne district of Belfast, past Loyalist protestors on the first day of the new school term in September, 2001. Photo: Paul Faith/PA Archive/PA Images.

Chai Brady

A Belfast priest has voiced his disappointment after a flag showing loyalist killer Michael Stone was put up near Holy Cross Girls' School in Ardoyne.

Rector at Holy Cross Ardoyne, Fr Eugene McCarthy told *The Irish Catholic* the incident wasn't representative of the Loyalist community.

"I think it could be an embarrassment to the Loyalist people to have this kind of stuff happening again. We don't want it, we don't need it and we have enough to do to keep ourselves going in the midst of this pandemic," he said.

"We're disappointed that it happened and please God it won't happen again," he continued, "sometimes it's done by people who don't

appreciate the consequences of that kind of behaviour".

Fr McCarthy added: "I was happy to hear that some of the groups on either side have been talking and so forth, it's better to have people talking than to have a deadly silence and that kind of behaviour."

The Stone flag, which included the slogan 'Hands up if you're going to be sectarian today', was taken down several hours later. It's believed it was put up along with several Rangers flags around the Ardoyne Road last week.

Holy Cross Girls' School was the focus of bitter loyalist protests in 2001 and 2002. It involved attempts to stop young girls from going to school.

A former UDA member, Stone was convicted of three murders and was subsequently released under the Good Friday Agreement in 2000.



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## Keep Myanmar missionaries in prayers during Holy Week as 'desperate' violence continues

Chai Brady

During Holy Week the Faithful should keep Myanmar in their prayers as violent crackdowns on protests against a military coup have led to the deaths of hundreds of people, an Irish bishop has said.

Bishop Denis Nulty of the Diocese of Kildare and Leighlin said the situation in the country "concerns me hugely". He asked Irish people to "remember our missionaries out there working in very difficult circumstances".

Hundreds of protestors have been killed since Myanmar's

military Junta seized power in a coup on February 1. Saturday, March 27, saw the bloodiest day of protests with 114 people killed in 44 towns, according to a tally by local media.

Unarmed civilians and children have been killed.

"I would be very worried that innocent people are being killed, it's terribly sad," said Bishop Nulty. "It's certainly not getting any more peaceful, the weekend has been the worst, Saturday was a desperate day. Let's keep them in our prayers, that's very important."

Ireland must use its position on the UN Security Council to

highlight the "desperate" situation in Myanmar, according to the bishop.

He commended Ireland's "powerful peacekeeping record", saying it's well respected across the world. "Let us lead the voice of peace in these areas of the world like Myanmar... now that we're sitting around a very powerful group, the security council, let us make our voice heard on these issues," said Bishop Nulty.

In a statement, the Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney lambasted the Junta after the weekend's violence and confirmed Ireland would use its position on the Security Council to

help end the violence, saying "the role of the military in society is to protect its citizens, not to murder and terrorise them".

"...the security forces have disgraced themselves and these actions leave another stain on the history of Myanmar," he said.

"Ireland continues to stand with the people of Myanmar and will continue to work with our partners in Europe, in the region and at the United Nations, both in the General Assembly and as a member of the Security Council, to see an end to violence and to bring about a peaceful and democratic solution to this crisis."

## Catholic schools body urges Govt to vaccinate staff in special schools

Ruadhán Jones

All staff and teachers working in special schools or in special classes attached to mainstream schools must be prioritised for vaccination, say the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA).

"It is vital that all staff [in special schools and special classes] are vaccinated to reduce the demand for substitutes, or we will assuredly face the forced closure of special schools and special classes in the not-too-distant future," Seamus Mulconry, CPSMA General Secretary, warned

Minister Stephen Donnelly in a letter.

Mr Mulconry told *The Irish Catholic* that teachers working with children with special needs "can't employ the same risk mitigations as in mainstream schools".

"These staff are in many cases performing the same type work and are exposed to the same type of Covid-19 risks as frontline health workers," he said.

"It seems to us both prudent and fair that the staff in these schools and classes with special needs should be given priority in vaccination."

## New Zealand miscarriage leave a welcome but contradictory step

Jason Osborne

A move to allow paid leave to mothers and the fathers following a miscarriage or still-birth is "one that I'd welcome here," according to Niamh Uí Bhriain of the Life Institute.

This comes on the back of New Zealand's introduction of just that following a vote in

parliament in what is one of the first provisions of its type in the world.

"It is one of those issues, I think that previously, people were just expected to get on with it and often that kind of approach – it was more guided by misunderstanding than any kind of cruelty," Ms Uí Bhriain told *The Irish Catholic*.

"People thought it's difficult

to discuss this issue, perhaps it would only upset the mother if you raised it. I suppose we have a better understanding now that people need support and often want an acknowledgement of the fact that they lost a baby."

The key point for many women, according to Ms Uí Bhriain, is the fact that they've lost a child. "Everybody wants

the value of their child to be recognised," she said, adding that it raises the discussion of the humanity of the child for countries that have introduced abortion, such as Ireland and New Zealand.

"We have this situation where unborn children only have value when another human being decides they have value," she said.

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## Cherishing all children equally



Aontú counsellor Denise Mullen stages a protest in Stormont to protest Westminster's increased efforts to commission abortion services in Northern Ireland, March 25.



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# Easter 2021 – a day to be grateful

**E**aster Sunday this year falls on my 77th birthday, so I'll be marking it with gratitude for the gift of my life. To be honest, my poor Ma wasn't exactly thrilled when she found herself with a fourth pregnancy in her forties when her other children were born a good decade before that. But she adored me, and was embarrassingly proud of anything I did – even the bold bits – and I thank heaven I've made it through to my late seventies.

## Earned

Old? What do I care? I've earned every wrinkle and every grey hair – even if the grey is now dyed purple!

I like being old. I like the way that eccentricities considered weird in



## Mary Kenny

a younger person are tolerated in the old. I like not being in any competition to be smart, pretty, or even alluring: take me as I am, folks! I like being able to look back on life and understand the past so much better than, perhaps, I understand the present.

**“I don't like everything I see in the past, and that includes my own personal past”**

Truly, as the Danish Christian philosopher

Soren Kierkegaard said, “life can only be understood backwards” – though it has to be lived forwards.

I don't like everything I see in the past, and that includes my own personal past. I sometimes think of the poet John Betjeman's definition of Hell: being turned on a spit while the most shaming moments of your life are played over and over again on a visual loop.

## Perspective

But old age gives you the perspective of understanding the past, and how actions

and consequences are interwoven – in society as well as in a personal narrative.

And I view my Irish Catholic upbringing with understanding and gratitude. Yes, there were shortcomings and human failings in that world, but there was goodness, altruism, beauty and generosity too. Yes, we rebelled against its strictures and disciplines in youth – that's what youth does – but time often brings a different perspective.

**“I've earned every wrinkle and every grey hair – even if the grey is now dyed purple!”**

Social changes are correctives. Too much repression calls for a freeing of the human spirit: but too much licence reminds us of the need for boundaries.

Yes, Easter 2021 is an occasion for thankfulness – and joy!

● A BBC poll asked people what they most missed during lockdown, aside from family and friends, and top of the list came – choirs and choral singing. I can identify with that: online Mass, although we're glad to have it, has seemed so very austere all this time without any music. Even with churches opening in the North (and Britain), I think it will be a while before we get back to the pleasure and uplift of music in church.

As it happens, my singing teacher advised me to go on YouTube regularly and sing along with chosen music, as it's healthy for the lungs and the heart. So over the past week I've heard (and watched) religious music via the terrific YouTube facility.

I've listened to a beautiful *Salve Regina*, sung by the Canto Católico, uniting 450 voices from 33 countries. I've tuned into an Anglican hymn that my

husband liked very much *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind (Forgive Our Foolish Ways)* feelingly performed by Katherine Jenkins with a choir at St David's Cathedral in Wales.

I've watched Luciano Pavarotti sing Schubert's *Ave Maria* in two versions – one in the presence of Pope John Paul II in 1979. And there's a gorgeous video of *The Irish Blessing* available, in which singers from 300 churches from all over Ireland perform (with a little bit of dancing) the blessing based on *St Patrick's Breastplate*. Accompanied by a range of instruments, and stunning shots of the Irish countryside and seascape.

I was rather charmed, too, by former President Barack Obama rendering a hesitant version of *Amazing Grace*. He's almost as mediocre a singer as myself, so I felt well encouraged to karaoke with him!

## The deafening silence of God



*Christ Before the High Priest* by Gerrard van Honthurst.

The sacred painting I've chosen for Holy Week is Gerrard van Honthorst's *Christ Before the High Priest*, from about 1617. It had a profound impact on me when I first saw it at London's National Gallery, where it hangs. It so perfectly illustrates, and illuminates, the passage in Matthew's Gospel (26:63) where Jesus is accused by false witnesses,

and the high priest addresses him: “Have you no answer to make?” But “Jesus was silent.” The painter has given such a depth of expression to Our Lord's face – acceptance, wisdom and a divine knowledge all intermingled – and skilfully depicted the accusatory body-language of the Sanhedrin. Unforgettable.

Gerard (also called ‘Gerit’) van Honthurst,

who was from Utrecht, trained in Rome, was influenced by Caravaggio and nicknamed Gherardo delle Notti because of the way he used evening light as ‘chiaroscuro’. He also did some wonderful nativity painting bathed in a night-time light, and other scenes from the New Testament, as well as many paintings of musicians.



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# Delight for Le Chéile as new Catholic school announced

**Ruadhán Jones**

The Catholic school's trust Le Chéile have expressed delight as they press forward with plans to open a new secondary school in Ballincollig, Co. Cork.

The trust won the majority of 800 votes – the largest turnout for any school patronage vote last year – to establish a school with a capacity of 1,000 students in the Cork town.

Dr Áine Moran, ethos and leadership officer for Le Chéile, said they are “delighted

to win the patronage”.

“One of our objectives is to pursue Catholic education and to continue on the heritage of Catholic education,” Dr Moran told *The Irish Catholic*. “There were a number of schools decided in December. We only applied to Ballincollig and it had the biggest vote – around 800 – which we won by a significant amount.

“It’s nice to be going into a town with a mandate from parents, it puts you in a very strong position,” she added.

Le Chéile recently announced the principal

for the school, Ms Nicola Barrett, and are waiting on confirmation from the Department of Education regarding temporary buildings.

Enrolment began in January 2021, so Dr Moran says “it’s unlikely we’ll come anywhere near the numbers we would like” for the first year.

Ballincollig parish priest Fr George O’Mahony said it was very pleasing to know that parents “back Catholic education and hopefully they’ll get good all round education for all the pupils”.

The Le Chéile trust will continue to apply to be patron for schools across the country, working in tandem with the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS).

“It’s part of our strategic plan to apply to open new schools,” she said. “Obviously, there are different Catholic trusts, we try not to compete against each other. With bodies like the ATCS there’ll be more of a co-ordinated approach to applying for patronage by Catholic trusts.”

## Catholic school to switch patronage

**Staff reporter**

The Church in Dublin has decided to hand over management of a Catholic Irish language school to another patron body after ensuring that religious education will continue under the new multi-denominational ethos.

Archbishop Dermot Farrell hailed the transfer of patronage of Scoil Chaitlín Maude from the Archdiocese of Dublin to An Foras Pátrúnachta as “a good model for the future to accommodate parents’ requests”.

Negotiations have been ongoing as part of the Church’s desire to create more pluralism in education by divesting from some schools where there is already a plentiful supply of places in local Catholic schools.

In a statement last Friday, Dr Farrell confirmed that Catholic children in Scoil Chaitlín Maude will continue to be prepared for First Holy Communion and Confirmation as part of the school day.

This is seen as significant in guaranteeing the rights of parents who want to continue to have a Catholic education for their children.

Dr Farrell said that the transfer

“marks a new chapter in Ireland’s education system.

“Scoil Chaitlín Maude will provide education through the medium of Irish to Catholic children and to children of other faiths and none,” he said.

More than a decade ago, the Church signalled a willingness to divest from some Catholic schools where there was duplication or no longer demand to justify an additional Catholic school. Progress to date has been slow with difficulty in achieving local agreement cited as one of the reasons.

## ‘Strong hope’ coroner will vindicate Ballymurphy victims

**Chai Brady**

There is “strong hope” that families of the victims of the Ballymurphy massacre in west Belfast will see their loved ones vindicated as they await the coroner’s findings, according to the parish priest.

Fr Paddy McCafferty PP of Corpus Christi, Ballymurphy said there has been 50 years of “anguish” in the lead up to fresh inquests into the deaths of 10 people shot dead in August 1971.

Coroner Justice Keegan said she will deliver her findings on May 11 into the shootings involving the British army.

Speaking about the inquests and

how they affected the families, Fr McCafferty said: “It was horrendous for them. I was there for some of it and it was heart-breaking, reliving the horrible details of the inquest, the injuries that were inflicted on their loved ones, it was awful, absolutely horrific.

“They went willingly into the process, knowing how traumatising it would be, to get a determination that these were innocent people who were slaughtered,” he said.

“We’re hopeful now that on May 11 the coroner will publicly, before the whole world, say these people were killed unlawfully and they were innocent people.”

## Receiving a Holy See-I of approval



Irish ambassador to the Holy See Derek Hannon said he “was honoured and pleased” to be one of eleven ambassadors to the Holy See to have been awarded the Grand Cross of the Pian Order in the Vatican, March 25. The award recognises his outstanding service to the Church and to the State.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Covid highlights ‘big challenges’ for young people today, says bishop

Following a report from Trinity University on an increase in depression during lockdown, Bishop Paul Dempsey of Achonry has said the pandemic “highlights some big challenges for young people today”.

The report showed that almost half of young adults are suffering from mental health issues during the pandemic.

Bishop Dempsey said the pandemic has highlighted “issues of loneliness” afflicting more than young people alone.

“We need to talk more about the importance of community and human contact,” he said. “For the Church, one of my hopes post-Covid is that people will welcome the opportunity to come together as a Christian community.”

### Primate of All-Ireland pleads for information about the Disappeared

Archbishop Eamon Martin, the Primate of All-Ireland, has pleaded for anyone with information about the location of the bodies of the Disappeared to come forward.

Speaking at the annual Mass for the Disappeared in St Patrick’s Cathedral in Armagh, Archbishop Eamon spoke of the pain and suffering the families of the Disappeared continue to bear.

“I appeal once more today to anyone out there who has even the slightest amount of information, to show compassion and mercy by sharing it with the Independent Commission or with others,” he said.

“It’s never too late to bring the key that will ease the suffering of others and help them find peace and consolation. For the love of God, do not remain silent.”

### Covid teaches us homelessness can be defeated – Sr Stan Kennedy

Focus Ireland published its 5-year strategic plan last week which aims to support over 5,000 households out of homelessness by the end of 2025.

The charity aims to deliver 1150 new homes in partnership with local authorities and other State agencies through a mix of direct build, buying and leasing.

Focus Ireland said they will also work in partnership with State agencies to support 4,000 fami-

lies leaving homelessness.

Founder of the charity Sr Stan Kennedy said: “Covid-19 must prove to be a turning point in the battle to end homelessness and we need to move on from short-term measures and hubs to provide more social and affordable rental housing. The work over the past year is an indication that homelessness can be alleviated and eventually defeated – if we set our minds to it.”

# Protecting Christian Girls in Pakistan



Conn McNally

One of the most distressing aspects of the persecution of Christians in Pakistan is the frequent kidnapping of teenage Christian girls. After being kidnapped, these girls are coerced into converting to Islam and then placed in forced marriages with one of their kidnappers. There have also been cases of these girls being forced into prostitution before and after their “marriages”. This issue is only getting worse. Pakistan’s Movement for Solidarity and Peace reported that in 2019 around 1,000 Hindu and Christian women and girls in Pakistan were kidnapped and coerced into forced marriages. It is believed by some that in 2020 this number doubled to around 2,000 cases of kidnappings and forced marriages.

## Previous Legal Battles

By forcing the girls to convert to Islam the kidnappers make the return of the girls to their families far less likely. It is unlikely for many courts in Pakistan to allow a girl who has legally converted to Islam to return to her family out of fear she will revert to the religion she actually believes in, whether it be Christianity or Hinduism. The families of these girls face an uphill legal battle in court, as the legal process will put as many hurdles as possible in their way. Non-Muslim families must be represented by a Muslim lawyer in the courts and the cases are held under the principles of Islamic law, which Pakistan’s Christians and Hindus are unfamiliar with. Frequently the kidnapper will have more lawyers working on his case, giving him an obvious advantage.

## “The failure to implement the Child Marriage Act is an example of a trend over recent years in Pakistan”

The 2014 Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act and other similar legislation was supposed to try to tackle the issue of abductions and forced marriages in Pakistan. The Child Marriage Act raises the legal age of marriage to 18-years-old, an attempt to make marriage of abducted teenage girls illegal. This act has been ignored by many Pakistani courts who rule using Islamic legal principles if the girl has been forced to convert to Islam. Marriages have been ruled as legal by Pakistani courts if the girl has “converted” to Islam and has also entered puberty. This scandalously happened in the case of 14-year-

old Catholic girl Huma Younus, who was abducted in October 2019. She was forced to convert to Islam and then was married to one of her abductors. In February 2020, a court ruled she was legitimately married as she had legally converted to Islam and had entered puberty.

## “In February 2021, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) in Britain handed in a petition to the British Government to grant Maira asylum in the UK”

The failure to implement the Child Marriage Act is an example of a trend over recent years in Pakistan. There are Pakistani politicians who are, to their credit, sincerely trying to improve the situation for Christians and other religious minorities in the country, but they are often thwarted by other politicians and by judges.

## An Appeal for Refuge

Even if the girl manages to return to her family, the girl and her family are at risk of retribution, as the girl will be regarded by many fundamentalists as an apostate from Islam. This was the case with Maira Shahbaz, a 14-year-old Catholic schoolgirl from Faisalabad in Punjab. Maira was abducted at gunpoint in April 2020. After being kidnapped Maira was raped, forced to sign a statement that she converted to Islam and then was “married” to one of her kidnappers.

Maira’s family brought the case to court to try to get their daughter back.

The case came before the High Court in Lahore, who outrageously ruled that the 14-year-old Maira was legitimately married and had converted to Islam. This was despite evidence that Maira was clearly underage. Maira broke into tears in the court as the judge made his inexcusable ruling. In August 2020, Maira managed to escape back to her family. Maira rubbished the idea that she had converted and was willingly married. Maira and her family now live in fear of retribution. Maira is now regarded as an apostate by many Islamists, putting the Catholic girl and her family at risk of retribution.

In February 2021, Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) in Britain



14-year-old Huma Younus

handed in a petition to the British Government to grant Maira asylum in the UK. The British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, has signalled his support for persecuted Christians before and has set up a Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief. This case is a test as to whether this stated support is empty rhetoric or if it will be backed by meaningful action to help real persecuted Christians. ACN’s petition was publicly supported by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London and the Founding President of Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

## A New Project

Giving the seriousness of these issues, the Pakistani Catholic Bishops’ Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) will start a new campaign for greater protections and safeguarding measures for girls from religious minorities, including Christian girls. CCJP is receiving support and aid from ACN

for this project. The director of CCJP, Fr.

Emmanuel Yousaf, spoke about kidnappings and forced marriages in Pakistan:

“One of the most noted challenges has been the recent rise in cases of abduction, forced marriage and forcible conversion. This phenomenon, though not new, has catalysed during the recent past, due to the lack of adequate laws and the absence of implementation of existing safeguards to protect the young minor girls and women from the religious minority community.”

The CCJP plans on consulting and contacting politicians and other representatives to raise awareness of the issue of abductions and forced marriages and will advocate for solutions. Fr. Yousaf details some of the work already done:



14-year-old Maira Shahbaz

## “ACN’s petition was publicly supported by the Anglican Bishop of Truro, the Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London and the Founding President of Christian Solidarity Worldwide”

“We at CCJP have been documenting and monitoring the incidents of abductions, forced marriage and conversion which have been found to be occurring with Hindu and Christian minor girls and also adult women. The surrounding pressure in courts from extremist groups, the biased attitude of police, the fear of harm from the abductor, and stigma associated force the victim to often give a statement in favour of her abductor. CCJP believes that in order to initiate and effect change, there is a need to engage both nationally and internationally to raise a

voice, demand that the state takes adequate action on the said issue and also mobilise a public appeal for legislation.”

Please pray for the work of ACN and the CCJP in Pakistan, that we may secure rights and protections for Christian girls in Pakistan. If you would like to stay up to date with ACN’s projects, please consider subscribing to our email newsletter at [www.acnireland.org/newsletter](http://www.acnireland.org/newsletter).

Conn McNally is a member of staff at Aid to the Church in Need Ireland.

If you want to learn more about ACN’s work or help persecuted Christians please visit [www.acnireland.org](http://www.acnireland.org) or ring (01) 837 7516

## Maria Steen

### The View



# In Ireland the Mass is now effectively outlawed

**I**t was an interesting start to Holy Week 2021. Last Palm Sunday evening, Michael Kelly of this newspaper reported that the State had confirmed in the Declan Ganley case (which challenges the ban on public worship) that it was an offence to go to Mass, or for a priest to say Mass publicly (other than a funeral or wedding).

Many had suspected that this was the case. Certainly, gardaí appear to have been operating on this basis, threatening priests with prosecution, and even charging Fr PJ Hughes of Mullahoran, Co. Cavan with an offence and issuing him with a fixed penalty notice. However, there has been considerable debate on the issue. Notably, Prof. Oran Doyle of Trinity College's Law School has expressed the view in writing that religious services (and attendance at them) were not prohibited by the ministerial regulations.

### Assured

Back in October 2020, the Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly took the same line, saying that he "assured" his colleagues in the Dáil that no penalty attached to religious services. The Department of Health in an answer to this newspaper and in a written statement to the Journal.ie, similarly denied that holding a religious service was a penal offence, adding that the list of "reasonable excuses" was non-exhaustive.

Now the minister and the State say that it is indeed an offence, and that it is not a reasonable excuse to leave one's home to attend Mass – or indeed for a priest to say Mass publicly.

**“A priest cannot lawfully say a public Mass, and the public cannot hear Mass”**

In the Seanad on Monday, Senator Rónán Mullen put this conundrum to the Minister for Health, asking for clarification and offering to forgo his own speaking time in order to allow the minister a chance to clarify. However the minister, looking rather uncomfortable even behind his mask, chose not to take him up on the offer. Later in the proceedings, the Minister, acknowledging that it was a reasonable question, indicated that his department would give a written answer. At the time of writing, that answer had not been provided.

So it stands that in Ireland in Holy Week 2021 the Mass is effectively outlawed – a priest cannot lawfully say a public Mass, and the public cannot hear Mass. For many, this state of affairs is not only a deep source of upset in the holiest



The Government position articulated at the weekend seems at odds with what Health Minister Stephen Donnelly told the Dáil.

week of the year, but also represents an outrageous interference with the constitutionally-protected right to freedom of religion. But is it? What has been found in other jurisdictions?

Last Week the Court of Session in Scotland delivered a judgment in the Philip case which challenged the Scottish government's restrictions on public worship. Like the Irish regulations, the Scottish law banned public worship but also went even further and closed churches even for private prayer. The case was taken by a number of Protestant ministers and another party, a Catholic priest, who was added to the proceedings at a later stage.

### Judgment

The judge who delivered the judgment, Lord Braid, highlighted the fact that (similar to this jurisdiction) while the aim of the regulations in force may not be to criminalise public worship *per se*, it could hardly be denied that they had that effect, given that anyone breaching the regulations would be committing a criminal offence.

The key issue in the case was whether the restrictions were a

proportionate response to the government's desire to protect public health. Because the restrictions were very onerous, they required careful justification.

The court noted that compliance by those attending public worship with voluntary Covid-19 mitigation measures at an earlier point – when such worship had been permitted – had generally been very good. The Scottish government was not, therefore, able to show that gathering for public worship posed particular risks over or above those associated with any other type of gathering, some of which remained permissible. These included essential retail such as supermarkets.

Lord Braid said that while the government had "paid lip service" to the right to the free profession and practice of religion (guaranteed by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights) there was "no evidence that they had accorded the importance which such a fundamental right deserves".

### Essential

The distinction drawn between 'essential' activities and religious worship served to emphasise this disparity in treatment. Importantly,

the court said that it was impossible to measure the effect of the restrictions on those who hold religious beliefs.

In response to the argument that the closures of churches were only temporary, and that people could access religious services online, the judge rejected this, saying that online services could only be seen as an alternative to, not a substitute for, worship. At the very best, he said, it could be called 'worship-lite'.

**“The restrictions were a proportionate response to the government's desire to protect public health”**

He highlighted the importance of physical presence in the Catholic rites of the Eucharist, Confession and Baptism, also noting the particular significance of the consecrated church building in the Catholic Faith, which was a sacred space and not comparable to one's home: "While some people may derive some benefit from being able to observe online services, it is undeniable that certain aspects

of certain faiths simply cannot take place, at all, under the current legislative regime: in particular, Communion; Baptism; and Confession, to name but three. It is impossible to measure the effect of those restrictions on those who hold religious beliefs. It goes beyond mere loss of companionship and an inability to attend a lunch club."

### Hobby

This is a welcome judicial acknowledgment of the fact, recently well-expressed by *The Irish Catholic* columnist, David Quinn, that, for the Faithful, religion is not a hobby.

Having regard to the ability to mitigate transmission risks through various measures – such as mask-wearing, physical distance, and hygiene – the complete ban was held to be disproportionate and therefore illegal. The judge held that the government had failed to recognise that manifestation of religious belief was a fundamental right and freedom, and had erred by treating public worship as if it were a non-essential activity. In considering proportionality, the court took into account the fact that other activities, such as professional sport and banks, had been allowed to continue to operate.

The Scottish decision is one of a number made throughout Europe, the US, Canada and South Africa recently which have struck down severe restrictions on public worship. Our Government seems unwilling to reconsider its own approach, and so, as in other jurisdictions, it may fall to the Irish courts to give the last word on this issue.

**“Now the minister and the State say that it is indeed an offence, and that it is not a reasonable excuse to leave one's home to attend Mass”**

# FOCUS Ireland

## Focus Ireland launches new strategy to tackle homelessness post pandemic

We need to make a clear, positive and unshakable commitment to eradicating homelessness as a looming recession threatens more hardship for vulnerable people.



**Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy**  
Founder & Life President  
of Focus Ireland

**F**ocus Ireland has a proud track record in always taking a progressive approach towards tackling homelessness. Since I first founded the organisation in 1985, we have been driven by the need to first identify the routes into homelessness and then work to progress the policy, services and legislation that will block these pathways. This prevents young people, families, and individuals from becoming homeless in the first place.

The foundation of this approach is to ensure that there is not only an emergency response to homelessness. There must be a clear plan in place to look beyond the need of a bed for the night and towards delivering permanent homes with supports when required.

All of us at Focus Ireland firmly believe that homelessness can be ended.

We know what is working and what isn't. And we also have a very clear vision of what needs to be done by the government and all parties concerned in order to ease and then end this crisis. This vision is outlined in Focus Ireland's new strategy, launched in March, and is informed directly by the amazing work our staff does as we help to support families and individuals while they are homeless. This strategy is consistent with what we have always set out to do and with our vision that everyone

has a right to a place they can call home.

As we are still dealing with the Covid-19 public health emergency, Focus Ireland is working more closely than ever with the State and partner organisations to protect people who are homeless. We have helped to move record numbers of families and individuals out of homelessness in this period. This work must continue. As the country eventually opens up, we must not let homelessness be a part of our new normal. We need to move on from short-term measures and hubs to provide more social and affordable rental housing.

**“The work over the past year is an indication that homelessness can be alleviated and eventually defeated – if we set our minds to it”**

There are no positives about pandemics; but our response as a society to the Covid-19 pandemic has certainly taught us a great deal about what we can achieve when we choose to work together in a common cause. The work over the past year is an indication that homelessness can be alleviated and eventually defeated – if we set our minds to it.

As the country emerges from lockdown, we will be facing much uncertainty.

Even as the pandemic hopefully recedes later in 2021 as more are vaccinated, it leaves havoc in its wake: not only the sad bereavements that families all over the country have suffered but also job losses, the closure of businesses and, very likely, a looming recession.

These are classic circumstances for a rise in homelessness – an outcome we desperately need to avoid.

Such an outcome can be avoided, but only if, as a people, we make a clear, positive and unshakable commitment to eradicating homelessness. In a civilised developed country like ours, no family should ever have to experience the trauma of losing their home. No child should ever be born into homelessness in this country.

But this continues to happen. The main reason it happens is that people simply can't afford to pay their rent or their mortgage. We have always had people who have fallen into homelessness for reasons such as illness or family breakdown, but we now also have the phenomenon of the 'new homeless'—people who fall into homelessness for purely economic reasons, and those should be the easiest reasons of all to tackle, if we choose to do so.

The temporary ban on evictions and the rent freeze brought in by government to prevent homelessness in Covid times definitely has made a big difference in cutting the numbers of people becoming homeless. This is a precious achievement that we cannot allow to go into reverse.

Effective as the short-term measures to prevent homelessness have been, we now need to look to the longer term. Government has already committed to certain actions in the Programme for Government that Focus Ireland has been calling for in recent years. This is very positive to see and we now need more action on the following commitments:

- To hold a referendum on housing as a constitutional right
- Establish a housing commission with the aim of providing social and

affordable housing to rent and to buy

- Develop a strategy to prevent and alleviate youth homelessness

I am pleased there has been some action of the items just mentioned but more needs to be done. We urge government to develop a strategy on family homelessness that can move us from managing this crisis towards ending it.

We need to move beyond short-termism on the one hand, and the aspirational on the other. That is why Focus Ireland launched a campaign at the end of last year calling on government to set a deadline to end homelessness altogether, backed up by a realistic plan and timeline to achieve the eradication of homelessness. We did in the past have a government commitment to ending long-term homelessness by 2010, and this led to the lowest-ever level of homelessness in Ireland.

### Economic crisis

Unfortunately, that success was swept away by the economic crisis, but we can do this again, and we can do better next time. No country has ever managed a significant reduction in homelessness without having a clear commitment to ending it. A Focus Ireland campaign this year has called on government to make such a commitment and set a clear and firm deadline for the ending of homelessness in this country. Over 10,000 people have added their name to this petition which will be handed in to Government next month and we hope this aim can be incorporated into policy and the country can work together towards ending homelessness. We will continue our work under this

new strategy towards achieving our vision that everyone has a right to a place they can call home.

### Donate

This really can be achieved, but only if, as a people, we make a clear, positive, and unshakable commitment to eradicating homelessness. All of us at Focus Ireland will continue to play our part and I hope Irish society will too.

People often ask me “how can I help?”. These are the most powerful words a person can say, and there are several ways to do so. You can sign our petition to end homelessness on our website, donate to Focus Ireland or leave the organisation a gift in your will. Leaving a bequest to Focus Ireland will ensure we can be there for people for years to come and will allow us to continue the fight against homelessness.



## This Easter, give the gift of hope.

Inspired by the vision and passion of Sr Stan, many people are choosing to leave a loving gift in their Will to support people who are experiencing homelessness to find safety, security and a place they can call home.

**Give the gift of hope this spring and remember Focus Ireland in your Will.**

**FOCUS**  
Ireland

To join in Sr Stan's vision please contact  
[liam.redmond@focusireland.ie](mailto:liam.redmond@focusireland.ie)  
or phone 01 881 5912

# 'Outrageous' ban on public worship sets a very 'worrying precedent'



There has been widespread criticism of the criminalisation of Mass with people drawing obvious historic parallels, writes **Ruadhán Jones**

**G**arda roadblocks barring parishioners from attending Mass in Co. Cavan raised historic parallels with penal times, as it was confirmed over the weekend that public worship is now deemed a legal offence.

The confirmation came when the Government responded to Declan Ganley's High Court challenge to the ban on public worship. A letter from the Government's legal team says it is an offence for a priest to leave his home to celebrate a public Mass, unless this is a funeral or a wedding. The State adds that it is a similar offence for a parishioner to leave their home to attend Mass.

Bishop of Meath Dr Tom Deenihan told *The Irish Catholic* that it "establishes a worrying precedent with regards to religious freedom and religious worship".

## Future

"Will future Governments also criminalise religious worship?" Bishop Deenihan asked.

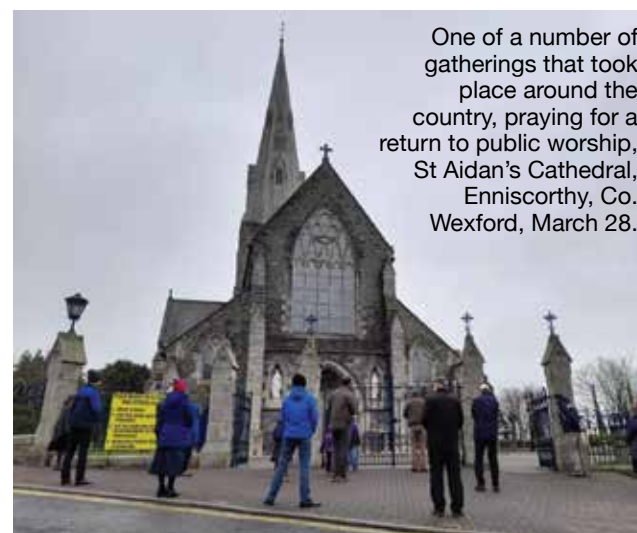
He said that while he had not seen the response made by the State to Mr Ganley, "what was reported was of grave concern".

Bishop Deenihan said that "it might be more prudent of the Government to acknowledge the sacrifice and loss of these Catholics who have been unable to attend Mass

for nine of the past thirteen months than to seek to criminalise them".

"No other country," he added, "has suffered such restrictions on religious worship for so long and courts throughout the world have thrown out such attempts as being unconstitutional or in contravention of human rights."

In October 2020, Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly told the Dáil that celebrating Mass publicly was not a penal offence. He was responding to a question from Independent TD Michael McNamara, who said that he believes the minister "misled the Dail and either hadn't read the regulations or



One of a number of gatherings that took place around the country, praying for a return to public worship, St Aidan's Cathedral, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford, March 28.

was misled by his officials or both".

"That in itself is very serious given that it's the minister who makes the regulations," Mr McNamara told *The Irish Catholic*. "A minister who doesn't know what he's doing when he's interfering with fundamental rights is a very serious proposition in a democracy."

Mr McNamara said it is now a matter for the courts to determine the constitutionality of the legislation.

He added that he is concerned about the lack of "sufficient funding in the courts to make sure that such matters are determined quickly to provide an effective remedy".

"You've this very draconian legislation being made by the Government and they're not resourcing the courts sufficiently to actually determine whether it's constitutional," Mr McNamara said. "That's very worrying for me, because it is a negation of rule of law and how these things operate in a democratic state."

Tipperary TD Mattie McGrath joined Mr McNamara in criticising the legislation, calling the penalising of public worship "outrageous" and "totally anti-Christian".

"From the minister standing up and introducing his own law and he doesn't know what's in it...it's a sad state of affairs for a country," he said. "Shocking."

Fianna Fáil TD John McGuinness, commenting before the legal ban was confirmed, said that he found the fining of Cavan priest PJ Hughes "offensive".

"I think it damages the trust between all parties involved," Mr McGuinness told this paper. "It damages the relationship between the Faithful and Government when you need that relationship to function fully and properly."

The Carlow-Kilkenny TD was one of a number of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael politicians

who put pressure on the Government to ease restrictions on public worship.

TDs and senators pressed the Taoiseach and Tánaiste on public worship at parliamentary meetings last week.

"There's no common sense explanation for the closure of churches in the way that the Government did from the very beginning," said Mr McGuinness. "Because of the size of churches, because of the responsible attitude taken by priests in that they count people in – they don't allow more than the Government guidelines."

**“Religious freedom is something that is valued throughout the world and in our own country”**

"I'm a Mass goer and I see myself the demand – I would like to go to Mass myself," Mr McGuinness continued. "My constituents have been in touch with me saying they want to go back to Mass. I've called on Government to explore the proposal that they be reopened."

Former justice minister Charlie Flanagan also pushed for a return to public worship for Easter, adding that a number of his constituents have contacted him about the importance of public worship.

"I know from access last year after the lockdown, that particularly the Catholic Church, where there were big buildings, the stewarding was exemplary," he told *The Irish Catholic*. "The organisation by the parishes of the seating was such that every effort was made at social distancing."

"I know the importance of faith to my constituents here in Laois-Offaly, and particularly people of a senior age. It would be a signal to them that we're

moving in the right direction and there's hope ahead."

Fine Gael TD Alan Dillon said that it is "important that we're listening to people on the ground because they're the ones most affected".

He argued that public worship must be part of Government plans as it moves towards reopening society.

"Our most vulnerable have been the most affected by this round of cocooning, limiting interaction, it would give them a huge sense of hope," he said. "As we move and progress through the vaccination programme, especially for over 75s and over 80s. They will have certain liberties that will allow them to actually integrate into society."

TD Cormac Devlin and Senator Mary Seery-Kearney both emphasised the need to take into consideration other faiths when looking at restarting public worship.

"It's been so long and I've been contacted by so many in Dun Laoghaire, across all faiths it has to be said," Mr Devlin said.

Facing an Easter of lives-treasured Mass in the Republic, Bishop Deenihan was keen to acknowledge "the comfort and connectivity that online broadcasts bring". At the same time, he said, Catholics "realise that the Church is sacramental and that one cannot receive the Eucharist, Confession or any of the sacraments virtually".

He said that if what is reported is true, "it will be seen, at best, as a foolish act."

"Religious freedom is something that is valued throughout the world and in our own country," he said pointing to the many calls, letters and emails he had received on the issue.

## Comparison

"Many had drawn a comparison with previous attempts to outlaw religious observance here," he said. Dr Deenihan said he believed that "the criminalisation of people who wish to attend Mass will leave a bitter taste and a long memory locally". He said he was sure that it "did not enjoy the support of politicians locally".

In that context, he wondered "was the reported response to Mr Ganley a response from Government, the Attorney General or officials in the Department of Health without Cabinet knowledge?"

The case is due back before the High Court on April 13.

**i** Additional reporting by Jason Osborne



# The Dominicans

*Truth has no Expiry Date!*



"Opinion is a flitting thing,  
but Truth outlasts the sun."

- Emily Dickinson

[www.irishdominicanvocations.com](http://www.irishdominicanvocations.com)

# Pope Francis: Climate change 'causing immense hardship for the most vulnerable among us'



Extreme weather causing widespread droughts and floods, destroying crops and food supplies in world's most vulnerable countries.

**T**he Pope expressed concern over the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather phenomena and the desertification of the soil. With climate change related hunger and malnutrition increasing, Pope Francis warned, "We have caused a climate emergency that gravely threatens nature and life itself, including our own."

The Pope made his comments as part of a written appeal for the 'World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation'.

**Worldwide, droughts and floods have more than doubled since the early 1990's with Africa particularly badly affected.**

An increase in droughts – combined with ongoing conflict and unemployment – means dry spells have an increasingly destructive impact on people living in already vulnerable communities. Such as those in Niger, Western Africa where 80% of the population relies on agriculture for their livelihoods.

This year droughts and floods have already caused a 12% drop in cereal production in Niger compared with the already poor yields of 2018/19. 2.7 million people are now projected to be in severe acute food insecurity – urgently needing food if they are to survive.

**“Listen to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, who suffer most because of the unbalanced ecology.”**

**– Pope Francis**

Since 1968 Irish charity Concern Worldwide has worked around the world helping alleviate hunger caused by natural or man-made disasters. Over this period climate change has become one of the key drivers of hunger.

In 2019 alone, Concern helped 28.6m people in 24 of the world's poorest

countries – including Niger.

Concern doesn't just provide emergency food to those affected by hunger. The charity continues to work alongside communities so they are able to feed themselves long into the future.

*People's lives are transformed when they are equipped and empowered to do it for themselves. This is how real progress is made.*

One of Concern's most vital funding sources – on which it absolutely depends – is gifts in the Wills of its supporters. These gifts ensure Concern will always be there for people in need of a helping hand.

## What Concern's help looks like

In Niger life is a *constant* struggle for survival. A struggle which becomes almost impossible during the annual 'hunger gap'.

*Causing untold suffering, the annual hunger gap is a desperate period.* Food from the last harvest has run out and it will be months until more is available.

During this time, normal life grinds to a halt. Children leave education to help with agricultural chores at home. Adults travel anywhere they can to find work to earn even the smallest amount to support their families.

Every day becomes a terrifying battle to find food.

The hunger gap used to last 3 months, ending when the harvest was ready. But *climate change has made this terrible problem much worse*, with infrequent rainfall and rising temperatures drastically reducing crops.

As a result this torturous period now lasts 5 months from April to September, with people spending almost half their year struggling to stay alive.

And Covid-19 has further exacerbated an already dreadful situation. Restricted movement and border closures are impacting supplies to local markets, pushing prices up. Now even those who manage to work can't buy food because it's too expensive. Seeds for next season's crops are also being affected by these shortages. This means the pandemic's

deadly effects will be felt next year too.

**Vulnerable families, who already have little to eat, are in grave danger.**

But thanks to gifts in Wills, Concern is able to immediately support families in desperate need and equip them to support themselves long into the future.

For families affected by climate change in countries like Niger, one of the ways this is achieved is by providing communities with drought-resistant seeds, *proven* to yield more food ... the tools needed to farm their land ... and training to adopt climate-smart techniques. For example, crop rotation and composting to keep the soil in the best condition. And methods to capture and keep as much rain as possible.

Thanks to generous people leaving Concern a gift in their Wills, families can now grow their own food in their own vegetable gardens. The food they're growing now will feed them this year. **The knowledge and skills they gain will make sure they have enough food to eat every year from now on.**

Chawada Aboubacar is a mother of five. Thanks to her own hard work and support from Concern, she now has a thriving kitchen garden of her own. Her family own a small piece of land where they grow the grain, millet. When it runs out between harvests, it used to be a struggle to provide the food they needed to survive.

But Chawada now grows tomatoes, onions, cabbage and carrots in her kitchen garden. This garden will provide nutritious food for her family this year and for years to come. Keeping her children safe from hunger so they can thrive.

*"We will start eating cabbage, carrot and lettuce in one month and then the onion in about six weeks. This garden helps me and my family. It makes me happy."*

– Chawada Aboubacar

Having enough food prevents life threatening malnutrition, meaning Chawada and her children have the opportunity to live long and happy lives. What's more, any surplus food from

the kitchen garden can be sold, giving the family money to buy other nutritious food and essential items.

Best of all, a regular, dependable source of food means Chawada's children don't have to work on the

Your gift ensures your legacy lives on, supporting Concern to help people like Chawada and her family long into the future.

Many who do leave a gift in their Will have been so affected by the suffering of



With Concern worker Mounkaila's help, Chawada can now grow food to help her family survive.

land and can go back to school. Getting the education essential for a brighter future for them.

By passing on the skills she has gained to her children, Chawada is ensuring they will be self-sufficient in the future; able to provide for both their own families and the wider community – helping to pull everyone out of poverty.

## Be part of a world without hunger

**“What would induce anyone ... only to be remembered for their inability to take action when it was so urgent and necessary to do so?”**

**– Pope Francis**

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Inside you'll see how legacies left by people like you are helping the world's poorest people. Both today and for years to come.

The booklet also answers many of the common questions people have about leaving a gift in their Will. And explains how to start the process.

Of course requesting your free booklet does not oblige you to leave a gift, or do anything else.

***"Moments of kindness shine in the darkness and give so much comfort – that's the final gift I intend to leave to the world."***

– James, Co. Wicklow

To receive your free, no obligation booklet – in complete confidence – please contact Concern's Legacy Manager, Siobhán O'Connor. Call **01 417 8020**, email **siobhan.oconnor@concern.net**, or visit **www.concern.net/bequest**



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# We need to speak out more against the ban on public Masses



Other countries are opting for a more balanced approach to coronavirus, writes **David Quinn**

**A**t the weekend, the Netherlands played Latvia in a qualifying match for the soccer World Cup. In Ireland, the equivalent game with Luxembourg was devoid of spectators. In the Netherlands, 5,000 were permitted to attend in a stadium that can fit 55,000 people.

Why the difference? Is it because the Netherlands has Covid-19 under better control than we have? That's not the answer. On the contrary, it has about three times the rate of the Republic.

**“Other countries, therefore, are generally opting for a more balanced approach, closing down some things while allowing others to take place”**

The real reason for the different approach is attitude to risk. Here in Ireland, we have one of the strictest lockdowns in the world and the latest version has lasted since Christmas. We are extremely risk averse.

You might think that is sensible because of the huge spike in cases we had from Christmas and into January. But an indefinite lockdown has all sorts of other damaging effects as well, for example, to mental health, to livelihoods, to cancer and other treatments, to the long-term educational prospects of a generation of young people at first, second and third level.

Other countries, therefore, are generally opting for a more balanced approach, closing down some things while allowing others to take place. This extends to public worship. Within the EU, only two other countries are currently banning public worship, aside from Ireland, namely Slovakia and Slovenia and that is



Parishioners returned to Mass in St Mary's in Belfast city centre on Friday. Photo: Hugh Russell

because they have two of the highest death rates per head of population in the world. Estonia has been added to the list for Easter.

It might be worth looking at a selection of EU countries to see what they are currently doing in terms of restrictions. This will allow us to compare and contrast.

- Spain: ordinary shops, open; restaurants, open; hairdressers, open; public worship, permitted. Current infection rate per 100,000 people: 143.

- France: ordinary shops, closed; restaurants, closed; hairdressers, open; public worship, permitted. Current infection rate per 100,000 people: 562.

- Italy: ordinary shops, open (but depends on region); restaurants, open (but depends on region); hairdressers, open (but depends on region); public worship, permitted. Current infection rate per 100,000 people: 517.

- Germany: ordinary shops, closed; restaurants, closed; hairdressers, closed; public worship, permitted. Current infection rate per 100,000 people: 195.

- Finland: ordinary shops, open; restaurants, open; hairdressers, open; public worship, permitted. Current infection rate per 100,000 people: 172.

- Netherlands: ordinary shops, open; restaurants, closed; hairdressers, open; public worship, permitted.

Current infection rate per 100,000 people: 481.

In each case, when an activity is permitted, limits are put on numbers, hands must be sanitised and social distancing observed. That includes where public worship is permitted.

But as we can see from the above list, while the situation varies country-by-country in terms of whether restaurants, hairdressers or non-essential retail is open, public worship is permitted. This is also the case whether the current infection rate is relatively high, or relatively low.

**“Now we have it confirmed that it is actually illegal to attend Mass for the first time in centuries”**

In other words, while governments, advised by their own versions of NPHET, are coming up with different sets of restrictions, they are all agreed that public worship is safe, so long as the usual protocols are followed.

As mentioned, Slovenia and Slovakia have the excuse of very high death rates to keep public worship closed, although the rate has come down a great deal in Slovenia. Still

and all, Slovenia is currently allowing ordinary shops to open, and hairdressers, which might say something about the priorities of the Slovenian government.

The point, of course, is that a decision to open or close something is not a purely scientific question, it is also one of values. What do we value most? Slovenia seems to prefer to open shops and hairdressers than allow public worship, even in a very limited way.

In Ireland, as we come down out of level 5 and go down to level 3, ordinary shops will open again, and you will be allowed to go to a gym, barber or hairdresser, but not to Mass. This shows what our Government and NPHET value. Public worship is far down their list.

Now we have it confirmed that it is actually illegal to attend Mass for the first time in centuries. *The Irish Catholic* learnt at the weekend, that the Government has advised businessman Declan Ganley of this fact. The law imposing lockdown is open to interpretation, and it was not absolutely clear if the ban on public worship was merely advisory, or had the full force of law.

Mr Ganley has challenged the ban in court, and last week a judge asked the State to say how it interpreted its own law. We now have it from the horse's mouth, as it were; going to Mass, or saying Mass in public can

land you with a fine, and if you refuse to pay, in prison. The same applies to all public worship.

Fr PJ Hughes in Co. Cavan has been allowing members of the public to enter his church when he is saying Mass and he has been issued with a €500 fine which he will not pay. He faces the prospect of prison.

Even if you think it acceptable to halt public worship in level 5, it is another thing for priests to face prison over the matter.

## Risk-averse

Some people will be tempted to think the most Christian thing to do under the present circumstances is to be as risk-averse and safe as possible. But if this is so, then why aren't churches closed all over Europe? If total risk-aversion is the most Christian course of action, then Europe's bishops would stop public Masses even if the State allows them. But they are not following such a course because it would be so grossly disproportionate.

Catholics need to become far more outspoken about what is happening. It is one thing for the Government to advise religious leaders not to organise public worship, but it is quite another to make it illegal to either organise or attend Mass and other religious worship. It's time to make our voices heard more clearly.

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# The rising of Jesus from the dead was the most important day in human history

## The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester  
O'Flynn  
OFM Cap.



I like the story about an ageing flower-lady with an outdoor stall. Her clothes were old and shabby, her face weather-beaten and wrinkled. A regular customer asked how she was always in good form. "It's my friend Jesus", she replied. "Good Friday was the worst of days. Three days later, Easter Sunday, the best of days. So, when I have a problem, I know that if I wait three days, Jesus will overcome it for me."

If ever the world needed a message of light and hope it is this year of the coronavirus pandemic.

**“Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history”**

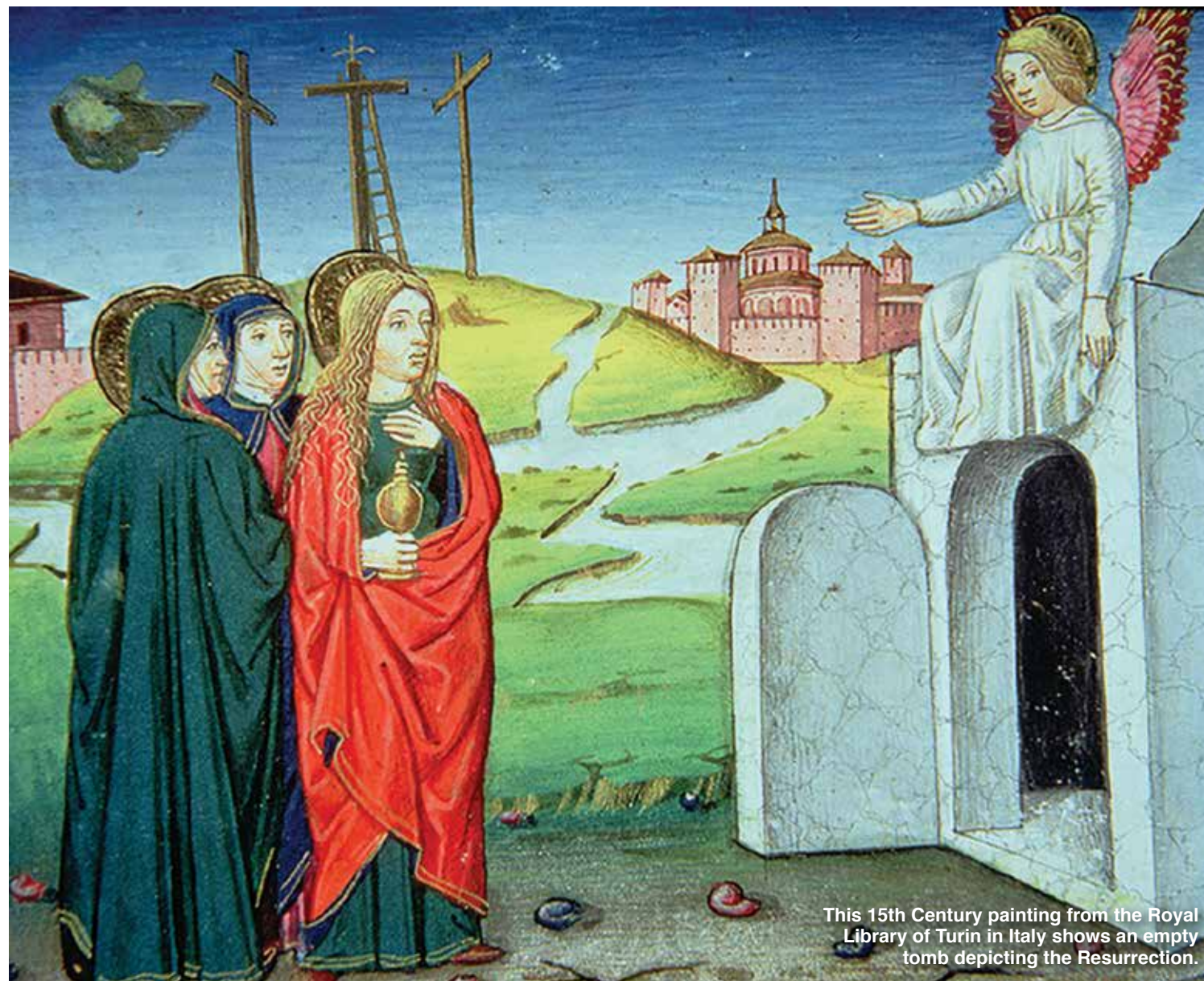
The flower-lady knew that Easter is not just an event of past history but her friend Jesus is a living reality.

Pope Francis tells us: "Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated the world. Where all seems to be dead, signs of resurrection suddenly spring up. It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life and sooner or later produces fruit. However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history." (*The Joy of the Gospel*, 276).

### Not all doom and gloom

The pandemic is proving to be a challenge bringing out the extraordinary goodness of people. It hasn't been all doom and gloom. Recalling the words of Pope Francis, however dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. That is the dynamism of the resurrection.

If you feel overwhelmed by the bad news why not take out a biro and paper to write a list



This 15th Century painting from the Royal Library of Turin in Italy shows an empty tomb depicting the Resurrection.

of the good things that have happened. Much of the old sense of neighbourliness was being lost as more and more people have moved from rural life to urban, but restriction of movement resulted in city people getting to know their neighbours. People became more aware of housebound neighbours and volunteered to do their shopping. Volunteers young and old came up with marvellous ideas. Chefs out of work came together to cook delicious meals for the housebound. Sports clubs organised their members to deliver meals. Factories changed production so as to supply medical equipment. Retired medical staff volunteered to come back. Confined by travel restrictions, people have taken up gardening and rediscovered a child's wonder at the awesome development of tiny seeds. Some individual starts a project to raise funds and the response is extraordinary. The response of the Irish people to a genuine cause promoted on the *Late Late Show* is overwhelming.

### Christian values

Practical love, manifested in care of our neighbour is the greatest proof of God's presence. We are told that we are living in a post-Christian society. But the evidence before our eyes is that the Christian inspiration is alive and well. To quote again from Pope Francis: "Values always tend to reappear under new guises, and human beings have arisen time after time from situations that seemed doomed. Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelise are instruments of that power."

The rising of Jesus from the dead was the most important day in human history. St Paul was so convinced of the essential place of the resurrection that he wrote that if Christ is not risen then all his preaching and all our believing is in vain. He saw clearly that the resurrection is not simply a past event but a present reality. Paul's conversion occurred when the risen Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul asked the

vision, "Who are you?" The answer, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:5). Two beliefs were revealed. Not only is Jesus risen from the dead but his followers, whom Paul was persecuting, are intimately united with the Lord.

**“The celebration of Easter is not complete until Christ is risen in you and me”**

In proclaiming the mystery of faith, we say that Christ is risen, present tense. The celebration of Easter is not complete until Christ is risen in you and me. Christian not only in name but also in behaviour. At Baptism our personal candle received light from the paschal candle of Easter. That is why we renew our baptismal commitment at Easter. Whether you are availing of a streamed or televised service,

or on your own, why not light a candle as a reminder of your own baptismal union with Christ. And if everyone lit just one little candle, what a bright world it would be!

### Renewal of Baptism

*Risen Lord Jesus, this Easter Day I wish to renew my relationship with you which began at my Baptism. May I be Christian not only in name but in fact. With the support of the Holy Spirit, I resolve to resist the temptations of the devil. I renew my personal relationship with you as the way, the truth and the life.*

*You are the way whom I resolve to follow in all the moral decisions I make.*

*You are the truth that I wish to follow according to the creed and the teaching of the Church.*

*You are the life, and I wish to walk my life each day in the prayer of personal friendship.*

*Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life, Lord Jesus, come in glory.*

# Smiles abound at ‘wonderful’ return to Mass in NI



Mass returns to St Mary's Church in Belfast city centre as restrictions in Northern Ireland are lifted. Photos: Hugh Russell



## Ruadhán Jones

Churches opened their doors to the Faithful for a “wonderful” return to Mass in Northern Ireland on Friday March 26.

Fr Tim Bartlett, administrator of St Mary's Church, Belfast, said that it was a privilege to hold public Mass for the first time since January.

“You could see the smiles on everybody as they were leaving,” he told *The Irish News*. “It was really, really wonderful to see.”

Fr Bartlett said that they had to close the doors to St Mary's before Mass began as they had already reached full capacity.

The timing of the reopening means that Holy Week will be celebrated in person, though with restrictions on numbers due to social distancing measures.

Churches are organising booking services to enable people to ensure that those who wish to attend are able to do so safely.

Fr Bartlett said that the reopening was “cautious and careful”, acknowledging the “privilege of being the first to be allowed to express our religious freedom and come back to public worship”.

Meanwhile, churches in the south remain closed for Easter as restrictions on public worship continue.



Margaret McCrisken, 92-year-old organ player at St Mary's Church in Belfast city for over 50 years, prepares to play during mass as restrictions in Northern Ireland are lifted, March 26.



Parishioners return to Mass at St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast on Friday 26 March after churches in the North reopened for public worship.



# Ministering in 'war-zone' wards



## Myths and conspiracies about Covid would stop if everyone saw the first-hand effects, **Chai Brady** hears

**T**he worst thing anyone could do after the world manages to suppress the virus and life returns to some normality is to pretend nothing happened, as the many challenging situations people have faced must be acknowledged and new ways of ministering must be discussed post-Covid, according to a hospital chaplain.

Fr Tony McAleese (36) has seen first-hand the pain families have experienced due to Covid and the ongoing restrictions through his ministry as a chaplain in the Mater hospital in Belfast. While the situation is improving in hospitals "it's still extremely difficult", he told this newspaper.

The hospital is split into green, amber and red zones, which require increasing levels of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to enter. "I got called into a red zone, it was for a person who required the Last Rites. I've never been a chaplain in the army or anything like that but when I was walking out, it gave me that real sense that it was almost like a war zone," says Fr McAleese. "The staff were doing everything they could, they were exhausted, they were working as hard as they could be expected to and beyond."

### Member

Fr McAleese was accompanied by a member of the patient's family who was also in full PPE. A nurse joined them in prayer while he administered the Last Rites. In situations like that Fr McAleese

says: "You're administering the Last Rites, you're trying to be there for the family and you're aware that there's other family members who can't be there because they're not allowed in".

While many families have suffered due to restrictions on hospital visits, Fr McAleese says hospitals have made huge strides in keeping people connected virtually. "You could be administering the Last Rites while a nurse is holding up an iPad and the family are joining in virtually, which is a really surreal experience," he says.

"It's very creative and it's good that the family can still join in. I have to say the family members who did join in were very appreciative of both how they were able to participate insofar as they could, but also for the advancement in technology. You know if we go back 15 years there wasn't WiFi in hospitals. There's a huge advancement in technology, and the ability to do this is great, but it still doesn't substitute from the human contact which a lot of people do miss.

**“With the vaccine rollout and low case numbers in the North there are less and less red zones in hospitals”**

"When you go around patients who aren't in red zones, who are just in an amber zone, their only contact with loved ones is through a phone call or FaceTime or some doctor or nurse contacting them each day to update them on their loved one. It's not the same."

There are occasions when some family members are allowed visit a patient, but they are "quite rare" and it is a challenge to offer the same levels of comfort compared to pre-Covid times, the chaplain explains. "We're trying to be there for them but when they're breaking down your normal instinct is to give them a hug and you can't do that. It is a surreal situation in a hospital."

With that being said, he hastens to add that "it's not all doom and gloom", with the vaccine rollout and low case numbers in the North there are less and less red zones in

hospitals and not as many people are being transferred to ICUs which has led to increased optimism in the hospital.

Although there is somewhat of a return to normality, with more patients presenting to hospital with non-Covid related symptoms, Fr McAleese says those who come in are still subject to tough restrictions on family visits. "That can be hard. The one message that we've tried to make known is that the chaplains are still available, we're still here. My role as a chaplain isn't just for the patient, my role is for the patient, for the family and for the staff," he says.

From the beginning of the pandemic – due to increased restrictions on ward access – the chaplains decided to be as present to people as possible, even if that meant standing in a hallway or the atrium "just providing support".

He says: "We also set up a telephone number that people could ring, but a lot of the comfort at the moment is coming from the fact that things are starting to get back to a wee bit of normality, not fully but very slowly."

### Conspiracy

Fr McAleese says he still meets people who don't believe Covid-19 exists.

"You see some people who almost don't believe that there is Covid, who are acting as if there is no such thing. You really just want to slap them around the head and say, 'guys wise up', you know, if they saw half of what I've seen in the hospital, they wouldn't doubt it."

Fr McAleese says he doesn't understand how the minority of people who believe Covid-19 is a conspiracy, dubbing it the 'pandemic' or 'scamdemic', can't see what is happening around them. "By this stage we're about a year on and I have to say there is probably nobody that this hasn't affected in some way or another, through a family member or a close relation," he says.

"There's real basic health issues, breathing issues, the fatigue, the basics of just getting up and walking Covid patients have found difficult. Many people are coming in and some of them have been in bed

for quite a long time, particularly if they've had to go to ICU."

Regarding the future, Fr McAleese says that hope is certainly there but it must be accompanied with a sense of realism – an understanding Covid won't just disappear.

**“The hospital is split into green, amber and red zones, which require increasing levels of Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to enter”**

"I know we're all absolutely cheesed off with lockdown, with not being able to get away. But it's there for good reason, it's there to protect the NHS and each other. I'm as cheesed off with lockdown as

the next person I'm sure but I can see the reason and the benefit of it.

"In the hospital, while my patient numbers during Covid were reducing, now my case numbers are through the roof, it's not Covid but it's people coming in for other issues and maybe they put it off or maybe now hospitals are able to get around to some of the issues that were there."

He adds the hospital is still ticking over and will continue to do so for a while after the pandemic, when a majority of the population have been vaccinated. "I'm very fortunate and blessed being part of the healthcare system that I was able to get the vaccine because otherwise, given my age, I probably wouldn't be getting it for quite a long time. I'm delighted," he says.

### Lent project

Outside his work as a hospital chaplain, Fr McAleese was industrious before and during Lent in organising a series of talks on the theme 'Covid to Light'. Knowing there would most likely be a long third lockdown after Christmas due to the strain hospitals were under, he decided Lenten talks would allow people to gather





together virtually and have discussions.

He says: "The reflections are based on our own experiences and how we transform these into something greater. That's really the whole theme of the series, in terms of from Covid to Light, from when we started with Covid to now moving into a greater light, the light of Easter and how we move forward as a Church and as a faithful group of people. I think there needs to be a recovery of our understanding of Church."

### Gathered

"A lot of people think Church is purely the building, and it isn't, the Church is the gathered Faithful, whether it's in a building or somewhere else, it's the gathered Faithful who are and is the Church."

From the beginning of the third lockdown until March 26, churches in the North were closed except for private prayer which led to a "great hunger" among some of the faithful, those of whom will most likely return to being physically present at church, Fr McAleese says.

However, he warns that it's not enough to wait for people – who

have been watching Mass online for the majority of the last year – to return.

"I think what has to change is our own perception of waiting for people to come back and presuming people will come back. I think we have to go out and try and bring the mission of Christ out and about," Fr McAleese insists.

**"The hospital is still ticking over and will continue to do so for a while after the pandemic, when a majority of the population have been vaccinated"**

"The mission is still to let people know the love of Christ. How do we do that? It will be different, we're going to have to use technology. I don't think it's an either or, I think like a lot of theology and a lot of Catholicism, it's a both/and, it's both an opened Church for people coming in and also a virtual way for those who are housebound or unable to

get to the Church, I think that's the approach we need to take."

### Walked

"One of the best things that Fr Eugene [O'Neill], the administrator here, and myself did during lockdown was we walked about the parish every week and just waved and said hello to people who we saw and let people know that we're still here."

"That visual connection has made a greater impact than many other things that we have done in the parish. I think it is about getting out and it is about letting people see, getting away from that sense of 'the priest: he says Mass and that's it'."

He adds that priests should move away from some of the meetings they attend and the boards they are on in order to "readjust our own focus to what actually is most important".

Pointing to Zoom and similar software, Fr McAleese says they will allow for more creativity in parishes and often online events have a larger attendance.

"The thirst is there, people want to learn things, people want to discuss, they want to come together



Hospital chaplain in Belfast, Fr Tony McAleese.

**"I think we have to go out and try and bring the mission of Christ out and about"**

and journey together and while it is strange – there's absolutely no doubt that for me trying to run a course looking at a computer screen is very strange and certainly something that I'm not used to – the fruit and the benefit of that and the messages of encouragement that came from people who joined in on our first talk can only drive me on further," he says.

Looking at the long-term impact of Covid on the population, Fr McAleese said there must be a period of reflection.

"I think the worst thing we could do is just go back to normality, because that doesn't acknowledge what we all went through," he says.

**"Churches in the North were closed except for private prayer which led to a 'great hunger' among some of the Faithful"**

There must be an opportunity to look at what a post-Covid ministry will look like and what it will mean for priests, Fr McAleese says, asking "how do we minister?"

"Both in terms of the grief that people will have suffered, the restrictions on funerals and so on and so forth, particularly with Covid, one of the cruellest parts I think is while wakes can't happen if it's Covid you can't even have your loved one home. That's one of the cruellest things, so what do we do?"

"I think going forward we have to look at the hope that's there, we have to see the advantages that we have, we've gained so much, we've gained a wider group of people who are wanting to join in in celebrations albeit from their home, but how do we cop in to that, how do we come together as a Church, and maybe that isn't always in person."

### Benefits

"It's looking at the benefits that are there, it's trying to acknowledge the path that we went through but acknowledge it with a thankful heart that one, we've come through it and two, we've had lessons in it. So Covid hasn't been and isn't all negative, there has been some good things in it, I would never have used these online platforms as much as I did."

The greatest achievement people have made during Covid, Fr McAleese says, is the realisation that there is a need for family and human connection at a time when it seemed Irish society was cheapening those connections and leading to people "almost alienating our family".

"A family member is really sick, sure we'll bring them to a nursing home or wherever," says Fr McAleese, "But Covid has shown us the importance of needing to be there for our loved ones, our loved ones are worth more than our job... That's what the Church is, we're a family and I think that's why there's that hunger. People still want that connection, they still want to be with their family, with the Church family and biological family."



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we wish you and  
your families a  
blessed Easter**



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# Technology at the service of beauty



A three volume tome dedicated to the Sistine Chapel brings the latest technology to bear on Michelangelo's masterpiece, writes **Jason Osborne**

**A**nyone seeking to capture an artwork of the profundity, immensity and timelessness of the Sistine Chapel should expect to encounter unprecedented challenges, and that's exactly what Nicholas Callaway and Manuela Roosevelt of Callaway Arts & Entertainment described.

"This could not have been done five years ago. The technology curve is ascending rapidly, and so this really does represent something that could only have been done starting in the last few years," Mr Callaway, Founder and CEO of Callaway Arts & Entertainment, told *The Irish Catholic*.

Coming in at 24 inches by 17, 822 pages, and weighing 25lbs per volume, the three volume set costs a staggering £16,500 (€19,088), but Mr Callaway sees this as "a book for the ages, a publication for the ages and for the world" – thus justifying its price. Upon hearing of the process and the technical details involved in

its production, it's hard to disagree.

"This project is a partnership between the Vatican Museums, Callaway Arts & Entertainment and Scripta Maneant, an Italian artbook publisher," Mr Callaway explains.

"What we share with Scripta is that both companies have been pioneering the usage of what we've referred to as 'gigapixel' photography, which is ultra-high resolution, which is at the forefront of digital imaging technology and which is revolutionising the capture and transmission of art. Callaway has always been a company that marries art and technology, or shall we say, the use of advanced technology in the service of art."

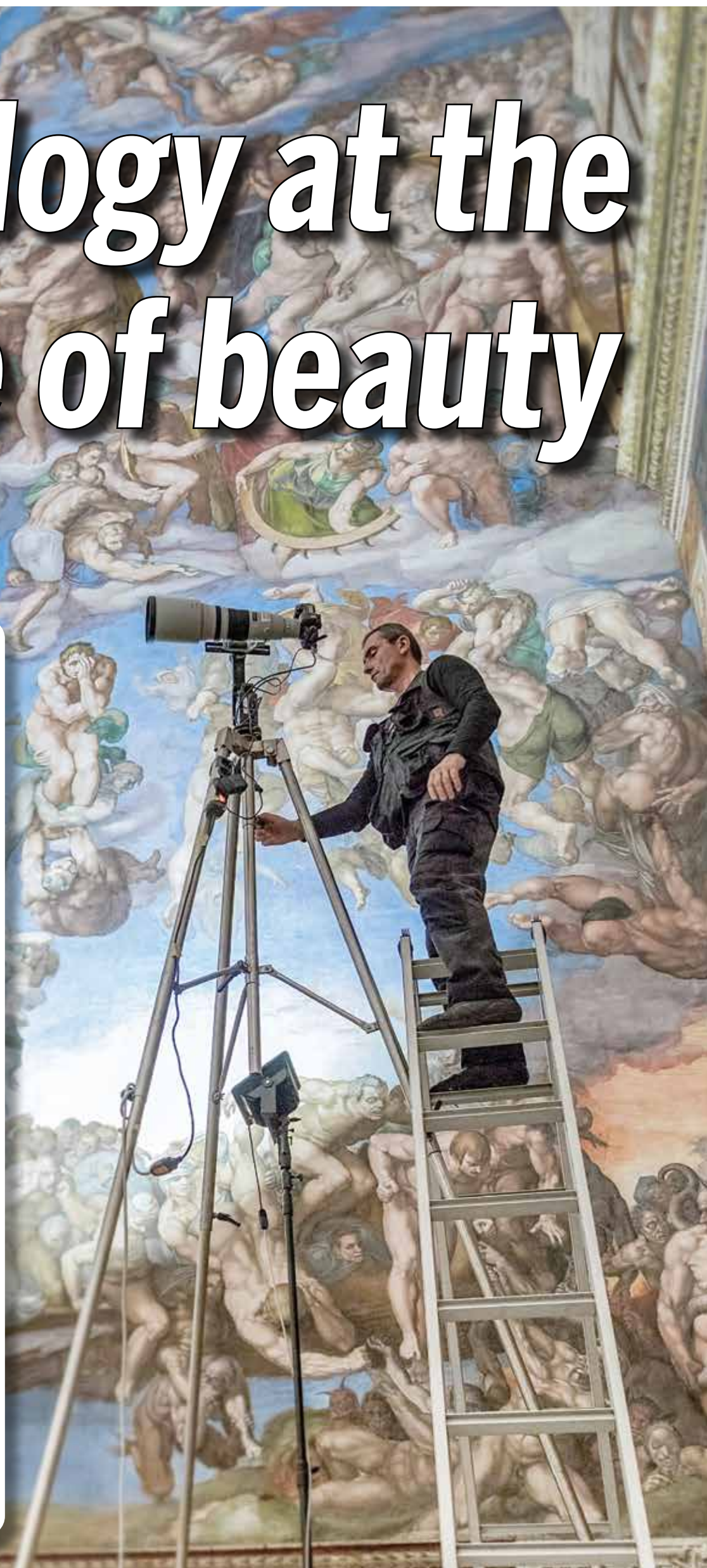
While the capture of the images of the Sistine Chapel was a technological marvel, it also required old-fashioned, strenuous physical labour.

## Technical challenges

"There were many technical challenges as you can imagine," Mr Callaway says, continuing, "many challenges, starting with convincing the Vatican Museums to allow this to be done. It was done with a team of three Italian photographers across 67 nights."

"The Vatican would not allow the Sistine Chapel to be closed during the daytime because there were 20-25,000 people coming through every day. This is of course pre-pandemic. It had to be done at night, and so a 33-foot tall rig was assembled every night. The photography took place all night and then the rig was disassembled every day, so that's a challenge right in and of itself."

Securing permission and achieving the right set-up were difficult, but the process of collecting the images themselves was to require a Herculean effort,





## “There were many technical challenges as you can imagine”

with hidden difficulties most of us wouldn't foresee.

“One of the amazing things about it is that in order to achieve the highest resolution files, each individual photographic frame or capture is only two and a half centimetres, or one inch – one inch of the chapel. And so there needed to be a tracking system so that, think of it as a giant puzzle with 270,000 pieces, that is what this represents,” Mr Callaway says.

“Many issues of, not only of resolution, clarity, colour fidelity – but the curve of some of the surfaces, such as the ceiling and parallax correction – stitching together each frame, one inch frames, stitching them together, which was done each night, whatever section was completed was then taken to the studio and the frames were stitched together in post-production software.”

### Rendering

“[This was all done] with the goal of rendering the painting, the frescoes, with the maximum amount of sharpness or resolution, clarity, detail and colour accuracy,” Mr Callaway says.

Why go to so much trouble? Three main reasons, according to Mr Callaway: preservation, communication (or “revelation” as Mr Callaway sees it) and inspiration.

Mr Callaway elucidates each reason with appeals to what their production could contribute to the world; the Sistine Chapel is now captured in ultra-high fidelity, making it “as accurate a blueprint

as technology allows today” in Ms Roosevelt's words, safeguarding it “for as long as books or digital files might last”.

On its communicative or “revelatory” function, Mr Callaway says, “This enables us to see the Sistine Chapel for the first time, for the world to see it for the first time, as it has never been seen. Because of course when you go, unless you are an especial part of the art conservation programme, no one gets to go up and see it with that kind of proximity, so it's a great example of artworks that the world thinks that it knows, but in fact it doesn't.”

**“You can open to any page and there are astonishing discoveries”**

And finally, he believes its potential for inspiration speaks for itself – deep calls to deep, as Scripture says. None of it would have been possible without Ms Roosevelt, the Editorial Director, however, who has accomplished “quite a few miracles” in Mr Callaway's own words.

“I think as a company, as a team, Nicholas and I were very, very excited about the possibilities of technology today and their application, particularly with these world treasures of sacred art or any other art,” Ms Roosevelt explains.

“There are of course repositories of art and archives that have seldom opened, and I have known for a

lifetime that the Vatican Museums hold incredible treasures. The possibility of collaborating very closely with the archive and the direction of the Vatican Museums was, I think, a once in a lifetime opportunity for us as a company, as creators, as art publishers.

### Involved

“They were involved. All the texts have been written by Antonio Paolucci, who is the former director of the Vatican museums. This is his last project. The texts of course tell the stories, so volume one – the walls of the chapel, and those are both Old Testament and New Testament stories. It's the life of Christ and the life of Moses,” she says.

Volumes two and three depict the ceiling (Michelangelo's masterpiece) and the Last Judgement in striking detail, with Ms Roosevelt describing the Last Judgement scene as “frightening”, “the faces, the colours, the mood, the moment of spiritual reckoning for humankind” – all combining in something akin to a spiritual experience.

On the practicalities of the project, Ms Roosevelt says that, although pricey, “I think it's a world achievement... what went into it is extraordinary, never to be repeated”.

Those who do brave the fee, which has so far included a “variety of people and economic means” become patrons of the Vatican Museums and receive a certificate to say so. Not only this, but once the Covid crisis has elapsed, “we will be able to organise VIP tours for the collectors who have purchased



St Bartholomew holds a knife in one hand and his skin in the other, symbolic of his martyrdom by being skinned alive. Detail from Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*.

the set, to visit the Chapel,” Ms Roosevelt says.

“There's 822 pages in three volumes of discoveries. What I find, even as the publisher is, you can open to any page and there are astonishing discoveries. And every time that you look at it, you see other things, and of course, that is the true mark of a masterpiece and of genius,” Mr Callaway says.

### Surprises

“But there are all kinds of surprises, starting with the grandeur of scale of the achievement. I mean it was clearly intended to be the most

spectacular artwork ever created, on a monumental scale. Because of that, that was one of the reasons we decided, once we were engaged in this, we had to go to the ‘nth’ degree. That also meant, well, if we have this kind of ability to show something that's never been seen, why not do it in one-to-one scale? Which is kind of a crazy idea,” he laughs.

“We realised that we could, and so that's the other thing, is when you are in front of the pages, it's as if you are at the same arm's-length distance as Michelangelo when he was



The Baptism of Christ by Pietro Perugino.



painting. It's like being a little bird on Michelangelo's shoulder so that you see it in actual scale."

### Aesthetic

Describing the effect of such an aesthetic wave, Mr Callaway says, "That is overwhelming. His palette is so astonishingly radical and modern and unconventional, which of course we, in our times, first got a sense of when the Chapel was restored in the 1980s and 90s. That was literally like, the scales falling from your eyes because centuries of grime and candle soot and pollution had obscured the work. So that restoration did almost literally lift the veil on it. In other words, if it had not been restored, it wouldn't be the same thing at all."

Asked whether the newfound proximity to the work that the set offers revealed anything surprising to him, Mr Callaway pointed out some of Michelangelo's artistic flourishes that go unnoticed from the ground of the Chapel.

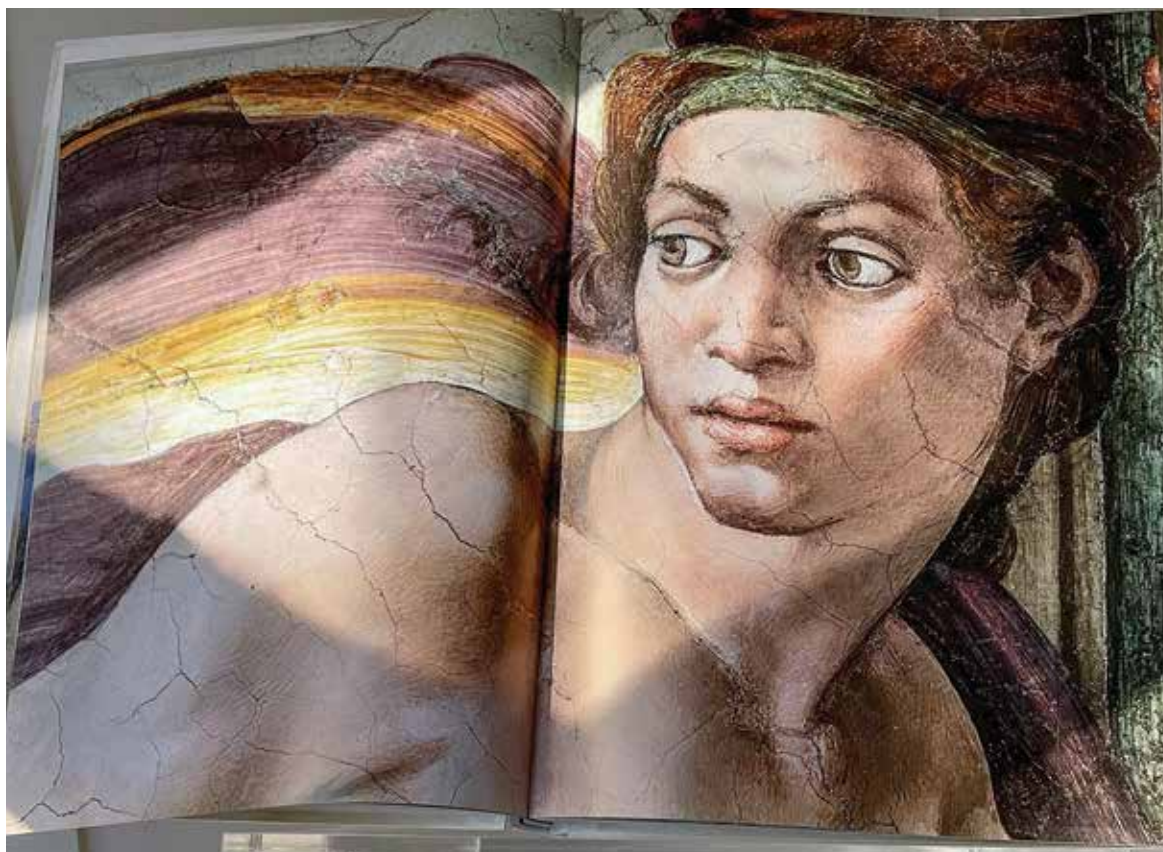
"There are things that you literally cannot see from ground level. In between the vaults – between the major paintings and ceilings he

Painted, essentially, decorative medallions that were painted in a two-tone, two colours. Bright yellow and a deep bronze colour because they were *trompe-l'oeil* oval medallions to imitate the look of a hammered, bronze shield.

**“Its potential for inspiration speaks for itself – deep calls to deep, as Scripture says”**

"They look like postage stamps from the ground, you just can't see them at all, but in the book, you can see one-to-one size, when they're about two feet high. There are, I think, over a dozen, well over a dozen of those. Even for a renaissance art historian, they would not have seen those in that kind of detail. So in other words, it's the kind of thing that, if you have it, you can open to a different page and contemplate one page a day and see something new each time."

Ms Roosevelt takes up that sense of contemplation and elaborates on



Jesus preaches to his followers after his baptism, in detail from Perugino's *The Baptism of Christ*.

it, describing the artwork as revealed in all its glory by the volumes as “prayerful”, saying it “renews your sense of wonder”.

The images themselves draw the mind to the nearly-unimaginable work that Michelangelo himself put in, with Ms Roosevelt explaining some aspects of his task.

### Devise

“First of all, Michelangelo had to devise the scenes, then prepare cartoons on the floor, then somehow transpose those cartoons into the ceiling. Now, you know, this is hundreds of years ago, and then because the fresco technique is you have to paint very quickly – it dries within six hours, or in the summer it’s probably three hours – so buckets of paint and brushes, and you literally can see the brush strokes done very, very quickly.”

Mr Callaway also comments on this, saying that the immense detail the volumes provide will offer insights into his artistry for years to come.

“It’s renaissance action-painting. It really is, I mean, you could do a comparison between Michelangelo and Jackson Pollock because the gestural quality of both is quite similar, actually. In the pages you can see he is racing. You can see the speed and the energy that had to go in because, as Manuela says, it’s all a race against time.

**“When attempting to convey what is arguably the world’s finest artistic achievement in volumes that are ‘never to be repeated’”**

“And you can’t make any mistakes, that’s the other incredible part of it. Not only that, but of course it took him, I think, just under three years, two and a half years, to do the ceiling and so he’s racing the whole time. It’s miserable. Remember, there’s also only natural light and candlelight, there’s no lighting system. Except God’s lighting system,” he laughs.

“We hope there will be many books that will come as a result of these books, but you could devote an entire volume just to the technique, and how he did it.”

When attempting to convey what is arguably the world’s finest artistic achievement in volumes that are “never to be repeated”, a reasonable concern might be that the volumes themselves overshadow the art they seek to convey. When asked about this, Mr Callaway relayed the reactions they’ve received so far, suggesting that time and familiarity with their production may be what’s needed to allow the art itself room to breathe.

“When people see it, those who have purchased it and those whom we have sent sets to – some of the journalists – so that they can see it in person...it tends to exceed people’s expectations,” he says.

**“You could devote an entire volume just to the technique, and how he did it”**



Michelangelo's *The Last Judgment*

“I have had quite a number of people who have just...tears come to their eyes upon witnessing it. So that is great because all of this technology and all this craftsmanship and all of this scholarship is in service of conveying the art as eloquently as we can.

“But the fact of the publication, so far, is in itself an astonishment, that people tend to focus on the ‘how’ more than the ‘what’ and we are looking forward to people who are going to go beyond. I mean, all that we’re describing is simply a vehicle for conveying the art and the meaning of it. That’s why we did it. And so we look forward to more journalists, scholars, historians really talking about the ‘what’; what it is, what the art is,” he says.

With that said, the volumes themselves cannot be overstated, with Mr Callaway describing them as “the quintessential Italian production, starting with what Michelangelo did”.

“We felt it had to be done in Italy, and uniquely so – there’s a tradition of making beautiful things and of hand-craftsmanship that we can see whether it’s an automobile, a Ferrari, a Prada dress, a Valentino *oud couture*, or a book, so it’s in the culture.

### Italians

“It’s in the blood of Italians. We were able to bring together, whether it’s the photographic team, the pre-press team, the printer and the binder, just the best of Italian craftsmanship and that’s one of the glories of this. Everyone was so devoted. Everyone gave it their all, you know, it’s just a matter of

national and cultural pride. That is a wonderful thing, when everyone is working toward a greater purpose together. That’s the most satisfying kind of collaboration.”

Printed in six colours on a 62-inch press, with the optimal digital files employed, hand bound and sewn, using Italian silk, calf leather and metallic inks of gold, silver and platinum, and a year spent on the design of the packaging alone – the set is guaranteed to draw its own share of appreciative gasps.

**“You could do a comparison between Michelangelo and Jackson Pollock because the gestural quality of both is quite similar”**

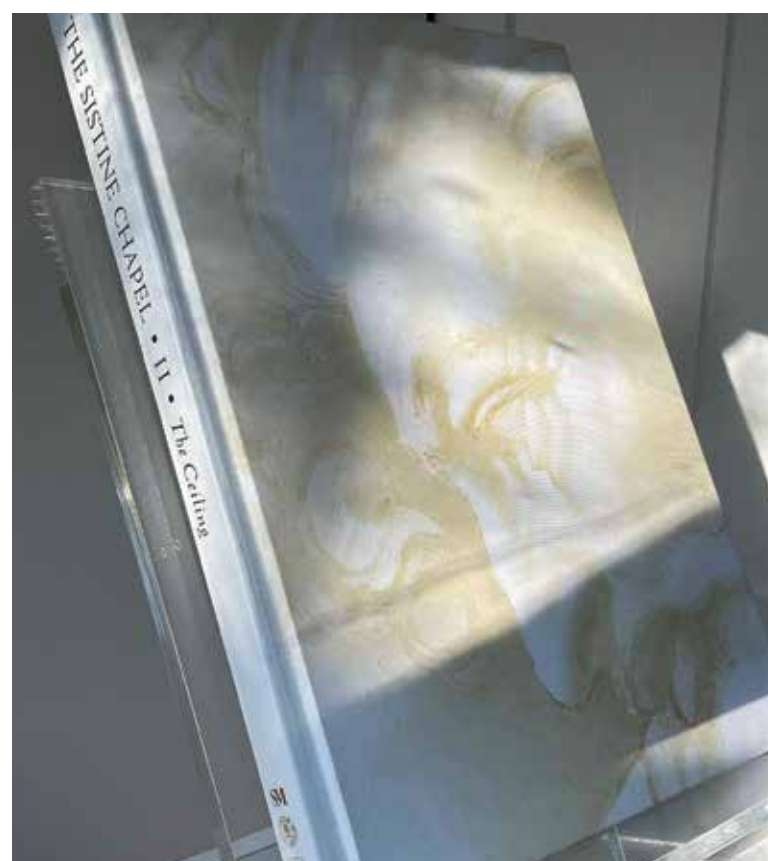
Keen not to intimidate anyone, Mr Callaway insisted that the book has so far proven itself for a surprising range of people, saying “there are ultra-high net worth individuals, but there are also people for whom this is so meaningful, either because they’ve visited the Sistine Chapel or they’ve recognised what this represents as a treasure, that they have spent a large percentage of their annual income on it, and everything in between”.

With a set for our own Hodges Figgis in Dublin city centre, perhaps it won’t be long before it finds an Irish home.

**i** For more information, or to reserve a copy go to [callaway.com/sistinechapel](http://callaway.com/sistinechapel).



Christ is baptised by St John the Baptist in Perugino's *The Baptism of Christ*



# Are politicians prepared to criminalise the religious orders to enable seizure of assets?



Site of a former state-funded, Catholic-run mother and baby home in Tuam, Ireland is seen in this undated photo. Photo: CNS



## The rhetoric from some members of the Oireachtas should seriously worry us, writes David Mullins

**D**uring the course of a recent Dáil debate, Alan Kelly, the leader of the Labour party, suggested that the assets of those religious orders who were involved in the mother and baby homes should be seized in the event that they do not make a sufficient contribution to any compensation or redress scheme.

He was joined in this call by Mick Barry of Solidarity/People Before Profit, with Brid Smith also suggesting that at the very least the assets of the religious orders be frozen "unless they agree to deliver a decent redress".

Mr Kelly then warned the religious orders that he would personally write the law ("I will draft it myself") that would enable the State to "take their assets and ensure they make that contribution".

Those with long enough memories will recall that such political

declarations on the part of Deputies Kelly, Barry and Smith amount to little more than the parroting of lines previously used by then Minister for Health Simon Harris in 2017.

### Media coverage

In those days Mr Harris received widespread media coverage after he publicly stated that there was "significant merit" to the idea of the Government seizing hospital and school lands owned by the Church as a means of meeting the estimated €1.5 billion cost of sexual abuse redress payments.

### **"We have to treat immediately those graveyards around those homes as crime scenes"**

Of course - and because this is rarely pointed out - that €1.5 billion was the total cost of the redress scheme for both the State and the religious congregations. The religious orders were never legally obliged to pay €1.5 billion. In fact, since then the religious have paid over hundreds of millions of euro as part of their efforts to meet their half of the total cost and all without recourse to semi-dictatorial seizure policies.

To be clear; there is no suggestion here that those who were treated terribly in mother and baby homes and indeed county homes should not receive redress or compensation. Of

course they should. If nothing else there is a clear moral imperative for the religious orders involved and the State to assist these people, as in fact the religious and the recent commission report have accepted.

Instead, the primary question here should be whether the policy, variously supported by Messrs Harris and Kelly et al would actually benefit the former residents or would it hinder them. Would it make accessing compensation or redress an easier or a vastly more complicated and protracted system?

This is particularly important because as Leo Varadkar has previously pointed out, any such asset seizure policy would require a referendum to overcome the property rights enshrined in our constitution. He also thought, by the way, that such a move would fail.

To be precise, his exact words were "I don't think if we had a referendum on that there would be any chance of it passing".

### Referendum

So, if the referendum option is closed to Mr Kelly and his colleagues, what other options might there be available to them?

Given the language of 'seize' and 'freeze' it would reasonably appear that legislation similar to that which currently underpins the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB) is what is being tacitly suggested.

As CAB itself points out, the powers that it has been invested with emerge from the *Proceeds of Crime Act*, 1996 to 2016. This legis-

lation allows the bureau to freeze and seize assets which it shows to the High Court are the proceeds of criminal conduct.

Is this what Mr Kelly and his fellow TD's want? To designate entire religious orders as criminal enterprises. To put them in the same moral and legal categories as the Kinahan and Hutch gangs?

Legally and constitutionally speaking there appears to be nothing in the way of an alternative.

### **"€1.5 billion was the total cost of the redress scheme for both the State and the religious congregations"**

Leaving aside the unprecedented nature of such a move; would dragging the religious orders before the High Court help the former residents or would it almost certainly contribute to depleting whatever assets the orders do have (thus emptying the compensation pot)?

If you think this is far-fetched, and if you think nothing of the sort would enter the minds of our politicians, then perhaps it might be instructive to read what Brid Smith went on to say during that same debate: "We have to treat immediately those graveyards around those homes as crime scenes. They are crime scenes and need to be treated as such. The process of redress also needs to start, not by offering these people enhanced

medical cards, but by telling these institutions which have built their wealth on the bones of dead babies, that their assets will be effectively frozen."

### Language

This kind of reckless language is startlingly reminiscent of how very many politicians and commentators have always referred to criminal gangs. That it is now being openly and indiscriminately applied to the religious orders, and by default all the remaining members of them, should cause us all to be profoundly alarmed.

It ignores the enormous, empirically quantifiable level of social good that the religious orders and indeed the wider Catholic Church have contributed to our own society and the advancement of the common good throughout the world.

For example, the Church operates more than 140,000 schools, 10,000 orphanages, 5,000 hospitals and some 16,000 other health clinics. Caritas, the umbrella organisation for Catholic aid agencies, estimates that spending by its affiliates totals between £2 billion (€2.32 billion) and £4 billion (€4.64 billion), making it one of the biggest aid agencies in the world.

As Dr Tom Finegan of Mary Immaculate College has rightly observed: "while this should not mitigate despicable evils perpetrated by its members, a serious assessment of the Church can't ignore them" either.

That is why when mainstream politicians of Alan Kelly's standing threaten the religious orders with terms like 'seize' and 'freeze,' all of us should be concerned. History is full of examples of where such thinking takes us and the harm it ultimately brings about.

### **"There is no suggestion here that those who were treated terribly in mother and baby homes and indeed county homes should not receive redress or compensation"**



# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Philippine bishop chides govt over church gatherings ban

● The Philippine government should have consulted Church leaders before trying to ban religious gatherings, Manila Archdiocese's apostolic administrator Bishop Broderick Pabillo said March 24.

His comment came in a pastoral letter in which he questioned a March 20 government order banning religious gatherings for two weeks to curb a surge in Covid-19 cases.

He also re-affirmed his intention to defy the ban despite a government threat to enforce it.

The ban from March 22-April 4 effectively prohibits churches in Manila from conducting services during Holy Week.

Earlier this week Bishop Pabillo said he would defy the ban by allowing churches to remain open but said they should not admit more than 10 percent of their total seating capacity.

### El Salvador gathers to remember St Romero

● Hundreds of devotees of St Oscar Romero, martyred by a single bullet as he celebrated Mass in 1980, packed the cathedral in San Salvador, March 24, before heading down to the crypt to touch the tomb where the saint is buried.

Some rubbed the mitre on the bronze work of art that covers his tomb, knelt and cried in front of it as they asked for the saint's

intercession in liberating the world from the pandemic and El Salvador of the different social ills it faces today. Archbishop Jose Luis Escobar Alas of San Salvador said in a homily that if St Romero were alive today, he would "advocate for an El Salvador free of impunity, corruption... a country free of violence and one of peace".

### US bishops welcome Virginia death penalty abolition

● While standing outside the prison that housed Virginia's execution chamber, Gov. Ralph Northam signed legislation abolishing the death penalty in the state.

Legislators and anti-death penalty advocates joined the signing ceremony outside Greensville Correctional Center in Jarratt, where 101 people have been executed since 1991.

"Over our 400-year history, Virginia has executed more than 1,300 people," said Gov. Northam. "(Today) we join 22 other states in saying the government will not take a life, the government will no longer execute people."

Bishop Michael Burbidge and Bishop Barry Knestout, Virginia, welcomed the new law, as did Archbishop Paul Coakley, the chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development. He called it "a bold step toward a culture of life".

### Fear Canada's assisted suicide law will harm indigenous peoples

● A Canadian suicide prevention group is raising alarms that the country's new assisted suicide law could especially harm indigenous peoples.

The Embrace Life Council, based in Canada's northern territory of Nunavut, says that the proposed expansion of assisted suicide, Bill C-7, was crafted without proper input from indigenous voices and may exploit deficiencies in the territory's mental health system.

"More research is required to determine the relationship between mental health and the current public health emergency of suicide in Nunavut," said a letter sent to Nunavut Senator Dennis Patterson from the Embrace Life Council, reported by the CBC.

The group said that mental illness creates a "significant impact on productivity, morbidity and mortality" in the territory.

The majority of the Nunavut's population is Inuit, a group of indigenous peoples.

## Priest 'overjoyed' after blanket ban on public worship quashed

Scotland's supreme civil court ruled last Wednesday that the Scottish government's blanket ban on public worship is unlawful.

Judge Lord Braid overturned the ban on March 24 in response to a challenge by 27 faith leaders, alongside Glasgow Catholic priest Canon Tom White.

Judge Braid had heard their challenge on March 11-12 at the Court of Session in Edinburgh.

His ruling came a day after the Scottish government announced that public worship could resume from March 26 with a cap of 50 people.

Canon White is dean of the City East St Alphonsus Church in Glasgow. His parish includes three of the most deprived areas of the UK.

He said: "I'm overjoyed to hear that the court has understood the essential need to protect not only the physical and material health of our society but also its spiritual needs and therefore overturned the disproportionate, unnecessary and unlawful blanket ban on public worship."

### Decision

"This decision highlights the significance of the Church's role in society. Now, we can trust that our fragile and damaged communities will never again be left without the Church as a source of hope, comfort, and vital spiritual nourishment in times of crisis."



Canon Tom White, the Scottish priest whose legal challenge succeeded in overturning a blanket ban on public worship in Scotland. Photo: ADF International.

"I'm grateful to all across Scotland and beyond who have offered their financial support for my case, and who have faithfully prayed with me for church doors to be reopened. Thanks be to God for this wonderful news!"

Public worship was first suspended in Scotland on March 19, 2020. Masses with congregations were permitted again from July 15, but subject to a 50-person limit.

The Scottish government suspended public worship again on January 4 this year.

Canon White's legal challenge was presented by Aidan O'Neill, QC. The human rights advocate called the ban "an

extraordinary abuse of the state's power".

"[The blanket ban] has a fundamental chilling impact on worship and belief. It requires people in good conscience to choose between God and Caesar," Mr O'Neill said.

Canon White said that he was inspired to launch the legal challenge by his "grieving" parish. He launched a crowd funding site to cover the costs of the legal challenge but has so far raised only around 35% of his goal.

### Celebrate

Ryan Christopher, director of the Christian legal group ADF UK, which backed the case,

said: "We celebrate this decision with Canon Tom White, because the court has recognised that which the government did not – that freedom of religion and belief is a human right to be afforded the highest protection."

"In declaring the ban to be 'unlawful,' the court helps ensure that people of faith will not again have their rights erased in this way. We congratulate the Canon and the other faith leaders involved for having the courage to take this necessary challenge forward, and securing protection for churches across Scotland for the future."

## Cardinal Woelki refuses to resign following abuse report

Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki, 64, said he won't resign following the publication of the report on the handling of clerical sex abuse in the Archdiocese of Cologne.

"To simply take the moral responsibility with me and to go to protect the reputation of the office of bishop and of the Church – I think that's too easy. And in my view it is also wrong," the cardinal said March 23. "Such a resignation would only be a short-lived symbol."

At a news conference, Cardinal Woelki gave an update on the consequences and measures being taken after an independent report on the handling of abuse cases at the Cologne Archdiocese was released March 18.

The German Catholic news agency KNA reported Cardinal Woelki said he could only improve things from within his office.

"In (the) future, I will do everything I can to ensure that, if possible, no more mistakes can happen," he said.

The cardinal admitted that he had made himself culpable in his handling of abuse cases. He said that he knew from the abuse report that he had acted dutifully and legally in the case of the accused priest identified as O, KNA reported.

"But it's not just about doing the right thing, it's about doing everything humanly possible. And I didn't do that." It would have been better if he had reported the case to Rome, he said.

## Ecuador to host International Eucharistic Congress in 2024

The Vatican announced March 20 that Pope Francis has designated the Archdiocese of Quito in Ecuador the host of the 2024 International Eucharistic Congress.

The conference, in its 53rd edition, will also take

place during the 150th anniversary of the consecration of Ecuador to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

"This great ecclesial meeting will manifest the fruitfulness of the Eucharist for evangelisation and the renewal of faith in the Latin

American continent," the Vatican said.

The city of Quito sits in the foothills of the Andes Mountains at an altitude of 9,350 feet. It is the capital city of Ecuador and the most populous, with over 3 million people in the metro area

– 85% of whom are Catholic.

The archdiocese shared the news of its designation as the seat of the 2024 Eucharistic Congress on Facebook, writing that "we assume this great responsibility with joy and are committing everyone to work".



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
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## St Oscar Romero – Martyr for the poor



Bro. Luis David Perez gets ready for morning prayer on the feast of St Oscar Romero at the chapel of the Discalced Carmelite community in San Salvador, El Salvador, March 24. Photo: CNS

## Viennese cardinal displeased by Vatican 'no' to same-sex blessings

Christoph Cardinal Schönborn has declared he was "not happy with the explanation of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith", since the message reported by the dicastery was "only a no", and declared he would, under certain circumstances, bless same-sex unions.

The CDF said March 15 that the Church hasn't the power to bless same-sex unions.

Speaking to the diocesan newspaper *Der Sonntag* in an interview published March 24, the Archbishop of Vienna compared the Church to a mother, saying, "a mother will

not refuse to bless" her children, "even when her son or her daughter is going through a problem in life".

Acknowledging that the CDF's explanatory note had clarified that there could be no blessing of homosexual unions in the Church for several reasons, including the fact that such unions are not the same as marriage, whether sacramental or natural, Cardinal Schönborn nonetheless confirmed he would "not refuse" blessing same-sex unions.

"If the request for the blessing is not a show, that is, not just a kind of culmination of an

external ritual, if the request for the blessing is sincere, it is really the request for God's blessing for a life path that two people, in whatever situation, are trying to walk, then they will not be denied this blessing," the cardinal said.

"Even if, as a priest or bishop, I have to say: 'You have not realised the full ideal. But it is important that you live your way on the basis of human virtues, without which there is no successful partnership.' And that deserves a blessing. Whether the right form of expression for this is a liturgical blessing ceremony

– that is something to think about carefully," he added.

Several other Austrian bishops have chimed in on the matter. Bishop Hermann Glettler of Innsbruck told Australian state broadcaster ORF it was his position that one does not deny the blessing to people who expressly ask for a blessing and want to walk their path of life "with the Church".

The Bishop of Innsbruck, said he had been "disappointed" by the response from Rome.

## US officer killed in mass shooting recalled as 'man of character'

Officer Eric Talley, an 11-year veteran of the Boulder Police Department, was the first to arrive at the scene of a mass shooting at a King Soopers grocery store the afternoon of March 22 and the first of 10 to be killed.

A Catholic, Talley often stopped by St Martin de Porres Church just across the street from the store "and participated in its events, even though he wasn't a parishioner there", Denver Archbishop

Samuel Aquila said.

"St Martin de Porres, the patron of the parish, was someone who experienced tragedy and hardship in his life, and so, we ask for his intercession in these difficult circumstances, that God would bring good out of this great evil," he added in a statement issued late March 23.

Archbishop Aquila said he was "deeply saddened by the tragic and

sudden deaths" of the 10 shooting victims.

"I have been praying for all those impacted by this senseless act of violence and want to express my spiritual closeness to them," he said.

Police arrested 21-year-old Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa of Arvada, Colorado, charging him with 10 counts of first-degree murder and one count of attempted murder.

## Vatican roundup

### Pope approves pay cuts for cardinals, top management at Vatican

● With the need to reduce costs and make sure employees are not laid off, Pope Francis has approved pay cuts for cardinals, clergy, religious and upper management officials who work in the Roman Curia and other Vatican entities.

The pay cuts will go into effect starting April 1, according to a papal decree issued March 24.

Because "the financial management of the Holy See" has seen deficits each year and because revenues have been substantially reduced with the Covid-19 pandemic, "a sustainable economic future requires today, among other decisions, adopting measures that also concern employee salaries", the papal decree said.

To contain costs and ensure employees are not laid off, the Pope approved measures "according to criteria of proportionality and progressivity", which resulted in cuts for lay employees with higher pay-grade levels and for priests and religious.

Cardinals who work at the Vatican will see a 10% reduction to their salary, which has been estimated to be about €5,000 (\$5,960) a month.

Heads of departments and senior administrators will see an 8% cut, while those who are priests or religious will have a 3% reduction in pay.

### Chilean survivor added to Commission for the Protection of Minors

● Pope Francis has named Juan Carlos Cruz, a survivor of sexual abuse by a notorious Chilean priest, to be a member of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors.

Cruz, James Hamilton and José Andrés Murillo, all victims of then-Fr Fernando Karadima, met with Pope Francis in 2018, several weeks after the Pope wrote a letter in which he said he had been mistaken in his initial assessment of the situation in Chile and asking forgiveness of the survivors and others he offended.

In a tweet after the appointment was

announced, Mr Cruz thanked the Pope and said the assignment "renews my commitment to continue working to end the scourge of abuse and for so many survivors who still do not have justice".

The Vatican announced the appointment March 24 and said Pope Francis also had extended by one year the three-year terms of 15 commission members but made no mention of the terms of the commission president, Cardinal Sean O'Malley of Boston, nor the group's secretary, Msgr. Robert Oliver.

### Rethink arms funding, say Vatican webinar speakers

● The world needs to rethink personal security and move away from the idea that complex weapons systems can protect people, said speakers at a Vatican-led webinar.

"We need to rethink our concept of security, placing human beings at the center," Izumi Nakamitsu, UN high representative for disarmament affairs, told viewers during the program developed by the Vatican's Dicastery for Integral Human Development.

The UN estimates that the pandemic has erased six years of development in poor countries, with women bearing the bulk of the cost, Mr Nakamitsu said.

Despite the cease-fire proposal, she said, violent conflicts have continued, while spending on armaments has increased, and a new arms race is developing as more complex weapons systems are sought worldwide. "This is the opposite of where our efforts should be going," Mr Nakamitsu said.

Drawing on pleas for a global cease-fire so a coordinated worldwide response to Covid-19 could occur, participants in the March 23 event stressed that it is time to prioritise vital human needs over the limited interests of violent conflict.

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# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

In the past week several intriguing news stories moved across the Vatican wire, and the mere act of listing them is likely enough to illustrate what they have in common.

● In the latest hearing in a Vatican sex abuse trial, an official of the former head of St Peter's Basilica testified he'd been made aware of concerns about inappropriate sexual behaviour at a pre-seminary on Vatican grounds but denied there were any suggestions of "violence" or "abuse". A former pre-seminarian who first brought the charges to light also testified, saying he witnessed "dozens" of acts he considered abusive. The principal defendant in the trial is one former pre-seminarian, now a priest, charged with abusing another at a time they were both minors.

● The Pope's Vatican charity announced this week that 1,200 of the poorest and most vulnerable people in Rome will receive the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine for free during Holy Week and Easter. The vaccinations will take place in the Paul VI audience hall, the same setting where Vatican personnel already received their shots.

● In an effort to contain a ballooning deficit driven by coronavirus-related shortfalls in income, Pope Francis decreed that senior Vatican personnel will receive pay cuts, beginning with cardinals who'll see their monthly stipends reduced by 10%. (The 40 or so Vatican cardinals generally get about \$6,000 a month, so that means a cut of roughly \$600 each). Department heads will get an 8% cut, and other clergy and religious will lose 3%. Salaries of ordinary lay employees are largely unaffected, though the Pope did also decree a freeze on automatic increases due to seniority.

● A UK court issued a stinging rebuke to Vatican prosecutors, unfreezing the assets of an Italian financier in London named Gianluigi Torzi, which had been seized at the Vatican's request as part of a probe into a \$400 million London financial deal in which the Vatican claims Mr Torzi and others defrauded it of millions in illegitimate fees. However, Judge Tony Baumgartner of Southwark Crown Court rejected the Vatican's claims, accusing Vatican prosecutors of "appalling" misrepresentations and concluding that the transactions from which Mr Torzi profited were all explicitly approved by Venezuelan Archbishop Edgar Peña Parra and Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the top officials at the Vatican's Secretariat of State.

● Pope Francis appointed Chilean clerical sexual abuse survivor

## 'Pope of the Little Guy' caught up in the heavy lifting of reform



Pope Francis leads the Angelus in the library of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican, March 21. Photo: CNS

**“In all honesty, those pays cuts won't really move the needle – saving maybe \$25,000 on cardinals' pay every year isn't a lasting solution to a \$60 million deficit”**

Juan Carlos Cruz to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, the body the pontiff created in 2013 to advise him on reform from the abuse scandals, and which is presently undergoing a process of transformation into a stable Vatican office. Mr Cruz is known as the figure who turned Francis around on the crisis in the Chilean Church.

### Developments

The common element in all five developments is a reaction to scandals involving abuse, either sexual or financial, and the ups and downs of the Pope's efforts to make things right.

Francis legendarily has a keen sense of justice and a hard-wired bias in favor of the underdog, and the initiative of his charitable right-hand man, Polish Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, to ensure that Rome's poorest of the poor are not left out of the cycle of vaccinations while people with connections, money, or both, get the shots, is a classic illustration. For that matter, so is the

Pope's insistence that the Vatican deficit not be balanced on the backs of worker bees, and that whatever belt-tightening is required begins with those Vatican personnel wearing crimson and purple.

In all honesty, those pays cuts won't really move the needle – saving maybe \$25,000 on cardinals' pay every year isn't a lasting solution to a \$60 million deficit. Everyone knows the only way to balance the books is to cut payroll, by far the Vatican's biggest expense, but so far Francis has refused to let anyone go in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic.

That, of course, is also an expression of the pontiff's real concern for the little guy.

However, it's also clear that Francis, like pretty much every reformer Pope before him, is still struggling with the institutional translation of those core instincts.

The quirky abuse trial currently playing out in a Vatican court is a good example.

At the moment, it appears that

defence attorneys are trying to establish that whatever happened inside the Pre-Seminary of St Pius X, it was largely consensual behaviour among sexually developing adolescents. However that shakes out, it seems clear senior Vatican officials were aware of concerns that something hinky was going on, and, aside from ordering the rector removed, didn't really do much until Francis waived a requirement in Vatican law at the time that required an accuser to come forward within a year of the alleged offense in order to launch a criminal prosecution after the charges became public.

**“In any reform, stating principles and staging feel-good ways to illustrate them, however inspiring, is always the easy part”**

At least to the extent known, none of those officials are currently under investigation or facing disciplinary consequences. The Pope did accept the resignation of Cardinal Angelo Comastri, the former archpriest of St Peter's Basilica and one of the officials who'd been made aware of the concerns, on February 20, but ostensibly that was for reasons of age since Cardinal Comastri is now 77.

Similarly on the London scandal, the UK judge basically lobbed the ball back into the Vatican's court, essentially ruling that if something untoward occurred, it was approved by the two highest authorities in the Secretariat of State, so ultimately they're responsible – as we Americans like to say, “You break it, you bought it”.

### Strategy

Apparently, the Vatican's traditional strategy in such cases, which is finding a convenient fall guy (usually a shady Italian financier, sometimes a lower-level Vatican operative) while insulating higher-ups from blame, doesn't cut much ice in courts outside the Vatican City State. It remains to be seen now how Vatican prosecutors will react.

In any reform, stating principles and staging feel-good ways to illustrate them, however inspiring, is always the easy part. Figuring out how to embed those principles in operations – and being willing to pay the political price for doing so – is where the heavy lifting starts, and that would seem to be where Pope Francis finds himself now.

John L. Allen Jr is Editor of *CruxNow.com*

# Virtual closeness, real community: Pope's ministry flourished online



People watch television at a home in Cisternino, Italy, as Pope Francis gives his extraordinary blessing *urbi et orbi* from the atrium of St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican March 27, 2020. Photo: CNS.



Cindy Wooden

**P**ope Francis, his liturgy office and his communications team made very deliberate decisions over the past year with the goal of letting people experience how close the Pope was to them in their isolation and suffering.

And people – tens of thousands of them – responded, praying with him and for him.

As the Vatican and much of Italy prepared for another Holy Week in lockdown, although a modified version compared to 2020, that dialogue continued on social media and influenced the planning of the papal liturgies, including details like the positioning of video cameras for television broadcasts and livestreaming, attention to the music and the pacing of the commentators offering translations in multiple languages.

## Broadcasts

Of course, live broadcasts have been part of the Vatican's Easter offerings for decades.

"They are a sign of the Pope's closeness to the people of God," Natasa Govekar, director of the theological-pastoral office of the Vatican

Dicastery for Communication, told *Catholic News Service*.

"Most of the Faithful will never have an opportunity to come to Rome to meet the Pope at an audience, a Mass in St Peter's or another event," she said. "So, the Pope draws close to people, arriving in their homes, to share with them the word of God and prayer, to communicate the Lord's mercy, to confirm them in the Faith and to accompany them where they are."

## “Live broadcasts have been part of the Vatican's Easter offerings for decades”

The Dicastery for Communication, which includes the Vatican television production centre, always plans the coverage of papal Masses, including the camera positions, with the Pope's master of liturgical ceremonies.

"The most obvious difference is that with the Covid-19 regulations we have gone from a full basilica to a situation with far fewer people, distanced at least a metre from each other," Ms Govekar said. "That's why it was decided to move the celebrations to a more intimate part of the basilica," the Altar of the

Chair behind Bernini's towering baldachin.

But there is no attempt to hide the fact that the celebrations are different. In fact, according to the dicastery staff, "there is always a camera very far" from the altar that frames not only the congregation of 100-150 people, but much of the empty space around them.

## Challenge

A particular challenge, Ms Govekar said, is "relaying the community aspect" of the liturgy when the assembly is small, socially distanced and not allowed to exchange a sign of peace.

Even when it was possible to fill St Peter's Basilica with thousands of Catholics or fill St Peter's Square with tens of thousands for a Mass, she noted, Pope Francis still needed the help of a microphone and, in the square, mega-screens.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the Church is using other means, and often mini-screens, to amplify his voice and help people feel that they are there, praying with him.

Experts have estimated that in the first year of the pandemic, the use of social media – Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and others – grew by 12% as people sought ways to be connected to one another.

## “The Church is using other means, and often mini-screens, to amplify his voice and help people feel that they are there, praying with him”

The Twitter (@Pontifex) and Instagram (@franciscus) accounts of Pope Francis grew as well. His Twitter accounts, in their nine language versions, had a total of more than 52 million followers March 24 – that was a growth of almost 740,000 followers in nine months, according to the Dicastery for Communication. And, over the past year, the Instagram account grew by 1 million followers to reach 7.7 million followers in late March.

## “With the Covid-19 regulations we have gone from a full basilica to a situation with far fewer people, distanced at least a metre from each other”

Seven of the 10 most popular tweets – those “liked” or retweeted – in the past year, Ms Govekar said, were requests for prayer with the hashtag #PrayTogether, “creating a community around the world that was praying with the Holy Father, spiritually united despite the distances”.

The comments on social media, she said, showed that people found

strength and consolation in connecting with the Pope and others around the world as they prayed.

"This service was especially evident in the early months of the pandemic when almost 4 billion people around the world were confined to their homes," Ms Govekar said. "Through the live broadcasts of the different celebrations, Pope Francis wanted to accompany them in a time of difficulty, fear and uncertainty, and to pray with them, fortify them in the midst of tribulation and communicate hope and trust in the Lord who will never abandon us."

## Celebrations

Over the 69 days from early March to mid-May 2020, when the public celebrations of Mass were banned in Italy, Pope Francis decided to livestream the Mass he celebrated each morning in the chapel of his residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae.

"We received countless comments, including through the mail, that made us see just how much people felt accompanied by the 'homiletic magisterium' of Pope Francis, that is, how important it was for them to be able to hear his voice and not just read quotes in an article," Ms Govekar said.

Social media, television, radio and the internet have helped the Pope "to be near to people all over the world in a year that has been difficult for everyone", she said. "And people have responded in turn with their closeness to the Pope. There has been a kind of virtual dialogue unprecedented in the history of the Church."

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Cruel sanctions on Syria causing 'untold suffering' to poor

**Dear Editor,** After 10 truly dreadful years of utter horror in Syria, the unfortunate people there must now endure cruel US and international sanctions on their country. Donald Trump imposed the so-called Caesar's Law sanctions on Syria last June and there is no sign of Joe Biden lifting them.

These sanctions are causing starvation and untold suffering to poor people with 83% of the population existing below the poverty line. There are long

queues for bread and basic essentials. UNICEF says that the price of food has gone up by over 230%, affecting children. Medicines are sometimes impossible to get and people go to bed cold because the electricity is off for most of the day. Many hospitals have been forced to close because of lack of essential equipment. The Secretary General of the UN, Antonio Guterres, called it "a living hell". It's reported that in some cases people are actually

selling a kidney to feed their children. If any country or building contractor tries to help Syria rebuild it will be severely punished with sanctions by the US. This is a crime against humanity. Pope Francis has asked for prayers and help for Syria. The world stands back and says and does nothing about this cruelty and inhumanity.

*Yours etc.,  
Anthony Redmond  
Dublin 12*

## We love the sinner and hate the sin

**Dear Editor,** As expected, the recent document from Rome states that a priest cannot bless a same sex union because it is a sin. It is not only homosexual sin, but heterosexual sin; cohabiting without marriage. How can it come as a surprise that we priests are servants? We do not 'own' the sacraments of the Church. I accept the decision, those priests who are against the decision need to re-examine their vow of obedience and ask why they are a priest. I think there is another agenda here. I will bless a same sex couple when the Pope does. We love the sinner and hate the sin.

*Yours etc.,  
Fr Paul O'Connell  
Douglas, Georgia, USA*



## CDF finding on same sex blessings was not 'vicious'

**Dear Editor,** Intemperate and personalised criticisms of Pope Francis regarding the CDF document on same sex unions are deeply concerning. Those who make the time to actually read the (shortish) document itself will be hard put to find even the remotest semblance of "vicious" or "gratuitously cruel" language.

The CDF document

addresses the question: "Does the Church have the power to give the blessing to unions of persons of the same sex?" It restates, in rigorous and always respectful language, precisely why the Church does not have the power to re-make the teaching, of which it is the custodian, in the likeness of contemporary culture. The three most recent Popes,

with all of the authority vested in the Petrine office, have reiterated that same teaching.

It will be rejected by some as a "hard saying" (John 6.67). It may lead some German theologians into schism, though it would seem they were already well embarked on that road. The Cambridge philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe made the point that

Christianity was a radical challenge to pagan Rome. It remains so today. The role of the bishops, in Ireland and across the universal Church, is to take courage and confirm Catholics in the compassionate and definitive teaching, reiterated by Pope Francis.

*Yours etc.,  
Ray Kinsella  
Ashford Co. Wicklow*

## We must remember Jesus Christ has never left us

**Dear Editor,** I was deeply disturbed to read an account of a priest representing the Association of Catholic Priests, Fr Tim Hazelwood, making the following statement regarding the CDF's recent document on civil unions: "If Christ was with us now, he would do the caring, the loving thing."

The document of which he was speaking isn't what I want to address; what is worrying is the inference that Jesus Christ is no longer with us. I've seen this attitude popping up more

and more. Fr Hazelwood as a priest holds the Risen Jesus in the Eucharist in his hands every day at Mass, which is more than most during this lockdown. If we as a Church have forgotten Christ's promise that "I am with you always, yes, to the end of time", (Matt 28:20), and that he is still head of his Church, then there is a great place for a national synod to start in unravelling the problems we now face.

*Yours etc.,  
Catherine Coyle,  
Ballybofey, Co. Donegal*

## Creativity and skill needed for Ireland's synod

**Dear Editor,** The Irish synod: There is also a disconnect with the adults. It has been known for years that some Catholics don't agree with Church teaching. The trouble started when their questions were not answered. The synod will be too late for some, hopefully not for too many.

Don't educate around the question, truthful honest information to the above questions is the only way to education. This is the age of 7-year-olds with iPads. Your answers will be double checked in Google.

Bishop Dempsey is right – listen, listen, listen and repeat, repeat, repeat every Sunday if necessary. Bishop Leahy's enthusiasm is good. See what it did for the Irish rugby team and Rachel Blackmore, some creativity, some skill, some of Pope Francis' courage and the help of the Holy Spirit.

*Yours etc.,  
Joe Curley,  
Kinvara, Co. Galway*

**facebook community**  
Each week we publish a selection of comments from The Irish Catholic Facebook page

### Gardaí fine Fr PJ Hughes for celebrating public Mass

I support Fr Hughes for his courage and wish that all priests had his courage to do the same thing. – **Brendan Kennedy**  
Did we ever see the day; a throwback to the Mass rock. We could blame England then but now it's our own Government. – **Eilish Higgins**

I'm no longer RC but a Christian however I admire this priest for standing for his right to pastor his flock. – **Sheila McGirr McGarry**

Well the rules were for everyone, is it not because of people carrying on as normal that we are where we are? – **Liz McCabe**

I am 75. Any chance of a job as a Garda? Think I might have more common sense! – **Pat McGlinchey**

That's ridiculous carry on. – **Gerry Quinlan**

Shame on the Irish Government. Fair play to you father for standing up to them. You're in my prayers God love you. – **Mona McKee**

Remember this at the next election people. – **Eunan Brennan**

Sorry but this country is packed by drugs. Easy tunnel for smugglers. This is what they should do finally. In short, disgraceful! Hands off all priests! – **Katarzyna Michalak**

The days of priests being above the law are long gone. – **Jimmy Jordan**

He's breaking lockdown restrictions and setting a very bad example. – **Sandra Dunne**

While not a regular Mass goer myself, I think the churches are big enough for people to safely congregate. There are more people in the supermarkets on an hourly basis. – **Claire Ni Dhoire**

An absolute shocking scandal... local coffee shop crammed today along with the garden centre. – **Angie Geraghty**

When is something going to be done to stop this madness, God help us. – **Una Williams**

It is time to have attendance at Mass restored and we need to make our voices heard on this. – **Sheelagh Hanly**

**What do you think? Join in the conversation on The Irish Catholic Facebook page**

## Dusting down our Mass rocks

**Dear Editor,** In the light of the current and ongoing prohibition on the Faithful attending Masses, now that the weather is improving a bit, is it time to dust down the Mass Rocks? Their use would tick several Covid boxes (ventilation, social distancing etc...) and they seemed to work well in previous times of repression!

*Yours etc.,  
Gabriel Meehan  
Bailieborough, Co. Cavan*

## Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from The Irish Catholic as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

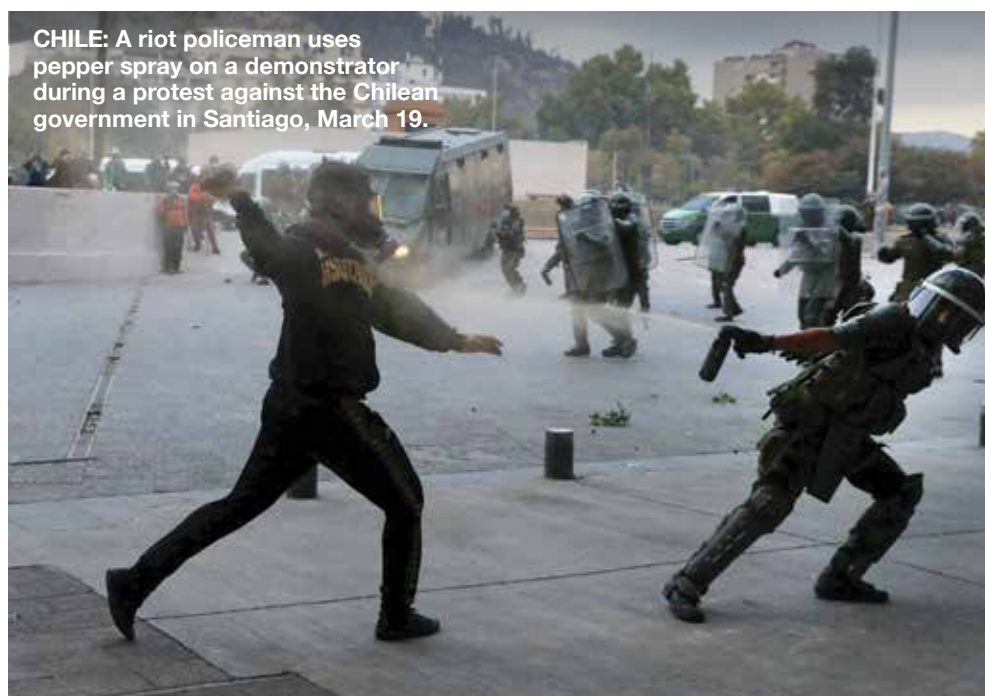
merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to The Irish Catholic, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.

# Around the world



▲ **VATICAN:** Pope Francis and cardinals arrive to celebrate Palm Sunday Mass in St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, March 28. Photos: CNS.

◀ **USA:** People in Boulder, Colorado attend a candlelight vigil, March 24, at Cornerstone Boulder Church to pray for the victims of a mass shooting.



**CHILE:** A riot policeman uses pepper spray on a demonstrator during a protest against the Chilean government in Santiago, March 19.



**BANGLADESH:** A Rohingya refugee boy sits on rubble after a fire broke out at a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar.

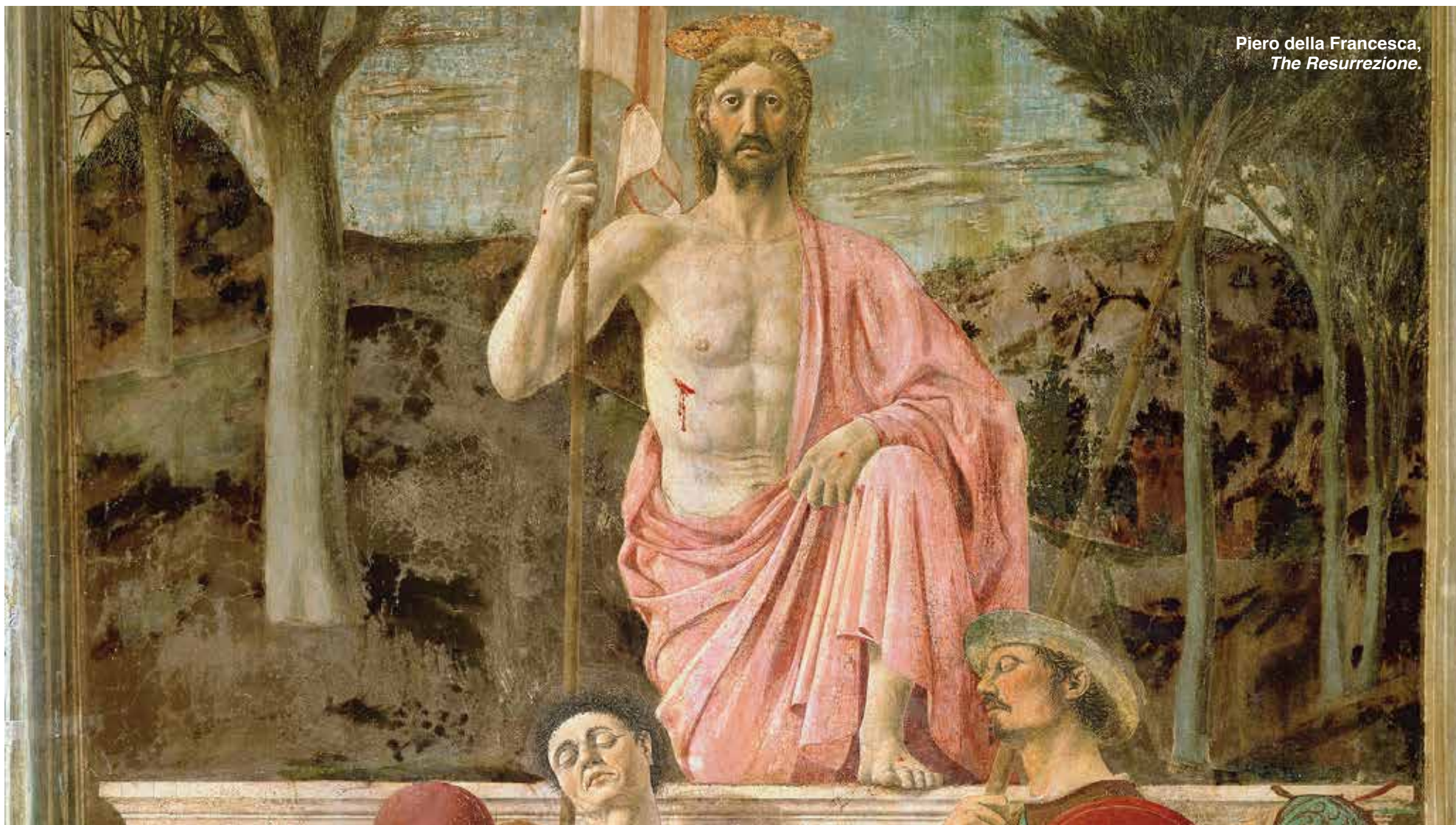


**AUSTRALIA:** Floodwaters surround a home along the Hawkesbury River in Wisemans Ferry, March 25.



**MEXICO:** A group of Central American migrants rest along railroad tracks in Macuspana on their way to seek asylum in the United States.

# The cosmic dimension of the resurrection



Piero della Francesca,  
*The Resurrezione.*

**P**ierre Teilhard de Chardin was once asked by a critic: "What are you trying to do? Why all this talk about atoms and molecules when you are speaking about Jesus Christ?" His answer: "I am trying to formulate a Christology large enough to incorporate Christ because Christ is not just an anthropological event but a cosmic phenomenon as well."

**“The resurrection is about more than something changing inside of human consciousness”**

In essence, what he is saying is that Christ did not come just to save human beings; he came to save the earth as well.

That insight is particularly relevant when we try to understand all that is implied in the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was raised from death to life. A body is a physical reality so when it raised up as a body (and not just as a soul) there is something in that which is more than merely spiritual and psychological. There is something radically physical in this. When a dead body is raised to new life, atoms and molecules are



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

being rearranged. The resurrection is about more than something changing inside of human consciousness.

## Human hope

The resurrection is the basis for human hope, surely; without it, we could not hope for any future that includes anything beyond the rather asphyxiating limits of this life. In the resurrection of Jesus, we are given a new future, one beyond our life here. However, the resurrection also gives a new future to the earth, our physical planet. Christ came to save the earth, not just the persons living on it. His resurrection ensures a new future for the earth as well as for its inhabitants.

The earth, like ourselves, needs saving. From what? For what?

**“St Paul assures us that the earth will enjoy the same future as human beings, resurrection, transformation beyond our present imagination, an eternal future”**

In a proper Christian understanding of things, the earth is not just a stage for human beings, a thing with no value in itself, apart from us. Like humanity, it too is God's work of art, God's child. Indeed, the physical earth is our mother, the matrix from which we all spring. In the end, we are not apart from the natural world; rather we are that part of the natural world that has become conscious of itself. We do not stand apart from the earth and it does not exist simply for our benefit, like a stage for the actor, to be abandoned once the play is over. Physical creation has value in itself, independent of us. We need to recognise that, and not only to practice better eco-ethics so that the earth can continue to provide air, water, and food for

future generations of human beings. We need to recognise the intrinsic value of the earth. It is also God's work of art, is our biological mother, and it is destined to share eternity with us.

Moreover, like us, it is also subject to decay. It too is time-bound, mortal, and dying. Outside of an intervention from the outside, it has no future. Science has long taught the law of entropy. Put simply, that law states that the energy in our universe is running down, the sun is burning out. The years our earth has before it, like our own days, are numbered, counted, finite. It will take millions of years, but finitude is finitude. There will be an end to the earth, as we know it, just as there will be an end to each of us as we live now. Outside of some re-creation from the outside, both the earth and the humans living on it have no future.

St Paul teaches this explicitly in the Epistle to the Romans where he tells us that creation, the physical cosmos, is subject to futility, and that it is groaning and longing to be set free to enjoy the glorious liberty of the children of God. St Paul assures us that the earth will enjoy the same future as human beings, resurrection, transformation beyond our present imagination, an eternal future.

How will the earth be transformed? It will be transformed in the same way we are, through resurrection. The resurrection brings into our world, spiritually and physically, a new power, a new arrangement of things, a new hope, something so radical (and physical) that it can only be compared to what happened at the initial creation when the atoms and the molecules of this universe were created out of nothingness by God. In that initial creation, nature was formed and its reality and laws shaped everything from then until the resurrection of Jesus.

## Resurrection

However, in the resurrection, something new happened that touched every aspect of the universe, from the soul and psyche inside every man and woman to the inner core of every atom and molecule. It is no accident that the world measures time by that event. We are in the year 2021 since that radical re-creation happened.

The resurrection was not only spiritual. In it, the physical atoms of the universe were rearranged. Teilhard was right. We need a vision wide enough to incorporate the cosmic dimension of Christ. The resurrection is about people, and the planet.

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# Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, April 1, 2021

## Personal Profile

One hundred years old and going strong

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# Easter activities to breathe new life into your family

**I**f Lent is a challenge every year, it has been an arduous slog this year in particular. We've already given up so much that we took for granted, and we found ourselves asked to give up more without recourse to our usual outlets.

However, Easter is upon us at last and with it the spirit of life that the risen Christ breathed upon the apostles, and through them, us. While this is a very deep thing, some of the ways in which we can partake in this joy are little more than uplifting fun, which is exactly what the whole family needs right now, particularly the youngest among us.

These activities can be as com-



**After a long and arduous Lent compounded by lockdown, some Easter activities can breathe new life back into your house, writes Jason Osborne**

plicated or simple as you choose to make them, but the greatest effects will be seen if they are done together and with the meaning of Easter in mind.

### Easter egg hunt

Last week, I wrote about the idea of decorating eggs (possibly with Easter-time symbols of the Resurrection and biblical stories)

as a way to see children through the final stretch of Lent. A more enjoyable activity for them as Easter Sunday approaches might be the good, old-fashioned Easter egg hunt.

With all of the time spent indoors these days, an outdoor egg hunt is ideal if the weather permits it. This year, why not incorporate some new elements into

the activity? Try adding a special golden egg (or any other kind of egg) and rewarding with a special prize the person who chances upon it.

### Easter baskets

Easter baskets are an American tradition, and have since become quite commercialised, stuffed full of chocolate, sweets and other treats. There is of course nothing wrong with this, particularly with the year that's in it, but the original Easter baskets were a way to celebrate the end of Lenten penance. Many of the foods that traditionally went uneaten during Lent, such as cheese, butter, eggs and meat, were placed in the bas-

ket and blessed.

These days, as mentioned, it's more popular to go with sweets and chocolate. For the sugar conscious, the baskets can also include small toys, books, flowers, or any kind of religious paraphernalia that raises the mind to God in an age-appropriate way. In today's world, it's good to offer reminders of the feast days without being condescending or pushy about them. In this instance, it's an opportunity to remind each other of the great feast of the Resurrection – it's not just an opportunity to stuff yourself with chocolate.

» Continued on Page 33



## AND EVENTS

### ONLINE EVENTS FOR CHILDREN OVER EASTER

Corrib Kids are running creative technology clubs for 8-16 year olds, which teach children how to build, design, code and animate in a fun and engaging way using Scratch, Roblox, Lego robotics and more.

To register for online classes and camps, visit [www.corribkidscoding.com](http://www.corribkidscoding.com).

For a more literary twist, Creative Connections is an online platform providing classes in creative writing, drama and English grinds. Catering for students aged 7-18, they offer group classes, one on one lessons and sibling discounts.

The creative writing classes are six week courses focusing on character creation, structuring a story, plot creation, descriptive language, setting and more. The classes are small in size to allow each student individual attention and an opportunity to get to know their classmates so that they can share ideas and make friends.

The Easter camp will take place from April 5-9, and costs €90, but offers a 10% sibling discount. For more information, visit [www.creativeconnections.ie](http://www.creativeconnections.ie).

### LITTER IN NI PUBLIC SPACES A 'GROWING PROBLEM'

The BBC has reported that littering and dog-fouling have increased during the pandemic, which was revealed by an annual survey by an anti-litter charity.

Keep NI Beautiful observed more than 900 areas during the summer of 2020, and said they found twice as much dog-fouling as in 2019. Litter was also on the increase, they found.

Discarded PPE items were found in 30 of the areas they surveyed, with the charity estimating that at any one time, there could be more than 7,000 gloves and masks lying around.

In all, public spaces were generally found to be less clean.

Head of the charity, Dr Ian Humphreys said everyone has a part to play in cleaning up the problem.

"We have a growing litter problem that we need to face up to as a community," he said.

"The cost to our environment and public purse is too great a burden for us to bear.

The pandemic has seen us care for the vulnerable in society. It is now time we extended that care for our vulnerable environment."

### US DATA SHOWS ASTRAZENECA VACCINE EFFECTIVE FOR ALL ADULTS

The Associated Press (AP) has reported AstraZeneca's announcement last week that its Covid-19 vaccine provided strong protection among adults of all ages in a long-anticipated US study, a finding that could help rebuild public confidence in the jab around the world and move it a step closer to clearance in the US. In the study of 30,000 people, the vaccine was 79% effective at preventing symptomatic cases of Covid-19 — including in older adults. There were no severe illnesses or hospitalisations among vaccinated volunteers, compared with five such cases in participants who received dummy shots — a small number, but consistent with findings from Britain and other countries that the vaccine protects against the worst of the disease.

# Meditation and dying to self



## Mindful living

Dr Noel Keating



So here we are again in Holy Week – a week when we are invited to recall the sacred rhythm of the spiritual life: the inevitable cycle of death, burial, and resurrection. For all of this week we celebrate the paschal mystery, the passion of Jesus and his resurrection as Christ because, as the Easter liturgy declares, "dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life".

**"Meditation is a process of emptying ourselves of unreality, so space is made for the real you"**

A central message of Holy Week is that we too are called to practice self-emptying love. In Philippians 2:6-11, St Paul, encourages us to "make your own the mind of Christ".

"Who, being in the form of God,  
Did not count equality with God

Something to be grasped  
But he emptied himself,  
Taking the form of a slave,  
Becoming as human beings are

And, being in every way  
Like a human being,  
He was humbler yet,  
Even accepting death,  
Death on a cross."

The phrase 'emptied himself' is the English translation of the Greek verb *kenosein*, which is the opposite of the word 'grasped' in the previous line. Jesus started his earthly life and finished it with the same commitment to kenosis, to letting go. It is the hallmark of his ministry, it was his way of being in the world and each of us is called to follow his way.

We could say that *kenosis* is the theological basis for meditation. In Christian theology, *kenosis* refers to the 'self-emptying' of Jesus' own will and becoming entirely receptive to God's divine will. This is our intention when we meditate. By focusing our attention on our mantra, our sacred word, we aim to move our attention away from the egoic self – to let go of all thoughts, feelings, images, emotions, sensations, to let go of doing and simply be in God's presence. The aim of our meditation is to leave self behind, as Jesus taught, and leave ourselves open to a graced encounter with the divine, open to becoming 'one with the one who is one' in the words of John Main. While whatever happens in meditation occurs at a level of consciousness deeper than ordinary self-consciousness, we have faith that by leaving ourselves open to such a graced encounter, our spirit will be transformed and enriched by the Holy Spirit.

It is important to understand that our letting go of self-consciousness at the time of meditation is not about self-rejection but self-fulfilment; letting go of our daily preoccupations, of our desire for power, prestige and possessions and discovering as a result who we truly are at the depths

of our being. As we let go of the false, egoic self, we come to discover the true-self. This constant letting go, through the continual repetition of the mantra, never becomes boring, because it is always taking you beyond yourself. It is always opening your spirit to what is beyond, to more of the infinity of God. As John Main describes it: "The essential message of Christianity is that our call and our potential is to enter into the life of God through Jesus, through his Spirit present in our heart. We do this, not by analysing God or analysing Jesus, not by thinking about God or thinking about Jesus, but by being silent and still and, in his Spirit's presence, opening our hearts to his love."

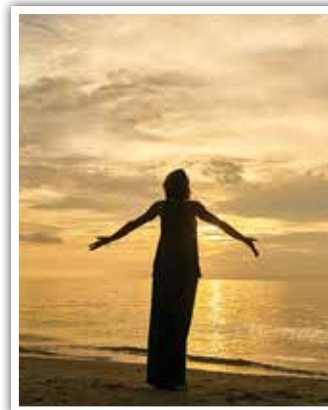
Meditation is a process of emptying ourselves of unreality, so space is made for the real you. When we let go of our tendency toward self-preoccupation and self-

follows: "At the centre of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point of pure truth, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God, which is never at our disposal, from which God disposes of our lives, which is inaccessible to the fantasies of our own mind or the brutalities of our own will. This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us."

There is in our world today a great spiritual hunger, which derives from a loss of connection with our true-self identity, linked to the decline of the great spiritual traditions of humanity. Meditation has the capacity to re-waken our innate spirituality and satisfy that spiritual hunger.

Being centred, being present, and opening your heart to the deepest place within, where your spirit communes with the Spirit of God: that is the practice of Christian meditation. While the intention is to allow for this communion, it is not something one is striving to achieve. Meditation is not about doing, but being. It is the path of letting go and letting be, allowing love to be itself.

**1** After 40 years in the education sector Noel Keating was awarded a PhD for his research into the child's experience of meditation and its spiritual fruits. Noel now leads, in a voluntary capacity, a project which offers free in-service to primary schools who may wish to consider introducing meditation as a whole-school practice. Noel is author of *Meditation with Children: A Resource for Teachers and Parents*.



indulgence, we move from a mind-set of wilfulness, where we put ourselves and our needs at the centre of everything, to a mind-set of willingness, of allowing God's word to find a home in us. Meditation is a way of making space for our true-self to be, that space which Thomas Merton described as

» Continued from Page 31



### A blessing of the family table

Once upon a time, some Christian families used to partake of a “blessing of the table,” which saw a priest, the head of the household or another family member bless the Easter meal with holy water. In a world that’s as fractious as ours, a simple, physical reminder of the importance of sitting down to a meal together is a worthwhile inclusion in your Easter Sunday itinerary.

### Making a homemade triptych

A triptych is a work of art that is divided into three panels that are hinged together and can therefore be folded shut or displayed open. A kind of art that is often employed in churches, the most famous triptych, or one of the most famous, in our modern world is Hieronymus Bosch’s *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, which has stoked scholarly debate for years.

However, nothing of that sort need be achieved for our purposes. Large, panelled triptychs using three pictures or three Easter symbols make for a prayerful background for a home altar or elsewhere in the house. They can be made of three equal panels of cardboard connected together with gummed tape so that the panels will fold.

A triptych could be made using three symbols combined with the following feasts:

- Ascension Crown
- Pentecost Dove
- Trinity Triangle

A similar triptych, using pictures instead, might include:

- The Passion
- The Death

- The Resurrection

Alternatively, a triptych could be constructed showing three saints who embody the Easter message in one way or another, such as:

- St John
- Mary, the Mother of God
- St Peter

The options are endless, with many varied sources for inspiration too; the Bible foremost among them. Young children could have the triptych constructed for them by a parent, leaving them free to work away at it with paint or crayons.

A couple of symbols worth suggesting to them to keep their eyes on Heaven might include:

- Passion: A crown of thorns or a cross might be depicted on one of the panels, the age-old symbols of Christ’s Passion.

- Easter: A circle or a ring has long been associated with eternity, symbolising having no beginning or end. It has often been used to depict eternal life, or God himself.

- Ascension: A golden crown, dis-



playing the triumph and reign of Jesus Christ over the forces of sin and death might be appropriate for this panel. It also offers a chance to reflect on the relationship between the crown of thorns and the crown of glory, with the two facing each other on the opposing panels.

### A “wreath of victory”

St Paul speaks of the “imperishable wreath” of victory that will bequeathed to those who run the race of faith to the very end. In Ireland, we’re well familiar with Advents wreaths, but rarely do we take the opportunity to make “victory wreaths” for Easter – an activity which can be fun and educational for children in the house.

### “Let’s pray that he gives us eyes to see his victory more easily in this troubled world”

There are a number of tutorials online for making wreaths from scratch, which involve some time and materials. However, if you’re inclined to take a simpler route for the time being, wreaths can be purchased online or from most florists. These can then be entwined with whichever flowers you like, or with ribbons adorned with verses from Scripture.

These are but a few simple ideas with which to ring in the era of God’s reign, but they are well needed to keep up the spirits at this difficult time. Let’s pray that he gives us eyes to see his victory more easily in this troubled world.

## Faith — IN THE — family



Bairbre Cahill

Our Críotáil agus Comhrá group met on Thursday – a handy way for people to catch up on some knitting tips and build their confidence in speaking Irish. We usually try to avoid any chat about Covid but on Thursday a question emerged, “Cá háit a rachfá dá dtiocfadh leat?” – where would you go if you could? We thought about it, “To the sea, I’d go and walk on a beach”, “To my daughter in Dublin, I haven’t seen her in months”, “To Paris!”. There was an energy and delight created just by talking about the possibilities.

As I write, we have just moved beyond the Spring Equinox. Today the daylight is that fraction longer than the darkness. We are moving forwards into the light.

Liturgically too we are about to celebrate Easter. The long Holy Saturday of this Lenten season is drawing to a close.

So as we approach Easter 2021, what does it mean for us? What will it mean for you? Strangely enough, I find it is the image of Lazarus emerging from the tomb which keeps coming back to me at the moment. How disoriented and unsure did he feel as he stepped out into the light? Are we perhaps a little like that as we think about a world beyond Covid?

Easter reminds us that God’s action in Jesus is stronger than any violence or destruction. God’s love, made real for us in Jesus cannot be suppressed, enclosed by the forces of darkness within the tomb. There has been a lot of darkness around over the past year. We have lived through fear and frustration, anger and anxiety. When I speak to people now I am aware of so many talking about how tired they are, how exhausted by restrictions, how worn down by trying to do the right thing. In the coming months we will emerge and maybe now is the time to reflect on how we want to do that.

Perhaps resurrection will be about allowing the energy and delight of new possibilities to open wide our hearts and liberate us from some of the anxiety and frustration we have carried. Perhaps it will mean a new awareness of the small things in life, blessings in the bits and pieces. Surely, after all we have been through

we have learned something about a new way of living, an appreciation of community, a deep gratitude for the natural world, an awareness of our own lives and our own homes as a place of God’s presence.

I believe the Church is also called in a very particular way to resurrection at this time. The past year has been



a rupture in our experience as Church and perhaps has been very useful in revealing some unpleasant truths to us. What can we learn? Are we open to resurrection and new life as Church? I am heartened to see that the Irish Bishops are planning a synod and say they are aware of the deep and challenging conversations that need to happen. Bishop Michael Router speaks of the need to find “a new way of being Church” and I would certainly agree with him. Bishop Michael Duignan talks about the importance of the Domestic Church – us, family, at home, living our faith but I think the past year has revealed that for many people, when the weekly Mass is taken away they are left lost and adrift. How much sense does “Domestic Church” make for them? What has been done to enable people to take ownership of the idea of their home as a holy, God-filled place where faith takes root? Have we the courage to have these conversations? Will we follow the Spirit? Cá háit a rachfá dá dtiocfadh leat?

In the resurrection of Jesus the whole of reality is transformed. Nothing is left untouched. Are we open to such radical transformation? After all we have been through ‘business as usual’ is not enough. Business as usual will not roll the stone away. We need resurrection, for ourselves – and for our Church.

# One hundred years old and going strong

## Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

**W**hen Fr Norman Davitt SVD was nine years old – this being back in 1930 – the local parish priest came across him in a field near the Church. “He said, ‘what do you want to be’, I said, ‘I want to be a missionary,’” Fr Davitt explains. “About two years later, he asked me again and said, ‘so you want to be a priest.’ So he took me to his house, gave me a missal and said, ‘now you’re going to Mass every day.’”

**“When I was in Papua New Guinea, up in the mountains, I was walking for a whole week, going to one place and moving on to another,” he says”**

From that moment on, Fr Davitt was set on the path which he still follows today. In less than a year, the Birmingham-born priest will celebrate the 75th anniversary of his ordination and he recently passed a momentous milestone, turning one hundred years old on March 29.

When he was 11 years old, another priest, in a new parish the Davitts had just moved to, sent for young Norman: “He said there’s a man here wants to see you,” Fr Davitt tells *The Irish Catholic*. “When I got there, he said this is a missionary from China. He’s one of the missionaries looking for students, do you want to go join them? And I said

‘yeah, why not?’. He said, ‘go and get your mum and dad’, which I did, and here I am.”

Fr Davitt went to the minor seminary aged 12 and 14 years later he was ordained to the Society of the Divine Word.

“After I was ordained, I wanted to go to China,” Fr Davitt explains. “But I wasn’t allowed to go because they needed an English teacher in the new college in England. So I was kept at home at England, before I went to India seven years later.

“It was marvellous, I enjoyed it immensely. Again I came home and I was home for a while, I went to visit my dad. When I went to Rome to get my ticket, they said you’re reappointed back to England. So

I went back and became a superior there, which I didn’t like. I got out of that eventually and after a few years I went to Papua New Guinea.”

### Missions

Fr Davitt worked in parishes on the missions. It was tough work, he says, but rewarding. He enjoyed working with people and getting his hands dirty.

“When I was in Papua New Guinea, up in the mountains, I was walking for a whole week, going to one place and moving on to another,” he says. “I’d visit several different places in a week, heading up and down the mountains. It was a very, very interesting career. What I enjoyed most of all was being with the people,

encouraging them, training them, enjoying life with them. God was there all the time, there was no doubt. God was guiding them and pushing it along.”

Born and raised in England, Fr Davitt now lives in the SVD community at Donamon Castle, Co. Roscommon. His connection with Ireland began in 1939, when he was one of the first to join the novitiate in the castle, which the order had purchased that year.

“After, when I came home, I would visit Ireland,” Fr Davitt says. “When I retired from the missions, I went to England, and the provincial said there isn’t much happening here. And I said, come on, we’ve got to do something. Then I came over to Ire-

land and I’ve been very happy here. I was very busy up to a few years ago, I was driving, delivering cars up and down the country. I’d be meeting people and talking about things. The last few years I spent helping out in parishes round about. Then I had to retire quietly.”

**“Fr Davitt celebrated the platinum anniversary – 70 years – of his ordination in 2017”**

Fr Davitt continues to say Mass in the community at Donamon Castle, though he doesn’t get out as often anymore. In the 82 years since he first arrived in Ireland, he says it has changed enormously.

“I came back here after my own ordination in about 52, I suppose, and I did vocation work,” Fr Davitt explains. “The people were wonderful, they were very devout all over the place. But there was a great pressure from the clergy, which I couldn’t understand, the clergy were everything.

“It all changed in the years before my return back from the missions, and it has continued to change dramatically since I came back to Ireland. The Faith is weakening. Some people’s faith remains strong and tremendous, but other people’s faith is gone totally. It’s a strange situation, a bit disturbing in some ways.

“Ireland has become missionary territory, yes, yes. They’re losing faith and losing morality altogether, there’s murdering and killing and all kinds of nonsense going on which wasn’t there before.”

Fr Davitt celebrated the platinum anniversary – 70 years – of his ordination in 2017. He laughs when asked if he’s targeting his 80th anniversary: “I’ve a couple years to go yet. Next year is my 75th.”



## Sweet Treats

Laura Anderson



## Sumptuous cinnamon-coated hot cross buns: an Easter treat

**T**hese might be easy to buy, but why not try to make your own this Easter, you won’t regret it! They are crunchy and golden on the outside but wonderfully soft on the inside. If that doesn’t sound indulgent enough, they are then coated in cinnamon sugar. A definite crowd pleaser!

### Ingredients

Makes about 12 hot cross buns  
For the buns:

- 500g strong white bread flour
- 75g caster sugar
- 5g salt
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp mixed spice
- 2 x 7g sachets fast-action dried yeast
- 50g unsalted butter
- 300ml full-fat milk
- 1 medium egg, beaten
- 100g sultanas
- 50g mixed peel
- 1 red apple

- 50g apricot jam, to glaze
- For the crosses:
- 75g plain flour
  - 80ml water



Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 5-10 mins until the dough is smooth and elastic. Shape into a ball and place into a lightly oiled

bowl. Cover with cling film or a clean tea towel and leave to rest until doubled in size and your finger leaves a dent when pressed into it (1-1½ hours).

Peel, core and finely chop the apple. With the dough still in the bowl add the sultanas, mixed peel and apple. Bring together and knead into the dough on a lightly floured surface making sure to evenly distribute the fruit then leave to rest in a covered bowl as before for another hour or until doubled in size.

Line two baking trays with parchment paper. Knock back the dough by punching it flat on a lightly floured surface and then divide and shape into 12 equal smooth balls. Place onto the baking trays, spacing them evenly about 1 inch apart. Cover lightly with cling film or a tea towel and leave to prove again until doubled in size (45 mins -1 hour).

Pre-heat oven to 220°C/200°C Fan/Gas mark 6. For the crosses mix the flour with the water to make a thick paste and spoon this into a piping bag with a small nozzle. When the buns are ready, pipe lines across each row to make crosses. Bake for 12-15 minutes until golden brown. Gently heat the apricot jam and while the buns are still warm brush it on top to glaze them. Leave to cool.



# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Scenes of joyous return to Mass overshadowed by Westminster

**I**t was a great sign of hope to see churches opening for Mass in the North on Friday.

**Newsline** (BBC One NI, Friday) reported from a lunchtime Mass at St Mary's Church in Belfast describing it as "a small landmark along a difficult journey" – an understatement! One churchgoer said it was "the most important thing for me". Fr Tim Bartlett spoke of "a day of quiet joy". Reporter Kevin Sharkey said it would be different, with necessarily small attendance due to health guidelines, and though distancing was in operation for that Mass, it was well attended. I liked the way the report ended with a shot of that attractive banner of St Joseph with the logo 'St Joseph protect us'.

While this was welcome news for the North, other news wasn't so good, with the ongoing threat of abortion provisions being forced on that jurisdiction by Westminster. **The View** (BBC One NI, Thursday) explored the issue in detail. At the start deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill was quoted, as if competing for the Euphemism of the Year award, describing abortion as "modern compassionate healthcare"! Journalist and activist Susan McKay was all for wide-ranging abortion measures – she maintained that it was obligatory under international law, human rights and UN requirements. It was good to see columnist



Nuala O'Loan.

with *The Irish Catholic* Baroness Nuala O'Loan speaking up for the rights of unborn children, and expressing her desire that babies with disabilities be protected – "in each pregnancy there's a little baby, someone has to speak up for them". She pointed out that it was only an unelected committee of individuals in the United Nations (UN) that was pushing this. Further she

drew attention to the 1,091 abortions carried out in the North last year – so abortion 'services' were already in existence. It wasn't enough for Ms McKay – e.g. she didn't want it confined to cases of 'fatal foetal abnormality' (remember how that was used as a Trojan Horse down here during our referendum). She said it was a misnomer to talk of 'fatal' abnormal-

ity as distinct from one that wasn't fatal – she said it was practically impossible for the medics to say whether 'the thing' was a fatal abnormality or not.

Ms McKay, I thought, was rather dismissive of Baroness O'Loan – at one point referring to her "private moral version" of what abortion is or isn't – sounded like a 'get back in your box' moment. She overegged it further – accusing Mrs O'Loan of talking in an "offensive" way about women and being "judgemental" it was, as they say, an accusation 'without evidence' – I certainly couldn't find a trace of it.

In the more political discussion that followed Jeffrey Donaldson (DUP) said he found that Ms McKay had a "very narrow view of human rights" – were we really saying that the unborn had no rights? Sadly, that's the approach taken by the courts and electorate down here. John O'Dowd of Sinn Féin was also in the running for the euphemism award as he referred to an abortion regime meeting "the highest standard of human rights"!

The issue was treated in a noteworthy way in two current drama series. New Irish thriller series *Smother* (RTÉ One, Sunday) started reasonably well with a tight enough plot and good acting (Dervla Kirwan stands out). By episode three it was wilting a bit, but I'll probably stay

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### EASTER VIGIL MASS

RTÉ One Holy Saturday April 3, 10.40pm

Mass from Knock Basilica, which has just been recognised by Pope Francis as an International Marian and Eucharistic Shrine.

#### EASTER SUNDAY MASS

RTE One Easter Sunday April 4, 10 pm

Easter Sunday Mass from La Carità, a Covid-19 hospital in Locarno, Switzerland, with commentary and translation by Fr Thomas McCarthy OP

#### OILITHREACHT

BBC Two (NI) Tuesday 10pm, Wednesday 10pm, Thursday 10pm

This three-part documentary series explores Lough Derg, a unique place of pilgrimage, and follows the experiences of young people who descend on the tiny Station Island over a summer.

with it at this stage. One plot thread features an arrogant bullying father who, despite making the pro-choice spiel, effectively forces his young daughter into having an abortion – with serious knock-on consequences for her wellbeing. In last Sunday's episode the baby's father apologised years later for not being there for his girlfriend, but again the pro-choice sentiment was evident.

**Unforgotten** (ITV, Monday) is back for a fourth series – with yet another historical crime being unearthed much to the discomfort of those originally involved. Nicola Walker and Sanjeev Bhaskar are always watchable in the lead roles, though the idea is getting a

bit formulaic at this stage. The drama has its 'woke' moments, though in one plot thread a married woman is contemplating abortion after a tentative diagnosis of disability. The husband is initially supportive of going through with the pregnancy but pulls back when he gets drawn in to the ongoing investigation. The mother is hugely conflicted and at one stage describes abortion as "this brutal really horrible thing". Now there's a frankness we don't get very often.

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Pat O'Kelly



# Music

## Remembering the unfailingly haunting Mirella Freni

While googling for something recently the name Mirella Freni popped up on screen. It rang a bell immediately as it recalled Wexford 1962. She was making her festival debut as Elvira in Bellini's *I Puritani*. I was attending my first Wexford production.

Getting there was not without difficulty. A car had to be borrowed. A travelling companion coaxed her mother to lend us her Austin 1100. It came with conditions. We were forbidden to drive on the Dublin/Bray road and our speed should not exceed 40mph. The first was obeyed. The second? Well, maybe not.

With her performance described as "exquisitely



Mirella Freni around 1970.

smooth, impeccably accurate and unfailingly haunting", Mirella Freni was a marvellous introduction to Wexford Festival Opera.

Directed by Peter Ebert and under Gunnar Stern's baton it made an indelible impression on me.

Ms Freni was born in Modena on February 27, 1935 just a few months before Luciano Pavarotti (1935-2007). Their mothers were working companions while Mirella's father was a barber and Luciano's dad a baker. Mr Freni and Mr Pavarotti were childhood friends, shared the same voice teacher for a while and often appeared together on stage.

Singing Puccini's *Un bel di* in a competition at the age of 12, one of the adjudicators – acclaimed tenor Beniamino Gigli – cautioned her to "go slowly". It was advice she

followed and later passed on to her own pupils. She initially studied with an uncle, Dante Arcelli, then with Ettore Campogalliani, one of Mr Pavarotti's tutors, and finally Leone Magiera, whom she later married.

Making her operatic debut as Micaëla in Bizet's *Carmen* on March 3, 1955 at the Teatro Municipale in Modena, Mirella Freni was an immediate success with public and critics alike. Following a period with the Netherlands Opera, she made her Glyndebourne debut as Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in 1960. Covent Garden came in 1961 with Freni as Nannetta in Verdi's *Falstaff* under the renowned conductor Carlo

Maria Giulini.

Mimi, a role she kept in her repertoire for 25 years, brought her to La Scala in a production by Herbert von Karajan following which she became one of his favourite singers and through him took on heavier roles including Desdemona (*Otello*), Elizabeth de Valois (*Don Carlos*) and Aida.

Ms Freni's New York Met debut was in 1965, again in *La bohème*, with one reviewer remarking how she used "voice and gesture to create a Mimi of ravishing femininity and grace. The voice is pure and fresh without seam from bottom to top". Mirella Freni remained on the Met's roster for almost 40 years.

Following her divorce from Leone Magiera in 1978, Ms Freni married Bulgarian bass Nicolai Ghiaurov (1929-2004) and extended her repertoire into Russian opera not least Tchaikovsky's *Tatiana* (*Eugene Onegin*), *Lisa* (*The Queen of Spades*) and *Joan of Arc* (*The Maid of Orleans*) – the role in which she concluded her long performing career at the Washington National Opera on April 11, 2005.

Mirella Freni died at her home in Modena on February 9, 2020 and, following tributes at the Teatro Comunale, her funeral Mass was celebrated in Modena's metropolitan cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta e San Geminiano.



# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Recent books in brief

**The Best of Benedict; An Irish Perspective**  
edited by Dualta Roughneen  
(One by One Press/  
Alive Newspaper,  
available from Knock  
Shrine Bookshop and  
Mayo Books, €12.99 plus  
postage)

Peter Costello

This is not, as the title might at first suggest, an anthology of the writings of the Pope emeritus. These now span many decades of theological investigation and social comment, which record the changing perspective of his mind since the 1950s.

Dualta Roughneen's book is in fact an anthology of writings about aspects of Benedict's thought by Irish writers, which gives it a special local interest, which many will respond to.

These pieces were put together by the editor (an engineer working in overseas development) over the course of two years.

Many admirers of Benedict will be delighted to have these in one convenient format. The editor hopes, too, that they will enable the press, which he sees as largely hostile to the pontiff emeritus, to gain a better and more balanced perspective on the man and the scholar.

**“Dualta Roughneen himself has gone some way in attempting a sketch of such a book from a positive and admiring viewpoint”**

The contributors are a very varied group. The most eminent is Fr Vincent Twomey SVD, who studied with Prof.

Ratzinger. His is certainly a piece that will be read with deep interest.

But other pieces, such as that by John Waters, may need to be approached with more caution.

### Highlights

The book highlights the fact that Benedict has passed through the hands of biographers, with the usual confusing results; but what is needed by readers worldwide is an account of his thought which, as I say, has changed over the years, by a qualified theologian. This, however, would be such a formidable task that those most qualified to write it may be reluctant to take up the challenge.

**“The book highlights the fact that Benedict has passed through the hands of biographers, with the usual confusing results”**

Dualta Roughneen himself has gone some way in attempting a sketch of such a book from a positive and admiring viewpoint in *The Pope and the World: The thoughts of Pope Benedict* (Cambridge Scholars, €88.59), which is due to be released in the coming months. This upcoming book should perhaps be seen as a continuation of the current anthology, but in a more formal and effective way, more focused on what Benedict thinks than what his admirers think he thinks, or what they think themselves.

This book, meanwhile, provides a broad perspective on the impact Benedict made and the challenges he posed to the thought of the present day.

## Hearing the voice of God in a world that seems silent

**The Word is Very Near You**

by Fr Wilfrid Stinissen

OCD  
(Ignatius Press  
£12.50/€12.00)

Ruadhán Jones

**W**e all want a personal relationship with God. But that seems very difficult when, more often than not, he doesn't speak to us in prayer. He may prompt or console, but verbal communication or physical contact - two essential components to any relationship - appear to be lacking.

That needn't be the case, however, as Carmelite Fr Wilfrid Stinissen shows in his short introduction to reading the Bible, *The Word is Very Near You*. The title summarises the theme of the book - the Word, Christ, is very near to you, waiting for the type of verbal communication which we so often desire.

### Bible

This book is an excellent way to get into the Bible. And 'get-

ting into it' is the operative phrase. Fr Stinissen, without pouring scorn, suggests that objective readings of the Bible, either as narrative, as historical account, as social or as moral guide, only scratch the surface. We should not read the scriptures as though we are journalists, observers who are not engaged in stories.

**“The way we should read the Bible is as a personal meeting with God in his Word”**

The way we should read the Bible is as a personal meeting with God in his Word. This personal reading of the Gospel is called *lectio divina*, divine reading. This will be familiar to many of you already. It is the practice of reading and meditating on texts from the Bible, typically the Gospels. Most often, it is a three-stage process:

reading (*lectio*); meditation (*meditatio*); and prayer (*oratio*).

Repetition is the key, re-reading a text multiple times, as it requires us to delve into the words to come up with pearls that catch our eye. We pause with them for as long as the lustre lasts and then dive in again. Fr Stinissen recommends speaking to yourself quietly whatever words strike you most. Then pray over them until you have exhausted their meaning. Take a new word or phrase and begin again.

### Technique

But that is just the technique. The desired result is that, by reading the Bible with our interior eye - that is, our heart - we communicate with God *cor ad cor*, heart to heart. It is not an intellectual process, though it involves our minds; it is not a physical one, though it involves our bodies; it is, ultimately, a spiritual one. It is union with

God in Faith, 'the crystalline fount' as St John of the Cross calls it. By faith, in its clarity, we best appreciate God; and it is a fount of spiritual blessings from which we can draw.

The book is less than 140 pages long, and the print is big at that. There are six chapters and each of these are broken down into another six or seven sections, the longest no more than six pages. Its style is pastoral and Fr Stinissen admits from the start that he is not a biblical scholar.

He was born in Belgium, where he joined the Carmelite Order in 1944. In 1967 he was sent to Sweden to co-found a small contemplative community, and the spirit of contemplation infuses the book, drawing liberally from the writing of mystics and saints to illustrate his points.

All this is to say, it is a book for the layman, humble, but by no means shallow. I certainly found myself better off by the end..

**“The desired result is that, by reading the Bible with our interior eye - that is, our heart - we communicate with God *cor ad cor*, heart to heart”**



Pope Benedict writing in his study



Fr Wilfrid Stinissen

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

# Discovering 'the Peace of God' in the modern world

*Finding the Peacemakers: A journey of faith from the mines of Chile to the deserts of the Middle East*

by Dan Morrice  
(Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99)

**Anthony Redmond**

**T**here is so much in this truly extraordinary book, and it covers so much ground and so many subjects, that I find it difficult to know where to begin discussing it. The author travels extensively in search of himself and of people who have made a positive impact on the lives of others.

He calls them 'peacemakers'. He interviews some of the brave miners who miraculously survived being trapped in a mine in Chile in 2010, and how their lives have changed all who heard their amazing story.

He talks to a wonderful man from Syria, Karim, who does extraordinary work in Greece helping refugees who come from the horrors of Syria. He visits the families of the 21 young men who were beheaded by Islamic State on a beach in Libya.

He travels to Jerusalem and stands on the Mount of Olives to watch the sunset over the Old City. He talks of his impression of the Temple Mount and the gold roof of the Dome of the Rock as it shimmers in the last rays of sunlight. Dan Morrice is a great writer.

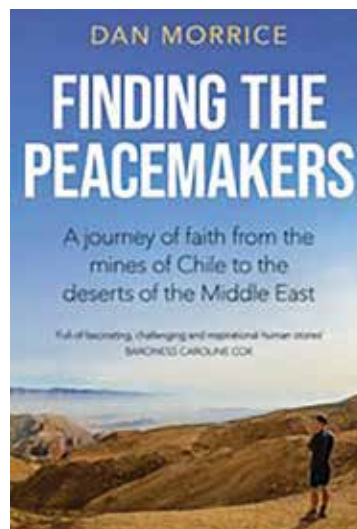
**“In discussing the resurrection and its effect on Jesus' disciples, Dan Morrice talks about their terror after the crucifixion”**

I will remember the rescue of the 33 Chilean miners who were trapped in a mine for 69 days over 2,000 feet below the surface back in 2010. The entire world was gripped by the superhuman effort to rescue them. Words cannot express the relief and joy when all 33 were brought safely to the surface. It was nothing short of a miracle.

## Miner

One miner, Jose Henriquez, had worked in the mine for 30 years and he was a deeply-religious man with a strong faith in God. He gathered the trapped miners and encouraged them to pray and he helped them to remain calm in the terrible situation.

Dan Morrice went to interview him for this book. He writes: “Jose



shared the key to their unity. In their daily prayers, the men would confess their sins and ask God for forgiveness, not just for past regrets, but also for moments of fracture in the mine. 'I would call them back to one another, make them shake hands, give one another a hug and request to be forgiven. Praying reconciled them to one another.'"

## Family

The families of the miners gathered close to the mine praying and comforting one another together with the world's media. The rescuers worked around the clock trying to drill down to the trapped miners. At any moment the huge rocks blocking their escape could have crashed down on top of them.

After 17 days the drill that was working its way down to the miners came back up and a torn and dirt covered note was found attached to it which read, "We are all well, the thirty-three."

Dan Morrice writes: "The sheer rawness of human emotion was captured by the cameras in a moment of unhinged euphoria. Grown men dropped to the sand weeping with joy, drilling crews embraced each other like brothers returning from battle, technicians raced down the hill to the waiting families who were camped out in the desert, and the shock of beautiful news rippled out to the watching world. Against all the odds, the lost had been found."

It was 69 days before they finally escaped the terrifying mine. They all said that they felt God's caring presence with them all the time and they referred to themselves as the "34 miners". Jesus was the 34th miner.

The author goes on separately to discuss the persecution of Christians in the world. He writes: "The grow-

ing persecution of Christians across the globe has long been hidden in the media, but now it seems it's getting harder to avoid".

Last year, 245 million Christians experienced 'high levels' of persecution, and eleven Christians are killed for their faith every day...*The Spectator* in London called it: "The unreported catastrophe of our time", and former Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sachs, told the House of Lords that the persecution of Christians across the world is a "crime against humanity", before adding, "I'm appalled at the lack of protest it has evoked".

We are reminded of the horror of Islamic State and its sheer sadism and savagery. The author talks about the cold-blooded murder of 21 Egyptian workers on a beach in Libya, 20 of them Coptic Christians and one Christian worker with them from Ghana. He interviewed their families who are all devout Christians devoid of hatred or feelings of revenge.

**“He travels to Jerusalem and stands on the Mount of Olives to watch the sunset over the Old City”**

They rightly regard those murdered for their faith as martyrs. The workers were asked by the Islamists to renounce their Christian faith but they all refused. As they were beheaded they each uttered the words, "Ya Rabbi Yassou! Oh, my Lord Jesus". What extraordinary heroism and courage.

## Resurrection

In discussing the resurrection and its effect on Jesus' disciples, Dan Morrice talks about their terror after the crucifixion.

What was it that totally changed and inspired the disciples to be willing to give up their lives to proclaim the Gospels and Jesus' message? He quotes the writer, Philip Yancy on the effect of Jesus post-resurrection on the disciples: "The eleven men who had deserted him at death now went to martyrs' graves avowing their faith in a resurrected Christ... This remarkable sequence of transformation offers the most convincing evidence for the resurrection. What else explains the whiplash change in men known for their cowardice and instability?"

This is quite simply a fascinating, absorbing, and spiritually uplifting book.

**“We are reminded of the horror of Islamic State and its sheer sadism and savagery”**

## A word in season

**Peter Costello**

Easter was never 'a normal day'.

Over the years in these pages we have often stressed the need to use words properly as an aid to clear thinking and so to a better understanding of things. Over recent days I have been struck by the way so many people speak of longing for 'a normal Easter.'

We know what they mean: eggs, chocolates, rabbits, family gatherings, the family at Mass in Church...and so on.

Yet this is to ignore that Easter was never a normal day. It has always been a quite abnormal day,

and was seen that way by the very first Christians, as the narratives in the four Gospels suggest.

Perhaps a little while should be found to read through these pages on Easter, whatever else one chooses to do.

They will remind everyone how strange it seemed at the time. And that strangeness is worth thinking about. No: the first Easter was not an ordinary day at all.

Perhaps 'abnormal' was not the word I was looking for above; it might have been better to say it was for everyone then and now quite out of the ordinary. It was and is, in fact, an 'extra-ordinary' day.



The empty tomb.

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Dear Heart of Jesus,  
In the past I have asked for many favours.

This time I ask for a special one. (mention here)

Take it, dear Heart of Jesus, and place it within your own broken

Heart where your Father sees it.

Then, in his merciful eyes, it will become your favour, not mine. Amen.

Say this prayer for three days.

J.O.S.

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**trócaire**

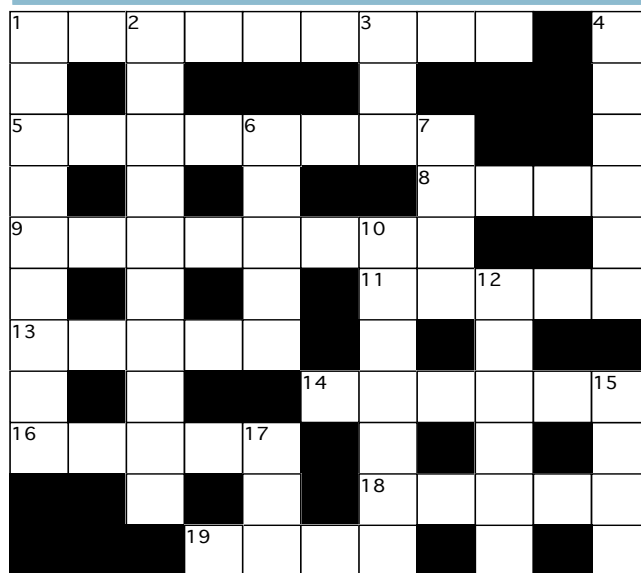
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One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives.

Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

## Crossword Junior

Gordius 376



### Across

- 1 Lots of them fall from the sky on a showery day (9)
- 5 Press (8)
- 8 Unlock (4)
- 9 A bird that has not yet flown from its home (8)
- 11 A written composition (5)
- 13 \_\_\_\_\_ Eastwood is a Hollywood actor and director (5)
- 14 A person who uses a bow and arrow (6)
- 16 Travels like a ball or a wheel (5)
- 18 Clean hard with a brush (5)
- 19 Make something with nee-

### dles and wool (4)

### Down

- 1 It's driven in Formula One (6,3)
- 2 "That's \_\_\_\_\_, it can't be done" (10)
- 3 Row a boat using this (3)
- 4 This river enters the sea at Wexford town (6)
- 5 A baby bird that will hunt by night (5)
- 7 What puppies grow up to be (4)
- 10 Closest (7)
- 12 It's in Africa - the world's largest desert (6)
- 15 Takes something by force (4)
- 17 Your boy-child (3)

## SOLUTIONS, MARCH 25

GORDIUS NO. 500

**Across** — 1 Fib 3 Swallow dive 8 Verity 9 Drill bit 10 Heavy 11 Heeds 13 Peals 16 Chicken satay 20 Scull 21 Druid 23 Cycle 24 Hiawatha 25 Tivoli 26 Dead as a dodo 27 Fur

**Down** — 1 Five hundred 2 Barnacle 4 Lady Day 5 Welsh dresser 6 Imbued 7 Eat 12 Saint Helier 13 Press 14 Sahel 17 Knock-off 18 Custard 19 Guyana 22 Drama 23 Chico 24 Hod

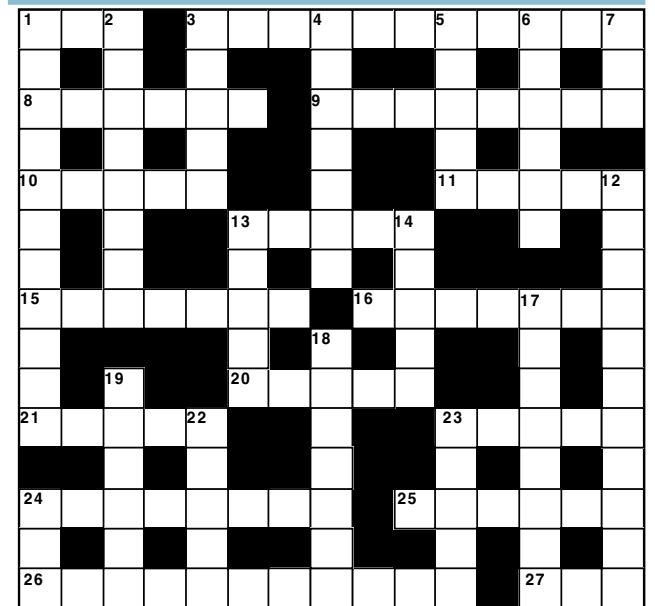
CHILDREN'S No. 375

**Across** — 1 Groceries 6 Cue 7 Ladies 9 Island 12 Carrot 14 Ape 15 Pets 17 Nicer 19 Big 20 Ought 22 Rang 23 Under 24 Spindle

**Down** — 1 Golf clubs 2 Ordering 3 Ewe 4 Scrape 5 Mend 8 Sit 10 Lap 11 Net 13 Orchard 16 Saturn 18 Rogue 21 Gods

## Crossword

Gordius 501



### Across

- 1 Enjoyment (3)
- 3 Relaxing space - or cartoon-ist's work chamber? (7-4)
- 8 Take for granted (6)
- 9 Deem deer to have scattered, and thereby saved (8)
- 10 Below (5)
- 11 Gallic brilliance (5)
- 13 Throw recklessly (5)
- 15 Somehow make a dime off feudal property (7)
- 16 Large, flat serving dish (7)
- 20 Prone to weeping (5)
- 21 County of Trim surroundings! (5)
- 23 British coppers identify the former US Vice-President (5)
- 24 & 25 Orison adopted by Alcoholics Anonymous and others (8,6)
- 26 Without any added sugar (11)
- 27 Container for ashes (3)

### Down

- 1 Main movie (7,4)
- 2 Vertical fall - into a disreputable place for hooters? (8)
- 3 Have reservations (5)

### 4 Military vessel (7)

- 5 Aquatic bird (5)
- 6 It's decorative and gold-colored, this part of the Minor Moluccas (6)
- 7 Member of a 1960's scooter-riding subculture (3)
- 12 Pyramid of freshly treated horn (11)
- 13 Hoar or rime (5)
- 14 Ravine (5)
- 17 Expression of gratitude (5,3)
- 18 Get a vehicle to the embankment? That's a bit hairy, on the face of it! (3,4)
- 19 Chennai was once called this by crazy artists (6)
- 22 From here (5)
- 23 Put a new point on a pencil (5)
- 24 Historic French coin (3)

## Sudoku Corner

376

### Easy

7	2		9					3
	9	8		2			6	4
		6	3			2	9	
			1		8	6		5
	8						1	
6		1	5		2			
	3	5			1	4		
4	1			6		5	7	
8					9		2	1

### Hard

4		3		9			8	
					2			
	6	9	7	3		5		
				2			5	4
			5		6			
3	5			4				
		7		8	3	6	9	
			2					
	3			6		1		5

## Last week's Easy 375

6	2	1	5	9	4	3	7	8
7	3	4	6	8	2	5	1	9
9	8	5	1	3	7	4	6	2
8	1	9	3	2	6	7	4	5
2	6	7	9	4	5	8	3	1
4	5	3	8	7	1	9	2	6
1	9	6	7	5	3	2	8	4
3	4	8	2	6	9	1	5	7
5	7	2	4	1	8	6	9	3

## Last week's Hard 375

4	7	9	6	8	5	1	3	2
6	2	8	1	7	3	9	4	5
5	1	3	2	4	9	7	6	8
1	6	4	8	9	7	5	2	3
9	3	7	4	5	2	8	1	6
2	8	5	3	6	1	4	7	9
8	5	6	7	2	4	3	9	1
7	9	1	5	3	6	2	8	4
3	4	2	9	1	8	6	5	7

## Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# In Easter we see the promise of a 'risen people'

**A 'PREGNANT PAUSE'** is supposed to be one of the best tools in the armoury of a public speaker. In my 37 years of preaching, I have used it on only one occasion — on an Easter Sunday morning. It was amazingly effective.

Easter Sunday is a hard day for the preacher. In Holy Week, up to four other homilies have to be prepared. Priests in one-priest parishes — most of us now — know the routine. First there's Palm Sunday, for which a short homily is suggested in the Missal. This of course requires a lot more preparation than a long one; anyone can talk all day, but making a valuable point briefly requires effort.

After Palm Sunday comes the Triduum, which requires at least a homily a day; for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Vigil. Some might use the same homily at Vigil and morning Masses, but those two celebrations feel very different.

## Trouble

The trouble is that Easter Sunday requires an interesting few words, even better than normal. The (pre-pandemic) audience was often considerable, with people who hadn't been seen since Christmas usually making an appearance. And these,



The Resurrection is depicted in a painting by Laura James.

no less than those who are at every ceremony, deserved to be nourished, no matter how un-enthusiastic the homilist might feel.

Preachers in the diocese to which I am attached (Cork and Ross) have one slight advantage to counter those downsides. The wise pastors who preceded us insisted that the Easter Sunday collection went to the priest, not just the Easter offerings envelopes. This does add a slightly unworthy

incentive to the priest to make that little bit of extra effort, knowing that the people whose envelope lies safely on the mantelpiece at home might still be encouraged to impetuously show Easter generosity to the poor exhausted preacher.

## Easter Sunday

Which brings me to the pregnant pause, and my effective use thereof. That Easter Sunday, I spoke of my experience of visiting graves. One classmate of mine died in a February, so on the following Easter Sunday I visited his grave and found it signalling Easter hope. Not only was it bedecked with flowers, but a butterfly fluttered nearby, to banish all doubts.

My mother also died in the early part of the year. The following

Easter Sunday I visited her grave, expecting a similar experience. But instead (pregnant pause), I felt (another pregnant pause) NOTHING. Gasps were heard. Had I lost faith? Was a dispiriting confession of agnosticism about to be made? A long pregnant pause followed, during which, I was told afterwards, many people never heard the church so silent.

The words that came to me at her graveside were from that morning's Gospel: "Why search among the dead for someone who is alive?...She is not here, she has risen."

That's our Easter faith in a nutshell. If it's true for Jesus, it's the same for all, for you and me too. When you visit the grave of someone you love this Easter, remember it. And have a Happy Easter!

● I'm grateful to the readers who contacted me who share my unease with the 'Act of Spiritual Communion', now often included in Masses. From Rome came words of approval also, and the reminder that Holy Communion is of its very nature spiritual, "signs of invisible grace" being the phrase used. I was also informed that Dominicans with good theology would say that St Thomas would object to the actual prayer often used. Whether it's St Thomas Aquinas or Thomas the Apostle, I don't know and didn't ask — I didn't want to push my luck. A word of affirmation is always welcome!

## The power of the passed

I wrote about my great grand-uncle here last time; he was parish priest where I now serve, many years ago. One of his successors "took the feet off him", as the people here say. This successor was a great fan of straight graveyard paths, and wasn't best pleased that old Fr Bernard's grave protruded. So he decided that radical action was required, and re-directed the path over the end of the dead priest's grave. It didn't go down well, so, sheepishly, the feet had to be restored. And he learned that dead priests sometimes have more power than live ones...



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**It costs approximately €100 a month (€1,200 a year) to feed, clothe and educate a student for the priesthood**

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