

The Irish Catholic

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Pilgrims flock to Bethlehem to celebrate first post-Covid Christmas

Chai Brady and Ruadhán Jones

Thousands of pilgrims have flocked to Bethlehem to visit the birthplace of Christ to celebrate Christmas for the first time post-Covid after pandemic restrictions meant the holy city was enveloped in silence during the normally festive period.

Pilgrims have travelled from all over the world to venerate the spot where Jesus was born, with local Christians saying it has given a huge boost to morale after two Christmases without pilgrims.

Most local Christians work in services for pilgrims and during Covid-19 were without work or an opportunity to earn an income.

David Tabash, a local Christian shopkeeper, told *The Irish Catholic* that the arrival of pilgrims for Christmas has given a great boost to local Christians and that hotels are nearly full and Christian businesses are doing well.

"From nothing to what we see, it is more than we expected," he said.

"What we say is that God is good, he blessed us by the end of the year, Christmas, and we hope this continues."

"We are hearing good news for 2023, that everything is going to pick up step by step, back to

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Gold, frankincense and Christmas cheer...



Cealan, Gerrard and Cian from P3 in St Eithne's Primary School, Derry, starred as a smiling trio of wise men in their class's nativity play.

ROSEMARY CONLEY

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A year dominated by war and problems walking PAGE 27



YOUR FAITH

90 days to become a better man PAGES 29-30



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Pilgrims flock to Bethlehem to celebrate first post-Covid Christmas

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normal," Mr Tabash said.

He said that the pilgrims are "giving hope back to Christians and we're trying to show everyone that it's the experience of a lifetime to come and visit the Holy Land, especially where Jesus was born".

Louis Michel, a Christian shopkeeper and tour guide well known to pilgrims who have travelled to the Holy Land with *The Irish Catholic* said that the atmosphere of the city is upbeat this Christmas.

"For two years there was nothing at all, now people are coming back for Christmas - maybe 10,000 people are expected to come for

Christmas," he said.

Pilgrims have been away for nearly three years and are now returning to the Holy Land to celebrate Christmas, he said. "We are looking forward to see those tourists returning to Bethlehem. It's a great atmosphere.

"For two years we stayed at home, we had nothing, we didn't have any support from the government. Now we're starting to build ourselves up," Mr Michel said.

During the pandemic, most people were without the opportunity to work or earn a living so were reliant on Church-run charities.

Yousef Khalil said it will also be a joy for local Catholics to join with pilgrims for Christmas Mass. "We feel

more together, and this gives us a warm feeling spiritually. It is part of our culture. We can't be alone," he said.

"Jesus, who was born here, came to bring us together. It is sad to see the Christian community shrinking, but at the same time we have hope."

Mr Khalil urged pilgrims not to just visit the churches and holy shrines, but to also make an effort to meet the "living stones," or the people.

"Both are important here," he said.

Until recent decades Christians were the majority of residents in Bethlehem. However, now only about 15% of residents are Christian.

See Page 6.

Christmas is an invitation to friendship with God

There are a few books that I read and re-read almost every year. Amongst them is the *Jesus of Nazareth* trilogy written by Pope Benedict XVI. If you haven't come across them, Christmas might provide some free time to pick them up and have a read.

In the pages, the former Pontiff presents a compelling portrait of Jesus that is inviting, accessible and reflective.

The work is profound, and yet simple: and on every page one senses that Benedict was at pains to point out what really becomes his central message: that the entire work of the Christian life is nothing more than cultivating friendship with God.

This can be difficult if we have an image of God who is far off – a distant scold waiting to chastise us when we do something that is wrong or don't live up to a standard that we have set ourselves.

Mercy

The antidote to this type of thinking is surely the proclamation of mercy – and God knows our world needs mercy as much as we need it in our own lives.

If someone who had never heard the story of Jesus were to ask any of us about his origins, we would, I suspect, begin with the story of his birth in Bethlehem. It's a story



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



Pope Francis visits the nativity scene during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican on December 7. Photo: CNS

that we're all familiar with from childhood.

In schools and parish halls across the country, countless generations of Irish children have told and re-told the story in nativity plays.

But, amidst the carols and candles, the presents and parties, there is a awesome, but simple truth at the centre of Christmas that can sometimes escape us in the midst of the hustle and bustle: God became man.

“The pandemic has been tough on everyone, but mercifully now for the most part behind us”

It's a dynamic story with a profound meaning: for the religious believer, Christmas transforms everything. It is a moment in human history that, in the humility of a little baby, God, the Creator of the world, entered into human history.

I love the story of the Magi visiting from the East, expecting to see a king clothed in grandeur and surrounded by a royal court. What they encounter, instead, is a baby laid in a manger, the child of poor people. The Christmas story contrasts the noisy and ostentatious power of this world with the defenceless power of love in a little baby, for who can fail to be moved by the unconditional love of a baby? Or the story of the Holy Family forced to flee as

refugees to Egypt far from the land of their birth?

But, unless Christ is born and reborn in the cradle of our heart, the nativity narrative from a stable or a cave on the outskirts of Bethlehem some 2,000 years ago remains little more than a beautiful story.

Many people will not have the Christmas they intended this year. The pandemic has been tough on everyone, but mercifully now for the most part behind us.

Scarce

But with the cost-of-living crisis, money is scarce again for many people. For others, it was always scarce. In many homes, cherished companions are no longer with us.

But isn't there hope in the vulnerability of the

Christmas story? For it is not a story of pure sentiment: it is a story of struggle. The fear of the young woman Mary found to be with child outside of marriage; the bewilderment of Joseph; the newborn child with only a manger for a bed. This new family forced to flee as asylum seekers into Egypt far from their home and families. This is the message of Christmas: a message of a God who wants to be our friend, one who is called 'Emmanuel' – a word which means 'God-is-with-us'.

Happy Christmas.

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Bishops praise bravery of Irish peacekeeper killed in Lebanon

Chai Brady

Ireland's bishops have offered their sympathy following the killing of an Irish UN peacekeeper in Lebanon last week.

On behalf of the Irish bishops' conference, Archbishop Eamon Martin of Armagh and Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin said it was a "tragic event".

It is the first time in more than 20 years an Irish soldier has died on the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The incident happened in Al-Aqbiyeh. The armoured SUV Private Rooney was travelling in was shot at, stopped and surrounded by locals.

The archbishops said: "Private Seán Rooney was serving with the 121st Infantry Battalion in the cause of world peace. Private Rooney's bravery, honour and commitment to

peace will never be forgotten. We offer our prayers for the happy repose of Private Rooney's soul, and for peace and consolation of his family, loved ones and to the wider community of the Defence Forces. We also remember in our prayers the injured Private Shane Kearney and his family at this time."

Tragic event

"This tragic event, coming as it does so close to Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace, reminds all of us of the work and sacrifices that our Defence Forces, and their families, are asked to make on our behalf to promote peace and reconciliation in our world," they said.

Bishop Alan McGuckian of Raphoe diocese issued a separate statement saying the soldier made the "supreme sacrifice and has given his life in service of

peace and reconciliation in our troubled world".

"His tragic death reminds us of the great service and sacrifice that the men and women of our Defence Forces make in their work of promoting peace and reconciliation in our world, often in the face of great danger to themselves," Bishop McGuckian said.

The bishop described Private Rooney's death as a "terrible blow" to his family and the community.

"On behalf of myself and the people of the diocese I offer our deepest sympathies. We pray that Seán's loved ones get the strength, comfort and hope that they need in this devastating time," he said.

The 24-year-old, originally from Newtowncunningham in Co. Donegal but grew up in Killeagh, Dundalk, was due to be married next year.

Christmas cards associated with better mental health, study shows

Ruadhán Jones

Sending Christmas cards is associated with better mental health, especially among Christians, a study from the University of Limerick has shown.

The study found that depressed people were less likely to send Christmas cards than non-depressed people.

Sending Christmas cards is "more than just the exchange of pleasantries and good wishes over the festive season", one of the lead researchers said.

The research, led by Prof. Stephen Gallagher, director of the Study of Anxiety Stress and Health Lab at UL, was published in the journal *Cogent Psychology*.

Insight

Prof. Gallagher and colleagues in the study were curious to see if the sending of Christmas cards offered any insight into the sender.

"We found that approximately 55% of non-depressed people reported 'always' sending Christmas cards, compared to 46% of those with depression," the UL professor said.

The researchers suggested that not sending a Christmas card "might be

indicative of lower mood" and encouraged family and friends to "check in on a loved one, friend or colleague who doesn't send us that card where ordinarily they would've is a wise and kind thing to do.

"Mentioning that you missed receiving their card and asking if there is anything that is troubling and offering to listen may be the best Christmas gift you can give someone," the study says.

The Board of Trustees of Mater Dei Academy is seeking to appoint a

Principal Teacher



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Sharing the crib with Cork...



Leah Braham, Regina Mundi College, Aoife O'Sullivan, Christ King Secondary School and Orla Cullinane, Christ King Secondary School, brought Christmas cheer to Cork's iconic Share crib lights on Patrick St. Almost all of Cork's fifth year students have been taking part in this year's Share collection in aid of the elderly. Visit sharecork.org to donate. Photo: Gerard McCarthy.

A LASTING GIFT OF A SMILE THIS CHRISTMAS CAN
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Arlyn was born with a cleft lip, but after receiving surgery during an Operation Smile medical mission, she's now a happy child with a brighter future. Her mother Dominga is filled with gratitude.

"I pray to God that he will help those who helped me and my child."



Arlyn, Philippines

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Public safety top priority before giving prisoner Christmas release, Govt says after Pope plea

Chai Brady

Following Pope Francis' call to release prisoners on Christmas the Department of Justice said Irish prisons are committed to treating "everyone with dignity and respect".

The Pope asked governments around the world – including Ireland – last week to give prisoners "a gesture of clemency" as communities prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

He asked for leniency to "those of our brothers and sisters deprived of their liberty whom they deem fit to benefit from such a measure,

so that this time marked by tensions, injustices, and conflicts may be opened to the grace that comes from the Lord".

In a statement to *The Irish Catholic* from a Department of Justice spokesperson, in response to the Pope's message, they said that "significant investment is made to ensure that services and supports provided to prisoners are focused on rehabilitation and on supporting reintegration into society, including through education, counselling and addiction treatment".

They continued: "All prisoners with a sentence

to which remission applies qualify for one quarter remission on their sentence on the basis of good behaviour. In addition, prisoners who have engaged in authorised structured activity may apply to the Minister for Justice, to receive enhanced remission of greater than one quarter, but not more than one third, of their sentence."

The spokesperson said that prisoners can apply for a period of temporary release over the Christmas period and periods of temporary release can be granted for varying durations, from a number of hours to a number of days, in accordance with

the Criminal Justice Act 1960.

"The overriding concern when considering such applications is the safety of the public. In addition to compassionate and humane considerations, other criteria taken into account include the nature and gravity of the offence, length of sentence served to date, prior record on temporary release, behaviour while in custody and previous criminal history," they said.

"All releases are subject to stringent conditions and any offender who breaks these conditions may be arrested and returned immediately to prison by the gardaí."

They added that Article 13.6 of the Constitution provides that the right to pardon is vested in the President, and in accordance with Article 13.9 this right "is exercisable only on the advice of the Government. A statutory scheme governing pardons is contained in Section 7 of the Criminal Procedure Act 1993".

Last week veteran former prison chaplain Sr Imelda Wickham PBVM, who worked with prisoners for two decades, welcomed the Pope's message, saying he has consistently raised the issue of imprisonment and is calling "all of us to recognise

the dignity and humanity of each person".

"There are many, many people in prison today who could actually be with their families during Christmas time and it's not facilitated. I think he's asking us to look at ways you could show clemency, that you could show mercy. It's also recognising their dignity, their human needs and their humanity."

"Christmas is a very, very difficult time for people in prison, I've worked in prison on Christmas days, it is a very poignant day. A joyous day in one sense but also a very, very sad day," she said.

NI Churches invited to apply for energy relief

Ruadhán Jones

Churches in the North have been invited to apply for a relief scheme aimed at combatting the energy crisis.

The North's Department for the Economy told *The Irish*

Catholic that churches are eligible for the Energy Bill Relief Scheme, along with businesses, voluntary and public sector organisations.

"The Energy Bill Relief Scheme is being run by the Department for Business,

Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and is now live with discount being applied to all non-domestic consumers electricity and natural gas tariffs until March 31, 2023, after which time it will be reviewed," a spokesperson for

the department said.

The department didn't confirm when the payments would be received, although payments to individual houses have been delayed until after Christmas.

In the South, churches are not one of the qualifying businesses covered by a scheme

rolled out to businesses and charities.

A number of parishes have criticised the Government's refusal to offer support to churches in the South.

However, the Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme (TBESS) allows for churches to claim up to 40% of

the increases in their energy bills where facilities like parish halls are used for community services.

The Irish Catholic understands that some dioceses have asked parishes to draw up claims and the diocese will make a joint submission on behalf of all parishes.

Disability rights campaigner Heidi Crowter makes BBC's '100 women' list

Jason Osborne

Pro-life advocate in the UK Heidi Crowter has been listed as one of the BBC's '100 women of 2022', in what was a big year for the 27-year-old.

A woman with Down's syndrome, Ms Crowter has worked in recent years to challenge England's abortion law which permits abortion up to 24 weeks, but allows unborn babies with a disability, including Down's syndrome, to be

aborted up to birth.

She took the UK government to court over the legislation which allows babies with Down's syndrome to be aborted up until birth, saying it was discriminatory.

The High Court ruled against her challenge, saying the law aims to strike a balance between the rights of the unborn child and of women.

In late November, Ms Crowter lost her appeal, but said she and her team plan to "keep fighting" and take the case to the Supreme Court.

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Showing Concern this Christmas...



CBS Kilkenny's Concern 'fasters', who started fasting from 6pm the night before, are pictured before heading for a lovely meal, December 14. They are pictured with Ms Evison, who organises the student response every year.

Is 'A Christmas Carol' Christian? Slightly!



Mary Kenny

Charles Dickens is sometimes described as having 'invented' our modern Christmas with his story *A Christmas Carol*. His compelling tale of the money-grubbing Ebenezer Scrooge – Dickens was a genius at his characters' names – and his loathing for Christmas, pitted against the poor but loving family, the Cratchits, merrily celebrating the Saviour's birth – became the Christmas fable of all time.

Dickens invokes the holly and the ivy, the merriment and the family games, and carollers singing: "God rest ye merry, gentlemen/Let nothing you dismay." Written in 1843 (when the author was broke), it aligned neatly with the launch of the Christmas card, and the Christmas tree brought from Germany by Queen Victoria's German husband, Albert.

Christian fable

A Christmas Carol is seen as a Christian fable, since Scrooge is visited by spirits, including his old business-partner Marley, showing him the error of his ways: he changes, finds redemption, and becomes a reformed character.

But is *A Christmas Carol* really Christian? It obviously invokes Christian, even Catholic, themes. Dickens refers, in his text, to the ghost of Hamlet, always seen as a Catholic motif in Shakespeare – being an allusion to purgatory, which Protestants rejected. He has evidently based Marley's ghost on Hamlet's father: Marley is condemned to walk the earth carrying his terrible chains and fetters, these being emblematic of the sins of his earthly days.

But Dickens is more general – sometimes vaguely general – than specific in his Christian themes. He only quotes two lines from "God rest ye merry, gentlemen" and doesn't provide the follow up: "Remember Christ our Saviour/Was born on Christmas Day/To save us all from Satan's pow'r/When we were gone astray."

Scrooge's nephew makes a

reference to the Christian purpose of Christmas but again, in a sidelong kind of way, saying he always celebrates Christmas time "apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that – as a good time, a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time".

"Humbug!" is what Scrooge replies to these commentaries, reminding his nephew that he is "poor enough" not to indulge in such merrymaking.

"A Christmas Carol is seen as a Christian fable, since Scrooge is visited by spirits, including his old business-partner Marley"

The spirits of Christmas past, present and future come to haunt Scrooge, and in a pre-Freudian note, Dickens implies that the miser's mean character was rooted in a lonely childhood. The scenes are terrifyingly well described, and through this "lived experience", and the visions he is shown, Scrooge comes to see the wrong values he has chosen.

It is the image of Tiny Tim, the crippled child, so bravely going to church carried on his father's back, that is the clincher for old Ebenezer. He will change. He will exercise the virtues of Christian charity. He will be kind and amiable to all.

Tiny Tim is the most directly religious character in the story, saying that "he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see".

A Christmas Carol draws essentially on Christian ideas. Marley's ghost illuminates the theme that "we reap as we sow". "I wear the chain I forged in life," he tells Scrooge. "I made it link by link and yard by yard."

The "star that led the wise men" to a poor abode is also suggested as a parallel to the



A scene from *A Christmas Carol*, illustration by George Alfred Williams.

Cratchits' modest household. "The invisible world," is very much present, and the legend of St Dunstan is mentioned (St Dunstan was said to have nailed a horseshoe to the devil's cloven hoof: the devil promised never afterwards to enter a household where a horseshoe hung).

Imagery

But while he draws on Christian themes and imagery, Dickens is careful not to seem too religious. He was aiming at a broad audience, many of whom wouldn't have had that much religious education.

A deeper sub-text to *A Christmas Carol* might be seen as a critique of the Protestant work ethic, which, as the German sociologist Max Weber later said, sought to discourage holidaying and celebrations among the people: the saints' days marked as public holidays in Continental Europe were regarded as "skiving". Even bank holidays for working people didn't start in the UK until 1871. Scrooge – and Marley – are the extreme embodiment of those who saw work as the highest virtue: but this also forged tormenting chains.



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Diversity in old Ireland

Yes, there was 'diversity' in old Ireland, back in the day. My uncle and aunt used to wish some people 'Compliments of the season', if they didn't mark Christmas – such as Orthodox Jews,

or Protestants like Baptists and Plymouth Brethren. It's a nice old-fashioned phrase which covers all eventualities.

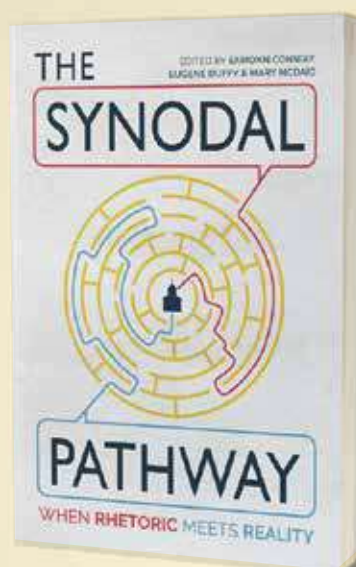
But "Merry Christmas" is still the most fitting of all

seasonal greetings, surely, celebrating with optimism and joy the feast of the Nativity. So – Merry Christmas! (And in Tiny Tim's words: "God bless us every one!")

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'We Christians are staying here in Bethlehem, hoping for peace'



Pilgrims are breathing fresh life into the city of Christ's birth, writes **Judith Sudilovsky**

On the third Sunday of Advent the pews of St Catherine's Church were overflowing, with families and young children, teenagers and older parishioners attending Mass in anticipation of Christmas.

"We go out, we go shopping, we have places where we eat out, we have a social life, we have fun"

Pilgrim groups waited outside in the courtyard and, in the Church of Nativity, adjacent to the parish church, more pilgrim groups gathered along the stairs leading to the grotto marking the place of Jesus' birth, as Armenian clergy celebrated their liturgy.

Despite an uptick in violence between the Israeli army and Palestinians in the northern West Bank, the pre-Christmas atmosphere in Bethlehem was festive and optimistic and, for the first time since the Covid-19 pandemic, Bethlehem hotels reported near full capacity during the weeks leading up to Christmas.

The return of pilgrims to the city is like a breath of air for local Christians, said St Catherine parishioner Flor Abu Slameh, 28.

"We are preparing in our hearts for Christmas and to welcome baby Jesus, and when we see the people come to visit



Joelle Mohrez, 15, poses with her family after attending Mass at the Church of St Catherine in Bethlehem. Photo: CNS

us here, we feel more alive," she said.

Joelle Mohrez, 15, who attended Mass at St Catherine's Church with her three siblings, mother and grandmother, had a message for Christians abroad: "We still keep our traditions, we celebrate Christmas when Jesus was born, and I am glad to be born here. Life here isn't just [the violence] you see on the media. We go out, we go shopping, we have places where we eat out, we have a social life, we have fun."

Holy Land

While Christians make up less than 2% of the population in the Holy Land and many young Christian Palestinians emigrated in recent years due to the economic crisis of the pandemic and the difficult political situation, Miss Mohrez's grandmother, Randa, said she was proud that all of her four children have remained in the Bethlehem area.

"We are staying here in Bethlehem, hoping for peace," she said.

In Bethlehem, Yousef Khalil, 37, said the act of attending Mass during Advent with his family and gathering to pray with other members of the community brings him feelings of peace and comfort in uncertain times.

"We feel more together, and this gives us a warm feeling spiritually. It is part of our culture. We can't be alone," he said, balancing his 10-month-old son, Rafael, in his arm. "Jesus, who was born here, came to bring us together. It is

sad to see the Christian community shrinking, but at the same time we have hope."

Mr Khalil urged pilgrims not to just visit the churches and holy shrines, but to also make an effort to meet the "living stones," or the people.

"Both are important here," he said.

One older parishioner who asked that his name not be used said he was pessimistic about the future of Christians in Bethlehem.

"Seeing the pilgrims arriving again in Bethlehem has buoyed their spirits this Christmas"

"In 10 years, there will be no Christians left here. We are sandwiched between two religions - the Muslims and the Jews," he said. He pointed to the corruption of the Palestinian Authority and also charged that Christian lands in the Bethlehem area are being bought illegally by Muslim residents.

Travel agent Suheil Hazboun, 31, who came to Mass with his wife, Sandi, 28, and 7-month-old daughter Mariella, noted that in addition to the political problems and the shrinking Christian population, economically he struggles to support his young family. Sandi, a radiologist, is unable to find work in her profession, he said.

"Maybe in five or six years we will have to leave but we will see," he said, adding that seeing the pilgrims arriving again in Bethlehem has buoyed their spirits this Christmas. "This is what Bethlehem should be like. The Hazboun family is a big family in Bethlehem. So, we will continue to stay in Bethlehem until our last breath."



Suheil Hazboun, 31, holds his 7-month-old daughter, Mariella, next to his wife, Sandi, 28, during Mass in the Church of St Catherine in Bethlehem. Photo: CNS

i Judith Sudilovsky writes from the Holy Land for Catholic News Service.

Nuala O'Loan

The View



Women and men still flee terror as Mary and Joseph did with Jesus

Two thousand years ago a young man and a young woman made a long journey on foot to Bethlehem. She was pregnant - nearing her time. They must have been very concerned as they plodded on, the woman riding on a donkey, wondering whether they would be able to get accommodation. Would it be warm and clean? Would they get there safely? Do you think they would have been quite worried and anxious?

“Matthew and the others did not tell us about how it was for Mary and Joseph that night”

They got safely to Bethlehem, and went looking for somewhere to stay. Catastrophe! There was no room at the inn, no proper place for this weary girl to lay her head. The only place offered to them was a stable already occupied by animals. They had no choice. They tried to make themselves somewhere to sleep. However, the girl had gone into labour, her pains increasing in length and intensity, and they knew that very soon their child would be born. And so it was: Mary gave birth to her baby, the Child Jesus, in that stable, because there was no room for them anywhere else that they could afford. Joseph watched over them. How do you think he must have felt that night?

The Christmas story is familiar to every reader of this paper, and yet although we know about it, there is so much we do not know. Those who wrote the Gospels tell us very little of the birth of Jesus. They tell us about the angels and the shepherds and the kings, the wise men, who came to worship the Christ Child. They tell us that Herod became very alarmed at what happened in Bethlehem that night, so alarmed that he directed the murder of every boy child under the age of two. They tell us of the flight into Egypt to escape the massacre of the little children.

Matthew and the others did not tell us about how it was for Mary and Joseph that night. I think it might



The Holy Family at the Nativity is depicted in this painting by artist Laura James. Photo: CNS

have been different had a woman written a Gospel telling the story of the birth of the baby Jesus. I have pondered on it so often. Were there other women with her as she gave birth in the stable? Many people must have been travelling that road to complete their census obligations. The women would have seen the young girl ready to give birth. Surely God sent someone to be with her and to help her? Was she warm enough? Was it a clean stable?

Sacred

The moment of giving birth is unique and sacred, yet it is a moment filled with fear as you listen for the first cry of your child, praying that all will be well for the little one whom you have carried in your womb for so many months. That concern for your child stays with you all the days of your life, no matter that they may grow strong and tall. It was thus for Mary, that day when they took her lovely, strong son and nailed him to a cross because he was a threat to them in his great goodness, though his message was only one of love for God and for each other.

As we look out on the world this Christmas, how many mothers are there who are having difficulty finding a safe, clean place to give birth? In so

many countries hospitals are scarce and cost money which people do not have. There may be few or no doctors or nurses. Women may be on the road, fleeing war, terror, persecution. To try to get to a safe place may be the only thing they can do. They may even be crossing seas in tiny boats trying to get to a place where they and their little children will be safe.

It is profoundly sad this Christmas that, 2,000 years on, women and men still flee terror as Mary and Joseph did with their little baby. It is profoundly sad that in this world which is capable of providing enough food for all, people are hungry; in a world in which huge sums are spent on things like building stadiums for the World Cup in Qatar, people don't have homes to live in; in a world in which some pupils, some students have access to everything they could want, there are still millions of children who can't go to school. It is terrible that there are those who make great fortunes out of loading people onto dangerous boats and casting them off into the sea, where many die, cold and terrified in the dark waters.

This Christmas will be difficult too, as the economic crisis grows and prices rise frighteningly, so that terrible decisions have to be made about how to

try and provide food, heat and shelter from an income which is just not enough. There will be cold homes this Christmas, empty cupboards, fewer toys for the children, and there will be lonely people who cannot afford the fare to travel to stay with somebody and must spend Christmas alone.

“We know what to do. Jesus told us in the parable about the Kingdom of Heaven”

For each of us this is an opportunity. Hopefully as you read this you will be looking forward to a warm, happy, peaceful Christmas, families coming together in love. One of the things I learned during the three years we spent up country in Kenya, far from shops and towns, was that we don't actually need many things to be happy. We do need to be able to be together, to have enough to eat and drink, to be safe and secure. The interesting thing during those simpler days was that Christmas and the birth of the Child Jesus was such a wonderful time because the focus was on that little baby and all that he meant for each of us and all that he has done for each of us.

The question for each of us every day, but especially at Christmas is, knowing what Christ has done for us, have we done all we can for those whom we encounter on the journey? The answer will probably be 'no!'

The wonder is that as long as we have life, we have the opportunity to do more. We just have to take the opportunity. We know what to do. Jesus told us in the parable about the Kingdom of Heaven. He said, "the King will say, 'Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. I was hungry and you gave me

food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me.'” He went on, “In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.”

World's problems

We cannot solve all the world's problems, but if we each do our small part the world will be a much better place. As we try to look on others with love, Jesus looks on each of us with such greater love.

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The enchantment of the secular



The Annual Newman Lecture took place in Newman University Church St Stephen's Green Dublin. Titled 'The Enchantment of the Secular', it was given by Prof. William T. Cavanaugh. Kevin Whelan, Linda-Jo Duffy and Robert Black are pictured after the lecture. Photos: John McElroy



Kevin Hargaden, Niamh White, Fr Edmond Grace SJ and Keith Adams enjoy some refreshments after the lecture.

Ruadhán Jones

In the annual Newman Lecture, Prof. William Cavanaugh teased out the religious element at the heart of the West, December 7.

Speaking in Newman University Church, St Stephen's Green, Prof. Cavanagh's talk focused on 'the Enchantment of the Secular'.

The American professor showed that "religious" and "secular" people have more in common than is commonly thought, and thus open avenues of conversation between them.

Prof. Cavanaugh is a professor of Catholic studies at DePaul University, Chicago, and Director of the Centre for World Catholicism and Intercultural Theology.



Joshua Furnal talks to speaker William Cavanaugh after the lecture.



Fáinche Ryan and Dominique Cunningham are pictured in Newman University Church following the lecture.

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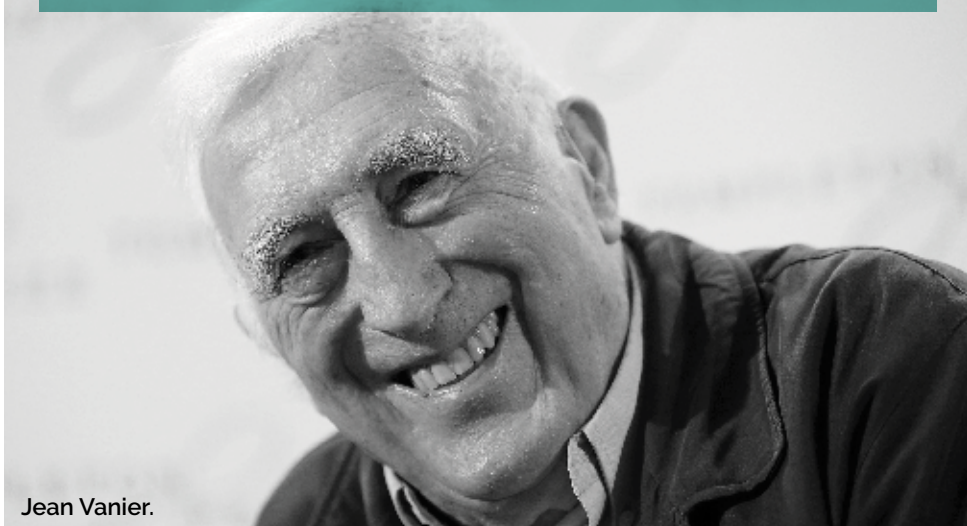


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William T. Cavanaugh delivers the annual Newman lecture, Wednesday, December 7.

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Martin O'Neill: Christmas, religion and an all-Ireland team



Footballer turned manager Martin O'Neill at St Columba's College.

but politics is not up for discussion when the players meet twice weekly for training. And when matches begin, Martin Donnelly from the Falls Road would die for Alan McCarroll from the Shankill Road, and the reverse is absolutely true."

Speaking further on this point, he said that "whatever upbringing those two lads had which would obviously be totally separate, no question about it, their friendship seemed to surpass any sort of religious bigotry".

Mr O'Neill was the first Catholic captain of the Northern Irish football team, which he states was a big thing at time. "Even in 1980, when I was first made captain, the Troubles were very, very strong still in the North, therefore it caused a bit of concern," he explained, "But the Protestant manager of the team, Billy Bingham said 'Listen I think you're the best man for the job, and therefore accordingly if you start to win football matches, it will be forgotten'.

"And I think he was proved right and who knows what might have happened had we not started winning games, but at least his prophecy proved correct."

Due to Qatar's record of human rights abuses, the World Cup has been mired in controversy, leading to some refusing to travel to the country or watch the matches. Some players have even made politically significant statements on the pitch.

“He said despite there being an undercurrent of what led to the Troubles most of the issues were in urban areas and at the border”

Regarding sport and politics, Mr O'Neill said: "It would be nice to consider sport as its own entity but it's very, very hard in current days to separate things. There always seems to be a cause for something or other and I suppose because sport, and particularly football, particularly a World Cup where lots of people's attention throughout the world are drawn, then perhaps maybe it's a time for someone to try and make some sort of political statement. It's very easy for me to say we should separate sport and politics but I must admit I'm afraid the reality is they seem to be entwined."

"It's been a big subject now not just for this particular World Cup but for a number of main events. You take the Olympics, all of these events, there always seems to be some sort of controversy that surrounds the event that perhaps maybe should take its place elsewhere," he said.

A simpler issue with the World Cup, which Mr O'Neill had, was its proximity to Christ-

The Irish Catholic

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Ireland's former football manager gives his two cents on the entwining of sport and politics, writes Chai Brady

Growing up in an Irish Catholic family in the North of Ireland, football star turned manager Martin O'Neill said he would pray the rosary every evening – his mother being a strong influence in this – and they had a picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the wall.

Mr O'Neill admits in his recent book, *On Days Like These*, that while saying their evening rosary took fifteen minutes, "it's a long time for a young lad to remain solemn" so occasionally he would pull out 'The Victor' comic from behind the prayer book. Making sure no one was watch-

ing he would read what he believed to be the best football story ever invented 'The Goal-maker' about a player who has connections with historical games and players.

From reading stories of great sportsmen when he was eight years old, he went on to join the elites as a professional player and subsequently a manager.

Midfielder

Most notably the midfielder spent most of his time playing for Nottingham Forest, winning the European cup twice in 1979 and 1980. He also has 64 caps for the Northern Ireland football team and was the captain for the World Cup in 1982.

Growing up in the mixed Catholic and Protestant town of Kilrea, Co. Derry, in the 50s, he said despite there being an undercurrent of what led to the Troubles most of the issues were in urban areas and at the border.

He told *The Irish Catholic*: "It seemed where we were, we seem to have escaped. I suppose really up until the Troubles really started around about 1969, I think that Protestants and Catholic did actually live together particularly in the provinces."

Regarding the ability of football to surpass political and religious division, Mr O'Neill spoke of the Belfast-based Distillery Football Club, which he played for when he was just starting out as a footballer.

Writing in his book, Mr O'Neill said: "The team is made up of Protestants and Catholics,

mas. He said: "Overall, maybe it's the time of year, to think that after the World Cup final there's only a few days until Christmas day – that seems really strange. I just haven't been able to enjoy it as much as I might have done had it been in the summertime."

Asked about his Christmas traditions over the years, he said that a deeper understanding of Christmas comes to a person as they grow.

“It would be nice to consider sport as its own entity but it's very, very hard in current days to separate things”

"At one stage in our village you used to have three Masses at Christmas. Growing up, certainly in my early years, meant Santa Claus coming for a start, never mind anything else. But then from Holy Communion from seven onwards and then Confirmation, then of course you start to think about what happened on Christmas day 2,000 years ago. I think for our particular family there is a bit of everything, obviously the younger you were the more you enjoyed Santa Claus and the older you got you realised just what a big feast it is really – and not in terms of the food," Mr O'Neill said.

Regarding faith, he said he views life through a different lens than he did 20 years ago and that most people, as they age, have a different perspective.

"Maybe some people are so steadfast in their views that they're hard to change but I'd like to think that I know that I have a really open mind to religion and what it might mean to me as opposed to what it might mean to someone else," he said.

"Do you still pray for things that might be beyond you? Yes. But fundamentally I don't think I've changed dramatically in my years of existence."

Football career

Following his professional footballing career he was the manager of the Republic of Ireland team, starting in 2013 he led them to the 2016 UEFA European Championship. Most recently he was appointed as the manager of his former team, Nottingham Forest, in 2019 but left after half a year.

Before this Mr O'Neill was the manager of multiple other teams including Celtic, Aston Villa and Sunderland. Notably during his tenure Leicester City reached the final of the Football League Cup final three times. The team won twice. Celtic won seven trophies under his management over five years starting in 2000, including the 2003 UEFA CUP Final and three Scottish Premier League titles.

While there are many fond memories during his footballing career, Mr O'Neill says

there isn't one that stands out above others.

"I would have a number and they're very difficult to separate," he explained, "When you go into football as a young man you obviously want to try and win trophies and medals, things like that. One that would stand out is the Champions League – but in my day it was called the European Cup – so for Nottingham Forest to win twice, that was just amazing: To be on the field of play, when the final whistle goes, and you've actually achieved that fantastic win of that competition."

He also mentions playing in the World Cup in 1982 when they beat the host nation, Spain. "Then to reach the quarter finals of the World Cup, that was a fantastic day, we didn't actually win anything that particular day but it was so memorable and it's still a stand out moment in Northern Ireland's footballing history. Those things were great and then when I moved into management, obviously the winning of competitions of Celtic and Leicester City – it was just an enormously brilliant feeling," he said.

Achievement

But with great achievement also come regrets to which Mr O'Neill said he has a number, such as not winning the UEFA cup with Celtic in 2003 when they were beaten by Porto. He said that is a "major regret" for him. "We were beaten 3-2 in extra time and Porto then go on with virtually the same team to win the Champions League the following year so it shows you how close we might have been. To lose that particularly when 75,000 Celtic fans descend upon Seville, that was really disappointing to lose," he said.

"If you could turn back time it would have been nice to have won that but of course there are moments even with the Republic of Ireland, we qualified for the Euros, we did well in France and then we got well-beaten by Denmark in the play-off game to try and qualify for the World Cup in Russia in 2018 and that would have been nice."

He added: "I think if you're going to have a footballing career, or a sporting career, there's going to be obviously moments of regret and obviously moments of just sheer joy."

Having half a century of experience in the professional football world, Mr O'Neill is in a good position to notice how the game has progressed and developed since he started. He notes one of the biggest changes are the state of pitches in modern times which are much better compared to the 1970s and 1980s.

"I think anybody who was watching football or who grew up watching football in the 70s and 80s when George Best was in his prime, and some other great, great players, to look at the pitches, which look pristine now and stay pristine seem-

ingly for most of the year, that's a major difference," he said.

"I think the likes of George Best and all those great players, if they were around now, they would score more goals because it's a less physical game than before and there would be more protection for those great players," he said.

With both the Northern Irish and Republic team's recent failures to qualify for major competitions, Mr O'Neill was asked his opinion on both teams playing under the same banner in order to pool talent.

Good side

He said: "It has been talked about for quite some considerable years. I'm going back 40 years when Northern Ireland had a good side and were qualifying for the World Cup too and the Republic of Ireland probably were really unlucky not to qualify then... if you were joining forces with the North you'd start to think how strong that team would have been at the time."

“I think if you're going to have a footballing career, or a sporting career, there's going to be obviously moments of regret and obviously moments of just sheer joy”

"Now and again it seems as if there's a clamour for an all-Ireland team and then it dies a death again. I suppose you have to say that if the Rugby team can muster it – although I accept we're talking about two different codes really – but at the end of it, if the Rugby team can manage and they are very, very good at this minute as a combined team, there might be an element now of people wanting an all-island side in terms of soccer."

"I think it's a long way away, it will take a lot of talking around the table I think before eventually some solution might be reached."

There are multiple purposes for writing his new book *On Days Like These* which details his footballing and managerial career for 50 years. This includes the changes that have taken place in football and his early footballing memories which includes his attempts to try to "make the grade when I obviously found it difficult going for quite some considerable time".

He added: "I think it's just recounting of those as much as anything else and also the fact that I've got two daughters as well, by the time that they came into being my playing career had finished so they never really got to see me play, so I suppose maybe there's an element of recounting something for their benefit as much as anything else."



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Croatia has made Sunday a day of rest again, so why can't we?



The freedom to shop affects other people's freedom to be with their families on a day of rest, writes **David Quinn**

It is like a blast from the past, or if you prefer, something from a more genteel age; the Croatian government has decided to impose heavy restrictions on Sunday trading.

Shops will be allowed to nominate 16 Sundays in the year when they can open, and apart from that must stay closed.

Croatia, on the beautiful Adriatic coast with its Italian-like climate, is a heavily tourism-dependent country and therefore this seems like an act of self-harm on the part of the Croatian government.

“The Croatian law is not as rare and archaic as you might think. In Ireland, we have very few restrictions on Sunday shopping”

But presumably most shops will use up their 16 days over the summer and in the run-up to Christmas, so it is unlikely the tourist industry will be too badly affected. Croatia obviously feels any damage is worth it because of the benefits of curtailing Sunday shopping.

Announcing the measure, the Croatian prime minister Andrej Plenkovic said: “The law will allow retail staff to spend Sunday with their families”.

The Croatian law is not as rare and archaic as you might think. In Ireland, we have very few restrictions on Sunday shopping. Sunday in this



regard has been reduced to another day of the week, with little to mark it out. Britain is the same. Even the North and Scotland, which were once very strict about the Sabbath, have almost completely relaxed the rules.

But other European countries have not surrendered so readily. For example, in Norway and Switzerland there is almost no Sunday shopping. In Germany it depends on the individual state, but some still place heavy curbs on Sunday trading.

The rules vary in France. Areas with lots of tourists have few restrictions, but in other parts of the country, shops are mainly closed on Sundays.

Spain also has curbs. Again, these vary from region to region but are often quite strict.

In Italy, shops also usually closed on Sundays, except in the big tourism centres, generally speaking.

The big argument in favour of Sunday shopping is, of course, freedom of choice. If people want to shop on a Sunday, then they should be let do so. If someone does not want to shop on Sundays, that is their prerogative as well. It's up to you. Don't impose your choice on others.

Another is that shops would be harmed by not opening on Sundays and their revenue would reduce,

although people are obviously free to do their shopping on other days instead. Saturdays could become busier again, for example.

But the main argument against the 'freedom of choice' argument is that this freedom to shop affects other freedoms, especially those of workers who are rostered by their employers to work on Sunday. If Sunday shopping was banned or heavily restricted, then those workers could be with their families instead. This is especially important when children are young.

Families

It might be countered that families can spend other days together, but what days would they be? Children will be at school during the week, and one parent might end up working on a Saturday and another on a Sunday so that the whole family is almost never together at the same time.

Furthermore, teenagers often love to descend on shopping centres at weekends, including on Sundays, so even if both parents are off over the weekends, their teenage children might prefer to go the local mall with friends.

This means there is no family day as such. As it is, the all-pervasiveness of smartphones has damaged fam-

ily life, and the proliferation of other kinds of devices in households, including gaming consoles and computers. Parents can be as guilty as their children of spending too much time on their phones etc, rather than talking to each other.

The arguments used in favour of Sunday shopping are basically the same as those which were used to justify opening pubs on Good Friday here a few years ago, namely freedom of choice and the demands of tourists.

“The Bible says that after the six days of creation, God rested on the seventh day”

Another element is the secularisation of society. For obvious reasons, curbing Sunday shopping is associated with religion and observing the Sabbath, that is keeping one day of the week sacred, not secular.

One of the Commandments tells us to 'keep holy on the Sabbath Day'. The Bible says that after the six days of creation, God rested on the seventh day. This is figurative language of course, but the message is that we need to rest and one day of the week should be different from the rest, marked out in some way.

Unfortunately, the 'Sabbath'

became over-associated in some cultures with an overly strict approach, especially in countries with a Puritan heritage, like Scotland and Northern Ireland. But Catholics tend not to have been very strict Sabbatharians. People were not expected to stay at home, reading the Bible and praying.

Holy hour

Pubs used to have a 'holy hour' in the Republic from 2pm to 4pm on a Sunday but that was abolished in 2000. By contrast, the North kept pubs closed altogether on a Sunday from the 1920s until the 1980s, in the days when it very much wanted to be a Protestant state.

The lifting of the ban on serving alcohol on Good Friday in South was a sign that we had 'moved forward' and that it would help the tourism industry.

But are all countries to give up long-standing local customs in order to accommodate tourists?

And are we really a better society because the 'holy hour' is gone, we can go into pubs on Good Friday and shop any day of the week we like?

Presumably the pubs will eventually open on Christmas Day as well, like they do in England, and then a lot of people will head off to the local rather than spend the whole day with their families. Is that really 'progress'?

In countries like Germany,

one of the big opponents of making Sunday a shopping free-for-all has been the trade unions. They believe that would amount to an attack on workers' rights, especially casual worker who are not on permanent contracts and can easily be dismissed by their employer if they refuse to work on a Sunday.

“At the end of the day, making Sunday the same as every other day isn't even a victory for secularism, or individual rights”

In Ireland we have completely given up the ghost on trying to defend the distinctiveness of Sundays. But quite aside from religious ones, there are good sociological reasons to make Sunday less commercial than other days and restore it as a community day of rest for everyone. Often there are good sociological reasons behind religious rules, of course.

At the end of the day, making Sunday the same as every other day isn't even a victory for secularism, or individual rights. It is really a victory for commerce which wants us to spend our money every day, all day, with no rest.

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Christmas indulgences with Rosemary Conley



The diet and fitness expert tells **Ruadhán Jones** about her faith, family and Christmas traditions

It's not very often that you'll hear a diet and fitness expert and instructor saying, "it's quite good to over-indulge", but that's what Rosemary Conley CBE told me. Of course, to put this in context, the famous originator of the low-fat, 'hip and thigh' diet was speaking about Christmas and its importance as a Christian festival.

"I will always say to people on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, eat as much as you like," Ms Conley tells me over the phone. "I think it's quite good for people to over-indulge and we are very much aware of the fact that Jesus celebrated with his disciples and often partook in food and drink and what have you."

By eating and drinking well, we become part "of the celebration of what he was teaching us and so I think it's good for us on this most important festival to be able to relax and enjoy it, to be with our families or whoever it is that we're with", Ms Conley continues.

Christmas

Although Rosemary likes to eat well over Christmas herself, last year she and her husband ended up eating a chicken stir fry after a Covid-19 disaster. Every year, she and her husband go to her daughter Dawn's, house for Christmas and 2021 was no different.

"Last year we went and my daughter got a phone call from the NHS to say that her PCR test had come back positive and she had Ccovid," says Rosemary, laughing at the memory. "So as we walked out we could smell the turkey cooking through the fan because it was near where our cars were parked. We went home and had a chicken stir fry, so that was a bit of a disappointment."

She is praying for a Covid-free Christmas this time, she says, joking, "Hopefully we will be able to stay and last the whole day".

"I will always say to people on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, eat as much as you like"



Rosemary Conley CBE, the famous diet and fitness guru, whose Christian faith has grown in importance since she first turned to God almost 40 years ago.

Rosemary's love for her Christian faith is something that flourished in tandem with her success as a diet and fitness instructor. She shot to fame in the late 1980s with her book, *Rosemary Conley's Hip and Thigh Diet*. For nearly four decades, she has been the face of diet culture.

"Every year, she and her husband go to her daughter Dawn's, house for Christmas and 2021 was no different"

For a time, her low-fat diet and fitness classes rivalled Slimming World and Weight Watchers in the UK. However, as low-fat diets fell out of fashion, Ms Conley has gone through her own highs and lows, as she details in her autobiography, *Through Thick and Thin*. This is the most recent of the more than 30 books she has published since becoming a household name in the '80s.

Through all the ups and downs, the constant in her life has been her faith in God. It wasn't always the case, however, as Ms Conley is the first to admit.

"It's a life story of two halves in that respect because I went to church as a child with my parents," she explains. "But as often happens with that kind of introduction to a faith, you don't really know what it's about, you just go because that's what your parents tell you to do."

Crises

It wasn't until Rosemary was in her 40s, staring down the barrel at multiple crises coming all at once, that she turned to God sincerely.

"It was in 1986 that I really had a major transformation. That's after I had gone through a lot of challenges in my life. My first husband and I had been divorced. I was in a new relationship and that had come to an end. I was losing my job, I was going to have to move house," she says matter-of-factly.



As if that wasn't enough, Ms Conley became very ill with a gall stone problem. However, though it didn't seem like it at the time, this proved a providential illness, which set her on the path both to God and her success as a fitness instructor.

"It was whirlwind turnaround, which Ms Conley credits to God's help"

"While I was in hospital, I saw an advertisement for a book called *Powerful Living* in *Women's Magazine*, where Cliff Richard, Lord Tony Pandy and Gerald Wil-

liams, the tennis commentator, were saying if I would like to have powerful living, I could send for this free book," Ms Conley begins.

"And so I thought, if ever anybody needed powerful living it was me, sitting up there feeling a complete failure. So I sent for the book and it came to me in about 10 days' time and I read it and I just felt it was written just for me. It spoke about God in everyday language and I could understand it, I understood who Jesus was, the Holy Spirit – all of the Christian ethos, I suddenly got it."

Engrossing

After being sent home that night, Rosemary continued to be

“I went from being very voluptuous around the hips and thighs to being significantly more slender”

engrossed by the book, saying she simply couldn't put it down. As she read it, she came to a page with a prayer that told her, “if I would like to invite Jesus into my life, I could”.

Rosemary continues, saying: “I knelt at the side of the bed and I prayed that prayer for all I was worth. And I felt that I had been washed through. There were no claps of thunder, no bangs or anything like that. You know, no smoke, nothing around me. But I felt brand new.

“Building on this, Rosemary designed a low-fat diet, tried it out on various people through her classes and so on”

“I lifted myself up from kneeling by the side of the bed – not something I would normally do, I hasten to add. The fact that I knelt at the side of the bed is in fact a demonstration of my desperation for some salvation,” Rosemary says, laughing gently at the memory. “And I sat up in bed and I just felt so excited because I knew God was saying to me – I'm the chairman of your life, trust me and we'll go forward.”

And that is exactly what happened. Almost overnight, Rosemary says her life was “utterly, utterly changed”. This was true in a spiritual and also a material sense. The second benefit that came of her issue with gall stones was her discovery of a low-fat diet that benefitted her figure.

“If I was going to avoid surgery for the gall stones – I didn't want to have surgery on because I was in the middle of winding up a business – I would have to eat very low-fat foods. And I said, well that's what I'll do then,” Ms Conley explains.

“And the benefit on my figure was immense. I went from being very voluptuous around the hips and thighs to being significantly more slender. I only lost six pounds, but it transformed my shape. I realised I had hit on something.”

Diet

Building on this, Rosemary designed a low-fat diet, tried it out on various people through her classes and so on. She found it worked for everyone else as well, “they lost their big thighs and hips as well. So I wrote a book about it in 1986, which came out in 1988, which went on to being a two million, worldwide best seller,” Rosemary says.

It was a whirlwind turnaround, which Ms Conley credits to God's help. Ever since this initial personal encounter, she has given her spiritual health the same rigorous attention she gives her physical health.

Going through her daily routine, Rosemary says that “Every morning I go for a 30- or 40-minute walk and I pray out loud. I have my mental list in my head, close family I want to pray for. Then I thank him for all the things that I'm so grateful for in my life. I feel unbelievably blessed in my life.”

Her mental list of people to pray for is quite lengthy. As well as her family, Rosemary prays for those who are ill or poorly, praying for healing for them. Then she prays for “a whole load of people I just want the Lord to bless. And it is the greatest, most beautiful thing to do.”

Turning to God

Often her walk takes her through a wood next to her house. It is somewhere she frequently finds herself turning to God.

“I have gone into that wood and had conversations with God where I've not known what to do about a situation and I've sort of said, look if you want me to do this, you're going to have to show me what to do because I don't know how. And incredibly he sends people into my life who can make things happen,” Ms Conley says.

“It's the most wonderful” thing she adds. “I mean I would have to say this year, that my faith, my closeness to God is the closest it's ever been. Because he's illustrated to me things that I didn't know how I was going to do and they happened.”

It's not only in things that do happen, however, that Rosemary sees the hand of God at work. “If ever doors were opened, I've seen it this year. And if ever doors were closed, I've seen it this year,” is how she sums it up, before giving an example.

“God's providence has been working in Rosemary's life ever since she was young, she reflects towards the end of her interview”

“I'm patron of a charity and every year we do a big fundraiser for them. Obviously we've missed out for the last two years and I thought well I'd better do one this year. And it was really striking how the place we would normally hire suddenly said, no we're



Rosemary Conley CBE pictured with her *Dancing on Ice* partner Mark Hanretty.

going to charge you corkage for the wine that we're given – we're given wine by a lovely local businessman – and it would have cost an astronomical amount.

“Then I went to Next, the fashion retailer who has sponsored us and paid for the food for the last eight years we've been running the event. And they just said, we're stopping all sponsorship. And I knew from that, God was saying no, don't do it this year.”

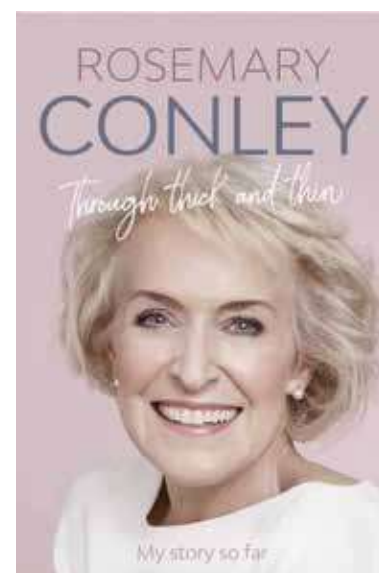
Providence

God's providence has been working in Rosemary's life ever since she was young, she reflects towards the end of her interview. Ms Conley recalls how her determination to be as physically fit as she can be is born out of the fact that she has reached the age of 76 when she was, at one point, not supposed to live past 10.

“My lungs were underdeveloped when I went to school and my specialist told me that if I had not followed a career in exercise – which is what I've been doing, I've been teaching my classes for 50 years – if I had not done that my life story would have been very different.”

“I would have to say this year, that my faith, my closeness to God is the closest it's ever been”

That seems more than a little providential, Rosemary agrees: “Totally, and that was without me realising it because I didn't particularly have a relationship with God at that stage, when I started doing my classes. So God obviously had a bit of a plan.”



i Rosemary Conley's autobiography *Through Thick and Thin* published by SPCK publishing is available online and in stores nationwide.

RTÉ broadcasting star opens up



Retired RTÉ presenter Eileen Dunne in action.



Christmas can be a time to pray for loved ones abroad or who have passed away, Eileen Dunne tells Chai Brady

Veteran media newsreader and household face Eileen Dunne will miss being in the hot seat when breaking news stories land but plans to take it easy and enjoy Christmas after her retirement from RTÉ.

Ms Dunne has long graced Irish television screens, working her way up through the national broadcaster and in recent times presenting the popular *Nine O'Clock News*, before announcing her departure in a final RTÉ broadcast in November.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, she described her love of the build-up to Christmas, her traditions, and the importance of faith in her life – and spoke in defiant defence of giving and receiving Christmas cards.

Celebration

While her celebration of Christmas changed since her son Cormac grew up and moved away she keeps a busy festive season, hosting a Christmas night with friends and presented concerts in Christchurch in Dublin and another in Ballina in St Muredach's cathedral.

"When Cormac was small I suppose the [RTÉ] Toy Show was the start of Christmas for everybody," Ms Dunne says, adding however that she puts up the Christmas tree on December 8, a day she would have had off school when she was younger. "I suppose it was always considered that the country people came to town to shop, we didn't necessarily go into town that day

because it would be mad," she explains.

Speaking of Christmas traditions when she was a child, Ms Dunne says: "My father used to bring us to do the tour of the cribs. We started in Clontarf and St Gabriel's used to have a lovely crib at the back of the church, which they still do.

"I think for a lot of people getting a Christmas card might be the only time they hear from people"

"There's three churches in Clontarf, St John's, St Gabriel's and St Anthony's and then the moving crib in Parnell Square and we used to finish up in the big church in Inchicore because they had a life-size crib. That was our adventure.

"My grandparents, one lived in Westmeath, the other lived in Laois – my mother's mother and my father's father. He used to

come up mostly for Christmas but we'd go down then to Westmeath, maybe on Stephen's Day, to visit my granny."

Ms Dunne is a staunch defender of the Christmas card, which she loves to receive. Virtual cards are just not the same thing.

"I'm a big believer in Christmas cards, I would hate these people who say don't send Christmas cards, give money instead – you can do both," she insists.

"I think for a lot of people getting a Christmas card might be the only time they hear from people, so I think maybe those who are on their own and maybe retired, as I am now myself, that somebody in the company thought of you and sat down and wrote a card, even if they only typed it. I'd hate to see them disappearing and I hate these internet, virtual Christmas cards."

Christmas cards are all part of the joy of Christmas for Ms Dunne, who also loves the music, concerts, Advent and the general

build-up buzz. Christmas day also holds a deeper significance due to a sentiment passed on from her mother whose three brothers lived in America and two sisters lived in England

"I remember my mother, one year when we were quite small, said something that has always stuck with me. I remember her saying 'Just think that everywhere around the world this morning (Christmas morning) people are kneeling down or sitting down to pray for each other,'" she said.

"Ms Dunne is a staunch defender of the Christmas card, which she loves to receive. Virtual cards are just not the same thing"

"You obviously think of people who are abroad and who are not with us, or who are no longer with us, around Christmas time."

Journalism

How did Ms Dunne become the experienced and renowned media personality Ireland knows so well? According to Ms Dunne it was her primary school teacher that set her on the path towards journalism, encouraging public speaking at a young age.

"You obviously think of people who are abroad and who are not with us, or who are no longer with us, around Christmas time"

on Christmas and her gift of Faith

In secondary school, Manor House School in Dublin's Raheny, she credits the Poor Servants of the Mother of God glowingly.

Ms Dunne said: "That was in the early 70s, I started there in 1970 and left in 1975 and not everybody would have had my experience. I think some who came after us might not be as complimentary, but it was the beginning of women's lib and all that kind of thing and they pushed us to be the best that we could be. I always say on our graduation Mass on the back of the leaflet was the poem *Desiderata*, and that was the best advice to send us out into the world with and as I get older I appreciate it even more."

“In recent years she says there has been no shortage of important breaking news events, including the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic more than two years ago”

The poem states that "Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself".

She adds: "I was on a couple of debating teams, and I was in a thing we used to do called the 'sing out' which got you up on the stage, we used to do it in conjunction with St Paul's College down the road. It started early and there was a build-up so I never had a problem getting up on a stage or getting up to do public speaking or whatever, I was doing it from the time I was quite young."

Education

Her education has certainly proven to be of high quality, as Ms Dunne went on to cover some of the most ground-breaking and historic events in the history of Ireland and abroad, and is a nonsense, direct interviewer.

Asked about what she feels are the most memorable moments in her career she said: "I suppose the Good Friday Agreement was one of the highlights. I also always talk about the Dunblane massacre."

The Dunblane massacre is the deadliest mass shooting in Britain's history. It took place in 1996 in the Dunblane Primary School near Stirling, Scotland. A man shot dead 16 pupils and one teacher and injured 15 others before taking his own life.

She explains: "It happened just after Cormac was born, I was a mother so that story affected me in a way that those kind of stories hadn't affected me before."

In recent years she says there has been no shortage of important breaking news events, including the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic more than two years ago.

"I was very pleased to be working through Covid for all

kinds of reasons, to get me out of the house but also RTÉ did an important job during the pandemic, but it was relentless, it wasn't easy and every day was a really busy day and there were just so many angles to the whole story. It has just continued ever since," she says.

"There was one thing after another, there was President Trump and his antics in the middle of all of that and then we have what's happening across the water and our own politics here and then the war in Ukraine it just hasn't let up for the last few years. That's probably what I'll miss, when a big story like that breaks, that you feel 'Oh God I'd love to be in the newsroom today'."

She gives the example of the changing of the guard in Irish Government, with a new Taoiseach and cabinet elected, and all the speculation in the build-up – something she would have been in the newsroom for; in the thick of it.

There's no shortage of other historic events the veteran journalist has covered during her career, including the inauguration of Pope Benedict as well as his resignation, Pope Francis' visit to Knock Shrine in 2018, Queen Elizabeth's state visit to Ireland and the result of the 2005 papal conclave.

Reflecting on the changing media landscape over the course of her career, she says: "It's completely different from when I started. From a professional point of view the technology has changed so much which allowed us to do a lot more but then from a viewer or a reader's point of view, I think obviously people are not just consuming news in the same way that they did."

“The cost of having people at events or in other countries as correspondents is also prohibitive for some media organisations”

"I think Covid maybe brought a bit of that back because people were tuning in basically because they had nothing else to do," she laughs, "but the younger people, like my son for example, wouldn't sit down and watch a news bulletin but he would know everything that's going on that the same time. He might be on the RTÉ website but he wouldn't sit down and watch a whole bulletin, that sort of thing. The problem is in cracking that, no one has yet come up with a solution to make that pay."

"People don't seem to be willing to pay for it at the moment so it's very difficult for newspapers and other media then to try and sustain themselves. The other side of it is Donald Trump did us all a favour with his fake news because it did bring people back to what they perceived to



Eileen Dunne in her younger years.

“I go to Mass and I read in my local church every couple of Sundays. It's an important part of my life”

be reliable, trustworthy sources but are people willing to pay for it? I don't know. That's where I'd be worried, how it sustains itself going forward."

The cost of having people at events or in other countries as correspondents is also prohibitive for some media organisations which has led them to reduce the amount of journalists they have on the ground. This is something else that concerns Ms Dunne, she explains: "For example, somewhere like Brussels, I think the number of correspondents who actually live and work there now is greatly reduced over the years so people are getting the information third hand, or are tuning in to news conferences remotely, and it's not the same as being there, it's not the same as talking to people and getting the story from different sources."

GAA

Reporting is not Ms Dunne's only passion, as she is a big fan of the GAA, something inherited from her father.

"My father was RTÉ's first GAA correspondent, having worked in the *Irish Press* before that – Mick Dunne. So we grew up with it basically, and being born in Dublin, we're all Dubs fans, we have our season tickets so I'll be looking forward to that, getting out on the road for the new year and being freer to go to more matches."

“From a professional point of view the technology has changed so much which allowed us to do a lot more”

"As the GAA say themselves, nothing beats being there," she says.

Ms Dunne also has a Catholic faith of which she is grateful. She told *The Irish Catholic*: "I go to Mass and I read in my local church every couple of Sundays. It's an important part of my life. I could have been born a Muslim

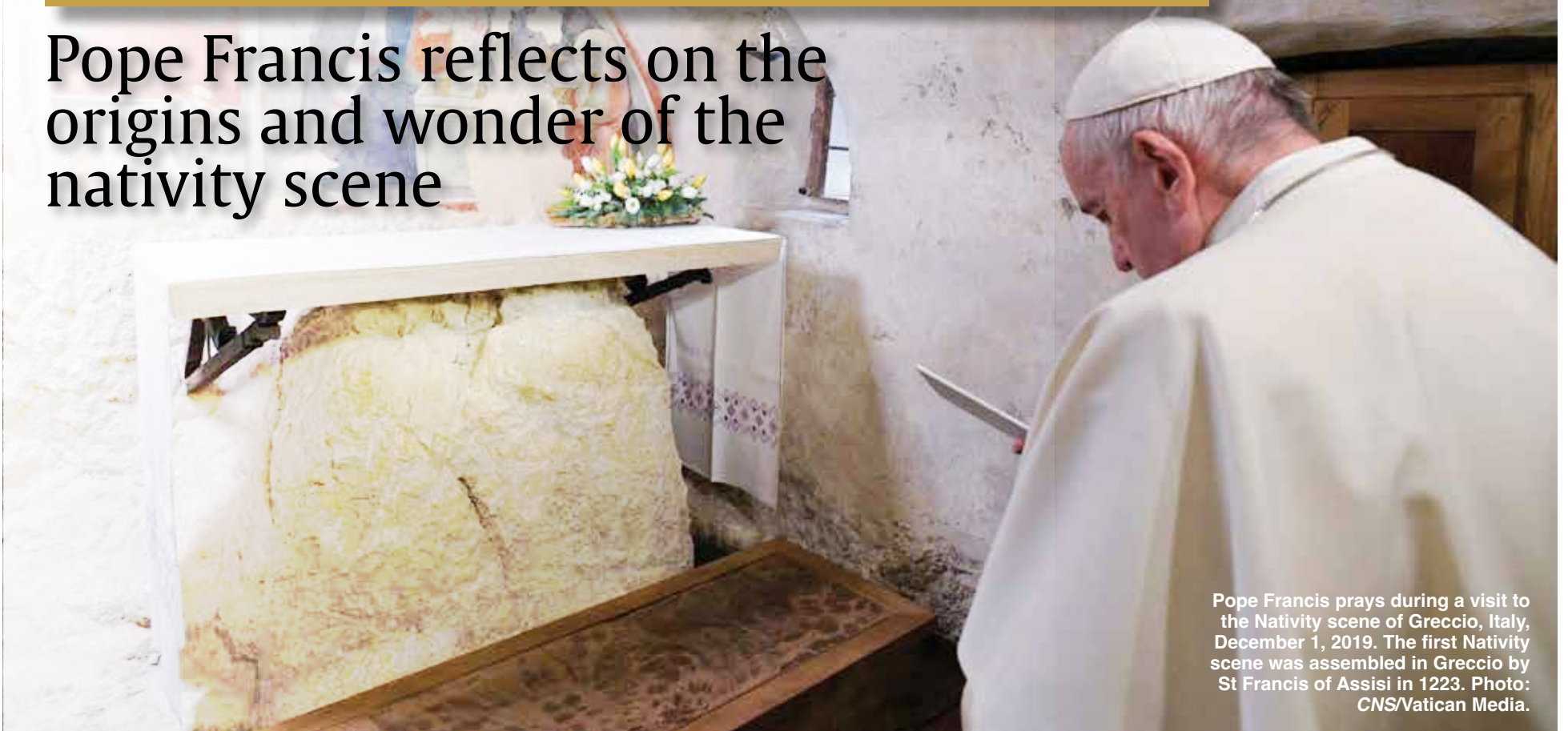
in Islamabad or a Protestant in Belfast but I was born a Catholic in Dublin and I am very grateful for the gift of Faith."

Despite knowing the buzz of a newsroom will be missed, Ms Dunne plans a more relaxed existence, saying: "I have no concrete plans at the moment, I'm just taking it easy for a few months and seeing where it goes, I definitely don't want to work full time again and I'm seeing a lot of people around me getting ill and there are others who didn't make it this far, so I think I'm going to travel a bit and just get out and see people and enjoy life and maybe take on the odd project here or there but I definitely don't want to work full time again, I don't want to work too much."

The lack of Ms Dunne's visage will be strange in the months to come on Irish television screens, but she has certainly deserved a rest from the relentless news cycle – leaving behind a lasting legacy in the world of journalism.

The enchantment of the Christmas crib

Pope Francis reflects on the origins and wonder of the nativity scene



Pope Francis prays during a visit to the Nativity scene of Greccio, Italy, December 1, 2019. The first Nativity scene was assembled in Greccio by St Francis of Assisi in 1223. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

The enchanting image of the Christmas crèche, so dear to the Christian people, never ceases to arouse amazement and wonder. The depiction of Jesus' birth is itself a simple and joyful proclamation of the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture. As we contemplate the Christmas story, we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey, drawn by the humility of the God who became man in order to encounter every man and woman. We come to realise that so great is his love for us that he became one of us, so that we in turn might become one with him.

With this letter, I wish to encourage the beautiful family tradition of preparing the nativity scene in the days before Christmas, but also the custom of setting it up in the workplace, in schools, hospitals, prisons and town squares.

Origin

The origin of the Christmas crèche is found above all in certain details of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as related in the gospels.

But let us go back to the origins of the Christmas crèche so familiar to us. We need to imagine ourselves in the little Italian town of Greccio, near Rieti. St Francis stopped there, most likely on his way back from Rome where on November 29, 1223, he had received the confirmation of

his Rule from Pope Honorius III. Francis had earlier visited the Holy Land, and the caves in Greccio reminded him of the countryside of Bethlehem.

“Why does the Christmas crèche arouse such wonder and move us so deeply?”

The Franciscan sources describe in detail what then took place in Greccio. Fifteen days before Christmas, Francis asked a local man named John to help him realise his desire “to bring to life the memory of that babe born in Bethlehem, to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he was laid upon a bed of hay”.

At this, his faithful friend went immediately to prepare all that the saint had asked. On December 25, friars came to Greccio from various parts, together with people from the farmsteads in the area, who brought

flowers and torches to light up that holy night.

When Francis arrived, he found a manger full of hay, an ox and a donkey. All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Eucharist. At Greccio there were no statues; the nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present.

Tradition

This is how our tradition began: with everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original event and those sharing in its mystery.

Why does the Christmas crèche arouse such wonder and move us so deeply? First, because it shows God's tender love: the Creator of the universe lowered himself to take up our littleness. The gift of life, in all its mystery, becomes all the more wondrous as we realise that the Son of Mary is the source and sustenance of all life. In Jesus, the Father has given us a brother who

comes to seek us out whenever we are confused or lost, a loyal friend ever at our side. He gave us his Son who forgives us and frees us from our sins.

Setting up the Christmas crèche in our homes helps us to relive the history of what took place in Bethlehem. Naturally, the Gospels remain our source for understanding and reflecting on that event. At the same time, its portrayal in the crèche helps us to imagine the scene. It touches our hearts and makes us enter into salvation history as contemporaries of an event that is living and real in a broad gamut of historical and cultural contexts.

“The Franciscan sources describe in detail what then took place in Greccio”

In a particular way, from the time of its Franciscan origins, the nativity scene has invited us to “feel” and “touch” the poverty that God's Son took upon himself in the Incarnation. Implicitly, it summons us to follow him along the path of humility, poverty and self-denial that leads

from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross. It asks us to meet him and serve him by showing mercy to those of our brothers and sisters in greatest need (cf. Mt 25:31-46).

I would like now to reflect on the various elements of the nativity scene in order to appreciate their deeper meaning. First, there is the background of a starry sky wrapped in the darkness and silence of night. We represent this not only out of fidelity to the Gospel accounts, but also for its symbolic value.

We can think of all those times in our lives when we have experienced the darkness of night. Yet even then, God does not abandon us, but is there to answer our crucial questions about the meaning of life.

Emotion

With what emotion should we arrange the mountains, streams, sheep and shepherds in the nativity scene! As we do so, we are reminded that, as the prophets had foretold, all creation rejoices in the coming of the Messiah. The angels and the guiding star are a sign that we too are called to set out for the cave and to worship the Lord.

“Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us” (Lk 2:15). So the shepherds tell one another after the proclamation of the angels. A beautiful lesson emerges from these simple words. Unlike so many other people, busy about many things, the shepherds become the first to see the most

“The nativity scene is like a living Gospel rising up from the pages of sacred Scripture”

essential thing of all: the gift of salvation.

It is the humble and the poor who greet the event of the Incarnation. The shepherds respond to God who comes to meet us in the infant Jesus by setting out to meet him with love, gratitude and awe. Thanks to Jesus, this encounter between God and his children gives birth to our religion and accounts for its unique beauty, so wonderfully evident in the nativity scene.

It is customary to add many symbolic figures to our nativity scenes. First, there are the beggars and the others who know only the wealth of the heart. They too have every right to draw near to the Infant Jesus; no one can evict them or send them away from a crib so makeshift that the poor seem entirely at home. Indeed, the poor are a privileged part of this mystery; often they are the first to recognise God's presence in our midst.

“The birth of a child awakens joy and wonder; it sets before us the great mystery of life”

The presence of the poor and the lowly in the nativity scene remind us that God became man for the sake of those who feel most in need of his love and who ask him to draw near to them. Jesus, “gentle and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29), was born in poverty and led a simple life in order to teach us to recognise what is essential and to act accordingly.

The nativity scene clearly teaches that we cannot let ourselves be fooled by wealth and fleeting promises of happiness. We see Herod's palace in the background, closed and deaf to the tidings of joy. By being born in a manger, God himself launches the only true revolution that can give hope and dignity to the disinherited and the outcast: the revolution of love, the revolution of tenderness.

From the manger, Jesus proclaims, in a meek yet powerful way, the need for sharing with the poor as the path to a more human and fraternal world in which no one is excluded or marginalised.

Cave

Gradually, we come to the cave, where we find the figures of Mary and Joseph. Mary is a mother who contemplates her child and shows him to every visitor. The figure of Mary makes us reflect on the great mystery that surrounded this young woman when God knocked on the door of her immaculate heart.

Mary responded in complete obedience to the message of the angel who asked her to become the mother of God. Her words, “Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38), show all of us how to abandon ourselves in faith to God's will.

By her “fiat”, Mary became the mother of God's Son, not losing but, thanks to him, consecrating her virginity. In her, we see the mother of God who does not keep her Son only to herself, but invites everyone to obey his word and to

put it into practice (cf. Jn 2:5).

At Mary's side, shown protecting the child and his mother, stands St Joseph. He is usually depicted with staff in hand, or holding up a lamp. St Joseph plays an important role in the life of Jesus and Mary. He is the guardian who tirelessly protects his family.

Joseph treasured in his heart the great mystery surrounding Jesus and Mary his spouse; as a just man, he entrusted himself always to God's will, and put it into practice.

When, at Christmas, we place the statue of the infant Jesus in the manger, the nativity scene suddenly comes alive. God appears as a child, for us to take into our arms. Beneath weakness and frailty, he conceals his power that creates and transforms all things. It seems impossible, yet it is true: in Jesus, God was a child, and in this way he allowed to reveal the greatness of his love: by smiling and opening his arms to all.

Joy

The birth of a child awakens joy and wonder; it sets before us the great mystery of life. Seeing the bright eyes of a young couple gazing at their newborn child, we can understand the feelings of Mary and Joseph who, as they looked at the infant Jesus, sensed God's presence in their lives.

“Life was made manifest” (1 Jn 1:2). In these words, the Apostle John sums up the mystery of the Incarnation. The crèche allows us to see and touch this unique and unparalleled event that changed the course of history, so that time would thereafter be reckoned either before or after the birth of Christ.

God's ways are astonishing, for it seems impossible that he should forsake his glory to become a man like us. To our astonishment, we

“This is how our tradition began: with everyone gathered in joy around the cave, with no distance between the original event and those sharing in its mystery”

see God acting exactly as we do: he sleeps, takes milk from his mother, cries and plays like every other child!

As always, God baffles us. He is unpredictable, constantly doing what we least expect. The nativity scene shows God as he came into our world, but it also makes us reflect on how our life is part of God's own life. It invites us to become his disciples if we want to attain ultimate meaning in life.

“The nativity scene clearly teaches that we cannot let ourselves be fooled by wealth and fleeting promises of happiness”

As the feast of Epiphany approaches, we place the statues of the Three Kings in the Christmas crèche. Observing the star, those wise men from the East set out for Bethlehem, in order to find Jesus and to offer him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These costly gifts have an allegorical meaning: gold honours Jesus' kingship, incense his divinity, myrrh his sacred humanity that was to experience death and burial.

As we contemplate this aspect of the nativity scene, we are called to reflect on the responsibility of every Christian to spread the Gospel. Each of us is called to bear glad tidings to all, testifying by our

practical works of mercy to the joy of knowing Jesus and his love.

The Magi teach us that people can come to Christ by a very long route. Men of wealth, sages from afar, athirst for the infinite, they set out on the long and perilous journey that would lead them to Bethlehem (cf. Mt 2:1-12). Great joy comes over them in the presence of the Infant King.

They are not scandalised by the poor surroundings, but immediately fall to their knees to worship him. Kneeling before him, they understand that the God who with sovereign wisdom guides the course of the stars also guides the course of history, casting down the mighty and raising up the lowly. Upon their return home, they would certainly have told others of this amazing encounter with the Messiah, thus initiating the spread of the Gospel among the nations.

Reminding

Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children, eagerly waiting to set it up. These memories make us all the more conscious of the precious gift received from those who passed on the Faith to us. At the same time, they remind us of our duty to share this same experience with our children and our grandchildren.

It does not matter how the nativity scene is arranged: it can always be the same or it can change from year to year. What matters is that it speaks to our

lives. Wherever it is, and whatever form it takes, the Christmas crèche speaks to us of the love of God, the God who became a child in order to make us know how close he is to every man, woman and child, regardless of their condition.

“Standing before the Christmas crèche, we are reminded of the time when we were children”

Dear brothers and sisters, the Christmas crèche is part of the precious yet demanding process of passing on the Faith. Beginning in childhood, and at every stage of our lives, it teaches us to contemplate Jesus, to experience God's love for us, to feel and believe that God is with us and that we are with him, his children, brothers and sisters all, thanks to that child who is the Son of God and the Son of the Virgin Mary.

And to realise that in that knowledge we find true happiness. Like St Francis, may we open our hearts to this simple grace, so that from our wonderment a humble prayer may arise: a prayer of thanksgiving to God, who wished to share with us his all, and thus never to leave us alone.

✠ This is an excerpt from Pope Francis' letter *Admirable Signum*. The full letter can be accessed on www.vatican.va.



Franciscans and others pose with Pope Francis after a visit to the nativity scene of Greccio. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.



For 50 years Rena Kennelly has brought joy to Killarney's children by curating the crib, **Ruadhán Jones** hears

Earlier this year, Killarney-based great-grandmother Rena Kennelly was surprised to receive an award from the Pope. Pope Francis awarded her the Benemerenti medal in honour of her 50 years curating the crib at St Mary's Cathedral, Killarney, Co. Kerry.

"It was a great honour," Ms Kennelly tells me over the phone from her home near Killarney. She was presented with her medal in the cathedral, accompanied by her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. "My son is thrilled to bits, he's more pleased than anyone. He was saying to me, mother you're famous!"

Tradition

Born in Tralee, Ms Kennelly has become a fixture in Killarney's Christmas tradition through her work on the crib since she and her husband moved there in the 1960s. It all came about due to her own happy childhood memories of the crib in the Friary in Tralee.

"As a child, the friary always had a little crib and it used to



St Mary's Cathedral Crib, Killarney, created by Rena Kennelly. Photos: Valerie O'Sullivan

fascinate me when I'd go down to look at it," she says, adding later: "It was just inside the door and it was really beautiful. It was the way it was laid out I suppose, I don't know really."

When the administrator of Killarney cathedral was renovating the church in the late 60s or early 70s, Ms Kennelly asked him if they would have a crib. He said they would, but when Rena went down to see it, she wasn't impressed: "There was an area with a donkey and Mary up on it and Joseph and that was it. That was their crib," she says.

So she volunteered to make a new crib. It was a DIY job, as Ms Kennelly ended up using shop models for the figures.

"I made the heads out of sculpture," she continues. "They turned out lovely. They weren't quite the right figures though. A new priest took over and he nearly had a fit when he saw the St Joseph. The cape fell off him when we were bringing him down to the crib. He was a woman underneath it, because they were shop models! He nearly had a fit and said, no we need to get proper figures."

New figures

And so new figures were purchased, although Ms Kennelly was satisfied with the originals. "They did what was needed," she says. Later, the cathedral got a new stable and

Rena added Christmas trees from a local company. "They gave me these winter trees like you'd see in a Christmas card and they're lovely. They fill up the whole space."

One of the more unlikely animals adorning the crib is a real-life baby fawn gifted to the cathedral. Ms Kennelly gives me the backstory: "This fella, he's a lovely boy and he found a baby deer on the road, a lovely baby fawn, it had been knocked down and killed."

"He took it into public works and he asked if he could have it, because you can't take these things without permission. He got it stuffed and for years he's given me the deer. I have a big piece of bog oak and

I put him into that, as if he's in a little cave. It's nice."

As well as Mary, Joseph and a deer, a row of ducks also attend to the baby Jesus. These have a habit of going walk-about – they almost couldn't find them last year, causing some consternation and concern. But it all came together in the end.

“I made the heads out of sculpture,” she continues. “They turned out lovely. They weren’t quite the right figures though”

"The kids love it. That's all I'm doing it for, the children. We used to have a crib opening every year. We had about 100 kids from the schools," Ms Kennelly remembers. "They used to love it; it stuck in their memories forever."

Ms Kennelly recalls how she was in the church one evening after finishing the crib when a man came in and stood beside her.

"We said nothing, I was just looking at what I had done to see if it was alright," she continues. "He said, do you remember me missus? And I looked at this big man and I thought I wouldn't know him with the sky over him. And he says, I was a shepherd. And I looked at him – he was a shepherd when he was about 10, I'd say."

"I thought it was very funny, it stuck in his mind. He said, I always remember that. The

girls who were angels will come back and they'll tell me, oh I was an angel, I was a shepherd. It meant a lot to the kids."

Enjoying

As well as the finished product, Ms Kennelly still enjoys the "great sport" that goes on in the background. "The carry on is a fright," she jokes.

"When I did the first crib, a man gave me a baby foal, a donkey foal that had died and he got it done at the taxidermist. And he used to give him to me every year. He said I could keep him. We had lambs and all sorts. But whatever way they treated the donkey, whatever way the taxidermist did it, sure the donkey used to be sweating!"

It's 50 years since Rena first did the crib in St Mary's cathedral Killarney. It has changed a lot in that time, all overseen by her watchful eye and she has no intention of stopping now. Thanks to the help of a local builder, Martin Walsh, she's able to get the crib set up quickly and with a minimum of fuss.

"He has a few fellas and he'll ring me up and say we'll put up the crib tomorrow. I'll come down then and tell them where to put everything. Before I used to do it all myself, but it was too much heavy work."

"But Martin's men, they have it done in an hour for me. It's great. He's very good, he sets it up in no time. I used to have a pile of people who would say, oh I'll come and help. But they'd only be in my way. Honest, I'd prefer to do it myself," Ms Kennelly finishes.



The highly coveted Benemerenti Medal, was bestowed upon Mrs Rena Kennelly earlier this year by Fr Kieran O'Brien, ADM of St Mary's Cathedral, Killarney, in recognition for her years of service to the Cathedral – creating the life-size Christmas Crib for over 50 years, in the Cathedral. Rena is pictured with her two great-grandchildren Roan (left) and Ben Clifford.

Out&About

A bishop's blessing on a Christmas crib



SLIGO: Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey joined the staff and pupils of St Mary's College, Ballisodare for their Advent Service and to bless the new crib made by staff and students.



SLIGO: Bishop Dempsey is pictured at the crib with (from left) Deputy Principal Shane Kennedy, Principal Michael Horkan and Sr Mary Forde.



DUBLIN: Self Help Africa's Ronan Scully received the sixth Oireachtas Human Dignity Award at a ceremony in Leinster House. Mr Scully is pictured with his wife Jacqui and daughters Sophie and Mia. Photo: John McElroy.

IN SHORT

Family Solidarity criticises 'disappointing' synodal pathway

The Irish national synodal synthesis "does not represent us and it does not represent what we have heard at the meetings in our parishes", Irish family advocacy group Family Solidarity has written in an open letter to Ireland's bishops.

"After a year, we must admit that both the process and the provisional outcomes of the synodal pathway in Ireland are disappointing," Irish family advocacy group Family Solidarity chairman Angelo Bottone wrote.

"At the local level, we have seen a lack of enthusiasm and poor levels of participation. Reading the diocesan reports, it is clear that

many parishes have shown no interest in the national or in the worldwide synod."

Dominicans Instagram initiative sees success

The Irish Dominicans have been active in preaching online and on social media, their most recent endeavour taking them to Instagram.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, Fr Conor McDonough OP said that the response to their content so far has been "really impressive".

"Many young people who are not engaging with our material elsewhere are actively engaging with what we're posting on Instagram," he said, adding that they've gained almost 800 followers in recent months and that their posts

and reels have been viewed nearly 40,000 times.

Our intention is "to build up the Irish Church with our preaching of the Gospel," Fr McDonough said.

Their content includes weekly reflections on the Sunday Gospel, biblical education videos, such as their series, "Unsung heroes of the New Testament", posts about the lives of the saints, prayer and more.

They can be followed @irishdominicans

Ronan Scully takes home Oireachtas human rights award

Self Help Africa's Ronan Scully pictured above was presented with the sixth Oireachtas Human

Dignity Award at a ceremony in Leinster House earlier this month.

Mr Scully was honoured for his many years of service to others, both as a volunteer and professionally, in some of the world's poorest countries, as well as for his commitment to youth education and development.

This award is presented by the Oireachtas Life and Dignity Group to a person or group whose commitment to the promotion of human dignity is exemplary.

Independent Senator Rónán Mullen, who proposed Mr Scully for the Award, described him as "a person of energy, enthusiasm, faith and hope, dedicated to improving people's lives in the toughest parts of the world".

Since 2010, Mr Scully has worked with Self Help Africa. Prior to that he spent 18 years as a volunteer and employee with GOAL.



DUBLIN: Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Darragh O'Brien is pictured at the launch of *Local Matters, Parish, Local Government and Community in Ireland* with the author Finola Kennedy. The book was published by the Institute of Public Administration (IPA).



DUBLIN: Pictured with author Finola Kennedy are (from left) Lucy Kennedy, Frank Kennedy, Dylan Viani-Walsh, FK, Conor Harnett, Saran Kennedy-Williams and Ruth Kennedy. Photo: Orla Murray/Coalesce.



ANTRIM: QUB Catholic chaplaincy's choir, Canticle, performed the University Carol Service in the Great Hall, led by choir director Marcella Walsh and pianist Fiona Donnelly.



ANTRIM: Fr. Conor McDonough OP, guest speaker at the Catholic Chaplaincy at QUB's annual carol service and nightfever, chats to students after the service.



ANTRIM: Marcella Walsh and Focus missionary Áine Lee enjoy the festive atmosphere after the carol service. Students gathered at the Catholic chaplaincy in Queen's University Belfast for music and song, adoration, street outreach, a shoebox 'wrapathon,' guided prayer and lots more besides.



ANTRIM: Aoife Hendron, Meabh Carlin, baby Una-Meabh and Patricia Moitie.

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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DERRY: Two little angels from St Eithne's PS's Nativity play.



DERRY: Pupils from Mrs Logue's P1 class at St Eithne's Primary School, who played the Three Wise Men at their Nativity Play before Christmas.



DERRY: Mary and Joseph, as portrayed by students from Mrs Logue's P1 class at St Eithne's PS.



DOWN: Year 13 students at St Louis Grammar School, Kilkeel, wrap up boxes to be donated to St Vincent de Paul's Christmas appeal, as part of the John Paul II awards programme.



DUBLIN: Bro. Grieve OP is congratulated after his ordination to the diaconate by another recent ordinand, Fr. Anthony Kavanagh OP.



DUBLIN: Dominican Bro. Ruaidhri Grieve was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop-emeritus of Dublin Eamonn Walsh, in St Saviour's Church, Dominick St. Photos: Bro. Seán Blackwell.

Events

● The events column will be back after Christmas. Please send in any events taking place in the new year to Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie. The deadline is a week before publication. Events sent in any later will not be considered for publication.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Canadian Church reflects on Pope's 'pilgrimage of penance'

● The Canadian bishops have released a reflection on Pope Francis "words of healing and reconciliation" during his 'penitential pilgrimage' to Canada last July.

The Canadian Conference of Catholic bishops' message marking the National Day of Prayer in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples, celebrated in Canada on December 12 every year, highlights "Pope Francis' understanding of the family bond over generations" and the part it plays in opening "the doors for all Catholics to learn about and apply understandings of the Indigenous world view toward reconciliation".

The Council concluded its message expressing their hope that "our journey of reconciliation will bring the springtime back once again," banishing the "winter of shame".

Virgin of Guadalupe 'shows way to peace'

● Our Lady of Guadalupe "always leads us to Jesus, who will show us the way to find peace," Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles said recently.

"Jesus will show us the way to the true happiness and love in our lives," he told thousands of the Faithful gathered for an annual outdoor Mass at East Los Angeles College's Weingart Stadium.

"True conversion is to change the way in which we live," Archbishop Gomez

said in Spanish during his bilingual homily.

"Let's ask our Mother Mary to help us discover what are those small things we need to change in our lives."

He reminded Massgoers of Our Lady of Guadalupe's message of hope, compassion, unity and love.

"Let's make of our families a model of unity and a place full of love," the archbishop said.

El Salvador crackdown on gangs causes human rights abuses

● A massive crackdown on gangs in El Salvador has led to ongoing human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions, torture and deaths in custody, according to a report from a pair of human rights groups.

"The authorities' campaign of mass, indiscriminate arrests has led to the detention of hundreds of people with no apparent connections to gangs' abusive activity," said a release by Human Rights Watch and the Salvadoran human rights group Cristosal.

"In many cases, detentions appear to be based on the appearance and social background of the detainees, or on questionable evidence, such as anonymous calls and uncorroborated allegations on social media."

The report documented widespread abuse committed by security forces in the Central American country after President Nayib Bukele declared a state of emergency in late March in response to a spate of gang violence.

Pope concerned by deadly clashes in South Sudan

● Pope Francis said Sunday he is concerned about recent deadly clashes in the northern part of South Sudan.

"I follow with sorrow and concern the news from South Sudan about the violent clashes of the past few days," he said at the end his Sunday Angelus message, December 11.

Pope Francis is scheduled to travel to South Sudan's capital city, Juba, in just under six weeks.

"Let us pray to the Lord for peace and national reconciliation, so that the attacks may cease and that civilians may always be respected," Francis said Sunday, after violence broke out in South Sudan's Upper Nile state, in the north-eastern part of the country in the second week of December.

US Catholic population shows growth and southward move

The Catholic population in the United States has grown by about two million people in 10 years. With nearly 62 million people, it continues to constitute the largest religious body in 36 US states, according to the latest religion-focused survey of America's religious congregations.

Over the last decade, many Catholics, the survey found, have moved to the South.

"Perhaps the most notable changes were by region," Clifford Grammich, a political scientist involved in the US Religion Census, told CNA.

"Fifty years ago, 71% of US Catholics were in the Northeast and Midwest; in 2020, 45% were. And the South now has more Catholics than any other region. I was surprised to see there are now more Catholics than Southern Baptists in Missouri and Virginia."

The US Religion Census is conducted by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies every 10 years. Its latest report was released last month.

Its 2020 survey reported that there were 61.9 million Catholics in the US, about 18.7% of the population. The survey identified 372 religious bodies with more than 356,000 congregations and 161.4 million adherents in the United States.

With a population of 331.4 million Americans, that would mean 48.7% of the country is a member of a religious congregation. While other surveys



Part of the procession during the annual Fête-Dieu du Têche in the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, is seen August 15, 2021. The Catholic population in Southern America is growing, according to a new study.

group Americans by how they self-identify, researchers for the religion census focused on counting people who have some connection with a religious congregation.

While Protestants collectively outnumber Catholics in the US, the researchers of the US Religion Census viewed various Protestant bodies as their own denominational groups, not collectively. According to this categorisation, Catholics are the single-largest religious group in the US. There are about three times as many Catholics as nondenominational Christians or Southern Baptists, the next two largest groups.

Despite being the largest religious group, Catholics have the fourth-most congregations of all religious bodies. The survey identified 19,405 Catholic congregations. The number of Catholic congregations is the lowest the religion census has found in more than 50 years.

According to Mr Grammich, the decline in congregation numbers reflects consolidation in the Church. Mr Grammich, who authored a report focused on the 2020 survey's Catholic findings, is an associate of the Glenmary Research Center. The centre provides research for the Glenmary Home Missioners, a Catholic

society of priests and religious brothers who focus on serving the people of Appalachia and the South.

Mr Grammich told CNA he was not surprised to find that the Catholic population remains at around 60 million, about the same since 2000.

For the purposes of the 2020 census, a Catholic "congregation" means a parish, mission, or other site with regularly scheduled public Mass at least six months of the year. A Catholic "adherent" is an individual "associated with a Catholic church in some way".

French bishops set up 'comprehensive' national Church court

France's Catholic bishops have set up what they believe to be the world's first major national church court, replacing a previous network of local tribunals, although sexual abuse cases involving children will still be referred to the Vatican.

"As a community of believers, the Church has developed a comprehensive legal system, which includes the right to sanction behaviour by members" who undermine "the Church's spiritual and human values", the bishops' conference said in a statement.

"These ecclesial procedures do not con-

flict with French law. ... Like all religions, the Catholic Church is free in its internal organisation, and all Catholics, as French citizens, also remain subject to the state law."

The statement explained the role of the National Canonical Penal Court, set up in Paris earlier this month.

It said the 20-member court, approved by the Vatican in September, would be tasked with judging "canonical offenses committed by clergy and laity" nationwide, such as acts of sacrilege, apostasy, schism, misuse of sacraments and teachings against the Church's magisterium.

The court aimed to "strengthen and harmonise" procedures formerly followed by diocesan and archdiocesan tribunals.

Establishment of the court, partly staffed by lay experts, was one of 45 recommendations by an Independent Commission on Sexual Abuse in the Church in its 2,500-page report released in October 2021.

The report also proposed an external audit for victim support units and selling diocesan assets to finance compensation to those who were abused.

President Biden's transgender mandate suffers second big court loss

The Biden administration may not force Catholic organisations and medical professionals to perform gender-transition surgeries or provide insurance coverage for them, the US Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals has said in a recent ruling that cited religious freedom grounds.

"The federal government

has no business forcing doctors to violate their consciences or perform controversial procedures that could permanently harm their patients," Luke Goodrich, vice president and senior counsel at Becket legal group, said Friday.

"This is a common-sense ruling that protects patients,

aligns with best medical practice, and ensures doctors can follow their Hippocratic Oath to 'do no harm'."

Becket serves as legal counsel for a coalition of Catholic organisations representing hospitals, doctors, and clinics that had filed the legal challenge to the mandate issued by

President Joe Biden's Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

The Catholic groups alleged that the mandate required them to perform and provide insurance coverage for gender-transition surgeries and abortions, against their conscientious objections.



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The flame of faith...



Bishop Robert Brennan of Brooklyn, New York, lights a torch outside the Co-Cathedral of St Joseph on December 12, after Mass on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Photo: CNS/DeSales Media

Spanish Catholics plea to Pope to save monastery from government

A group of Spanish Catholics sent a petition to the Madrid cardinal and Pope Francis' ambassador, asking help to prevent the removal of a giant cross and a Benedictine monastery from a civil war cemetery and memorial outside Madrid.

"These Benedictines carry out an invaluable task: They pray for the people buried there, for peace and reconciliation between Spaniards," said the petition, addressed to Cardinal Carlos Osoro Sierra of Madrid and Archbishop Bernardo Auza, the Vatican nuncio.

The petition, by the Enraizados en Cristo y la

Sociedad (Rooted in Christ and Society) association, was circulated as Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's coalition government prepared to enforce a new law requiring the Valley of the Fallen, known in Spanish as *Valle de los Caídos*, to be redesignated a "place of democratic memory" and stripped of political elements it said exalted the dictatorship of Gen. Francisco Franco, who died in 1975.

"The permanence of the Benedictine community is not negotiable or interchangeable," said the Madrid-based association, founded in 2012 to provide "a Catholic voice in public life".

"We ask the Holy See's nuncio and archbishop of Madrid to defend the monks and safeguard the cross – if we don't act quickly, everything will go down the drain."

The remains of Franco, who ruled Spain for four decades after the 1936-1939 civil war, were reburied at Madrid's El Pardo cemetery in October 2019 after being exhumed from a pontifical basilica at the valley, which also contains the graves of 34,000 conflict victims and is dominated by the 460-foot stone cross.

The Democratic Memory Law will require Spanish schoolchildren to be taught

about Franco's dictatorship. It will pardon tens of thousands of people convicted of rebelling against Franco and will facilitate identification of murder victims from mass graves.

Under the law, the Valley of the Fallen will be renamed and made a national cemetery, giving equal status to those killed on both sides.

It will be managed by a secular organisation instead of a Catholic foundation.

Benedictine Fr Santiago Cantera Montenegro has vowed to resist moves to expel his community, which has run the Valley since 1958.

'Nigeria is waiting' for justice in Pentecost church massacre

Six months after the Pentecost Sunday attack on Sts Francis Xavier Owo Catholic Parish in Ondo Diocese, which left 39 Catholic worshippers killed and more than 80 injured, there have been arrests and promises but no prosecution, Bishop Felix Femi Ajakaye has lamented.

"December 5, 2022, is the sixth month of the evil attack, the dead have been buried and their people and other well-wishers are still in sorrowful moods," the leader of Ondo's neighboring Ekiti Diocese said in a December 5 statement.

"Nigeria is still waiting."

On August 11, Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff General Lucky Irabor told journalists that four suspects allegedly involved in the June 5 attack had been arrested. He identified the suspects as Idris Omeiza (aka Bin Malik), Momoh Abubakar, Aliyu Itopa, and Auwal Onimisi.

"More than ever, the people who have been in custody since they were arrested need to be prosecuted now," Bishop Femi emphasised.

"General Irabor, Nigeria is still waiting," he said, adding that the Nigerian security official should issue an update on the investigation and the status of the prosecution.

There were "outcries, condemnations, and there were promises" made nationally and internationally, the bishop noted.

Authorities have said little since announcing the arrests months ago, Bishop Femi said.

Vatican roundup

Church must take workers' problems seriously, Pope says

● All workers should feel welcomed by the Church and know that their needs and problems are taken seriously, Pope Francis said.

In fact, labour and employment are experiencing "a phase of transformation that needs to be accompanied," he told members of Italy's Movement of Christian Workers during an audience at the Vatican.

"Social inequalities, forms of slavery and exploitation, family poverty due to the lack of work or poorly paid work are realities that must be listened to in our church communities. They are more or less forms of exploitation – let us call things by their real name," he said.

The movement, which was celebrating the 50th anniversary of its official establishment, promotes the church's teachings and Christian values in society, in the world of work and in government policies.

Pope Francis asked members to make a special commitment to bringing the concerns and problems of workers to the many levels of the church community.

"It is important that workers feel at home in parishes, associations, groups and movements; that their problems are taken seriously, that their call for solidarity can be heard," the Pope told them.

Ukraine minister welcomes Holy See's negotiations offer

● Every effort for peace in Ukraine coming from Pope Francis and the Holy See is welcome, Ukraine's Foreign Minister has said, whether it is helping to mediate for the exchange of prisoners or in assisting migrants and refugees.

However, the time for broad negotiations after the Russian aggression has not come yet, Dmytro Kuleba told a small delegation of journalists visiting Ukraine on December 9 that his country has requirements for any such mediation to eventually take place.

The interview lasted about 40 minutes, and the questions dealt with Holy

See-Ukraine relations, Holy See efforts for peace, and how Ukraine would welcome this effort.

Though appreciating Pope Francis' constant mention of the Ukrainian situation and expressing an open invitation to the Pope to visit the country, Kuleba also told CNA that some of the Pope's words have been "painful" for Ukrainians.

Kuleba told journalists that "the protocolar response would be that a negotiation would be more than welcome," but "the sad truth is that the time for this broad mediation hasn't come yet and the reason for that is President [Vladimir] Putin."

Rome meeting focuses on grassroots nonviolence promotion

● While many people involved with the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative continue to hope Pope Francis will issue an encyclical promoting nonviolence as a spirituality and way of life, they also know that Catholics already are engaged in teaching and supporting nonviolence in situations of conflict and exploitation around the globe.

Nonviolence "points to another way of being in relationship to each other and the planet," said Marie Dennis, programme chair of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative.

"It is not only what we are trying to accomplish, but it is how we get there."

The initiative, sponsored by Pax Christi International and the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission of the international unions of superiors of women's and men's religious orders, brought 75 people to Rome December 5-7 to discuss nonviolence and Pope Francis' teaching. "Many people at this meeting said we would have a clearer place to stand if we had" an encyclical, Ms Dennis told *Catholic News Service*.

"But in my mind, the work of imagining what a paradigm shift to nonviolence would look like is a work of the whole Church. And we are the Church."



Letter from USA



Barb Umberger

Parishioners at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church in Minneapolis, about half of whom are deaf, had the chance to attend Mass celebrated by the first deaf man ordained a Roman Catholic priest in the US, Fr Tom Coughlin.

About 80 people attended the Mass last month at the small church, a fact noted by Fr Coughlin in his welcome.

He used American Sign Language to say he came from a "huge, fancy, million-dollar cathedral" in New Jersey to this "cute, little church" that is cosy and warm.

“Fr Coughlin, an incardinated priest in the Diocese of Honolulu, celebrated Mass with Fr Mike Krenik, pastor, who is learning ASL”

Ordained in 1977 for the Trinitarians, Fr Coughlin, 75, left that order and helped found a community of priests and brothers who minister to the deaf, disabled, marginalised and minorities in parishes and hospitals. The order, the Dominican Missionaries for the Deaf Apostolate, is based in Newark, New Jersey.

"I feel all the warmth and love," he told the congregation. "Jesus is here with you."

After the liturgy, deaf parishioner Carol Buley, 73, said it was "really exciting" to have a deaf priest celebrate Mass, which doesn't happen often.

"It's ... fantastic to be able to see a deaf priest signing directly with us," she said. "It's great to have interpreters, but to have somebody of our own culture, having a deaf priest signing directly with us, is just fantastic."

Interpreter and parishioner Susan Sweezo, born to deaf parents, used a microphone at the front of the church to speak Fr Coughlin's words to the hearing audience. During parts of the Mass with singing, parishioner Stephanie Stork stood near the altar and signed the words. Two others each took a turn.

Fr Coughlin, an incardinated priest in the Diocese of Honolulu, celebrated Mass with Fr Mike Krenik, pastor, who is learning ASL. The parish has about 120 parishioners.

Jesuit Fr William O'Brien, director of novices for the Jesuit Novitiate of St Alberto Hurtado in St Paul, had invited Fr Coughlin to visit sometime with deaf novice Todd Honas of Nebraska, who is in his first year of formation. That opportunity presented itself when Fr Coughlin trav-

America's first deaf priest still inspiring



Fr Tom Coughlin, the first deaf man ordained a priest in the US, prays the Eucharistic Prayer using sign language during Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Minneapolis. At left is Fr Mike Krenik, pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, who is learning American Sign Language. Photo: CNS/Dave Hrbacek, *The Catholic Spirit*

“Ordained in 1977 for the Trinitarians, Fr Coughlin, 75, left that order and helped found a community of priests and brothers who minister to the deaf, disabled, marginalised and minorities in parishes and hospitals”

elled to the Twin Cities to preside at a wedding on November 19.

Mr Honas, 25, has been helping at Our Lady of Mount Carmel since September, serving as a lector at Masses, leading a weekly "faith group" and, occasionally, delivering Communion to deaf parishioners. Fr Coughlin said Fr O'Brien hoped to give Mr Honas support and encouragement.

"He has the right personality, skills and intelligence, and he has the vocation for it," Fr Coughlin said of Honas. The pair have been communicating for about a month via a "video relay phone", signing back and forth on the screen.

"It's very important for him that I'm his friend and supporter because he's so new in this experience, coming into a religious community, religious life, ... and I'm so happy to give him advice and support," Fr Coughlin said through an interpreter.

Mr Honas said having the first

ordained deaf priest in the US connect with "the most recent man to want to become a deaf priest (is) kind of a cool mix".

Fr Coughlin recalled feeling lonely when he was a novice and thinking about leaving. But his director told him, "You have to suffer so that other people can have it easier." Fr Coughlin then understood the meaning of his suffering. "That gave me a purpose of why I have to suffer coming into the seminary," he said. He decided to stay.

Fixed

Through an interpreter, Mr Honas said people who are deaf do not need to be "fixed" and they don't want sympathy.

"We accept our deafness ... but we want (others) to understand that from our perspective," he said.

It can be frustrating meeting with priests and bishops who cannot communicate with the deaf, he



Todd Honas, left, a deaf Jesuit novice, uses sign language to convey the readings for Mass at Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Minneapolis, as lector Mike Iacarella reads them aloud.

said. Noting that many priests know Latin, Greek, Spanish, "Could they learn ASL?" he asked. He suggested offering ASL classes at seminaries as a start.

Deaf people face significant challenges as priests, he said, such as administering the Sacrament of Penance because "you can't use an interpreter for penance; you have to have a deaf priest". He wishes interpreters were not needed at Mass because "circumventing has to occur".

"It's not direct communication", he said.

Fr William Kenney, 92, who served the deaf and hard of hearing in the Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis for 40 years, attended

the Mass. Our Lady of Mount Carmel initially served a large population of Italians, and as numbers dwindled, there had been talk of closing the parish, he said.

Deaf community

So, he told parishioners that "if we wanted to keep it open, if we brought our deaf community here, they would have the opportunity to stay open," he said. "And they all wanted the deaf to come."

Serving those who are deaf or hard of hearing is a reminder, Fr Kenney said, "that we should be mindful of those who are not able to use the normal avenues to make contact with their religious faith."

Pope's 2022: A year dominated by war and problems walking



Cindy Wooden

While 2022 finally saw the publication of Pope Francis' constitution reforming the Roman Curia, the biggest news and the biggest changes in his ministry came from Russia's war on Ukraine and from the Pope's own problems walking.

Knee problems forced the Pope, who celebrated his 86th birthday on December 17, to postpone a planned trip to Congo and South Sudan in July, although he did make a major trip to Canada later that same month.

“As the Pope's step faltered, his cries for peace increased, although not without controversy and criticism”

A few weeks before heading to North America, he had told the *Reuters* news agency that an inflamed ligament in his right knee caused him to limp, which made him walk badly and that, in turn, caused a small fracture.

The Pope was complaining of knee pain in January and cancelling public events already in February; by early May he was arriving at audiences in a wheelchair.

As the year ended, he mostly used a cane to walk in public, but the wheelchair was a frequent alternative. And, at papal liturgies, it became the norm for him to preside over the Liturgy of the Word and give the homily, but have a cardinal or bishop preside over the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

As the Pope's step faltered, his cries for peace increased, although not without controversy and criticism.

Soon after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, Pope Francis took the unusual step of leaving the Vatican to go to the Russian Embassy to the Holy See to plead for peace and offer the Vatican's services as a mediator. And, inviting bishops around the globe to join him, he solemnly entrusted and consecrated the Church, all humanity and “especially Russia and Ukraine” to the Immaculate Heart of Mary during a prayer service March 25 in St Peter's Basilica.

But even as millions of Ukrainians – mostly women and children – fled and as evidence mounted of Russian war crimes, Pope Francis did not publicly condemn Russian President



Pope Francis adjusts a traditional Indigenous headdress during a meeting with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities at Maskwacis, Alberta, July 25, 2022. Photo: CNS/Paul Haring.

Vladimir Putin. That, along with his pleas for Russia and Ukraine to dialogue and negotiate peace, left many people, particularly Ukrainians, hurt that the Pope seemed to somehow blame “both sides” for the war.

Journalists repeatedly asked Pope Francis to explain.

In late November, he told the Jesuit-run *America* magazine he did not think it was necessary to name names. “If you have a martyred people, you have someone who martyrs them.”

“Why do I not name Putin? Because it is not necessary; it is already known,” he said.

Holy See

And, he said, “the position of the Holy See is to seek peace and to seek an understanding. The diplomacy of the Holy See is moving in this direction and, of course, is always willing to mediate.”

It was not until October that Pope Francis publicly said he was calling on “the president of the Russian Federation, begging him to stop this spiral of violence and death, also for the sake of his people”.

At the same time, Pope Francis appealed to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy “to be open” to any “serious peace proposals”.

Also in the area of diplomacy, in October the Vatican renewed for another two years its agreement with China on naming bishops that are acceptable to both the communist government and the Pope. But

soon after, the Chinese government transferred a bishop without Vatican approval, drawing an unusual statement of “regret” from the Vatican that the assignment “did not take place in accordance with the spirit of dialogue existing between the Vatican and Chinese sides”.

“The project had been a long one. Six months after taking office in 2013, Pope Francis set up his international Council of Cardinals to advise him and to help design the reform”

In August, the Pope created 20 new cardinals and led the entire College of Cardinals in a two-day meeting on the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* (Preach the Gospel), which was the first major reform and reorganisation of the Roman Curia since 1988.

Published in March and taking effect in June, the document merged some Vatican congregations and pontifical councils and raised the status of others – particularly the charitable office of the papal almoner. But mostly, it insisted the Roman Curia was a service organisation meant to support the Pope and local bishops in their efforts to promote the Church as

a community of missionary disciples, sharing the Gospel and caring for all those in need.

The project had been a long one. Six months after taking office in 2013, Pope Francis set up his international Council of Cardinals to advise him and to help design the reform. They interviewed all the heads of Vatican offices, studied what each was doing and made dozens of proposals, going through various drafts and consultation periods before the final version was promulgated.

Apology

Also long in the making was Pope Francis' trip to Canada to apologise to Indigenous communities for the ways Catholics and their institutions, especially residential schools, contributed to their suffering and to the stifling of their language, culture and traditional spirituality.

The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action in 2015 included a request that the Pope make such an apology on the land of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. And representatives of the three groups came to the Vatican in March and April to share with the Pope the stories of the survivors of residential schools and to recount the multigenerational trauma that came from the physical and emotional abuse, the splitting apart of families and the suppression of their

people's language and cultures.

Meeting Indigenous people in Edmonton, Maskwacis and Lac Ste. Anne in Alberta, in Quebec City and nearby Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré and, finally, in Iqaluit, Nunavut, in the Canadian Arctic, Pope Francis repeatedly said, “I'm sorry”.

“The overall effects of the policies linked to the residential schools were catastrophic,” he said at Maskwacis. “What our Christian faith tells us is that this was a disastrous error, incompatible with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Pope Francis made three other foreign trips in 2022: focusing on migrants in Malta and on inter-religious dialogue and promoting human fraternity in visits to Kazakhstan and Bahrain.

Throughout the year, the Pope continued to talk about the need for the Catholic Church to embrace “synodality”, a style of sharing the Gospel by listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit and making room for each of the baptised to accept his or her responsibilities as a disciple and welcoming the gifts of all.

Saying he did not want to rush the process of discerning how the Holy Spirit is calling the Church to grow in “synodality”, Pope Francis announced in October that the next assembly of the Synod of Bishops would take place in two sessions: October 2023 and October 2024.

Letters

Letter of the week

Facilitating the wickedness of NI abortion

Dear Editor, Westminster has continuously proven to disregard the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland by pushing ahead with plans to bring in abortion 'services'. Fuel prices soar and people are cold in their houses, yet for some reason the biggest priority for them is abortion.

Once again, due to the inability of the politicians of the North to form an Executive, Westminster runs roughshod over people's democratic rights. As Archbishop Eamon Martin said [*The Irish Catholic* – December 8, 2022] little has seemingly been done to help the most vulnerable this Christmas.

There is a cost of living crisis that is devastating the poor, with many children included in that number,

and yet making sure abortion is available is the priority? It's an absolute disgrace.

As the archbishop said: "The abortion regulations being introduced by Westminster are predicated on the assumption that the unborn child in the womb has no right to love, care and protection from society, unless the child is wanted. Nothing could be further from the truth."

This hits at the heart of the issue. When the reality of abortion is hidden with euphemistic language, such as calling it healthcare for women, people are distanced from the truth and it is increasingly seen as an acceptable action. All of this leads to the dehumanisation of the unborn.

A society that puts individuality and personal choice above personal responsibility and taking moral actions is doomed to wallow in hubris and destruction.

What makes the situation worse is that so many people recognise this but their voices are not respected or being heard due to the political stalemate. Thus the secretary of state Chris Heaton-Harris continues to ignore dissenting voices, the voices of those who speak for those who can not speak for themselves, in order to facilitate the wickedness of abortion.

Yours etc.,
Mary Walsh
Ranelagh, Dublin

One death by suicide is too many

Dear Editor, The article written by you on suicide in the North [*The Irish Catholic* – December 8, 2022] was striking, and heartbreakingly sad. Even one suicide is too much, but there were 237 deaths by suicide in 2021, and as the article states it's the highest number since 2015.

There are major legacy issues that have not been addressed, there is so much pain, and there are so many people quietly struggling day to day to make ends meet and just survive. This is all leading to the loss of something so precious and often fragile: hope. Once a person loses hope, it is very difficult to bring them back from a precipice from which there is no return.

These people who are crying out for support, often silently,



must be helped. While it can be difficult to see the signs, everyone must arm themselves with information around the warnings. Even then, it may be

almost impossible to stop someone.

Far more supports need to be offered to tackle this desperate situation.

One death by suicide is too many.

Yours etc.,
Deirdre O'Connell
Derry City, Derry

Rebranding Christmas is not on the cards

Dear Editor, Advent means 'coming', it is a Latin word for arrival and serves as a countdown to Christmas when Christians use the four Sundays and weeks of Advent to prepare and remember the real meaning of Christmas.

Orthodox Christians don't eat meat and dairy during Advent. But more public bodies are refusing to give the festival its proper name for fear of causing offence. Fáilte Ireland's 'Winter in Dublin' marketing campaign, aimed at showcasing compelling reasons to visit the capital, has omitted the word Christmas from their marketing campaign. The ad reads "Winter in Dublin it's magic"

but fails to mention Christmas at all. People are disgusted that Fáilte Ireland is giving the impression that this winter ad is part of a dumbing down of Christmas. Instead of easing tensions in the capital, the winter ad is creating problems.

Christmas is a unifying festival that brings people together. Christmas endures because it is more inclusive than winter could ever be. Everyone can play their part believers, unbelievers alike. Fáilte Ireland is not alone. There are more examples than ever this year of councils and organisations avoiding Christmas for fear of upsetting unbelievers. "Have yourself, a merry little Winterfest."

The politically correct brigade on the UK's Stoke on Trent council considers it fair game to discriminate against Christians by calling Christmas 'Winterfest'. A survey of festive cards dispatched by local authorities found only one out of 122 mentioned the birth of Christ, preferring phrases such as Season's Greetings or Happy Holidays. Charles Dickens invented our modern Christmas by portraying shopping and feasting as ways to show affection and bring people together which the advertising industry sells relentlessly.

Yours etc.,
Gerry Coughlan,
Tallaght, Dublin 24

Time to clamp down on euthanasia in the south

Dear Editor, We know four things about the devil:

1. He loves complacency
2. He strikes when we're strong
3. He strikes when we're weak
4. The devil loves distraction.

These things are not separate. Should we be afraid of the devil? Probably. But how does this relate to euthanasia?

I'm not saying that it's time give up on the idea that we can ever see a day where new life is always a blessing or a day when a life that begins at conception is seen as an opportunity and not a problem to be dispensed with by any means possible. I'm not saying that we should try and reverse the wrong that was committed when the 8th amendment was repealed in the Republic of Ireland. However, I do believe that the devil loves distraction.

It may be time to turn our collective attention away from abortion and towards the growing calls to ensure more access to euthanasia services for the elderly. Euthanasia is legal across the continent and to what extent this is allowed in these countries varies from country to country. That said, Right to Life UK have increasingly been pointing out the new calls to adopt continental standards for euthanasia in the UK. This should be alarming to pro-life people on the island of Ireland. The UK abortion statistics outlined in the build up to the vote on the 8th amendment such as the 1 in 5 pregnancies ending in abortion were not just scaremongering from the pro-life side of the debate. Our abortion statistics are becoming scarily similar to the UK statistics that were cited as a warning prior to the repealing of the 8th amendment. But it has been repealed and there is not much we can do for now. However, we can nip euthanasia in the bud. We must not get complacent, we must face reality and observe what is coming down the road for the devil strikes when we're strong.

Yours etc.,
Gareth Foynes
Moville, Co. Donegal

Rebuilding the Church in Ireland

Dear Editor, I am extremely impressed with the new 'Your Faith' section of *The Irish Catholic* and would like to congratulate all involved in making it come to life.

A deeper understanding of the Faith is integral to rebuilding the Church in Ireland, as so many received little to no education in why we

believe what we believe. In this position, it makes it very easy for others to win debates on issues regarding Catholic theology. How can we prosper when we have built our house on sand? It is great to see efforts to remedy this.

Yours etc.,
Jill Dunne
Cork City, Cork

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.

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, December 22, 2022

Questions of Faith

What is the Catholic position on aliens?

Page 32



90 days to become a better man



Exodus 90 is touted as a “roadmap” to a more fulfilling life for an increasing number of men year on year. Started in a seminary in the US in order to help seminarians grow spiritually and to overcome various struggles in their lives, the programme has gone global, with between an estimated 300-400 men taking part in it in Ireland last year alone. What is it about it that’s appealing to so many men at the moment?

Exodus 90 is a 90 day spiritual exercise, a bumper Lent, if you will, based on three key pillars – prayer, asceticism and fraternity. For prayer, it recommends making a daily holy hour (or 20 minutes at the very least



Spiritual programme Exodus 90 challenges men to become better through prayer, asceticism and fraternity, writes Jason Osborne

if you absolutely can’t do more) as well reading each day’s provided scriptural passage and a reflection based on the book of Exodus. Men are encouraged to travel alongside the Israelites from slavery into freedom with God’s help.

Asceticism

The asceticism is the element that turns the most heads,

with a number of practices prescribed that send shivers down the spines of most. These include:

- Cold showers
- Regular, intense exercise
- Get a full night’s sleep (at least seven hours is recommended)
- Abstain from alcohol, deserts and sweets, eating

between meals, soft or sweet drinks (white milk, black coffee, and black tea are permissible)

- Abstain from television, movies, televised sports and video games
- Abstain from non-essential material purchases
- Listen only to music that lifts the soul to God
- Only use the computer for work, school, or essential tasks (e.g., paying bills)
- Only use mobile devices for essential communications; cut out non-essential texting, app, and internet use
- Take Wednesdays and Fridays as days of fasting. (Abstain

from meat and only eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal.)

Sounding impossible yet? The idea is to help men achieve a higher degree of detachment from the world than usual in a special effort to grow closer to God.

Fraternity

Finally, “fraternity” sees each man journey through the 90 days is a small, close knit group of other men undertaking the same challenge. They are to meet regularly, fostering edifying friendships and keeping each other accountable.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* newspaper, keen proponent

» Continued from Page 29



A group of men on a monthly outing as part of Exodus 90.

of Exodus 90 in Ireland, Cork-based Fr Marius O'Reilly (who's undertaken the challenge 5 times himself now) said that its "made hard on purpose". Despite that, or rather, because of it, Fr O'Reilly describes it as an extremely "humbling experience".

“Different times he did it, different things presented themselves as challenges for him”

"It was one of the lads here in Cork brought it to me five years ago or so. I saw it and I went, 'Sure, we'll give it a go'. I thought maybe it would help the lads more than me, you know? But it helped me enormously in the sense that it really humbled me and helped me to realise how little I can do with my own will and determination and grit," Fr O'Reilly says.

Humbled

"That humbled me and made me realise how much I need to depend on God, which is a lesson I keep learning again and again and again and again. Not on my own strength, but with him all things are possible."

Different times he did it, different things presented themselves as challenges for him. For example, the first time he did it, he

says he didn't struggle too much with the fasting. The second time was a different story, though, and he sees one of the programme's lessons in that.

"Second time, couldn't really get a handle on that [fasting]. Again, the Lord was teaching me, 'You were able to do it the first time because I gave you the grace for it'. They were really, really important blessings," he says.

Journey

You're not making the difficult journey alone though. The journey with other men over the course of the three months and beyond is "absolutely wonderful," Fr O'Reilly says.

"It really sharpens you up, picks you up, humbles you. We would go on outings then as well, you're supposed to go on one outing a month over the course of the three months, so they were fantastic. A hike, we even went swimming in the sea in winter together – they're great bonding occasions."

There are few opportunities like this to be humbled and to learn the truth of the adage, "no man is an island," Fr O'Reilly says. It helps you to realise how much you depend on the Lord, rather than on yourself. Rather than this being a difficult realisation, though, Fr O'Reilly says men really do come away changed, and that he's seen it himself.

"The thing as well is that, nobody succeeds in getting everything right in Exodus 90 and that's kind of the point. It's made hard on purpose because it's like, as Christians, we're called to be perfect and yet none of us become perfect and we continue to sin but the saint is the one who keeps getting up and trying," he says.

“There are few opportunities like this to be humbled and to learn the truth of the adage”

"So Exodus helps you to be more aware of that, too, that you've got to keep going, you know? You fail, but you can't let yourself get down over it, you've got to get up again and try and try and be a better man. Everyone will benefit from that around you. Your family, your parishioners, whatever your status in life is."

Partaken

Undertaking a survey of 37 men who've partaken of the programme in Ireland, Fr O'Reilly said all 37 of them came back saying they intend to do it again and would recommend it to others.

"We've just seen the benefit of this, that it's really helping guys to form fraternity to help each



Fr Marius O'Reilly

other in the struggle, in the Faith. That's been fantastic, and you'll hear guys saying, 'This changed my life, it's made me a better man. I was spending far too much time on the phone and I was present to my wife and kids but I wasn't giving them my attention because my real attention was on my phone, and now I realise that'.

Liberating

Exodus 90 "shines a light on" the places we're all fond of hiding, Fr O'Reilly says, and when you realise that, it's "tremendously liberating"

"Guys are saying that 'I'm spending more time with my family, I'm not as irritable and I'm coming home from work and the first thing I'm doing is not going in to watch a football match, but I realise that I need to spend time with my family and they need me to be a better man'. So Exodus 90 helped guys to be better men and to be more aware of the needs of those around them, not to be so focused on

themselves and their own needs and desires. It really highlights that for guys," he says.

The programme starts on January 9, 2023, and lest people think it's an unrelenting slog for 90 days, a "discipline" such as the cold showers or ban on movies or televised sports, is relaxed every Sunday, as well as on solemnities.

The logo for Exodus 90, featuring the word "EXODUS" in a bold, sans-serif font inside a white shield-like shape with a black border, set against an orange background.

Those interested in Exodus 90 can visit www.exodus90.com, or to find a fraternity undertaking the challenge in Ireland, can visit www.exodus90ireland.com

“The journey with other men over the course of the three months and beyond is ‘absolutely wonderful’”

How to live the life of an everyday saint

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

The undisputed Christmas classic is *It's A Wonderful Life*. The 1946 drama tells the story of an upright businessman, George Bailey, who needs the intercession of an angel to understand the true meaning of his life. It's a decidedly Christian story from an era that was unashamed to be so.

“Through his business and loan company he helps hundreds of men and women to get houses at a fair price”

The film, starring James Stewart, Donna Reed and Lionel Barrymore, was a flop on its release. But after its copyright ran out, it built up a following through regular TV showings to the point that it's now considered one of the great American films – and essential Christmas viewing.

From an early age we see that Bailey (played by Stewart) is conscientious, hard working and caring. But he's also talented and ambitious, with plans to travel the world and to become a great engineer. His small hometown, controlled by the mercenary businessman Mr Potter, seems constricting.

But first when his father dies, and then when his younger brother marries and gets a job, George is forced to give up on his dreams. Instead, he fights the good fight against Mr Potter. Through his busi-

James Stewart (centre) is mobbed by his family in the Christmas classic, *It's A Wonderful Life*.



ness and loan company he helps hundreds of men and women to get houses at a fair price.

But although he's happily married with children, his dreams eat away at him and he feels he has achieved nothing. It is only through the timely intervention of an angel that he doesn't do something terrible.

Christian element

You might think that the angel is the Christian element of the film. But actually, that isn't the case. If anything, his role perpetuates the popular myth that when people die they become angels, not saints.

But the Christian tenor of the film is present from the film's opening shots, with a series of petitions by George's friends and acquaintances, by his wife and by his children, as they all pray to God, Mary and St Joseph to help him.

The film makes it onto the

Vatican's list of great films under the values section and it is more so in the morality that marks it out. It's about a life of self-sacrifice, oriented towards the good of more than just 'Bailey'. He has a family to care for, but also the wider community, and exists in a slow-martyrdom, trying to let his dreams die so that he can give more of himself.

“He is a haunted man, who is committed to loving his life, but who finds it difficult all the same”

It's actually a very Christian theme, one that Frank Duff reflected on in his pamphlet *Can We Be Saints?* Duff was an experienced civil servant and wrote the pamphlet for the working man, trying to bring sainthood a little closer

to the everyday.

What he noticed is that a 9-5 life can wear you down. It is hard to be always reliable, attentive to every small detail, to give up the temptation to envy the life of another or to drift into fantasies about what you could do.

This is exactly what Bailey has to come to terms with. He is a haunted man, who is committed to loving his life, but who finds it difficult all the same.

Failing

And in fact, he's on the verge of failing – he lashes out at his family and all around him, he gets blinding drunk and contemplates suicide. Then, and this is the hook of the film, the angel allows him to see what the town would have been like had he never been born.

We see the impact he made by his everyday martyrdom, one hidden even from Bailey himself.

This life has required resistance to temptation, both money and pleasure, firmness in the face of aggression, and prudence while all around are losing their heads.

Because it's a fan-favourite, there's always someone who wants to make their name by tearing it down. So one *New York Times* columnist argued that the film is uniquely depressing, about giving up your dreams in favour of mundane reality, about how this leads to bitterness and self-recrimination.

“What could be a more apt message for Christmas, the time of God's gift to the world, his only son”

Watching it recently, I realised that he's right, up to a point – there is bitterness, there is anger, there is violence. But there is also grace and love, grievously earned from a life well-lived.

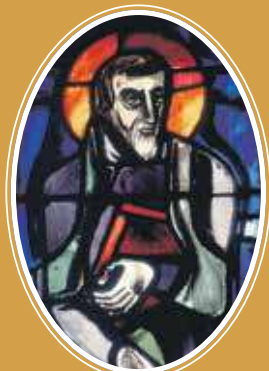
There's a sweet naivety in Bailey, but also a steeliness. There's great passion and love, but also an awkwardness in expressing it. He is a folksy American hero, but he's faced with real and tangible troubles.

If he didn't abandon his dreams, then he would actually be abandoning his father and his brother, his wife and his children, his home town and the community who rely on him for support and encouragement.

Contrast Bailey's character to that of *Citizen Kane*, who I talked about a few weeks back; whereas Kane is consumed by his self-love and ultimately loses his freedom and his dreams, Bailey finds fulfilment in emptying himself of his love. He gives freely of all his talents, making a gift of them to those he loves. What could be a more apt message for Christmas, the time of God's gift to the world, his only Son.

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



St Peter Canisius is depicted in stained-glass. Photo: CNS

St Peter Canisius: The Catechist of Germany during difficult days

“In his loving providence, God made St Peter Canisius his own ambassador at a time when the voice of the Catholic proclamation of faith in German-speaking countries risked falling silent.” So wrote St John Paul II of St Peter Canisius SJ, in a letter to the German bishops to mark 400 years since his death.

Peter Kanijs was born in 1521 in the Dutch village of Nijmegen, which was then a part of the Holy Roman Empire. Coming from a wealthy family, he went on to study at the University of Cologne before entering the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) in 1543, after taking part in their famous Spiritual Exercises under the direction of another St Peter – St Peter Fabre. Not long after this, he participated in the famous Council of Trent in 1547.

Around 1562, Peter Kanijs began to use the Latin form of his name, “Canisius”. Whether intentionally or not, St Peter's identification with the Latin tradition was the shape of his

life, as he's most renowned for his defence and support of the Catholic Faith in Germany during the time of the Protestant reformation there.

After spending time in Rome and Messina, Peter held various positions and posts around the German-speaking world, which he used to create a network of Jesuit communities and colleges in support of Catholic reform. His efforts penetrated every level of society, too – all the way up to Emperor Ferdinand I of the Holy Roman Empire and Pope Gregory XIII. His method of teaching was fresh and innovative; rather than rattling off lists of heresies and doctrines, he sought to explain the endless novelty of the Church's message, and its relevance to every person's life.

In his latter years, he founded the Sankt Michael College in Fribourg, Switzerland in 1580. He died, on December 21, 1597, and was buried in the university church of that same college.

So extensive was his contribution to the

Catholic reform that, Pope Benedict XVI told us during a General Audience in 2011, at least 200 editions of a Catechism he compiled were published during his lifetime alone.

“And hundreds of editions succeeded one another until the 20th Century. So it was that still in my father's generation people in Germany were calling the Catechism simply “the Canisius”. He really was the Catechist of Germany for centuries, he formed people's faith for centuries,” Pope Benedict XVI went on to say during that same audience.

Despite his enormous contribution to the formation of generations in the Catholic faith, at the heart of his example is his total reliance on prayer and his personal relationship with Christ. The Christian life as set out in all of the Church's teachings will not flourish, he believed, unless it is nourished by frequent personal prayer, by personal contact with God.

Even the greatest believer goes through the tunnel of doubt



The Wisdom of Pope Francis

John the Baptist, hearing of Jesus' works, is seized with doubt as to whether he is really the Messiah or not. In fact, he imagined a stern Messiah who would come and do justice with power by chastising sinners. Now, on the contrary, Jesus has words and gestures of compassion towards all; at the centre of his action is the mercy that forgives, whereby "the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them". It does us good, however, to look more closely at this crisis for John the Baptist, as it can tell us something important too.

Prison

The Gospel emphasises that John is in prison, and this, as well as

being a physical place, makes us think of the inner situation he is experiencing: in prison there is darkness, there is no possibility of seeing clearly and seeing beyond it. In effect, the Baptist is no longer able to recognise Jesus as the awaited Messiah. He is assailed by doubt, and he sends the disciples to check: "Go and see if he is the Messiah or not". It surprises us that this should happen to John, the one who had baptised Jesus in the Jordan and had indicated him to his disciples as the Lamb of God. But this means that even the greatest believer goes through the tunnel of doubt. And this is not a bad thing; on the contrary, sometimes it is essential for spiritual growth: it helps us understand that God is always greater than we imagine him to be. His works are surprising compared to our

calculations; his actions are different, always, they exceed our needs and expectations; and therefore, we must never stop seeking him and converting to his true face.

A great theologian used to say that God "needs to be rediscovered in stages... sometimes believing that we are losing him". This is what the Baptist does: in doubt, he still seeks him, questions him, 'argues' with him and finally rediscovers him. John, defined by Jesus as the greatest among those born of women, teaches us, in short, not to close God within our own mindsets. This is always the danger, the temptation: to make ourselves a God to our measure, a God to use. And God is something else.

We too at times find ourselves in his situation, in an inner jail, unable to recognise the newness of the Lord, whom we perhaps hold captive in the presumption that we already know everything about him. One never knows everything about God, never! Perhaps we have in mind a powerful God who does what he wants, instead of the God of humble meekness, the God of mercy and love, who always intervenes respecting our freedom and our choices.

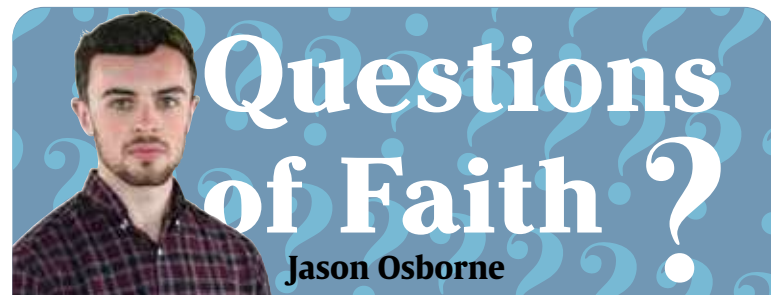
“Advent is a time in which, instead of thinking about gifts for ourselves, we can give words and gestures of consolation to those who are wounded, as Jesus did with the blind, the deaf and the lame”

Perhaps we even find ourselves saying to him: "Are you really you, so humble, the God who is coming to save us?". And something similar can happen to us with our brothers and sisters too: we have our ideas, our prejudices and we attach rigid labels to others, especially those we feel are different to us.

God is always the one who stirs wonder in you. A time – Advent – in which, preparing the Nativity display for the Infant Jesus, we learn again who Our Lord is; a time to leave behind certain preconceptions and prejudices about God and our brothers and sisters. Advent is a time in which, instead of thinking about gifts for ourselves, we can give words and gestures of consolation to those who are wounded, as Jesus did with the blind, the deaf and the lame.



Detail of stained glass window created by Louis Comfort Tiffany in Arlington Street Church, Boston depicting John the Baptist. Photo: John Stephen Dwyer.



What is the Catholic position on aliens?

There's a widespread interest today in the possible existence of life on other planets. With the development of telescopes that are able to reveal things our eyes have never seen and the expansion of human efforts in space, questions have naturally been asked about who, or what, we might bump into "out there".

Many claim that if humanity were to encounter life out there in the seemingly endless expanse of space, it'd be game over for religion. That claim stems from the idea that if there were life elsewhere, then life is probably abundant in the Universe, and so humans aren't as special as most religions claim them to be – Christianity included. Is that the case, though? Does the existence of aliens automatically invalidate our faith in Christ? Indeed, what's the Catholic position on possible extra-terrestrial life anyway?

The first thing to clarify is that there is no clear-cut Catholic doctrine on this matter – just a lot of speculation. As to whether life does exist out there on a planet in the void of space, the Church doesn't weigh in on that either, properly understanding that it's a scientific question rather than a theological one. That said, if life were to be discovered, there would be theological questions to be answered, so what can be said about those, guided by the Church's intellectual tradition?

An Italian Dominican Friar, Giordano Bruno, wrote in 1588 the following in his *Fifth Dialogue of On the Cause, Principle, and Unity*: "I can imagine an infinite number of worlds like the earth, with a Garden of Eden on each one. In all these Gardens of Eden, half the Adams and Eves will not eat the fruit of knowledge, but half will. But half of infinity is infinity, so an infinite number of worlds will fall from grace and there will be an infinite number of crucifixions."

It's a very interesting idea, that is most definitely unprovable to us at the moment. It does open up the question, though, as to what the spiritual state of other creatures might be like that we might encounter. As Fr Bruno speculated, it's entirely possible that there are creatures out there that never fell, as we did. While he couched the language in a setting familiar to us – the Garden of Eden – the original setting of their race would probably look entirely different.

Despite the differences,



though, the key elements remain the same. Created by God, would/did they choose him, or would/did they choose their own path instead? As mentioned, it's possible that they made the wiser choice than us and never "ate the fruit" (or whatever their version of the fruit happened to be) and so exist in a state free from sin.

C.S. Lewis in his novel *Peregrina* speculated about the possibility of a fallen race – like us – influencing unfallen aliens, which is one potential scenario that could play out if we were to make contact with a species that had never sinned. The former director of the Vatican Observatory José Gabriel Funes, for example, hypothesised that "we human beings might be the lost sheep, the sinners in need of a shepherd. God became man in Jesus to save us".

Regardless of whether or not there's sentient life out there, or whether or not that life chose God or chose sin (like us), neither of these weigh in on the validity of our Christian faith. While Scripture and Tradition are silent on the question of aliens, neither do they say anything about God revealing himself only to man.

Indeed, our Faith speaks frequently of the role of an entirely different kind of being in the order of creation – angels. It's not that much of a stretch to believe that there are intelligent creatures out there that God has revealed himself to in a way they'd understand, just as he has done for us in Christ.

At the same time, there's no guarantee that there must be life on another planet, either. Despite the statistical likelihood some scientists suggest of it, based purely on the staggering number of stars and planets out there, there's been no trace whatsoever picked up of life elsewhere, making this simply a fun thought experiment that leaves our faith totally intact either way.

Giving birth to God



I did my doctoral thesis on the classical, philosophical proofs for the existence of God. The concept had always intrigued me: 'Can you prove that God exists?' After researching the thought of Aquinas, Anselm, Descartes, Leibnitz, and Spinoza (all of whom assert that you can 'prove' the existence of God through rational argument) what was the conclusion? Can you prove that God exists?

“God never dynamites his way into to our lives with a force so powerful that we can't resist”

No, at least not in a way that would compel anyone to make an act of faith on the basis of a mathematical or scientific argument. God can't be proven in that way, albeit these 'proofs' point to some important things. The existence of God can't be empirically proven because God doesn't work that way. God doesn't appear in the world as the conclusion to a mathematical equation. God, as we know through the way Christ was born, comes into our lives at the end of a gestation process.

That also describes how faith is born in our lives. God never dynamites his way into to our lives with a force so powerful that we can't resist. The divine never takes us by storm. No. God always enters the world in the same way that Jesus



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

did on the first Christmas. God is gestated in a womb and appears as a helpless infant that has to be picked up, nurtured, and coaxed into adulthood. The presence of God in our world, at least within the dynamics of the incarnation, depends upon a certain human consent and cooperation.

For God to take on real flesh and power in the world we must first do something. What? The answer to that lies in the way Jesus was born. Mary, Jesus' mother, shows us a certain blueprint, a pattern for how God is born into our world and how faith is born in our lives. What's the pattern?

When we look at how Mary gave birth to Jesus, we see that there are four moments in the process: impregnation by the Holy Spirit; gestation of God within one's body and soul; the stretching and agony of giving birth; and the nurturing

of an infant into adulthood. What's implied in each of these?

Impregnation by the Holy Spirit: Mary, we are told, became pregnant by the Holy Spirit. What an extraordinary notion! This doesn't just mean that Jesus didn't have a human father, but also that Mary so let the seed of God's spirit (charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, long-suffering, fidelity, mildness, faith, and chastity) take root in her that it began to grow into actual flesh.

Pregnancy

Gestation of God within one's body: As we know, pregnancy is not followed immediately by childbirth. A long, slow process first occurs, gestation. In the silent recesses of her heart and body (and surely not without the normal morning-sickness that accompanies pregnancy)

an umbilical cord began to grow between Mary and that new life. Her flesh began to give physical sustenance to the life of God and this steadily grew into a child which, at a point, as in all pregnancies, demanded to be born into the world.

The agony of giving birth: only with much groaning and stretching of the flesh can a child emerge into this world. It is always excruciatingly painful to birth something to the outside world, to take what's precious inside and give it birth outside. Mary, despite all the over-pious treatises that would make Jesus' birth something unnatural, experienced the normal birth-pains common to all mothers. Nothing secretly gestated is born into the world without pain, Jesus included.

Nurturing an infant into adulthood: Annie Dillard once suggested that we always find God in our lives as Jesus was found in Bethlehem on Christmas, a helpless infant in the straw who must be picked up and nurtured into adulthood: "God's works are as good as we make them. That God is helpless, our baby to bear,

self-abandoned on the doorstep of time, wondered at by cattle and oxen." Mary gave birth to the baby, Jesus, but what she ultimately gave the world was the adult, Christ. Like all mothers she had to spend years nursing, cajoling, teaching, and nurturing an infant into adulthood.

“The object of our faith and worship doesn't appear as a compelling proof at the end of a rational experiment”

In that pattern, the incarnation, in looking at how Mary gave birth to Christ, we are given a blueprint that invites imitation not admiration. Mary is the model of faith. What she did each of us too is called upon to do, namely, give birth to God in our lives. Christmas is for marvelling at what once took place, but it's also for imitation, for continuing to give God flesh in the world.

How do you prove to anyone, yourself included, that God exists? You don't. The object of our faith and worship doesn't appear as a compelling proof at the end of a rational experiment. God has to be gestated into the world in the same way as Mary did all those years ago at the first Christmas.

“The agony of giving birth: only with much groaning and stretching of the flesh can a child emerge into this world”

The reason for the season is Jesus

Have we forgotten why we celebrate Christmas? A friend told me she got a card wishing her a very merry winter festival? Could you beat that! People tell me they have to search in shops for cards that portray the Nativity but there is no shortage of snowy fir trees, red robins, reindeers and Santas. What are the so-called Christmas stamps celebrating? Do we have to be so politically correct that we cannot publicly celebrate our Christian heritage?

“The popularisation of the Christmas crib is attributed to St Francis of Assisi”

In the early Christian centuries, there was little if any celebration of the birth of Jesus. The major feasts were Easter, celebrating the Resurrection, and Epiphany, celebration of the manifestation of Jesus as king (gold), priest (incense) and suffering servant (myrrh). Just after the winter solstice, people celebrated the return of the Unconquered Sun. But, as often happens in pagan festivals, it had become a drunken orgy which usually ended up in violence. The Church authorities addressed this problem by selecting this time to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ, the light of God coming in human flesh. A few years ago, the renowned soprano Celine Byrne was asked on Lyric FM's *Marty in the Morning* why did Christmas mean so much to her. Her answer was marvellous. “The reason for the season is Jesus.”

The popularisation of the Christmas crib is attributed to St Francis of Assisi. His early biographers have left us vivid accounts of Christmas night at Greccio. According to Thomas of Celano, Francis set out “to bring to life the memory of that babe born in Bethlehem, to see as much as possible with my own bodily eyes the discomfort of his infant needs, now as he lay in a manger, and how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he was laid upon a bed of hay”. On Christmas night, the friars and local people arrived with flowers and lights. His friend, John, had arranged an ox, a donkey and a manger full of hay. “All those present experienced a new and indescribable joy in the presence of the Christmas scene. The priest then solemnly celebrated the Eucharist over the manger, showing the bond between the Incarnation of the Son of

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



God and the Eucharist. The nativity scene was enacted and experienced by all who were present” (Thomas of Celano). Everyone went home full of joy.

I like this story which I came across in a book by the late Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini. He was a highly qualified scriptural scholar but well able to enter the world of stories for children. Imagine Jesus as a growing boy in Nazareth. One of his pals was celebrating his birthday. All the kids were expected to bring little presents. In those days most toys were made of wood, like little dolls, houses or wagons. Last year a friend gave me a Rudolf, the red nosed reindeer, constructed from a fallen branch and a few twigs. Anyway, getting back to Nazareth. One of the boys spotted that Jesus arrived emptyhanded, so he challenged him.

“Jesus, you brought nothing”. Jesus replied, “Oh yes I did.”

“I can see nothing. My dad says that you religion people are all talk but you do nothing. What did you bring?”

“I can fix it”, Jesus replied.

“What do you mean, I can fix it?”

“In Daddy Joseph's workshop people bring in all sorts of broken stuff and he is a genius at fixing things. I have watched him closely. So, if any of the toys you bring gets broken, then I can fix it.”

The name, Jesus, which was announced by an angel, means the one who saves ... the one who can fix the life that is broken and needs healing.

Broken parts

This Jesus invites us to come to him with our problems and broken parts.

Come to me with whatever needs to be fixed in your life.

Come to me with your burdens and heavy loads – and I will give you rest.

Come with your darkness, questions and difficulties of faith – *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not be walking in the darkness but will have the light of life.*

Bring me your questions – your inner needs and search for meaning – *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, whoever believes in me will never thirst.*

Come to me when you



A painting by artist Patricia Brintle titled *Madonna and child - Hope for the World*. Photo: CNS

are feeling lost, aimless, searching for direction – *I am the Good Shepherd who will guide you along the right path.*

Come when you are lonely or deserted – *I shall not call you servants any more – I call you friends.*

Come when you feel crushed, wronged, angry or agitated – *Peace I leave you, my peace I give you.*

Come when you feel guilty or hopeless – *I am the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.*

Come when you are sad or suffering a bereavement – *I am the resurrection and the life...I am going now to prepare a place for you.*

Today a Saviour has been born for you – his name is Jesus whose name means one who saves.

Saviour

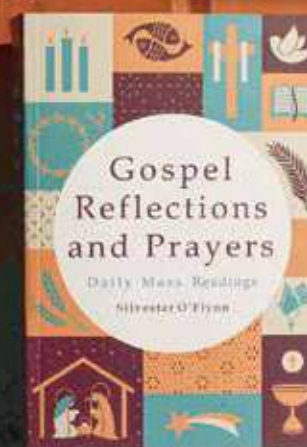
We are celebrating the coming of the Saviour, the one who can fill the empty space in the heart, who can fix whatever is broken.

Prayer

May you experience the singing of the angels rendering glory to God: the peace of God in your heart and mind, the joy of the shepherds, and the worship of the Magi. Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.

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The year the war in Ukraine replaced Covid-19 as the main news story

I can still remember my unprintable language when I woke up on the morning of February 24 to hear that the long-dreaded Russian invasion of Ukraine had started. At the end of **Newstalk Breakfast** that day Cormac Smith, former advisor to the Ukrainian government, said “the fog of war has descended”. The coverage of those early days was intense and shocking. Courageous journalists reported from the war zones. On **Midnight News** (BBC Radio 4) in late February Fergal Keane saw the refugees fleeing – “an extraordinary tragic scene”. **Sky News** coverage in early March was dramatic when their crew was fired on and you could hear the ricochet of bullets on their car – mercifully no-one was killed in that attack. Sadly, Irish journalist Pierre Zakrzewski was killed in Ukraine after his vehicle was hit by Russian shelling, along with Ukrainian journalist and producer, Oleksandra Kuvshynova.

Atrocities

Footage of Russian army atrocities in areas occupied by them and later abandoned were devastating, as was footage of desperate refugees fleeing as best they could – it was mainly women and children – and they weren't leaving their pets behind! My frustration was eased by the fine welcome Ireland gave to the refugees, and though there were some inadequacies and poor judgements from Government agencies (e.g. moving people suddenly when they had found some stability), it was disconcerting towards the end of the year to see news reports of protests aimed directly at refugees' locations rather than at Government Buildings or the like.

“For the most part the media continued to cheerlead for Government policy”

Covid-19 hadn't gone away of course – I'm writing this in isolation! Most restrictions were ended, rather suddenly I thought, back in January. For the most part the media continued to cheerlead for Government policy, instead of adopting a more questioning and



TV & Radio Review 2022
Brendan O'Regan

analytical approach which you'd expect and which they can do if they want to. But whatever you think, our Government did a lot better than in China, where, finally, at the end of the year, we were seeing news footage of untypically public protests

Campaign doing well on **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk). It was much the same locally in July when the disastrous abortion figures for 2021 were released, and later when issues like 'safe access zones' and the 'three-year review' were discussed. As usual there was a complete absence of hard questions for those supporting availability of abortion 'services'.

Engaging

Fr David Vard of Portlaoise parish, Ireland's youngest priest, did very well on the **Tommy Tiernan Show** (RTE One) in March – he was cheerful and engaging with the comedian host who

Seán Sheehy in Co. Kerry in November. Fr Sheehy reiterated Catholic teaching, which is the important thing, but did it in a way that did a disservice to the message, an approach further compounded in several follow up appearances on radio – two testy interviews – **News at One** (RTE) with Bryan Dobson and **Liveline** (RTE Radio 1) with Joe Duffy and a better one on **The Hard Shoulder** (Newstalk) with Anton Savage. Interviewers must take some of the blame or credit for the way these things go. By contrast, Fr John Joe Duffy made a gentle and empathic impact for his parishioners and

We Are Church group got very generous access and exposure in the media.

Quality

All the regular religious shows continued to maintain the quality – **The Leap of Faith** (RTE Radio One) got a good run this year in Spring and Autumn and new presenter Siobán Garrigan has slotted comfortably into the role. I enjoyed her interviews in September with our editor Michael Kelly about his book *An Irish Pilgrimage Guide to the Holy Land* and in October with Mary Kenny about her book *The Way We Were*, and Iranian woman Dr Roja Fazaeli about the protests in

There were some specifically religious one-off programmes worthy of note. **Pilgrimage: Road to the Scottish Isles** (BBC One, April) brought a group of likeable celebrities along a pilgrimage route taking in sites in Northern Ireland and Scotland, following the footsteps of St Columba. The saint also featured in an interesting docudrama **Colmcille – An Naomh Dána** (TG 4, June). **Walled City Passion** (RTE One, Easter Sunday) was an imaginative modern passion play set in Derry, with a Jesus-like character coming to grief in a sectarian environment.

Drama

On the drama front the one that stands out is the third series of **The Split** (BBC One, April), an adult show in the best sense. The acting and scripting were superb and it was graced by a beautifully enhancing soundtrack of songs by Olivia Broadfield. I wasn't convinced by the 'good divorce' message, but the treatment of grief in one plot strand was at once heart wrenching and life affirming. The much heralded series **Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power** (Amazon Prime) landed in September. It could be irritating at times, but improved as the series went on and some elements were quite riveting.

“We owe a debt to these priests who continue to impress in media interviews”

Of course, Queen Elizabeth was the dominant public figure in the UK and Irish media showed a strong interest as well. In June, for the platinum jubilee, several programmes reflected on the importance of the Christian faith in her life, including special editions of **Songs of Praise** (BBC One) and **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster). With her sudden death in September we got blanket coverage. In divisive and polarised times she united almost all factions in tribute – even those with no great love for the monarchy.

Her constancy, dedication to faith and state, and her sense of humour figured large.



Covid-19 didn't exactly go away, but media coverage was dominated by Ukraine, the death of Queen Elizabeth II and the overturning of Roe v. Wade in the US.

and finally they began to relax some of their draconian zero-covid rules.

Another big story of particular interest to readers of *The Irish Catholic* was the reversal of Roe v. Wade, the US Supreme Court decision that had legalised abortion across the country. The media's pro-choice bias was very evident, then and since. For the most part I had to go to **News Nightly** (EWTN), **Spicer and Co.** (Newsmax) or **Dan Wooten** (UK) to hear pro-life responses and some positivity. I also remember Eilis Mulroy of the Pro-Life

apparently never knows who his next guest is going to be. He was optimistic about his vocation without denying the “dark cloud” of clerical child abuse – “the sins of a few have darkened the goodness of a lot”. Fr Vard was also optimistic on a **Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk) item, also in March, as was Fr Bryan Shortall OFM Cap., at the time of Priorswood Parish in Dublin. We owe a debt to these priests who continue to impress in media interviews. In this context it's hard to ignore the brief controversy involving Fr

for the nation as a whole after the awful explosion in Creeslough, Co. Donegal, in October.

The Synodal process continued apace in the Church, but every time the secular media got a hold of it the focus was almost entirely on gender and sexuality issues, with emphasis on liberal perspectives. This was the case for example when the synthesis report was issued in August. I remember a lively and balanced debate on **Newstalk Breakfast**, with Fr Patrick McCafferty and Fr Iggy O'Donovan. The liberal

her country. **The Meaning of Life** (RTE One) depended on the guests, but I did enjoy the interviews with Joan Freeman and Ardal O'Hanlon. North of the border **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster) was comprehensive and I particularly remember a sensitive item on the Creeslough tragedy. Spirit Radio and Radio Maria continue to serve listeners with some well needed positivity about religious faith. For the New Year I hope they improve their catchup or podcast offering, to help media reviewers!

BookReviews

Peter Costello



Some of our regular reviewers present their choice of a 'Book of the Year for 2022', a very varied and enticing selection covering a wide range of topics.

Christopher Moriarty

My choice for a book of the year falls upon Eoghan Dalton's *An Irish Atlantic Rainforest: A Personal Journey Into the Magic of Rewilding* (Hachette, Books Ireland, €22.95). This remarkable book by a writer of many talents combines a wealth of information on the environment and its needs with one man's personal journey and success in creating a specimen of the type of vegetation which once clothed large areas of Ireland and of dry land the world over.

The author is a sculptor by profession and an apostle for the 're-wilding' of the world. A little more than ten years ago, he moved from Dublin to the Beara Peninsula in Cork and proceeded to restore 30 acres of severely damaged native oakwood to its pristine glory.

The results became apparent in a remarkably short time. This book describes in very readable detail both some aspects of his own life and progress, together with the intricacies and beauties of the forest habitat and the need to restore much of it in the interests of humanity itself.

Mary Kenny

The book which most clearly explained the "woke" culture, at least for me, was by a British writer of Irish parents, Andrew Doyle's *The New Puritans* (Constable, €28.00). "Social justice warriors" have effectively become the dominant forces in our society today. Doyle calls this a new religion, but without the self-reflection or examination of one's own sins of traditional Christianity. Fascinating and alarming. Visiting France after

lockdown rekindled my interest in French culture and history and Peter Watson's *The French Mind* (Simon & Schuster, €42.00), was a pleasurable voyage through "400 Years of romance, revolution and renewal", accessibly written in sections, according to the reader's special interests. The most beautifully-written book I read was Donal Ryan's *The Queen of Dirt Island* (Doubleday Ireland, €13.99). He writes such poetic prose and captures old rhythmic ways of Irish speech, along with allusions to enduring aspects of our tradition: the rituals of novenas and Holy Wells – along with the profane, to be sure!

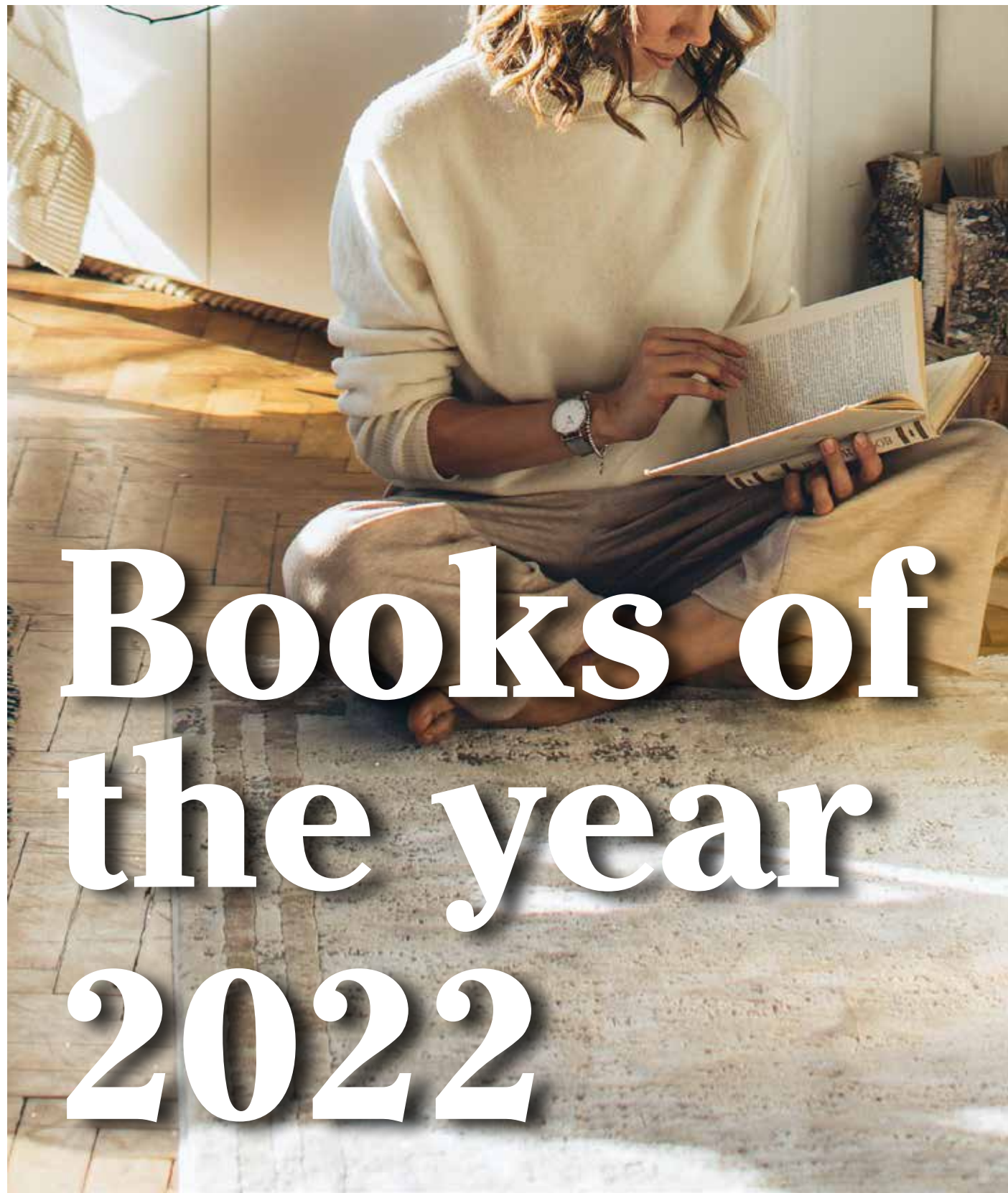
“The author is a sculptor by profession and an apostle for the 're-wilding' of the world”

Ian d'Alton

My book in 2022 has to be the new book by Finola Kennedy, *Local matters - parish, local government and community in Ireland* (Insitute of Public Administration, €25.00)

This has cantered up the rails late in 2022, only published recently. Finola Kennedy, well-known both in Church and academic circles, has penned a thought-provoking book exploring the importance of building our 'social capital' – often ignored in the rush to increase economic development.

Perhaps unfashionably – but persuasively – she still sees a place for the Catholic parish in that endeavour, acting as a bridge between the secular and the sacred.



To this Church of Ireland reviewer there is a familiar ring to it – the Protestant community has had a long history of trying to find place and space in an environment which it no longer dominates.

Dr Kennedy's illuminating and excellently-written book is a workshop manual for charting a relevance for the Catholic Church in Ireland in the 21st century. It is highly commended.

Joe Carroll

My choice, for my personal book of the year is *Ireland and Argentina in the Twentieth Century*, by Dermot Keogh (Cork University Press, €39)

For anyone interested in Ireland's links with Argentina from the mid-19th Century up to the present, Dermot Keogh's 560-page book will be invaluable. The sub-title reveals its scope: *Diaspora, diplomacy, dictatorship, Catholic mission and the Falklands crisis*.

The book is the result of Keogh's long personal involvement in Argentina and his numerous contacts there over many years. To this can be added his professional interest in Latin American affairs and extensive knowledge of Vatican archives.

Ireland's relations with Argentina from famine

times are overshadowed by our close links with the United States. Keogh's book will help to correct this imbalance.

“The book is the result of Keogh's long personal involvement in Argentina”

His analysis of how the Falklands/Malvinas crisis in 1982 affected the Ireland-Argentina relationship is especially revealing. It put great strain on Irish relations with London, but earned us the lasting grati-

tude of Argentina. The role of Irish missionaries, especially in education, is also described and analysed.

J. Anthony Gaughan

The most important and timely publication I read during the year was Bishop Michael Smith's *Vatican Council Memories*. Like the 16 key documents of the Council, it clearly shows that the Council Fathers succeeded in achieving their aim, namely to update and modernise the Church, while ensuring that it remained aligned with the teaching of Christ, not the spirit of the age.

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.



Bishop Smith is not the only person to share his 'Vatican Memories'. The late popular Bishop Pat Dunne enjoyed telling this story against himself. As the 2,500 bishops lined up before entering St Peter's Basilica for the beginning of the Council in 1962 he exchanged greetings with the very tall person beside him, who informed him that he was the archbishop of San Antonio in Texas. On learning that Dunne was auxiliary bishop in the archdiocese of Dublin since early 1946 the American reflected for some time and then leaned down and enquired, 'What did you do?'

Gabriel Fitzmaurice

Of this year's crop, the book I most treasure is *An File Mícheál Ó Gaoithín: The Blasket Painter* (Lilliput, €40).

Selected and introduced by the artist Maria Simonds Gooding and augmented by essays from writer Éilís Ní Dhuibhne Almquist and art historian Catherine Marshall, it is a celebration of the paintings of Mícheál Ó Gaoithín, "an file" (the poet) as he was affectionately known.

A writer and poet whose autobiography and poems, translated by Tim Enright,

were published by Oxford University Press, he took up painting, encouraged by Simonds Gooding, in the final six years of his life.

Catherine Marshall describes him as "an outsider artist". He had no formal training in art, yet his paintings vividly tell his story and that of the Blasket islands in all their shapes and moods. His vividly colourful paintings are gorgeously reproduced and are things of beauty and a joy forever.

Felix M. Larkin

An Post has recently published a sumptuous volume, *History on a Stamp* (An Post, €95.00) showcasing

“There is a new kind of irony in Christ’s judgments and parables, which look on the spectacle of human folly and wryly show us how to live with it”

the stamps issued as part of the Decade of Centenaries commemorations between 2013 and 2022.

There were 26 sets of such stamps, with a total of 54 stamps issued. This volume is, first and foremost, an album containing the actual stamps; and they are displayed in a most attractive manner. In addition, the volume includes an extended essay by the UCD art historian, Emily Mark-FitzGerald, in which she outlines and evaluates the stamps as an exercise in national commemoration.

“He had no formal training in art, yet his paintings vividly tell his story and that of the Blasket islands in all their shapes and moods”

While noting that “a stamp is an inherently humble physical artefact”, she argues that these stamps “express not only political and cultural meanings, but our understandings of the events they commemorate”. This volume thus complements in a very novel way the many scholarly endeavours that the Decade of Centenaries has inspired.

Anthony Redmond

My favourite book this year was *Up From the Ashes: A Syrian Doctor's Story of Sacrifice and Hope*, by 'Dr A', with Samara Levy (Hodder & Stoughton, €19.99).

This is an inspiring story of a Syrian Christian doctor who decided to stay in his country and help as many people as he could after the horrific war broke out there in 2011.

That was the year that monstrous changes took place in Syria with huge numbers of Jihadists flooding into the country with the intention to overthrow the government of Bashar al-Assad and impose an Islamic regime. Anyone who opposed these violent

Jihadists in Syria became a target. ISIS became short-hand for horror and sadism.

The West supported many of these Jihadist rebels. Archbishop Jacques Behnan Hindo, the Syrian Catholic Archbishop, said that if Assad were forced to go, Syria would become another Libya. We now have the cruel situation where the US has imposed the most terrible sanctions on Syria resulting in dire poverty, hardship, and hunger for the Syrian people. They find it very difficult to feed their children.

'Dr A' (he has to remain anonymous for the sake of his family) has decided to stay and help his people in their hour of need. His deeply moving story is one of heroism and love for his country and his people.

Desmond Egan

Christ himself was a great artist: wonderful stories (the Good Samaritan; the Prodigal Son), with a lovely eye for nature (lilies; sparrows; sheep; foxes). He also had that sense of humour, rarely pointed-out (the plank we notice in someone else's eye; the banter with the woman at the well; the coin tribute to be found in a fish's mouth), which always seems to accompany the genuine artistic temperament.

English philosopher Roger Scruton even suggests that, "There is a new kind of irony in Christ's judgments and parables, which look on the spectacle of human folly and wryly show us how to live with it." It involves distance, the perception that we have here no lasting city.

Through the centuries, the Catholic Church has been associated with great art: in painting, sculpture, poetry, music. Down to our time, that is. What has gone wrong in this century? Flying-saucer churches; bland stained-glass; dilettantish hymns and verse... and worst of all, Disney Christs. Why have those who commission such things lost touch with genuine art and artists? Why has the concept

of Beauty become marginalised? And why is there so little interest in defending and promoting it?

In an effort to understand why, I have been reading Richard Niebuhr's important study, *Christ and Culture: Expanded Edition* (Harper Collins, €16.28): this is my book of the year.

Aubrey Malone

The Killing of Father Niall Molloy (Mirror Books, £12.99) is a fascinating study of the still-unexplained killing of the priest of the title in 1985. The acquittal of the man responsible still beggars belief. The cosy relationship between the "horsey" set and the judiciary seems to have played a large part in this.

“Through the centuries, the Catholic Church has been associated with great art: in painting, sculpture, poetry, music”

Bob Dylan was supposed to have written the second instalment of his memoirs by now. Instead he's given us *The Philosophy of Modern Song* (Simon & Schuster, £35.00), a beautifully written (and beautifully illustrated) description of all the songs he loved growing up, and why.

Did you know Paul Newman wrote an autobiography? *The Extraordinary Life of an Ordinary Man* (Century, £25.00) has finally been published all those years after his death. It shines the light on many aspects of him I didn't know about, like problems with alcohol and insecurity. A treasureable tome about a very humane man.

I postponed buying Bono's memoir *Surrender* (Hutchinson Heinemann, £25.00), as I find he over-writes and shows off incorrigibly. But when it's good it's great.

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4094 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

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 homeless to find safety and a place they can call home.



To join in Sr. Stan's vision please contact cian.dikker@focusireland.ie or phone 01 881 5962

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Ireland



Please remember GOAL in your Will

45 years on we continue to deliver lifesaving support to the most vulnerable people in our world. Leaving a gift in your Will is priceless.

Contact Courtenay on 01 2809779 or via email at cpollard@goal.ie

Registered Charity No. 20010980; CHY 6271



Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20054588 Revenue Number: CHY 15661

By remembering Operation Smile in your Will, you are leaving the gift of a lasting smile for a child born with a cleft condition.

Operation Smile envisions a future where health and dignity are championed through safe surgery.

Get in touch with Natalie Madden, Legacy & Fundraising Manager, on

01 667 6659 or natalie@operationsmile.ie or visit operationsmile.ie/LastingSmile



Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

Your heart for the homeless



Merchants Quay Ireland reaches out with kindness to people living on our streets, sleeping in doorways, suffering and alone.

Your legacy, of any amount, can enfold the most vulnerable and lonely in wrap-around supports. You may wish to keep the details confidential. But we want to give you this little wooden keepsake, made by a client, for you.

This is your heart for the homeless and those on the road to recovery.

To receive your little wooden heart and information on remembering

Merchants Quay Ireland in your will, ring Emma Murphy, Legacies Manager at 01-524 0965 or email emma.murphy@mqi.ie

CENACOLO COMMUNITY

CENACOLO is a residential community offering FREE help for men and women with addictions. Visit www.communitycenacolo.ie or phone 094 9388286.

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- Pope John Paul II

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info@christiantvireland.ie

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*Little Nellie
of Holy God*

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

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Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmisions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

Consider leaving a gift to
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Ireland's Foremost Introduction Agency for Catholics

www.heavenlypartners.ie



A WORLD WITHOUT HUNGER

A gift in your Will is an act of kindness that has the power to help end hunger and extreme poverty for generations to come.

Your legacy could help families overcome the life-threatening challenges caused by climate change and the devastating effects of poverty and hunger, by providing the tools needed to support themselves long into the future.

Your compassion today could change the future.

For more information, please request your free copy of Concern's legacy guide. Contact Siobhán on 01 417 8020, email siobhan.oconnor@concern.net or visit www.concern.net/legacy – finding out more does not, of course, oblige you to leave a gift.

Concern Worldwide, a company limited by guarantee, Registered Company Number: 39647, Registered Revenue Number: CHY 5745, Registered Charity Number: 20009090, Registered in Ireland, Registered address is 52-55 Lower Camden St, Dublin 2
Image: Roge Wavio (29) of Kalacha, Marsabit, Kenya holds produce she has grown with support from Concern. Photographer: Jennifer Nolan / Concern Worldwide

When you remember
Trócaire in your
Will, you bring hope
to people living in
the world's
poorest places

trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call **Grace Kelly** on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

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.

The Gift Of A Lifetime
Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188



www.hospicefoundation.ie

Classifieds: 01 687 4094

Win a trip to Lourdes

- ACROSS**
- 1 High-ranking clergyman (10)
- 6 Lies show they are not the real outlaw Robin (10)
- 11 Take away from one's value or reputation (7)
- 14 Transport for the 46 down on the first Christmas (5)
- 15 Not suitable for one to consume (8)
- 17 & 44d The Band Aid single that gave rise eventually to Live Aid (2,4,4,3,9)
- 19 & 70a Beautiful 81 down that includes the words "Fall on your knees" (1,4,5)
- 20 Nickname for a native of Liverpool (7)
- 23 Tree whose name derives from a word for spear (3)
- 24 Improve, beautify (7)
- 25 Be in debt (3)
- 26 Cathedral city in Cambridgeshire (3)
- 28 Takes to court (4)
- 30 Heavenly messengers (6)
- 33 This Biblical prophet upset Ma, so (4)
- 36 Having a slight azure tinge (6)
- 37 Elevate (5)
- 38 Panache (5)
- 39 It facilitates international co-operation between police forces (8)
- 40 Items of citrus fruit (6)
- 43 Niche, recess (6)
- 45 Mandible (3)
- 46 Sea fish (8)
- 48 Culpability (5)
- 49 The name of this weather phenomenon is Spanish for 'the boy-child' (2,4)
- 50 The usual or most common form, conditions, etc (4)
- 51 Santa's transport (6)
- 54 Purchasing credit for one's phone (7,2)
- 56 These playing cards do not belong in any suit (6)
- 57 Chemical element, symbol I (6)
- 58 Immense (4)
- 59 Something worth having (5)
- 61 Brazil's most colourful city, in short (3)
- 62 Constantine's saintly mother, who is said to have discovered the True Cross (5)
- 65 Sweet potato (3)
- 66 Meat often served with turkey (3)
- 67 Many families play them at Christmas time (5)
- 68 Fish eggs (3)
- 70 See 19 across
- 74 The 'D' of CD (4)
- 75 See 30 down
- 77 Peninsula in North West England connected to Liverpool by the Mersey Ferry (6)
- 78 I sanction movement for conductor Arturo (9)
- 79 Canoeed around a member of the clergy (6)
- 80 Cab (4)
- 83 Small, whimsical statues seen in some gardens (6)
- 84 Animal innards (5)
- 86 Name meaning 'God among us' (8)
- 88 Flying saucer (1,1,1)
- 89 Circus tent (3,3)
- 93 The humble spud (6)
- 95 Pickled herrings (8)
- 97 Magical being you may find at the top of a Christmas tree (5)

- 98 The main artery of the body (5)
- 100 Novelist (6)
- 101 Untruths (4)
- 103 Comment (6)
- 105 Travelled at high velocity (4)
- 106 Curved line (3)
- 108 Chunk of wood (3)
- 110 Careered (7)
- 111 Belonging to him (3)
- 112 Being the accused in a court case (2,5)
- 113 Jumps over a rope (5)
- 116 & 36d 81 down about a young percussionist (6,7,3)
- 117 Humiliation, condition of infamy (8)
- 118 A gourd or cantaloupe (5)
- 119 An abundance; too much (7)
- 120 Dessert whose name comes from French words for 'white' and 'eat' (10)
- 121 Publicised the transplanting of David's tree (10)
- DOWN**
- 2 A writer of classical music (8)
- 3 Roar like a bull (6)
- 4 Reflective, glossy (5)
- 5 Supervise (7)
- 7 & 48d Second line of a traditional 81 down (3,2,4,3,2,6)
- 8 Whirlpool (4)
- 9 Cereal used to make porridge (4)
- 10 Long cutting tool (6)
- 11 It carried Mary to Bethlehem (6)
- 12 Traditional municipal office (4,4)
- 13 Soccer club based in Birmingham (5,5)
- 14 The working out of one's route by looking at the stars (9,10)
- 16 Removes the creases from garments (5)
- 18 Net (4)
- 21 Bird with a red breast (5)
- 22 Ocean (3)
- 23 Presently, soon (4)
- 27 Big (5)
- 29 Starch used to make a dessert (4)
- 30 & 75a Dormant situation of the infant Christ according to one 81 down (6,2,3,3)
- 31 It denotes a lady's maiden name (3)
- 32 Inner parts of garments - clouds are said to have silver ones (7)
- 34 & 96d Seasonal savoury offerings (5,4)
- 35 Guide or navigate (5)
- 36 See 116 across
- 41 'Away in a _____' (6)
- 42 Line from 'Good King Wenceslas' (4,3,5,3,4)
- 44 See 17 across
- 46 The three Wise Men (4)
- 47 Portable computer (6)
- 48 See 7 down
- 52 In what way? (3)
- 53 Power, strength (5)
- 54 One portion of the school year (4)
- 55 Gad about (9)
- 59 The colour of the middle traffic light (5)
- 60 Bronzed skin colour (3)
- 63 Middle-Eastern country (6)
- 64 Extol (6)
- 65 The Abominable Snowman (4)
- 69 Passing craze (3)
- 71 Utterly useless (4,3,7)
- 72 Black Sea peninsula, the scene of a Victorian war (6)
- 73 Missal (4,4)
- 76 Shout (4)
- 77 Charming, sweet (7)

Christmas Crossword No. 1

Marian Pilgrimages, Ireland's group pilgrimage specialists to shrines throughout the world for over 30 years, are delighted to offer readers of *The Irish Catholic* the opportunity to win a pilgrimage for two to Lourdes during 2023.

Along with Lourdes, Marian Pilgrimages also offer pilgrimages to Medjugorje, the Holy Land, Italy, Fatima and Camino de Santiago, all available to view on www.marian.ie. For more information, please call them on 01 878 8159 or email info@marian.ie.



How to enter the competition

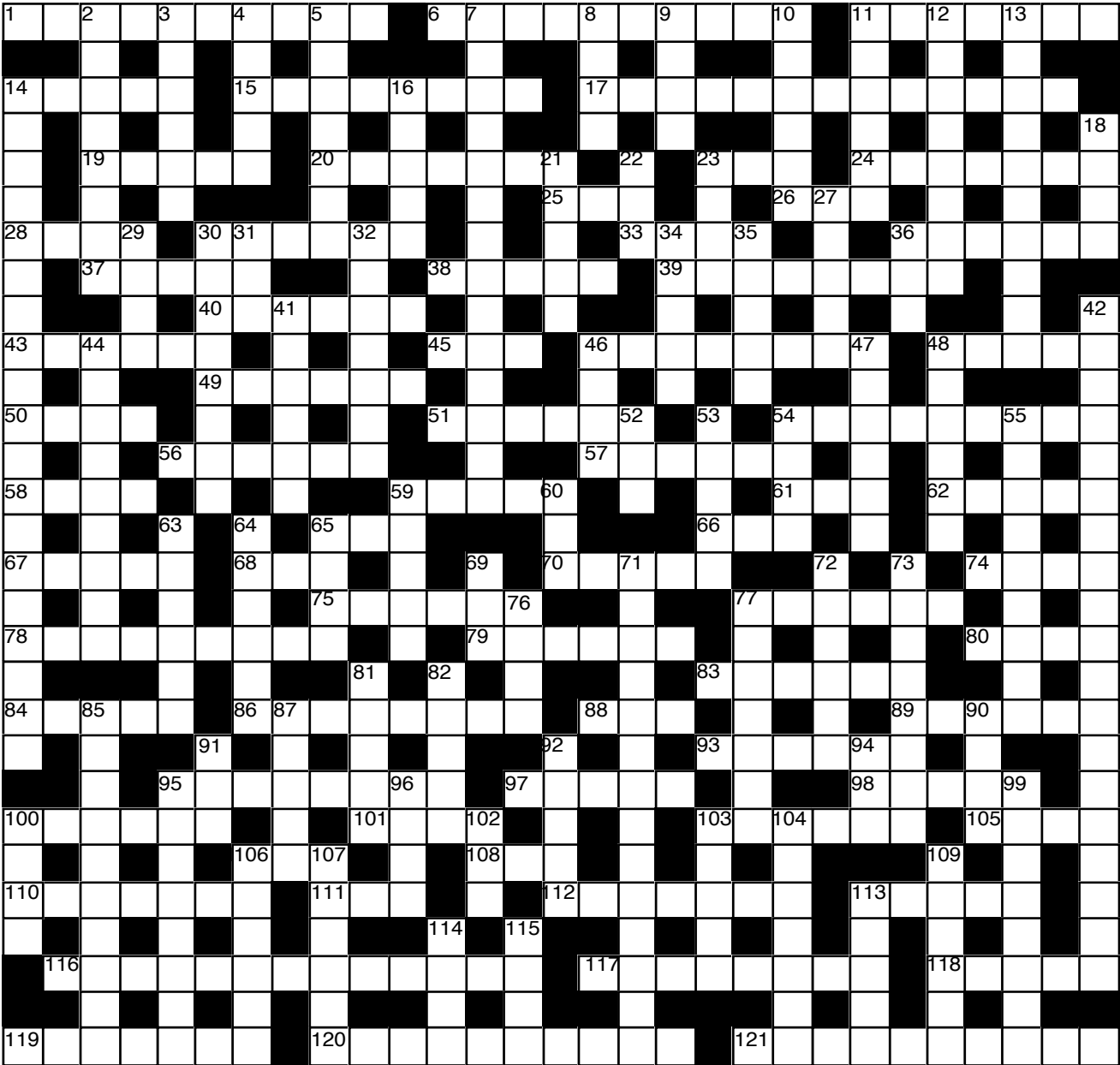
The competition consists of **TWO** crosswords. Crossword No.1 which is published this week and Crossword No.2 which will be published in next week's edition. All you have to do is answer all the crossword questions correctly on **BOTH** crosswords and your name will be entered in a draw for the pilgrimage. Remember, even if you don't manage to complete the crosswords correctly you will be entered in the draw to win one of the three runner-up prizes of a **signed copy of Mary Kenny's The Way We Were**. When you have completed the crosswords send CROSSWORD No.1 and CROSSWORD No.2 before **Friday, January 13, 2023** to: **LOURDES COMPETITION** Marian Pilgrimages, 38 Pearse St, Dublin, D02 DD83.



NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE



- 81 Christmas song or hymn (5)
- 82 Heartbeat, as felt at the wrist, perhaps (5)
- 85 Does this breed of dog have a brush instead of a tail? (3,7)
- 87 Grinding tooth (5)
- 90 Obtains (4)
- 91 In favour of (3)
- 92 Tropical fruit (5)
- 94 Bituminous substance, pitch (3)
- 95 Gambling game played in casinos (8)
- 96 See 34 down
- 99 Jesus' original twelve disciples (8)
- 100 Pain (4)
- 102 Cunning, underhand (3)
- 103 Feeling regretful (5)
- 104 Type of duck (7)
- 106 Religious season leading up to Christmas (6)
- 107 One of the 30 across, of a certain type (6)
- 109 Destiny, fate (6)
- 113 You use it to sift flour (5)
- 114 A sign or portent (4)
- 115 Prepare the Christmas tree (4)

SOLUTIONS, DECEMBER 15
GORDIUS No. 589

Across – 1 Bow 3 Papal States 8 Suture 9 Infantry 10 Badge 11 Kneel 13 Put up 15 Lawless 16 Fizzing 20 Early 21 Perch 23 Phase 24 Memorare 25 Tumble 26 Reassembled 27 Lad

Down – 1 Baseball cap 2 Withdraw 3 Puree 4 Agility 5 Thank 6 Totter 7 Shy 12 Long weekend 13 Posse 14 Pricy 17 Istanbul 18 Proverb 19 Crimea 22 Horns 23 Pound 24 Mar

CHILDREN'S No. 463

Across – 1 Conditioner 6 Ointment 7 Ivy 8 Garbage 10 Sandal 12 Nods 14 Karate 16 Giants 17 Hang

Down – 1 Cookies 2 Nanny 3 Immigrant 4 Inner 5 Engaged 9 Bananas 11 North 13 Sense 14 Kid 15 Egg

Solutions to Sudoku No. 463 will be published in the edition of January 5.

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



What has Covid-19 done for us?

YOU MAY OR NOT have seen the movie, *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. It's good in spots, though not every bit of it thrills me. One funny interlude comes when Reg, the leader of the anti-Roman guerilla faction, asks its members: "What have the Romans ever done for us?"

The objective of the question was to galvanise his listeners to take action against their oppressors, but it didn't quite work out like that. The more they thought about it, the more they noticed how much they had in fact gained from Roman occupation. After all, the Romans had brought the aqueducts, sanitation, roads, medicine, education, safety — and peace.

Question

You might ask a similar question of Covid-19: what has this pandemic done for us? Initial reactions might be in the negative. We Catholics have suffered the loss of a whole generation who either died during coronavirus or no longer leave their homes for public ceremonies. We have seen numbers attending Sunday Mass decimated, and commitment



Hand sanitiser and protective masks became the order of the day during the pandemic. Photo: CNS

lowered in many who weren't that committed to start with. Has Covid-19 done anything positive for us? Yes, I would say, at least five things, maybe more.

1. Covid has led to lay parishioners playing a more active role. Covid-19 has meant no more hangers-on; if you are a member now, you are involved. Many had to fight to keep their local parish afloat during the pandemic. This

led to a new sense of ownership, which has survived. And it might not have happened but for Covid-19.

2. Communion to the sick is now overwhelmingly brought by family members. This rarely happened before. Some wouldn't dream to bring Communion to anyone, while in other cases ministers of the Eucharist were recruited to the task. Now family members bring home a host to their housebound family member as a matter of course, as if it were the most natural thing in the world — which, of course, it is.

3. Live-streaming of Masses has happened everywhere. Parishes would have always thought this a great idea, as it allows housebound people to continue to join in the community's

masses — but it would never have happened had Covid-19 not forced it.

4. Zoom meetings are another benefit from Covid-19. We no longer have to travel across parishes and counties to attend meetings and seminars, we can attend from home. It would always have been possible to make this happen, but Covid-19 forced it upon us, to our benefit.

5. Finally, I would consider the increased reliance on www.rip.ie as a benefit of Covid-19. No longer do people have to drive miles simply to shake hands with a grieving relative: a message uploaded to this website is as effective (especially when we take the trouble to write something meaningful). It has an additional benefit in larger parishes: the photos accompany-

● Congratulations to An Post for the lovely Christmas stamps they produced this year. Last year's were terrible, I didn't use them. This year's are inclusive and yet appeal to believers as well. One stamp gives a silhouette of the crib, another a candle (Jesus the light of the world), another an angel, another the Christmas tree. The prevailing colours are red and white, strong Christmas colours, but also the hue used to draw attention to the persecution of Christians, who still today give their (red) blood for the faith. Pray for them as you send or receive a Christmas card.

Missal controversies

Our family of parishes introduced one simplified Mass leaflet, containing the readings, president's prayers of the Mass, Gloria and Creed. It was the latter I chose to draw attention to when introducing one congregation to their new leaflet. One attendee took issue: "You mentioned that our new missalette will contain the words of the Creed, so we can recite it together. You forget that we once knew the words of the Creed off by heart, but then they changed the words, and then they changed them again!"

Which nicely summarised the Missal re-writing controversies, as perceived in one local parish...

ing obituary notices remind us who exactly has passed away, and prayers will surely follow.

All these things (at least) Covid-19 has done for us. Can you think of any more?



YOUR CHRISTMAS GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

Millions of children throughout the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition due to conflict, disease, displacement, and other factors. And the situation in Africa is only getting worse. Millions of women and children are struggling with inadequate diets which can lead to stunting and other health problems. Countless children are dying of malnutrition each day.

The Little Way Association is receiving requests from missionary priests and Sisters who urgently need funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. For a helpless child, prolonged hunger is a devastating, bewildering, intensely painful experience.

Your Christmas gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

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€..... **FOOD FOR A HUNGRY CHILD**
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☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

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To donate online go to
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DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.



As we prepare to welcome the Christ child at Christmas, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child.

In your prayers at the Crib, please ask the Holy Child to bless and protect all missionaries as they labour to bring the knowledge of His love and saving power to the world.



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."

- St Therese

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful Christmas and many blessings in the New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain all the blessings and graces you need for 2023.

In gratitude for your kindness a **CHRISTMAS NOVENA OF MASSES** is being offered for YOUR INTENTIONS