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Schools feel let down by Govt 9-5 approach to Covid

Ruadhán Jones, Chai Brady and Jason Osborne

Schools are frustrated by the lack of access to timely advice, according to the acting director of a Catholic schools' body, as the Government has failed to offer the promised 24-hour support principals need.

"Schools can only remain open to in-school teaching if the correct supports and sufficient measures are in place," according to Alan Hynes of St Senan's Education Office. "This shambles of a Government are failing on that score."

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Mr Hynes said that the majority of people want to keep schools open, but "principals need to be able to access advice in a timely manner so they're not left hanging".

"What's there isn't sufficient," he continued. "Principals were asked back at the

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CJ says thanks to God as he hangs up his boots



Tributes were paid to Ireland international CJ Stander this week after the Ireland rugby player announced he was retiring from all competitive participation in the sport. Announcing the move the player, who has spoken frequently about his faith, expressed his gratitude to God. Photo: Brian Lawless.

'Delight' as churches reopen for Easter in North

Chai Brady

There is "cautious optimism" and delight as Catholics return to public Mass in the North this week.

The return in time for the celebration of Holy Week and Easter has been described as "great news" as people were at "the end of their tether".

Catholic activist Tracey Harkin told this paper: "I think the feeling among the Faithful is that it's long overdue, I think there's been a huge amount of frustration North of the border and south of the border."

"I have a house full of young people and you can just see their mental health dipping, the same I'm finding with older relatives, myself as mom I love the Eucharist. I'm a bit sick of watching things online, it's like we've been doing it for a year and it's great to have that option but it's not at all like being there."

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Church will have a job to manage synod expectations

The howls of derision from some quarters that met the recent note from the Vatican confirming that the Church does not bless same-sex unions should sound a warning bell for anyone looking naively at the idea of a national synod.

The Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) in a short document approved by Pope Francis, simply confirmed what has been the Church's constant approach. One might quibble over some parts of the language, but it one should hardly be surprised that the Pope ordered the congregation to clarify the issue.

Most of the annoyance at the document seems to have come from those who believe that the direction of the Church should be set by those who shout the loudest.

This should serve as a wake-up call for those charged with preparations for a proposed synod of the Church in Ireland to be held within the next five years.

“Perhaps some of the frustration vented at Pope Francis over same-sex unions is that expectations have been unfairly raised”

Bishops have said that they want to hear from people who have left the Church, and so they should. If we believe – as we do – that Christ revealed the Church as the means of salvation, we should not glibly dismiss the souls of those who have walked. As Pope Francis has shown,

the Church has a fundamental duty to draw near to people – particularly those who feel themselves on the margins of the Church.

The challenge in preparing for the synod will be to manage expectations both about the role of a synod and the nature and irreformability of Church doctrine.

Participate

Will those who participate in the synodal way have an appreciation for the Church's self-understanding which, for example, means that the Church has no authority to ordain female priests?

Is it worthwhile to spend time airing the many grievances that many people have about areas of Church teaching that cannot and will not change?

These are questions that will have to be faced honestly. Those who want to engage with the synod process – from whatever hue of Catholicism they come from – deserve the honesty

to know what the limits of the synod process are.

Perhaps some of the frustration vented at Pope Francis over same-sex unions is that expectations have been unfairly raised.

“Pope Francis has shown, the Church has a fundamental duty to draw near to people”

This is neither just or honest. If a head of steam is allowed to build up in preparation for a national synod that gives the impression that everything is on the table this will only lead to pointless disagreements. It will also mean that people who have participated in expectation of fundamental change to Church teaching will walk away (again?) even more frustrated than when they began.

We must trust in the power of the Holy Spirit

gently guiding the Church, but we cannot be naïve or adopt the approach that “all will be well”.

Exhortation

In his apostolic exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*, Pope Francis proposed that the real reform that is needed in the Church is transcending traditional divisions and “finding other, better ways, perhaps not yet even imagined”.

Fundamentally more important than an actual national meeting of the Church in Ireland will be ensuring that we can find a way to unleash the synodal nature of the Church where synodality informs the way we interact together in parishes and communities.

i To join Friends of The Irish Catholic and support Catholic journalism, please phone the office on 01 6874094 for more information or to make a contribution.

State given two weeks to clarify law about Mass

Ruadhán Jones

The Irish state has been given two weeks to clarify whether, in fact, there is a law against Masses being said in public.

The instruction was made on Tuesday March 23 by Judge Charles Meenan, as part of the constitutional case being taken by businessman Declan Ganley, according to *Gript.ie*.

Mr Ganley's lawyers used a procedural hearing Tuesday to raise the question as to whether the ban on Masses – which Mr Ganley argues would be unconstitutional – actually exists in law.

They cited a recent report by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, made up of

senior constitutional law experts, which states that there is, in fact, no ban on the holding of public masses.

Lawyers for the state told the court that they would have to consult with their client before being able to state clearly, on the record of the court, whether such a ban exists.

Mr Justice Meenan instructed Mr Ganley's lawyers to formally ask the state for their position, and gave the state two weeks to respond.

The matter is due to be heard again on April 13.

The instruction comes days after a Cavan priest was fined €500 for holding a Mass in public.

Schools feel let down by Govt 9-5 approach to Covid

Continued from Page 1

start of the school year to be available pretty much on a 24/7 basis to assist in contact tracing. But the support services for principals have not been 24/7.”

Principals do not have an issue working overtime, Mr Hynes said, but “the outrage was being asked to do that when the State... wasn't willing to put in the resources that would support them in their roles”.

“There has been a lot of frustration,” Mr Hynes said. “Teachers took a bit of a kicking back in January over the delay in reopening, without the context and understanding that the state played a large part by not building sufficient confidence in the education system that the schools are being supported adequately.”

One primary school principal in Co. Meath told *The Irish Catholic* she was unable to contact the principals' helpline over the weekend, after a staff member was designated a close contact.

“We had a case here on a Friday evening and I was hoping to get some clarification on it,” Ailish McKeown of Kilskyre NS said. “But the principals' helpline rang out in the evening, all day Saturday and all day Sunday. Eventually, I was trying Monday morning at eight and half eight, but it was quarter past nine before I got through to them. We were told at the start that the helpline would be 24 hours.”

Another principal, Nicola Roche in Scoil Mhuire Barntown, Co. Wexford, voiced concerns that principals “feel a little bit alone” and questioned the timings of department communications.

“I do feel strongly that some of the communications that have come out through the Department of Education,” Ms Roche said. “For example, they come out on a Friday evening through an email – it's very difficult on a Friday evening because you feel that you can't and you shouldn't contact members of staff to get going on this.”

Not all principals feel let down, however. Jane Brady, Principal of St Colmille's NS Gainstown, Co. Westmeath, said that in her experience “things have come together”.

“We had a brush with Covid back in October time and I would have found it difficult,” she said. “But I have to say, my experience is that that would have changed. There is a dedicated line there and any time I've ever called it, I've got an answer instantly.”



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TDs express outrage over fining of priest for saying Mass in public

Chai Brady

Politicians have dubbed the fining of a priest for holding public Mass “disgraceful” and grossly unfair.

This newspaper revealed at the weekend that Co. Cavan-based Fr PJ Hughes had been slapped with a €500 fine by gardaí after he left the doors of the church open so parishioners could feel free to attend Mass.

This is despite the fact that Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly last year assured the Dáil that this would not happen and the Department of Health confirmed to *The Irish Catholic* in November that it was not a penal offence.

Michael Fitzmaurice TD of the Roscommon-Galway constituency told this newspaper: “It is disgraceful that we’ve gone to the stage in this country that we’re fining priests and putting them at risk of further sanction. I think we are just losing the plot.

“If you look at the record of the Dáil the minister stated that no priest would be fined. I think the minister will have to clarify his position at this stage,” he said.

Clare TD Michael McNamara described the fining of the priest as “very sad”.

He said: “I think it is grossly unfair on religious

groups and equally unfair on An Garda Síochána to have to implement a law which is confusing and unfair.

“You have the minister categorically stating in the Dáil that it wouldn’t give rise to penal sanctions, and now there’s somebody being fined which is of course a penal sanction so even the minister who introduced this law seemingly doesn’t understand the law: utterly farcical,” Mr McNamara said.

Laois-Offaly TD Carol Nolan said that it is clear from recent legal commentary that “there is an intolerable level of ambiguity around the current law on restrictions and the offering of public mass”.

“I, like many practicing Catholics am utterly appalled that we have arrived at a point where a priest has been fined for opening the doors of his Church.”

Ms Nolan added she would be raising the issue with the Minister for Health and Minister for Justice because it is “manifestly clear... we have lost all sense of proportionality”.

Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín described it as an “incredible failure” of the administration and branded the fine an “incredible mismanagement of the situation”.

“I would be calling on the Government to indicate clearly whether or not this is - in their eyes - a

fineable offence because there is definitely mixed messages coming from the Government and the gardaí at the moment,” the Meath West deputy said.

When asked under which section of the The Health Act 1947 (Section 31A-Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) (No.10) Regulations 2020 a priest is committing a penal offence for holding a religious gathering, a Garda spokeswoman cited two regulations within the act.

Meanwhile, confusion apparently reigned in Government this week on the issue. When asked to clarify whether the Garda were interpreting the act correctly, the Department of Health referred this newspaper to the Attorney General, whose press queries are handled by the Department of the Taoiseach.

However, the Department of the Taoiseach referred the query back to the Department of Health. This back and forward continued as this newspaper went to print on Tuesday evening.

Sources close to Fr Hughes said that he is determined not to pay the fine and is prepared to go to jail if necessary. He is also adamant that he will continue to celebrate Mass while the church doors remain open.

Putting faith before the number eight

Jason Osborne

In his retirement message, Ireland rugby veteran number eight CJ Stander credited his faith as one of the most important things in his life.

The South Africa-born forward has long been known for his deep faith – a fact Mr Stander has never shied away from himself.

“Thank you Jesus for protecting us and keeping us healthy throughout this year,” he proclaimed on his social media at Christmas, quoting John 8:12 in the process.

“When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.’”

Bliss as happy couple ties the knot



Caroline Shields and Christopher Ward are pictured on the occasion of their marriage at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, March 2021.

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Bishop says blessing same-sex unions 'not pastoral care'

Ruadhán Jones

"It's not pastoral care" to bless the relationships of same-sex couples, says Bishop Donal McKeown of Derry, following backlash over a Vatican document on the blessing of same-sex unions.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's (CDF) recent document which ruled that the Church cannot bless same-sex unions sparked controversy, as priests and bishops in Germany spoke out in protest.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Bishop McKeown said the document was a "pastorally sensitive" response to a specific question regarding the blessing of same-sex unions.

"The question was for a formal, religious recognition of that sort of union," Dr McKeown said. "The Vatican was simply saying, sorry, that is not an option for us."

"It is not pastoral care to say we are going down the route of saying, we are actually blessing homosexual couples' unions as if they were equivalent to heterosexual couples' unions."

The bishop of Derry added that it is in no way a criticism of individuals, but that it was important to answer the question put to the CDF.

"I think all clergy know homosexual couples, many of them are church-goers," Bishop McKeown continued. "We're happy to walk with them and take them seriously. I think the document says that does not mean to give religious recognition which is precisely what people wanted the Vatican do."

The controversy following the document's release "raises a broad question about how we in the Church discern God's way forward", Bishop McKeown added.

"There's a temptation to assume that if we have shrill voices in a sort of party parliamentary context we can get a way forward," he said. "In the context of the synodal Church, it's not just a case of who can shout loudest... It's about how are we as a Church discerning God's way forward, about how we discern teaching in the Church."

New poll finds half of regular Mass-goers would return now

Jason Osborne

A new survey carried out has shown that almost half (47%) of regular Mass goers would attend Mass today if they could, despite the ongoing pandemic.

The poll, which was commissioned by the Iona Institute, found that 57% of regular Mass-goers went again over Christmas, and over 24% of the overall population.

The same research revealed that the numbers of people watching religious services online is increasing, rising to 30% in the latest lockdown, with the figure in the first lockdown being 27%.

Commenting on the latest findings, an Iona spokesperson described the rise in people viewing Mass online as "encouraging".

"You might have expected that weariness with the situation might cause people to switch off, but the opposite seems to have happened. Obviously, a lot of people find solace

in this way," they said.

"At the same time, almost half of Mass-goers want to return to public worship now. Given the age group of those who mainly attend religious services, including Mass, this is a high number."

This finding comes as Ireland remains one of the only countries in Europe banning public worship completely. The majority of EU countries allows public worship to take place with strict limits on the numbers.

"Both NPHET and the Government have previously admitted that they have no direct evidence to justify the ban on public worship. It is disproportionate and should be lifted in line with almost all of Europe."

"At a minimum it should be permitted again once we drop down out of Level 5. Under the current Government plan, it will not be allowed until Level 2, which could be months away," the spokesperson said.

» Continued from Page 1

She added: "I'm delighted that it's opened... People were just at the end of their tether and I think that was reflected in the statement that came out from the bishops as well."

Paula McKeown of Living Church in the Diocese of Down and Connor said: "There is cautious optimism. Throughout the pandemic people speak of missing family and that applies also to the Church family."

She said so many families have been impacted by the pandemic through loss, living with long Covid and fatigue experienced by frontline workers.

"A return to Church is desired by so many and clergy and volunteers are working hard in making preparations to do so safely and maintain a blended approach by continuing to minister online where we are engaging with great numbers of people too. So it is certainly a time of great hope and people are looking forward to gathering, albeit at a distance, and most importantly people are looking forward to being fed spiritually by the Eucharist," she said.

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Hopes prayer gatherings for Mass will go national



Catholics gather at Bride Street Church, Wexford, to pray for a return to Mass on the weekend of the 21 March.

Ruadhán Jones

Parishioners gathered in Wexford and Dublin this weekend to pray for a return to public worship, as Christians face a second Easter without Mass.

"Sixty people gathered together, all safely spaced out," said Ms Katie Black, who was involved in the gatherings. "Everyone was delighted

to come together and some even expressed later that they felt very emotional. They all felt the need that something had to be done." Parishes in New Ross, Dundalk and Enniscorthy will join the movement this coming weekend, as Ms Black "hopes the gatherings will become a national thing".

"I am very hopeful that other par-

ishes will also join us to highlight and pray for the need to return to public worship," Ms Black continued. "We are calling for all towns to gather, with social distancing in place, and with permission of their priest, at 12 noon."

If you wish to organise a gathering or to send pictures of gatherings, you can contact Ms Black at kanddans@hotmail.com.

After the storm?

In a recent book, *Frost-quake*, the English writer Juliet Nicolson recalls the winter of 1962-63, which was the coldest for perhaps 80 years. Everything froze, communications broke down, lights and heating went out. When the thaw came, in March of 1963, it is Ms Nicolson's thesis that Britain – and elsewhere, too – woke to a changed world. The '1960s' began after that thaw, with the Beatles, the Profumo affair, the contraceptive pill made widely available, and the launch of the 'permissive society'.

Changes

The year 1963 would bring many other changes, including the visit of President John F. Kennedy to Ireland and later in the year, his tragic assassination at Dallas. The thawing climate of 1963 would also bring about the changes to the Catholic Church introduced by Vatican II, the first being the switch from a Latin Mass to Mass in the vernacular, followed by the many other measures of what was called *aggiornamento* – bringing up-to-date.

Juliet Nicolson – granddaughter of the writer Vita Sackville-West – thinks that the post-thaw social changes begun in 1963 were all to the good. Yet, maybe as the Chinese leader answered when asked 200 years later about the outcome of the 1789



Mary Kenny

French Revolution – “it's too soon to say”.

On Vatican II, there were positive changes, but “it's too soon to say” what may have been some of the longer-term outcomes.

Impact

Will Covid-19, when we emerge from it, have a similar impact? Will we awake to a different world? Are we seeing signs of that already – a world without travel, or with much less of it? A world in which we are more inclined

to be confined to our national boundaries?

A world in which the state tracks us ever more intimately, keeping data on all our movements, requiring ‘passports’ for every activity – including more state control of religion?

The ice-floes are changing the contours politically, already: Scottish independence, a form of re-united Ireland already on the radar. It's evident that when the ‘thaw’ eventually comes, everything will be different. We had better be ready for it.

● The Cheltenham race festival was a breath of fresh air during St Patrick's week – and a great triumph for the Irish. Having no crowds seemed odd, and yet it allowed us a purer focus on the turf: and the clear sight of a rider in perfect harmony with the horse is surely one definition of poetry in motion.

I always think of the racecourse as an inclusive and even ecumenical place, as expressed by the fine ballad about the ‘Galway Races’, where “the Catholic, the Protestant, the Jew, the Presbyterian” mingle together in an atmosphere of jollity. In times gone by, Irish priests were often seen, in clerical habit, at the Cheltenham races. Far from scandalising,

a day at the races was considered a harmless hobby for a hard-working man of the cloth.

Tipperary woman Rachael Blackmore was indeed brilliant and a great inspiration; the wholesome normality of her general attitude, and that of her family, was so much in contrast to all the gloomsters and doomsters who have prevailed over the last year.

Although her stunning equestrian performance evoked my own misery-memoir moment: I'm still resentful that as a youngster I wasn't allowed riding lessons at Iris Kellett's famed Dublin stables – because they cost seven-and-six-pence each!

In St Joseph's workshop



Christ in the House of His Parents by John Everett Millais in Tate Britain in London.

Raphael, Caravaggio, Albert Dürer, Andrea Mantegna, Georges de la Tour, John Everett Millais, Robert Campini, Guido Reni and Giuseppe Maria Crespi are among the many artists who have portrayed Joseph, a saint who inspires the greatest devotion.

De La Tour's portrait of St Joseph, in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Nantes is bathed in exquisitely warm colours illuminated by can-

dlelight, depicting the angel appearing to Joseph to tell him of Mary's pregnancy. Caravaggio's *Joseph*, at Rome's lovely Galleria Doria Pamphilji, is wonderfully delicate and vivid, portraying St Joseph as guardian of the Holy Family.

Appealing

But Everett Millais's picture of Joseph, at London's Tate Gallery is enormously appealing and almost con-

temporary: it's a portrait of St Joseph at his carpenter's trade, entitled *Christ at the House of His Parents (The Carpenter's Shop)*. Millais was part of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood who sought to bring Christian ideals into ordinary lives, and his picture of Joseph is as guardian, protector, and practical breadwinner of the family which here includes John the Baptist.

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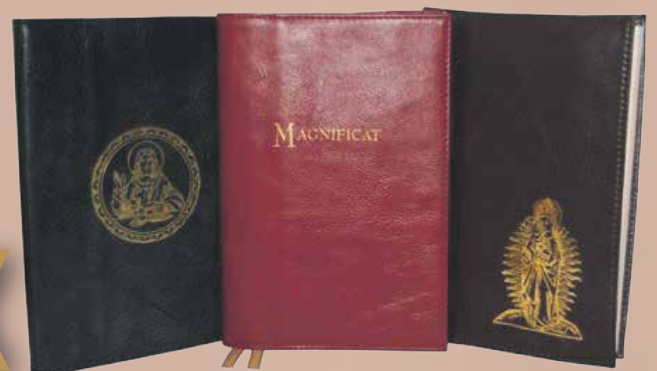
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UK abortion move attack on peace process - Church

Staff report

The northern bishops have accused the British government of showing a "reckless disregard" for the region's cross-community power-sharing government over plans to impose abortion legislation. The Westminster government has announced that it is to give the Secretary of State new powers to compel the locally-elected parliament to implement abortion laws.

In March 2020, when the assembly was not meeting due to tensions in the five-party coalition, parliament in London acted to legalise terminations in the region.

Agreement

However, when a fresh agreement was reached and local devolution restored, the commission of the services was stalled with Health Minister Robin Swan unwilling

to act insisting it was undemocratic and against the wishes of the majority of people in the North.

In a statement, the bishops described the move as "the latest in a line of unilateral interventions by the current Westminster government to portray a reckless disregard for the fragile checks and balances of the international peace settlement between these islands."

Concern

"Such a development should be a matter of grave concern for anyone who upholds the principle of devolution at the heart of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement," the bishops said.

The bishops say they are "deeply concerned" that the British government now "intends to bypass the NI Assembly to force the Minister for Health here to commission some of the most extreme and liberal

abortion services on these islands".

The Church leaders insist that: "What Westminster seeks to impose, against the clear will of a majority of people here, is a law which blatantly undermines the right to life of unborn children and promotes an abhorrent and indefensible prejudice against persons with disabilities, even before they are born."

“Such a development should be a matter of grave concern for anyone who upholds the principle of devolution at the heart of the Good Friday”

They call upon locally-elected politicians to

"speak out against the extreme and profoundly discriminatory nature of these abortion regulations, which the Secretary of State seeks to impose over their heads."

Representatives

"We ask you, as our locally-elected representatives, not to meekly acquiesce in this effort to bypass internationally agreed devolved structures. We appeal to you to publicly defend the rights of all children in the womb to be treated equally and to have their right and that of their mothers to love, care and protection by our society respected and upheld," the statement adds.

Vaccine delays a cause for mental health concern

Jason Osborne

The vaccine delay is the "overarching factor" that has changed people's attitudes to the lockdown, according to Professor of Psychiatry Patricia Casey.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Professor Casey said the delay is "very distressing for people" and encouraged them to get in touch with their TDs to express how "disgruntled" they are.

"This is the overarching factor that has changed people's attitude to the whole Covid lockdown now. People were beginning to feel positive that the summer was coming and the vaccine was at least being rolled out," Prof. Casey said, but then "slowness" and the decision

to pause the AstraZeneca vaccine made people "upset, distressed and irate".

"I wouldn't want to overplay – this is distress, it's not major psychiatric illness. I think we're tending to lose sight of that," Prof. Casey said.

"It's the kind of thing we all experience from time to time and we're understandably experiencing now. Of course, for those with pre-existing mental illness, this could well tip them into perhaps needing additional resources."

"For people who already are mentally ill, the distress caused by the delay...is I think going to upset them and may well trigger them into needing additional supports, be it psychological supports or pharmacological supports. It may well trigger that."

Heaven-sent horse snatches Cheltenham victory



Jockey Richie Condon rides Heaven Help Us to victory at Cheltenham.

Staff Reporter

Trainer Paul Hennessy whose horse 'Heaven Help Us' snatched an impressive victory in the Coral Cup at the Cheltenham Festival opened up about the religious names of some of his other horses over the weekend.

Mr Hennessy said on RTÉ's CountryWide that the winning horse's siblings all have religious names. The mother of Heaven Help Us had three other foals, Mr Hennessy said, with the first called 'First Friday'.

"I called him First Friday because my dad, God be good to him, had great devotion to

the Sacred Heart on First Friday and my mum too. He won four races, first in Dundalk, he was a great character, he was a bit iffy, he maybe put his head in front and maybe wouldn't but we had great sport with him," he said.

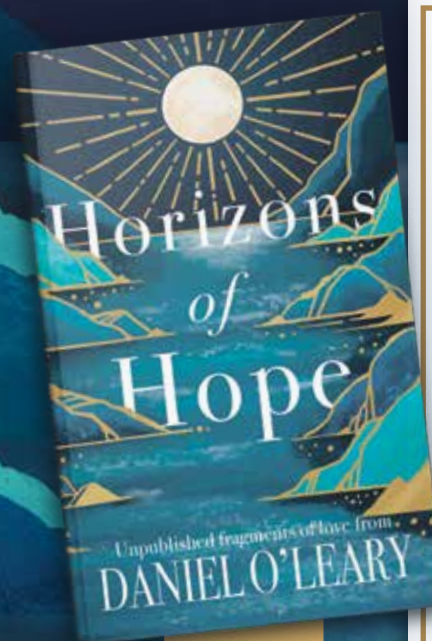
The next foal was a filly called 'Thy will be done'.

Mr Hennessy said the third foal "believe it or not, was born at 3pm on Good Friday and I said this is it, this is going to be the one that's going to do everything, I called her Merciful Hour, as in the hour of great mercy, and I'm afraid it didn't really work," he laughed.

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Ceremonies for Holy Week and Easter will be streamed live on the Knock Shrine website www.knockshrine.ie. We invite you to join us from home for some, or all, of these ceremonies during this holy season.

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As you are unable to join us in person this Easter, you may like to light a candle here at Knock Shrine for family and friends.

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You may also wish to include your petitions and prayer petitions in our daily Masses.

See www.knockshrine.ie for more details.

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Online Easter Ceremonies



HOLY WEEK 2021

Palm Sunday, March 28

12 noon & 7.30pm (with Rosary at 7pm)

Monday – Tuesday, 29th & 30th March

Mass at 12 noon & 7.30pm (with Rosary at 7pm)

Wednesday, 31st March

Mass at 12 noon & 7.30pm

A Penitential Service will take place at 7pm

Holy Thursday, 1st April

10.00am: Morning Prayer

7.30pm: Mass of the Lord's Supper

Good Friday, 2nd April

10.00am: Morning Prayer

12.00pm: Stations of the Cross

3.00pm: The Passion of Our Lord

Broadcast Live from Knock on RTÉ TV & Radio and on www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live

7.30pm: Stations of the Cross

Holy Saturday, 3rd April

10.00am: Morning Prayer

10.30am: Blessing of Bread for the Polish community

Easter Vigil Mass (Time to be confirmed)

Broadcast Live from Knock on RTÉ TV & Radio and on www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live

Easter Sunday, 4th April

Easter Sunday Mass

12.00 noon & 7.30pm (with Rosary at 7pm)

Join us at
www.knockshrine.ie/watch-live
or on Facebook@knockshrine

Martin Mansergh

The View



The tricolor was never seen as a beacon of reconciliation by unionists

Many problems in life arise from the habitual gap between ideals and realities. The Church knows this well, as it works at the coalface trying to bring into some harmony the ideal of a Christian life and a Christian society with the realities of personal sinfulness and sometimes dire societal failings. Churches are often afflicted with difficulties of their own. The ambition to present newly independent Ireland as a model Christian country aligned to Catholic teaching was confronted with the difficulty of dealing with behaviour that fell outside that framework. There was also the problem of institutional abuse by people in trusted positions. The instinct in every organisation, and it happened elsewhere, was to maintain the façade and bury the problem. Society is still coming to terms with catastrophic failures outlined in many reports of the last 20 years, not exonerating the State itself or practices which often preceded its foundation. Painful progress should not be viewed as cancelling out either the conscientious endeavours of the vast majority or the positive advances made in the past century, including advances in Christian understanding and compassion.

Equality

Because independence and/or equality of rights were hard won, even if it is work unfinished, in the Republic a high value is attached to the State and to the nation to which we belong. In Northern Ireland, lack of consensus on identity makes patriotism pull in opposite and sometimes threatening directions.

A variety of theories have been constructed to explain relationships between different people and peoples in these islands. Even the best of them provide only an imperfect approximation to reality.

One might think that there are only two states in these islands, the United Kingdom and Ireland. The world recognises

two categories, sovereign independent states, almost all UN members, then states in federations like the United States or Federal Republic of Germany, such as Alabama and Bavaria. Many historians loosely refer to the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland as equivalent states, when Northern Ireland was always a devolved region of the UK, albeit starting with some of the trappings of statehood, such as a government, a parliament, and a prime minister. Since Stormont was suspended in 1972, language used to describe its institutions has been scaled back to executive, assembly and first minister, albeit still housed in a monumental parliament building. Nobody today refers to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland as states, though Scotland has ambitions to be one. Allegiance to Britain or Ireland is mostly stronger than any specific allegiance to Northern Ireland, the long-term existence of which is still politically contested. Though at best an approximation, the description nation-state fits independent Ireland, which is relatively homogenous though growing more diverse, quite well, even though part of the nation on the island is outside the state. The two concepts are distinct in the Constitution.

“There are four ‘home’ nations in rugby, which, like most sports apart from soccer, is a one-nation activity in Ireland”

Many people will have read of one- and two-nation theories. Confined to these islands, it is possible to count more variants, ranging from a no-nation theory up to a four-, and five-nation theory. The last admittedly relates only to soccer, and the bid by Britain supported by Ireland to host the world cup. Two ‘nations’ exist on the island of Ireland for this



Despite the orange, the tricolor has not proved to be the unifying symbol for unionists it had been hoped. Photo: CNS

purpose, Northern Ireland and the Republic. There are four ‘home’ nations in rugby, which, like most sports apart from soccer, is a one-nation activity in Ireland. Like the churches, few sports were partitioned in 1921-2. Rugby differs from the GAA in that it is not culturally Irish, and is neutral on the constitutional question, causing periodic controversy about non-use of the national anthem.

The civil wars of the 17th century were referred to as the war of the three kingdoms, ignoring the principality of Wales.

The logic of the United Kingdom 1801-1921 and its symbolism was that it consisted of four nations, one of which was Ireland. The British government recently resumed referring to the four nations of the UK, implicitly counting Northern Ireland as a nation, perhaps optimistically hoping that over time this will generate a common allegiance. At present, those calling themselves Northern Irish probably see it as complementary to being either British or Irish. Originally, some Ulster unionists objected to the

name Northern Ireland, lest it be taken that they were Irish. The appropriation of Seamus Heaney in a celebration of Northern Ireland’s centenary was done insensitively without seeking family or other consent.

Two nations

The ‘two nations’ of medieval Ireland, the Anglo-Normans and the Irish, gradually co-mingled, despite laws to keep them apart, and were brought together gradually by resistance to the Reformation and the

plantations. In Jacobite parlance the ‘old English’ became the ‘new Irish’. A Catholic Irish nation came together in the 17th century, only to be conquered and dispossessed, but surviving underground to rise again. A similar effort influenced by the Enlightenment and the American and French revolutions to form one nation from Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter was made by the United Irishmen at the end of the 18th century, Wolfe Tone recognizing that the Catholics were “the Irish properly so-called”. The United Irish and Defender movements were shattered in the bloodbath of the 1798 rebellion followed by the Act of Union. A generation later, their inclusive ideals were revived by the Young Irelanders, who added a cultural nationalist dimension. The tricolour brought from Paris in 1848 represented a one-nation flag, aspirationally uniting, and symbolising peace between, green and orange.

“The tricolour, while a source of pride to the vast majority of Irish citizens north and south, was never seen as a beacon of reconciliation by Unionists”

As stated earlier, theories and symbols at best approximate to reality. Even in the early days, important figures rejected Orangeism, such as Bishop Stock of Killala briefly made prisoner by the French in 1798 and the Duke of Wellington. While the Orange Order later became a dominant element in unionism and Ulster Protestant identity, it never represented the whole of that community in Northern Ireland, and had little presence outside of Ulster. The tricolour, while a source of pride to the vast majority of Irish citizens north and south, was never seen as a beacon of reconciliation by Unionists (*to be continued*).

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Church teaching on sex may soon be classified as 'hate speech'

The liberal view of sexual relationship is so dominant it is coming to regard any opposing views as a form of bigotry, writes David Quinn

The Catholic Church places contraceptive use among acts it considers "intrinsically evil". This is extremely strong language, rarely heard today.

When Pope St Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, reiterating and confirming the Church's age-old teaching against artificial contraception it caused a firestorm of protest. Contraceptives such as the pill are an extremely convenient way of preventing pregnancy and married Catholics who already had several children considered *Humanae Vitae* very unreasonable, and it is indeed a hard teaching.

“The Catholic view, is that some sexual acts are wrong by their nature, even if they appear to harm no-one else”

But strictly speaking, from the point of view of Catholic doctrine (and all Christian doctrine until the 1930s), it is intrinsically wrong to use artificial contraception because it deliberately interferes with the true nature and purpose of sex which is to be both unitative and procreative. This is not to say that every sex act has to be aimed at pregnancy, but that artificial barriers should not be put in the way.

Natural

The Church allows natural family planning because this uses the natural infertile period each month to plan your family. It works with nature, in other words, rather than against it. Natural family planning is about as effective in preventing pregnancy as the condom and about half as effective as the pill.

I say all this by way of introducing a Vatican document issued last week which deals with the issue of whether the Church can bless same-sex unions. It says it cannot do this. It was issued because in some parts of the world, not least Germany, clergy and other Catholics are saying the Church ought to bless same-sex unions.

The most controversial passage of the short document says: "he [God] does not and cannot bless sin".

Understanding

This cannot be understood without also understanding the totality of Catholic teaching about sex. The Church believes that all sexual relationships must be marital, and therefore it believes that all sex that takes place outside marriage is wrong. But even inside marriage it believes that using artificial contraception is wrong, or to use its very strong term, 'intrinsically evil', because sexual intercourse, as mentioned, must be both unitative and open to procreation. That is, it must be a reproductive act, at least in principle. If a male-female couple are infertile, that is not their fault, the Church says. The act is still reproductive by its nature, even if a given couple can never, or no longer, have children.

The Church opposes artificial contraception for the same reason it is against homosexual acts; because it believes both go against the true, reproductive nature of sex. Once you drop opposition to one, it becomes much easier to drop opposition to the other.

Some Christian traditions now teach that sexual intercourse need not be orientated towards procreation, that doing so does not contradict its nature and purpose. But once you go down that road, then why does it have to be unitative, that is, an act of physical love and unity? The purpose of sex is then whatever you want it to be. It can be purely and solely for pleasure, and this is obviously precisely what modern societies now believe.

In fact, what we have here is a very major clash of worldviews. One, the Catholic view, is that some sexual acts are wrong by their nature, even if they appear to harm no-one else, whereas the liberal view is more or less that no sexual act is wrong unless it is non-consensual and does harm to another person.

“The Church allows natural family planning because this uses the natural infertile period each month to plan your family”

Liberalism believes this because it has ditched the belief that sex has an inherent, intrinsic design and purpose.

For a very long time, the Christian teaching on sex was dominant in the West, and versions of it were elsewhere also, and in some parts of the world, still are.

Then, for a few decades the two views co-existed in an uneasy ten-



sion. But now we seem to be moving into a new phase in which the liberal view of sex and sexual relationship is so dominant it is coming to regard any opposing views as a form of 'hate', and 'bigotry', the public expression of which might even have to be outlawed, and certainly massively socially discouraged.

Therefore, the Church must mute what it has to say about contraception, same-sex relations, divorce, cohabitation, casual sex and so on.

To a large extent, in the West at least, it has already done so, and certainly it almost never attaches words like 'sin' or 'intrinsically evil' to those activities.

This is partly justifiable on prudential grounds. The vast majority of married Catholic couples use artificial contraception and telling them they are engaged in 'intrinsic

evil' (meaning the act is wrong by its very nature), will only alienate and annoy them.

Pope Francis is urging a softer approach that places less emphasis on 'hard talk', and condemnatory language, and more emphasis on mercy.

Teaching

On the other hand, he is not changing the actual teaching on these matters. He is not free to do this even if he was so inclined. He is as bound by the revealed truth of God as every other Catholic.

He believes instead in pastoral 'accompaniment', that is, bringing someone gently towards the truth, rather than lecturing them every inch of the way.

But if we do come to the point where certain Church teachings around sex are classified as 'hate speech' and even outlawed, then we will have arrived in a whole new world where, for the first time ever, Christian leaders will have to be willing to break the law in order to proclaim what they believe to be true about the nature of sex and sexual relationships.

“It is intrinsically wrong to use artificial contraception because it deliberately interferes with the true nature and purpose of sex which is to be both unitative and procreative”

Prayer and protest on St Patrick's Day



● A number of people processed through Dublin on March 17 "to push back against Government attempts to restrict public worship" and to honour St Patrick.

Starting from the Garden of Remembrance, the procession wound its way to end at St Stephen's Green where it concluded with hymns.

According to a release from an unnamed organiser, the protestors "wanted to show Catholics that it is important to push back against Government attempts to restrict public worship".

"Openly professing our Faith in public is an essential part of our Faith," the statement said. "The Government can never suspend our God-given rights which includes the right to practice our Faith especially in public where we can do the most good to souls."

“I could see that there were several families whose parents would love for their teenagers to have something that could support their faith...”



Currently, one in four young people in Ireland are going through a crisis of faith, according to the Barna Research Group. This will come as no surprise to anyone – these young people are our brothers and sisters, children, grandchildren. They sit in our classrooms; they are our parishioners, our friends. And more and more of them are navigating a changing world without the strong foundation of a living faith.

Only 2% of young people surveyed said that they turned to prayer in times of anxiety. In these tense and anxious times, this begs the question – are we serving our young people well enough? It is easy to feel, in times when most of us have seen nobody outside our own homes for months, that there is nothing we can do to reach the young people that are the present and future of the Irish Church.

As you read this, there are 40 young missionaries working all across Ireland to reach these young people, going to meet them wherever they can find them. This year, that place is mostly the Internet so they are doing ministry online – online youth groups, podcasts, livestreams, online youth Alpha, online Confirmation classes. In previous years, and please God in the 2021/22 year, they will meet young people on the streets, in the schools, in the pews, in cafes and on football pitches. Once they have met them, they build authentic friendship and earn the right to be heard in presenting the Gospel.



That this is possible is due to the grace of God and the support of generous partners who support financially, invite a team to give a parish mission or act as contact people in parishes and schools. These young missionaries have given a year of their lives in the most uncertain of times because they believe that bringing Jesus to their peers is the most important thing that they could do. They go on your behalf to your young Church to announce the Good News of the Risen Jesus. It is only when young people know Jesus as the friend who wants to be the centre and meaning of their lives that renewal will happen and the Church will have the energy to reach outwards again.

COMING ALIVE:

Fr Philip Kemmy of the Letterkenny Cathedral parish, who is working with his fourth NET team this year, is a faithful and dedicated priest. He often speaks of how NET missionaries helped him turn a struggling youth group into one that attracted 30 young adults each week before the pandemic.

“I could see that there were several families, who I knew whose parents would love for their teenagers to have something to go to, to support their faith. The NET team became a focal point, it was a campfire that they all gathered around and began mingling. From there, I’ve seen young people from good solid Catholic families have a vehicle, a mode of actually coming alive in their faith, and then they invite others. It’s hard work, but if you keep at it the Lord will reward that fidelity. Our young adults group now has 20-30 people coming without Covid 19 lockdown. Even in



“This is the fruit that comes from the faithfulness of many people – which is nurtured and helped by the presence of a NET team”

lockdown, the NET team through their social media accounts provided the ability for the young people to connect with their youth group friends, and gives them faith which is a strong internal resource that they can draw on in times like this.”

IMPACT:

Thanks to the hard work of the whole community in Letterkenny in reaching out to their young people, there are flourishing men’s groups, school-age youth groups being run by young adults (before lockdown),



young men open to the idea of priesthood, one hoping to enter seminary next year, one couple who met through NET getting married this summer, a seminarian already in formation. They are seeing conversions of young people who grew up as atheists - one of whom has applied to serve as a NET missionary themselves this coming year. These are lives that are impacted and changed forever, young people who are now co-workers in the work of evangelisation.

Anthony Hartnett, originally from Wicklow, is a seminarian from the Diocese of Raphoe, who served on NET for two years. He is on track for ordination to the priesthood in two years' time, and is the only seminarian currently studying for the Diocese of Raphoe. He says that his time on NET helped in his vocational discernment:

"I learned on NET how to listen to God in prayer and open myself to Him. I also learned something of the cost of discipleship. Both of these helped me to ask deeper questions about my life and what God wanted of me. On NET I began to take seriously Jesus's call to follow him. I learned that for my faith to deepen, it needs to be shared."

FIRST MAKE DISCIPLES:

Anthony touches a crucial point for the future of the Church: if we want vocations, we must first make disciples - something NET Ministries is concentrating on. Disciples of Jesus build his Kingdom in their own spheres

of influence. Sometimes that looks like giving by going, sometimes it means going by giving.

Mairead from Co. Kerry is one of the people who regularly partners with NET missionaries through her financial contributions. She wants the faith in Ireland to be rekindled again.

"I want everyone to know Jesus and his love, especially young people. There are so many of them who think that they have no value and that their life has no meaning, they're more anxious and suicidal and suffering from depression than ever. Through NET I

can give young people faith, love, joy and peace. I have seen firsthand the amazing things that NET has done, and I know that an encounter with one NET Missionary can change someone's life completely. We don't know what will happen after the churches are allowed to open again. Will people come back; will they have lost the habit of going to Mass? For many parishes, it can be hard because they simply don't have contact with many young people, but the NET missionaries can reach

them. That's why I support them. They go to the young people I can't reach myself."

Before lockdown, NET Ministries was reaching 20,000 youth a year. Please prayerfully con-

sider coming on mission with us by donating now. Together, we can bring youth back to the Church.

Tony Foy, Executive Director, NET Ministries

“They go to the young people I can’t reach myself.”



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Jesus: the wounded healer

It is the time of year when Christians remember the death and resurrection of Jesus, the most important days in human history. Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. You may have a crucifix at home, perhaps a small one on rosary beads. Maybe you can download the picture. The one you see nailed in pain is the wounded healer.

This year we read St Mark's account of the passion of Jesus. Mark wrote his Gospel when the Christians in Rome were suffering persecution. Some were asking where was God during this injustice and suffering. Mark's answer is that although Jesus might have saved us in a painless way, yet his total love inspired him to enter into solidarity with all who suffer. No matter what you suffer, physically, emotionally or spiritually, Jesus was in there before you.

The drama of Calvary

Drama was the most popular form of literature in Rome when Mark was writing, and he was a master dramatist. More than the other evangelists, he spares nothing of the physical brutality Jesus suffered. His drama rises to the cry of inner dereliction: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Even faith itself is tested. Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. The narrator pauses dramatically in stunned silence. It seems that all is lost. Then we are told that the veil in the Temple was torn from top to bottom. The Roman centurion who had directed the execution, standing in front, having seen how he had died, said, "In truth this man was the Son of God."

“During the present pandemic, everybody is suffering in one way or another”

It's the first time in this Gospel that anybody has recognised exactly who Jesus is. This is Mark's answer to those who were asking where is God in their experience of persecution. He is with us because he has entered into solidarity with all who suffer. Actions speak more loudly than words. By entering suffering he is telling us, "No matter how you are suffering, I am there with you." This is what is called compassion,

“People who have suffered an injustice might remember how Jesus too was a victim of false charges and an unjust trial”

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



which literally means suffering with somebody.

The Letter to the Hebrews, also written for a people going through a hard time, calls Jesus a compassionate high priest. "For the suffering he himself passed through, while being put to the test, enables him to help others when they are being put to the test" (Hebrews 2:18).

The many sufferings of Jesus

Think of all the ways Jesus suffered. People who have suffered an injustice might remember how Jesus too was a victim of false charges and an unjust trial. He was mocked and spat upon. People who have been betrayed in marriage will relate to the cold kiss of Judas on the cheek of Jesus. When we feel let down by friends remember that Jesus was deserted by many of his closest followers. He must have experienced family pain as he looked at his mother at the foot of the cross. As Simeon foretold many years previously, a sword of sorrow pierced her heart. Think of the physical suffering...crowned with thorns, scourged with whips, faltering under the cross, nailed through hands and feet. His breathing became more jerky. Every movement of his body stabbed a new pain. He even entered the darkness of spiritual dereliction: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." He has fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "By his wounds we are healed."

We are being tested

During the present pandemic, everybody is suffering in one way or another. Frustration at the restrictions on movement and social contact is boiling over. Our patience is tested. Maybe our faith is being tested too. The Scriptures assure us that the wounded Saviour is with us in our trials.

Stations of the Cross

The Stations of the Cross remind us of people who accompanied Jesus. Simon of Cyrene shared the weight

of his cross. Veronica wiped his face clean of blood, sweat, spittle and dust. A group of sympathetic women wept for him. The apostle John and some women supported Mary. The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the extraordinary goodness of many people reaching out to help others. Heroic, selfless medical staff. Trained people returning to make their contribution. The unselfish acceptance

of severe restrictions for the sake of others. Never forget that the death of Jesus was the prelude to his resurrection. We are a people of hope who trust in God.

On this Palm Sunday, think of the humble donkey carrying Jesus into Jerusalem. I may not have much to offer, but the little sacrifices I make for the wellbeing of others make me a carrier: not a carrier of virus, but a carrier of Jesus, the wounded healer.

"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which lay ahead of him, he endured the cross, disregarding the shame of it, and has taken his seat at the right of God's throne" (Hebrews 12:2).



Christ's crucifixion is depicted in stained-glass.

Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, compassionate Saviour, by humbly accepting the sufferings of your Passion, you have lovingly entered into solidarity with all who are suffering in any way. As we look up at your cross may we recognise that you have not deserted us but you are with us in every valley of darkness. As your painful death was the prelude to your resurrection, may we go forward to Easter full of hope.

Pope hails Irish missionary spirit as he elevates Knock to international status

Staff reporter

Pope Francis has urged Irish Catholics to remember the great faith that Irish missionaries have brought to every corner of the world.

The Pope made the plea on Friday evening via a videolink to Knock Shrine where he formally elevated the site of the Virgin Mary's apparition in 1879 as an international sanctuary of special Eucharistic and Marian devotion.

He said the elevation "is a great responsibility".

"You accept to always have your arms wide open as a sign of welcome to every pilgrim who may arrive from any part of the world, asking nothing in return but only recognising him [or her] as a brother or a sister who desires to share the same experience of fraternal prayer," he said.

Apparition

Unique to the apparition at Knock is the representation of the Eucharist as the risen Lord which appeared as the Lamb on the altar, standing before his Cross and surrounded by a host of angels.

The Holy Father said that ever since the apparition on August 21, 1879: "the Irish people, wherever they have found themselves, have expressed their faith and devotion to Our Lady of Knock."

“In her apparition at Knock, the Virgin says nothing. Yet her silence is a language”

"You have been a missionary people. We cannot forget how many priests left their homeland in order to become missionaries of the Gospel. Nor can we forget the many lay people who emigrated to far-away lands but still kept their devotion to Our Lady," he said.

Recalling the legacy of faith, the Pope said: "How many families in the course of almost a century and a half have handed on the Faith to their children and gathered their daily labours around the prayer of the Rosary, with the image of Our Lady of Knock at its centre."

"The arms of the Virgin, outstretched in prayer, continue to show us the importance of prayer as the message of hope which goes out from this Shrine."

"As you know, in her apparition at Knock, the Virgin says nothing. Yet her silence is a language; indeed, it is the most expressive language we have. The message which comes from Knock is that of



Pope Francis honours Knock Shrine with a special message March 19. Photos: Sinead Mallee.

the great value of silence for our faith," Pope Francis said.

He said that "It is this silence in the face of mystery, which does not mean giving up on understanding, but understanding while aided and supported by the love of Jesus who offered himself for all of us as the Lamb sacrificed for the salvation of humanity."

"It is this silence in the face of the great mystery of a love which cannot be reciprocated unless in trusting abandonment to the will of the merciful Father," the Pope said.

Comfort

Fr Richard Gibbons, rector of Knock Shrine said that: "Since the time of the apparition, Knock Shrine has been a place of hope and given comfort and consolation to people."

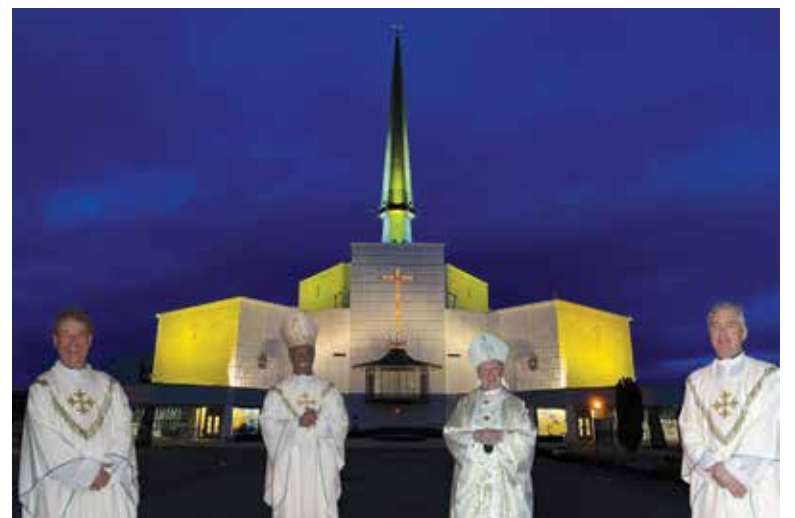
"The completely unique nature of the apparition scene is something that has fascinated and inspired people for generations. We are truly grateful for this recognition from Pope Francis, through the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation, which recognises Knock on an international level in terms of its special status as Marian and Eucharistic Shrine," he said.

Over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, Knock has led the way in helping people to engage with

their faith and offered daily religious services online. On November 22 last year, for example, the shrine celebrated a Mass of Remembrance for all who had died on the island of Ireland from Covid-19. Over 120,000 people joined in the Mass online. 3,000 candles were placed around the sanctuary of Knock Basilica, one candle to represent each person who died due to Covid-19 up to that time.

“The arms of the Virgin, outstretched in prayer, continue to show us the importance of prayer as the message of hope”

The story of Knock began on August 21, 1879 when Our Lady, St Joseph and St John the Evangelist appeared at the south gable of Knock parish church with the Lamb of God. The apparition was witnessed by 15 people. Today, Knock is an internationally-recognised Marian Shrine and was visited by Pope St John Paul II in 1979 as part of his apostolic pilgrimage, and in 2018 by Pope Francis as part of the celebrations in Ireland for the World Meeting of Families.



Fr Francis Mitchell, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Jude Okolo, Archbishop Michael Neary, and Fr Richard Gibbons with Knock Basilica lit in papal colours.



Knock parish church and papal flag.

“The Irish people, wherever they have found themselves, have expressed their faith and devotion to Our Lady of Knock”

The human condition...and the question of normality



We must be vigilant, discerning, and watchful over what kind of 'new normal' is appearing on the horizon of our post-Covid world, writes **Dr Philip Gonzales**

One of the fundamental tasks of philosophy is to seek to understand something of the riddle – or better – mystery of the human condition. In this never-ending task, philosophy always has something to say to the present moment. True philosophy, then, is not a mummified reminiscence but a vital and living act that speaks to our present condition. Indeed, one might be so bold as to say that it is necessary for navigating the tumultuous seas of the present. For when one understands something of the truth of the human condition one is then able to better judge current events according to this truth.

“For what such a world would look like is far too nebulous for any to predict”

What can philosophy tell us amidst the Covid-19 crisis and the ever-buzzing clamour of the slogan – ‘the new normal’? I would hazard to say that philosophy’s knowledge of the human condition tells us that we are entering ethically ambiguous waters. However, I do not fully intend to pursue that here but rather reflect on how the human condition is itself ethically ambiguous. Once this is seen it becomes clear that we must be watchful and vigilant in relation to the chatter about the new normality of a post-coronavirus world. For what such a world would look like is far too nebulous for any to predict. And whether our post-Covid world will be better than the ‘old normal’ is far too uncertain to proclaim. This uncertainty calls for vigilance and informed discernment concerning



Men and women are seen behind barbed wire after the liberation of the Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oswiecim, Poland, in 1945. The Holocaust was largely a product of the unwillingness to challenge the ‘new normal’ of the Nazi regime Dr Gonzales argues. Photo: CNS

the myriad of possibilities of what a post-Covid world should, or could, look like.

Humanity

“Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing uncanner than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him,” reads one possible translation of the first line of the choral ode from Sophocles’ *Antigone*. This ode, without a doubt, is one of the greatest reflections on the strange and uncanny nature of our humanity within the western tradition. Who indeed can unriddle or solve the mystery that we are to ourselves? Yet, perhaps, what is paradoxically most uncanny about humanity is how uncanny we actually are in our social and daily lives. What animal, besides the human animal, loves more the stability and certainty of its fixed habitat; the habitual nature of the human habitat that seeks to ever-secure itself against intrusions that could surprise or disturb its very rhythm of sameness within the quotidian tempo of our social and daily life. Perhaps what is strangest about our humanity is that it seeks to create a buffered space of normality over against what is strange, other, and exceptional. No being or animal loves or seeks out more the state of being normal than the human.

In our current situation this

demand for normalcy is most radically expressed by the fact that we are seeking to define the exceptional crisis of Covid-19 as the “new normal”. Our desire for the normal is so great that we cannot even call something which is an exception – an exception – and in not naming it such we cannot fully understand it as an event which disrupts our general manner of life. The exceptional becomes the ‘new normal’, and in being the ‘new normal’ it ceases to be exceptional. This should give us pause for worry socially and politically, on more than one front.

“Humanity’s ability to adapt to all circumstances – good or evil – is thus ambiguous and uncertain”

Looking at this philosophically it must be asked: what does this reveal about the human condition? It reveals that what is so strange and uncanny about the human condition is that the normal is *relative* and that our humanity can treat something exceptional as if it is normal. There is ambiguity and a play of light and darkness in this aspect of the human condition. Who has not seen one of those photographs of a child playing

amidst the rabble of a war-ravaged country; playing in the shadows of machines of death and destruction? Children continue to play, despite how exceptional the circumstances are, and this is ever a sign of hope in humanity, in a world given over increasingly to violence and control. Or think of Roberto Beggioni’s acclaimed and haunting film, *Life is Beautiful* (1997). This film calls to mind our reason to hope as well as the inverse image of our ethical ambiguity to adapt to all conditions, despite how exceptional. This aspect is masterfully seen in Hannah Arendt’s indispensable book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963). The banality of Eichmann’s evil was largely his unwillingness and inability to question the ‘new normal’ of the Nazi regime and its ‘final solution’. This exceptional evil became fused with his normal life and daily routine. And this is ever reason for despair in humanity, in a world given over increasingly to violence and control.

Dual aspect

Humanity’s ability to adapt to all circumstances – good or evil – is thus ambiguous and uncertain. It reveals hope and a transcendence towards the light, but it also reveals our ability to go down and transcend invertedly into the very depths of

darkness. This dual aspect of the human condition shows that the ‘new normal’ of a post-coronavirus world harbours both these possibilities. If anyone thinks this hyperbole or ashen doom-speak, all one needs to do is look at the last century to exorcise such trite objections. The 21st Century is not immune to those horrors and, in many ways, it may even be ripe with its increasing transhumanistic bent and its fable of counterfeit transcendence. But, as Christians, we are called to live in hope, and work for, a better future and a fairer more equitable world, beyond our late-capitalistic malaise and morass. Yet, Christian hope is never naïve or optimistic. It is vigilant, discerning, and watchful over what kind of ‘new normal’ is appearing on the horizon of our post-Covid world. Christians must, as Pope Francis says ‘dream,’ but we must also know that dreams too quickly become nightmares.

Dr Philip John Paul Gonzales is a lecturer in philosophy at St Patrick’s College, Maynooth. This article is part of a new regular column where philosophers from Maynooth Drs Gaven Kerr and Philip Gonzales offer accessible introductory thoughts on perennial themes in the history of philosophy and the Catholic tradition.

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‘No words to describe the grief that comes from losing a child’



Actress Bernadette Brown stars in the one-character drama *The Good Room* by Mick Draine.



Belfast playwright Mick Draine's short film addresses a pressing issue in NI, writes Ruadhán Jones

Suicide is an urgent issue in Northern Ireland. A 2019 report by the mental health charity Samaritans revealed that suicide rates in Northern Ireland are higher than anywhere in the UK or in Ireland. For example, men and women are twice as likely to commit suicide in Northern Ireland than in England. It has the 15th highest suicide rate worldwide.

Belfast playwright Mick Draine is personally acquainted with the tragedy of suicide. “There are no words to describe the grief that comes from losing a child,” he told *The Irish Catholic*. But in his recent short-film, *The Good Room*, this is exactly what he attempted to do. 2020 began for him with the tragic death by suicide of his 11 year old son, Cillian, and he was still in the midst of grieving when lockdown began.

During lockdown, Mr Draine reworked a play he wrote in 2016. Only the outline survived the re-write – the content, themes and tone changed dramatically. *The Good Room* (2020), which was released in June, is a one character drama which explores themes of grief, loss and suicide. For Mr Draine, writing the film was part of the grieving process, coming to terms with the loss of his young son, who died on January 1, 2020.

“The plot is deceptively simple – a young woman sits alone in a room in her family home and starts monologuing to a picture of JFK which hangs on the wall”

“I got this idea in my head: if I can try and create something over a two-month process, if I can try and recover creatively what I can lost, that process might help me recover my real life,” Mr Draine said.

“It was a way for me to figure out where my head was at, to go through different trains of thought and see where my thoughts were and to go through them to see if I could make any sense of it. If I could, or if the character could ask the right questions, it could help somebody who was in the same boat as me,” he continued.

It was on July 1 2020, the six-month anniversary of Cillian's death and what would have been his 12th birthday, that Mr Draine set himself the target of writing a short play. Due to lockdown, the project morphed into a short-film, which was shot and edited over course of a few weeks before being published online.

The plot is deceptively simple – a young woman sits alone in a room in her family home and starts monologuing to a picture of JFK which hangs on the wall. She covers topics as wide-ranging as the different religions' funeral practices, to the effects of lockdown on the grieving process.

Northern Ireland's suicide problem

One of the central themes Mr Draine sought to explore was the issue of suicide, one with a clear personal resonance, but also of significant importance in Northern Ireland. At the start of 2020, Mr Draine was hopeful that the issues were finally being addressed. Following the death of Cillian, he began to campaign to raise awareness and was impressed by the interest taken by the new Health Minister, Robin Swann.

“We had the likes of Mick Condon the boxer and Packie Lee, who started a campaign, who is Johnny Dogs in *Peaky Blinders*,” Mr Draine said. “Obviously because Cillian was part of a boxing club in

North Belfast, it was big thing, a lot of boxers came on board to do all sorts of stuff.

“At the start of the year, it looked like they were being addressed. I think the executive got together a day or two before or a day or two after Cillian's death. We got a new health minister in, who was taking it very seriously. He met myself and some other parents who had lost children with the Chief Medical Officer. It kind of looked like ok, this now is going to be taken as a serious priority that we are going to try and deal with in the here and now,” he added.

“If I could, or if the character could ask the right questions, it could help somebody who was in the same boat as me”

Then Covid-19 hit and Northern Ireland entered lockdown in order to protect “the sanctity of life”, as Mick described it. While he understands the rationale behind it, he was concerned that it will lead to an increase in the numbers committing or considering suicide.

“But is it a case now that there are more dying on a weekly basis from suicide than from covid,” he asks. “As is stated in the film, people die of isolation and staying isolated. By locking people down,

by keeping them away from their communities and families, it is without doubt going to increase.

“If that is the case, and if those suicide numbers are increasing more from March then they have been in the previous years, you have to question, well what sanctity of life are we protecting here? What are we doing? But it's difficult to get numbers on these things.”

Mental health

As it stands, figures from a recent study by the University of Glasgow suggest that there is no evidence of an increase in suicide rates during lockdown. However, their report shows the effects of the first lockdown on the UK's mental health, including increased rates of suicidal thoughts.

The study found suicidal thoughts increased from 8% to 10% and they were highest among young adults (18-29 years), rising from 12.5% to 14%.

It is a stark reminder of the importance of continuing to address mental health issues facing Northern Ireland, especially during the pandemic. Mick Draine's story is one that he hopes will not be repeated, though he knows that's unlikely.

“I hope that as few people as possible end up in the situation I'm in, but the reality is that there will be more people this week; and more the week after,” he said. “Hopefully somebody gets something out of it [the film]. Certainly, I got something out of trying to get stuff out on paper and recording it on camera. I've got good feedback, people saying that it has helped them in whatever stage of grief they're at.”

“For Mr Draine, writing the film was part of the grieving process, coming to terms with the loss of his young son”

'I don't know where my mother could have gone if the home wasn't an option'



From birth in a mother and baby home to a life full of gratitude, one former resident shares her feelings as told to **Jason Osborne**

I have no memories of the sisters of the Good Shepherd as I was only a baby when I was in the home in Dunboyne in the 1970s. My mother spent a few months there prior to my birth, and I would have spent some time there as a new-born prior to my adoption.

At the very beginning of my search for my biological family, I wrote to the Good Shepherd Sisters to try get some information as I didn't know how or where to begin searching. They sent me back a very nice letter, and it was warm and reassuring in the sense that it mentioned that in Dunboyne the girls and their babies were looked after, and it was a nice place. They directed me to the agency which held my file which was St Brigid's, the Holy Faith Sisters, where I could get further information. All other interaction I had from then on was with St Brigid's.

I get a good impression of that particular home, and, after reading the report on it, it appears to have been a home where women and their babies were cared for and looked after.

"I have come to be more open to allowing things to happen in my life in God's way and in God's time"

I feel grateful to everyone there who looked after me. I was baptised in the nearby Church of Ss Peter and Paul at the Easter Vigil, about two weeks after I was born, so the sisters would have helped in the organisation of that. My Baptism is something I think of a lot, and something which is very important to me, being the beginning of my faith journey.

I think that the sisters would have provided the best care that they could with the resources that they had, that's my own feeling on it. I honestly don't know where my mother could have gone if the home wasn't an option.

My adoptive parents never formally told me that I was adopted. The only reference I remember was



my mam saying that they walked into a room full of babies and picked me out of all the babies there.

Shock

Finding out that I was adopted came as quite a shock to me. I was always of a curious nature as a child, and would often search through drawers and presses at home, and, one day in the middle of one of my 'normal searches' as I rummaged through some clothes in the chest of drawers, I found a letter confirming the adoption order. It felt like I was reading about someone else and not me. I kept repeating the words over and over to myself. "I was adopted". I had to keep saying it to myself to get it to sink in. I never said anything to my parents of what I had discovered that day. I just kept it to myself and tried to make sense of it, and then, all the questions flooded into my mind as to who I was, where I came from, and who my biological parents were, etc. I am the person I am today because of my time there - because I was adopted. That was the road map for my life.

If I hadn't been adopted I wouldn't be married to my husband now. I wouldn't have the children I have, I wouldn't have the amazing extended family and friends that I have. The path that unfolded before me had to have been planned out for me by God, because it has made me into who I am, and has given me a different perspective on many things in life.

Both sides

I've seen both sides of the adoption story. The sorrow and the joy and how they merge together and my place in the centre of all of that. I have crossed paths with so many amazing people on the journey. I know that I wasn't part of anyone's plans back then, but

"I think that the sisters would have provided the best care that they could with the resources that they had"

I believe that I was part of God's plan because my adoptive parents were so overjoyed to have me in their lives. They were amazing parents who loved me so much they couldn't even tell me that I was adopted. In their eyes I was theirs and that's all there was to it. I grew up as an only child, my parents devoted themselves completely to me. I wasn't spoiled with material things, but I was spoiled with their time and their love. My mam stayed home full time with me. They brought me everywhere with them. I was never left with anyone. If they couldn't bring me somewhere with them, they just didn't go.

Gift

My adoptive parents handed on the gift of faith to me and that has been, and is, the foundation stone of my life. It has got me through lots of difficult times, including the tedious and constant searching that was an everyday trial for quite a long time for me.

I have come to be more open to allowing things to happen in my life in God's way and in God's time so it has helped me to be more patient in that regard.

My time in the Good Shepherd Home both as an unborn and as a new-born has made me reflect deeper on the sanctity of human life and I have always felt a strong connection to the unborn and got involved for some time with Cura [the crisis pregnancy agency]. I personally felt very affected by the results of the abortion referendum here in Ireland

and broke into tears when the results were announced.

I recognise and appreciate that a lot of sacrifices were made for me. My biological mother made a huge sacrifice in having me, and then giving me up for adoption. My adoptive parents made sacrifices for me in devoting their time completely to me.

"If I hadn't been adopted I wouldn't be married to my husband now. I wouldn't have the children I have"

My mam gave great witness to her vocation as a mother, by staying at home with me full-time, and this was something that I wanted to hand on to my own children. These particular parents who were chosen for me, shaped my life and the life of my family today. My life stems from, and is shaped by, the circumstances around my birth. I am who I am because I was adopted, and I believe I am who God wants me to be.

I think that with adoption, the light of hope is left on, and it leaves room for love to grow and be shared in very difficult circumstances, and it brings with it the possibility for future reunions, whereas with abortion, it's much more final, and there are no reunions. With adoption, life is changed but not ended and there is a focus placed on the life of the child. The child's life is seen as important and that life mat-

ters. I feel heartbroken that abortion seems to have replaced adoption in Ireland. So many couples today would love to be able to adopt a baby, and sadly that choice is not there for them.

Tears

Abortion moves me to tears, because I was in a position where my life was literally in someone else's hands, in a situation where everything was quite bleak, and I was given a chance. I had a home in the womb for nine months and was carried safely into the world.

Sadly, the womb is no longer a safehouse for many unborn babies in our world today as many are evicted through the horror of abortion and the global crisis of homelessness now has the unborn in its clasp. How many of the 6,666 babies whose life was ended in Ireland in the first year of abortion could have been the future scientists, teachers, front line workers etc of tomorrow? What reports will we be looking back in horror at in 30/40 years' time? Will our deafness to the silent screams in the womb today be the report of tomorrow?

I feel blessed to have been adopted and not aborted. I thank God for my life and I thank my biological mother for all that she endured because of me, all the sacrifices she made to ensure that I was placed into a good home and family. I am forever grateful.

The former resident who shared her feelings and experiences wished to remain anonymous and is known to The Irish Catholic.

Fruits of 'courageous' papal



Pope Francis is working to break a perspective that religion is connected to violence, writes **Chai Brady**

The Pope has been a leading light when it comes to interreligious dialogue – breaking down barriers in the Middle East – and when it comes to his visit to Iraq, he gave new hope in an area that was rife with conflict, much of which has been connected with religious divisions.

The March 5-8 trip made waves around the world and drew the attention of international media to a country which is often connected to violence and war. It was the first time a Pope has ever visited Iraq, a country which is the birthplace of Abraham, the patriarch of the three great monotheistic religions but in recent years, due to atrocities perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State, there has been a mass exodus of Christians. Over the past 20 years more than one million Christians have fled.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, the Archbishop of Erbil, Bashar Matti Warda CSSR, a Redemptorist who trained in Dundalk, Co. Louth, said the visit not only brought joy to Christians but hugely impressed the general public.

“Believe me, what I’ve seen over the last month from the young people was really a miracle”

“The public was really impressed with the guest of peace, his humble spirit, his ability to smile, some gestures here and there that were really very touching to them and at the same time we know, because the public media paid a lot of attention to his way of life and his visits, speeches, being really very concerned about the poor and the marginalised and the way he lives – not in a palace – all of these facts make Iraqis really aware of his personality,” Archbishop Warda said.

“Second, when he was here also, the general feeling was that this is a historical moment because the world is watching us, for the first



Pope Francis is greeted by Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of Shiite Islam’s most authoritative figures, during a courtesy visit in Najaf, Iraq. Photos CNS.

time the world is seeing images different from what they are used to seeing in Iraq, there’s not war, no violence, no sectarian conflicts, no political disputes, it’s images of people shouting dancing, praying.”

As part of the Pope’s visit, he went to the Syriac Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Deliverance, sometimes referred to as Our Lady of Salvation, which is now a shrine to 48 Christian martyrs who were killed on October 31, 2010, when militants laid siege to the church, detonating explosives and shooting people; 48 Catholics – including two priests – died inside and more than 100 people were wounded.

Reminded

Archbishop Warda said: “Various Christian stations reminded us why he was at the Church of Our Lady of Deliverance because there was a massacre in 2010 and out of this massacre there is still hope and people are still alive there who are committed to continue the service, adjusting.”

Shortly after the Pope returned to Rome, Archbishop Warda said the prime minister of Iraq was very complimentary about the spirit of the visit.

Regarding the political feedback, the archbishop said: “When it comes to the fruit of the visit, the prime minister announced because of the spirit of joy and tolerance that accompanied His Holiness,

let’s have a national dialogue to set apart all our political disputes and really make benefit of this historical moment and historical visit, that was a call from the prime minister, specifically mentioning the spirit of His Holiness visit.

“For the first time the world is seeing images different from what they are used to seeing in Iraq”

“You could say well, we made a contribution as Christians. That’s why I’ve said to myself, don’t underestimate yourself at all, don’t say we are few people, if you believe in yourself you can bring the whole world with you and around you. Yes, we were delighted. Some other political figures have welcomed the call of the prime minister which means welcoming also the spirit of the visit.”

Speaking of the influence of young Iraqi Christians on the papal trip, Archbishop Warda said: “Believe me, what I’ve seen over the last month from the young people was really a miracle. We are not really specialists or experts in organising big events. We don’t have organisational companies; we have done it ourselves. We have learned in the spirit of joy and hospitality how to prepare for this.”

He described the work of 300



Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Bashar Warda of Erbil, Iraq.

young Christians who had just one month to prepare as “inspirational”. This includes learning the Latin Rite for the Pope’s visit, as the Chaldean Church practices the Eastern Rite.

Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue is not about sitting around a table discussing issues, said Archbishop Warda and the Pope is living and teaching a model that is about leaving comfort

zones and reaching out to people.

“It’s a journey that he started in Egypt and Abu Dhabi... meeting all the important figures of Islam. That is really a very ethical decision to take: I will leave my space where I’m comfortable and go to the other space, be at his hospitality, no matter how he is going to receive me or not. That is very courageous, it is not just an ethical but a courageous decision,” the archbishop said.

visit to Iraq already being felt



Pope Francis participates in a memorial prayer for the victims of the war at Hosh al-Bieaa (church square) in Mosul.

"Then going to Ur, reminding us all that we are all brothers of Abraham and then of course Mosul and Nineveh Plains, getting the world to know that much needs to be done concerning rebuilding."

Terrorism

The phenomenon of Islamophobia, Archbishop Warda said, has grown particularly in the western world and is leading people to think religion is the cause of violence.

“Yes it’s always true that we are a missionary Church, even if we are quite a subtle, institutionalised Church”

"Everyone is saying that religion is the cause of violence, religion is the cause of terrorism. What he is doing by meeting all of these religious representatives is telling the whole world 'we cannot kill in the name of God' and that religion cannot be a source of violence. In fact, he is really helping Islam, helping all of the religious people, all the religions, giving them a new face, with the commitment they all have to fight violence and fight terrorism," he said.

"I've said it to Muslims here, 'if you understand, it's not about evangelisation it's about you all as well'. Because everyone now, especially when you go to Europe, to America, to all of these Western countries, they are convinced, most of them, that the source of all violence is religion. So it's better not to have religion.

"Here he is coming and saying, wait, no, we cannot kill in the name of God and religion has always been about valuing the humanity of the person. That's another way of really approaching, not just religious people, but also other people."

The ongoing process of rebuilding and offering homes for Christians who have been displaced due to extreme violence and persecution is a challenge, Archbishop Warda admits, but the Pope has given renewed hope to Iraq's Church.

He said that those who are in the country will probably return to their homes "if something serious will be done".

"Those who left and made it to America and other countries, this is really very difficult. But those who are still in the country, yes. Right now, for example in Erbil, I have 2,500 families from Mosul and Nineveh Plains still not able to go because they think it's not secure, it's not safe, their houses are not built. A lot of these issues are still there so probably they will find it very hard and very difficult to go but still the Pope is trying to tell the world to listen, we can do something here. He said thank you to all the people and organisations who have contributed but much is needed to be done as well."

Not forgotten

"I said it in my final thanks to His Holiness, 'You told us that we are not forgotten, persecuted but not forgotten, sometimes people, even when it comes to NGOs, they are tired because there is so much help needed but the presence of the Christians made it clear to the people who were helping and still helping that their help is making a difference. Still we have Christians here, despite all the difficulties, because you have cared a lot for the Christians – so still we have Christians. I think yes we are not forgotten, the visit showed that quite clearly."

The Church in Iraq's main task in 2014 was to provide a dignified way of living to internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were scattered in 26 camps. They were helped by a variety of charities, Churches and more including Aid to the Church in Need, the Knights of Columbians, bishops' conferences around the world and the Chaldean Church.

“I will leave my space where I’m comfortable and go to the other space, be at his hospitality, no matter how he is going to receive me or not”

They were able to start providing food, closing camps and renting houses to provide a dignified way of living for the families, while also providing medical assistance and subsequently building schools. "It lasted for three years and then when the liberation happened the whole focus was about rebuilding houses not churches, we decided as bishops to build houses, renovate houses before doing any work on churches, they would be the last on the list," the Archbishop Warda said.

"And then people started themselves to renovate churches and then ACN had a special programme with donors who were interested in renovating churches."

However, the archbishop explained that the fact is there is no livelihood programmes and that in itself is a big difficulty. "Unless there are public services jobs, because no one would dare

“The ongoing process of rebuilding and offering homes for Christians who have been displaced due to extreme violence and persecution is a challenge”



Choir members are pictured before Pope Francis' celebration of Mass at Franso Hariri Stadium in Erbil.



Children are seen near an image of Pope Francis during the Pope's visit with the community at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Qaraqosh.

to invest in a liberated area with the presence of so many military groups, it is a disputed area," he said.

"So livelihood programmes are missing and this is really, really going to affect the decision of the people to stay or to leave, so what we hope for after the Pope's visit is that people would understand, if you want really for those families to stay you have to think seriously about these types of issues, like livelihood programmes, how we are going to help them.

"In our part here in Erbil, I've established four schools, a Catholic university of Erbil, a hospital, a project which is important for us when it comes to pastoral and the mission side, but still it's important in a way for providing jobs, within these projects. I have 462 jobs to offer."

Challenges

Asked about his time in Ireland with the Redemptorists, Archbishop Warda said the Church in Ireland is facing challenges – although they are different in content compared to those faced in Iraq – and is being "squeezed" and not being given "a chance to go forward".

"I would say to our brother and sister Catholics there, yes it's

always true that we are a missionary Church, even if we are quite a subtle, institutionalised Church, but it comes to a moment where we have to be ready to evangelise and we can't be caught by the persecution, we should not be caught also by the difficulties and challenges," he said.

“Unless there are public services jobs, because no one would dare to invest in a liberated area with the presence of so many military groups, it is a disputed area”

"Our Lord knew very well that he was going to Jerusalem to be crucified and he did not back up, he told them I am going but the Resurrection is there, it is quite assured. I would say there are difficulties there, challenges are there, but here we are, we have been chosen for a vocation and we have to accept it."

Pope Francis has challenged Catholics to bring the Gospel to people in need – both geographically and in an existential world through a person's experience of pain, suffering and indifference. Without a doubt the Pope is practicing what he preaches, his visit to Iraq is testament to this, and Archbishop Warda's hopes are high that it will make a lasting change to the lives of the country's Christian minority.

Out&About

Lá Fhéile Pádraig!



DUBLIN: Senior infants from St Brigid's GNS, Glasnevin, celebrate having just finished a scavenging hunt for St Patrick's day, March 17.



DOWN: Fr Gerard McCloskey, dressed as St Patrick, makes a visit to children in St Mary's Primary School, Dunsford, on March 16 ahead of celebrations for the saint's day.



CORK: Bro. Desmond, Dominican novice in St Mary's Priory, is all smiles for St Patrick's day and a lovely cake to celebrate, March 17.

IN SHORT

'Authentic' understanding of St Patrick possible under lockdown says Archbishop Martin

The Primate of All Ireland said that St Patrick's day under lockdown is a chance to "rescue the real St Patrick from the legends and distractions surrounding him".

Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin also prayed for all those affected by the virus, and for "peace and reconciliation" as Ireland North and South reflect on "our shared history".

The archbishop said in his St Patrick's day message that as "the traditional parades, parties" have been postponed, we have a chance to "rescue the real Saint Patrick from the legends and distractions surrounding him".

"If you want to find the true story of Patrick, and get an authentic understanding of who he was, the best place to look is in his own words which are preserved for us in two ancient writings – Saint Patrick's *Confession*, and Saint Patrick's *Letter to Coroticus*," Archbishop Martin said.

"You won't find any mention there of green beer, snakes or even shamrock – but you will discover the testimony of a real person who dedicated his life and energies to spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ."

What you will read about, the archbishop of Armagh said, is a trafficked and enslaved teenager. St Patrick had "little knowledge or understanding of the true God. It was only while he was isolated and alone in captivity... that he found strength and courage in prayer and grew to know God's love and protection in a powerful and personal way".

Popular NI TV personality pledges support for SVP

One of Northern Ireland's best loved television personalities, Eamonn Holmes, has pledged his support to St Vincent de Paul after meeting with the charity's representatives.

Eamonn met with the Society's Regional President, Mary Waide, and Regional Manager, Pauline Brown, and they highlighted the work of SVP across Northern Ireland.

They stressed how the pandemic has impacted on the traditional means of donating to the Society and informed him about how some of the shops have remained closed while others are now operating a click and collect service until they are permitted to fully reopen.

After listening about the work of the Society, Eamonn said: "Charities like SVP

are being hit hard by the pandemic and although some SVP shops have had to close because of lockdown the need is not only still there, it's greater than ever.

"I went to visit a volunteer who told how deprived so many families are. It's heartbreaking but SVP is still there to help. You can help too by changing your charity donations and supporting SVP online. A little will go a long way."

Mary Waide, Regional President of SVP, added: "We are absolutely thrilled that Eamonn took the time to meet with SVP. I want to thank him for the interest he showed in the work that we are doing throughout local communities with families who have been devastated by the pandemic. We are very grateful for his support."

Edited by Ruadhán Jones
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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



ANTRIM: Students from Seaview Primary School, Glenarm, pictured with Fr McKay and teacher Ms Moran having just made their first Confession, March 16.



WATERFORD: Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan blesses two people with a relic of St Patrick, which he processed through Waterford City, March 17.

KILKENNY: Fifth year students are welcomed back with broad smiles at the Presentation Girls Secondary School in Kilkenny, March 15.



CLARE: Bishop Fintan Monahan of Killaloe diocese blesses a statue of St Patrick in Ennis Cathedral, March 17.



LOUTH: Two local businessmen volunteered to give the Augustinian Church, Drogheda a thorough spring-clean, March 7.

Events

● In the current Covid-19 crisis, it is clear that most (and perhaps all) Church events, other than some Masses, are suspended. Consequently, we are withholding the popular Events Listing column until normal activities can resume in our parishes. However, please do email us if you know of any parish event planned and we will publish details.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Teen killed in stabbing at Canadian Catholic school

● A 17-year-old girl is dead following a stabbing at a Catholic high school near Edmonton Monday March 15 morning. According to local officials, police were summoned to Christ the King Catholic School in Leduc, Alberta shortly before 10 am. They said the girl had been stabbed in a classroom. She was transported to a local hospital, where she died of her wounds.

A 19-year-old male student was arrested later that day and is currently in custody.

The identities of the suspect and victim have not been made public, and it is unclear whether they knew each other.

Charlie Bouchard, superintendent of the Saint Thomas Aquinas Roman (STAR) Catholic School Division said the school community will feel the loss greatly.

Brazilian bishops demand immediate Covid-19 vaccines

● The Brazilian bishops' conference and five civil society groups have criticised the federal government response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In a document titled "The People Cannot Pay With Their Lives", the groups said it was time to end the escalation of death. The groups, which formed the Pact for Life and for Brazil consortium, presented the document on a video call to the National Forum of Governors.

"There is no time to waste; denialism kills," said the document, referring to stances taken by Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who has denied the critical situation the country is facing and downplayed the importance of using masks and maintaining social distancing. "The Brazilian people need vaccines now. The virus will not go away through angry speeches," the document said.

Spain passes controversial euthanasia law

● Spain's parliament passed a law that legalises euthanasia in the country. The controversial law was passed March 18 with 198 votes in favour, 142 against and two abstentions. According to Cope, the radio network owned by the Spanish bishops' conference, the law will be effective in three months. The legislation makes Spain the fourth European country to legalise physician-assisted suicide after Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Other European countries, such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Finland and Norway, allow for what is known as "passive euthanasia", in which patients, under strict circumstances, can elect to not receive treatments, such as nutrition or hydration, that would prolong their lives. A similar bill that would decriminalise euthanasia was introduced by neighbouring Portugal's parliament, where the country's Socialist party hold a majority.

Appeal for prayers after Nigerian priest's kidnapping

● A Catholic diocese in Nigeria appealed last Thursday for prayers for the "speedy release" of a priest abducted March 15. Fr Benedict Okutegbe, administrator of Sacred Heart Cathedral in the Diocese of Warri, said March 18: "Please, join us in prayer for the speedy release of Fr Harrison Egwuenu who was kidnapped at about 8 pm on Monday at a bad spot in Oria-Abraka, Ethetape East Local Government Area, and for peace and security in Nigeria."

Fr Okutegbe told *ACI Africa* that the priest was returning to St George's College, Obinomba, Delta State, where he was recently appointed principal, when he was "kidnapped by armed gunmen who took him to an unknown destination". "The authorities have been notified and a manhunt has been launched for the abductors," he said.

Abuse report exonerates Cologne cardinal but Hamburg archbishop resigns

A much-anticipated report on the handling of abuse cases in the Archdiocese of Cologne exonerates Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki but Hamburg Archbishop Stefan Heße has requested "immediate release" from his duties following the report.

The report by the law firm Gercke Wollschläger accuses Cardinal Woelki's predecessors, the deceased Cardinals Joseph Höffner (1906-1987) and Joachim Meisner (1933-2017), of many breaches of duty in the handling of abuse cases – in terms of state and Church law as well as in terms of the Church's self-understanding, the German Catholic news agency KNA reported.

The report also incriminates the former vicar general, Fr Norbert Feldhoff, and the head of the Cologne church court, Fr Günter Assenmacher, who is accused of having given inaccurate legal information in two cases.

Reaction

In an immediate reaction to the findings, Cardinal Woelki relieved Cologne Auxiliary Bishop Dominik Schwaderlapp and Fr Assenmacher of their duties, KNA reported.

He added that he was not authorised to act in all cases, for example regarding diocesan bishops. "I will therefore forward the report to Rome today," the cardinal said.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Stefan Heße of Hamburg announced his resignation live on YouTube March 18,



German Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne speaks during a news conference to present a report on abuse cases by clergy at the Archdiocese of Cologne, March 18. Photo: CNS.

saying: "I am of the firm conviction that taking responsibility is part of our duty to actively deal with this dark chapter in the best possible way and to move towards a better future for everyone, first and foremost for the victims themselves."

"I have never participated in any cover-up. Nevertheless, I am willing to bear my share of responsibility for the failure of the system," He said.

Archbishop Heße stands accused of having neglected his duty in nine separate cases on 11 counts, according to the report, *CNA Deutsch* said.

"I regret very much if I have caused further suffering to those affected and their relatives as a result of my actions or my failure to act," the archbishop said in his declaration.

Debate

The debate surrounding the investigation into past abuse in the biggest diocese in the German-speaking world has been making headlines for months. Several German bishops have repeatedly complained that the events in Cologne were damaging the entire church in Germany.

At the news conference that Cardinal Woelki attended, Bjorn Gercke, co-author of the study, identified 75 breaches of duty by eight living and deceased officials between 1975 and 2018 based on the case files.

Cardinal Höffner had committed eight breaches of duty and Cardinal Meisner 24, or around a third of the total.

The law firm said its investigation covered the period from 1975 to 2018. It found cases of abuse and transgressive behaviour by 202 accused people, of whom almost two-thirds were clerics. There were 314 victims.

Poverty hitting Syrians hard as fighting wanes

Food, cooking fuel, jobs and, especially, hope are hard to come by in Syria, said two Catholic leaders reflecting on the 10th anniversary of the war.

"We feel forgotten. The sanctions have thrown the country further into desperation: 83% of the population is below the poverty line. We can't do it anymore. Enough," said Maronite Archbishop Joseph Tobji of Aleppo.

"We feel abandoned by the international community," he told Vatican News

March 17. But he said he and his fellow Syrians were grateful for Pope Francis' repeated calls for peace and for prayers.

The 10th anniversary of the war was March 15. In the past decade, an estimated 585,000 people have been killed and more than 11 million civilians have been displaced, including some 5.6 million Syrians who have sought refuge outside the country.

Vatican News marked the occasion by interviewing both Archbishop Tobji and

Cardinal Mario Zenari, the apostolic nuncio to Syria since December 2008.

"Syria is no longer the country I knew when I arrived 12 years ago as apostolic nuncio," he said. "Today, going out onto the streets of Damascus, I see long lines of people outside the bakeries patiently waiting their turn to buy bread at prices set by the state; often it is the only food they can buy. You never saw such scenes before, not even in the hardest years of the war."

US Pro-lifers say ERA would invalidate pro-life laws

If the Equal Rights Amendment were to become part of the US Constitution, its opponents say, it will actually harm women's interests and invalidate pro-life policies, such as the federal Hyde Amendment and all state restrictions on tax-funded abortions.

Its supporters say it will protect women from discrimination in the workplace, domestic violence and sexual harassment.

The amendment states: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or

by any state on account of sex."

On March 17, the US House voted 222-204 to remove an expired deadline for ratification of the ERA. Now the Senate has to take up the measure; it will need 60 votes to pass.

"Pro-abortion leaders have largely ignored, trivial-

ised or denied the fact that activists plan to aggressively use the federal ERA as currently written in a litigation strategy to overturn all pro-life laws," said Rep. Chris Smith, who is co-chair of the Congressional Pro-Life Caucus.



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No stopping St Patrick's day celebrations



Members of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, United Irish Societies and Knights of Columbus process into Most Holy Trinity Church in Detroit's historic Corktown district on St Patrick's Day March 17, amid the coronavirus pandemic. Photo: CNS

Faith leaders as important as health workers in pandemic response

Faith leaders have an important role to play as the world continues to respond to the coronavirus pandemic and the ups and downs of vaccine distribution, participants in a webinar heard.

That role is based on trust and accurately sharing information, said Kathryn Kraft, senior research adviser for faith and development at World Vision International.

Ms Kraft told the March 16 webinar, which was coordinated by Georgetown University's Berkley Centre for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, that faith leaders are essential players in the campaign to end the pandemic.

She described the findings of a World Vision report that identified faith leaders as being as important as health care workers in providing information and modelling appropriate behaviour in the pandemic response.

"As trusted community members with vital social, access and spiritual capital, faith leaders can exercise considerable positive influence in many communities during the current crisis," said the report, titled "Faith in Action: Power of faith leaders to fight a pandemic".

Like earlier efforts in response to HIV and AIDS, Ebola and Zika, faith lead-

ers are on the front line of responding to Covid-19, Ms Kraft said. In addition, she explained, because of their importance to local communities, faith leaders can help their congregations navigate through the massive amount of information – and disinformation – surrounding the pandemic.

In February 2020, prior to declaring a pandemic March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization warned that a "massive infodemic" stemming from the spread of false statements posed a danger to an effective coronavirus response.

In contrast, Ms Kraft

added, the overwhelming amount of fact-based information on the coronavirus has led people to become so "paralyzed" that they think that no action in response to Covid-19 is the best course, leading to reduced adherence to safety protocols and to greater doubts about the effectiveness of the vaccines.

Faith leaders can be "very meaningful" in modelling appropriate behaviour themselves, including receiving one of the vaccines, Kraft explained. Such action "helps people think through decisions for themselves," she said.

Lebanon facing a 'virus of crises', says Caritas

In the throes of a collapsing economy exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic and devastation from the catastrophic Beirut port blast last August, Lebanon is sinking further into a dire situation.

"Now we have the 'new' poor," Carmelite Fr Michel Abboud, president of Caritas Lebanon said of the rapidly rising segment of the country's population.

"So many people have lost their jobs.

Before, they came to us to donate. Now, in despair, they are coming to ask for help."

The Lebanese currency has lost nearly 90% of its value over the past 18 months, driving more than half of the population below the poverty line. A wage equal to \$1,000 is now worth less than \$100, and inflation is skyrocketing.

"The suffering of the people. The anxiety of the people. The 'virus' of the crises in Lebanon. We have many problems in

Lebanon," Fr Abboud told *Catholic News Service*.

"Now we are in the tunnel. The majority of families repeat the same expression to us: 'Our lives have changed. We were well-to-do, now we are poor,'" he said. "It's a tragedy."

The currency devaluation has caused hyperinflation, such that basic foods have become unaffordable for the previously middle class.

Vatican roundup

'I too kneel on Myanmar streets,' says Pope

● As security forces in Myanmar have increased their crackdown on civilians, with disappearances, detentions and the killing of peaceful protesters, Pope Francis appealed for an end to violence and the start of dialogue.

"Once again, and with much sorrow, I feel compelled to mention the tragic situation in Myanmar, where so many people, especially young people, are losing their lives for offering hope to their country," the Pope said at the end of his weekly general audience March 17.

Without mentioning her name, the Pope recalled the iconic gestures of Sister Ann Nu Thawng, who made headlines when photographs were published of her kneeling before police seeking to shield peaceful protesters and of her extending her arms begging police not to shoot or hurt anyone.

"I, too, kneel on the streets of Myanmar and say, 'Stop the violence,'" Pope Francis said. "I, too, spread wide my arms and say, 'Make way for dialogue.'"

Bloodshed "resolves nothing", he said, repeating his call for dialogue to begin.

Bishops and Catholic organisations have condemned the actions of the Myanmar military, which has continued to crack down on protesters since its February 1 coup.

At Vatican trial, ex-student says he was abused at minor seminary

● A former student of the minor seminary located at the Vatican said he was sexually abused over a six-year period despite having told the rector that an older student was "bothering" him.

The former student, identified as LG, took the stand March 17 at a trial in the Vatican City State criminal court. He testified against Father Gabriele Martinelli, also a former student at the St Pius X Pre-Seminary, who is accused of sexually abusing LG between 2007 and 2012.

Although both were under the age of 18 when the abuse apparently began,

the court accused the priest of continuing to abuse the younger student when Fr Martinelli, not yet a priest, was already 20. LG also said he was shunned by Msgr. Enrico Radice, the former rector of the seminary, when he tried to inform him of the abuse.

Msgr Radice's reaction, he said, "left me shocked, it was very harsh". According to LG, the former rector accused him of being jealous and threatened to call his parents and pastor, as well as kick him out of the minor seminary.

Pope requests study of worship congregation before new prefect

● Before Pope Francis names a new prefect for the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, he has asked that an outside expert consult with the office's staff and review its procedures.

The Pope in late February accepted the resignation of Guinean Cardinal Robert Sarah, who had reached the normal retirement age of 75 last June. The cardinal had been prefect since 2014.

A French website reported March 12 that it would be a "canonical visitation" carried out by Bishop Claudio Maniago of Castellana, president of the Italian bishops' conference's liturgical commission and a member of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments.

In response to questions from *Catholic News Service*, Archbishop Arthur Roche, who has served as secretary of the congregation since 2012, had an assistant reply that "this is not a canonical visitation. Rather it is more in the nature of the consultations a diocesan bishop would have with his vicar general and others when he is appointing a new parish priest. In such an instance, the idea is to get to know the needs of the parish, the actual situation."



Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

Catholicism is a vast, riotously diverse global institution, counting 1.3 billion members scattered in every nook and cranny of the planet. As a result, Catholic experience is a constant interplay between the universal and the local, a few basic constants refracted and lived out in a stunning myriad of different milieus.

One of those constants, given that religion stirs people's deepest passions, is that someone in the Catholic Church is always upset about something.

“A petition calling for Archbishop Naumann to be removed as chair of the pro-life committee quickly garnered 22,000 signatures”

However, precisely what upsets different Catholics at any given time often reflects features of their local cultures. Three tempests swirling around the Church over the past week illustrate the point.

- In Italy, some Catholics have objected to an announcement by the Archbishop of Potenza in the southern region of Basilicata that as soon as restoration work is complete on the city's Church of the Most Holy Trinity, it will reopen as a functioning parish. The church has been closed since 2010, when the remains of a teenage girl who had disappeared in 1993 were discovered in its loft, raising still-unanswered questions about how the body of one of Italy's best-known missing children had gone undetected in such a spot for almost two decades.

- In Germany and Austria, Catholic organisations and even several bishops have voiced critical reactions to a recent declaration from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith insisting upon the impossibility of offering blessings to same-sex unions. Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, the elected president of the German bishops' conference, described the content of the Vatican document as “points of view” that will be taken into consideration, but not necessarily heeded, during the German Church's ongoing synodal discussions.

- In the United States, some Catholics have applauded while others have expressed outrage after Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, who chairs the US bishops' pro-life committee, said in media interviews that US President Joe Biden “should stop defining himself as a devout Catholic”

Each Catholic culture brews a controversy made to order



Archbishop Joseph Naumann of Kansas City, Kan., chairman of the US bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, processes at the conclusion of the opening Mass of the National Prayer Vigil for Life January 23, 2020. Photo: CNS

“This week, a group of roughly 350 Austrian priests known as the Pfarrerr-Initiative released a statement asserting that its members would not abide by the Vatican decree”

and refrain from taking communion because of his pro-choice policies. A petition calling for Archbishop Naumann to be removed as chair of the pro-life committee quickly garnered 22,000 signatures.

Catholic circles

Of course, it's not only Italians who would be scandalised by perceptions that Church personnel may have been negligent, if not complicit, in covering up the murder of a child, just as it's not only German-speaking cultures where a debate in Catholic circles about the Vatican declaration on same-sex unions is underway. Nonetheless, the fact that these reactions seem most intense in particular settings is revealing.

In general, Italians tend not to get as upset as Anglo-Saxon and Germanic cultures about debates over Catholic doctrine and discipline, which reflects a basic cultural difference concerning law. In Anglo-Saxon and Germanic settings, law tends to be seen as a lowest common denominator of civic morality, so if something's a law, it has to be followed and enforced exactly as written. In

Mediterranean cultures, law is seen as something of an ideal, with a realistic understanding that most people, most of the time, will fall short, and so there needs to be plenty of room for interpretation and application to concrete circumstances.

Hence most Italian Catholics would look at the recent Vatican decree and conclude there's no need to react until they figure out what Don Guido plans to do about it in their local parish – and, most likely, Don Guido will treat it with formal praise while quietly continuing to do whatever he thinks is the best pastoral choice.

On the other hand, Italians do get upset about perceptions of hypocrisy and clerical arrogance. Thus when the brother of the 16-year girl who disappeared in 1993, and whose body apparently lay undetected in the local church for years while an agonising nationwide search unfolded, recently demanded that Archbishop Salvatore Grigorio first come clean about everything the Church knows, and then reconcile with the family and the community, before reopening the church where the remains were found, that posi-

tion resonated deeply.

Meanwhile, Germany was the birthplace of the Protestant Reformation, where disputes over doctrine and law long have been part of the fabric of ecclesiastical experience, and where Catholicism inevitably is influenced by the surrounding Protestant ethos of much of the country. Where Italians may greet Vatican decrees with a shrug, Germans are more likely to become outraged, to organise, and to speak up.

“Nowhere is that tendency sharper than in politics, as the ongoing upheaval related to former President Donald Trump illustrates”

This week, a group of roughly 350 Austrian priests known as the Pfarrerr-Initiative released a statement asserting that its members would not abide by the Vatican decree. In Italy it wouldn't occur naturally to most parish priests to make such statements, since they'd figure exercising discretion about which decrees to ignore is just part of the job, and it's a lot easier if you don't call attention to yourself while you're doing it.

Finally, we come to the United States, where it's telling that this

week's Catholic brouhaha once again has a partisan political edge.

Over the years, I've often heard Catholics from other places say they regard their American coreligionists as denominationally Catholic but culturally Calvinist, implying sharply dualistic tendency to think in terms of absolute good v. absolute evil, the elect and the reprobate. Nowhere is that tendency sharper than in politics, as the ongoing upheaval related to former President Donald Trump illustrates.

Had Archbishop Naumann simply repeated core Church teaching on abortion, it's unlikely beyond a small circle of the usual suspects even would have noticed. By tying those points to Biden, however, he guaranteed that it would go viral, triggering absolutely predictable reactions from the politically polarised camps into which American Catholicism has chosen to organise itself.

Naturally, the fact that these three controversies reflect the cultures in which they're set doesn't, by itself, provide a roadmap for resolving them. However, perhaps Catholics in each setting could at least consider that since the Church is universal, perhaps there's perspective from another culture which could be helpful in thinking through the challenges in their own.

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

Bolivian bishops protest arrest of former president



People protest the results of elections in La Paz, Bolivia, November 3. Photo: CNS.



Inés San Martín

Hours after Bolivia's former interim president was detained and accused of promoting an alleged coup against her predecessor Evo Morales, the country's bishops released a statement saying that "the politics of revenge" and a justice system aligned with the ruling political power "do not create confidence in the people".

"The arrest and prosecution of the former president of Bolivia, Jeanine Áñez, along with several of her ministers, without taking into account minimum constitutional guarantees or even the presumption of innocence, confirms the line of action that, unfortunately, we have seen in the judicial system," warned the prelates.

Revenge

"The politics of revenge and resentment and a justice dependent on political power, do not create confidence in the people and will harm us all, sooner or later," the bishops warned in a message released Saturday afternoon.

In the wee hours of Saturday, Ms Áñez and other members of

her former cabinet were arrested within the framework of an investigation into the alleged "coup d'état" against then-President Evo Morales in November 2019.

“You cannot create a false account of history, inventing the truth and manipulating the conscience of the Bolivians”

Mr Morales agreed to calls for his resignation and fled Bolivia following the disputed 2019 general election and ensuing unrest. After a temporary exile, spent primarily in Argentina, Mr Morales returned to Bolivia when his ally Luis Arce won a presidential election held last year.

Ms Áñez' short lived government was not free of controversies: After she took over, protests continued, primarily by those who sought Morales' return. The government's response led the chief United Nations human rights office to voice concerns over the use of force in response to the protests.

The bishops' Saturday message was released by video, with Bishop

Ricardo Centellas, president of the Bolivian bishops' conference, reading from a prepared text.

"We cannot remain passive while citizens who have served Bolivia, with their limitations, are persecuted," says Bishop Centellas, inviting the government to "desist from total control of the power, revenge and persecution".

The bishop also argues that democracy is only possible when there is an independent justice system that is not subject to the political interests of the ruling government. He said justice implies "respect for the truth".

"You cannot create a false account of history, inventing the truth and manipulating the conscience of the Bolivians," he said.

Arbitrarily

The prelate also said that when those in power act arbitrarily, "democracy dies and the exercise of power becomes imposition of power, which sooner or later will harm the entire society".

Bishop Centallas demanded "in respect of due process, which is part of internationally recognised fundamental rights, the immediate release of the detainees".

"We cannot remain silent when seeing the increasing political persecution, a memory of sad moments of history, and which don't build trust, peace and reconciliation among Bolivians," he said.

On Sunday, Archbishop Sergio Gualberti, archbishop of Santa Cruz, Bolivia's largest city, also criticised the government's actions in the context of what he called an "alleged coup d'état" and asked the country's leaders to "act according to the truth".

"It is intended to label the people and their representatives who defended the citizen vote and democracy as coup plotters, while the perpetrators of the fraud are presented as victims," he said. "Democracy demands respect for human rights."

Archbishop Gualberti also called on civil authorities to "strengthen democratic institutions and to respect the dignity and rights of each person, preserving the health and life of citizens and building a reconciled, united and peaceful country, on the basis of justice".

On Monday, Mr Morales went to Twitter to claim that some among the Catholic leadership had sided with "the oppressor".

"We regret the statements of some leaders of the Catholic Church of Bolivia who side with the oppressor, forget the humble and ask for freedom of coup plotters subjected to justice when they never claimed or mentioned the victims of the Senkata and Sacaba massacres," Mr Morales wrote.

Incidents

The Senkata and Sacaba massacres are two incidents that occurred during Ms Áñez presidency where up to 36 protestors died.

“We regret the statements of some leaders of the Catholic Church of Bolivia who side with the oppressor”

In May, Bishop Eugenio Scarpellini of El Alto asked for justice and compensation in favour of the relatives of the victims.

Asking for peace in Bolivia during the homily of a Mass on the anniversary of the founding of his city, the prelate argued that there cannot be peace without justice, without comfort to family members and also reparation to those who lost loved ones. He also called for medical care and work for those who were wounded.

"I cannot not condemn the irrational violence that was unleashed in our city, in our country," he said. "Violence always generates deep wounds, which will surely be healed over time."

“The politics of revenge and resentment and a justice dependent on political power, do not create confidence in the people and will harm us all, sooner or later”

Letters

Letter of the week

UCC abortion study is 'stark wake-up call'

Dear Editor, Yes; it is right that we should examine how children in mother and baby homes were treated and how their adoptions were arranged in the past century. But each generation has to face up to its own responsibilities! A recent study conducted by researchers at University College Cork has been published in the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology. It features interviews with doctors

who carry out abortions under Ireland's new laws. It makes for very difficult reading. This study, with its disturbing words and images, is a stark wake-up call. The upcoming review of our abortion laws needs to urgently address many issues including the following:

- The provision of appropriate pain relief for the foetus.
- The curtailment of feticide in late-term abortions.

- The clarification of the rights of babies born alive after failed abortions.

Following this publication, we cannot say that we were unaware of what was happening in our maternity hospitals. The provision of 'abortion services' is not a compassionate response to women in crisis pregnancies.

*Yours etc.,
Eamon Fitzpatrick,
Sligo*

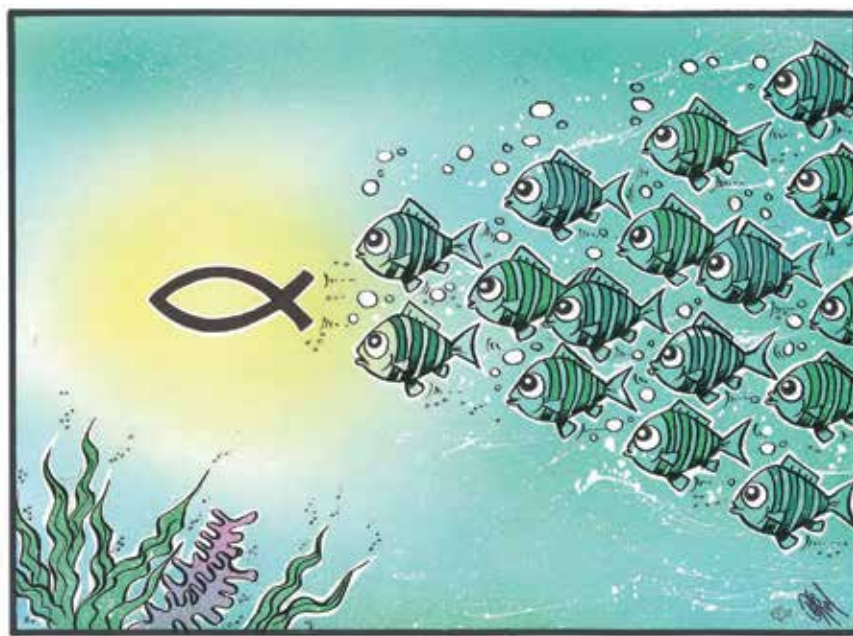
Calling all sinners home

Dear Editor, The headlines 'God cannot bless sin' re: same sex unions is unfortunate and goes against the main spiritual theme of the joy of outcasts and sinners who are now included in the incoming reign and Kingdom of God the merciful Father.

St Paul tells us that God loves us when we were still sinners. St John says Jesus comes to call sinners not the virtuous. The Gospels say we should not judge.

If everybody were allowed the freedom to form a conscience we would live in a more truly Christian world.

*Yours etc.,
Philip John Griffin
Rathfarnham, Dublin 16*



What is more noble and what is more petty?

Dear Editor, Let me be upfront and clearly state I also wish to be physically present and participate at Mass on a regular basis.

There has been a lot of letters and online comment published in *The Irish Catholic* regarding attending Mass in this time of pandemic. Many have commented very favourably upon the cleanliness of churches and the safety within those churches. This unfortunately misses the fact that as human beings people socialise together and

in Ireland too many stretch the rules. This has been seen in graveyards, gatherings outside churches after funeral Masses, First Communions and Confirmations. Physical distancing seems to be ignored, not just reduced to one metre or even a half of one metre. All of these events are conflating the social and religious aspects.

Yes the social aspects of life are important and cannot be divorced from the religious aspects for those of faith. However, a lot of the

rituals around the time of Easter have little to do with the Triduum and a lot to do with commerce and social interaction. The Fifth Commandment 'Thou shall not kill' applies in the context of pandemic when to lift restrictions too soon leads to a foreseen and rapid increase in case numbers and deaths.

Perhaps we should consider the words of Fr Rolheiser, in his article 'An invitation to something higher' [IC 04/03/2021]: "Saints don't think so much in terms

of what's sinful and what isn't. Rather they ask, what is the more loving thing to do here? What's more noble of soul and what's more petty?"

Let us practice our faith during this pandemic and use the opportunity to explore how we live individually and how we wish to live as a parish community after the pandemic. Returning to what was normal is not a very attractive option.

*Yours etc.,
John Murphy
Celbridge, Co. Kildare*

Magisterium has consistently rejected the ordination of women

Dear Sir, In his review of Fr John O'Brien's *Women's Ordination in the Catholic Church* [IC 18/02/2021] Peter Costello writes that in Rome the ordination of women is "usually seen as a matter settled by the long tradition of the Church".

Mr Costello's way of summarising the position might lead an uninformed reader to believe that he is merely reporting on private opinion in the curia. On the contrary, the magisterium has consistently rejected the ordination of women to the priesthood in the clearest possible terms. If Mr Costello doubts this he should consult St John Paul II's *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* (1994). In that document the late Pope stated that "the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be

definitively held by all the Church's faithful". What he wrote has been repeated by both his successors; and what they believe is consistent with the teaching and practice of all their predecessors.

I have yet to read Fr O'Brien's recently published work but I am familiar with the literature on the ordination of women, both in favour and against. That familiarity inclines me to agree with the late Msgr Graham Leonard, the sometime Church of England bishop of London who became a Catholic and was ordained to the priesthood after his reception. He once said that he had "heard many arguments in favour of women's ordination, but not yet a good one".

The assertion that the case against the ordination of women "is a matter

of Canon law rather than doctrine" is baffling when *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* and a large body of theological literature on the subject are recalled. Mr Costello cites no examples of "the emergent epigraphic evidence from the first three centuries" which he claims supports Fr O'Brien's case but one wonders if this "evidence" comes into the same category as the supposed evidence in favour of women priests from catacomb paintings from the 3rd Century which is discussed and dismissed in the late Geoffrey Kirk's *Without Precedent: Scripture, Tradition and the Ordination of Women* (2016).

*Yours etc.,
C.D.C. Armstrong
Belfast, Co. Antrim*

facebook community

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

Bishops outline synod plan to hear from Catholics who have walked away

Long overdue it's about time. The Church in Ireland needs to get its house in order. – **Malachy Kavanagh**

Hopefully the bishops will not neglect to preach about the wonders of the priestly and religious vocation amidst the inevitable doom and gloom that will undoubtedly cloud much of the rhetoric of this synod. – **Cearbhall O Lonagain**

During the two years of discerning could I recommend everyone read *A Church In Crisis* by Ralph Martin – **Daragh Harmon**

Great stuff. Really look forward to contributing when the time comes. – **Thomas O'Mahony**

Considering the way that the synodal process has gone in Germany I am not so sure about this. But I will be praying for the process going forward and it will be interesting to see where it will go. – **Tony Fullerton**

Ideas like this are sadly almost two decades too late. – **Padraig Cosgrave**

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

Policies not piety are the issue with President Biden

Dear Editor, Massimo Faggioli in Jason Osborne's account [IC 04/03/2021] mistakenly regards the election in modern times of two members of the Catholic Church to the US presidency as a significant achievement. This latter despite the traditional antipathy of the US Protestant majority towards Catholicism. Mr Faggioli misses what is really significant. Kennedy, speaking in Houston in September 1960 assured non-Catholics that Catholicism would not get in the way of policy. Mr Faggioli seems unaware that in contemporary US culture, Biden's membership of the Catholic Church is anything but significant, especially given his anti-Catholic policies. His candidacy emerged when Catholicism in the Anglo-European-American world is often regarded as decomposing. Indeed, traditional Protestants and Evangelicals, Orthodox and Conservative Jews, Muslims, Mormons, and even secular citizens have expressed concerns similar to those of some Catholics at being ridden over roughshod by these anti-Catholic policies, including the new Equality Act. His policies, not his piety, were the significant issue in Biden's election. Mr Faggioli also misses the essence of the US Catholic Bishops Conference response to the election. They anticipate the negative impact of Biden's anti-Catholic policies on Catholic practice. They offer cooperation in areas wherein they can. But, acting as America's good servants, but God's first, they also fulfilled their duty to "preach the Word in-season and out-of-season". They have already begun answering the question "what is truth" should he ever ask it.

*Yours etc.,
Neil Bray
Cappamore, Co. Limerick*

Letters to the Editor

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

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

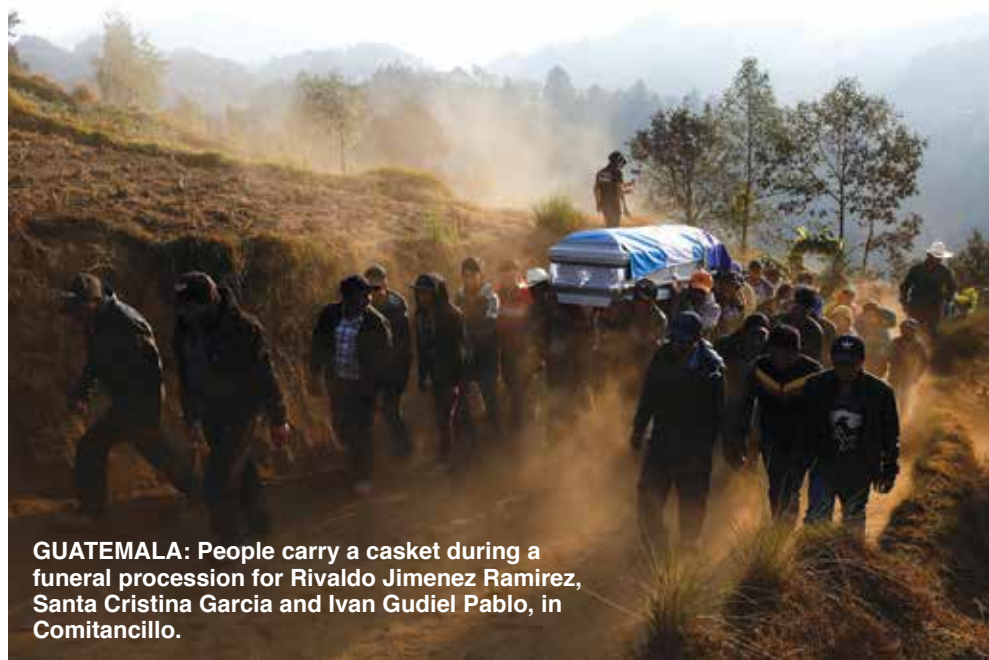
merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications.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

Around the world



▲ **USA:** An asylum-seeking family from Honduras walks down a dirt road in Penitas, Texas, March 16, after crossing the Rio Grande. Photos: CNS

◀ **USA:** A woman in Atlanta yells during a demonstration on March 18, following the March 16 deadly shootings at three day-spas in metro Atlanta.



GUATEMALA: People carry a casket during a funeral procession for Rivaldo Jimenez Ramirez, Santa Cristina Garcia and Ivan Gudiel Pablo, in Comitancillo.



MYANMAR: People transport a person who was shot during a security force crackdown on anti-coup protesters in Yangon.



VATICAN: People participate in a procession as Pope Francis celebrates a Mass marking the 500th anniversary of Christianity in the Philippines, in St Peter's Basilica, March 14.



SYRIA: People carry banners and opposition flags during a demonstration marking the 10th anniversary of the start of the Syrian conflict, in the opposition-held city of Idlib, March 15.

It is healthy to love your life



Among people of faith, there is the notion that if you are person of deep faith you can easily renounce the things of this world, see the world for all its ephemerality, not cling to things, and die more peacefully. Not true. That is naïve, at least a lot of the time.

James Hillman writes: “We don’t let go easily of the throne, nor the drive that took us there.” While that is obviously true, of itself it speaks more of human ego than of faith. So let me try another line. The famed novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, confronts us with this fact: “A common soldier often dies without fear; but Jesus died afraid.”

“One of the early signs of clinical depression is a loss of buoyancy in one’s life, a loss of any sense of personal delight”

This was borne out in the death of my own father. My dad was a man of deep faith to which his whole life gave witness. He died young, at 62, in faith – but he did not die easily. There was a deep sadness in him as he lay in palliative care waiting to bid his final goodbye to the rest of us. His sadness and its concomitant fear had nothing to do with fear of the next life, of what awaited him on the other side. His sadness and fear had to do with his giving up



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

his place in this world, of dying to all the richness that is life. He was sad to be dying, to have to say goodbye to his wife, his family, his grandchildren, his friends, his faith community, his health, and all the things he enjoyed in this life. He died in faith, but did not die easily.

Scriptures

If we read the scriptures closely, we will see that this was also the case for Jesus. He too did not die easily, not because he feared what would meet him on the other side of death; however, like my dad, he deeply loved this life. We see that clearly in his struggle in the garden of Gethsemane. Facing his death, the scriptures tell us that he literally “sweated blood” and begged his Father that he might somehow escape from dying. We (naively) tend to think Jesus was afraid because of the physical

pain that awaited him, the scourging and the nails; but that is not what the Gospels portray. He sweats blood in a garden, not in an arena. Archetypally, gardens are the place of love. It is Jesus the lover, not the athlete, who is sweating blood. His fear of death is predicated on love, love for life, this life.

“Facing his death, the scriptures tell us that he literally ‘sweated blood’”

The Jesuit theologian, Michael Buckley, wrote an essay within which he compared Jesus to Socrates, purely as a study in human excellence. The surprising thing is that, purely in terms of human excellence, Jesus seemed to come up short in comparison to Socrates. Here is a poignant quote

from that essay: “Socrates went to his death with calmness and poise. He accepted the judgment of the court, discoursed on the alternatives suggested by death and on the dialectical indications of immortality, found no cause for fear, drank the poison, and died. Jesus – how much the contrary. Jesus was almost hysterical with terror and fear; ‘with loud cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death.’ He looked repeatedly to his friends for comfort and prayed for escape from death, and he found neither. ... I once thought that this was because Socrates and Jesus suffered different deaths, the one so much more terrible than the other, the pain and agony of the cross so overshadowing the release of the hemlock. ... Now I believe that Jesus was a more profoundly weak man than Socrates, more liable to physical pain and weariness, more sensitive to human rejection and contempt, more affected by love and hate. Socrates never wept over Athens.” Jesus was incurably human.

Journals

Soren Kierkegaard in his journals confessed that he shuddered at

the thought of dying to the world, dying to ordinary life: “I love being a human being; I do not have the courage entirely to be spirit in that way. I still so much love to see the purely human delight that others take in life – something for which I have a better than ordinary eye, because I have a poet’s eye for it.”

Depression

One of the early signs of clinical depression is a loss of buoyancy in one’s life, a loss of any sense of personal delight, and the detachment that comes with that, namely, the easy capacity to let go of all the things that used to energise us and bring us meaning and joy. On the outside that can look good religiously. Look how wonderfully detached he is! However, saintliness should not be confused with depression, nor faith with emotional resignation.

“It is Jesus the lover, not the athlete, who is sweating blood. His fear of death is predicated on love, love for life, this life”

If you are healthy spiritually, do not be surprised if, like Jesus, you sweat some blood in the face of death in any of its forms, particularly if you love your life – more so if you have a poet’s eye.

“He too did not die easily, not because he feared what would meet him on the other side of death”

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, March 25, 2021

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A final Lenten push



The end of Lent is rapidly approaching, and it would be all too easy to let our guard down now. In particular, children who are just beginning to grow into the liturgical life of the Church may be getting a little fed-up with all of the sacrifices they're being asked to make. It's important to be understanding at this present time, as their Lenten sacrifices are compounded by all of the extenuating circumstances we're currently experiencing.

Viktor Frankl, author of the famous Holocaust book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, spoke about how man can live with any 'how'



As we approach Holy Week, a couple of activities can help families hold fast to their Lenten resolutions, writes Jason Osborne

if he has a 'why'. A conclusion to draw from this is that it's a lot easier for a person to endure something if they know why they're doing it, and the same is true of children and Lent.

This year, as Lent draws to a close and Holy Week looms, it's worth mixing in some solid catechetical activities with some good, old fashioned fun in order

to keep your children's attention. You might even learn something or come to view Lent differently yourself.

Sacrifice beads

Flicking through St Therese of Lisieux's spiritual masterwork recently, *The Story of a Soul*, I was struck by her use of 'sacrifice beads'. Quoting a letter her mother

wrote in 1876, she wrote:

"Even Thérèse wants to start making sacrifices now. Marie (St Thérèse's sister) has given each of the little ones a chaplet on which they can keep count of their good deeds...But the most charming thing of all is to see Thérèse slip her hand into her pocket time and again and move a bead along as she makes some sacrifice."

St Thérèse was characterised by her ability to refer all things back to God, and this device is particularly apt for Lent. It allows your child, or you, a simple, concrete way to keep track of times throughout the day you've offered something to God, as is the idea of Lent.

Keeping track of both sacrifices and failures is a powerful practice to hand on to a child and is directly related to the daily examen of Ignatian spirituality. By helping your child to get into a habit of interior reflection, it makes it easier for them going forward to see where they're doing well and where they could do better throughout their day.

As for the sacrifice beads themselves, these can be easily acquired online or wherever sells devotional items (whenever they're next open). If you're of a more industrious bent, they can be made quite simply using three

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Family News

AND EVENTS

ANCIENT SCROLL FOUND IN ISRAEL 'CAVE OF HORROR'

The BBC has reported that fragments of a biblical scroll and other relics have been found in what officials call an "historic discovery" in desert caves in Israel.

The dozens of pieces of parchment were written in Greek, with just the name of God appearing in Hebrew.

The scroll is believed to have belonged to Jewish rebels who fled to the hills following a failed revolt against Roman rule in the 2nd Century.

They were found during an operation to prevent caves in the area being looted.

It is the first such find of its kind since the early 1960s when similar fragments and some 40 skeletons were discovered at the site which became known as the Cave of Horror.

The newly found remnants contain verses from the books of Zechariah and Nahum, which form part of writings known as the Book of the Twelve Minor Prophets.

Israel Antiquities Authority's (IAA) director Israel Hasson said the scroll and other relics found there were "of immeasurable worth for mankind".

LIFESTYLE FACTORS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACT LIKELIHOOD OF DEMENTIA

Prof Sean Kennelly of Tallaght University Hospital has said up to half of all dementia cases worldwide could be prevented by addressing lifestyle risk factors through the course of people's lives, *The Irish Times* has reported.

Research has shown that in early life, education and other social factors help to lower risk but that in midlife, issues such as alcohol consumption, obesity, high blood pressure and hearing loss significantly increase a person's likelihood of developing dementia. In later life, physical inactivity, social isolation, depression and smoking are among the biggest risk factors.

SCIENTISTS GROW TEAR GLANDS AND MAKE THEM CRY

Miniature organoids that function like human tear glands have recently been grown in a lab and are capable of producing tears.

It's believed this development could be transplanted into people and used to treat dry-eye disease.

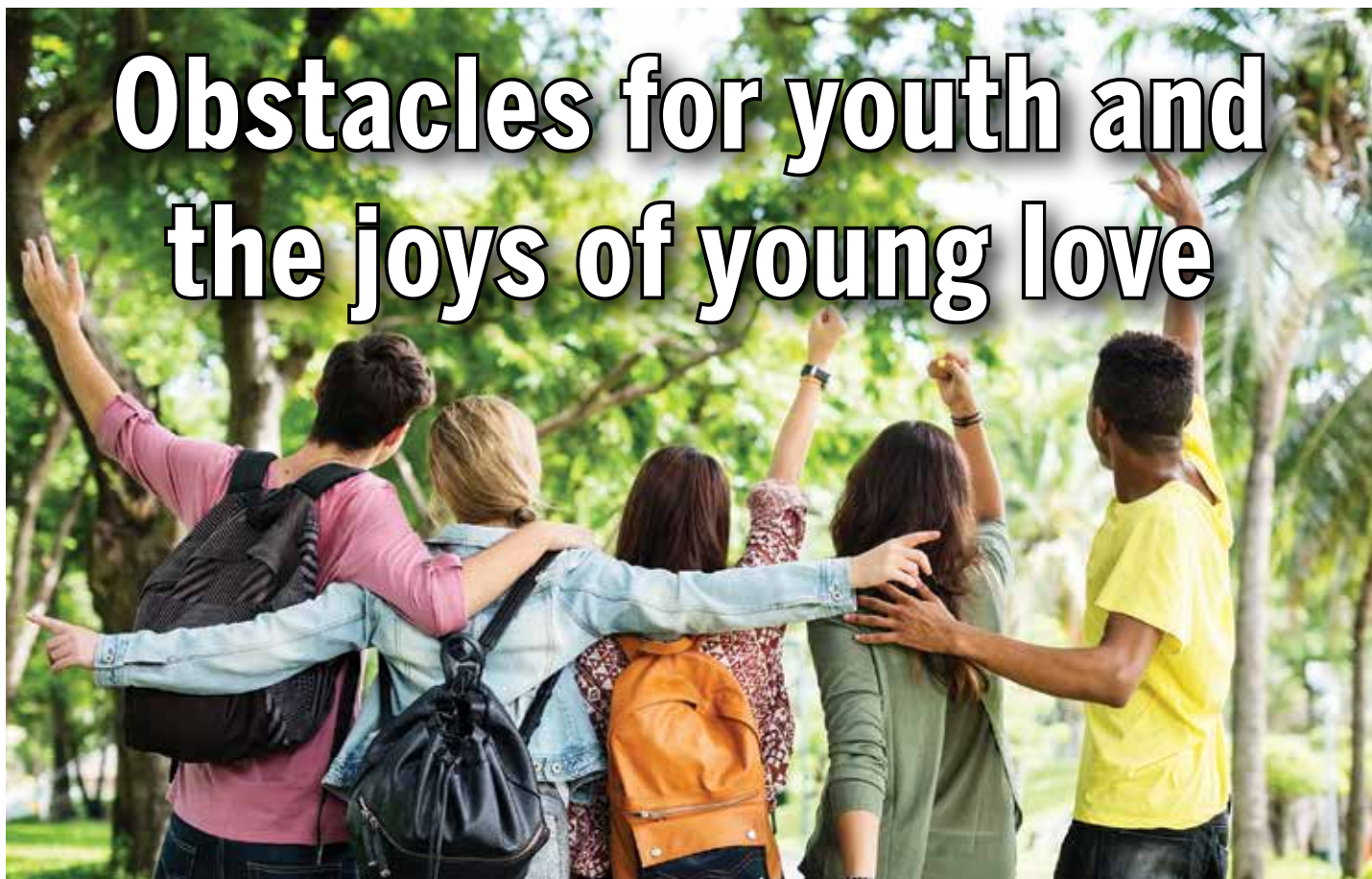
Tear glands lubricate the eyes by producing a protein-rich fluid. This liquid helps to remove dust and bacteria to keep the eye clean and healthy. However, it's long been understood that some people can't produce enough of this.

Hans Clevers and a team at the Hubrecht Institute in Utrecht in the Netherlands believe they may have found a way to treat such people.

They created the organoids by taking cell samples from tear gland tissue. Adult stem cells were isolated from these and treated with a cocktail of proteins to help them grow into tear glands.

"Adult stem cells are already specialised and they know what to make – we just have to encourage them with growth factors," Hans Clevers said. "This happens within a matter of two or three days: you see small cystic structures appearing that grow into the organoids."

Obstacles for youth and the joys of young love



I've detected an increasing sense of despondency and dismay with the realisation that any chance of life going back to normal seems a long way off. My daughter was watching an anime film recently; its themes of love and romance made her sad because she said it just reminded her of her own loneliness. In her former pre-Covid life, she was beginning to stretch her wings; she loved céili dancing and was attending a college of further education in Dublin. She really liked going to see a film, her trumpet classes, visiting art galleries and mountain walks.

“She has a passionate interest in classical music and particularly Chopin. She didn't go in the end, a decision she now regrets”

After many years of home education, she was expanding her horizons. Like a lot of young Catholics, she liked the camaraderie and sense of solidarity she found in events like Youth 2000 retreats or Nightfever, an initiative which involved teams of young people going out into the streets and inviting people into a church to light a candle and pray. Like her older brothers and sister before her, it's likely that she would have planned to travel abroad to one of the Catholic youth festivals or maybe to just see a new country and experience new sights and sounds. Her dream is to visit Japan and, a few short months before there was any mention of a deadly virus, she had been discussing a possible trip to Warsaw in Poland to visit the Frederic Chopin Museum. She has a



A parent's perspective Maria Byrne

passionate interest in classical music and particularly Chopin. She didn't go in the end, a decision she now regrets.

My daughter's story is just one of many. Young people's lives are on hold which is unfortunate, but these are the sacrifices we've all had to make. It's tough that at the moment there are no concerts, late night chats in cafés, pantomimes or picnics. Nothing much can be planned for at present but it's not the lack of different experiences that is the real tragedy. At the heart of the very real sense of loss and desolation is the lack of human contact. My 21-year-old was very emotional recently looking at some old footage of a music festival, something that's hard to even imagine now. Those of us fortunate enough to be happily married have a spouse to help us through the tough times and still have the benefit of something as simple as a hug when we feel down. For our poor adult children living at home there isn't even the possibility of a date or a dinner invitation, no shy smiles across a crowded room or the joy of young love. Even making friends or maintaining present friendships isn't the easiest with so many limitations on our children's freedom right now. All the great saints of the Church and holy men and women put a huge emphasis on friendship as the sweet honey that makes life bearable. St Maximilian Kolbe, that great Polish saint, who gave his life in Auschwitz to save a stranger said

"God sends us friends to be our firm support in the whirlpool of struggle. In the company of friends we will find strength to attain our sublime ideal."

With Easter approaching, the last days of Lent might be a good time to resolve to work on being a good friend or making a new friend and encouraging our children to do the same. I think with extended lockdowns



and families more confined to home, a lockdown can become a lockout. We know we miss others but it's easy to get cosy in our confinement and become a bit inward-looking and insular. Even with severe restrictions, there are ways to reach out. With existing friends and family, try to go the extra mile with phone calls, letters and little acts of kindness. We all love our schedules and value our family time but should be flexible enough to make the time when we're called upon. The dinner, housework or homework can wait-maybe that person ringing at an inconvenient time is suffering badly and

feeling isolated and is dying to hear a friendly voice. Social media is great but there are a few caveats. A lonely or shy child, teenager or young adult can expect too much from Facebook, Instagram or other platforms and end up feeling even more isolated.

“To gain a friend, you have to be a friend and people can soon sense irritability or indifference”

A message that's not responded to; a perception that other young people have more friends or are doing great despite the limitations, or even online bullying can lead to a huge amount of distress. On the plus side, there is a great community aspect to many of the online events and initiatives. I was amazed at a Dominican-run '33 Days for St Joseph' that attracted over 400 people on some evenings with men, women and children of all ages. There are many smaller Zoom events that include a chat element; another great way to make friends. Churches are still open for private prayer so even if you only wave at a friend from afar, at least make the effort.

To gain a friend, you have to be a friend and people can soon sense irritability or indifference. Be kind, be creative and bring to your prayer the words from the Book of Sirach – "A faithful friend is a sturdy shelter; he that has found one has found a treasure". Let's not underestimate the value of kind, caring friends and always pray that our children find the comfort of such good companions.

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feet of silk cord, a St Thérèse medal (or any keyring), pony beads, and a crucifix. Once these are gathered, the rest is simple enough:

- Find the middle of the string and pull it through the end of the St Thérèse medal or keyring. This should make a little loop with the middle of the string, through which you should pass the two ends of your string.

- Pull the two ends of the string tight, and it will secure the string to the St Thérèse medal or keychain, leaving the two strings dangling down.

- Lay out 10 pony beads (and these can be any colour or lack thereof), deciding which order you want to string them in.

- Take your first bead and put one string through one side of the bead and put the other string through the other side of the bead.

- Pull both ends of the string and the bead will slide up the strings towards the medal.

- Keep pulling the two strings in opposite directions until your bead goes all the way to the top.

- Do the same to the rest of the beads – one string going in one side and the other going in the other side.

- Once you have all ten beads on the string, then leave a space and tie a knot by wrapping the string around your fingers and putting the ends of the string through the hole you've formed. This knot needs to be big enough to hold the last bead in place, so double knot it if you have to.

- Place the 11th bead after this knot and tie another knot right under that bead to hold it in place.

- Now to attach the crucifix. Lace one string through the crucifix and then secure it with a knot. Trim the edges, but not too close to the knot, leaving a little extra to prevent it from becoming untied.

- To make sure it stays in place either: paint the knot with clear fingernail polish; burn the ends of the string with a lighter; put a dab of glue on each side of the knot.

And before you know it, you have your very own set of sacrifice beads with which to offer things up to God throughout the day. A good activity and good practice to get into.

Planting seeds

Another worthwhile activity to get into with what's left of Lent, and

ideally suited to springtime, is that of seed-sowing. It's an easy way to focus young minds on God's teaching as it's a physical manifestation of the dying-and-rising pattern. It's a lot easier to understand how something must be subdued and buried if you have a physical depiction of it playing out in a flowerpot or in your garden.

“He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”

Picking out easy plants in a garden centre is something a child can be involved in at any age – sunflowers are particularly pleasing as their sunny faces are likely to lift the spirits of any family they find a home with.

As they're planted and nourished, help your children to reflect on Christ's words:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”

Help them to draw the link between the springtime of nature and the spiritual, and eventually physical, resurrection we'll undergo. Help them to see that if something is to grow properly, both us and the



lowliest plant, it involves attention, time and dying to yourself – symbolised by the burial of the seed in the soil.

Decorating eggs

A final suggestion is to decorate eggs with symbols of the Resurrection and images from the biblical stories. Hand-decorated eggs can be left around the house in an attempt to draw the mind to God – children are more likely to be fascinated by a painted egg than by the great religious works of art, up to a certain age.

To do this, you need eggs, a pin or safety pin, a cocktail stick, two large bowls, washing up liquid, and (unusually) a baby aspirator (which should be available in pharmacies or on Amazon). This will help you to remove the yolk from the egg without shattering it.

“As mentioned, images of the resurrection or biblical figures are good ideas for the Lenten period”

Carefully pierce the egg with the pin at either end. Try to make the hole at the base (the wider end) of the egg large enough to fit a cocktail stick through. Push the cocktail stick into the egg to break the yolk, twist it around a couple of times, then remove it.

Then hold the egg over a bowl with the larger hole pointing downwards and press the aspirator over the smaller hole at the top and use it to pump air into the egg. The air will push the egg yolk and white out of the shell into the bowl below. Cover this and put it in the fridge to use in cooking or baking, if you like. Once the egg feels empty, pop it into the second bowl and fill it with warm water and washing up liquid. Use the aspirator again to pump soapy water through the eggshell.

Leave it to drain on a kitchen towel. Once it's completely dry, you're ready to decorate it. As mentioned, images of the Resurrection or biblical figures are good ideas for the Lenten period.

Dad's Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



After the drear of an Irish winter, the first few sunny spring days seem almost miraculous. As the gloom wore on, month after month, it seemed that never again would we rest easy in the sunshine. The Irish climate makes moments of luxuriating comfortably in nature rare, and therefore precious.

Yet all of a sudden, the bright green grass and the budding trees of spring arrive to give us hope. Each brave daffodil and every happy primrose that appeared in the shadowy woods promised that better would soon come. Covid restrictions have been varying in force for over a year now, and we can only hope that this spring will see the pandemic ease in tandem with the wintry weather, so that we all may roam more freely once again.

Now that the children are back in school, and spring is springing around us, there is some semblance of a return to pre-covid normality, or something akin to it. My wife is fully vaccinated and many older relatives are also thankfully receiving their initial shots. Day by day, there are ever more good reasons for fear to recede, and for hope to take its place.

Normally, the arrival of spring is merely a metaphorical release from prison, but this year it may be literally so. After the long winter lockdown, there is now hope that the restrictions which still hold us largely under house arrest will soon begin to be eased. At the very least, many hope that we might soon be trusted to travel beyond 5km from home, so that life will seem freer and more varied once more.

The brighter weather has seen kids spend more time playing out in the garden, and rediscovering the woods. They've even embarked on the construction of a camp. Rather ambitiously, they are watching episodes of *Grand Designs* for inspiration. With a bit of imagination, a few old bits of timber and sheets of galvanised can mean hours of joyful imaginary play for kids – even if the chances of Kevin McCloud

turning up to critique their architecture remain slim.

The warming, lengthening days have also seen the kids become immersed in gardening. In our polytunnel, growth never really ceases all year long, with kale and other vegetables sprouting up



merrily through the winter months. Now, under their nonna's tutelage, they've planted all sorts of new things which are already beginning to shoot up.

They take great pride in supplying food for the family, and when vegetables become objects of pride and fascination, they're all the more willing to eat them.

They are already planting lettuce and tomatoes, which taste far better when freshly picked.

The most poignant part of the polytunnel is the area set aside for flowers grown from seed. These were planted shortly after my mother died in February, so that we would always have fresh cut flowers to bring to her grave.

The heartbreak of her death is still raw, yet this time of year reminds us that life will go on and that there are better days to come. Even after the darkest night, comes the glimmering dawn, however pale it may yet seem. This longest winter has at last yielded to spring, as winter always must – however reluctantly.

Working for peace and justice in Korea

Personal Profile



Ruadhán Jones

Fr Patrick Cunningham is the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Co-ordinator for the Columban missionaries in South Korea. The role combines a number of his passions, particularly bettering the lot of the poor and migrants, with his calling as a missionary priest.

“Their human interest stories made a deep impression on me and what their work involved when they went to work overseas”

Fr Cunningham was born and raised in a traditional Catholic family, and benefitted from an education which involved the local priests of Mullingar. It was in secondary school that his desire to become a priest was cemented, specifically as a missionary.

“I was educated in St Finian’s college Mullingar which was run by the diocesan priests back in the day,” Fr Cunningham tells *The Irish Catholic*. “I come from a strong, traditional Catholic household and I always harboured ambition, mostly to go overseas as a missionary, to go over as an ordained priest to devote my life with people wherever I was called or sent.”

“I saw a lot of the good the



Fr Patrick Cunningham, Columban missionary in South Korea, is photographed standing in solidarity with the protestors in Myanmar

priests and clergy did, I was educated by priests in Mullingar and I got inspiration from some of them. And people who would come to give us vocation talks, the St Patrick’s Missionaries Kiltegan, the Columbans from Dalgan Park. Their human interest stories made a deep impression on me and what their work involved when they went to work overseas. I was inspired by their experiences and took the plunge.”

Fr Cunningham spent a year and half, prior to his ordination in 1995,

studying in South Korea. It wasn’t his first choice, he admits.

“As a student, there were three countries that came up for me to go overseas,” he explains. “It was Brazil, Japan and Korea. I wanted to go to Brazil initially because of my love of soccer and because the language would be a lot easier initially. Portuguese would be a lot easier than Korean.”

Fr Cunningham laughs when I ask if his grasp of the language has improved in his 25 years living there.

“Well, 25 years on, my Korean – I’m not too bad, not very fluent by any means. It’s a language that’s quite tough for Westerners. But on arrival here I had a good run at the language for a year in Sogang, a Jesuit university here.”

After that, it was straight into the ‘real world’. Fr Cunningham spent a year and a half in a local parish and after that moved into a ministry which was his passion – ministering to the migrant community.

“There’s a sense that migrants have been blamed or accused of not taking the necessary precautions, not understanding the living conditions they have been forced into”

“After that I spent about 10 years working with migrants in Korea,” Fr Cunningham says. “Early on, as a student, I knew that working with migrants was an area that I was very interested in. We established a migrant centre in 2000 in a diocese north of Seoul. I still have a regular, ongoing Mass for a Filipino community, that’s my only connection with migrants at the moment.”

“In terms of working with migrants, migrant workers particularly, we engaged with the three d’s – dirty, difficult and dangerous labour – and the injustices that they’ve had to suffer over the years in order to achieve their rights. We worked to improve their lot, their working conditions and safety in the work places.”

“Those issues are still ongoing. It’s been particularly highlighted in the pandemic. The living quarters

that the migrants live in are very poor, some in containers with people all in the one room. There’s a sense that migrants have been blamed or accused of not taking the necessary precautions, not understanding the living conditions they have been forced into.”

In 2006, Fr Cunningham returned to Ireland for over a year in order to complete a masters in International Peace studies at the Irish School of Ecumenics, which is now part of Trinity College. It was a combination of his study of the peace movement’s history in Korea and his background as an activist that led Fr Cunningham to be appointed to the role of JPIC Co-ordinator.

He has become a staunch support of peace movements and opponent of military expansion within Korea: “Young people are obliged to do military service,” he says. “It’s a very military country, it’s a divided peninsula and we’re still under armistice, the Korean Armistice Agreement which was signed 27 July 1953. We’re still officially at war with North Korea, no official peace treaty has been signed.”

“When the armistice was signed in July 53, as part of the agreement, the parties agreed that a peace treaty would be signed within six months. Here we are 80 years on and there’s been no peace treaty. That’s a sadness given the system of division here in the peninsula.”

But Fr Cunningham, buoyed by the active social role the Church plays in Korea, remains confident.

“We’re small in number, five and a half million out of a population of 50 million,” he says. “But in terms of its role in the democracy movement over the years, in the struggle of justice and peace for many communities – it has played quite an important role. It has quite a strong social position.”



Children’s Corner

Chai Brady

A decision between the light and the dark

We’re now approaching Easter and as the temperatures increase, the sun makes its presence felt and spring brings a plethora of growth in nature, what better time to investigate whether the colour of our clothes matters when it comes to retaining heat? When you’re out in the sun on a warm day does it pay to wear some light or dark-coloured clothes, and if so, why is that? Let’s experiment with light, colour, heat and some water to find out.

Apparatus

- Two identical drinking glasses or jars
- Water
- Thermometer
- 2 elastic bands or some cellotape
- White paper
- Black paper

Method

- Wrap the white paper around one of the glasses using an elastic band or cellotape to hold it on.
- Do the same with the black paper and the other glass.
- Fill the glasses with the exact same amount of

water.

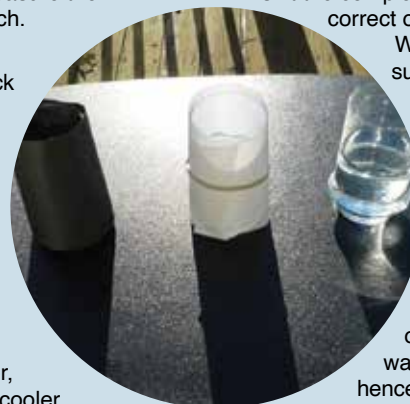
- Leave the glasses out in the sun for a couple of hours before returning to measure the temperature of the water in each.

What’s happening?

Dark surfaces such as the black paper absorb more light and heat than the lighter ones such as the white paper. After measuring the temperatures of the water, the glass with the black paper around it should be hotter than the other. Lighter surfaces reflect more light, that’s why people are advised to wear lighter coloured clothes in the summer, as it’s supposed to keep them cooler. Alternatively, on a day which is a bit cooler with some sun, black clothing should help you retain heat. We have established that darker colours attract more heat compared to lighter ones, but does it really have an effect on the

person wearing the clothes?

According to recent scientific studies, this isn’t the complete story or maybe not even the correct one.



When the sun is shining on a hot summer’s day, a combination of bright light and radiant heat is emitted. This sunlight consists of a mixture of wavelengths that include infrared, visible, and ultraviolet light. Light coloured clothing reflects most of the visible wavelengths which, in turn, absorbs less heat. On the contrary, darker or black clothing absorbs more wavelengths, absorbing more heat, hence making the clothing warmer to wear. Although darker clothes are known to absorb more heat, this doesn’t necessarily mean that the heat will be transferred to the person wearing the clothes.

Investigations are ongoing, so watch this space!



TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



RTÉ can take a well-deserved bow for the service to people of faith

St Patrick's Day dominated last week and it has been the second Covid version – never thought that would happen!

It was also the one-year anniversary of weekday Masses on the RTÉ News Now channel, as Fr Michael Toomey pointed out last Friday when saying Mass from Ardfinnan. This has been a brilliant service that started for last Lent and continued throughout the year. Fr Toomey said the first of these Masses and he's still going strong. He graciously thanked Roger Childs of RTÉ and Tony Bolger of Churchservices.tv – the plaudits are well deserved.

There have been several special programmes for the saint's day. One of the best was **Nationwide** (RTÉ One, Monday) which was an enjoyable episode on the life of St Patrick. Donal Byrne was an engaging presenter as he introduced to St Patrick's Camino in Co. Down, centred on Downpatrick. We met two pilgrim guides with an intriguing story. Martina Purdy had been a political correspondent with BBC Northern Ireland, while Elaine Kelly had been a barrister. The vocation to religious life was pretty sudden for Elaine, but slow enough for Martina (she spoke of play-



Fr Michael Toomey's offering Mass on RTÉ in an empty church has become an iconic symbol of the pandemic.

ing 'hard to get' with God!) Before they could take final vows, it became clear their order couldn't survive and so they had to leave and now describe themselves as consecrated laypeople.

We also met Dr Tim Campbell, Director of the St Patrick Centre, and he seemed tickled by the fact that someone from Britain was patron saint of Ireland! Dr Anthony Harvey gave some useful background on the history of Patrick's time, and of how stories like the banishment of the snakes might have arisen, as a metaphor for the banishment of pagan ways. Dr Cáitríona Ó Dochartaigh spoke of how revolutionary a religion

Christianity was at the time, especially for women, proposing as it did equality between all children of God. Slave or master, rich or poor, male or female, all souls were equal in value.

Apart from the feastday it was also a good week for the Church in Ireland when Pope Francis recognised Knock Shrine as a designated international Marian and Eucharistic shrine, an event covered on **RTÉ News** last Friday.

But there was negativity towards Pope Francis as well – former president Mary McAleese had a go at him for assenting to the Vatican document ruling out the blessing

of same sex unions. On **Morning Ireland** (RTÉ Radio One, Friday), she was reported as accusing him of being a "populist" (a handy dig) who "raises expectations only to dash them", unfair I thought. Sometimes expectations are unreal and more like wishful thinking. Elsewhere she accused the Pope of trying to "ride two horses" – but isn't that a good description of the approach of à la carte Catholics?

On the same programme, the Association of Catholic Priests (ACP) was reported as saying the document was divisive and strangely said it showed a "breathtaking certainty about what God can or cannot do", and yet one of their number, Fr Tim Hazlewood, seemed to suggest he knew what Jesus' attitude on the matter would be. It wasn't clear whether he disagreed with the teaching or with the language used to convey it. At one stage he said the Church's teaching on what marriage is hadn't changed, but seemed to imply that he would bless same-sex unions – certainly the interviewer took it that way and he didn't correct her.

Later that day on **Today with Claire Byrne** (RTÉ Radio One) there was an interview with Bishop Donal McKeown

PICK OF THE WEEK

BROTHERHOOD: THE INNER LIFE OF MONKS BBC 4 Sunday March 28, 8pm

The monks of Mount St Bernard Abbey, are opening the first Trappist brewery in the UK. For their historic, countercultural lifestyle to survive, the venture must succeed.

MASS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER RTÉ One Holy Thursday, April 1, 4.40pm (repeated Radio One Extra/ LW252, 7pm)

Celebrated by Fr Martin Smith (Chaplain, Carlow IT) with members of RTÉ Cór Linn.

SOLENN LITURGY FOR GOOD FRIDAY RTÉ One Good Friday, April 2, 3pm

Live from the Basilica of Our Lady Queen of Ireland, Knock Shrine, Co. Mayo. The principal celebrant is rector of Knock, Fr Richard Gibbons. Liturgical music by Schola Cantorum Basilicae.

about the matter. It was telling that the host asked him: "What did Jesus say about gay marriage?", surely a pointless question to which she already knew the answer. In respect of the idea of it being impossible for God to "bless sin", from the document, she didn't ask, but rather stated "that's not respect". Bishop McKeown said that particular sentence "jarred" with him, which showed the importance of choice of language when the Church explains and conveys its message. However, he did say he agreed with the Pope

in the overall teaching of the document. The Church, he said, wasn't going to bless those unions as if they were the same as marriage. There were awkward truths in Christianity, he said, but the presence of "shrill voices" from left or right was not the way forward.

"The truth will very often be uncomfortable", he said.

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Film

Aubrey Malone



George Stevens' Shane is a salvific figure

This is the 70th anniversary of the making of Paramount's archetypal western *Shane*, though it wasn't released until 1953. Anytime I mention it to anyone of my vintage (there are still a few of us around) I get the response, "It was the favourite film of my childhood."

Brandon de Wilde played the young boy who idolises the romantic gunfighter (Alan Ladd) riding into a Wyoming valley at the beginning. The film, like the book, is seen through his eyes.

George Stevens, its director, went on to make *The Greatest Story Ever Told* some years afterwards. This was a retelling of the life of Christ. In *Shane* we're vouchsafed more indirect references to the Bible.

He enters the valley from a high place. (Is it heaven?) His first request is for water. We know how strongly water features in the Bible.

When he first sees Joe Starrett (Van Heflin) he's cutting wood. One thinks of Joseph the carpenter. Joe's wife (Jean Arthur) plays a character called Marian. Again the allusion is obvious.

Redemption

Shane is a story of redemption and the purging of evil. The valley appears like a Garden of Eden but there are serpents in it that have to be expunged.

After *Shane* dispenses with the villains he goes back to his place on high. Does he die? We don't know. The finale of the film gives suggestions of



Alan Ladd starring in *Shane*.

a resurrection. Light streams through the clouds like sanctifying grace as he rides towards the top of Wyoming's Teton peaks.

Stevens was well aware of these motifs. He located *Shane*

'somewhere between Jesus and an Arthurian knight'.

Jack Palance's villain is suitably Luciferian. In one scene *Shane* "sips with a long spoon" as he shares a water ladle with him. Ryker, the leader of the

villains, is more nuanced. He resembles Moses as he's silhouetted against the night sky in a central scene.

I recently wrote a book about the film which you can buy from Amazon or the publisher, Bear Manor Media. It's called *Shane: Paramount's Classic Western*.

Tale

As well as being a tale of good and evil, it's a story of forbidden love between *Shane* and Marian. We can even view it as a metaphor for socialism versus capitalism in the tussle between the farmers and the cattle barons.

Alan Ladd deserved an Oscar for his performance but he'd left Paramount at the

time so they didn't mount a campaign for him. Likewise for Arthur and Heflin. Palance and De Wilde were nominated but they cancelled one another out.

The western remains one of the most generally loved of Hollywood's Golden Era. In my view it always merits an extra viewing, if only for the saloon showdown in the finale.

"I've come to get your offer, Ryker."

"I'm not dealing with you. Where's Starrett?"

"You're dealing with me."

And the final cry of de Wilde as his hero departs, "Shane! Come back!"

How those lines still resonate 70 years on.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



Nano Nagle: a heroine in her own time, a saint for our era

The Story of Nano Nagle: A Life Lived on the Razor's Edge.
by Anne Lyons PBVM
(Messenger Publications,
\$4.95 /£4.50)

Peter Costello

Anne Lyons has been appointed by the Presentation Order as the postulator to promote the cause of the beatification of the order's foundress Nano Nagle, who died in 1784. The cause was opened on the bicentenary of her death; she was declared a Servant of God in 1994 and Venerable in 2013.

This booklet is intended to promote her cause, and provides a brief summary of her life, her vocation, her order and her spirituality. Not everyone wishes to read a full length biography of such a person - though the names of all the important titles, scholarly and popular, are given. A booklet of this kind serves a different, but very important purpose.

Spiritual life

Sr Lyons wants to emphasise Nano Nagle's inner spiritual life, as a means by which others may follow her, applying what she experienced and thought as a factor in their own lives. In this way, not-immediately obvious aspects of her life

can be developed and so foster a devotion to her cause, and so hasten the day of her beatification. Beyond that her canonisation may take another significant period of time.

Emphasis

The author lays the emphasis on all the important aspects of Nano Nagle's life. She herself has worked abroad in Pakistan and in Cambodia. The promotion of female education which was so important to Nano Nagle can in some countries be difficult, even dangerous, especially in those countries where for various reasons, social, political, and religious, women's education (taken so much for granted here in Ireland) is vigorously opposed.

Sr Lyons' hope is that the combined elements and relevance of Nagle's life would be quite enough to bring her cause to the fore. The processes of canonisation, as most Catholics in Ireland are aware, are often painfully slow and long delayed for reasons that seem opaque to those outside the Vatican. But here is a cause that truly deserves to be promoted. Reading this pamphlet and passing it on to others would support that cause.



Statue of Nano Nagle leading the way out of darkness which stands at her birth place in Ballygriffin, Co. Cork.

The history of the Church as told by its churches

A History of the Church through its Buildings
by Alan Doig
(Oxford University Press, £30.00)

Peter Costello

This is an unusual book by an author with unusual talents. Alan Doig studied architecture at King's College Cambridge, later completing a doctorate in the same field. Having taught history of art for some seven years he was ordained into the Church of England and was for a time curate at Abingdon where he directed the restoration of a medieval painted ceiling in the Lady Chapel.

“He brings to a history of churches through the ages the understanding of both a clergyman and an architect”

He was then appointed chaplain of Lady Margaret Hall in Oxford, and since has been involved in many conservation projects.

History

However, he brings to a history of churches through the ages the understanding of both a clergyman and an architect: this is very unusual indeed, for many architects have little inner feeling for what churches are meant

for and how they are worked. Few parish clergy have any professional understanding of how architecture allows for human and religious activity: the jacket photograph of the architectural historian shows him in his clerical dress!

Rev. Doig's twinned skills are brought to bear in this excellent and always stimulating book. There is something here for every kind of Christian, and for those who wish to gain a deeper insight into the nature of church buildings, theology and ritual.

The book opens with an account of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem - in which the mythos of the salvation of humanity is engaged. He then moves on to Old St Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, and the emergence of the dominance of Rome as Christianity emerged as the faith of a new empire. Naturally this then leads on to Hagia Sophia in modern-day Istanbul and - a chapter everyone in the West should read - an account of



Author Alan Doig

the Cathedral of the Dormition in Moscow's Kremlin, still today at the heart of an empire.

It will be clear already how the book is structured, but it is the unusual detail and insights and perspectives that give the text its richness. Having dealt with the Renaissance and the spread of Christianity through the Iberian Empire, the last chapters however deal with the Crimean Memorial Church in Istanbul - “the English parish church exported” as he sees it now facing the sorry condition of Christians in Muslim lands.

“It should not be thought though that this is a book only for ecclesiologists”

Personally I found his account of Basil Spence's Coventry Cathedral, his concluding chapter, deeply interesting. Here are echoes of familiar conflicts between those (especially the clergy) who are content with the replication of churches in era long past, and those who wish to have ‘something modern’ but never quite formulate or fix their ideas.

Coventry was an attempt in those post-war decades to renew the stream of faith, but what emerged was a compromise which did not always seem successful. Rev. Doig speaks of it as ‘Festival of Britain’ style of 1951, but neglects to mention that the

Fifty Catholic churches to see before you die
by Elena Curti
(Gracewing, £14.99)

This is quite a different book from Alan Doig's original and insightful work. It is a sort of elegant tourist/pilgrims guide to a selection of historically-interesting churches in the eyes of the author, who is a journalist rather than an historian or architect. It is informed by piety, and an ambition to persuade English Catholics of the value of *their heritage* when it seems everywhere to be disdained by so many. She wants to show that Catholicism,

despite its ups and downs, has been always been at the heart of English culture, in many different ways.

But it is as I say a book of pious celebration; it lacks the scholarly depth of Alan Doig's book, which in the end is more truly revealing of the various stages of the Christian epoch.

Moreover it concentrates over much on the churches of the ‘second Spring’ in Victorian times, and on those that immediately strike the ordinary person as beautiful. Here I think there is a danger of confusing aesthetic pleasure with mystical insight.

Catholics should not need to be reminded that vestments and physically-beautiful churches do not change one whit the efficacy of the sacramental sacrifice offered in them in contrast, say, to a chapel in a poor Mexican village. The outpouring of grace is the same. These too are places where, (in those profound words of T.S. Eliot), “prayer has been valid”.

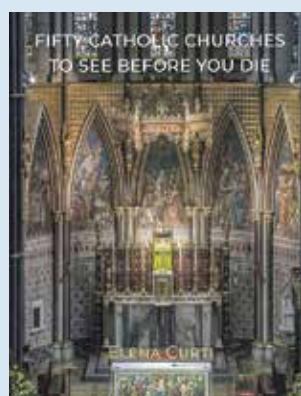
Still, the author is right that these are places well-worth visiting; but some thought should have been given to doing justice as well to the often far from beautiful chapels of the poor immigrant



cathedral was completed in the very first years of the Sunday colour magazine supplements which were to be the style arbiters in Britain for a generation.

Rebuilding

All across Europe at the time there was church rebuilding, especially in Germany, from which so much of the ‘new church architecture’ in Ireland in the last third of the 20th century flowed. There were those at the time, especially Catholics, who felt that the Catholic cathe-



Catholics, the Irish, the Italians and latterly the Poles and Africans, in places like Liverpool, Glasgow, and the inner city of London. P.C.

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.



Interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem

“Coventry was an attempt in those post-war decades to renew the stream of faith”

dral of Berlin, which faced with the same site problems as Coventry, achieved a more effective intersection of the ancient with new, for both faith and architecture.

So it will be seen that this always engaging and

enlightening book will feed discussions and comments, both informed and superficial. It should not be thought though that this is a book only for ecclesiologists. Ordinary readers (and church-goers) will be richly

informed and learn many things about history and theology which never have a place in the ordinary book of church architecture.

This is a book that deserves all the prizes available to celebrate its qualities.



The Cathedral of the Dormition of Our Lady in the Kremlin

A noble family and the fall of the British Empire

Fortune's Many Houses: A Victorian Visionary, a Noble Scottish Family, and a Lost inheritance by Simon Welfare (Simon & Schuster, £25.00)

Peter Costello

Here in Ireland for many people in the early 20th century (and some even now) the Earl and Countess of Aberdeen were figures of folklore among many nationalists, as both Lord Lieutenant Johnny Gordon and his wife Ishbel were seen as supporters of Home Rule, land reform and all the other good and great things promised by the Liberals but denied by the Conservatives. In North America, they were feted by Irish societies and political associations at elaborate dinners.

They returned later to the Phoenix Park and Dublin Castle for a second term which proved even more active and controversial - especially as it coincided with the notorious theft in 1907 of the so called 'Irish Crown Jewels' in which the Dublin rumour mill attempted to involve their son Lord Haddo (with others talking of unsavoury sexual scandals in the castle of which there was no evidence, merely the echo of cases in Germany and Austria).

But it was the Countess' campaign to eliminate TB, that scourge of rural and urban Ireland at long last, and her other work for the poor of Ireland, that was the real point of memory in Ireland.

Yet their hectic Irish years were only a small part of their lives. For Irish people what else they did in the way of active good works elsewhere is cloudy. This book, by distinguished television producer Simon Welfare who married into the family, will fill out the details, putting Ireland in a much wider, and even more extraordinary imperial perspective.

Avoided

But here too Ireland was not to be avoided. Ishbel was the promoter and the paymistress of the Irish contribution to the Chicago World Fair in 1893, for which she had erected an 'Irish village' around a replica of Blarney Castle, with its famous stone, and typical Irish village street. Largely through the sale of Irish-made goods, this was a huge success, and even more astonishingly it actually returned to the Aberdeens a nice fat profit.

The influence of what she did can be detected across every effort at the national marketing of Ireland as a desirable destination ever since. She may be forgotten by many, but

the influence of her ideas, her generosity and her good will to all lingers on.

However a dark shadow was creeping up on the family and its fortune. The story continues, but on a dying note as economies become commonplace, properties were sold off (when they could be); city houses went better than Highland estates, or other farms and holdings in Canada and the USA.

Outlived

Johnny died in 1934, Ishbel in 1939: they had outlived their era. There was, quite amazingly, nothing really left of that great family fortune to pass on to their heirs.

But they left behind them friendly memories and kindly thoughts. The popular Irish novelist of the day Katherine Tynan remarked: "Despite her preoccupation with many chari-



Ishbel with poor children in one of the Dublin play-grounds built by her Women's National Health Association of Ireland

ties and her way of turning night into day, there was, there is something extraordinarily comfortable about Lady Aberdeen. She, too, is of the women who make home where ever they are."

Such a family saga would be easy to over-fill to the confusion of both author and readers. But Mr Welfare has adroitly built the book around the Aberdeens' connection with a long series of houses, houses that in the end undermined their wealth and brought the family to ruination. His book as a whole provides an epitome in miniature of the rise, glory and extinction of the British Empire, in which Ireland is given a significant role.

I enjoyed every word of this biography, as I imagine will readers in Britain, Canada, and the USA. I was left wondering if we might not soon see the whole saga converted to a rival show to *Downton Abbey*. But meanwhile don't miss the book: it is a wonderful, run-along on wheels read, an always engaging account of the efforts of a gallant couple to change, if not actually save the world.



Ishbel Countess of Aberdeen entertains Gladstone - a close friend - at dinner.

Leisure time

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— Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912

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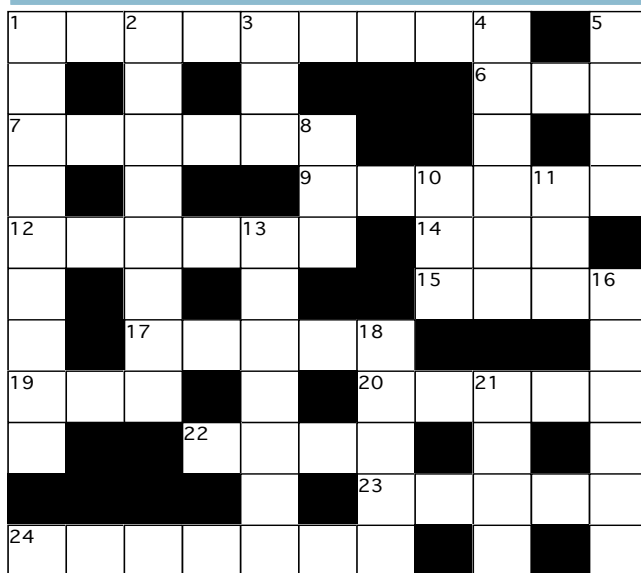
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One day, parents and their children will tell the story of how your legacy of love changed their lives. Thank you for considering a gift to Trócaire in your Will.

Crossword Junior

Gordius 375



Across

- 1 Things you buy in a super-market (9)
- 6 Snooker stick (3)
- 7 Sometimes, a speech begins with the phrase "_____ and gentlemen" (6)
- 9 It's completely surrounded by water (6)
- 12 Orange-coloured vegetable (6)
- 14 A gorilla, perhaps (3)
- 15 Creatures you take care of (4)
- 17 More pleasant (5)
- 19 Large (3)
- 20 'You _____ to do that, it would do you good' (5)
- 22 Sounded a bell (4)
- 23 Below (5)
- 24 The Sleeping Beauty

pricked her finger on this part of the spinning-wheel (7)

Down

- 1 You use them to hit a ball around eighteen holes (4,5)
- 2 Telling what you want from the menu (8)
- 3 A female sheep (3)
- 4 Rub harshly against (6)
- 5 Repair, fix (4)
- 8 Take a seat (3)
- 10 One go around the track (3)
- 11 Catch fish in it, or hang it behind a goal (3)
- 13 You might find apple trees here (7)
- 16 Planet noted for its rings (6)
- 18 Rascal (5)
- 21 Jupiter and Mars were two of the Roman ones (4)

SOLUTIONS, MARCH 18

GORDIUS NO. 499

Across — 1 Federation 6 Club 10 Saint Ives 11 Appendage 12 Crooked 15 Sense 18 NATO 19 Eight 21 Chemist 23 Heath 24 Hoar 25 Anon 26 Riper 28 Dragged 33 Universal 34 Ibiza 35 Held 36 Astrologer

Down — 1 Fuse 2 Dei gratia 3 Ratio 4 Tease 5 Oops 7 Learn 8 Beefeaters 9 Knesset 13 Kish 14 Diamond in the rough 20 Glowering 21 Charter 22 Sofa 27 Phial 29 Ruler 30 Grill 31 Asks 32 Fair

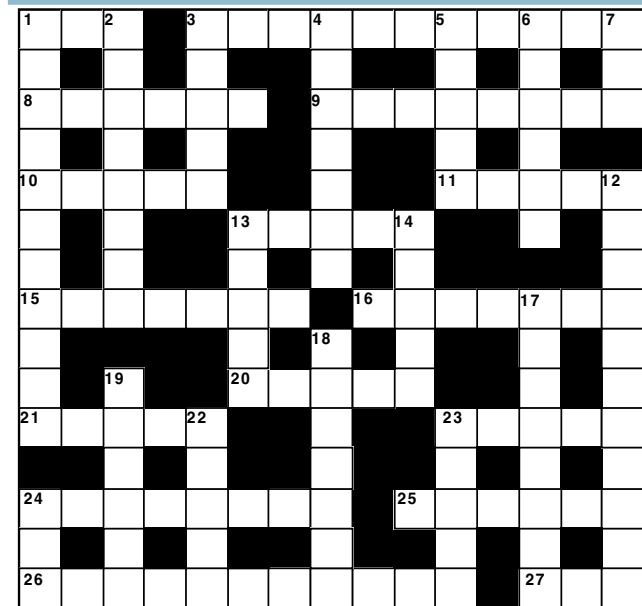
CHILDREN'S No. 374

Across — 1 Firefighter 6 Canada 8 Neat 9 Drag 11 Prowled 13 Drive 14 New moon 17 Garda 18 Slip 19 Sorry

Down — 1 Face-paint 2 Ransom 3 Fiddle 4 Hang 5 Rattlesnake 7 Are 10 Adding 12 Liberty 15 Walk 16 Oops

Crossword

Gordius 500



Across

- 1 Lie, falsehood (3)
- 3 Graceful way to use the springboard (7,4)
- 8 Truth will place it in the very setting... (6)
- 9 ...where the doctor has a sick part in identifying a boring head (5,3)
- 10 Of considerable weight (5)
- 11 Pays attention to (5)
- 13 Sounds from bells (5)
- 15 See 5 down
- 16 & 3 Asian dish hidden in a nice haystack (7,5)
- 20 Row a boat (5)
- 21 Ancient Celtic priest (5)
- 23 Travel by bike (5)
- 24 Native American hero of a poem by Longfellow (8)
- 25 Gardens in Copenhagen (6)
- 26 Fatally worse than merely being sick as a parrot? (4,2,1,4)
- 27 An animal's hairy coat (3)

Down

- 1 Number represented by the Roman numeral D (4,7)
- 2 Crustacean which often clings

to the hull of a ship (8)

- 3 See 16 across
- 4 Name connecting Billie Holiday with the Feast of the Annunciation (4,3)
- 5 & 15a Item of furniture that clothes one from The Valleys? (5,7)
- 6 Permeated through a strange emu bid (6)
- 7 Dine (3)
- 12 Town in the Channel Islands where you have your hairline set afresh? (5,6)
- 13 Cupboard (5)
- 14 Arid African region - of broken shale (5)
- 17 Merchandise as counterfeit as this? For a Marian shrine, that's not on! (5-3)
- 18 Yellow dessert food (7)
- 19 Georgetown is the capital of this South American country (6)
- 22 Theatrical work (5)
- 23 One of the Marx Brothers, seen during a mariachi concert (5)
- 24 In which a builder carries bricks (3)

Sudoku Corner

375

Easy

6		1	5			3	7	
		4		8			1	9
9			1	3	7			2
					6			
2	6						3	1
			8					
1			7	5	3			4
3	4			6		1		
	7	2			8	6		3

Hard

4								2
	2		1		3		4	
		3	2			7		
	6			9		5	2	
			4		2			
	8	5		6			7	
		6			4	3		
	9		5		6		8	
3								7

Last week's Easy 374

5	4	6	8	3	7	2	1	9
8	9	1	4	6	2	3	7	5
7	2	3	5	9	1	6	4	8
4	7	2	3	8	9	1	5	6
6	3	8	7	1	5	9	2	4
9	1	5	2	4	6	7	8	3
3	8	9	1	2	4	5	6	7
2	6	7	9	5	8	4	3	1
1	5	4	6	7	3	8	9	2

Last week's Hard 374

7	8	3	1	5	2	4	6	9
9	1	2	3	4	6	8	7	5
4	6	5	9	7	8	3	1	2
6	9	4	5	1	7	2	3	8
5	7	8	6	2	3	9	4	1
3	2	1	4	8	9	7	5	6
2	3	6	7	9	5	1	8	4
8	4	7	2	6	1	5	9	3
1	5	9	8	3	4	6	2	7

Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney

Everything we need to know about God is in the Prodigal Son parable

POPE FRANCIS SAID recently: "I know that many of you go to confession before Easter... Many will say to me: 'But Father... I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord. I want him to embrace me... How can I do that unless I find a priest?'"

"If you don't find a priest to go to confession, speak to God, he's your Father. Tell him the truth: 'Lord I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask his forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise him, 'afterward I will go to confession'. You will return to God's grace immediately. You yourself can draw near to God's forgiveness, without having a priest at hand."

Reflect

This year of Covid has challenged us to reflect on what is most important in many aspects of our lives. We have been stripped of many of the human and religious rituals which we just took for granted but in the stripping, we see what is at the heart and the centre. Pope Francis points us to what is at the heart of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and that is our relationship with an ever loving and forgiving Father. I have often reflected on how different our experience of Confession might have been if the ritual had been



based on the story of the Prodigal Son's experience with his Father. It has been said that if Jesus only had three minutes instead of three years to tell us about his Father he would simply have told us the story of the Prodigal Son. Everything we need to know about God and his relationship with us is in that story. The wayward and petulant young son can't wait to break for the border and find a new and exciting life away from the lonely and restrictive life on his father's farm. But he needs money to fund this new life and demands that his dad give him an advance on his inheritance. This probably involved the father selling off a few acres to give him what he wanted. Can you just imagine that

happening in an Irish rural context? This father, broken-hearted but willing to give the lad his freedom, does what is asked of him. The young son goes off with his pockets stuffed with cash and little intention of ever returning. Initially as we know, life was great. He lived the high life and while the money lasted he had plenty of friends around him. But when the money ran out, so did the friends. A bit like our experience of the last year, when he was stripped of everything he began to think about what was really important in his life. His vision had been blurred by money and a very false sense of reality. Now he began to think of home again and how much his father loved him. But had he

messed up completely? How could he expect to be taken back as a son? He had burned his bridges the day he walked out. And yet home was where he wanted to be even if he just worked and lived with the farm hands in the outhouse. He made a decision to go home but before that, he took time to honestly own up to his sins and he made a list. He fully intended to throw himself at his dad's mercy and confess everything he had done wrong.

Farmhouse

How must he have felt as he approached the familiar farmhouse at the end of the lane? A knot in his stomach as he wondered what kind of reception, if any, would he get. And then, long before he reached the house, he sees a figure almost running in his direction. Could it be his dad as this man looked so much older than he had remembered? My God it is and while there are tears in his eyes he is also smiling. The young lad doesn't know what to do but falls to ground and all he can say, over and over again; "I'm so sorry daddy". The father lifts him up, puts his arms around him and says over and over again; "Thank God you are home". The young lad blurts out the list of sins he has rehearsed so many times but the

father shows no interest. He is just happy that the young lad is back where he belongs. Through the ministry of the Church may God give you pardon and peace, and absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Prodigal Son

The priest in the classroom had been telling the story of the Prodigal Son. He was puzzled as to how to explain the phrase, "*He came to himself*". So, like any good teacher he decided to ask the class. One bright spark came up with the following novel explanation. In his best inner city accent he graphically described how the prodigal first of all took off his coat, then his jacket, and then his shirt. He next took off his vest and at last, "*he came to himself*".



The Little Way Association

PLEASE GIVE LENTEN ALMS FOR THE WORLD'S POOR

Your gift can make a life-and-death difference for desperately poor families and for sick and needy people living on their own in the midst of the present covid crisis. The Little Way Association has received many urgent appeals from bishops, priests, sisters and missionaries asking for help for those in their care. They tell us of how already-struggling families and communities are experiencing real additional hardships. It is hard to see how the world can easily return to normal, let alone how the homeless, sick and deprived can build a new life. The Little Way Association tries to respond favourably to all the many requests that we receive for the poor and needy but, without our supporters' generosity we would be powerless. This Lent, please can you spare a donation, large or small, for the suffering people in mission lands in desperate need of help.

Every euro that you donate goes intact to provide basic sustenance, water, medicine and housing for the children, families and individuals who need them.

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

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:
€..... **HUNGRY, SICK AND NEEDY**
€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**
(Please state no. of Masses _____)
€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) (Block letters please)

Address

To donate online go to
www.littlewayassociation.com

DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.

Your Lenten gift will be gratefully received and sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION to the missions, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a needy person.

All our donors are remembered at Masses offered for their intentions and the missionaries always promise prayers for their benefactors.

In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine:
"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. The very least trifle is precious in His sight."

MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

In these fraught times, missionary priests rely more than ever on stipends for their daily subsistence and for helping the poorest of their communities. The Little Way Association will convey your stipends and your intentions to the clergy overseas.

We like to send a minimum of €5 or more for each Mass.

In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving.