

The Irish Catholic

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Thursday, December 26, 2019

€2.00 (Stg £1.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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New British Government needs to prioritise 'fragile' NI peace process

Chai Brady

The new British government should acknowledge the "fragile peace" people of Faith have strived for in Northern Ireland and prioritise the peace process as Brexit looms, MEP Mairead McGuinness, Vice-President of the European Parliament, has said.

Following the Conservatives' massive election victory on December 12 and Prime Minister Boris Johnson's moves to make it illegal to extend the Brexit transition period beyond 11 months, making a hard deal more likely, Mrs McGuinness said the new government must make the peace process a priority.

Mrs McGuinness warned that since the Brexit vote there's a need to "rebuild relationships between communities".

"I think Brexit perhaps was a wakeup call, because if you remember the peace process was people of faith in the background working for a long time to bring people of violence to a better place within communities," she said.

"We need those voices

again, we need the ground-work to be rebuilt and I would hope that whatever comes of Brexit that we acknowledge and realise that a peace that is fragile needs a good scaffolding to hold it up and that's why we need community engagement and the role of people in faith."

Mrs McGuinness was speaking to *The Irish Catholic* after an intercultural dialogue with Churches and religious institutions in Belgium recently.

"When you talk to people in Northern Ireland who had been very happily building this peace, 20 years seems like a long time but it's a short time when you're resolving conflict," she said. "I would hope that something would guide whoever is leading the UK to understand how easy it is to pull people apart and how very difficult it is to rebuild communities."

British society is deeply divided "on many questions", Ms McGuinness continued, but particularly on their future in Europe. "I don't relish that division and I think it will be incumbent

» Continued on Page 2

Reaching for the 'Tree of Light'

Tomás O'Dowd (age 6) and mum Amanda from Coumeenole, Dunquinn at the century old 100ft high 'Tree of Light' on the grounds of St Mary's Cathedral in Killarney. Tomás, along with three-year-old Cialan Walsh from Waterville, are hoping for kidney transplants and were helping promote the Irish Kidney Association's annual Christmas ad campaign. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan


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Inside this week

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Looking back on 2019

Our 'Year in Review'

Pages 17-19 & 22-24



Managing Editor: Michael Kelly, editor@irishcatholic.ie

Northern Correspondent: Martin O'Brien, martin@irishcatholic.ie

Multimedia Journalists: Chai Brady, chai@irishcatholic.ie

Colm Fitzpatrick, colm@irishcatholic.ie

Newsroom: news@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874026

Books Editor: Peter Costello, books@irishcatholic.ie

Layout: Declan Moroney

Advertising: advertising@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874094

Accounts: accounts@irishcatholic.ie 01 6874020

Magnificat: magnificat@irishcatholic.ie

Office hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

9.30am–5.30pm

Shop: shop@irishcatholic.ie

Managing Director: Garry O'Sullivan

Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €145. Airmail €250. Six months – €75.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic,

23 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.

Printed by Webprint, Cork.

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St Stephen reminds us that Christians continue to suffer for the Faith

Where I was born in Co. Tyrone, today is generally known as 'Boxing Day'. It's a pity that – at least in that part of Ireland – the influence of British television and culture has had the effect of erasing St Stephen from the calendar.

Thankfully, in most of the rest of Ireland the day after Christmas Day is still commemorated as St Stephen's Day – the liturgical feastday of the first martyr.

It's no accident that the commemoration of the first Christian martyr comes so close to Christmas. Before his passion, Christ told his followers they would suffer for their faith – and so it was with Stephen.

Protomartyr

It's worth bringing to mind the biblical account of the protomartyr. Stephen was a deacon in the early Church at Jerusalem whose preaching about God revealed in Christ aroused anger amongst those opposed to the emergence of this new community. Denounced for blasphemy, he made a long speech at his trial to the Sanhedrin which takes up almost all of chapter seven of the Acts of the Apostles.

In the speech he traces the history of the Hebrew people through



Editor's Comment Michael Kelly

Abraham and Moses down to Jesus to prove his case that the God of the Israelites and the God revealed in Jesus Christ is the same.

“The story of Stephen is a story that lives today in the millions of Christians who are persecuted for their Faith throughout the world”

This enraged the crowd to such an extent that they stoned Stephen to death. The New Testament recalls it thus: “As they were stoning him, Stephen said in invocation, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit’. Then he knelt down and said along, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them’: and with these words he fell asleep” (Acts 7:59-60).

But, the story of Stephen is not just an account of events 2,000 years ago. His is a story that lives

today in the millions of Christians who are persecuted for their Faith throughout the world. Whether in Iraq or Syria, North Korea or China – more Christians are persecuted and even killed today than at any point in the history of the Church.

It's a sobering reflection and one that should not escape our attention and our prayers.

I've been privileged in my work to visit suffering Christian communities who live out their Faith under constant threat. I've sat with them, listened to them, prayed with them and wept with them. The one thing that they have always pleaded is simple: “Don't forget us”. Wouldn't it be a fine resolution for 2020 if we all committed ourselves in our parishes and communities to keep in our prayers the plight of those who suffer for their faith and ask our Church leaders and politicians to be more vocal in highlighting their suffering?

St Stephen – pray for us.

Protect fragile peace

» **Continued from Page 1**
upon political leaders to try and rebuild from a very difficult foundation because it is extraordinary that after the referendum in 2016 you would imagine that things might have been moving towards reconciliation or a healing, but that hasn't happened.

“The convictions on either side were so deeply held that there has been no dialogue at all and if any conversations are happening it's a dialogue of the deaf.”

The European People's

Party annual group intercultural dialogue took place at the Lebanese Maronite Monastery Saint Charbel near Brussels.

Document

Leaders from Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities took part and discussed the document ‘Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together’, which was signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb during the Pontiff's visit to Abu Dhabi in February this year.

Bishop bids farewell to Wexford Adoration sisters

Bishop Denis Brennan marked the departure of the Adoration Sisters from Bride Street Church in Wexford with a homily praising them for their “commitment and dedication”.

The sisters were present in the convent for 144 years. The historic building will be made into a residence for American students.

The group of enclosed nuns was established by late Bishop Thomas Furlong. They engaged in continuous

adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and prayed for the people of the diocese.

‘Fitting’

The sisters will move to Newtown road with the Sisters of St John of God. There is something “entirely fitting” that “both spiritual daughters of Bishop Furlong, should, while maintaining their unique and different charisms, be together,” Bishop Brennan said in his December homily.

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Principal criticises 'total inclusion' for special needs pupils

Chai Brady

Plans proposed by a Government body to place all children in mainstream schools, including those with special needs, has been dubbed "catastrophic" and "not possible".

The recommendation from the National Council for Special Education's (NCSE) for a 'total inclusion model' would see children placed in mainstream school regardless of the level of their disability.

Principal Niamh Corrigan of St Declan's Special School in Ballsbridge, Dublin, told

The Irish Catholic the model would not suit the pupils in her school.

"I don't believe the proposed changes is an appropriate model and feel it would not suit the children attending St Declan's – the purpose of our school is to help children who for one reason or another are experiencing emotional and behavioural difficulties in their own local school and need extra support," she said.

"We do this by building strong and positive relationships with the children and

their families and by also having small class sizes. This is not possible in mainstream schools as classes are already overcrowded and teachers and principals are already stretched to their limits."

Mention

The model was introduced in New Brunswick in Canada, where special schools and classes have been abolished, with all children being taught together. They have eliminated all mention of special education and now have no definition of special needs

students in order to create more inclusive schools that they say reflect what they want to create in society.

The NCSE made the proposals last month and it has been hotly debated, along with another recommendation that would make it illegal for schools to ask parents during enrolment whether their child has a disability. Schools have said the information is needed to determine whether they have the facilities to cater for the child.

Writing in the *Irish Times*, the General Secretary of the

Catholic Primary Schools' Management Association, Seamus Mulconry criticised the idea, saying it would potentially be "catastrophic on an already pressurised and overloaded system".

Poor success rates

He said several facts were missing from the NCSE report including a 2016 report showing poor success rates for some students in maths, science and reading.

Mr Mulconry wrote: "Student numeracy, literacy and achievement levels paint a

stark picture of the system and do nothing to instil confidence in this education model.

"The official policy is 'inclusion for all' in regular classrooms but it is far from universally accepted in the special education community."

"I urge all stakeholders, to participate and engage in robust debate on this issue, before critical decisions are made, which affect the most vulnerable children in our schools," he added.

Hundreds of Cork students raise funds for elderly

Staff reporter

True Christmas spirit will be felt on the streets of Cork City in the run-up to Christmas Eve, as hundreds of students from 22 schools across the city don the familiar yellow jackets and rally the troops for the annual SHARE (Students Harness Aid for the Relief of the Elderly) fundraising effort.

The iconic SHARE crib was lit on Friday marking the beginning of a collection that has been a cornerstone of Christmas in Cork for the past 50 years.



Jenna O'Mahony, Mary Galvin and James Dillon pictured at the SHARE fundraising effort in Cork. Photo: Gerard McCarthy

Hopes contactless payments will be boost for Armagh parish

Staff reporter

The Cathedral parish in Armagh has introduced contactless payments to meet the needs of parishioners as more and more people don't carry cash.

A new free standing portal was installed in St Patrick's Cathedral, with Administrator Fr Peter McAnenly saying it will help support the demands of the parish.

Fr McAnenly said: "It is a new and modern method of donating to the local parish and having such a facility in place makes it easier for people to donate as they please."

"The parish have worked closely with Goodbox, a

company that is committed to this new method of payment, and the new technological device which incorporates a secure and easy to use payment system, has been installed in the magnificent cathedral."

His parish have been considering embracing new payment methods, and have many visitors who "want to contribute to help support the costs associated with the running and maintenance of such a building".

"It is hoped that by introducing this form of contactless giving that the Parish can maximise donations to help support St Patrick's Cathedral," he added.

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No one obliged to cooperate with ‘unjust’ NI abortion law – bishops

Róise McGagh

Northern Ireland's bishops have said new abortion laws in Northern Ireland are "unjust" and that no one is obliged to cooperate with them.

Currently there is a regulatory framework in place in the North that governs abortion provision until more permanent legislation is expected to be introduced in three months.

"The new regulatory framework in Northern Ireland should provide all health professionals including midwives, nurses and ancillary staff working in hospitals and other community settings with the right to refuse to participate in any aspect of the delivery of abortion services such as consultation, administration, preparation, in addition to the direct and intentional act of abortion itself," the bishops said. They

added this should include pharmacists.

Archbishop Eamon Martin and Bishops Noel Treanor, Donal McKeown, Larry Duffy and Michael Router oppose any provisions to provide the abortion pill in schools. They have been backed by the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland has since reiterated its opposition to the new laws.

"The provision of abortion services in our schools would be contrary to everything a Catholic school stands for with regard to respect for all citizens and the promotion of the common good," said the bishops.

Cooperation

"No one is obliged in conscience to cooperate with any action permitted by this law which directly and intentionally leads to the killing of an unborn child. Indeed,

everyone is morally obliged to oppose this law by conscientious objection."

In July two sections of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, which made abortion a criminal offence, were repealed by the passing of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Act 2019, voted on in Westminster.

Threat

The laws are in line with recommendations in a UN report that said abortion should be legalised where there is a threat to a pregnant woman's mental or physical health. The same act legalised same-sex marriage in the North.

Coming into effect in October, it removed laws against abortion in Northern Ireland. However, without the restrictions of England, Wales, and Scotland, giving Northern Ireland the most liberal abortion laws in the UK.

Stormont has until the end of March to draw up regulations.

The bishops said obstetrics and gynaecology "must not become the domain of only those doctors and other medical staff who are willing to participate in abortion services".

Problems such as lack of counselling, poverty, relationship difficulties, housing, child care and safeguarding which can lead to women seeking abortion, they said, need to be addressed.



Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and Maureen Fox pose for a 'selfie' at the annual Croke Park Christmas Party where 650 elderly neighbours of the Jones' Road venue joined in the festivities. Local gardai joined with GAA officials in ensuring all had a great day with Christmas dinner and all the trimmings served. Photo: Mark Stedman

WMOF company to be put into voluntary liquidation after €4.56m losses

Staff reporter

The company tasked with setting up and running the World Meeting of Families (WMOF) in Ireland is to be put into voluntary liquidation after losses of €4.56m last year.

The decision is believed to have been made by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and others after various fundraising initiatives across Ireland failed to meet costs. The document lodged with the Companies Office declared that World Meeting of Families 2018 Ltd

was solvent when being put into liquidation, and has a total of €71,387 assets.

The WMOF took place in August last year and included various talks and workshops in the RDS in Ballsbridge and the visit of Pope Francis.

Borrowings

In total the company spent €18.56m last year, while the total amount they were able to fundraise was €13.99m. Despite the €4.56m difference the directors said it was "in line with projections and fully covered by bank borrowings. Fundraising will continue to address this deficit."

The directors said they were satisfied with the work undertaken and completed during the period and the spending was within their planned budgets over the period.

The general public contributed €1.1m while the company generated €107,938 in income from merchandise and €338,962 in exhibition income.

Event costs including the papal Mass in the Phoenix Park and the concert at Croke Park amounted to €12.5m last year.

The events were assisted by 11,000 volunteers and volunteer costs last year totalled €311,635 with a further €819,960 spent on marketing and promotional costs.

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference provided €10.07m in income and €294,062 in services last year.

Staff costs amounted to €1.4m with the company employing 33 people, with the highest paid employee earning €90,000-100,000.

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One of the most uplifting Christmas presents

I received was an old cassette tape – remember those listening tapes once played on a cassette machine? Well, I still have, and use, a cassette machine.

Back in the 1990s, my late nephew gave me a tape of some Dublin schoolchildren re-telling their versions of Bible stories (and the story of St Patrick). He was a filmmaker and he thought it one of the most engaging recordings ever. Perhaps rashly, I gave it away, subsequently, to a writer who was doing research on children's voices. I then wished I had asked her to return it.

Archives

But guess what? A cousin had just come across another copy of the original tape when clearing out his old cassettes (or transferring them to digital archives), and sent it as a Christmas present. And so, I was able to listen again to *Give Up Yer Aul Sins*, first recorded in the early 1960s. It's a delight, and a classic, introduced with great

A lovely Christmas gift!



Mary Kenny



The Annunciation: 'C'mere, Angel Gabriel, I want you to go to Mary and speak nice to her...'

empathy by Fr Brian D'Arcy on the cassette tape.

These young children came from the inner-city Rutland Street school in Dublin. They were often in classes of 60 or 70. The conditions were basic, and many of the kids were poor. Nevertheless they had been taught by a truly gifted teacher, whom Fr D'Arcy introduced as Miss Peg Cunningham; it's

evident that they made these Bible stories their own, and related to them with vividness. Their engaging Dublin accents inflected their innocent interpretations of the New – and sometimes Old – Testament.

They absolutely grasp the drama of Salomé, who "did a dance" and then asked for John the Baptist's head on a plate.

They mingle their vernacular with a sense of reverence. "C'mere, Angel Gabriel, I want you to go to Mary and speak nice to her," begins their version of the Annunciation, and "Our Lady was delighted that she was to have a young fella."

Then they continue: "Our Blessed Lady decided to visit her cousin Elizabeth – three days' walkin', an' she had to walk on the road, stones'd cut the feet off you," and then: "Our Blessed Lady made a gorgeous prayer."

There was a particular old-fashioned Dublin way of emphasising "gorgeous" which the tots enunciate with great charm.

As city-dwellers, they felt the need to explain the shepherds' role at the Nativity. "Shepherds are fellas that care for sheeps and little lambs an' all...and they heard this beautiful music up in the sky."

Temper

As for the bad King Herod: "He was gettin' in a shockin' temper."

The lesson of the Finding in the Temple was when Our Blessed Lady said "c'mon

home now" and "children shouldn't say no to their mammy or curse their mammy."

“They vividly recount the story of Calvary, and pick up on what ‘Mrs Pilate’ wrote to her husband: ‘Don’t do anything to Jesus, he’s a good man’”

They know all about Cana, and the miracles. "Oh where did you get this lovely wine? It's gorgeous!", "This fella was blind from a baby and he said to Jesus, would you cure me, Jesus? And Jesus said, 'yeah'."

When it comes to the Apostles, they describe Judas as "a dirty aul squealer".

They vividly recount the story of Calvary, and pick up on what 'Mrs Pilate' wrote to her husband: "Don't do anything to Jesus, he's a good man. But he didn't mind her."

When Simon is picked out of the crowd, the child tells of the order: "C'mere

you stranger and carry this cross!...Simon looked at Our Lord's face and he said, 'for the love of you, I'll carry the cross.'" So Simon became a shockin' holy saint.

Their guilelessness, and yet their confidence in speaking with such a sense of involvement and understanding, in their own terms, is stunning.

As for the story of St Patrick – they really identify with Patrick's struggle: "Go up there and mind them sheep and lambs and cows for me," they say, recounting his life as a slave. "And when he prayed to God at night, he prayed he wouldn't be afraid."

Give Up Yer Aul Sins is not only a dazzling message of faith. It's also a unique archive of the way Dublin youngsters used to speak. I was also glad to learn, subsequently, that Brown Bag Productions made a short film based on the original, and some of the clips are available via YouTube.

Though to have the original cassette really was a 'gorgeous' Christmas gift.



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Next Dublin archbishop ‘needs energy’

Chai Brady

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has said he believes someone with more energy needs to take over the archdiocese, as he is set to send the Pope his letter of resignation on his 75th birthday, in April 2020.

During an interview on Newstalk’s *Pat Kenny Show*, Archbishop Martin said there are many priests doing great work in the Archdiocese of Dublin, and he has high hopes for the future.

Conversation

Speaking about a conversation with the Pope, he said: “I did say to him that I believe that the amount of change that’s needed now in Dublin, that’s underway, is such that it needs someone with more energy than I have.

“He’s 83 and he reminded me of that. I basically believe that change would be good,” he said. The archbishop added that if he were to die he would be confident “the church in

Dublin is moving in the right direction. We’ve got begrudgers, but I think we’re moving along in the right direction.”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* the Papal Nuncio has indicated that the Vatican will be in no rush to replace Dr Martin.

He said: “It is delicate and still very premature for discussion. Otherwise, it could raise a flurry of undesired opinions. We wait until the Holy Father gives the go-ahead.

“As a servant, I cannot go ahead of my master. We wait until he blows the whistle, and the race takes off. I will let you know!” the nuncio said.

Asked about the shortage of priests, Dr Martin said some people believe the Church has given “too much authority to lay people”, but that it’s leading to parishes being revitalised.

“There are other signs that parishes are being revitalised by a really effective ministry of lay men and women who carry out a lot of the services,” he said.

Irish Rosary priest Peyton documentary wins award

A documentary about Irish Rosary priest Venerable Patrick Peyton has been awarded ‘best documentary’ at a Christian film festival in the US.

Pray: The Story of Patrick Peyton won the award at the 2nd Annual God Country Family Christian Film Festival held in Eau Claire, Wisconsin.

Patrick Peyton was born on January 9, 1909 in Carracastle in the parish of Attymass near Ballina, Co. Mayo where the Fr Peyton Centre is now located at the foot of the Ox Mountains.

With a legacy of inspiring Faith and prayer, his fame spread around the world, and audiences in the millions flocked to his public prayer rallies.

Anna helps bring Christmas joy to the world



Anna Kearney (13) from Foxrock in Dublin, who sang on this year’s *The Late Late Toy Show*, performs in ‘Christmas Voices’, a concert in the Pro-Cathedral in aid of the Peter McVerry Trust and Dog’s Aid. She was joined by well-known artists Red Hurley, Celine Byrne, Linda Martin, Cliona Hagan and more. Photo: Chai Brady

NI gambling consultation welcomed by Christian charity

Chai Brady

A gambling consultation launched by the Northern Irish government has been welcomed by charities who say the current law is “not fit for purpose” and is leading to “suffering”.

Launched by the Department of Communities (DfC) it runs from December 16, 2019 to February 21, 2020 and consults the public and stakeholders as to the effectiveness of current law.

It covers a wide range of issues including casinos, online gambling and research, education and treatment for

individuals suffering from problem-gambling.

The Northern Ireland Office has previously said that NI has an “extraordinary” rate of problem gambling which makes the new consultation even more significant, according to Christian charity CARE NI.

Current law

Mark Baillie, CARE NI Policy Officer said: “It is well known problem-gambling can have a devastating impact on individuals and families. It can lead to financial problems, family breakdown and in extreme cases it can even

lead individuals to take their own lives.

“The current law is no longer fit for purpose and real people right across our society are suffering as a consequence.

“Northern Ireland has proportionally the highest problem-gambling prevalence within the UK.”

DfC Permanent Secretary Tracy Meharg acknowledged that the industry is an “important employer” and responsible gambling is enjoyed by many.

“However it is very important to recognise that for some people, gambling has

the potential to cause considerable harm. Any future changes to the law must balance the interests of the gambling industry with the need for regulation to protect vulnerable people,” Ms Meharg said.

She added there is “no doubt” that current legislation is “outdated” and hasn’t kept pace with industry and technological changes.

Details of the consultation documents can be found at www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-regulation-gambling-northern-ireland

DCU Chaplain disagrees with SU on Beef

Róise McGagh

The Dublin City University chaplain has stated he would like students to have a choice

of food on campus after their SU has moved to move beef off the menu.

“Personally, I would like to see the option for those who

wish to be vegetarian and for those who wish to eat meat within DCU,” said Fr Seamus McEntee.

The DCU Students’ Union have received backlash after the decision was made to lobby within the campus for food suppliers not to sell beef.

on December 10, where it passed. It was raised due to health and environmental concerns because of the high carbon footprint created through beef farming.

Prof. Barry McMullin from DCU said: “In relation to climate change effects in particular, for many people, a shift away from ruminant based foods [beef, dairy] can significantly reduce their personal greenhouse gas footprint.

A similar shift at organisational, community or societal scale would, of course, have correspondingly more significant effects. In circumstances of urgent climate crisis, all available effective interventions need to be very seriously considered.”

Prof. McMullin works with the DCU Energy and Design Lab where he focuses on system’ approaches to deep decarbonisation.

Options

Fr McEntee says that the SU are independent and have the right to advocate but personally he thinks there should be options for students on campus.

There are currently vegetarian options for students in the campus restaurant.

“I think DCU is a university that tries to be inclusive as possible for the diversity of students that are there. I am in favour of offering options to be available in the restaurant,” he said.

A vote on the issue was put to class representatives

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Martin Mansergh

The View



A nuanced history of our Emergency years

A part from communal worship and family festivities, the Christmas season provides a moment of peace, rest and reflection. There is more opportunity to read a book. Prior to Christmas, the publishing industry brings out many new books suitable for gifts, some celebrating effort and achievement individual and collective.

One such book is *The Emergency: A Visual History of the Irish Defence Forces 1939-1945* (Wordwell), by Daniel Ayiotis, Director of the Military Archives, and John Gibney and Michael Kennedy of the Royal Irish Academy. It illustrates the mobilisation to defend Ireland's independence, integrity and neutrality during World War II. Modern weapons were scarce, and the ability to sustain prolonged resistance limited. Ireland's guerilla reputation was some deterrent, and the knowledge that any invasion would have triggered a hostile reaction in America. Remoteness from theatres of conflict, except the Atlantic, also helped.

First duty

The first duty of leaders is to protect their people from death and destruction, which was globally on a colossal scale. At an Armistice Day service in St Patrick's Cathedral, a sermon preached to a congregation including the president claimed that even if neutrality were expedient it was immoral, as there could be no neutrality between good and evil.

Decisions of peace and war can never be purely about morality. The pitfalls of entering into conflict cast in those terms were very evident in the Iraq war. There is often an unspoken assumption that Ireland, rather than exercising its independence, should have followed Britain, without considering its interests or exposure or realistically what it could contribute.

As Eamon de Valera warned in 1955, a small country has little influence on either the decision by great powers to enter a war or the terms on which they end it. The vital priority was to maintain internal



peace, so soon after the civil war, and given burning resentment over partition. The 1922 Irish Free State Constitution, pre-checked by the British for conformity with the Treaty, in Article 49 asserted the right to remain neutral, stating: "save in the case of actual invasion, the Irish Free State (Saorstát Eireann) shall not be committed to active participation in any war without the assent of the Oireachtas", a clause replicated in the 1938 Constitution (Article 28.3).

The British anxious to recover use of the ports handed back in 1938 vainly tried in 1940-41 to persuade the Irish Government that German invasion was imminent.

“Every neutral, not just Ireland, but Sweden and Switzerland, had to have some regard for its powerful neighbours”

A German invasion of Ireland would only have happened simultaneously with an invasion of Britain. In perilous times, great diplomatic skill, backbone and judgment were required to keep the country safe, as well as unity of purpose and participation, for example, in the part-time LDF.

Every neutral, not just Ireland, but Sweden and Switzerland, had to have some regard for its powerful neighbours. Despite an unbending public image, Ireland was a friendly neutral to Britain and later America.

The Emergency highlights a 'most secret'

memorandum of May 1941 by the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs Joseph Walshe, outlining the "help given by the Irish Government to the British in relation to the Actual Waging of the War". It listed the information being given to the British, or communicated in a way that could be easily intercepted, the internment of spies, the Donegal air corridor, large numbers who volunteered to join the British forces, as well as workers who had gone to Britain, and the export of surplus production to Britain.

The white stone landmarks for aircraft, such as the recently excavated 'EIRE 7' near Dalkey Point, were numbered at American request in 1943.

Dublin fire engines were dispatched to Belfast, when it was bombed.

There has been little public acknowledgement of this more nuanced history by either the British or the Americans since. Equally, Northern Ireland's indispensable role in providing safer waters for convoys and facilitating the assembling of US forces for the Normandy D-Day landings (their timing guided by weather reports from Belmullet) deserves more recognition in the Republic.

The main difference highlighted was the British desire to relax censorship and gain more favourable coverage versus the strong Irish conviction that it would be counter-productive, with Mr Walshe's hand-written comment, "chaos – as the view most strongly pressed will be for ejection of British".

Mr de Valera's two most controversial actions were his 1943 St Patrick's Day

broadcast on the virtues of the simple, frugal life, intended to bolster national morale, and his condolences to the German ambassador on the death of Adolf Hitler, balancing his condolences a fortnight earlier to the unfriendly US minister in Dublin on the death of President Roosevelt.

Ireland was spared invasion, but in the famous exchange between Mr de Valera and Winston Churchill in 1945, when the latter claimed that Britain could have been justified in seizing Irish ports and airfields to guard its southern approaches from hostile aircraft and submarines, Mr de Valera pointed out that treating Britain's necessity as a moral

code meant that no small nation adjoining a great power could be permitted to go its way in peace.

Criticism

Other great powers had behaved like that, when Germany invaded neutral Belgium and the Netherlands in May 1940, and when the Soviet Union annexed Eastern Poland and the Baltic States and attacked Finland in 1939-40, which he criticised in 1947.

Important lessons were learnt from the failed policy of appeasement and the brinkmanship that led to World War I, but also the unviability of a system of isolated small states. The morality of holding on to large nuclear arsenals

capable of inflicting mass destruction has been challenged by the Pope.

Pope Francis on December 6 was awarded the St Columbanus Medal from Carlow College St Patrick's, accepted on his behalf by the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo., from College President Fr Conn Ó Maoldhonaigh and in the presence of college patron Bishop Denis Nulty of Kildare and Leighlin. The citation highlighted Pope Francis' "consistent and courageous leadership in addressing the plight of migrants and refugees in contemporary society", and his exhortation to "welcome, protect, promote and integrate".



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The late Fr Ronan Drury.

Revisiting the legacy of Fr Ronan Drury

I hope you're not going to bore the socks off another generation of Irish Catholics" was the unlikely opening remark of the Professor of Homiletics Fr Ronan Drury to my class of seminarians in St Patrick's College, Maynooth in September of 1982.

As we later discovered Fr Drury's words stemmed from his passionate belief in the importance of communicating the Gospel message – especially on Sundays – in a meaningful and relevant way and from his deep love and respect for the person in the pew whose attention and patience he lamented were all too often taken for granted.

When he died in November 2017 at the age of 93 and busy with his ministry until almost the very end, Fr Ronan had spent most of his long life in St Patrick's College where he helped generations of Irish priests to develop their preaching skills and at the same time edited one of the most influential pastoral publications to emerge from Ireland following the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), *The Furrow*.

Young students with speech difficulties or those who lacked confidence in public speaking have spoken fondly since his death of his particular help with the challenges they faced. But alongside those roles he also maintained a deep and affectionate bond with his home parish of Mullagh in Co. Cavan where he celebrated Mass on Christmas Eve for an unbroken 68 years.

On one occasion he even left his hospital bed by taxi to ensure that he fulfilled his Christmas mission and returned afterwards to the care of the medical staff.

Emotional element

As he recalled in a radio interview not long before his death, "the whole midnight Mass has a strong emotional element for me. I can see their grandfathers look in the child's eye as they are coming up for Communion. It is a very rich experience."

After his death many people continued to recall his warmth, kindness and good humour and on the occasion of his first



Maynooth's Professor of Homiletics lives on through the preaching of his students, writes **Fr Paul Clayton-Lea**

anniversary Mass with the encouragement of his family, friends and colleagues, his secretary and personal assistant Maria Flood and myself decided to try and commemorate him in a way in which he might have approved.

“Young students with speech difficulties...have spoken fondly since his death of his particular help with the challenges they faced”

With the discovery of several notebooks he kept as a young seminarian containing his favourite literary and spiritual quotations and sources which he drew on throughout his life as well as a boxful of homilies, prayers, blessings and reflections we carefully selected and edited numerous pieces that we thought best represented his positive, sunny outlook on life, his joy in his priesthood and humanity and his compassionate nature.

All of these characteristics endeared him to many people throughout his life and as we discovered his notebooks and surviving writings contain many wise and inspirational words and images that continues to offer enlightenment and encouragement for both priests and most importantly for him, the laity today. We were especially struck by a number of his favourite poems and named the

publication for one which he had chosen as a young seminarian in Maynooth during the 1940s.

*Have you had a kindness shown? Pass it on!
'Twas not given for thee alone. Pass it on!
Let it travel down the years
Let it wipe another's tears
Till in Heaven the deed appears. Pass it on!*
– Henry Burton

Included in the book are meditations on the Stations of the Cross which he famously presided over each Good Friday in the College Chapel, Maynooth as well as reflections, homilies, prayers and blessings and memories of friends like Msgr Michael Olden and Fr Gerard McGinnity and some of the obituaries which followed his death. Of all his notebook reflections on the topic perhaps the following says best what he would want to say about his leaving,

*So be my passing,
My task accomplished and
the long day done
My wages taken, and in my heart
Some late lark singing,
Let me be gathered to the
quiet West,
The sundown, splendid and
serene, Death.*
– W. E. Henley

i Fr Paul Clayton-Lea is a priest of the Archdiocese of Armagh, former editor of *Intercom* and author of *In the Light of the Word* published by Veritas in 2018. *Pass it on!* is available by contacting mariaflood14@gmail.com or pacle@eircom.net. Price €15 hardback, excluding package and posting.

“Fr Drury's words stemmed from his passionate belief in the importance of communicating the Gospel message – especially on Sundays – in a meaningful and relevant way”

“On one occasion he even left his hospital bed by taxi to ensure that he fulfilled his Christmas mission and returned afterwards to the care of the medical staff”

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Liberalism will eventually overreach and then begin to recede



You cannot keep pretending that the individual is the basic unit of society to the detriment of the family or communities, writes **David Quinn**



Power always defeats itself in the end. This, to me, is almost a law of nature. Look through history and you see this 'law' play itself out again and again as empires collapse and estab-

lished orders grow old or are overthrown.

It is also true that power can be defeated. That's another law. But what I mean by 'power always defeats itself in the end', is that power has an inbuilt

tendency to overreach, or rather those with power have that tendency. They can't resist it. It's human nature.

The Church has done it at various points through history, including recently

in Ireland. After we gained Independence in 1922, we gave the Church huge power and it was happy to take it. What happened? It overreached. It became authoritarian and created a backlash that we are still living with today. This hasn't played itself out fully yet. We saw that when Pope Francis came here last year. He is a popular pope, and yet an awful lot of the old anger burst to the surface yet again, and his visit was largely overshadowed by that.

In fact, in the Vatican some people believe that only two of the visits Pope Francis has made to other countries can be considered failures (even if qualified failures); the ones to Ireland and Chile. In both cases the abuse scandals had done huge damage to the authority of the Church.

Trust

It's easy enough to let the situation of the Church in Ireland drag you down. But you have to fight that feeling in yourself and take the long view. God tells us that we don't know how all this will play out over time. Only he knows that, and we have to trust him. It can take lifetimes for something to play itself out and for God to act decisively in history.

When Joseph's family fled famine and sought refuge in Egypt, eventually becoming slaves, God waited 200 years before bringing them out of Egypt and then they spent another 40 years in the desert while he prepared them to found a new nation, purging and forging them in the process, giving them a new law to live by.

But 240 years is a long time. It must have seemed to the Israelites that their fate was sealed. Did they even have leadership in that time? Their liberator, Moses, was raised as an Egyptian, within the royal family. He was not a slave. The liberator of the Israelites was one of them and not one of them at the same time.

“We now live in a time when secular liberalism is triumphant and almost totally dominant”

God brought success out of failure, and that happens time and again. It is the same pattern for the Church. This is what St John Henry Newman meant when he said: “The rule of God's Providence [is] that we should succeed by failure.”

We now live in a time when secular liberalism is triumphant and almost totally dominant. Virtually all resistance to it has collapsed, in Ireland at least. It has only to wait for something for it to be done. The passage of an abortion law has now led to demands for euthanasia. Unless the medical profession rises up against that, it will pass in the next few years. The media will focus on a few tragic personal stories and the Oireachtas will fall into line and vote through a law. A referendum is not needed at all this time.

If the present secular, liberal moment cannot be defeated by any ideological rival currently on the

field, what might do it? The answer is that it will eventually defeat itself, by overextension.

For example, it has become ridiculously intolerant of other points of view, quickly denouncing them as 'bigoted' and now moving towards reforming the law so that it is easier to find people guilty of hate crimes. The formal and informal policing of speech by political correctness is already annoying a lot of people.

“Immigration past a certain point can begin to erode societal cohesion”

Liberalism also has an in-built individualism that will eventually create a backlash. You cannot keep pretending that the individual is the basic unit of society to the detriment of the family or communities like Churches or nations. People have a yearning to belong as well as to be free and we are currently overemphasising personal freedom at the expense of communities of belonging which create obligations, like families create obligations.

The present liberal movement might also over-extend in the direction of environmentalism, immigration and also gender ideology.

At a certain point, green policies will become extremely expensive. People such as farmers or Bord na Mona workers begin to lose their jobs. Retrofitting your house or buying an electric car costs a lot of money. So might carbon taxes ultimately.

Immigration past a certain point can begin to erode societal cohesion because you shouldn't allow people into a country faster than you can integrate them.

As for gender ideology, a lot of parents might not like it if schools teach their children that their bodies and the gender they say they are, are two different things; in other words that you might have a girl's body and really be a boy, or vice versa. That is a very radical and far-reaching belief.

The lack of real resistance on most of these fronts means that liberalism will push and push, overreach and then begin to recede. This is a certainty. No moral consensus lasts forever. Power always defeats itself.

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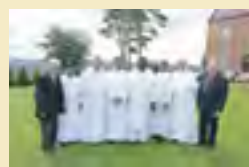
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Donal Walsh: A courageous legacy

Seven years ago, then 16-year old Donal Walsh celebrated his last Christmas. The Kerry teenager, having been faced with a looming sentence of succumbing to his cancer, determinedly powered through his terminal symptoms despite being told he should “prepare for an early Christmas”.

Donal would unfortunately pass away some months later on May 12, 2013, but his legacy lives on. As many may recall Donal's rise to prominence in 2013 through his writings and appearance on Brendan O'Connor's *The Saturday Night Show*, his strong simple faith and investment in the issues of suicide and poor hospital conditions for teenagers, even while sick, gained the young man a large media following and deep respect held nationwide.

Donal's selfless commitments to raising money for Crumlin Children's Hospital – €65,000 to be exact – and awareness around the prevalence of suicide in young people inspired his parents, Elma and Fionnbar, to found their charity, The Donal Walsh #LiveLife Foundation, moved to do so after an influx of donations to the family and a desire to continue Donal's altruistic mission subsequent to his death.

The charity has done significant work in the past six years of transforming hospital and hospice spaces for teenagers around the country and promoting an anti-suicide message; as to date, the Foundation has raised and distributed €500,000 to help develop hospice facilities in terms of mental health and faith, and every Pieta House facility now has a dedicated Donal Walsh room.

Mission

Donal's legacy and mission still vibrantly persists this Christmas. Donal's Mam Elma describes his memory as one recognised and well-valued. “It's hard to believe that six years later, a little boy who was on TV for 19 minutes is still remembered and respected and what he said is still respected,” she says. And there's no doubt that she is right and Donal is still remembered and respected. She excitedly informs *The Irish Catholic* of her son's nomination by the Red Cross Humanitarian Awards for the Young Humanitarian Award, which he won on November 16.

The second annual Humanitarian Award ball honours

Donal Walsh's message of life continues to inspire people, his mother Elma tells **Claire Fitzpatrick**



Some of the participants in the #LiveLife film competition gather before the foundation's logo.

humanitarian achievements of various respects, including young people with remarkable humanitarian accomplishments, undoubtedly characteristic of Donal.

Donal's mission to advocate for those who “were in difficulty and didn't have the resilience to speak about things and the confidence to speak about what they were thinking and where they were going in their own head and what was troubling them”, as Elma indicates, lies at the heart of the mission of the #LiveLife Foundation today.

“Those are the people he wanted to help,” Elma says. “And for us the same. It's a great endorsement to say that he's remembered and that the work we're doing is benefiting people. We're getting out to the schools all the time, we never ask to go to a school or a venue to talk, but people keep asking would we

talk at their venues and schools, and it's to talk about the message that Donal gave out six years ago.

“It's not something we planned, not something we organised, it's just something that keeps happening, and if it helps people, we'll keep doing it and if we don't help people we'll stop,” Elma says.

* * * * *

Donal's unwavering faith throughout his illness swept the nation with founded admiration and respect back in 2013. In his letters published by the *Sunday Independent*, Donal contended that his suffering was part of God's plan for him, and that if other people could learn from the character he maintained in his struggle, that would be enough for him reconcile with the cards he had been dealt.

“I have to remember that God is using me; whether he is using me as a symbol for people to

“I have to remember that God is using me; whether he is using me as a symbol for people to appreciate life more or whether his first two mountains weren't high enough for me...”



appreciate life more or whether His first two mountains weren't high enough for me, all I know is that I am walking with him even though it is along his path,” he wrote.

It was Donal's trust in God that motivated herself and her family to keep what would otherwise be a struggling Faith during his final months and in his death, Elma reveals. Donal's acceptance of his illness and fearless approach to his impending fate eased the family's concerns and made the process of accepting Donal's fate a less-difficult one.

“When we saw his Faith, we couldn't disrespect it or anything, that he had huge Faith himself, and I suppose we've all had a strong Faith here in the family. And you know we all come to die someday so we might as well face up to it. [His Faith] did help him in a huge way and I suppose him being at peace and knowing where he was going and what was happening helped us as well because he understood everything and he wasn't afraid to face where he was going or what was happening or anything, so that did help us. He wasn't resisting anything or fighting it, he had total acceptance

of what he was given in life,” Elma says.

This is not to say that Elma's Faith didn't falter in Donal's death. “I did fight with God and I did argue with him and I couldn't face the church, couldn't face going to Mass, couldn't face anything like that,” Elma revealed on the *Life and Soul* RTÉ radio show in July 2019.

However, Donal's faith in his lifetime set an example for Elma and inspired her to not abandon her faith in such difficult times. “I was here at home and I said, ‘What would Donal say? I said, ‘I know exactly what he would say so I went back to Mass, back to praying. I cried my way through the first six months,” Elma said.

In his reflection on his journey with cancer, Donal wrote in 2013, “if this was what God wants me to do, if he wants me to fight cancer, if he wants me to be a symbol to other people, or if he just wants me to die then I guess I'll strap up my hiking boots and get to the top of this mountain”.

* * * * *

The Walsh family has since led by example of Donal's resilience, with not allowing such tragedy to destroy their Faith or damage



their relationship with God, instead continuing Donal's mission and spreading faith in their commitment to Donal's humanitarian pursuits.

Since 2013, the #LiveLife Foundation has made remarkable progress in facilitating mental health awareness in Ireland, particularly in facilitating access to proper mental health care for struggling teens and promoting an anti-suicide message to young people across the country.

The impact of Donal's legacy evidently "has results", Elma says. "He was speaking on television for 19 minutes and those results have rippled across these six and a half years.

Teenage suicide rates are down according to coroners around the country. Mental health is an issue spoken more about now than it was six years ago."

Donal's commitment to human rights issues in his final months has inspired Elma to extend his mission into advocating for Pro-Life rights and education in Ireland. As keynote speaker of the June 2019 Ceiliuradh Cois Life, the Annual Dinner for Pro-life Education, Elma emphasised, "as human beings, we all have the right to life and the

right to live it up to the last day we naturally pass away."

Reflecting to *The Irish Catholic* upon her address, Elma reveals that Donal's advocacy for everyone, especially young people, to respect their lives and the time they've been given on this earth, remains at the heart of everything herself and the #LiveLife Foundation stands for, including supporting for Pro-Life education.

"Everything we say relates back to what Donal said on television," Elma says.

“Christmas has transformed hugely for our family...it’s a different type of Christmas, but he’s still well-remembered...”

Christmastime does not prove exempt of Donal's influence and memory. For the Walsh family, Christmas has drastically changed since Donal's departure. "It's always is," Elma says in response to the question of whether it's harder for the family to cope with his loss during Christmastime.



Christmas", and they wanted to make his last Christmas a very special one for him, and a memorable celebration that the Walsh family would be able to look back on fondly.

"We got Santa to come to the house that Christmas," Elma says. "Santa surprised us all with different things and different toys and remote-control toys and everything and we had a great day with friends and family. Great memories of that Christmas."

However, the Christmas family traditions have remained the same, as to stay true to how Donal loved to spend Christmas. "We stick to what he liked and what he used to do at Christmastime. He loved company, he loved his family and cousins and friends. He just loved company and talking and that's what we still do," Elma says.

Quiet life

Elma describes Donal's spirit and character, especially during Christmas, as exemplary. Even in his darkest days, Donal always focused on making the world brighter for those around him. Donal was always giving, especially at Christmastime, even in the simplest of ways. "He loved Christmas.

He loved giving. Always throughout the years, it didn't have to be Christmas, but he was always giving. You know, if he had €5 he'd go down to the shop and bring us all back a bar of chocolate."

Although Donal may no longer physically be here, Elma says that Donal's company and love of giving is very much alive and present in her own life. "I feel his company every day," Elma says. "As I always say, if he kept his mouth shut, we would've had a quiet life, so he's keeping us on our toes, he still is.

"When something happens, you have to have a laugh and say Donal definitely did that or Donal definitely meant for that to happen. You can see and feel his presence all the time and see he would have done something that would go out of his way. He was a great character, and had great wit, and

Donal Walsh (centre) with his sister Jema (left) and parents Finbarr and Elma.

he'd go out of his way to entertain people.

"He's still entertaining us," Elma remarks.

* * * * *

Donal's love of giving, care for other, concern for the greater good, and steadfast faith we can all look to this Christmas as example of how we should lead faithful lives and honour the true meaning of Christmas.

Elma explains that the most fundamental way one can get involved in the #LiveLife movement is by treating the people around us with the same kindness and attention Donal gave in his lifetime to both his loved ones and those he didn't know that were struggling to cope with troubling emotions and hardships in their lives.

She says that Donal's message is about "making the most of your life and appreciating your life while you have it. He always wanted people to better themselves and to do well for themselves and appreciate how lucky they are to be able to walk around and to have health".

Elma encourages everyone to "look out for your friends and loved ones", and to not shy away from the important conversations with our family and friends that may be hard to have, like being open and honest about mental health.

“Even in his darkest days, Donal always focused on making the world brighter for those around him”

As for the #LiveLife Foundation, the organisation strives to do the same – to provide an example for others, especially young people, about how to care for others, and to emphasise that life is always worth living. "Our part in [the foundation] is really to talk about Donal and encourage people to do what he said," Elma says.

The work of the #LiveLife Foundation Elma describes as constantly progressing. Advocacy for mental health awareness is a mission that should never quiet, she stresses, and additionally, says that the bettering of hospital and hospice care for teenagers is an ongoing process.

"The conditions for teenagers in hospitals isn't improved much, but were stilling working on it and hoping on it, we do what we can," Elma says.

Elma describes the celebration of Donal's message and memory as a year-long affair, and for readers to keep Donal in their thoughts beyond the Christmas season.

She extends her invitation for all to attend Donal's anniversary Mass – a day that honours Donal's memory and mission with the Eucharist and a series of mental health speakers and workshops – which will be held at Knock for the third consecutive year this upcoming spring on May 7.

Creating a song and



Fr Ray Kelly reveals all in 'raw and honest' book

Christmas, for Fr Ray Kelly, is a very special time of year, which he always spends with family. When his parents died he would spend Christmas with his sister and her family, and now that she has died he spends it in his family home where her daughter lives.

"There was always great excitement when we were growing up, we loved Christmas and Santa Claus, you know at that time, you'd get up in the morning and have a look at what Santa brought, but you wouldn't be allowed touch them at all until you went to morning Mass, you'd have one eye on the baby Jesus in the crib, while another eye was looking forward to getting home to play with the toys," he tells *The Irish Catholic*.

Fr Ray Kelly is a parish priest in Oldcastle, Co Meath who gained fame, not least in 2014 when footage of him singing Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah went viral, but also when he auditioned for *Britain's Got Talent* and got as far as the semi-finals.

He loves Christmas because he says that it's "really the fulfilment of our Christian calling in the sense of the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, and the Christmas Mass is still very much part of most families' tradition, now they mightn't be church-going people for too many other Sundays in the year, but still whatever it is about Christmas



Luke Silke

they like to bring the children to Mass and see the crib, it's still very special for a lot of people. Commercialism and shopping have kind of taken over but it's still there, Mass and Faith is still on the list, I think".

Illness

Fr Kelly has, this year, brought out a book: *Father Ray Kelly Hallelujah – Memoirs of a Singing Priest*. It chronicles, in a humble way, his rise to fame, from a rural Irish town, the midwife's son come parish priest. Fr Kelly focuses on his childhood in Tyrellspass, Co Meath, in the 1950s, his first memory being that of the birth of his sister Mary Regina, to whom Kelly devotes a full chapter where he recounts her illness and death.

Fr Kelly has lived a fascinating life, and has many a yarn to tell – about how he travelled with his mother to Belfast for a job interview in the height of the Troubles or how, in his teenage

years, a girl's refusal to dance with him would shatter his confidence.

A recollection of how Pope John Paul II's words in Ballybrit 1979 – "young people of Ireland, I love you" – touched his heart. Being told to kneel in front of the Sacred Heart for ten minutes was viewed, by the young Fr Kelly, as a form of punishment for laughing during the Rosary.

From the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1979 would stem the trail of events which lead Fr Kelly down the pathway towards religious life. The following meant he would commit himself to attending daily Mass before work, a habit which continued when the season of lent was over. A trip to Rome for a meeting of the Catholic Youth Council, Mass with the Pope and having been selected to sing *Danny Boy* for the Pontiff, and Fr Kelly was discerning, especially when he found himself back at work here at home, contemplating the experience.

First on the list of those to visit, upon his return from Rome was his 89-year-old grandmother. She passed away shortly after this visit, this affected him deeply.

The call to priesthood, for Fr Kelly, came suddenly, when one day, while queueing for Holy Communion, he saw himself dressed as a priest giving out Holy Communion. He turned and walked straight out of the church to his car. "I was 27 years of age, I had my own car, my own house with a mortgage; I was not giving all that up – no way!"

Revealing his thoughts to his friend and ending a relationship, and then seeking out which order he wished to join, would be the next difficult steps in his journey, he reflects, "as we drove over the cattle grid at the entrance to the cottage, the rattle of the tyres against the loose grid took me out of my questioning".

* * * * *

Fr Kelly entered seminary for the Kiltegan Fathers, and spent some time in Cork studying philosophy and then in Wicklow studying theology. Music remained part of his life throughout this period, and he used his talent to raise funds for African aid.

A few months in his final year working in a parish in the UK,

and Kelly was appointed to new mission territory – Tzaneen. In June 1989 Fr Ray Kelly was ordained at home in Tyrellspass. Following his ordination, he was sent to South Africa for a time, before returning to bury his father. His only Christmas away from home was while he was working in South Africa.

Fr Kelly has many memories of Christmas, most notably discovering the truth about Santa Claus accidentally when he went to the local shop to collect items for his mother, and was informed by the staff there that he should tell his mother that they "managed to get everything she ordered except the guitar".

Fr Kelly laughs at the thought, telling this paper that "the cat was out of the bag then and she had to sit me down for a talk!"

Having come home from the missions in August of 1991 Fr Kelly realised that he "needed time with my family to grieve over the loss of my dad and to heal. I needed to be assured my mum was okay after her illness and I needed time to catch up with my brother, my sisters and their children. I just needed time."

Having spent time with his family, Fr Kelly met with his superiors who suggested that given how 'turbulent' the first 26 months of his priesthood had been, perhaps

“I was 27 years of age, I had my own car, my own house with a mortgage; I was not giving all that up – no way!”

dance



Fr Ray Kelly celebrating Mass and, below, *Britain's Got Talent* judge Simon Cowell gives the priest the 'thumbs up' after a performance on the show.



some work in Ireland. In the ensuing months Fr Kelly worked as an army chaplain in the Curragh camp in Kildare. In the diocese of Kildare and Leighlin where he met many other priests and was involved in fundraising initiatives and the All Priests Show.

This was followed by a spell of "missionary appeal work" in the US, work which largely involved preaching and the sharing of his personal testimony. He returned to Ireland after this and worked in "a 70% Protestant town in Northern Ireland in the height of the troubles".

Fr Kelly remembers many stories from his time there – how parishioners were deliberately being held up at border checkpoints so they would be late for Mass. He says that he "couldn't understand" the "coldness of sectarianism".

“Interest in his story was particularly strong from Germany and indeed a TV company offered to fly Fr Kelly to Cologne”

Referencing how he was constantly on the move while working for the Kiltegan Fathers, Fr Kelly approached his own diocese

in search of some long term work. Working in Navan he immediately immersed himself in community life, getting involved in chaplaincy work in two local schools and the hospital and working with children with disabilities.

It was while working in Navan that he joined St Mary's musical society, where he made history as the first priest to be involved on stage. His first show was *Jesus Christ Superstar* in 1994.

Having decided not to go back to missionary work, Fr Kelly successfully applied to his superiors to leave Kiltegan Fathers and to be incardinated into Meath diocese in 1996. The bishop there at the time was Michael Smith. The move from Navan parish to a small parish outside Tullamore was difficult for Fr Kelly. His mother's dog "had to lick the tears from my face" when he visited on his way to this new venture.

* * * * *

Fr Kelly's singing in churches came to fruition when he was gifted equipment by his former parishioners. The following Sunday he sang *Panis Angelicus*. On a trip to Fatima some years later he was called home as his mother's health had deteriorated. He was unable to say the rosary by her bedside as he couldn't stop crying. He cried even when writing these words in his book, 15 years later.

Fr Kelly's story, which of the famous singing priest, is a story of survival, a raw and honest story of a life that was at many times difficult. Fr Kelly returned from abroad to funerals of close loved ones three times over the course of his journey in religious life. This book does not serve as an advertisement for vocations to religious life, but rather a blunt description in his own words, of the ups and downs he has experienced while fulfilling his vocation.

Fr Kelly says that the work he does musically is "almost like a ministry in and of itself", although he never views it as work "because it's a hobby to me really".

“Fr Kelly is a natural story-teller, with a phenomenal memory and great attention to detail”

The couple, at whose wedding Fr Kelly sang 'Hallelujah', to whom he owes his fame, are still in touch with him from time to time. Fr Kelly says that they reached out to him when he was partaking in *Britain's Got Talent* a few years ago.

This video gained over 68 million internet hits, and Fr Kelly suddenly found himself a celebrity with multiple media debuts in the days that followed. Interest in the story was particularly strong from

Germany and indeed a TV company offered to fly Fr Kelly to Cologne.

An invitation to take part in an audition for *Britain's Got Talent* was robustly turned down by Fr Kelly who says "it was much easier to watch it from the comfort of my own home with a beer in hand". Following phone calls and persistence on the part of the producers, he eventually agreed to take part.

Fr Kelly received numerous pieces of correspondence from members of the public in the aftermath of his TV appearances. Among these is one striking email from someone who felt that "death was the only option and had even written a suicide note", but stumbled across Fr Kelly's YouTube video and "literally felt the grace of God wash over me". The email concludes with the words "God placed you on that stage for a reason".

Fr Kelly is a natural story-teller, with a phenomenal memory and great attention to detail, even in conversation with this newspaper he relayed how "Ester my housekeeper came running when I came home, I thought there was an emergency in the parochial house, to tell me that the first copy of the book had arrived".

Catholic youth ministry is something which played a huge part in Fr Kelly's Faith journey, and he's now a chaplain in local schools,

a role which he feels is very important. One of these schools is dealing with the aftermath of a student suicide, and this, Kelly says, is a "sore point, but students have their own way of dealing with grief".

He says that while he would like to see more students coming to church and realising that prayer could help them in life, he feels that God's message would be more likely to reach them if it came from well-known sports people, "but we are seeing that a lot nowadays so I think it's a good thing".

Fr Kelly has dedicated the book to his mother, citing how he never intended to write a book about his life, but always wished to write one about his mother Mona, a midwife, "what she went through, bringing new life to so many families; the hardships, the primitive conditions she and expectant mothers had to endure to give new life".

Fr Ray Kelly's story is not just about him, but the stories of the people who shaped him, the vivid details of a journey; the fulfilling of a vocation. Fr Kelly tells his story honestly, vividly, with sadness and with humour.

There are a lot of life lessons that could be gleaned from his life, and most importantly, Fr Kelly gives his version of events, the background to the man you see on stage, and what a fascinating and rich background that is.



I don't look forward to the day when I may be unable to swallow the Holy Communion which the priest will bring me, writes **Kieron Wood**

It's estimated that five in every 100,000 people over 50 are affected by progressive nuclear palsy (PSP). I'm a male aged 70, so I'm in the most common target group for this rare disease – and I have PSP.

Following a piece I wrote about my illness, I received a card saying the sender's mother had died of PSP. But more men than women die of PSP, and they tend to be older. As the population becomes older, it is sure to become more common.

It's called PSP because it's progressive, it damages parts of the brain above the pea-sized nuclei that control eye movements and it results in palsy (the disease Jesus cured). It's caused by the death of nerve cells in the brain.

PSP does not affect everybody at the same rate. Early symptoms may include loss of balance and unexpected falls (normally backwards – I spent several days in the Queen Elizabeth teaching hospital in Birmingham following a backwards fall down my sister's stairs, and the hospital produced a comprehensive copy of my notes on discharge).

The difficulties can include sensitivity to light and a syndrome where the eyes go 'round the houses', instead of going smoothly up and down).

Depression

Some people can experience depression or cramped handwriting. (My writing has really slowed down – but is bigger, rather than smaller – and the necessity of filling in complex forms means I had to give up advising in the Free Legal Advice Centres in Dublin.)

My voice occasionally goes quiet, and speech and swallow problems can develop as the condition progresses. Falls become more frequent.

It all started more than three years ago with problems typing. The left side of the brain

Prayer is the only hope I have left



Kieron Wood with his daughter Sarah's twins.

(the speech area) controls the right side of the body, and vice-versa. A consultant psychiatrist spotted that I held my right arm at an unusual angle, and referred me to the Dublin Neurological Institute suffering from slowness of movement.

Prof. Tim Lynch, the State's leading expert on so-called 'tauopathies' (the involvement of tau proteins) said: "If I had to say it's anything, I'd say it's PSP."

PSP is a form of Parkinsonism, related to Parkinson's Disease (which Pope St John Paul II died of), but without the tremor. The microtubule-associated protein tau (the MAPT gene) is found throughout the nervous system, including in nerve cells in the brain. If the MAPT gene mutates, changes can occur that result in abnormal clumping of tau proteins.

But no definitive cause has yet been found – though Prof. Lynch says he sees a disproportionate number of farmers suffering from PSP. So maybe the cause is environmental, something to do with weed killers?

PSP is difficult to diagnose, but eye problems give a clue. Symptoms may mimic those of other neuro-degenerative diseases, such as Parkinson's Disease or Alzheimer's (though there's a difference between tau and amyloid protein in the brain, present in advanced Alzheimer's). Clinical assessment involves a battery of tests, including a lumbar puncture in the day clinic of the Dublin Neurological Institute (the fluid has to be sent to Britain for a result), several MRIs and a PET scan.

The report said my phosphorylated tau levels were

increased. A paper published by the 'Frontiers in Neurology' programme said: "Aberrant tau phosphorylation is acknowledged to be a key disease process, influencing tau structure, distribution and function in neurons."

“I don't look forward to the day when I can't write any more, and may be suffering from dementia and unable to swallow the Host which the priest will bring”

There is no effective treatment for PSP, so managing symptoms is essential for controlling the progress of the disease.

Swallowing difficulties increases

the risk of aspiration pneumonia. Regular exercise – physical and mental – is vital. (I do Sudoku and go for a walk most days. My two elder daughters assist me in this.) It is also important to see an experienced neurologist to get a definitive diagnosis, though Ireland has a marked shortage of neurologists.

The HSE community services can help. Among other things, I had a second set of banisters fitted in my home to prevent falls on the stairs, and the occupational therapist referred me to a physiotherapist, a public health nurse and a speech and language expert.

“Everyday tasks such as tying your shoelaces, pressing the buttons on the TV remote control or even personal hygiene issues become increasingly difficult”

There's also a group which supports people with PSP and their carers: the PSP Association Ireland, based in North Brunswick Street, Dublin 7, which organises events and monthly meetings.

I'm also suffering from Cortico-Basal Degeneration (CBD) and Primary Progressive Aphasia (PPA), which means I do not know what I was going to say – though I have an app which expresses my emotions for when I lose my voice entirely. The brain changes in PSP and CBD are similar, but not the same. CBD is a degenerative brain disease, which often starts with progressive numbness.

Everyday tasks such as tying your shoelaces, pressing the buttons on the TV remote control or even personal hygiene issues become increasingly difficult.

Eye issues are normally less debilitating than in PSP. Fortunately, my daughter (who lives in Madrid) is a speech and language therapist, so she helps out by Skype.

I don't look forward to the day when I can't write any more, and may be suffering from dementia and unable to swallow the Host which the priest will bring.

All I can do is what newspaper columnist Nigel Dempster did in his video on YouTube – pray. I go to Mass with some of the children every Sunday (at St Kevin's, Harrington Street) and I consider that, if Jesus cured a man of palsy, he can do it for me. It's the only hope I have left.

• Kieron Wood is a former RTÉ Religious Affairs Correspondent and a family law barrister.

“It all started more than three years ago with problems typing. The left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, and vice-versa. A consultant psychiatrist spotted that I held my right arm at an unusual angle, and referred me to the Dublin Neurological Institute suffering from slowness of movement”

2019 Review of the Year

Plea for Govt to step up and fight Christian persecution



Worldwide threat to missionaries set to worsen, religious warn



Bumper pilgrimage year for Knock Shrine

Call to honour Church's key role in fight for independence

Irish missionaries decry deadly cathedral bombing

JANUARY

Church in Chains, a charity dedicated to action in support of persecuted Christians worldwide, called for the Irish Government to take more "concrete steps" toward action against this persecution. The Foreign Office estimated that around 215 million Christians saw discrimination and violence in 2018 because of their faith.

Missionaries across Ireland predicted the numbers of religious people facing persecution for spreading the Faith would increase. Fr Fachtna O'Driscoll stated that "the majority of cases are because we are [...] leaders of the Christian community." Fr John Guiney SJ, Director of the Irish Jesuit Mission office, emphasised that Christians are called to stand for the Faith.

Knock Shrine reported an increase in pilgrims over the past year, supported by the historic visit of Pope Francis. Fr Richard Gibbons said he was hopeful growth will continue, and that the shrine would soon be introducing "a host of different programs".

As politicians met for a historic joint sitting to mark the centenary of the first Dáil, UCC historian and historical consultant to the Oireachtas Gabriel Doherty insisted the influence of Catholic Social Teaching on the foundations of independent Ireland should not be forgotten. Mr Doherty attributed this avoidance to a general backlash against the Church.

Irish missionaries condemned the actions of an Islamist terrorist group's attack on a cathedral in the Philippines that killed 20 and injured over 100. There has been a long history of violence in the region.

Missionaries see hope in rise of Venezuelan people

Irish priests promise to stand by the people

Plea that abuse not be used as 'political football'

TD silent on 'pernicious' plight of Christians in Iran



Poverty follows people to the grave as families rely on handouts
€8m a year spent helping grieving relatives

FEBRUARY

Irish missionaries in Venezuela said they see fresh hope in the large peaceful protests against the administration of President Nicolás Maduro. Fr Vincent Screene told *The Irish Catholic* that those who had long been suspicious of Chavez and Maduro "have come down from the hills and are supporting the opposition leader."

Fianna Fáil TD Niall Collins avoided questions about whether he had raised the issues of Christian persecution in Iran when meeting with the country's ambassador. Iran ranked as one of the most 'severe' countries for religious persecution. National Director at Aid to the Church in Need, Michael Kinsella said that religious freedom is undermined in the country, leading to rampant persecution and discrimination.

Ahead of the summit on abuse at the Vatican, Archbishop Eamon Martin pushed against the idea that the abuse scandals could be attributed to priests who are gay, pointing out that the "danger is that the issue – the horrendous chapter of abuse in the Church – becomes some sort of ecclesiastical political football, which is batted about between different wings within the Church."

Rising funeral costs forced some families to choose between burying relatives close to home or saving money. More and more people relied on government handouts to cover funeral costs, with more than €8 million in grants given last year alone.



2019 Review of the Year

MARCH

Prominent Northern Catholics voiced their concerns that a 'no deal' Brexit would end in disaster and that uncertainty surrounding Britain's departure from the EU had renewed and increased pressure to push for a united Ireland. Many prominent Catholics in the North voiced their own thoughts in response to a letter from former Unionist leader David Trimble, who claimed fears in the North were "groundless".

Wicklow-born Sr Orla Treacy received the International Women of Courage Award for her work in South Sudan, saying it was "heartening" to bring recognition to missionary efforts. A landmark meeting between the President of the Mormon Church and Pope Francis overcame the historical differences between the two churches.

Plans to move priestly training from a traditional seminary environment to parishes were discussed by a committee as a part of a new programme for the formation of priests in Ireland. "The old seminary model served its purpose, but there's a definite need to look at other models now," said Bishop Fintan Monahan of Killaloe.

The Dublin diocese settled on an initiative to divert funds previously set for priestly training to fund "invaluable" lay pastoral parish workers. A prominent Christian rights charity urged Irish Muslims to advocate "far more loudly" for the rights of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who has been prevented from leaving Pakistan even after blasphemy charges were dropped against her.



Irish nun hopes award will help highlight 'heroic' work of religious

'Not in our name'

Northern Catholics speak out against 'no deal' Brexit



Radical shake-up could see priestly training move to parishes

Church collection may be diverted to aid pastoral worker funding fears

APRIL

Local priests warned of "horrendous" confusion for parishioners in the wake of an EU plan that would set a different time-zone on either side of the border. In his exhortation Christus Vivit, Pope Francis warned the Church to listen to its young people or risk becoming a museum.

Children's Minister Katherine Zappone was under fire from various youth care groups for her "blinkered" view on the reality of the plight of young people in State care. A Sinn Féin call for State takeover of Catholic schools was rejected. Theologian Dr John Murray said secularised schools would contribute to an "overall pattern" of an anti-Church mentality.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin warned the Society of St Vincent de Paul to not shy away from its Catholic identity, amidst concerns expressed by some that the organization risked drifting from its religious roots. Fermanagh-based Fr Joe McVeigh said that the North's Catholics would not be giving up their Irish identity after Brexit.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar was accused of ignoring Christian persecution after his relative silence in the wake of the Easter Sunday bombings in Sri Lanka, which killed 320 people. Bishops warned that Ireland was in urgent need of young people in vocational roles. "No young person will want to consider a vocation to priesthood [...] unless they see priests or sisters or married couples who are living happy lives in the Lord," said Archbishop Eamon Martin.

Confusion on the cards as parishes to be left in different time zones

Priests warn of 'horrendous' problems from EU clock change

Archbishop warns SVP must not neglect Catholic identity



Children's minister accused of failing homeless teenagers



Why the silence, Leo?

Taoiseach accused of ignoring Christian persecution



L'Arche founder Jean Vanier honoured after death in May.

Money drying up for Ireland's religious as care costs rise Latest figures show some congregations face 'unsustainable' future

Challenge politicians at church gates, urges bishop

Medjugorje trips get papal green light



'Do not legalise cannabis' Anti-drugs campaigner warns of the imminent danger and says that hash 'makes people paranoid'



Laity need strong voice at Government / bishops talks

MAY

Figures from various congregations raised concerns regarding financial stability of maintaining ministries. Fr Martin Kelly said, "what we're living off is shares and bank loans," emblematic of excess cost patterns within orders throughout Ireland. The Presentation Sisters kickstarted donation of Cork City land valued at €1.5 million to charity for the promotion social and environmental justice.

Bishop Kevin Doran encouraged parishioners to hold canvassing politicians accountable for their stances. The tragedies of L'Arche founder Jean Vanier's death and fire at Notre Dame Cathedral inspired a societal revival in recognition of the importance of God, faith, and the commonality of all humanity.

Pope Francis officially allowed for priests to lead pilgrimages to Medjugorje, with hopes to encourage Irish clergy and bishops to visit. The Pope's apostolic letter of safeguarding those vulnerable to abuse was met with mixed reaction.

Cuan Mhuire's Sr Corsilio condemned cannabis legalisation for reason that "cannabis is the most dangerous drug of all". The Department of Health denied plans of legalisation, meanwhile media reports were inundated with affirming rumors. Facebook faced backlash after mistakenly censoring a foetus in the womb as "graphic content".

Bishops confirmed plans to discuss Taiioseach's "new covenant" between faith groups and secular society at July 4 plenary discussions. Local elections in Navan, Cavan, and Wexford resulted in three new councilors of the Aontú appointed, giving the pro-life party solid foundation for next general election.

Tackling gangland 'show funerals' could lead to 'serious confrontation'



Future of small dioceses in doubt as Rome stalls bishops' appointments

Dioceses must be fit for mission, says Primate



Vatican green light sought for GAA-Church land deal

Clonliffe site may attract large bids

Parents are 'morally obliged' to vaccinate their babies

Only 74% of Irish trust medical vaccines

JUNE

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin denounced "show funerals" of criminals directly involved in the "traffic of evil." Such statement led to pastoral conflict surrounding consideration of the issue; Fr. Joe McDonald stressed the responsibility of priests to defend the sacredness of funeral mass, while Fr. Hugh Kavanagh described funerals being for grieving families, not venerating a gang leader.

Archdiocese of Dublin awaited approval from the Vatican to finalise the sale of Drumcondra land at Holy Cross seminary to the GAA. Jesuit schools expressed commitment to use €55 million sale of Milltown Park campus to help poor children, support bursary programmes promoting diversity within secondary schools, and ensure the "survival" of the Jesuit mission.

The future of Ireland's smallest dioceses came under increased threat upon Vatican policy of withholding bishop appointment to vacant dioceses. Three dioceses were projected to not receive bishops, and may eventually be amalgamated. Archbishop Eamon Martin expressed malcontent with prospect of Irish diocesan reconfiguration being performed in Rome. Eco-theologians criticised the Government's Climate Action Plan for its failure to propose concrete practicalities, incentives, and infrastructural changes.

Priests and theologians were disconcerted with polls indicating only 74% of Irish trust medical vaccines. Fr Allan O'Sullivan emphasised the moral obligation of parents to vaccinate their children. *The Irish Catholic* won international prize for "Best special supplement – one-time special issue" at the Catholic Press Awards, as well as placing in five other categories.

AS THE NEW YEAR COMES IN,

WHAT'S YOUR RESOLUTION?

HERE AT COLUMBA BOOKS,
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OFFER VALID UNTIL
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MANY AS YOU
WANT FOR ONLY

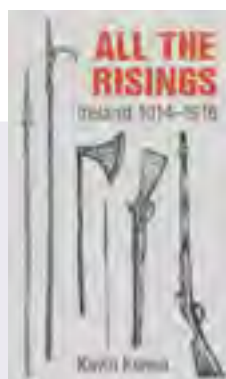
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FLAT RATE
P&P

FRESHEN UP ON HISTORY

Educational reading doesn't have to end once school is a distant memory. Brush up on Irish or religious history with the titles listed here. They're all interesting reads, perfect for an evening by the fire.

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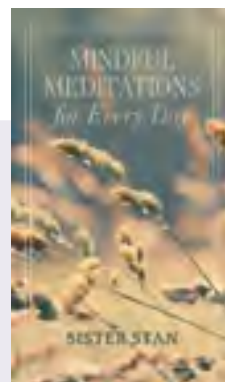


WAS €14.99 **€8.99**

SPEND MORE TIME RELAXING

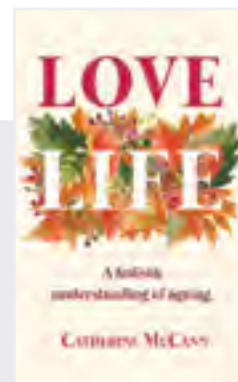
Today's hustle and bustle leave little time for moments of relaxation. Vow to make time for yourself this year. Curl up with a good book that will help you focus on bringing peace to your everyday life.

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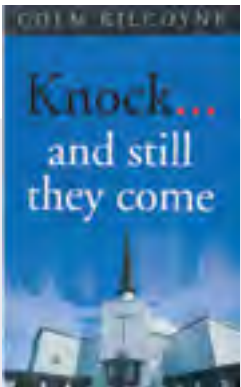
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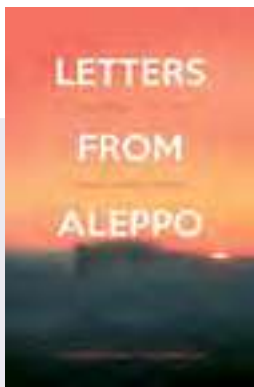
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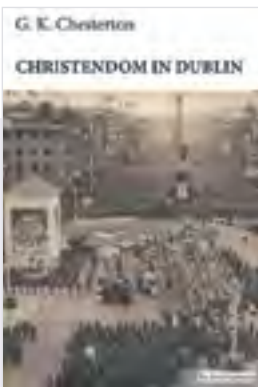
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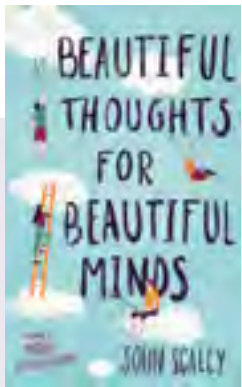
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2019 Review of the Year

JULY

Diocese of Cork and Ross reported a shortage of priests; Bishop Fintan Gavin emphasised that clergy and families have a duty to promote priesthood as “credible choice” for young men. Former Dublin seminarian falsely reported of being expelled from the Irish College in Rome for sexual liaison with another seminarian, finally received apology from the *Irish Times*, *Examiner*, and *Evening Echo* for their untrue articles.

Archbishop Eamon Martin revealed Ireland could be set to have 42 martyrs recognised by the Church in the near future. Church environmental lobbyists condemned the Government’s blocking of the Climate Emergency Bill. Pope Francis gave relics of St. Peter to the Orthodox Church.

Westminster voted to impose abortion and legalise same-sex marriage through the Northern Ireland Executive formation Bill if Stormont did not reconvene by October 21; Derry Bishop Donal McKeown called this an “inherently bad idea.” While July 12 celebrations in Northern Ireland typically provoke fear and violence, priest said this year was “quietest yet”.

Armagh’s Auxiliary Bishop Dr Michael Router said female laity should be given authority to participate in the decision-making process of the Church, as majority of worshippers, volunteers, and ministers in parishes are women. Trócaire worker commended the charity and the Church in their response to the Ebola crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Priesthood remains ‘credible choice’ says new Cork bishop

‘Lost’ Irish martyrs on the road to Rome for sainthood



Restore women to a ‘position of influence’ in the Church – new bishop

Northern Ireland abortion plan ‘very bad for democracy’ Bishop condemns Westminster MPs undermining devolution

AUGUST

Parishes take the “green” initiative to move away from fossil fuel heating systems to renewable energy sources. Croagh Patrick priest appealed to Catholics to push for mountain’s preservation as a pilgrimage site.

After discovering swastikas painted on the oratory and Holy Cross at Scrouthea Hill, Fr Michael Toomey of Tipperary warned of more attacks on Catholic churches. Psychiatric study led by Trinity College’s Professor Patricia Casey discovered that regular church attendance leads to better mental health.

Religious congregations named in the Ryan Report were found to have only contributed €356m – under half of what they volunteered to pay to the State’s cost of compensating former residents of institutions.

Pope’s adviser on evangelisation said shrines such as Knock and Lough Derg could lead to a re-birth of the Church in Ireland. Professor Eamonn Conway of Mary Immaculate College warned that emphasis on market forces is endangering theology’s place in Irish higher education.

Fr Ragheed Ganni, former student of the Irish College who was murdered by Islamist militant in Iraq in 2007, was set to be presented at the Vatican’s Congregation of the Causes of the Saints as one of the first formally-recognised martyrs of modern Iraq. Devotees of Little Nellie of Holy God were refused access to Cork grave by newly hired security.

Parishes taking the lead on becoming more green

Vandalism against churches set to increase warns priest



Numbers up at both Knock and Lough Derg Irish shrines point way forward, says Pope’s adviser

No vacancy in Dublin diocese – Papal Nuncio

Martyred Fr Ganni hailed as sainthood beckons





40th anniversary of St John Paul II's visit to Ireland Commemorated in September.

Call for parishes to dump 'distracting' Mass leaflets



**The voice of the people
must not be ignored**

Housing is a constitutional right says Bishop McGuckian

Galway parish priest calls for calm over direct provision row



SEPTEMBER

Fr Danny Murphy of the National Centre for Liturgy and Fr Tom Whelan of the Church's Council for Liturgy expressed disdain for disposable missalettes, stating they distance congregations and limit priests in their choices for Sunday Mass. Archbishop Michael Neary of Tuam formally acknowledged for the first time a healing at Knock, calling the 1989 incident medically inexplicable.

Over 20,000 people from all religious backgrounds silently protested outside Stormont Parliament Buildings in opposition to Westminster's intent to impose abortion after October 21; additionally, crowds marched in protest in the streets of Belfast. Distributors "frozen out" promoters of UnPlanned, making it difficult for filmgoers to view the pro-life film locally.

Fr Michael Connelly, parish priest of Oughterard, called for calm among the Galway community protesting the potential opening of a direct provisional centre; protests began a week prior after concerns arose surrounding the conversion of a hotel outside of town. Seamus Mulconry, head of the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association declared that free primary school education has largely become a myth in modern Ireland.

Bishop Alan McGuckian of Raphoe said housing is a constitutional right as fundamental as one's right to life or education in response to Dublin's worsening housing crisis. Trócaire questioned Taoiseach's Leo Varadkar for his contradictory approach to tackling climate change with opening a renovated Mayo runaway one day after the global climate strikes.

Govt caves in to pressure over Canonisation 'no show'

Ireland must be 'land of welcomes' for new foreign clergy – bishop



'Fear and anger' in border parishes as Brexit chaos nears



New purpose-built seminary on the cards for Maynooth Shake-up may see students leave historic home

OCTOBER

Priests in border parishes said that anxiety was growing in wake of an October Brexit deadline, as the British government appeared to have no credible plan to stop border chaos. Urney & Castelfin and Fermanagh priest expressed concerns over the fear, anger, and damage to infrastructure a hard border would present. Archbishop Eamonn Martin pleaded political representatives in the North to return to Stormont to prevent abortion legalisation.

Cardinal John Henry Newman was canonised on October 13. The Irish Government belatedly announced that it would send the Minister of Education to Rome for the canonisation following pressure from *The Irish Catholic* and lobbying diplomats and political circles calling for representation to be sent.

The Archbishop of Cashel and Emly said missionaries coming to Ireland is an increasing reality for the Church and called for Irish parishioners to welcome and support them in the same manner of foreign reception received by Irish priests. The Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest purchased a former Presbyterian church in Belfast with financial support from an anonymous donor.

Archbishop Eamon Martin disclosed radical plans proposing Maynooth seminary leaving the college's neogothic buildings in favour of a new purpose-built home on campus; he indicated the proposal as part of a larger plan seeking to transform the future of seminary formation and empower Ireland's laity. St Newman scholars criticised Taoiseach Leo Varadkar for improperly representing the saint's position on the human conscience.

2019 Review of the Year

NOVEMBER

Former President Mary McAleese misrepresented Pope John Paul II by giving the mistaken impression that he was a misogynist who justified rape in his consideration of female sexuality in *Love and Responsibility*; the quote McAleese cited was the Pope quoting a reductionist vision of human sexuality.

Bishop Dermot Farrell of Ossory criticised the idea of ordaining married men as a way to boost clerical numbers, saying that the vocations crisis and parishes facing service cuts is really a faith issue. Tipperary TD Mattie McGrath likened the move to produce hate crime legislation to new "secular blasphemy laws" which threaten freedom of speech. The Irish Catholic unpacked Mary McAleese's misinterpretation of Pope John Paul II's view on human sexuality after she denied having done so.

The Vatican was urged to step in to block plans by the Religious Sisters of Charity to facilitate the building of a new National Maternity Hospital where the government said abortions would take place. Aid to the Church in Need Ireland honoured The Week of Witness, where Christians supported martyrs persecuted for their Faith.

Experts found an increase of 2.1% from 2016 statistics reporting the percent of Irish people who pray every day, a hopeful statistic for the future of the Church. The body set up by the State to investigate claims of abuse in religious-run institutions admitted their report dramatically overestimated the number of children in the homes.

Calls for McAleese to admit error on John Paul II slur
Incoming Trinity Chancellor should 'check sources'



Vatican urged to block nuns' hospital transfer

Bishop warns married priests are not the answer to 'crisis of faith'

Radical plan will see Masses cut by 1/3



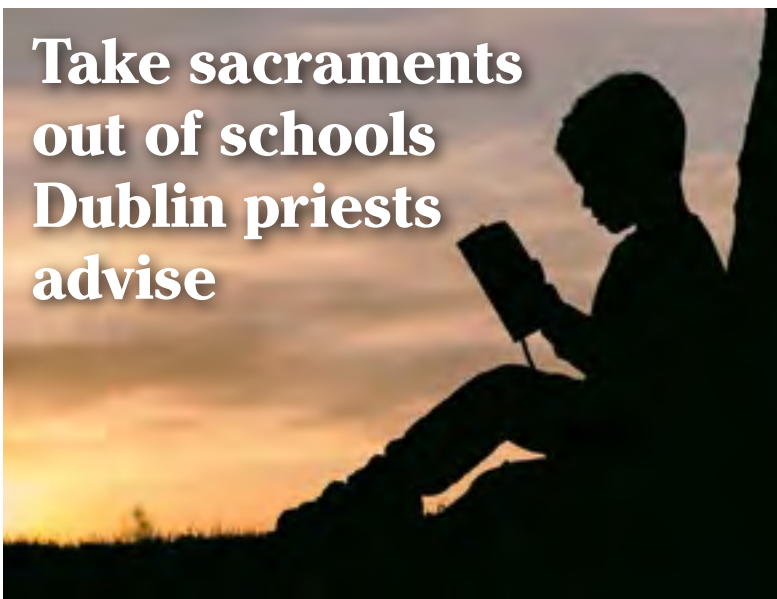
More praying, fewer staying but hope for Irish Church

DECEMBER

Dublin priests projected that preparing children for Communion and Confirmation will no longer mainly be conducted by Catholic schools, instead to be a parish-led programme; this would allow for children and parents to not be so isolated from one another in the preparation process, and for making the sacraments a more conscious choice rather than just following the norm and other students in the same year, said Fr John Gilligan. The Bishop of Ferns asserted that understanding, conversation and generosity would combat fear and racist ideologies instigated by politicians regarding refugees. London's Rev. Chris Lee went viral for his 60-second sermons, with over 100,000 Instagram followers and eight million views per video on YouTube.

The Pope's representative in Ireland, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Okolo confirmed that the process to streamline and merge Ireland's dioceses had already begun, despite opposition from some quarters; the amalgamation of Ireland's diocese was seen as desirable by many because it could streamline bureaucracy, reduce red tape and make the Church more fit for mission in an increasingly secularised Ireland, although the idea was deeply opposed by some senior bishops. Fr Ray Kelly, well-known singing priest and Britain's Got Talent contestant, made a surprise appearance on Dancing with the Stars; he hoped his appearance would delight his parishioners and show people that priests are ordinary, approachable people. Doras called for Mount Trenchard Direct Provision Centre in Limerick to close immediately due to unsuitable living conditions.

Take sacraments out of schools
Dublin priests advise

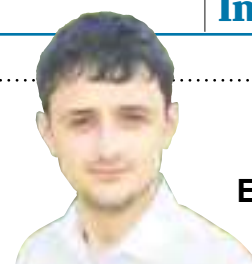


Fr Ray Kelly, well-known singing priest and Britain's Got Talent.

Merger of dioceses already underway – Papal Nuncio



World Report



Edited by Colm Fitzpatrick
colm@irishcatholic.ie

Pope drops pontifical secret to create more transparent Church

Pope Francis has abolished the obligation of secrecy for those who report having been sexually abused by a priest and for those who testify in a Church trial or process having to do with clerical sexual abuse.

"The person who files the report, the person who alleges to have been harmed and the witnesses shall not be bound by any obligation of silence with regard to matters involving the case," the Pope ordered in a new *Instruction On the Confidentiality of Legal Proceedings*, published last week.

The instruction was published by the Vatican along with changes to the already-updated *Sacramentorum Sanctitatis Tutela* Safeguarding the Sanctity of the Sacraments, the 2001 document issued by St John Paul II outlining procedures for the investigation and trial of any member of the clergy accused of sexually abusing a child or vulnerable adult or accused of acquiring, possessing or distributing images of child abuse.

Amendments

In the first of the amendments, Pope Francis changed the definition of images of child abuse. Previously the



subject was a person under the age of 14. The new description of the crime says: "The acquisition, possession or distribution by a cleric of pornographic images of minors under the age of 18, for purposes of sexual gratification, by whatever means or using whatever technology."

But the abolition of the pontifical secret over the entire Vatican process is the

greatest change made. And, not only are victims and witnesses free to discuss the case, the amended law specifies that the still-in-effect obligation of Vatican officials to maintain confidentiality "shall not prevent the fulfilment of the obligations laid down in all places by civil laws, including any reporting obligations, and the execution of enforceable requests

of civil judicial authorities".

Archbishop Charles Scicluna, adjunct secretary of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Vatican's chief abuse investigator, told *America Magazine* the new law makes it clear that "anybody who discloses misconduct or a crime and anybody who is impacted by the misconduct or the crime, and the witnesses, should never be subject to a vow or a promise of silence on the fact that they have reported".

New law

The new law, he said, explicitly states people's "moral duty" to cooperate with civil authorities in reporting and investigating the crime of abuse. "Moreover, there is an obligation not to bind people who disclose misconduct or crimes by any promise or vow of silence," he explained.

In a separate interview with *Vatican News*, Archbishop Scicluna described as an "epochal change" the Pope's decision to drop the "pontifical secret" - the highest level of confidentiality. "That means, of course, the question of transparency now is being implemented at the highest level," he said.

Catholic homilies shortest of all denominations, averaging 14 minutes

A new analysis from the Pew Research Centre shows that many Catholic priests are holding to Pope Francis' advice to keep their homilies on the shorter side, especially compared to Protestant denominations.

An analysis of nearly 50,000 sermons, given across a variety of Christian denominations during the months of April and May this year, found that the median length of a sermon was 37 minutes, but for Catholic priests, the average length was just 14 minutes.

Pew found that historically black Protestant sermons had the longest

median length of 54 minutes, while mainline Protestant sermons were an average of 25 minutes long, with evangelical churches falling in between at 39 minutes per sermon.

The analysis published last week was titled 'The Digital Pulpit: A Nationwide Analysis of Online Sermons'.

Services

Pew took data from 6,431 different Church websites to create the analysis. The Churches all posted all or part of their religious services online.

The analysis found that while

sermons at historically-black and evangelical churches typically contained roughly the same number of words, the sermons at the black churches were longer in length. The study's authors suggested that this was due to the inclusion of "musical interludes, pauses between sentences or call and response with people in the pews".

In analysing the content of the sermons, Pew found that 98% of Catholic homilies included the terms "God" and "Jesus". The only word that included in 100% of the Catholic sermons examined was "say".

Argentina updates abortion protocol for rape victims

The administration of Argentine president Alberto Fernández, who took office last week, has updated the country's abortion protocol to guarantee access to abortion to women who have been raped. Argentinian law allows abortion in cases when the mother's life or health is

in danger, or in cases of rape. However pro-choice activists maintain that it has not in fact been accessible because of hospitals' discretion and conscientious objection.

Health minister Gines Gonzalez Garcia stated that "the protocol will be used as a guide, especially in cases

where the law clearly allows for the interruption of pregnancies.

"We are respectful of conscientious objection but conscientious objection cannot be used as an institutional alibi for not complying with the law", Gonzalez added.

Fernández, of the Justi-

cialist Party, assumed office on December 10. He has also announced plans to decriminalise abortion.

A bill to legalise abortion through the first 14 weeks of gestation narrowly passed the Chamber of Deputies in 2018, but was rejected by the Senate.

IN BRIEF

French nuncio steps down amid misconduct allegation

● Pope Francis has accepted the resignation of Archbishop Luigi Ventura, the nuncio to France, who has been under investigation for sexual misconduct in France and in Canada. Announcing the archbishop's retirement on December 17, the Vatican provided no reason why he stepped down.

A statement released by the nunciature in Paris said Pope Francis accepted the resignation "for reasons of age". Archbishop Ventura turned 75, the age at which bishops must offer their resignations, on December 9.

A French judicial official confirmed in February that the prosecutor's office in Paris had opened an investigation into allegation of "sexual aggression" by Archbishop Ventura.

Religious must be vocal about life issues – cardinal

● A priest must say clearly to a person opting for assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia that he is committing a grave sin, a Dutch cardinal has said.

For the same reason, a priest cannot be present when voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide is performed. This might imply that the priest has no problems with the decision or even that "these morally illicit acts are not such in some circumstances according to the teaching of the Church", Cardinal Willelm Eijk, Archbishop of Utrecht and an expert on euthanasia issues, said.

A medical doctor before his vocation, Eijk dedicated his doctorate dissertation in the mid-1980s to the euthanasia law. He leads a flock located in one of the countries with the most liberal euthanasia bill in the world.

US prelates praise new farm workforce bill

● The US bishops have praised the passage of the Farm Workforce Modernisation Act of 2019, which creates a new status for migrant agricultural workers and enacts changes to the temporary worker program.

The bill passed the House of Representatives with bipartisan support. The bill now moves to the Senate.

"The Farm Workforce Modernisation Act was written in an effort to

make a better system for both the farmer and the farmworkers and to create more effective and humane agriculture industry," said Archbishop Paul Coakley of Oklahoma City in a statement.

"The Catholic Church has long recognised the dignity of work of both citizen and immigrant farmworkers and growers alike and welcome changes in the law to help ensure greater protections," he added.

Catholic campaigners voice concerns over stunted talks

● Catholic campaigners have voiced frustration over a lack of progress at United Nations climate talks in Spain, but vowed to step up demands for firmer international action.

"It's disappointing there's still a huge gap between what people on the streets are demanding and how governments are acting," said Chiara Martinelli, senior adviser to CIDSE, a network of 17 Catholic development agencies in Europe and North America.

"We all arrived here with such hope and energy, encouraged by the great youth mobilisation in recent months, but found everyone was just negotiating for their own interests. It's not encouraging to see the obstacles presented by big players such as the U.S., China, Australia and Japan."

Aid agencies struggling to support Venezuelan refugees

● While reports indicate that the migration of Venezuelan refugees into Brazil and Colombia has eased since the first half of 2019, aid workers in border communities said the influx of people has not slowed appreciably.

"Approximately 500 Venezuelans cross the border on a daily basis," said Heli Mansur, who oversees six shelters in Brazil's northern Roraima state for AVSI, an international aid and development agency.

Jesus set no store by personal comfort zones



Homelessness causes terrible trauma to any family but it is hurting children the most, writes **Sr Stanislaus Kennedy**

We can all take home for granted a lot of the time. But deep down we all know what it means. Our home is the foundation stone of our personal and family life. It is where we can relax after a long day. It's where we belong and feel safe, especially during Christmas.

The shocking truth of this homeless crisis is that three families will lose their home in Ireland every day. It is truly appalling and there's now a record total of 10,514 people homeless. Recent figures also show that 12% of children in families currently supported by Focus Ireland's family services were born into homelessness. I have never seen it this bad and to think children will be homeless at Christmas is difficult to accept.

Being homeless causes terrible trauma to any family or individual but it is hurting children the most. We are seeing this through our own work supporting these families. Babies are living in tiny hotel rooms where they don't even have enough room to learn how to crawl properly.

Response

The Government's response has been that it takes time to end this crisis. These children don't have time. They are damaged every day while homeless. Focus Ireland does not stand on the side-lines, we make a difference. In partnership with the State and our supporters, we helped over 1,200 families to escape from homelessness and to secure a home in the last two years.

However, the sheer scale of the housing and homelessness crisis means that the number of people homeless continues to



rise despite this great work.

Families and individuals are losing their homes as they can't afford to pay the rent or the house is being sold or repossessed. They have been called 'The new homeless'. That is the people who become homeless for purely economic reasons.

Focus Ireland believes that as a country we have a duty to look after all our citizens, especially those who are most vulnerable. We must cherish all of our children equally and ensure that no child suffers from being homeless.

As individuals, we cannot change the world, but we can change ourselves – and that is how the world starts to get changed.

One way we can start to make a difference is to speak up for what is right and what is true. This takes courage.

“The current situation is that we have to raise over 40% of our annual budget through fundraising and donations to keep our services going”

It takes courage to disagree with government policies in a certain sort of polite company. It takes courage to stand up for

immigrants or people who are homeless at a certain type of party. It takes courage, but it is worth doing, because that is how we can gradually win over hearts and minds.

Christmas is about the birth of one who risked everything. Jesus set no store by personal comfort zones. He had no interest in status. He asked the hard questions and he stood up for the 'wrong' people.

Hard as it may be socially, there are great spiritual rewards for being willing to take up our responsibilities, for living with integrity and free of guises, for becoming the women and the men we are capable of being, spiritual adults, free.



You don't have to be a Christian to believe in these values or to want to help build community. I believe to do this we must reach out to others. A kind word, or a hand offering help, not only helps people who are lonely and in need, it also helps the person offering the help.

We work hard to do this as we continue to develop realistic policy solutions to help end homelessness. Focus Ireland also work through our services across the country so we are there when people need us the most. This amazing work is done in partnership with the State, as well as through kind support from our generous donors.

The current situation is that we have to raise over 40% of our annual budget through fundraising and donations to keep our services going.

This means we really need public support at Christmas now more than ever so we can be there when families and individuals need help the most. A total of 89 cents from every euro received is spent directly on work to combat and prevent homelessness.

People can donate at www.focusireland.ie or 1850 204 205.

Our work will continue with your kind support because this crisis must be ended.

Everyone deserves to have a place that they can call home.

📌 Sr Stanislaus Kennedy is Life President and Founder of Focus Ireland.

“I have never seen it this bad and to think children will be homeless at Christmas is difficult to accept. Being homeless causes terrible trauma to any family or individual but it is hurting children the most...”

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Letters

Letter of the week

We must all play a part in renewal

Dear Editor, David Quinn writes that it's up to individual people and parish communities to revive the Church in Ireland (IC 19/12/19) rather than the Pope – I think he's spot on.

It's true that Francis is probably one of the most popular Pontiffs among the secular public but this won't put people in the pews or evangelise them. Conversion and evangelisation can only happen when people have a personal encounter with Jesus Christ – and this almost always happens in a local community.

Of course, people have turned to the Faith by stumbling upon a papal encyclical but these stories are few

and far between. Most people find Christ in their local church or by being exposed to the Faith through a friend who they admire. If that's the case, parishes need to make a concerted effort to reach out to those in the community who don't attend Mass or see the faith as irrelevant.

Indeed, Mr Quinn rightly states: "An awful lot more has to be done on the youth front as well. It is very unlikely that your children or grandchildren will keep going to Mass unless some of their peers are doing so as well. In some parts of the country, there isn't a decent Christian youth group for miles around."

If you think Mass attendance numbers are low now, just wait three decades and at the rate we're going, the pews will be empty. Reading the Bible and going to church on Sunday doesn't happen by accident – parents pass the tradition onto their children and so on. If parents are no longer doing this, and if the older generation is the only demographic in church, then Mass attendance will eventually die out. We need a renewal in Ireland...and fast.

*Yours etc.,
Veronica O'Hagan,
Clontarf,
Dublin 3.*

Attire not relevant

Dear Editor, There's been plenty of discussion about US Bishop Joseph Strickland's call for men/boys and women/girls to wear more formal attire at Mass.

The argument goes that if you would wear a suit and tie or a dress on special occasions, then why not also do so on the most significant event ever: the Mass. It's here that Jesus becomes eminently present and is where we eat his body and drink his blood. Surely, we should be wearing our best items of clothing for it? Not so. I don't think God cares what we wear. Jesus wasn't interested in social or aesthetic prestige and was comfortable associating with the poor and the marginalised.

Are we to say that those who can't afford pristine clothing are in some way lacking in their spiritual life when they attend church? Wear what you want to Mass – your character should not be judged on the content of your wardrobe but on the content of your heart.

*Yours etc.,
Peter Mallon,
Tallaght,
Dublin 24.*



Dress for a sacred event

Dear Editor, A US bishop has come out saying that we should wear more appropriate clothing in Mass. In my own experience, I have seen people in church wearing cargo shorts and small vest tops. I personally think it's inappropriate.

You're not going to a party, you're going to a sacred event. God deserves our very best...and that includes what clothes we wear!

*Yours etc.,
Fiona Buckley,
Drogheda, Co. Louth.*

Best foot forward, Fr Ray

Dear Editor, I'm over the moon that Fr Ray Kelly will be appearing on RTÉ's *Dancing with the Stars*. The Irish Church has been receiving so much negative press, so it's nice to see a more positive story about clergy in Ireland. Understandably, many Catholics will be suspicious of a priest taking part in such a secular television show, but I think it highlights that clergy are normal people too who have their own hobbies and ambitions. At the very least, his appearance will get people talking in their homes about the Church and religion in general. Who knows, maybe someone might even be inspired by him and join the priesthood.

*Yours etc.,
Claire Mooney,
Newry,
Co. Down.*

Disappointment at delay

Dear Editor, It's upsetting to read that Archbishop Fulton Sheen's beatification has been postponed for an undesignated period of time (IC 12/12/19). The reason for the delay – speculation about his role in priests' assignments – made me raise an eyebrow though. The diocese of Peoria said that it's "important for the faithful to know that there has never been, nor is there now, an allegation against (Archbishop) Sheen involving the abuse of minor". One can only assume that the allegations made against the prelate involve his knowing of abuse by priests and not sufficiently responding to it. I hope this is not true.

*Yours etc.,
David Blackwell,
Ballinteer,
Dublin 16.*

It bodes ill if we can't welcome the stranger

Dear Editor, I began reading David Quinn's article on the 'Church' and 'asylum policy' (IC 05/12/19) with great interest, only to be completely dismayed by his assertion that we need to distinguish between "genuine asylum-seekers and those who are really economic migrants".

Is he not aware that Ireland has signed up to the ECHR (the European

convention on Human Rights), which establishes the human right of every migrant to move from their country of origin for protection, but also for economic or even educational reasons?

For this assertion to be made in a Catholic newspaper supposedly loyal to the Christian principles of universal love and justice for all, horrifies me as it feeds into an undercurrent of racism

which is unfortunately being voiced sometimes even in our society. This is a cancer which destroys societies from the inside. If we are unable to "welcome the stranger" (Matthew 26:39) who is also made in the image and likeness of God, then I fear for the future of our society.

*Yours etc.,
Maire Lawless,
Baltinglass, Co. Wicklow.*

facebook community

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

US Bishop Joseph Strickland says boys and men should wear ties at Mass, while girls and women should wear veils

I hate wearing ties and I don't wear them but he is absolutely right. We would wear them if we were going to an awards ceremony or dinner dance, fundraiser etc. Sure why would you wear one in the presence of our Lord. – **Daragh Harmon**

The laity dressing better for Mass would be helpful in restoring a sense of reverence, but it misses the point. It is the buffoonery in the sanctuary that has led Catholics to believe that what is taking place there isn't very important. The bishop needs to restore the form of liturgy in his diocese and then reverence will follow. – **William Broderick**

I can 'be' reverent at Mass in so many ways. Wearing a veil doesn't make anyone more holy. Perhaps those who are hypocrites. Being reverent before, during and especially after Mass, when we are called as Christians to love all. The car park after Mass can be like a blood bath, survival of the fittest. It has become so bad that I stay in the Church for 10 minutes until the crowd is gone. Judge not let ye be judged. A Christian it is not by his clothing or words but by his actions. – **Anne Teresa Doran**

Did Jesus ask such things of those who came to be in his presence? The good bishop would be better focusing on real problems and alleviating poverty rather than asking people to spend money on such trivia. – **Noel Wilson**

It might be 2019 but reverence never changes. Bare minimum you can do is dress nice. – **Matthew Findlay**

You wouldn't dress before a judge in court in casual so why would you do so for the king of kings? – **Zane Ketty**

If you would dress better for a job interview than to be in the presence of the Creator of the universe, there is a serious problem. – **Adam Corral**

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

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.

Family & Lifestyle

The Irish Catholic, December 26, 2019

Youth Space
Losing yourself in
the wisdom of Lewis

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What to do about the winter blues?



Many people look forward to the winter season where you can build snowmen, drink hot chocolate by the fire and cosy up with a Christmas movie. However, this idyllic image of these icy months isn't shared by everyone – most summer-lovers dread the thought of each passing day becoming colder and darker.

This, of course, is understandable. Winter doesn't come without it challenges: shorter days, dry skin, slippery roads and runny noses. Indeed, according to most online polls, winter is people's least favourite season.

While some are impervious to the effects of howling winds and bone-chilling nights, there is a large demographic who



Winter can put many of us into a state of despair, writes Colm Fitzpatrick

particularly struggle at this time of year.

Seasonal Affective Disorder – its acronym appropriately being titled SAD – is a mood disorder or type of depression that arises during particular seasons. Although it can occur at any time, most people experience it during the winter months when the temperature has significantly dropped and the sun is shining less.

This isn't a condition exclusive to people already suffering with a mental health problem; SAD also affects those who are relatively psychologically well throughout the rest of the year.

The symptoms of SAD differ from person to person, but according to the NHS, those suffering can experience:

- a persistent low mood
- a loss of pleasure or interest in normal everyday activities

- irritability
- feelings of despair, guilt and worthlessness
- feeling lethargic (lacking in energy) and sleepy during the day
- sleeping for longer than normal and finding it hard to get up in the morning
- craving carbohydrates and gaining weight

It's unclear why SAD develops – various theories have been presented although there is no overriding scientific consensus on the matter. A popular suggestion is that the lack of sunlight during winter can have a negative effect on the brain. This reduced exposure may, for example, produce higher levels of melatonin which makes the body sleepy, or alternatively decrease serotonin levels which are

associated with depression.

Another possible cause may be that your body clock becomes disrupted – we're all used to a daily routine but when days are shorter and darker, your body may get confused and act in an adverse way.

Regardless of what its exact cause is, the effects are very real and must be treated seriously.

There is a common stigma about SAD and depression in general which assumes that you can simply overcome it through willpower or by taking a few days off work. People underestimate how much of a grip these mental illnesses can take on your day-to-day life, and this kind of attitude only makes the sufferer feel more alienated.

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Family News

AND EVENTS

A MUSICAL NEW YEAR

Why not start your new year off with a bang... of a cymbal and the beat of a drum? Join the National Youth Orchestra of Ireland and Symphonic Waves conducted by Gearoid Grant and James Cavanagh for a New Year celebration at the Bailey Allen Hall, NUI Galway! NYOI works with the next generation of musicians (aged 12-18) on a full symphonic programme including works by Beethoven, and Schubert. Their mission is to inspire young Irish musicians through the study of challenging and exciting repertoire under the guidance of music professionals, encouraging performance of the highest standard on national and international platforms. The event takes place on January 4 at 6.30pm. Tickets are priced €20, €13 (concessions), €10 (children aged under-18) and will be available for purchase at the door. This will motivate all the music lovers in the house to pick up an instrument and start playing!

THE GREEN ELIXIR?

As cities become more industrialised, we risk losing an abundance of natural landscapes – but these green areas may be more important than previously thought.

According to a new study which appears in The Lancet Planetary Health, green urban spaces can actually help people live longer. The research team, using the available evidence from studies that had looked at the same group of individuals over a number of years, analysed the availability of green space and premature death due to all causes. The studies they reviewed covered more than 8 million people across the US, Canada, China, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Australia.

The meta-analysis revealed that for every 0.1 increment in vegetative score within 500 meters of a person's home, there was a 4% reduction in premature mortality.

This means that those who live in close proximity to green spaces like parks are forests are more likely to have a longer lifespan.

A FITBIT FUTURE

One of the most popular New Year resolutions is to eat healthier foods and exercise more – but the motivation to keep this up usually wanes after the first week. Without a particular goal in mind or an efficient way of recording your progress, you're more likely to fall back into old habits. Fitbit watches have become very popular in recent years and for all the right reasons. The smart device allows you to track activity, exercise, food, weight, sleep and more for real-time information about your day and night. Mobile tools will provide you with graphs and charts to help you understand how well you're doing and what to do to improve. Once you celebrate a milestone, you'll receive an achievement badge and this will only motivate you to keep going. If getting fitter is a goal you'd like to accomplish this year, consider picking up this nifty health gadget.



MAKING CHRISTMAS MESSAGE PRIORITY FOR CHILDREN



Our family often attend Mass in the Dominican Priory of St Eustace in Newbridge, Co.

Kildare. Following the example of St Dominic, the Dominicans seek to impart the truth to people who are living in a time of radically changed circumstances, an ancient Gospel truth that is forever fresh and relevant to their changing lives. Any parent, teacher or person who's working with children and young people know how challenging it can be to make this message the priority in their increasingly busy lives. It's no different during the season of Advent when the pace of activity gets more and more frenetic. Celebrating Mass in St Peter's Basilica on the first day of Advent, Pope Francis urged Catholics to "resist the dazzling lights of consumption which will shine everywhere this month".

“Fr Harris went on to explain that the hectic, practical preparations for Christmas are very different to the spiritual preparation we engage in as we await the coming of Jesus”

Preaching to Congolese immigrants, he talked about consumerism being a virus that attacks the very roots of faith as it makes people believe that life is all about what you have and own resulting in you forgetting about God. On December 1 in St Eustace's in Newbridge, the priest celebrating Mass, Fr John Harris, was imparting a related message. He recalled how the statue of Baby Jesus had been removed from the town crib during the lead up to Christmas last year. It was a deeply upsetting incident



A parent's perspective Maria Byrne

for many to hear the news that the crib had been vandalised and the statue of the infant Jesus smashed. Shocking as it was, I think the underlying message behind Fr John's words reminded us of how much worse it would be if Christ himself was taken out of Christmas.

Fr Harris went on to explain that the hectic, practical preparations for Christmas are very different to the spiritual preparation we engage in as we await the coming of Jesus. He was joking about how he had been to Confession recently and was wished a "Happy Christmas" by the other priest to which he replied that he was sure that he'd be back again before Christmas. I was thinking later of how, on several Christmas eves over the years, I was racing back from some shop or another in time to rush to the church for the last possible chance to bring the children to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I think I'm not the only parent who struggles to make sure that the goodies in the Christmas stockings are secondary to what we're doing to increase the spiritual good for our souls.

It can be like holding back the tide trying to keep alive the message that Advent is a time of waiting and conversion. Christmas party nights are getting earlier and earlier. My husband's Christmas work event was way back in November and my two eldest daughters got their first Christmas party invitations weeks ago.

To ensure that the season of Advent doesn't pass without any real focus on what's it's really all about, it's a good idea to have a few key plans in place to stay on track. It's never too late to start. One great suggestion is to log on to some of the online Advent calendars that contain great resources and ideas. I'm



using the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference interactive one that the children love as there's a little door to open every day leading into a selection of prayers, reflections, music and simple suggestions for various acts of kindness that can be performed each day.

In the midst of all the buying and selling, searching for gifts and celebrating, it's good to escape the hustle and bustle and head to the nearest church

to light a candle and say a few quiet prayers. Not only will it be a source of grace but it's also a haven of tranquillity. St Teresa of Calcutta described the time spent with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament as "the best time you will spend on earth". Advent is a great time to attend Mass more and to make a point of popping into a church or adoration chapel. Children of all ages enjoy lighting a candle and saying a little prayer to prepare for Baby Jesus. Visiting cribs in different churches and pointing out to children that Baby Jesus is not in the crib yet helps children to join in the watching and waiting. The shopping centres are packed the closer it gets Christmas, with many small children arriving in their droves to see Santa. I'd really recommend another less stressful excursion to visit the Moving Crib in St Martin's Apostolate, Dublin. On the go for nearly 63 years, it's a real favourite with young and old alike and has become somewhat of a tourist attraction as well. There are over 100 figures in the Crib arranged in 14 different scenes covering various episodes of the Old and New Testament. The figures themselves are about a metre high, moulded in papier-mache and dressed in miniature clothes.

Whatever we choose to do in the last weeks before Christmas and whatever gifts we buy, the best present of all is the gift of God's love for each one of us. Even if everything else doesn't end up going as smoothly as we'd hoped, all that really matters is that God is with us. St Therese of Lisieux, summed it up well: "A God who became so small could only be mercy and love." What else do we need?

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According to Mental Health Ireland, one in four people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their life, which is worsened by social stigma and discrimination.

“Many people’s problems are made worse by the stigma and discrimination they experience – from society, but also from families, friends and employers.

“Nearly nine out of 10 people with mental health problems say that stigma and discrimination have a negative effect on their lives.”

“A common treatment of SAD is light therapy where you sit or work near a device called a light therapy box”

In an environment where this disorder is underplayed or mocked, those struggling with it will feel even more excluded and unwell. Sufferers of SAD don’t just experience physiological changes or chemical imbalances in the brain – its impact is also social. A partner may wonder why their significant other is becoming distant and irate or a close friend might be confused about why one of their outgoing buddies hasn’t spoken to them in a while. When the days feel grey and empty, the prospect of speaking or socialising with others can seem like an arduous affair. Those struggling might isolate themselves from the outside world resulting in cutting off loved ones.

It can be frightening to develop this disorder and not know where to turn. Luckily, there are ways to manage SAD and while these

treatments might not eradicate it completely they will improve your mood and overall quality of life.

A common treatment of SAD is light therapy where you sit or work near a device called a light therapy box. The box illuminates a light that mimics natural sunlight, thereby reducing the negative effects associated with truncated exposure to light during winter. The sessions can be done at home using a rented light box so it’s certainly worth considering.

If this isn’t appealing, eating healthily and taking exercise more seriously can have formative impact on your mood. This advice is usually fobbed off as an overused cliché, but numerous studies have shown the benefits that physical activity can have on your body and mind.

A recent study published in the American Journal of Psychiatry which looked at samples worldwide suggested that exercise had a protective effect on the risk of developing depression.

The researchers said: “Our results indicate that higher levels of physical activity offer a protective effect on



future development of depression for people of all ages (youths, working-age adults, elderly persons) and this finding is robust across geographical regions around the world.” It can be difficult to muster up the courage to put on some active gear and begin running or weight-lifting, so try exercising with a friend. You’ll support one another and be more likely to stick with it.

“It’s normal to feel morose during winter, but if you’re finding it difficult to sleep or experiencing extreme feelings of despair, you might be experiencing SAD”

Another less strenuous activity that the Irish are well-accustomed to is having a cup of tea and a chat. Just talking to a friend or relative can ease the emotional burden sufferers are facing and make the world seem like a friendly place again. If experiencing SAD become too much of a psychological toil and is having a drastic impact on your everyday life, it’s recommended that you speak to a counsellor who can offer you more clinical advice about your circumstances in the hope of finding a lasting solution.

It’s normal to feel morose during winter, but if you’re finding it difficult to sleep or experiencing extreme feelings of despair, you might be experiencing SAD. If that’s the case, seek out the right help to ensure you make the most of the season and all it has to offer.

Dad’s Diary

Rory Fitzgerald



Christmas looms large in children’s minds. It is for them a time when the mundane is transformed into the glittering and magical. The Christmas lights strewn across the land are a collective rebellion against the darkness in these, the very darkest days of the year.

Since the end of November, during every night-time car journey, the kids have been playing a game of counting the Christmas lights. They even have a system, where they are divided into teams one responsible for each side of the road. The results are added up and announced in triumphant terms at journey’s end. “Dad, there were 274 sets of Christmas lights!” Statistical change is observed on repeat journeys, as Christmas approaches and the lights multiply, “Dad, dad there were only 274 last week, now there’s 396!”

I can remember my heart lifting as a child, as I gazed in awe at the Christmas lights, which has transformed the normally grey and dreary streets of 1980s Cork into places of utter enchantment.

The other great brightening that happens at Christmas is in people’s moods. Infectious Christmas cheer can be found in the shops and in the schoolyard. Children are pleased to find their parents unusually prone to saying “yes” to their requests for things such as “just one more Quality Street”. The normal strictures around treats and toys dissolve before the dictum, “Well, I suppose it is Christmas, after all”.

Christmas has become overwhelmingly centred on children, and it’s all the better for it. For it is only through their eyes that we can experience again the magic which our adult hearts yearn to recall from Christmases past. Only their innocence and enthusiasm can keep the spark of Christmas spirit alive.

Yet the glitz and presents can amount to an empty show, descending into materialism and wanton consumption, unless we take the time amid the rush to remember, in our own way, the coming of light into the world which Christmas truly

represents. All the lights, the decorations and the open-hearted giving can serve as reminders of the deeper meaning of Christmas, if we let them.

Amid the festive fun, there is sadness at Christmas too. At Christmas, we think of loved ones long gone. As children, we used to visit my grandparent’s graves each



Christmas Eve. The absence of those we loved evokes greater pain at Christmas time. Those who are short of money, or who live in poverty, are put under greater strain by the demands Christmas brings. To remind the kids of this, I’ve always encouraged the children do some giving at Christmas, even if it’s just something small.

There is time for reflection at Christmas. Amid the bustle of the Christmas shopping, I always bring the kids into a church for a moment of calm, to light a candle, and to give thanks. For we have much to be thankful for. While there is much talk about giving at Christmas, there is less about receiving - which is a skill in itself.

We all take too much for granted. We can remedy this by taking time to be deeply grateful for each person in our lives li, and each aspect of our lives that brings us joy. By carefully counting such things with gratitude, we can remind ourselves of the real riches we possess. This Christmas, I’m going to try to count such blessings - with the methodical joy with which the kids count the Christmas lights as we drive along.

Losing yourself in the wisdom of Lewis

Youth Space



Books can open up our hearts and minds to God, writes **Matthias Conroy**

I had never attended a book club when I heard about the opening meeting of a new reading group for the writings of C.S. Lewis which would be operating out of St Saviour's Priory on Dominick Street, led by Fr Conor McDonough OP (the group that would later come to be known as 'the Reepicheeps', after the swash-buckling mouse from *The Chronicles of Narnia*). I was going through a rather serious bout of reader's block at the time; I had picked up several volumes over the last months and even years, but it had been far too long since I had actually made it from start to finish. However, almost from my first hearing about it, I knew that I wanted to give attending this group a try. Although I had only read, in totality, one of Lewis's volumes in the past, I had heard so much praise and received so many recommendations for his work that I was certainly intending to expand my knowledge at some point. Going into the first meeting I wasn't worried about the group itself; I knew a number of the attendees previously, and anyone who has witnessed Fr Conor's preaching or perused his eclectic and insightful Facebook feed, as I had, would have no doubts about his capabilities. Rather, my worry going into that



first meeting in January of this year was that I wouldn't be able to keep up with the pace. I simply thought that the monthly deadlines would be too demanding for me in my current situation.

Now, skipping forward half a year or so, I haven't missed a meeting or failed to finish a single book (even if that has required some last-minute catch-up, frequently into the late hours of the night before the meeting itself!). Why was this such a success for me, you might ask? I'll humbly suggest three reasons:

The first, and perhaps least glamorous, of the reasons, is that the pressure of an external deadline is a powerful motivator for getting the reading done. Fr Conor stressed in the first meeting

that one should treat finishing the books and coming regularly to the meetings as an act of charity for the other members of the group, and this is something I've tried to take to heart.

Secondly, the writings of Lewis are exceptionally accessible and succinct, he rarely will say in a thousand pages what he could in two hundred. His writing style is engaging, insightful, hopeful, even innocent. It has been mentioned at the group in the past that after reading Lewis one almost has a bemused bewilderment as to why you (or indeed anyone else) would ever do something you knew to be wrong or sinful. This is largely because Lewis has a profound sense of the Good, and he has expertly woven this into his stories and

apologetics, which we alternate between each month.

Thirdly, it is, as Uncle Andrew from the Narnia series might describe it, "a dem fine group of people". We hail from all over Ireland and further beyond, comprised of a variety of academic and professional disciplines, but all "caring about the same truth" as Lewis (borrowing from the thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson) says describing friendship in *The Four Loves*. The truth being, of course, Christianity. As a result of this, we are all able to contribute to the discussion, safe in the knowledge that we come from a shared tradition of thought and faith. This, of course, comes at the risk of becoming, as Lewis warns against in the same section of *The*

Four Loves, a "mutual admiration society", but the group's emphasis on humility goes a long way in dispelling the chance of falling into such a silly trap.

This emphasis is particularly important for a group of people who may have very wide-ranging levels of comfort with voicing their opinion. For those of us who find it all too easy to blab on about our own insights, thoughts and experience, it is a welcome reminder that every single person in the group has something to contribute and in most cases that is how it turns out as well. I have had my view of a number of things in the books positively changed and developed by the group, from Edmund's character arc in Narnia; to the manner in which one should react to the vision presented in our most recent book, *The Screwtape Letters*; to the very nature of allegory in Christian storytelling.

In *The Four Loves*, Lewis describes the feeling that can arise when one truly experiences the joys of Philia, or the Love of Friendship, "In a perfect Friendship this Appreciative Love is, I think often so great and so firmly based that each member of the circle feels, in his secret heart humbled before all the rest. Sometimes he wonders what he is doing there among his betters. He is lucky beyond desert to be in such company. Especially when the whole group is together, each bringing out all that is best, wisest, or funniest in all the others. Those are the golden sessions...Life - natural life - has no better gift to give. Who could have deserved it?" This is, I think, a good summing up of the mission of the Reepicheeps. May Almighty God help us in achieving it!



Green Fingers

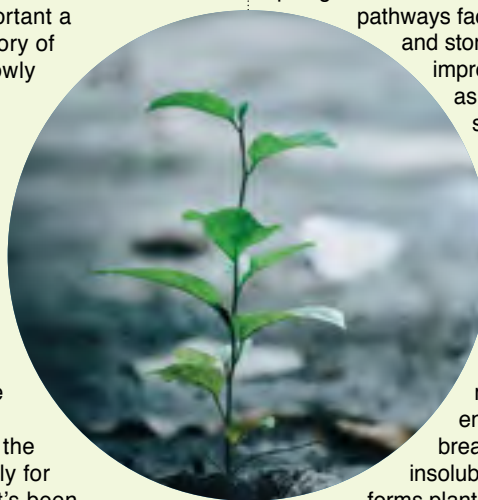
Paul Gargan

Power of earthworms can restore soil's health

"It may be doubted whether there are many other animals which have played so important a part in the history of the world as have these lowly organised creatures", said Charles Darwin.

Darwin wrote this in 1881, he spent over 40 years studying them. As gardeners we should think more about them, what they do for us and more importantly what we can do for them.

Earthworms are a sign of a healthy soul. The more earthworms in your soil, the healthier it is and the more nutritious it is not only for them but for your plants. It's been estimated there could be as many as 1 million earthworms per acre in healthy soils.



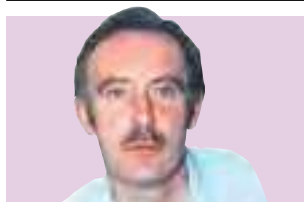
They aerate the soil, acting as sub-surface ploughs. Their borrows become tubular pathways facilitating the movement and storage of water, leading to improved drainage as well as water retention in the soil. They also enable the downward passage of roots. As earthworms travel through the soil, they excrete coelomic fluid which helps them move. It is also rich in glycoproteins, which encourages the growth of bacteria, fungi and soil microbes. These are the enablers of plant growth, breaking down soluble and insoluble organic matter into forms plants can use. Some convert compounds into nitrogen that plants use to build up proteins. They produce enzymes that

catalyse the mineralisation of phosphorous which is important for plant growth.

Science is only beginning to understand the universe of soil organisms, the services they perform and how they interact with each other and effect plant life above them. Elaine Ingham, one of the world's leading microbiologists has said "modern farming has reduced soil to 'dirt' - a sterile medium in which plants struggle to grow without artificial fertilisers. It has a self-perpetuating cycle of destruction and chemical dependence. Without soil organisms and soil structure to retain them water and soil nutrients leach away and the soil compacts.

To encourage earthworms in your soil, disturb it as little as possible, don't be too tidy in your beds, mulch with homemade garden compost and leaf mould and most important of all stop using chemicals or at least only us as a last resort. You don't need them, your plants don't and your soil organisms definitely don't need them.

2019 on the big screen



2019 moves in review
Aubrey Malone

Uplifting films of the year included **Breakthrough**, which dealt with the power of prayer to move mountains. Chrissie Metz is traumatised by the death of her 14 year old son and prays fervently for him to be returned to life.

The Last of Us told the story of missionary Graham Staines. He died in India in 1999 while teaching a group of children infected with leprosy. Another missionary, John Groberg, was featured in **The Other Side of Heaven 2**. It was set in Tonga in the 1960s. His faith is threatened when his son is born with a serious illness. The theme of death threatening faith also underpinned *Let Go and Let God*.

The year had many documentaries. **Pavarotti** was an affectionate tribute to the much-loved tenor which showed he had feet of clay as well as a voice like gold. Asif Kapadia continued the fine work he did in *Senna* with **Diego Maradona**. **Marianne and Leonard**, dealing with Leonard Cohen's love affair with Marianne Ihlen, captured the freewheeling era of the 60s, a time when everyone seemed to be living for the moment.

Gross invasion

Some films didn't work for me. I would have liked **Late Night** more if it didn't like itself so much. I strongly objected to Vincent Lambe's award-nominated film **Detainment** about murdered toddler Jamie Bulger. It was made without consulting his family. The gross invasion of privacy was bad enough. Making it so soon after Jon Venables' repeated violations of his parole conditions – Venables was one of Bulger's killers – compounded the agony. The film was both opportunistic and exploitative.

Liam Neeson raised a lot of hackles with his ill-chosen words about his reaction to a friend's rape some years ago. It killed off any chances of his thriller **Cold Pursuit** doing any business at the box office. His reaction was meant to indicate loyalty to her but it came across as strongly racist. I thought he was going to be sent to movie 'Coventry'



Joaquin Phoenix (above right) was excellent in *Joker* while Saoirse Ronan (above) starred in *Mary Queen of Scots*. Left, a scene from the well received *If Beale Street Could Talk*, another hit of the year on the big screen.

for life but that wasn't the case. Unlike people like Kevin Spacey, Charlie Rose and Harvey Weinstein, he received a stay of execution from the #metoo movement.

As a corollary to the gaffe, people of colour were featured in two quality films of the year: **Green Book** and the wonderful **If Beale Street Could Talk**.

Politics was the subject matter of **Vice**, a brilliant biopic of former vice-president Dick Cheney. **The Front Runner** dealt with presidential hopeful Gary Hart, whose career was derailed by a sex scandal.

Roma was a big hit at the Oscars. Glenn Close once again missed out on a statuette. She was odds-on for **The**

Wife but there seems to be a jinx on her there.

Another veteran, Clint Eastwood, showed he just goes on and on. Well into his 80s now, he's still churning out engrossing films like **The Mule**. Another veteran, Robert Redford, put the finishing touches to a lengthy career with **The Old Man & the Gun**. It was pedestrian in parts but

the perfect way to hang up his boots. 'The Sundance Kid' finally bowed out after half a century treading the boards.

Films about real life musicians dominated the year: **Yesterday**, **Blinded by the Light**, **Bohemian Rhapsody**, **A Star is Born**, **Rocketman**. Renee Zellweger gave a sensational performance as Judy Garland in **Judy**, capturing all her wounded pride as she tried to whistle through the graveyard in the autumn of her career. Biopics of people from other disciplines included **At Eternity's Gate** (Van Gogh) and **Tolkien**, which dealt with the famous Catholic writer as a young man.

Joaquin Phoenix excelled himself in **Joker**, a role that always seems to bring out the best in actors. It was a landmark one for Jack Nicholson as it was for Heath Ledger, who tragically died not too long after **The Dark Knight**.

Blockbusters like **Captain Marvel** took the big money in. Martin Scorsese's **The Irishman** paired Robert de Niro and Al Pacino. They appeared only once before, in **Heat**.

“Glenn Close once again missed out on a statuette. She was odds-on but there seems to be a jinx on her there”

Melissa McCarthy proved she could 'do' serious drama with **Can You Ever Forgive Me?** She was more trivial in **The Kitchen**.

Steve Coogan and John C. Reilly revived memories of Laurel and Hardy in **Stan & Ollie**. Those of us of a certain age also enjoyed other 'retro' films like **Mary Poppins Returns**. Sequels like **Creed II** capitalised on the goodwill factor justifiably awarded to

their predecessors.

Downton Abbey finally made it to the screen but divided opinion. A sequel is now in the offing. Saoirse Ronan continued showing us her chameleon qualities with **Mary Queen of Scots** but the film itself wasn't much to write home about. Felicity Jones gave an unbelievable performance in **The Aeronaunts**.

The revolting murderer Ted Bundy was the subject of **Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile**, the words his sentencing judge used about him at his trial. Zac Efron was credible enough to make us believe Bundy could charm his way into dozens of young women's lives before unleashing the monster that was inside him upon them.

Quentin Tarantino gave a resounding valentine to Tinseltown in **Once Upon a Time in Hollywood**, a film that reimagined the Manson murders. Leonardo DiCaprio gave a wonderful performance but the film itself seemed conflicted. If it set out to celebrate Sharon Tate's life instead of her death, as it claimed, why was there so much gore in it?

Peter Fonda died in August. He'd always lived in the shadow of his father, Henry. Most obituaries mentioned **Easy Rider**, which had its 50th anniversary during the year. He lived in the shadow of that too.

There was animation aplenty, **The Lego Movie 2**, **Frozen 2**, **The Lion King**, **Toy Story 4** and **Spider-man: Into the Spider-Verse**.

I think I counted six films that came our way during the year commemorating the anniversary of the first moon landing. Was this overkill? I don't think so. We should never forget the near-miraculous feelings it gave to those of us lucky enough to see it live.



Downton Abbey provided divided opinion.

A year of more Netflix progress

As I write this review every year the more recent programmes tend to have unfair advantage.

And so **The Crown** (Netflix) gets first mention this year. I reviewed two particularly good episodes from Season 3 (November) in a recent column – the ones that focused on the Aberfan disaster and Sr Alice, Prince Philip's mother and later a nun. Faith themes were picked up again in Episode 7, 'Moondust' which explored Philip's religious life in more detail, and tied his faith development into his obsession with the 1969 moon landings.

His private audience with his moon walking heroes (different planets, almost literally!) contrasted with his heartfelt opening of heart and mind with a group of troubled clergymen in a retreat house he supported. Rarely has religion been treated so seriously and maturely in a TV drama.

Another drama that featured religion quite regularly was **The Kids Are Alright** (RTÉ 2) where an adult narrator recalled events from his past, growing up in a Catholic family in the US in the 1970's. I thoroughly enjoyed it and found it funny and touching. It helped that it didn't have a laugh track, and that all the characters were so believable, if exaggerated. Was it looking back fondly or was it more jaundiced?

“Of all the regular programmes *Leap of Faith* (RTÉ Radio 1) with Michael Comyn continues to maintain a high standard”

There were plenty of jibes at the Church and some predictable Catholic stereotypes, but perhaps of the type that comes from people who are sticking to the faith despite the flaws of the flock.

Also making an impression on the drama front, last January, was a new BBC production of **Les Misérables** where religion was also treated positively and themes of justice, forgiveness and redemption were prominent, though there was some brief but unnecessary 'adult' content.

Dark Money impressed in July – a story about the abuse



TV & Radio Review 2019
Brendan O'Regan

of a child actor in Hollywood and the destructive consequences for the child and his family.

Also in January RTÉ's War of Independence drama **Resistance** was better than I expected, despite some lazy stereotyping of nuns.

A new series of **Derry Girls** (Channel 4) started in March, and while it was undeniably funny, it was marred by gratuitous foul language and over-the-top irreverence. One scene became iconic – where the priest on a cross-community youth retreat tried to get the youngsters to outline what Catholics and Protestants had in common, but all they could come up with were differences.

Good Omens (Amazon Prime Video) was a curious adaptation of a book by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman, with uneasily comical struggles between the forces of good and evil, with humanity seen as caught in the middle. It was intriguing though it could have been more religiously literate.

RTÉ featured several worthwhile documentaries during the year. In January the one-off documentary **Pope Francis in Ireland – Behind the Scenes** was a useful recap on the previous summer's papal visit.

In March **Guns and Roses** was an excellent documentary about Fr Patrick Peyton, the Irish 'Rosary Priest' who enlisted the help of various Hollywood celebrities – different times!

Divorcing God, in June, was comedian Oliver Callan's look at the Church in Ireland, interesting, not hostile, but could have been more unpredictable and incisive.

In **Father Delaney: Silent Witness** (RTÉ 1, November), Joe Duffy presented a fascinating documentary about the cine films of Irish life taken by Fr Jack Delaney, from the 1930s on. Even better, shown in early November, was his film **Children of the Troubles**, a sad and moving

programme about the children killed during the 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

BBC had its share of fine documentaries – in March BBC2 Northern Ireland had a very impressive series **Oil-threacht**, about young people taking on the Lough Derg pilgrimage – their faith and enthusiasm was inspiring.

In April, **Pilgrimage: Road to Rome** (BBC2) had various celebrities walking to Rome and reflecting on their faith or lack of it. Though irritating at times there were inspiring moments and a moving meeting with Pope Francis at the end.

Fern Britton's **Holy Land Journey** followed a similar path and gave insights into modern Jerusalem.

Our Dementia Choir, with actress Vicky McClure was an emotional exploration of the power of music.

In September, **Inside the Vatican** on BBC2 was an impressive, very human and insightful look behind the scenes of day to day life in the Vatican, including Pope Francis' visit to Ireland.

Eugenics: Science's Greatest Scandal (BBC4) was one of October's scariest programmes, tracing the history of eugenics and showing how the arrogant underlying attitudes are still very much alive today.

Legislation

January saw the introduction of liberal abortion legislation into Ireland. The programmes that covered it then and still have largely failed to ask any hard questions of those who promote this unjust and cruel practice.

Pro-life voices are sidelined as pro-choicers con-



RTÉ's *Resistance* – “better than expected”.



A scene from *The Crown* (Netflix).



Saoirse Jackson stars in *Derry Girls* (Channel 4).

tinue to get a free pass with easy interviews and if they are pushed by interviewers it's usually politicians being pressed on why they aren't introducing more liberal laws.

By May we were hearing about the 'abortion of a baby that did not have a fatal abnormality' on **Today With Seán O'Rourke** (RTÉ Radio 1). The media outrage ranged from muted to non-existent.

In July, **Panorama** (BBC1) did a special on the abortion controversy in the US and by usual standards it was reasonably balanced, though generally on BBC1 find interviewers favouring the pro-choice side. No mainstream debate I heard

during the UK General Election challenged the parties on their abortion policies which were very extreme in some cases.

In August, a new **Frontline** documentary *The Abortion Divide* on PBS America was reasonably fair, food for thought for the viewer without strong opinions either way.

The excesses of political correctness became more pervasive during the year, though Prime Time (RTÉ) did have a reasonably balanced programme on transgenderism in January, while **Newsnight** (BBC) had a robust item in November that asked some hard questions about the issue and highlighted those who de-transition.

Of all the regular programmes **Leap of Faith** (RTÉ Radio 1) with Michael Comyn continues to maintain a high standard, a programme that promotes reflective discussions and builds bridges in a world becoming more polarised and fractious. I particularly remember a programme last January that highlighted the widespread persecution of Christians around the world, and also flagged to persecution of Muslims in China, nearly a year before this became hot news after a **Panorama** (BBC) documentary in November.

In February, Comyn featured a reflective discussion on the difficult issue of clerical child abuse, there was an interesting special for St Patrick's Day and a considered coverage of the massacre of Christians in Sri Lanka in April. More recently I enjoyed his interview with religious affairs journalists Anne Thompson and Inés San Martín.

Life and Soul (RTÉ1 and Radio 1 Extra), launched in July, was an excellent, though occasional, addition to RTÉ's Sunday morning line up. It replaces **Sunday Service**

though, I'd prefer if it was in addition. That being said it is imaginative and innovative, with a mixture of personal stories of faith, prayers and some fine contemporary Christian music.

Insights

Songs of Praise (BBC) continued its long run and among the episodes I liked were specials on St Valentine's Day, St Mary's University in Twickenham and Lourdes. **Sunday Sequence** (BBC Radio Ulster) continued to be one of the best religious programmes on radio, with unique insights into the religious life of Northern Ireland and beyond, with frequent contributions from *Irish Catholic* Managing Editor Michael Kelly.

He was particularly insightful discussing the canonisation of John Henry Newman in October. **The Big Questions** and **Sunday Morning Live** (both BBC1) alternated, maintaining high standards on Sunday mornings, with quite a diverse range of opinions.

After initially being doubtful, the regular slot where a comedian and one other reviewed the religious stories of the week grew on me and now I'll miss it for the winter season.

EWTN News Nightly continued to make a valuable contribution in getting a Catholic perspective on news from around the world and provided a useful balance to the secular media.

In general the EWTN channel is a valuable resource for following papal visits, most recently the trip to Thailand and Japan.

And so, happy new year to all media folks – I hope you will resist the temptation to polarise and offend but that you will provide us with imaginative programmes that will entertain, challenge, inspire and unite.

boregan@hotmail.com

QUESTIONS of faith

Each week Colm Fitzpatrick looks at interesting and sometimes controversial questions people have about Catholicism...



Was Jesus actually born on December 25?

Every December 25, family and friends come together to relax, exchange gifts and celebrate the year that has just passed. For Christians, this moment in the calendar year is more than just a party, but a time for rejoicing in the birth of Jesus Christ over 2000 years ago.

The Church teaches that Jesus "was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. Simple shepherds were the first witnesses to this event. In this poverty heaven's glory was made manifest" (CCC 525).

There's no question that Catholics believe in the birth narratives described in Scripture – but nowhere in the Gospels does it say that Jesus was born on December 25. So where did this idea come from and more importantly, is it true?

To solve this conundrum, it seems that historians simply have to trace Christmas back to its origins and find out the date it was celebrated. The problem, however, is that differing sources record various birth dates for Jesus.

For example, Clement of Alexandria wrote that Christians in Egypt believed Jesus was born on May 20, whereas *De paschae computus* (243) records Christians celebrated the feast of Jesus' birth on March 28 and others on April 19/20. Other sources, too, mention December 25 as Jesus' birthday. Given the multiple, contradictory claims about the dating of this event, it's hard to really pinpoint what one, if any, is correct.

Popular claim

There is a very popular claim that the Church specifically chose December 25 to compete with pagan celebrations marked around this date. The Roman Festival of Saturnalia took place from December 17-23 and honoured the Roman god Saturn. Likewise, *Sol Invictus*, which means "birthday of the unconquered

sun", was held on December 25.

The similarities between these dates and Christmas has led some scholars to conclude that December 25 was chosen to celebrate the birth of Jesus in order to supplant these pagan festivities and influence more people to join Christianity.

Others, however, have argued that this theory doesn't stand up to scrutiny. There are numerous sources dating from the early 2nd Century attesting that Christians were celebrating the birth of Jesus on December 25, whereas the earliest evidence dating *Sol Invictus* to this particular day is found much later in 274AD.

“To solve this conundrum, it seems that historians simply have to trace Christmas back to its origins and find out the date it was celebrated...”

According to this view, it was actually pagans who copied the December 25 dating.

It has also been suggested that regardless of when Christmas was dated, it was always going to be accused of appropriating pagan festivities given that there were so many throughout the year. It would be impossible to pick a day which didn't have a connection with some other holiday.

Like most questions in life, we simply don't know the answer. By the end of the 4th Century, however, December 25 came to be the accepted date for celebrating the birth of Jesus.



In virtually all of his novels, Milan Kundera, manifests a strong impatience with every kind of ideology, hype, or fad that makes for group-think or crowd-hysteria. He is suspicious of slogans, demonstrations, and marches of all kinds, no matter the cause. He calls all these the great march and, to his mind, they invariably lead to violence, all of them. Kundera likes artists because they tend to steer clear of causes, wanting to paint or write rather than march.

There are causes worth fighting for and there are injustices and wounds in our world that demand our involvement beyond our wanting rather to paint or write. Still Kundera's severe judgment on marches and demonstrations of all kinds, the great march, is fair warning. Why?

Because in our more reflective moments we know how hard it is not to get caught up in ideology, hype, fad, group-think, and crowd-hysteria in a way that leaves us mindless. It's hard to know what we really think and believe, as opposed to what the cultural circles we move within prescribe for us. It's hard not to be caught up in the fashion of the moment.

Ideology

But it's even harder for us to ground ourselves in something deeper; to root ourselves in a perspective outside what Thomas Hardy once called the "madding" crowd. How can we ground ourselves in a depth that immunises us from ideology, fad, hype, fashion, and the subtle group-hysterias that plague every culture?

In Luke's Gospel, the disciples sense that Jesus is drawing his wisdom, calm, strength, and power from somewhere beyond himself, that he is grounding himself

Prayer as keeping us out of group-think



Fr Rolheiser

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in something beyond both the enticements and threats of the present moment. Their hunch is that he is finding this depth in prayer.

They too want to connect to this depth and power and they have come to realise that prayer is the route, the only route, to take them there. And so they ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. What did he teach them? How do we pray in such a way so as to ground ourselves in something truly beyond our own individual and collective narcissism?

“Sometimes even our sincere prayer together is nothing more than the deepening of our group narcissism and a deeper enslavement to the maddening crowd”

Metaphorically, this is described for us in the passage in Scripture which records the martyrdom of St Stephen. This is the scene:

A crowd of very sincere, though misguided, persons, driven by religious fervour, but caught up in some group-hysteria, gather to stone Stephen to death. Here's how scripture describes it: "They were infuriated when they heard this and ground their teeth at him. But Stephen,

filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. 'Look! I can see the heaven thrown open,' he said, 'and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God.' All the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they made a concerted rush at him, thrust him out of the city and stoned him." (Acts 7, 54-58)

Stephen's death was real, but the description of his dying is replete with metaphors that tell us what it means to pray and what it means to not pray.

What does it mean not to pray? The crowd, notwithstanding their religious fervour and sincerity, do not pray. The description here says it all: Their gaze is on in Stephen, at whom they are looking with misunderstanding and hatred.

Moreover, his message of love is at that moment an inconvenient truth so they are stopping their ears so as not to hear, and they are in the grip of group-hysteria. They are not seeing the heavens laid open, but rather a very earthly person whom they hate; and they are not in the flow of the Holy Spirit but in the grip of hysteria. That is why their gaze never rises above their bitter glare at Stephen. They are solely in the moment, in the now, seeing only what is below the heavens, and that is non-prayer.

No matter how sincere we are religiously, what has just been described is not prayer. Indeed sometimes even our sincere prayer together is nothing more than the deepening of our group narcissism and a deeper enslavement to the maddening crowd. Our eyes are still on each other and not on God.

“It's hard to know what we really think and believe, as opposed to what the cultural circles we move within prescribe for us”

Stephen, on the other hand, is praying. He is described as having his eyes turned upward (a metaphor, not a pictorial description) and he is gazing into heaven and seeing the heavens laid open.

His gaze is beyond the crowd, beyond the moment, beyond human divisions, beyond hatred, beyond even the fear of his own death. He is gazing into something beyond the crowd and the present moment. This, and only this, is prayer.

I share Kundera's fear about the great march and how easily and blindly I, and most everyone else, can fall into step. His hunch is that art can help ground us outside the maddening crowd.

I would add that prayer is even more helpful.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



A cosmic vision that

Peter Costello

All thoughts of Christmas might seem to have been far away from a late summer day in the warm climate of Provence, but such was not the case this year for me.

We were on a trip to stay with friends and relations in Toulouse. During the days we were there we were taken to see many interesting places. Among them was a museum devoted to the life of the Benedictine artist Dom Robert at Le Musée Dom Robert, which forms a part of the historic site of the Abbaye school in the hill-top Cité de Sorèze (Tarn).

And it was there in that late summer warmth that I encountered this extraordinary image by the artist Dom Robert, and was deeply moved both by how it was done and the meaning that it seem to be conveying. It is called *L'Adoration des Majes* – 'The Adoration of the Wise Men' – and evokes completely the spirit and meaning of Christmas and the Epiphany.

But before discussing this one illumination as it is called in detail, I first should say something about the artist's life and work, as I fear he may not be as well known today here in Ireland as he was half a century or so ago.

* * * * *

Dom Robert was the name in religion of Guy de Chaunac-Lanzac, born on December 15, 1907 at Nieuil-l'Espoir (Vienne), who died on May 10, 1997 at Dourgne (Tarn). He was a Benedictine monk, tapestry designer, painter and ceramicist. He was not indeed your typical figure of a modern artist.

As a monk living in the Abbaye d'En Calcat in Dourgne, a village next to Sorèze, he is celebrated for having in the 1940s helped revive and give a new direction to the Aubusson Tapestry Manufacture, which, during its 17th- and 18th-Century heyday rivalled the royal tapestry manufacture at Gobelins.

“Young Guy had been encouraged as an artist by his family long before he entered the Benedictines. There his life of work and devotion often had difficult turns”

Local legend claims that some North African Berbers, followers of Abd-er-Rahman, defeated at the battle of Poitiers in 732, fled and found exile of a kind from Ebon, the Lord of Aubusson. They married local women and are the origin of the people now living in the village. To these former Muslims is credited the introduction of tapestry making in the Middle-Eastern style.

Young Guy had been encouraged as an artist by his family long before he entered the Benedictines. There his life of work and devotion often had difficult turns. It fell into three stages. The art he created was largely in aquarelle and oilpaint before the war. Called up in WWII, he served in the French army, but after the fall of France in 1940 he had to make his way back alone through a devastated country to his home at the Abbaye d'En Calcat.

On this difficult journey home, by a route which took him past the

walls of Carcassonne which had inspired part of the background in the picture above, he had a mystical experience.

Passing a domaine wall he heard noises within and went through an open wicker door. He all of a sudden was exposed to a new world of nature, a private park filled with trees, flowers and plants, and of all things, pea fowls, both cocks and hens, with their weird penetrating cries.

It was a transforming moment. His art took another direction into the world of nature – indeed, human figures dropped out of his work almost completely. He now focused on nature, and through nature on creation, and though creation on the nature of God.

But it was not only his subject matter changed. He now became involved, as just mentioned, with other artists in the revival and

renewal of the tapestry making at Aubusson (Creuse).

His designs drawn from nature were rendered as cartoons and transferred by the weavers, working in reverse, into hangings, some of immense size. This work was sold through regular art galleries to the benefit of the monastery. Our own Louis Le Brocquay was also inspired by Dom Robert, Lurcat and other artists associated with the atelier in the 1940s and 1950s.

Spiritual nature

Dom Robert worked on with intense creativity into his 90s, active to the end. Today examples can be found all around the world. But perhaps because of the deeply spiritual nature of his vision they are not so often brought to the public attention which is a very great pity.

He had been a friend of Jacques Maritain and his wife Raissa, the

neo-Thomists. Like them Dom Robert drew inspiration from certain aspects of the Middle Ages, and the theological movements that culminated in the renewal of Vatican II.

* * * * *

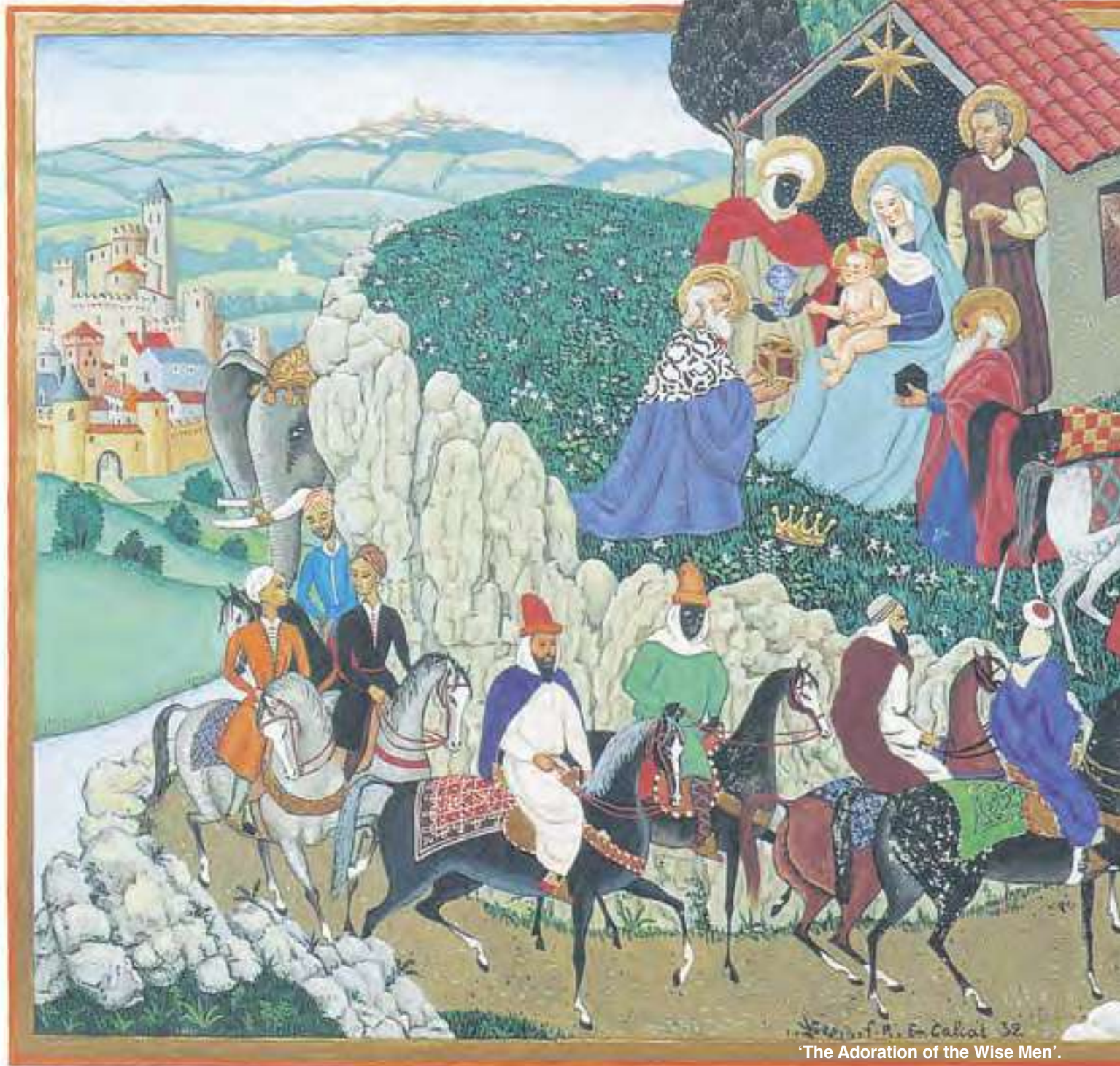
The image at the top of these pages is described as an 'illumination', a sort of brilliant water colour which he created at the Abbaye d'En Calcat in 1932. It manages to encode several periods of art and culture which were important to Dom Robert, but especially the style of painting in the late middle ages (such as those in have mentioned before which illustrated the Wonders of the World recounting the travel in Asia and the wonders seen by Marco Polo). But also, as in other of his images in the art of Persia.

In the background we can see the rolling fertile hills of the south of France. The city recalls something of

Carcassonne. I first saw those walls when I was 14 and they imprinted themselves on my memory. How could such a place have survive it was the very nature of the medieval world?

“Some today might talk here of different races, of different colours. But in fact for Dom Robert it seems to have been the cultures”

Of course I did not realise then what I am now so well acquainted with, that what the visitor see today at Carcassonne is largely the work of the restorer Viollet le Duc, a man it has to be said that brought that world alive for us all today, for everyone from Victor Hugo down to



'The Adoration of the Wise Men'.

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.

lifts Epiphany from canvas



Abbey Garden.



Cornflowers at Harvest Time.

Cecil B. de Mille.

But that is merely the background. The picture is called *L'Adoration des Majes*, ('The Adoration of the Magi'). Naturally it echoes countless other images over the centuries of a complicated tradition had developed in Christian traditions concerning the Wise Men from the East and their visit to the scene of the Nativity, is one that has appealed to both artists and to ordinary people, especially ordinary families, down the centuries.

Tradition

Here we see a long train of horse men approaching a small hillock on which a small cow shed is occupied by a family

whose child has just come into the world. At the feet of the Virgin kneels the oldest king, as by tradition, with the middle aged and young one standing to the sides.

From this eminence the eye follows the caravan back around the base of the hillock to the city.

There are some sixteen human figures in the picture, but look carefully and we find these present several different cultures, across North Africa from Morocco, though the Middle East and then towards the rear, two men who are intended to be Persians.

Just peeking around the cliff on the left of the picture, is the head of an Indian elephant, the most popular image of the

romance and mystery of Asia for the medieval European mind.

Some today might talk here of different races, of different colours. But in fact for Dom Robert it seems to have been the cultures, whose very different ideas about the beautiful and the decorative that caught his imagination. Race had nothing to do with it.

It was culture that created art, and it was art that characterised what was really human.

However, it is worth pointing out that the other cultures dominate what we see. There are only nominally three kings coming to pay homage, they represent the continents.

However, these other figures represent the culture, the people, the real individuals of the world coming to the manger to pay homage.

Perhaps I should say a little more about the way in which the artist has presented these various cultures. Persian art entranced Dom Robert from an early year. The three horse men on the left are straight out of Persian or Mughal miniatures and paintings, with their distinctive coats and headgear.

“His devotion to nature and creation has, of course, many echoes with what Christian ecologists feel very deeply about today concerning the protection of the natural world”

It will be seen then that we have the different hats of the men from the Middle East and before them the headdress of the desert folk of Arabia and of North Africa, Asians, Berbers, Black Africans (who are not slaves, by the way, but princes and their servants in the service of the black King Balthazar): it is a whole



Goats.

mix of types, very much an image of the world as we know it today.

But as I say this painting belongs 1932. A few words about the nature of his later art and life will set it in a context.

For a decade Dom Robert lived at Prinknash Abbey in England and was a friend of Dom Bede Griffith, famous for his work cultivating interreligious friendships. This was an important period in his art. However, he was able, after a change of abbot at Abbaye d'En Calcat, to return to his real home in the warm south, and it was then that the major period of his life's work began.

His devotion to nature and creation has, of course, many echoes with what Christian ecologists feel very deeply about today concerning the protection of the natural world.

Though this image is totally appropriate to this season of the year, an immersion in the ideas of art and Faith, the total cosmic vision of Dom Robert will prove deeply enlightening to many.

i The images on these pages are published by Éditions de l'Abbaye d'En Calcat, 81110 Dourgne, France.



Abbaye d'En Calcat.



Dombobert at work in the fields.

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Please pray for the beatification of

Little Nellie of Holy God

"May God enrich with every blessing all those who recommend frequent Communion to little boys and girls proposing Nellie as their model"

– Pope St Pius X, June 4, 1912



Everything Family & Life does to save babies and strengthen the family relies on you and our other generous friends. This work has never been more needed.

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www.familyandlife.org
www.prolife.ie

NOTICE THIS? GET YOUR MESSAGE OUT TO 90,000 READERS!

Win a trip to Lourdes

- ACROSS**
- 1 Will it help prepare the ground for winter crops? (10)
- 6 Walking unsteadily - how bizarre is that? (10)
- 11 Stormy sound (7)
- 14 Having taken a seat with the editor, one wanted for no more (5)
- 15 The cardinal finds that that printed version provides rebellious incitement (8)
- 17 “Gegs” Does this vintage clue deserve a toast? (9,4)
- 19 Gather together for a sacrifice (5)
- 20 One who does classy work! (7)
- 23 Tart or pastry (3)
- 24 Give evidence in court (7)
- 25 Hatchet (3)
- 26 Attempt (3)
- 28 Require (4)
- 30 Chessman in charge of a diocese (6)
- 33 Sporting match (4)
- 36 Trite, stereotyped expression (6)
- 37 Repetitive practice with dentists’ equipment (5)
- 38 One who will show you to your seat (5)
- 39 To make it to a Caribbean country, what will a bachelor do in pubs? (8)
- 40 Coat from Ireland’s Northern province (6)
- 43 Titter (6)
- 45 What do you dip your pen in? In potassium (3)
- 46 Too many actors chosen? That’s not so bright (8)
- 48 Adam’s Ale (5)
- 49 Financial type that artists rub the wrong way (6)
- 50 Use gold to make a car (4)
- 51 & 81d The preservation of a mealtime prayer is its only redeeming feature (6,5)
- 54 Tie braids up with outbursts of invective (9)
- 56 Promise (6)
- 57 Straightforward (6)
- 58 Demonstrate (4)
- 59 Spirit associated with Russia, Poland etc (5)
- 61 Take legal action (3)
- 62 Constantine’s saintly mother is seen in part of the Lenny Henry Show (5)
- 65 Lock-opener, or type of island off the coast of Florida (3)
- 66 The Spanish get potassium for the large deer (3)
- 67 Situated close to the centre (5)
- 68 It’s usually the best card (3)
- 70 Confined many elderly (5)
- 74 Mythological female lost in the dale (4)
- 75 See 92 down
- 77 Photographic device (6)
- 78 It has a smell that is too darned strange! (9)
- 79 American unit of currency (6)
- 80 Evil type of Biblical character (4)
- 83 Popular class? Do tell! (6)
- 84 More sage Kiwis, erudite in part (5)
- 86 Artist Rene literally needs to get a trim (8)
- 88 I would love to say these words in a marriage ceremony! (1,2)
- 89 It’s more than likely he’s a strange member of the family

- (4,2)
- 93 Does it find all other headgear to be beneath it? (3,3)
- 95 Defeated utterly (7)
- 97 See 102 down
- 98 Cries to see a 106 across postscript (5)
- 100 A lump of precious metal (6)
- 101 The Orient (4)
- 103 Spoke with the Almighty (6)
- 105 Seers point to a word of agreement (4)
- 106 Small (3)
- 108 Does her name define her as a father? (3)
- 110 Honorary title given to Mohandas K Gandhi (7)
- 111 Container for ashes (3)
- 112 Gun laid up in a listless way (7)
- 113 Yes - in Germany a swan is a Biblical character (5)
- 116 How hubby flutters around the buddleia! (9,4)
- 117 Word for word (8)
- 118 Soothes, assuages (5)
- 119 Ball-shaped objects (7)
- 120 Show piety around Venus, dotes! (10)
- 121 See 44 down
- DOWN**
- 2 Criminalised (8)
- 3 Hawker with a red pal (6)
- 4 How vital in the desert is this part of the Samoa Sisterhood! (5)
- 5 Split costs, or travel in clogs? (2,5)
- 7 & 11d Will this be the year that sees a town’s nutty don thawed out? (3,8,3,6)
- 8 A sudden rush of wind (4)
- 9 Mr McIlroy is central to the horror yarn (4)
- 10 Make a belt go round the chalice (6)
- 11 See 7 down
- 12 Such kitchen implements might literally make us silent (8)
- 13 A dalmatian digestive or collie cookie, perhaps? (3,7)
- 14 On a good day, being enlightened, they can be very enlightening religiously! (7,5,7)
- 16 Hobo (5)
- 18 Harplike instrument (4)
- 21 This bird will rant, to a point (5)
- 22 Lower limb (3)
- 23 Great cat, or Argentine Rugby player (4)
- 27 What one takes in, literally, about commercials (5)
- 29 Pharmaceutical product (4)
- 30 This flower has a sad ring to it, it appears (8)
- 31 I will shortly be sick (3)
- 32 Perform surgery (7)
- 34 It has orderly inhabitants (5)
- 35 Build, put up (5)
- 36 Many a beefy type shouts during rows (3)
- 41 Walked as the saint travelled on horseback (6)
- 42 Being inspired by Nano Nagle, these women have some kind of prettiness, señoritas! (12,7)
- 44 & 121a Transport feathers to alloy nails - then talk real business (3,4,2,5,5)
- 46 Is in possession of scattered snow (4)
- 47 Merchant (6)
- 48 Deserving of a try? How upset

Christmas Crossword No. 2

Marian Pilgrimages, who have been organising pilgrimages to Marian Shrines around the world for over 25 years, are delighted to offer readers of *The Irish Catholic* the opportunity to win an inclusive pilgrimage for two to Lourdes during 2020.

Along with pilgrimages to Lourdes, now with direct flights to Lourdes, Marian Pilgrimages also offers custom made itineraries to Medjugorje, the Holy Land, Italy, Fatima and Camino de Santiago. For more information, please call them on 01 878 8159 or email info@marian.ie.



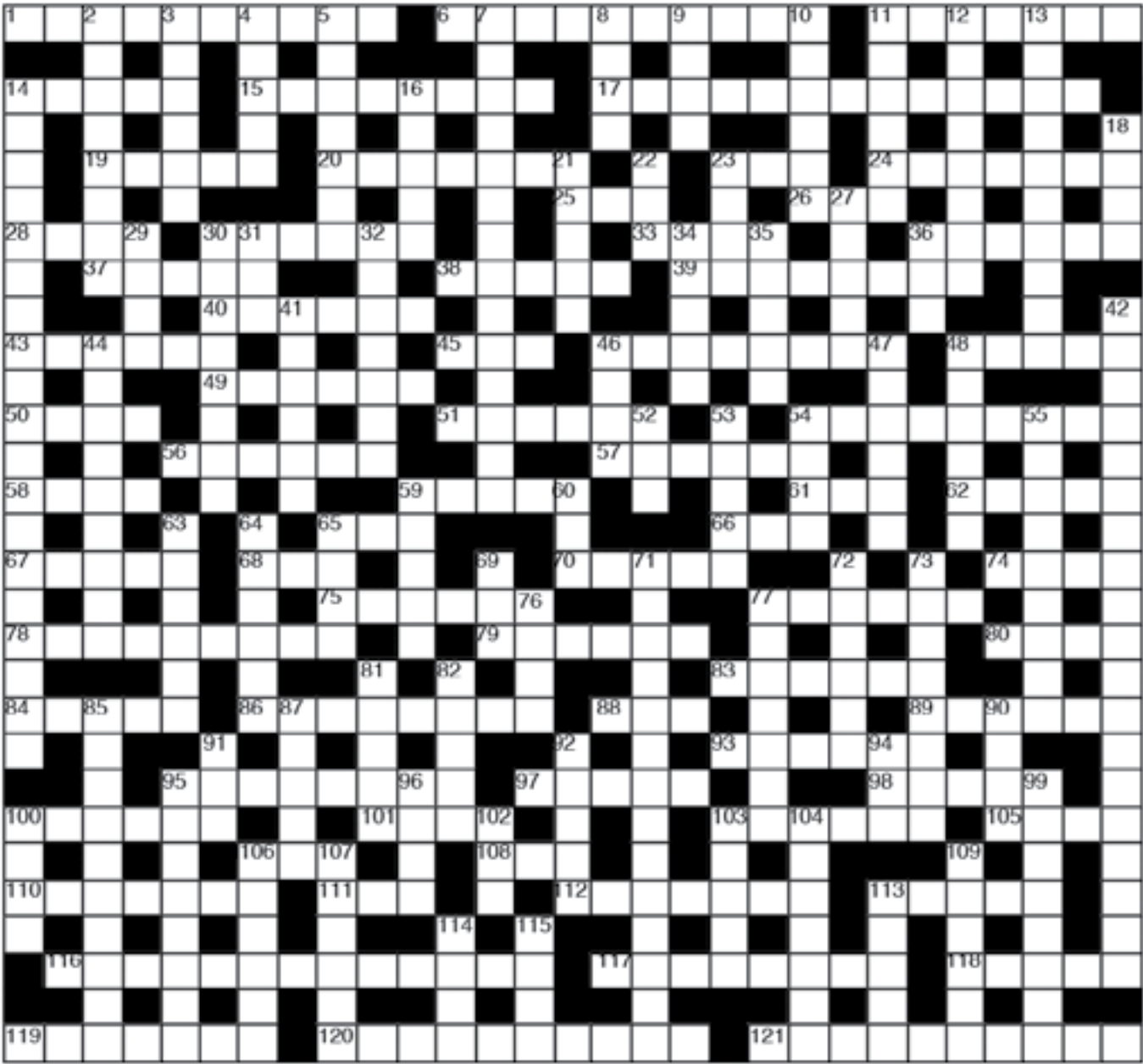
How to enter the competition

The competition consists of **TWO** crosswords. Crossword No.1 which was published last week and Crossword No.2 which is below. All you have to do is answer all the crossword questions correctly on **BOTH** crosswords and your name will be entered in a draw for the pilgrimage. Remember, even if you don’t manage to complete the crosswords correctly you will be entered in the draw to win one of the three runner-up prizes of the **World Meeting of Families Commemorative Bundle – Fáilte Pope Francis and Pope Francis in Ireland**. When you have completed the crosswords send CROSSWORD No.1 and CROSSWORD No.2 before **Friday, January 10, 2020** to: **LOURDES COMPETITION** Marian Pilgrimages, 19 Eden Quay, Dublin 1.

NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE



- one is (6)
- 52 Alcoholic drink (3)
- 53 Velocity (5)
- 54 School bench or office equipment (4)
- 55 Disciples are moved by the silver bee (9)
- 59 Striving to get to the heart of envy in Glasgow (5)
- 60 Part of St Joan’s circle? (3)
- 63 Fervour, passion (6)
- 64 Mother unfortunately turns up for a peaceful greeting (6)
- 65 “The Garden of England” (4)
- 69 Concealed one in the hard
- disk (3)
- 71 Being heavenly, they protect us from gnarled iguanas (8,5)
- 72 Free from unevenness or roughness (6)
- 73 Elevated in rank; advocated an idea (8)
- 76 Flow sluggishly (4)
- 77 Frankness means one is able to perform above the old city (7)
- 81 See 51 across
- 82 Breeding farms found on football boots? (5)
- 85 Mavis has shorts hung up
- (4,6)
- 87 Shade of blue (5)
- 90 Hoodwink (4)
- 91 A right display of creativity (3)
- 92 & 75a Nap in cupola disturbed by one from the Vatican (5,6)
- 94 Great wonder (3)
- 95 One who is making a will (8)
- 96 Work for a wage (4)
- 99 Some slimy cob can be standing for something else (8)
- 100 Identify (4)
- 102 & 97a World-famous mausoleum in Agra, India
- (3,5)
- 103 Find the depth of a fruit by letter (5)
- 104 External financial examiner (7)
- 106 Tusked sea mammal (6)
- 107 How have I clued this historic mathematician? (6)
- 109 Spotted cat of the Americas (6)
- 113 The apostle presents a preserve to some cardinals (5)
- 114 A Roman goddess jumped up near Orion, initially (4)
- 115 Fired a gun (4)

Notebook

Fr Vincent Sherlock

IT WAS ST STEPHEN'S morning and I was in the sacristy for morning Mass. As I got ready, I asked one of the altar servers if he had an enjoyable Christmas Day. I had follow-up questions as well: "What did you get from Santa?" Is that what you wanted?" Even more questions, if needed, but I was not totally prepared for his reply. Neither was I totally shocked. He was a good-humoured lad, wise beyond his years and had a twist on things that came from listening to older people's conversations. He looked at me and, with a slight shake of the head, said: "It's as far away as ever!"

Answers
My mind wandered to another day when we were in the church for the Blessing of Throats. I asked the children questions about St Blaise, why we blessed throats etc. but found myself doing most of the answering. I was wearing a little clip-on microphone with the battery pack attached to my belt. Going to the school afterwards, this same lad came running towards me and asked: "Vincent, where were you getting the answers? Was it from the black box?"
You couldn't write it and yet I am! "It's as far away as ever!" How many of us, in all honesty

It's as far away as it ever was....



might be thinking that way, even on St Stephen's Day? The presents have been opened, welcomed and maybe some are already on their way for return and exchange. The food has been eaten, the worst of the sweets still in the box and the second layer of the chocolates well plundered though there are still some in the top layer. The church was packed – 'the standing room only' that old people used to talk of – 'if you weren't there 20 minutes before Mass, you'd not get a seat'. *The Fairytale of New York, When A Child is Born* and *Driving*

● **A NEW YEAR PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, bless us with the spirit of St Joseph who, even in dreams, was open to your promptings and guided by your hand. As he went where you asked him to go, did what you asked him to do and remained ever faithful, so may we put our trust in you as we step across the threshold into a New Year. May his hands bless our work, may his loyalty to family be our inspiration and may his openness to your will be our constant guide. Amen.

Home For Christmas are back in the radio stations' vinyl vaults and the dreaded Christmas jumper is rolled up in a ball somewhere – maybe even headed for recycling. The Christmas tree and the candle bridge are looking tired (not least because some of them have been up since the end of November) and soon will be packed away.
On December 26, within 24 hours, could it be that it is as far away as ever?
Sadly yes, but in the reality of our Faith – no. If anything, it should be as near as ever and we should be doing all in our power to keep it so. Christmas speaks of making room for strangers so that a child might be born. It calls us to places of worship where we can gather with family, neighbour, friend and stranger and pray and sing our hearts out. It reminds us that in the uncertainties of life, home is the place to be, surrounded by people who matter and make a difference. It is about

the fulfilling of a heavenly promise and the need for the human 'yes' found on Mary's lips and in her heart.
It is about the very best of us in terms of generosity, not just in giving presents and time to the people we know, love and with whom we share our lives but about kindness – at its very best – when we dip into our pockets and our time and willingly give both to others who, all too sadly, are worse off. This is the time when we leave no stone unturned to do the right thing by people. It is, without doubt, the time that brings out the very best in us. As Jesus said to Martha at her brother's tomb: "Do you believe this?"
Struggle
If we do, even if we struggle at times with our Faith, we would not want this day, this time to be as far away as ever. On the contrary, we would never want to walk away from it. Pictures captured on phones – phones, that may well be upgraded during the year – could not do justice to the masterpiece we need to frame and hang on our walls. That masterpiece – a picture of a world in a better place because people are in a better place. That is,

has always been and will always be the call of Christmas. It is about people doing the right thing by one another, not just for a day or a few days but throughout the days and years of our lives.
"Vincent, where were you getting the answers? Was it from the black box?" I smile when I think of that moment but worry at times too. There are so many questions, not least around what the New Year might bring our way. Questions around our Church, our mission and our place in an ever-changing world; questions around faith, health, wellbeing and around life. The answers are there too, not always immediately obvious and needing time to reveal themselves.
They are there, not in the 'black box' but in staying close – very close, to Christmas and the promise and the answers found in a borrowed room.
It's as near as ever!



Could you help to save a poor helpless child?

The Little Way Association receives numerous requests from missionaries throughout the world asking for help to feed, support and educate needy, deprived children. They tell us of orphaned children left alone with no one to love or care for them, of families so poor that they cannot afford to send their children to school, and of street children, totally abandoned, hungry and homeless, experiencing much anguish and hardship during their most tender years. The whole future of these children often depends upon whether a missionary can find sufficient funds to care for them.

Your New Year's gift will mean a chance of health and happiness for a deprived child

As 2020 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children. You can use the coupon below or give online at tinyurl.com/lwadonations quoting "children" in the message field.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent without deduction, to enable a missionary priest or sister to carry the love, care and compassion of Christ to a deprived, abandoned or orphaned child. Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.



"Jesus wills that we give alms to Him as to one poor and needy. He puts Himself as it were at our mercy; He will take nothing but what we give Him from our heart, and the very least trifle is precious in His sight."
- St Therese

We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and peaceful New Year.

May St Therese reward you in a special way for the sacrifices you make to support our work, and may she obtain many graces for all our benefactors during 2020

In our modern age of materialism and selfishness when so many are searching for an authentic spirituality, Therese's little way of simple love for God and others has a powerful appeal. Perhaps we too can join her on the 'little way'.

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466
www.littlewayassociation.com

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IC/12/26