

The Irish Catholic

MARY KENNY

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Warning over scam Catholic social media friend requests

EXCLUSIVE

Chai Brady and Jason Osborne

Catholics have been warned not to be "misled" by bogus friend requests on social media from people they do not know inviting them to online prayer meetings and claiming to be Catholic or Christian.

The warning comes in light of a wave of fake profiles on Facebook in recent months targeting Irish Catholics and other Christian denominations with friend requests which are followed up by invitations to Bible studies.

The profiles often consist of a generic name, a smiling profile picture and numerous religious posts, which are interspersed by posts about ordinary activities. However, those who engage with them are frequently invited to join Bible study sessions over video call.

The scheme is allegedly the work of a Chinese sect 'Eastern Lightning', or 'The Church of Almighty God', which reportedly seeks to convince people to join its congregation.

A number of priests who have spoken to *The Irish Catholic* said they were aware of parishioners being duped by the requests into thinking they actually knew the person in real life.

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'And every knee shall bow...'



Santa Claus takes time out for a moment of quiet prayer at the nativity scene in Holy Family Church, Drogheda in Co. Louth before the statue of the Christ Child is added to the crib.

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Speaking up for persecuted Christians

The last year has been another bloody one for Christians around the world. Persecution continues to be a feature of the life of many Christians in the 21st Century – we hardly need reminding of the sober fact that the last 100 years has seen more Christians die for the Faith than in the persecution in the early Church.

Last month, a report was published which really didn't gain any attention outside of the Catholic media.

Persecuted and Forgotten? A Report on Christians Oppressed for Their Faith 2020-22, was compiled and published by the British branch of the pontifical foundation Aid to the Church in Need, which helps persecuted Christians.

The authors of the report investigated religious freedom in 24 countries over the last two years and found that there was an increase in the oppression or persecution of Christians in three-quarters of them.

Sharp rise

They said Africa saw a sharp rise in terrorist violence, with more than 7,600 Nigerian Christians reportedly murdered between January 2021 and June 2022.

They included 20 Nigerian Christians filmed as they were killed in May by terrorists from Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province.

The report identified state authoritarianism as the main driver of worsening oppression in Asia, with North Korea the gravest offender because it continued to routinely and systematically repress religious belief.

The ongoing rise of religious nationalism involving Hindu and Sinhalese Buddhist nation-

Catholic social media friend requests

really they're no more than a 'friend,' he said.

Mr Ducklin said that when faced with unlikely or unusual messages from someone you think of as a 'friend', stop and ask yourself whether you really know this person, whether they really know you or are just using information easily obtained from social media to lure you into a deeper relationship and whether you can be sure you know the account isn't hacked.

"The simple advice is: If in doubt, don't give it out. If you think it's a scam, then back yourself: assume it is a scam," Mr Ducklin said.

your social media accounts, such as your hobbies and beliefs.

A cybercriminal who can message you as a "friend" on social media is much more likely to get your attention than a scammer who sends you a "random spam email out of the blue", Mr Ducklin said, adding that there are two main ways that crooks can "weasel their way" into your closed groups.

"Firstly, they may hack someone's password and then message all their friends and family directly.

"Secondly, they persuade you somehow to accept them as a friend, when

Editor's Comment

Michael Kelly



A woman and child cry following a funeral Mass in the parish hall of St Francis Xavier Church in Owo, Nigeria in June. The Mass was for some of the 40 victims killed in an attack by gunmen during Mass at the church. Photo: CNS

alist groups active in India and Sri Lanka respectively was blamed for increasing violence against Christians in South Asia, where authorities have also arrested Christians and forced the cessation of church services.

The report noted that India had witnessed 710 incidents of anti-Christian violence between January 2021 and the start of June 2022, driven in part by political extremism.

In one instance, members of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party applauded during a mass rally in Chhattisgarh in October 2021 as Swami Parmatmananda called for Christians to be killed.

Silence

There is one thing that hard-pressed Christians in trouble spots cannot understand: the virtual silence of the western human rights community on their plight.

Christian persecution goes largely unnoticed and unreported, including by many human rights organisations. Tragically, the same goes for the Irish Government.

There's a peculiar blind spot in most human rights circles, and that blind spot prevents any real activism or energy being put into highlighting abuses of religious minorities, particularly minority Christian communities living in Islamic countries.

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

Irish Catholics must do all that we can to ensure that we are not complicit in the

silence. If we will not speak up for persecuted Christians, who will?



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Warning over scam Catholic social media friend requests

» **Continued from Page 1**

Principal Threat Researcher at cyber security company Sophos, Paul Ducklin, advised people not to be misled "by the fact that someone you have 'met' online seems to have interests in common".

"If they know you're a regular churchgoer, for example, it's easy enough for them to introduce 'prayer groups' into the equation, no matter what their own religious beliefs might be," he told *The Irish Catholic*.

Scammers can "be the person you want them to be" based on facts obtained from

Future of Ireland won't be secured by changing borders – Bishop McKeown

Ruadhán Jones

The future of the island of Ireland won't be secured by merely changing borders or politicians, Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown has warned.

Drawing comparisons to the Holy Land in Jesus' time, Bishop McKeown said that "local rulers would not guarantee a wonderful country, if those leaders were not people of wisdom and humility".

"Similarly, the future of this island and this continent will not be secured merely by changing politicians or borders, unless we have leaders who call us all to a shared greatness and not merely to narrow victories over those labelled as enemies," the bishop of Derry said in his Christ-

mas message.

"A just country will not be achieved by changing the deckchairs on the Titanic – and deciding who sits on those fragile deckchairs."

His comments come as debate continues on the possibility of a border poll, with calls increasing for a referendum on the potential unification of the island of Ireland.

Bishop McKeown warned that "if government is merely about economics and without inspiring community-building ideals, then we give tired answers to threadbare questions".

He called on the "Christmas people" to challenge politicians "to inspire young people with truth and not merely to sell self-serving political fairy tales".

Dr McKeown pointed to the power of Christ's

weakness to effect a change in men and women at the deepest level.

"This Christ child will bear witness to the power of grace, mercy and forgiveness to change the mess that we often make of our relationships and our world," he said.

"He came, not to change a political system but to change human hearts."

As we "struggle with the mess that unredeemed human nature has made of our society", we must proclaim the "daring vision of hope and... call to believe" heralded by Christ's birth, Bishop McKeown continued.

"We have to build prayerful communities where the young can discover the divine dream for the world. We need one another if we are to face the cold winds of cynicism and rejection."

Christian leaders in Holy Land: Refugees suffer like the Holy Family

Jason Osborne

The patriarchs and heads of Churches of the Holy Land spoke over Christmas of the suffering Jesus and the Holy Family endured in his early life, likening it to the way many people and refugees suffer today.

"Similar sorrows and travails continue to afflict the world in our time, whether they be in Ukraine, Armenia, Syria, or throughout the Holy Land itself," the Church leaders said in their December 22 Christmas message, which noted problems such as threats of violence, forced registration, family displacement, and existence as refugees in a foreign land.

Special concern was expressed for the "Christian remnant" in the Holy Land, which the Church leaders said has increasingly faced physical assaults on people and property, restrictions on freedom of worship and legal threats against possession and management of Church property.

i Additional reporting by Judith Sudilovsky

Peacekeeper's family reinforce faith to 'reunite in heaven'

Chai Brady

The mother of UN peacekeeper Seán Rooney who was killed in Lebanon told mourners the family will "strengthen our faith" at his funeral last week.

Private Rooney (24), from Newtowncunningham, Co Donegal, died when his convoy came under attack while travelling to Beirut from their camp in the Golan

Heights.

Speaking at the funeral, which took place in Holy Family Church, Dundalk, his mother Natasha said her son was a "national hero".

"I promise my son that I will stay strong to take care of my family," she said.

"I promise we will try our very best to strengthen our faith and love so that we can be reunited with Seán in heaven. I don't have the words to express my love for

him and the pride as I look around at everyone here today for Seán."

Chief celebrant Fr Derek Ryan said that the young peacekeeper's death "really did pierce the heart of his family and this close-hearted community, and even the town of Dundalk".

Private Rooney's family also include his father Paul, his grandparents Eugene and Rachel, his grandmother Ann McClusky, and his fiancée Holly.

Private Rooney was killed on December 14. He was part of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which the Irish Defence Forces has been involved in for more than two decades.

His armoured vehicle was attacked near the southern village of Al-Aqbiya a stronghold of the Iran-backed group Hezbollah. Hezbollah are described by the UN and EU as a terrorist organisation.

Welcoming the Christ Child...



First class students from Holy Cross Mercy School, Killarney, welcomed the baby Jesus to the crib in St Mary's Cathedral Killarney, following Bishop of Kerry Ray Browne blessing the crib. Pictured are: angels Evie Spillane, Clodagh Blennerhassett, Abby Quill; shepherd Molly Ferris; Mary, Sadie O'Connor and Joseph, Alice Harmon. Photo: Valerie O'Sullivan.

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Newspaper accused of ignoring abuse in Protestant homes

Staff Reporter

The Irish Times newspaper has reportedly refused to publish letters from campaigners highlighting abuse in non-Catholic institutions in Ireland, it has been claimed.

While the newspaper published a short note on the death of Derek Linster – a former resident of the Protestant-run Bethany Home – it did not mention that he had long been a critic of what he saw as *The Irish Times* framing abuse as an

exclusively Catholic problem.

The late Mr Linster wrote two books on abuse in Protestant-run institutions and lamented the fact that such institutions were often ignored in Irish public discourse around abuse.

According to an article in *The Phoenix* magazine: the books “were ignored by *The Irish Times*”.

The Phoenix alleges that “the long-time refusal of *The Irish Times* to cover Protestant victim [Mr] Linster and Bethany Home is just one

example of the newspaper’s refusal to cover child abuse in Protestant-based institutions”.

The magazine further claims that “a similar censorship appears to be at play on the issue again. A week after [Mr] Linster died Fintan O’Toole wrote a column about the revelations of abuse in Catholic Spiritan schools such as Blackrock College and demanding, not unreasonably, that the State should seize the records of religious orders.

“One of [Mr] Linster’s friends

and collaborators, Dr Niall Meehan of Griffith College’s media faculty, wrote to *The Irish Times* saying that [Mr] O’Toole should not have confined his remarks to Catholic institutions. [Dr] Meehan also pointed out the irony of [Mr] O’Toole’s remarks given the failure of various investigators, including *The Irish Times*, to examine Protestant institutions. He also noted that [Mr] Linster, a survivor of Bethany Home, found such silence ‘extremely frustrating,’ the article adds.

The Phoenix claims that Dr Meehan has written two letters to *The Irish Times* since the controversy around Spiritan schools arose. “He suggested, not for the first time, that the documented cases of serious abuse in Protestant institutions and their subsequent cover up be also investigated by the newspaper.

“*The Irish Times* has so far failed to do this. In the meantime, the newspaper has also refused to publish [Dr] Meehan’s letters,” *The Phoenix* claims.

President’s Christmas message adopts papal themes

Jason Osborne

Christmas is the time to renew our commitment to fighting the “culture of indifference” that Pope Francis speaks of, President Michael D. Higgins has said in his Christmas message for 2022.

The president used his yearly message to

highlight the “culture of indifference” that Pope Francis notes in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, that relates to climate change, the recent pandemic, ignoring global issues, global hunger, migrant deaths and increasing militarism.

The Pope “challenges us all not to avert our gaze from all those who suffer in different ways on our shared planet,” President Higgins said, adding that his words constitute “a call to

action” to protect all life on earth through the “forging of better connections between ecology, economics and ethics”.

President Higgins thanked members of the Defence Forces who spent Christmas overseas “building and supporting peace” in many of the conflict-torn regions of the world, “including conflict zones so near the homeland of Jesus Christ whose birth we celebrate at this

time, and where efforts and peace-making is in such short supply, where suffering and exclusion is deepening”.

Reflection upon the Christmas story, which highlights the troubles of the vulnerable seeking refuge, should encourage us to “stand in solidarity with those who are vulnerable, put ourselves in the shoes of the ‘other,’” the president said.

‘We three kings...’



Students from St Joseph’s NS Kingscourt, Co. Cavan, including the three wise young men, acted out the Christmas story during Mass in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, December 25.

Taoiseach opens refurbished Christian Brother education centre

Ruadhán Jones

In one of his last official acts as Taoiseach, TD Micheál Martin officially opened a refurbished centre of Catholic education in Cork.

The Edmund Rice Centre, Mardyke House, was blessed by Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin, and reopened before Christmas following extensive refurbishment undertaken by the Christian Brothers.

In a wide-ranging address, the then-Taoiseach encouraged young people to engage in service with their community and the wider society.

The centre, located near University College Cork, houses the Leadership Education and Formation (Leaf) project, which offers leadership workshops, training, seminars, and retreats to young adults on their faith journey.

“We are very happy that the Leaf project is collaborating with and supporting the wider renewal taking place in our diocese,” said Bishop Gavin.

“We hope and pray that this newly refurbished centre and the work of the Leaf Project will continue to develop and flourish into the future. It is a sign of hope in our diocese.”

Something cheering for the end of year

Many sad things happened in 2022 and there are many glum predictions for 2023, but there's always something to be grateful for. And the re-opening of Dublin's Leopardstown Races on St Stephen's Day – first time since 2019 – cheered me up.

Ecumenical agent

I'm a great supporter of the horse as ecumenical agent: throughout the ages, this noble crea-



Mary Kenny

ture has brought people together.

'Inclusion' is one of the aspirations of our age and horse-racing has always been the most inclusive of sporting activities. At a horse-race you see people from every part of the social spectrum, from the

belted earl to those from the Travelling community.

In times when some sports were perceived as sectarian, the horse race always ecumenically embraced – as the famous song about the Galway races puts it – "The Catholic, the Protestant, the Jew, the

Presbyterian".

Yes, some denominations formally disapproved of the horse race because of its link with gambling, and gambling can be a vice, when developed to the point of excess or addiction. But Ireland never imposed the restrictions on racing and betting as America and Britain did. Ireland, which surely produced the best horses in the world, could even claim that the horse race was a patriotic endeavour.

Irish life

The 1940s were a lean period in Irish life, but one of the great achievements of the era was the establishment of the National Stud, the Hollywood of equine life. (At the launch of the Free State, two decades earlier in 1923, Sir Henry Greer, a southern unionist, was made a senator because of his great expertise with horses and cavalry.)

As well as supporting Irish life and the economy,

the horse has been an enabler of equality between the sexes. Women have uniquely been able to compete equally with men on horseback, and Rachael Blackmore from Tipperary is deservedly the queen of the turf.

Welcome

Leopardstown is one of the most beautiful of all racecourses, surrounded by the Dublin mountains: what a welcome comeback it has made!

The Princess of Wales on Christmas Day.



● Kate Middleton, now the Princess of Wales, was applauded for wearing an elegant Alexander McQueen fedora hat to church service on Christmas Day. The fedora is always a stylish design, and this one was stunning.

But is there an element of the 'performative' in the British royal family's very public appearance at St Mary Magdalene Church in Sandringham, with all members of the family on parade in their finest winter apparel? People camp out in the roads and byways the night before just to see this particular church procession of king, queen and family.

Yes, I suppose there is a 'performative' or display aspect. And a symbolic one too. Andrew, always now referred to "as the disgraced Prince Andrew" was seen to be included, to the surprise of some. But why shouldn't someone described as sinner attend church? Isn't that part of Christianity's message?

Thinking back, I remember how carefully we all once dressed for Mass at Christmas (and Easter), as if it was something special. The 'Sunday best' clothes were part of the sense of occasion. It all added up to a feeling that this was important and significant, an event for which one prepared. 'Performance' can bring meaning

Correcting ill-informed commentary'

Fr Fergus O'Donoghue SJ, has written a powerful essay in the influential *Dublin Review of Books* about the Irish Catholic Church, and the almost relentless current hostility now evident among the commentariat.

"A strange entity haunts contemporary Irish commentary," he begins. "Hardly a day passes without it being cited in some, almost invariably negative, context. It's 'The Catholic Church.' It's 'to blame for everything wrong with Ireland.'" The Catholic Church has been called "Stalinist" – an insult to the 20 million murdered by Stalin – and "our Holocaust" – offensive to the six million Jews

deliberately killed in a Nazi genocide plan.

The Church is seen as a 'foreign body' and 'an incubus' even though the clergy were from the same background as so many of their fellow Irishmen and women (and were frequently related to their fellow laity). Priests, it is noted, are referred to as "misogynistic eunuchs".

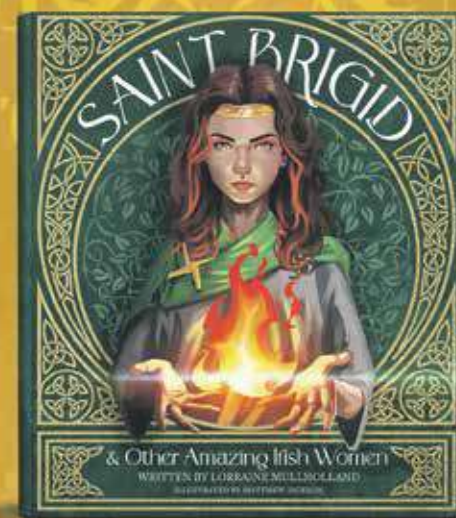
It's a strong essay, explaining some of the ill-informed commentary: the Catholic Church in Ireland is not, and never was, one sole body. Administration was diffused through dioceses and parishes. Pre-Christian Ireland was not some hippy, nature-loving Elysian field:

it was savaged by tribal war, and ignominiously steeped in slavery. Irish Christianity survived through centuries of persecution often through heroic measures.

The contemporary commentary writes Fr Fergus, "lacks nuance and is ahistorical": most of it is based on bad history. The essay has been re-tweeted hundreds of times: English friends of mine who have read it have been fascinated, and shocked that Irish commentators have such a coarse and hostile attitude to their own people. See the *Dublin Review of Books* at: <https://drb.ie>

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Sport – in search of greater glory...



Pope Francis gestures as he participates alongside thousands of young soccer athletes in a project to promote the values of sport and soccer at the Vatican.



Sport and religion overlap in that they can teach people values and understanding, writes Gerard Gallagher

Sport continues to unite people from different backgrounds. This was evident recently. During December as the World Cup was played during a political storm, it was uplifting to see many sports stars make some small gestures of ritual and prayer. Whether it was the Christians, blessing themselves or saying a quiet prayer, to our Muslim brothers also spending a moment in prayer.

Sport has the capacity to bring people together, crossing barriers and bringing unity to spectators and participants. Sport can bring us all moments of joy, despair, hope and heartache. Most people have experienced attending some type of sporting event. Whether they were in the grandstand or watching on television, sport has the capacity to engage the spectator and help those who are watching to escape and be in communion with others.

“The island of Ireland has produced some amazing sports legends who have set the world of sport on fire”

For some observers, sport has replaced the religious experience. In some cases, it has replaced the rituals and communal gatherings of religion with a secular replacement. Our stadiums and pitches have become the new cathedrals and temples.

Hope

Sport gives hope. Sport can help us live a better tomorrow. It can bring individuals meaning. It can strengthen a community. Sport has a deserved place in civic society. Sport and religion overlap in that they can teach people values, rules, respect

and understanding. This is the communion of sport.

The island of Ireland has produced some amazing sports legends who have set the world of sport on fire. From Christy Ring to Ronnie Delany, Mary Peters to Sonia O'Sullivan, we have a long list. Sport can bring a communion of unity. Think of Italia 90. Think of Barry McGuigan boxing for all of Ireland, bringing hope in a time of darkness.

There is the drama of sport too. Entire nations can hold their breath as we watch an event. Empathetically we celebrate the sports stars that just come up short and miss the glory of winning. But there is no less drama elicited when an individual, perhaps with very few people in attendance, fulfils a personal dream.

Recently I have been promoting my new book, *Faith In Search of Greater Glory* in Sport I have encountered some very interesting conversations with sports journalists, who normally don't cover the topic of faith. It is a question that intrigued them, their sporting hero having a faith! Getting to know some of Ireland's most famous past and present sport stars was a privilege. Some of them were very open about how their faith and spiritual side is important to them. They really are ordinary people who have done extraordinary things with God's given talents.

Surprise

There has been the surprise that many of our heroes in sport have a spiritual and religious part of their life. Some sports stars are more associated with faith than others. World Champion Boxer Katie Taylor is one example. She has said: "Faith is probably the most important part of my life. I knew growing up that God had a great plan for my life. Boxing felt like a gift that God has given me. I want to make the most of this gift and to honour God in everything I do."

She is not alone. Josh van der Flier, World Rugby player of the year 2022, is more private about his faith. "I found it hard early on to talk to my peers about faith. It does not come natural to me. My youth pastor encouraged me to 'honour God by playing rugby'. I know God gave me a gift and I honour that by playing to the best of my ability."

It might seem unusual for some of our sports stars to have a religious side. Many noted small rituals that comforted them in their pre-match preparations. Some prayed, others had a miraculous medal sewn into their kit, others had a small bottle of holy water in their bag, some prayed with their teammates when travelling to team competitions. A few had crosses on their body.

Others are still searching for meaning.

Legendary Jockey and Trainer, Johnny Murtagh pointed out:

"When I went out [to] the big races, I just left it to God with his words, 'Thy will be done' it was whatever was God's will. I had done my preparations and I left it in God's hands. If I won or was beaten, I was just grateful."

Ireland's first Olympic gold medallist, Ronnie Delany, dropped to his knees instinctively once he realised, he had won gold. Looking back he notes "I am not a holy Joe. God is strong and central to my life. Before a race I'd pray on my own. I would have my little holy medal, holy water. I would not pray for success, just the ability to run to the best of my ability."

“There has been the surprise that many of our heroes in sport have a spiritual and religious part of their life”

This is key. None of the sports stars interviewed prayed to win or for success. Their prayer was just to give their best. Whether it is Ciara Mageean pointing out, "I don't pray to win. When I run...it is all me." Or Catherina Mc Kieran, "during races I prayed for strength when I was tired and said to God...you lift my legs, and I will let them down."

Whilst many of these sports stars featured in my book are single-minded in the pursuit of glory, they are sporting examples of what St Paul spoke of in his letter to the Corinthians, "Whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31)

Legend

I witnessed this recently at the funeral of Dublin GAA legend Brian Mullins. An overflowing church, the majority of those in attendance were men. Faith and sport can complement and co-exist. Many of our sporting heroes also grapple with some of the bigger questions in life. Speaking to me not long before his death, Mullins, said: "I lean towards God who gives sense and purpose to what my world should be. Maybe it's not worked out like other people's understanding. God wants us to be good and create goodness. For me, that is trying to be the best you can be."

Tyrone man Micky Harte has experienced success and tragedy. Faith is an important part of his life. He reflects on his faith: "Over the course of my lifetime, society has turned away from the sacred. But a life without faith does not

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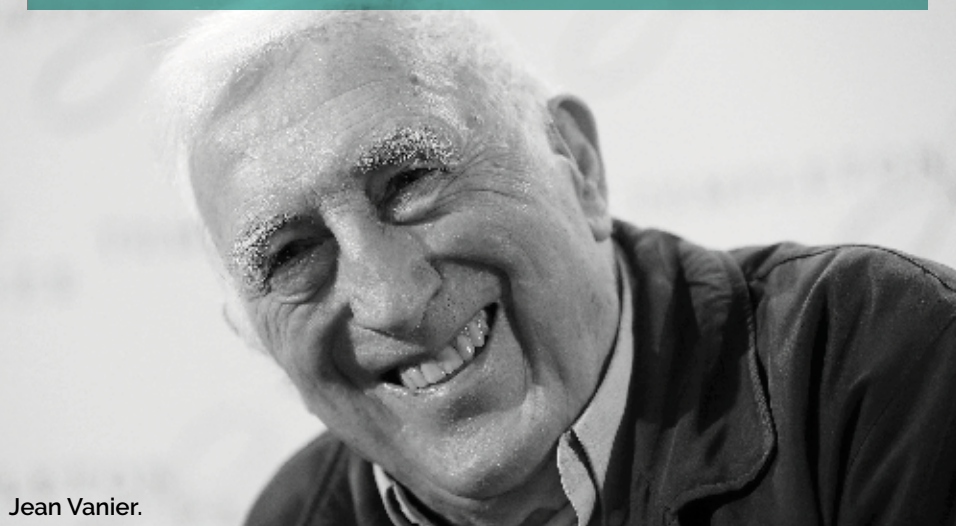


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Michael W. Higgins is a biographer, documentarian, scholar, columnist, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Sacred Heart University (CT), Basilian Distinguished Fellow of Contemporary Catholic Thought, University of St. Michael's College (ON), Senior Fellow, Massey College, University of Toronto



Jean Vanier.

and faith

truly lead to fulfilment. Get to know God. You miss out on so much when you neglect your relationship with him." He has often spoken about how he prays the rosary in the car whilst driving. Tyrone players have recalled the rosary being said on the bus coming and going from a match. Other inter-county players also recalled similar personal moments of prayer.

“It might seem unusual for some of our sports stars to have a religious side”

Stories of faith and sport are not just synonymous to Ireland. Further afield there are many other sports stars who speak openly about their faith. Tony Dungy, who led the Indianapolis Colts to Super Bowl victory in 2007 is very candid about his faith and relationship with God. "God's word presents a different definition of success – one centred on a relationship with Jesus Christ and a love for God that allows us to love and serve others. God gives each one of us unique gifts, abilities and passions. How well we use those qualities to have an impact on the world around us determines how 'successful' we really are."

Carl Lewis said that his faith "gave him a perspective on life. It keeps me level-headed because I realise that this a God given talent, like everybody else has, I believe that's what I have".

Teammates

Willie John McBride just before the British Lions matches told his teammates, "Now go and make peace with yourselves." Being centred is also being grounded.

Speaking recently at a conference hosted in the Vatican on 'Sport for All', Pope Francis noted that we need to work

harder to "promote the notion of sport as something for everyone." Echoing some of the sentiments of *Fratelli Tutti*, he said that sport has a role to play in the striving for the common good. The International Olympic Committee would agree. It recently updated its motto to reflect this: faster, higher, stronger now has an added value, together.

Anyone who has watched the film *Chariots of Fire* can relate to Eric Liddell and his belief that God-given talent is there to be developed to the best of his ability. It is the same for each of us.

St Catherine of Siena is reported to have said: "if you are what you should be set the world on fire".

Heroes

For our heroes of sport, we can see ordinary people digging deep and doing something that makes their ordinary extraordinary.

What is common among the many sports stars is, they also have faith in themselves, faith in their teammates and backroom team, and faith in a greater power perhaps that can help them to reach their greatest potential on the biggest stages of their sporting careers.

There is consensus among the people I spoke with that even though they believe in God, no one asked for God to help them win. Most recognised their God-given talent. For most of them, faith supported them and was integrated into their whole being.

As more people gravitate towards attending sporting events, there is a challenge and an opportunity to engage with this periphery. If we really want a Church that engages with culture, then our pastoral leaders also need to embrace new dialogues and partnerships with those who participate in sport. Our Church needs to be more creative if it really wants to reach out to the community of sport. Rather than



Olympian Ronnie Delaney.

getting bogged down in the attitude of sport capturing the minds and hearts of our young people, maybe have a rethink. If we want to be a missionary Church, then we need to at least accompany those in sport who have the residues of faith.

“There is consensus among the people I spoke with that even though they believe in God, no one asked for God to help them win”

We need role models who live their faith and participate in sport. Hopefully those who read my book can start a conversation with people who are more into sport than their faith. My conclusion is you can 'do' both: enjoy sport and live your faith. They are compatible and not opposites.

There is no such thing as the perfect Christian. Neither is there any such thing as the perfect athlete. Both Christians and sports people strive for perfection. In sport there are



Boxer Katie Taylor reads from her Bible.



Gerard Gallagher presents his book to Pope Francis.

many winners fulfilling their dreams. Yet there are many others who have had an honest go at trying to be the best they could be. And that is to the greater glory.

Gerard Gallagher works with the Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) and has just published, Faith – In Search of Greater Glory in Sport which is available now.



Josh van der Flier, World Rugby player of the year 2022.

The Irish Catholic

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Our Lady marches through Wexford



Ruadhán Jones

A large crowd processed through Wexford town with a statue of Our Lady to mark the feast

of the Immaculate Conception.

The Faithful who gathered December 8 prayed the rosary as the candlelit procession made its way from the Franciscan Friary.

The feast, which celebrates Mary's immaculate birth without the stain of original sin, is celebrated with processions, food and cultural festivities around the world.



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Ireland's forgotten



There are many Irish Catholics on the path to sainthood who deserve to be known better, writes **Fr John Hogan**

While Ireland has a long list of saints dating from the earliest years of Christianity, since the Church's process of canonisation was formalised, few Irish have been proposed for glorification.

At the moment 93 Irish Catholics are being investigated for possible canonisation, including six Irishmen numbered among English martyrs. There are 27 Blesseds; seven Venerables, for which a miracle is required for beatification; and 59 Servants of God.

Each of these individuals has their own unique story, though some are not very well known among the Faithful in Ireland. Here are the stories of some who deserve to be known better.

Servants of God Elizabeth Kearney and Margaret of Cashel

The history of persecution is written deeply in the experience of Irish Catholics, as the years following the Reformation led to the martyrdom of numerous Irish men and women. From these martyrs, two causes of 59 people have been advancing, while 17 have already been beatified. Among these martyrs are three women: Blessed Margaret Ball and the Tipperary martyrs, Elizabeth Kearney and Margaret of Cashel.

We know very little about the two latter women who were martyred during a massacre of Catholics at Cashel on September 13, 1647. Elizabeth was the mother of the martyr priest Blessed John Kearney. Born Elizabeth Creagh, she married John Kearney of Cashel. A pious woman, she took great care to raise her children in the Faith even in difficult



Women carry banners featuring Irish saints during the opening ceremony of the 50th International Eucharistic Congress in Dublin June 10, 2012. Photo: CNS

times and this inspired her son John to enter the Franciscans, earning a reputation for holiness long before he was martyred.

Elizabeth was active in her local community, providing support to the poor and to persecuted clergy. As the mother of a priest, she seemed to nurture a love for all priests. By 1647 she may have been widowed.

“As she was searching among the corpses for survivors, she was discovered by Inchiquin's troops and put to death”

In September 1667, in the midst of the Confederate Wars, Murrough O'Brien, Lord Inchiquin, led his troops against the town of Cashel; the garrison there was Catholic. The garrison and people of the town fled to the cathedral on the Rock, Elizabeth among them.

Inchiquin demanded the soldiers surrender to receive his mercy; the defenders offered to negotiate. They wanted the clergy and Catholics to be covered by the terms; Inchiquin

refused and the assault on the cathedral began.

Eventually breaching the defences, the attackers entered the cathedral and slaughtered soldiers, priests and laypeople, men, women, and children; the latter had taken refuge around the altar. It is believed Elizabeth was killed with a pike. As they lay dying, their assailants plundered the cathedral and desecrated the sacred art.

One of the women in the cathedral, known only as Margaret, had managed to survive the massacre. While her surname is unknown, Margaret was a Dominican tertiary and her reputation for piety has come down to us. She initially fled the scene of the sacking but concerned for possible survivors and for the fate of her spiritual director, Fr Richard Barry OP, she returned to the cathedral.

As she was searching among the corpses for survivors, she was discovered by Inchiquin's troops and put to death. Fr Barry had been captured at the cathedral and taken away; after being tortured by the soldiers, he was killed the day after the massacre. His cause is advancing with that of Elizabeth and Margaret.

While little else is known of these two women, their personal heroism and devotion to their faith is representative of that of many Irish Catholics in times of persecution and hardship throughout various periods of our history, and indeed they may provide encouragement and spiritual

assistance for difficulties that are to come.

Venerable Mary Aikenhead

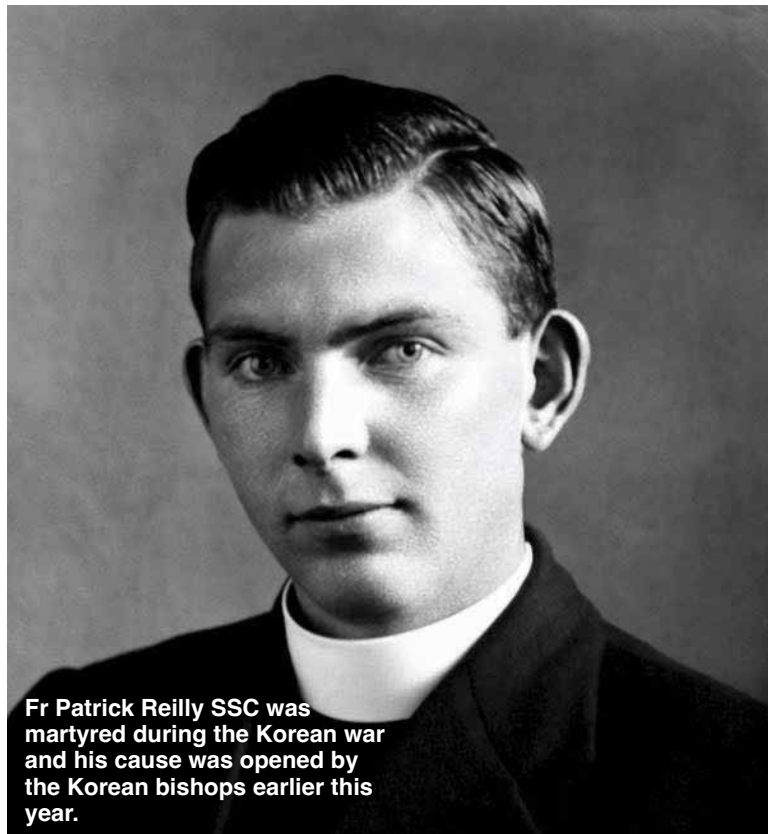
Following years of persecution and the destruction of religious houses, the fate of the poor and



A likeness of Venerable Mary Aikenhead is depicted on an old Irish stamp.

“Each of these individuals has their own unique story, though some are not very well known among the Faithful in Ireland”

witnesses to the Faith



Fr Patrick Reilly SSC was martyred during the Korean war and his cause was opened by the Korean bishops earlier this year.

sick in Ireland was often uncertain. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Irish Catholics felt a need to respond to the material and educational needs of many who existed on the fringes of society. Among those being considered for beatification is Mother Mary Aikenhead (1787-1858) a woman born to privilege whose heart was turned to those in need.

Born in Cork, Mary was raised Anglican, though she harboured a desire to convert to her mother's Catholic Faith. When her father converted to Catholicism on his deathbed, Mary felt free to enter the Church and was received in June 1802. Like many converts, Mary was gifted with tremendous zeal, and while that zeal was somewhat confined as she managed the family household, with the death of her mother in 1809 possibilities opened up for her.

At the suggestion of Bishop Daniel Murray of Dublin that a congregation of active, non-cloistered sisters was needed to carry out charitable work, Mary discovered that a seed had been planted in her heart.

In 1815 she founded the Irish Sisters of Charity and at once they made their presence felt in the streets of Dublin as they sought out the destitute and the sick. Mary's vision for her congregation was that of proactive Christian women reaching out in a creative way to those in need.

She did not see her role as merely responding to need but working to ensure that need did not emerge in the first place. She inspired her sisters to go the coalface and meet every challenge with complete trust in God, love for Christ and for their neighbours, the poor and the sick.

Following cholera epidemics in the 1830s, Mary opened a small

hospital in Ringsend. She sent sisters to Paris to train as nurses and in 1834 she founded St Vincent's Hospital on St Stephen's Green. Her zeal could not be contained and her congregation and its works of charity increased, moving beyond Ireland to Australia to work among deported women.

“Mary's vision for her congregation was that of proactive Christian women reaching out in a creative way to those in need”

Suffering from ill health for most of her life, Mary took refuge in prayer and there she found the strength to continue her work and inspire her sisters. For the last 27 years of her life she was confined to a wheelchair, yet up to the day of her death, her vision and selfless service remained vibrant and effective in meeting the needs of the destitute.

Servant of God, Fr Patrick Ryan

Emigration is a vital part of the story of Ireland, and among our emigrants are a number of Irish born candidates for canonisation. Fr Patrick Ryan (1844-1878), a priest of the Diocese of Knoxville, Tennessee, USA, is being investigated under Pope Francis' new category for sainthood, 'Offer of Life'.

Originally from Nenagh, Fr Ryan's family emigrated to America following the famine. He grew up in New York. He offered himself for service in the then Diocese of Nashville and was ordained in 1869; in 1872 he was

appointed pastor of Ss Peter and Paul parish, Chattanooga.

The new pastor faced many problems in the quickly growing city recovering from the American Civil War. The parish was large consisting of the town of Chattanooga and most of south-western Tennessee. However, Fr Ryan was zealous, athletic, and apostolic; he impressed upon his parishioners the importance of being Catholics in deed as well as in name. His efforts bore fruit. He enlarged the parish church, built a school and brought a religious congregation into the parish to widen the scope of pastoral service.

In September 1878 Yellow Fever struck Chattanooga and within a few days it was an epidemic. While most of the inhabitants fled the town, Fr Ryan was among the few that remained. Turning the parish school into a hospital, he was in the frontline tirelessly caring for those suffering and dying from the fever. He was known to have gone to the worst infected parts of the city seeking out the sick.

Aware of the risks he was taking, as a priest Fr Ryan understood he had to reach out to the most afflicted, bringing them the comfort of Christ and prepare those who were dying to meet their God. On September 26, he caught the fever himself; two days later he was dead. Fr Ryan's cause was opened in June 2016, his reputation for selfless service of the sick and his heroic sacrifice a living and potent memory among Catholics in Tennessee.

Servant of God, Fr Patrick Reilly SSC

The call to serve on the missions has been one which has occupied many Irish Catholics since the days of the early monks. The foundation of the Columban Missionaries in 1917 was another expression of this missionary zeal. The Columbans have given the Church many heroic missionaries, among them a number of martyrs, seven of whom are advancing to beatification among the New Martyrs of Korea. Fr Patrick Reilly is among them.

Fr Reilly was born in Drumraney, Co. Westmeath in 1915. He entered the Columbans in Dalgan Park in 1934 and was ordained in December 1940. In 1947 he was appointed to Korea as parish priest of Mukho on the east coast. For the next three years he carried out his pastoral duties with great fidelity, building up his small parish.

In June 1950, the Korean War broke out. On the June 27, North Korean soldiers landed at Mukho and locals fled for refuge, including Fr Reilly's parishioners. Alone with his cook, the priest made his way to where he heard Catholic refugees were hiding. Carrying out a discrete ministry, he quickly discovered how dangerous it was and remained hidden in the house of a catechist.

He was soon discovered by the communists and taken prisoner. It is believed that he had been forced to march from Mukho to Kangnung, a distance of 30km, and at some point was shot in

hatred of his faith and priesthood. His body was found on a mountain path by an old man.

Servant of God, Alfie Lambe

The Legion of Mary is perhaps one of Ireland's greatest contributions to the pastoral mission of the Church. Empowering lay people in the context of the mandate given by Jesus to every baptised Christian to proclaim the Gospel, members of the Legion around the world have offered their lives to serve the Church in every area of pastoral ministry. Legionaries have also taken on the mantle of the missionary life, among them the Tullamore born Alfie Lambe (1932-1959).

“The Legion of Mary is perhaps one of Ireland's greatest contributions to the pastoral mission of the Church”

Alfie was among the many young Irish people who nurtured a religious vocation, however his poor health prevented its realisation. Working at a local factory, he discovered the Legion of Mary, finding a forum to occupy his apostolic zeal. Alfie had a deep devotion to Our Lady, so the practical spirituality of the Legion resonated with him.

Before long, Alfie was working for Concilium in Dublin. In 1953 when Seamus Grace was appointed Legion Envoy to South America (envoys are Legion missionaries), Frank Duff suggested Alfie might go with him. If Alfie left as assistant to Grace, he soon became the prominent envoy.

He threw himself into his work and made numerous foundations throughout Colombia, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Argentina. Constantly combating poor health, Alfie was extraordinarily effective and those who met him quickly identified a beautiful holiness. They called him *el corderito*, the little lamb. While Alfie achieved more in a few years than many missionaries in a lifetime, his own life was to be short. In January 1959 he was discovered to have cancer, and on 21 of that month he died in Buenos Aires.

Alfie Lambe and the other five potential future saints I have named, are among many who confer on us a legacy of true holiness, pastoral zeal and a witness that is relevant in all times. Reflecting on them in our day, we can discern how to respond to the challenges that face us and how the Church in Ireland can move forward in a process of renewal.

i Fr John Hogan is Postulator for the Cause of Fr Willie Doyle. He is co-editor with Patrick Kenny of *The Rock From Which You Have Been Hewn* to be published by Veritas Publications in 2023.



Servant of God, Alfie Lambe.

A trip of a lifetime in the Holy Land...

A pilgrimage to the Holy Land is an opportunity for faith and culture to meet. Visiting the holy places associated with the life of Christ, the Gospel comes to life in a new and meaningful way. Journeying together with fellow pilgrims one gets a chance to penetrate the essence of the Faith in the land where Christianity was born.

ITINERARY:

Day 1

Make your way to Dublin airport and check-in for direct flight to Tel Aviv with onboard catering and personal entertainment. On arrival in Tel Aviv, we will be met by our Marian Pilgrimages representative and guide in the arrival hall before boarding our tour coaches. We can get acquainted with the group on the short transfer to Bethlehem – birthplace of Jesus Christ – for check-in to the four star Manger Square Hotel for four nights with dinner, bed and breakfast.

Day 2

After breakfast, we take the short walk to the Church of the Nativity where we spend the morning and celebrate Mass. Here we will visit the birthplace of Jesus, and the Holy Manger as well as the chapels of St Joseph, St Jerome, the Holy Innocents and the Church of St Catherine.

Leaving the Church of the Nativity, we make our way to the Milk Grotto Church before sitting down to lunch in Manger Square where we will have a chance to meet the Mayor of Bethlehem and hear from local Christians. After lunch, we board the coaches for the short drive to the Shepherd's

Fields' where the angels heralded the birth of Christ. After lunch, we continue to Ein Karem and visit the Churches of the Visitation (where Mary met Elizabeth) and St John the Baptist before we return to the hotel for dinner.

Day 3

This morning we drive to Jerusalem and enter the Old City to the Church of St Anne and nearby, see the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed a man paralysed for over 40 years. Close by we begin the *Via Dolorosa* – the way of sorrow – and follow the stations of the cross through the markets and streets of the Old City to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the site of Calvary (where Jesus was crucified) and his tomb. Here we will celebrate Mass and take some time to reflect at this sacred site.

Afterwards we can enjoy some free time in Jerusalem for lunch and exploring the markets, before visiting the Western Wall.

Day 4

After breakfast, we drive to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem where we take our group photo and enjoy the view of the Old City below. We make our way to the highest point on the

Mount of Olives to the Ascension Dome that marks the site where Christ ascended into heaven. After this, we continue to visit the *Pater Noster* Church, *Dominus Flevit*, the Assumption Church and Grotto and the Garden of Gethsemane. In the afternoon we celebrate Mass in the Church of St Peter in Gallicantu or 'cock's crow', where Peter denied Jesus three times and see the dungeon where Jesus was held the night of Holy Thursday.

Afterwards, we walk around Mount Zion and visit the Church of the Dormition of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Tomb of King David and the Room of the Last Supper before returning to the hotel for dinner.

Day 5

This morning, we leave Bethlehem and visit Bethany where Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, for Mass. We will then drive via the Inn of the Good Samaritan to the Dead Sea – the lowest point on earth. We have some time to relax and float on the water near Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. We will then continue to Qasr-al-Yahud where Jesus was baptised in the River Jordan by St John the Baptist for a renewal of baptism vows.

We then proceed to Jericho to see the Mount of Temptation where Jesus was tempted by the devil, and the Sycamore tree of Zacchaeus. After lunch, we drive along the Jordan Valley to Nazareth and for check-in to the four-star Legacy Hotel for four nights, dinner, bed and breakfast. Optional Eucharistic Adoration at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day 6

After breakfast, we will spend our morning exploring the city where Jesus lived as a child. We make our way to the Basilica of the Annunciation to celebrate Mass. Visiting the lower level of the basilica, we see the remains of Mary's house and where the Angel Gabriel visited her. Here inscribed on the altar are the Latin words of 'Here the Word was made flesh'. Adjacent to the basilica is the St Joseph's Church, where we will visit the site of Joseph's workshop and the house of the Holy Family.

A short walk from the basilica through the thriving market is Mary's Well where we have the opportunity to draw water from the same well as the Virgin Mary.

After some time for lunch, we take the short coach journey to Cana where we visit the Wedding Church, the site of Jesus' first miracle, turning the water to wine. Couples on the pilgrimage can take part in the special ceremony to renew their wedding vows and there is also prayers and blessings for spouses at home and deceased husbands and wives. In the lower level of the church we see artifacts from the site before having an opportunity to taste and purchase some wine from this sacred site. Afterwards, we make the short return journey to Nazareth for dinner in our hotel.

Optional rosary at the Irish icon at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day 7

This morning we make our way to the Mount of Beatitudes overlooking the Sea of Galilee, Capernaum and Tabgha. Here we take some time to listen to the readings of the great Sermon on the Mount before continuing to Capernaum to see the old syna-

gogue and the excavations of St Peter's house. We then visit the nearby site of the multiplication of the loaves and fish at Tabgha, and the Church of the Primacy of St Peter.

We enjoy lunch on the shore of the Sea of Galilee before taking a boat trip on the lake. Before returning to the hotel, we visit Magdala and the magnificent retreat centre and celebrate Mass in the newly-built chapel at the home of St Mary Magdalene.

Optional candlelit procession at the Basilica of the Annunciation at 8.30pm.

Day 8

After breakfast we drive to Mount Tabor and ascend by taxi for Mass at the Church of the Transfiguration where Jesus is transfigured and speaks to Moses and Elijah. We have a chance to enjoy the view of the Valley of Armageddon before returning to Nazareth for some free time and dinner at the hotel.

Day 9

Early breakfast before taking our coach to Tel Aviv airport for return flights to Dublin via Istanbul.



The Church of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor.



Irish pilgrims pray at the Garden of Gethsemane in the Holy Land.

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An almost 400-year-old Irish chalice used throughout periods of persecution has been returned, **Ruadhán Jones** writes

There were two Franciscan friaries in Co. Leitrim, one in north Leitrim and the other in south Leitrim. Creevelea friary was set up in the year 1508 beside the village of Dromahair in north Leitrim and Muintir Eolais friary was set up in 1643, near the village of Jamestown in the south of the county.

In 2017, when researching and writing the chapter 'Franciscans in County Leitrim 1508 – c.1800' for the *Leitrim history and society* volume, Msgr Liam Kelly, a priest historian and a native of south Leitrim, learned that a chalice had been given to the Jamestown friary in 1644 which had the inscription *Pro residentia fratru[m] minorum de Munter olius 1644* (For the residence of the Friars Minor of Muintir Eolais 1644) inscribed on its base.

He also discovered at that time that the chalice was still in existence and that it was in the Mount Saint Joseph motherhouse convent of the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati in Ohio.

In 2017 Msgr Kelly, with the help of an American friend who was working in Cincinnati at the time, established contact with Veronica Buchanan, the archivist for the Sisters of Charity.

Neither she, nor the religious community there had any idea where Muintir Eolais was nor where the chalice had originated from. They were delighted to learn that Muintir Eolais was an area of approximately seven parishes in south Co. Leitrim, an area within which the Jamestown friary had been situated, and that the chalice which they had in their possession had begun its life in Leitrim almost 400 years earlier.

The archivist provided photographs of the chalice at that time and these were included in the *Leitrim History and Society* volume which was published in 2019.

Story

The Muintir Eolais chalice has had a chequered history. It is possible that the chalice was used for the celebration of Mass at the National Synod of Church leaders which was held in Jamestown throughout the second week of August 1650.

However, on March 19, 1653, just nine years after it was given to the friary, Jamestown fell to the



Msgr Liam Kelly is pictured receiving the Muintir Eolais chalice from the Sisters of Charity in Cincinnati in October of this year. Pictured giving him the chalice are (from left) archivist Veronica Buchanan, Sr Marie Ann Schneider and Sr Mary Ellen Murphy.

Cromwellian forces and the friary was suppressed. The friars and other priests were ordered to leave the country within a period of one month and they were "not allowed to exercise their function" until they did so.

The Franciscan priests of Jamestown ignored this edict and instead they fled and hid in the woods and mountains of south Leitrim, bringing the chalice with them and using it when they celebrated Mass in secret wherever they considered it safe to do so.

“It is possible that the chalice was used for the celebration of Mass at the National Synod of Church leaders which was held in Jamestown”

This use of Mass rocks and other out of the way places to celebrate the Eucharist continued until about the year 1750, when the Penal Laws were eased and Catholics could safely gather to celebrate Mass in public once more.

Since 2017 people on both sides of the Atlantic have been trying to find out when and how the Muintir Eolais chalice was brought to America. Little progress has been made to date but it is thought that Irish Franciscan priests brought the chalice with them to America, possibly to Santa Fe or Albuquerque in the state of New Mexico, in the decades after the Great Famine.

The American Sisters of Charity also had a mission there and the Franciscan missionary priests used

to celebrate Mass in their convent which may explain why the chalice came into their possession.

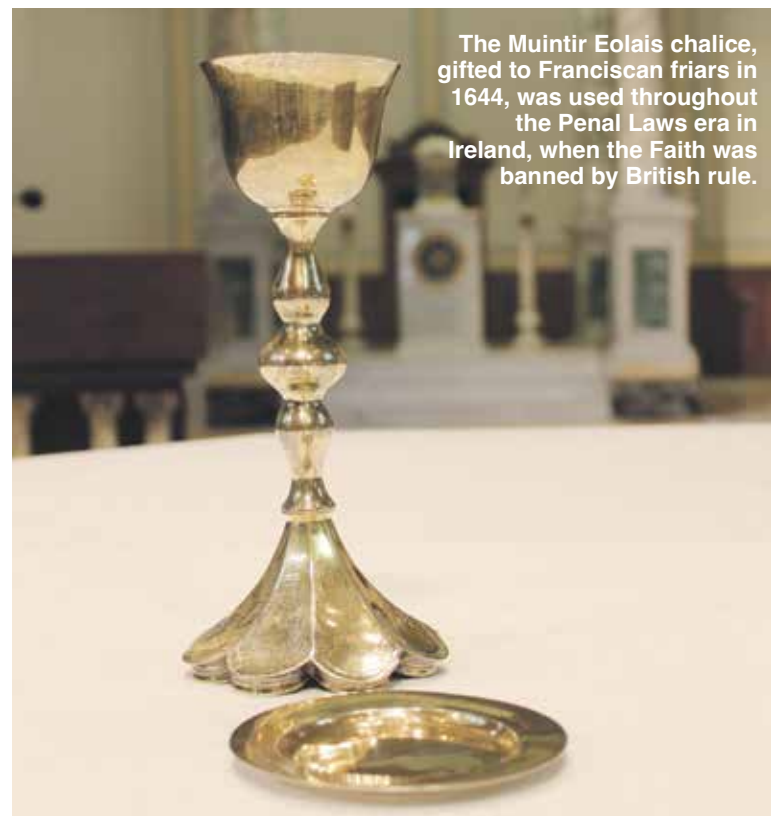
References

There were, throughout the 1900s, a few written references to the chalice which proved invaluable in tracing its whereabouts. The reference to it in April 1916 in *The Catholic Bulletin*, a weekly newspaper published in the city of St Paul in Minnesota, merely stated that among the treasures held in the Sisters of Charity motherhouse in Cincinnati was “a precious gold chalice of 1644”. In that same year a Washington quarterly journal called *The Catholic Historical Review* gave a more detailed description of the chalice stating that:

“Among the many valuable possessions of the [Sisters] of Charity... in that fascinating centre of Catholic historic associations, Mount St. Joseph-on-the-Ohio, there is a gold chalice, 9 inches high, with a cup 4 inches in diameter, a base 4 ½ inches across, and a paten about 5 inches broad. On the base of this chalice are inscribed the words: *pro residentia fratrum minorum de Munter olius, 1644.*”

Then 30 years after the above reference Fr Canice Mooney OFM (1911-63), a Drumshanbo native and a gifted Franciscan historian, wrote about the chalice in his article ‘The Franciscan friary of Jamestown’ which was published in *The Journal of Ardagh and Clonmacnois Antiquarian Society* in 1946. So, it is clear from these references that the chalice has been in the convent of Mount Saint Joseph in Cincinnati for more than 100 years.

Msgr Kelly had been hoping to travel to Cincinnati just to see the



The Muintir Eolais chalice, gifted to Franciscan friars in 1644, was used throughout the Penal Laws era in Ireland, when the Faith was banned by British rule.

chalice. However, to his delight, he received an email last May from Veronica Buchanan saying that the convent there was downsizing and that they were looking for a new home for the chalice.

It was then agreed that St Mary's Church in Carrick-on-Shannon, the parish in which the chalice began its life, would become the new owners of the chalice and that Msgr Kelly would travel to Cincinnati to collect the chalice and bring it safely back home.

On October 17 of this year he visited Cincinnati, where he received a

wonderful welcome from the Sisters of Charity. They handed over the chalice to him and on October 26 he flew back to Ireland, bringing the chalice home with him.

This chalice, which has been described as “a wandering symbol of Irish faith”, was presented to Fr Francis Garvey, the parish priest of Kiltoghert, at the 12 noon Mass in St Mary's church in Carrick on Shannon on Sunday December 11.

This historic and much travelled chalice has returned to its roots and will be retained in the parish where it began its life 378 years ago.

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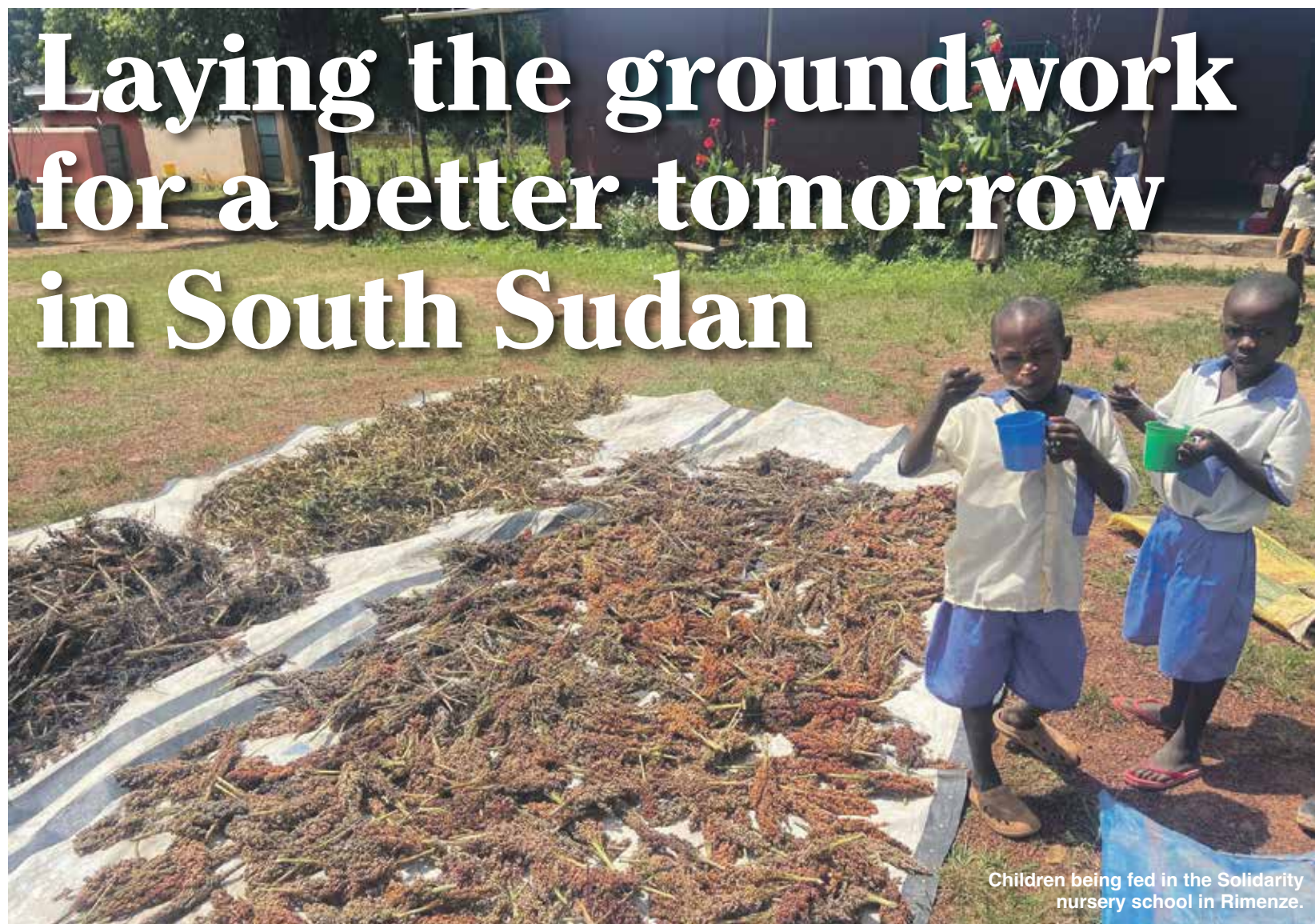
The Church is at the forefront of efforts to serve a struggling people in one of the world's newest countries, writes **James Bradshaw**

It was recently announced that Pope Francis will be visiting South Sudan in early February as part of an 'ecumenical pilgrimage of peace'.

When he arrives in South Sudan in the company of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, and the moderator of the Church of Scotland, Iain Greenshields, Pope Francis will be welcomed by a predominantly Christian population which has suffered enormously during the civil war which started in 2013.

The Church has been at the centre of efforts to end this multi-sided political and tribal conflict which has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

These efforts were memorably symbolised by the Pontiff hosting a retreat for the country's political leaders in 2019, during which he kissed the feet of the Presi-



Children being fed in the Solidarity nursery school in Rimenze.

dent Salva Kiir and his arch rival, Riek Machar.

Moreover, a unique organisation led by a Kilkenney priest is at the forefront of efforts to build up the Church's capacity to serve a struggling people.

Solidarity

Solidarity with South Sudan was established in 2008. After many decades of deadly conflict between the Islamic government in

Khartoum and the Christians of southern Sudan, a peace agreement had opened the way for an eventual referendum on independence, which passed with overwhelming support in 2011.

Though a nation was about to come into being, there was no state to go with it. Instead, an impoverished and traumatised population was preparing to take their first steps as a free people.

Seeing the need for action, the Sudanese bishops' conference requested urgent support from religious congregations.

The structure that emerged from this represented a new model of collaboration involving inter-congregational communities of male and female religious drawn from across the world, each bringing their own particular skill set to help a country which lies at the very bottom of the 191 nations included in the global Human Development Index.

Initiatives

Working together, the Solidarity team has established various initiatives across the country to lay the groundwork for a better tomorrow where South Sudan will no longer require so much assistance from the outside world. In 2019, the Callan native Fr Jim Greene became executive director of the organisation.

During his long and varied career within the Mis-

sionaries of Africa, Fr Greene had previously spent 13 years working in Malawi among other postings, and he now directs the activities of Solidarity from its base in the capital of Juba.

“The Sudanese bishops' conference requested urgent support from religious congregations”

“Basically, we are here at the invitation of the local bishops. We are here to help build capacity in certain areas, in education, health, pastoral and belatedly agricultural, to build capacity in the Church, and for the service of the society in view of bringing about a more peaceful society,” he explained.

“So it is working with the Church but it is also in terms of being, if it's not too pretentious to say it, agents of cooperating in a transformation of society.”

South Sudan has an estimated population of over 11 million, more than half of whom are below 18 years of age - many of whom have never experienced true peace in their lifetimes.

Solidarity's activities include the Solidarity Teacher Training College in Yambio, a facility in Rimenze

which works to upskill farmers to help combat the food crisis, and a facility for training nurses in the city of Wau.

Much of the discussion about social services in developing countries focuses on the need for physical buildings and equipment, which sometimes distracts from the severe shortage of trained personnel to work in them.

South Sudan's education sector is a case in point, as Solidarity's teacher training college is one of only two in the entire country.

Among the missionaries working there is Sr Jacinta Prunty of the Holy Faith Sisters in Dublin, who left behind a distinguished career as a history lecturer in Maynooth University to help train the next generation of primary school teachers in South Sudan.

Role

When asked what made her role in Yambio so important, Sr Jacinta points to the mantra at the heart of Solidarity's work. “I suppose it's the difference you make, because everything you do here is a help,” she said. “The biggest thing is you are handing over. You're helping out, and handing over, and every single thing you do here is for student teachers.”

In Wau the training facility for nurses had had a long history, the site itself was derelict when the organisation took responsibility for it.

Drawing upon their expertise and the assistance of hundreds of international congregations and agencies supporting their work, Solidarity were able to renovate and reopen the facility - something that was beyond the means of the cash-strapped diocesan authorities.

All of this work is taking place in an extremely challenging environment.

The peace agreement which the main warring factions signed up to in 2018 is still in place, but is fragile, with as many armed groups operating as ever.

“South Sudan's education sector is a case in point, as Solidarity's teacher training college is one of only two in the entire country”

Road infrastructure is exceptionally poor, and unsafe to use in many parts of the country. Though clergy are generally much-respected, they are not always safe; the shooting of Bishop-elect Christian Carlassare last year was one of several such attacks in recent years.

There is a shortage of priests nationwide. As Fr Cletus Atindaana, a Ghanaian priest of the Missionaries of Africa explains, this can mean that isolated Catho-



Malakal Cathedral still bears the scars of a mortar strike.



Fr Jim Greene in the computer room.

“The Church has been at the centre of efforts to end this multi-sided political and tribal conflict which has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives”

lic communities centred around parish out-stations can only attend Mass a few times a year, relying on the teaching of lay catechists in the meantime.

Widespread

Polygamy is widespread, even among practising Catholics, many of whom often stubbornly hold on to animist religious practices.

Tribalism runs deep, meaning that priests can feel hostility towards them if they are not of the same group as those who they are ministering to. “Here, it is said, there is a proverb that the blood of tribal relationship is thicker than baptismal water,” Fr Atindaana noted. “A chunk, a good number of the people are not able to go beyond [this].”

For all of these challenges, the depth of the people's faith is obvious.

During the course of a religion class on the Old Testament and Jewish prayer in the teacher training college in Yambio, a student teacher from the northern side of the Sudanese border – a recent convert from Islam – told his classmates of one source of continued confusion for him.

If the Jews had not accepted their fellow Jew as God's Son, how then he wondered were others to do so? Before the teacher leading the class could respond, a classmate in the next row replied that a prophet was not without honour except

in his country and among his own people.

A second student quickly chimed in to remind his classmate that those who knew Jesus in his youth had questioned whether he were not merely the carpenter's son, being unable to see the truth, after which a discussion on the relationship between Christ's teaching and the old Mosaic law ensued.

“For all of these challenges, the depth of the people's faith is obvious”

Many of the trainee teachers had spent part of their childhoods in refugee camps, but it did nothing to dim their interest in a faith which they are learning to share with the next generation in classrooms: hopefully in solid classrooms and peaceful days to come.

They are the future of their country and Church, a future in which Solidarity aims to hand over what it has built to the people of South Sudan. The organisation has always been intended as a transitional body, and the members of its communities return to their respective orders after their time in South Sudan is complete.

Dangerous

Reflecting on what makes this organisation of volun-

teers who have willingly ventured forth into one of the world's most dangerous environments, Fr Greene said that there is something else that is unique and special, beyond the organisational structure. “You are definitely talking about entering into the mystery of God. It's mysterious, people are coming from all different angles, all different experiences, all different expectations, and in some way they find their calling and their home here in Solidarity.”



Parishioners at Mass in the Malakal refugee camp.



Huts outside the religious retreat centre in Kit.



Solidarity Teacher Training College in Yambio.

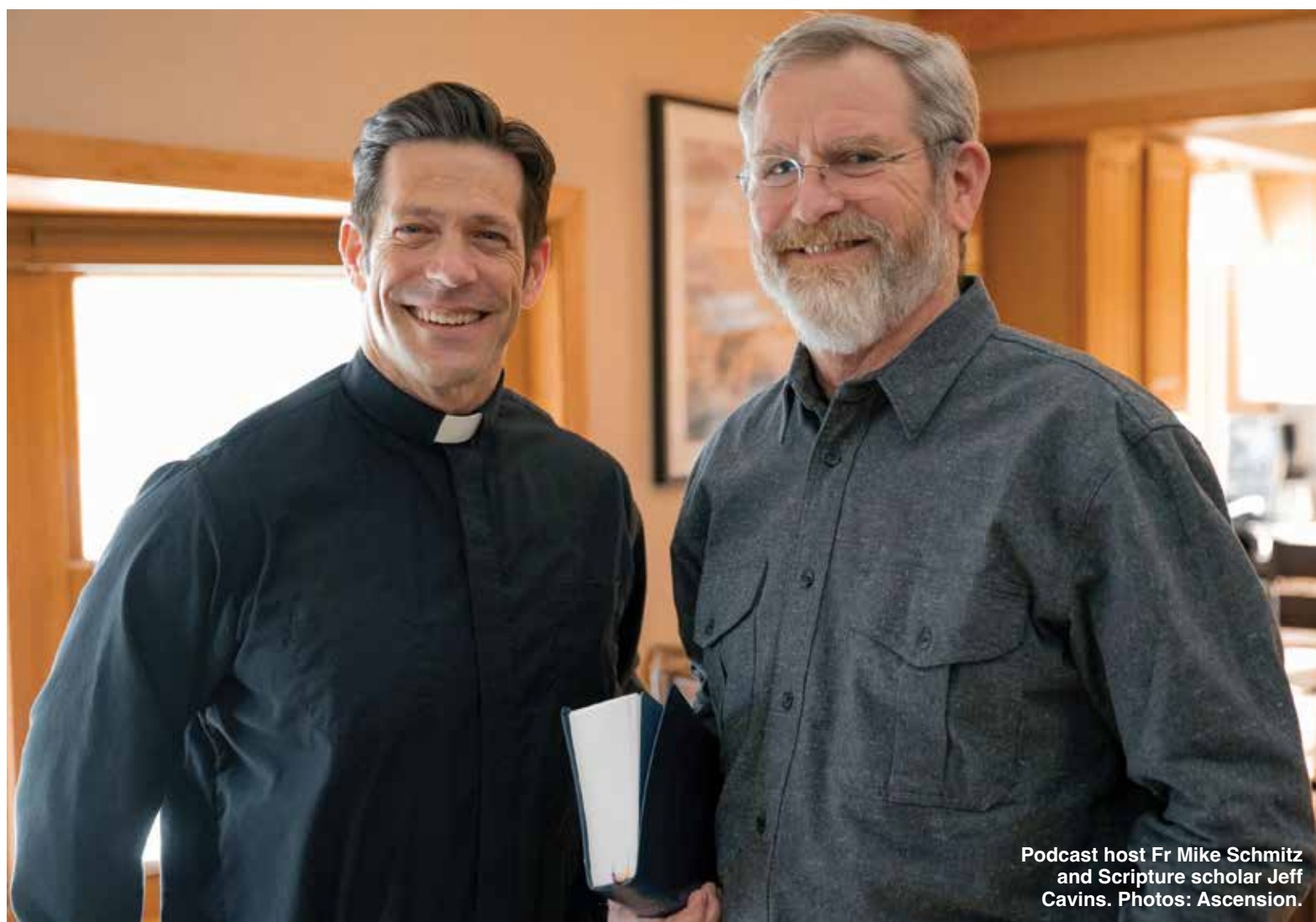
Breaking through barriers with



Internet star Fr Mike Schmitz and Scripture scholar Jeff Cavins are looking to bring the facts of the Faith to a new audience in the new year, writes **Jason Osborne**

By any measure, Ascension's *The Bible in a Year* podcast, hosted by Fr Mike Schmitz and featuring Jeff Cavins has been a runaway success. At a recent press conference, it was revealed to journalists that in the 30 days before the conference, the podcast had reached an audience of 1.5 million people via various electronic devices.

On top of this, as of the time of said conference, the podcast had surpassed 365 million all-time downloads. With numbers like that, it's no surprise that *The Bible in a Year* was the number one podcast in the US in all categories from January 2 to January 18, 2021 – knocking other top shows off their perch. In 2022, it did the same thing again from January 1-7, as people looked to kick off their new year with the Word of God.



Podcast host Fr Mike Schmitz and Scripture scholar Jeff Cavins. Photos: Ascension.

Storm

In the coming year, they're looking to take a searching world by storm again as they launch their new *The Catechism in a Year* podcast on January 1, 2023. The podcast will feature 365 daily episodes plus bonus content, and will see Fr Mike Schmitz slot back into the role of presenter once again. As with *The Bible in a Year*, and as implied by the title, *The Catechism in a Year* podcast will see Fr Mike read every line of

the Catechism of the Catholic Church throughout the year. He'll be regularly joined by other Catholic teachers and theologians as special guests on the show – including renowned Bible scholar Jeff Cavins, who was a regular on *The Bible in a Year*.

“There is the age of the Church and one of the things that we recognise is that here's the Holy Spirit who continues to move”

Asked during the conference what he hopes listeners of *The Catechism in a Year* will get out of it, the priest of Duluth diocese, Minnesota, said that he hopes that people “will not only grow in information but real transformation”.

“When I wrote the email to Ascension saying, ‘We should do the Bible in a Year,’ I think my original email said we should do the Bible and Catechism in a year. My proposal was that we would do both [at the same time], and y'all wisely, wisely said that that would be way too much, so I'm really, really grateful,” Fr Mike laughed.

“Also, I think that having just the Bible was completely the way to go and now having just the Catechism is the way to go because this recognition that what God is doing in this world, it didn't end with Acts chapter 28. It continues, and there is the age of the Church and one of the things that we recognise is that here's the Holy Spirit who continues to move. Here's God who continues to reach

out to his people, God who continues to make us his sons and daughters.”

Fr Mike described his gratitude for the gift of the Catechism, because it contains the ring of “real truth”.

“You can't love what you don't know and God reveals himself in Sacred Scripture and so we get to love him more, but he also reveals himself in Sacred Tradition and so we get to love him more. And that's what I hope. I hope that when it comes to the Bible, we had a biblical worldview that was either given for the first time or rediscovered. With the Catechism, it's a biblical worldview that is now amplified or I think even brought into even sharper distinction or clearer vision, so that's what I'm hoping, that people will not only grow in information but real transformation,” he says.

Encourage

Mr Cavins, who was also present at the conference, encouraged those who enjoyed *The Bible in a Year* to give *CIY* a go, as it'll feel very familiar to those who listened through it. Describing the Catechism as a “seamless” follow up to the Bible, Mr Cavins said that as the Bible “reveals God to us in words and deeds,” the Catechism helps us to figure out how to respond to God in words and deeds.

“In that, we need some help. To be taught in the Body of Christ is perfectly natural. A father has to teach his children, just like a child is taught by their Mom and Dad, so we are taught by the Church what certain things mean. For example, faith. Well, if you go out there in the world or you go on Google, you're

going to find that there's hundreds and hundreds of different definitions of faith, but we're interested in what did Jesus pass on,” Mr Cavins said.

In the Catechism, “we bring the past into the present to educate us and to form us,” giving us a better view of what's expected of us, he said.

“A father has to teach his children, just like a child is taught by their Mom and Dad, so we are taught by the Church what certain things mean”

“And so in the area of faith, we understand what faith is and then we can get onto living that in our life and the Catechism does this in a systematic and organic way – a beautiful way. I think that also, one of the other things that is really important is that we don't leave the story behind, of salvation history. What we do is we populate that in our own life and it becomes fuller and fuller.

“Finally I would say that, in order for us to grow as Catholics, we have to know our faith and that's really, really important. In order for us to grow, we need to learn how to share the Faith. In learning how to share the Faith, we have to know what our Faith is and how to articulate it to other people and so our hope is that the *BIY* and *CIY* are going to go one step further in forming people so that they can become like little sat-



Fr Mike Schmitz

the Bible and Catechism in a Year

ellites and share with other people, so I'm really excited about it," Mr Cavins said.

With the National Eucharistic Revival coming up in the United States, Fr Mike was asked whether the *CIY* will help to get people into the spirit for that. Acknowledging that the Catechism doesn't discuss the sacraments initially, he said that it will bolster the Eucharistic Revival's efforts in that the revival is about "an invitation into love, relationship with God himself".

“There’s something in there...that invites us into greater understanding and invites us into greater love”

“As we said before, we can't love what we don't know and one of the things that gets unpacked, even in the very beginning paragraphs of the Catechism, is where we start talking about God in himself. There's something about that that's just so powerful. I think a lot of times for myself and maybe for a lot of people, we think about, 'Ok, what has God done in time? What has God done in my life? What has God done in the lives of other people?' Which is awesome, it's incredible, because that's part of how God reveals himself, but there's also sections of the Catechism that talk about God in himself – not just what God does, or what he has done – but just the who and the what that God himself is,” Fr Mike said.

“There's something in there... that invites us into greater understanding and invites us into greater love. It's kinda like, you know, you can see someone do something but when you get to know, like, who they are – on their own – not just when they're at work or when they're at home, but just to know who they are, you can either dislike them or you can fall more in love with them, and I think the whole point of the Catechism is to fall more in love with the Lord.

“And so I think it dovetails up really, really well even with the idea of revival. I think that when it comes to rediscovering the Bible and rediscovering God as he reveals himself through the Bible, that's a revival. The next step of course, is how does God continue to reveal himself now, and he continues to give himself to us in the Eucharist, through the Church. So, it's all combined.”

Success

On the groundbreaking success of the *BIY* podcast, Mr Cavins said that he couldn't have anticipated it. When he put together his Bible timeline, on which the *BIY* reading plan was based, Mr Cavins was only 25 years old, and thought it'd only be for him.

“I just had this idea, but it was only for me – I just wanted to see the story, and so I went out and bought some paper and got some

coloured pencils and a ruler and I went home and stayed up for 48 hours and created this chart, having no idea that that would define my life. But I can see now in hindsight that what it did for me personally and continues to do for me is happening in other people's lives, and so when people say, 'Wow, you know, the Bible timeline really changed my life,' I say, 'Me too!,'” he laughed.

“It changed my life in so many different ways, but now we're going forward together and discovering more and more together, and so it kinda belongs to the Church now. It's just our story, and we found a way to communicate that in a way that everybody can get on board. So no, I didn't expect it. Am I happy? Absolutely.”

While the Bible is obviously of interest to Christians of every denomination – even if they have their differences over it – the Catechism is of course the Catechism of the Catholic Church. An obvious question to put to them is whether the new podcast will be as accessible as their last one was, or whether it'll appeal more to those already in the Catholic camp than to others.

Expansive

“I think it's not going to be exclusive. I think that hopefully, it's going to be even more inclusive and more expansive than possibly the Catechism has ever been in the past,” Fr Mike said, adding that he thinks there's a “challenge” there when it comes to communicating the Catholic Church's rich intellectual tradition.

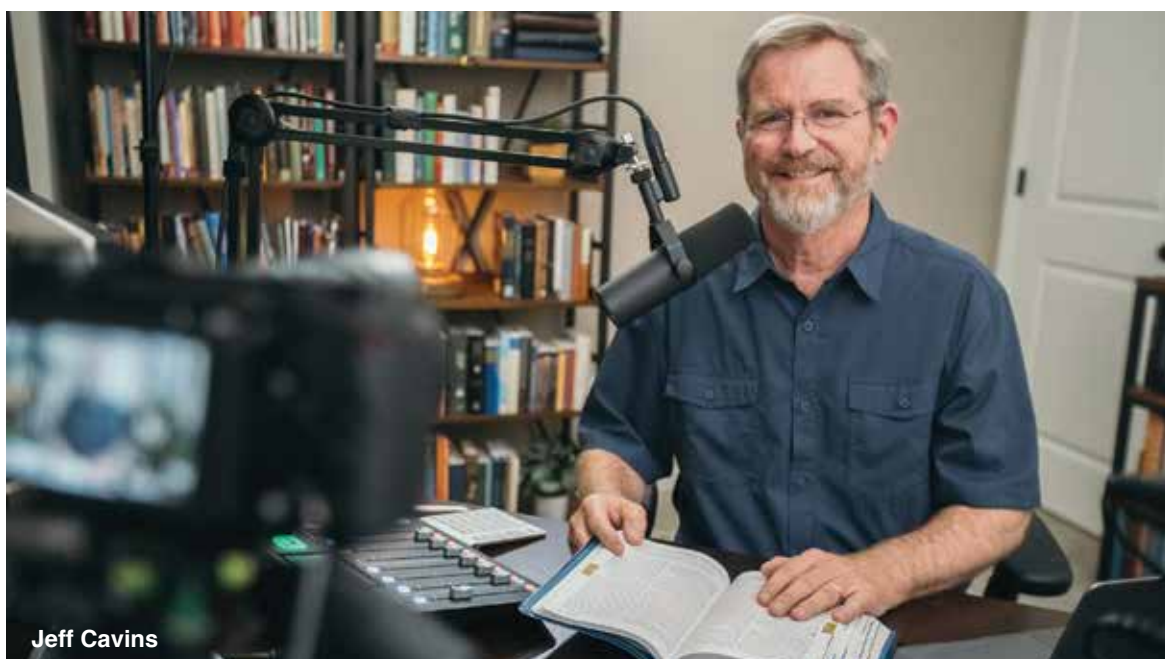
“You know, Bishop Barron will often reference the fact that we have an incredible intellectual tradition in the Catholic Church that isn't as often as it ought to be communicated. There is a lot of profound thought that has gone into our Faith, and so my thought would be that, during the Catechism, there is a similar kind of rediscovery of that depth of thought, just like when somebody is led through the Bible, they realise, 'Oh my gosh, there is more to the Scripture than I thought. I thought it was just a collection of a bunch of stories, or a collection of a bunch of holy stories,' or something like this. We've talked about before the 'Hallmark' version of the Faith. Well, I think when it comes to the Catechism, there is such a thing as like, 'I have my second grade version of the Faith'. What this is is a kind of levelling up,” Fr Mike said.

“On the ground-breaking success of the *BIY* podcast, Mr Cavins said that he couldn't have anticipated it”

He described it as “an encouragement” to know that the Faith “has been thought through”. “It has a lot of really good and mature answers to really good and mature questions,” as he puts it.



Fr Mike Schmitz records a reading of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.



Jeff Cavins

Mr Cavins said that the *CIY* is for everybody “because life is for everybody and God's plan is for everybody and the Eucharist is for everybody. Our Blessed Mother and the saints, all of it, the Mass, it's all for everybody out there”.

“I think in some ways, with the times that we're living in right now, as difficult as they are socially, politically and so forth that people are searching, more than any other time and it's evidenced by the *BIY* and the numbers that've been put up on that. I think in a way we've moved a little bit beyond apologetics in terms of let's talk about this and battle about it into, 'Let's invite people in', because they need everything that the Catechism talks about,” he said.

Admitting that the Faith isn't always “the easiest thing to talk about,” Mr Cavins said “neither is your family”.

“If I met you on the street and said, 'Hey, tell me about your family?' Where do I begin? That's the way it is in telling the Faith – we're telling people our family story and it takes a book like the Catechism to get us started in explaining that.”

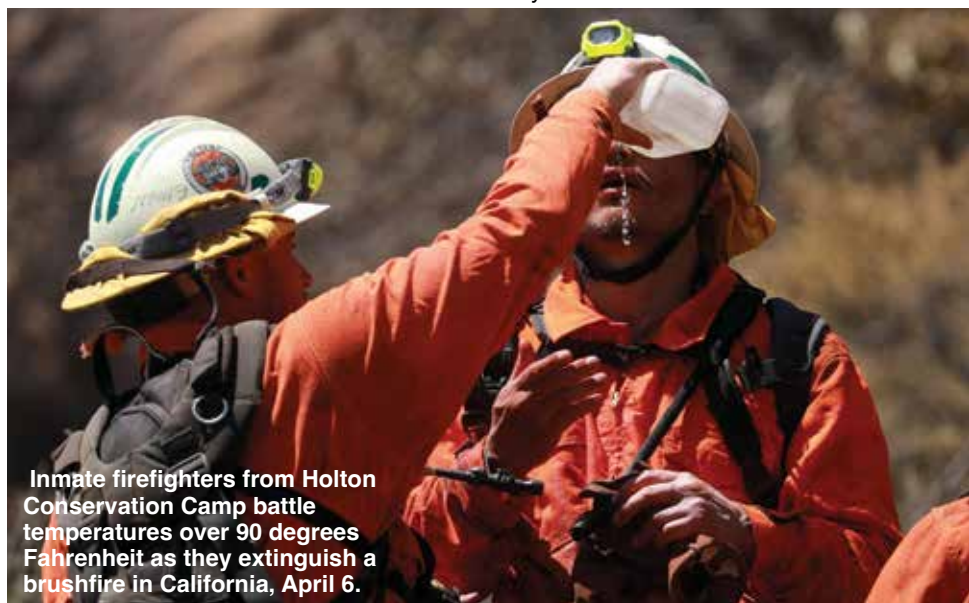


A billboard in New York's Time Square spotlighting *The Bible in a Year* is seen December 19, 2021. Photo: CNS

Year in Pictures



Pope Francis touches a young boy's pacifier as he greets people during his general audience in the Paul VI hall at the Vatican February 16.



Inmate firefighters from Holton Conservation Camp battle temperatures over 90 degrees Fahrenheit as they extinguish a brushfire in California, April 6.



People visit a memorial outside Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas, May 25, the site of a mass shooting.



The Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement's retreat house is seen after a snow storm in Washington January 3, 2022. Photos: CNS.



Ukrainian men carefully carry a statue of Jesus taken down from the Armenian Cathedral of the Assumption of Mary in Lviv to be stored in a bunker for protection. The last time the statue was taken down was during World War II.



Ukrainian soldiers present colours during an international opening ceremony May 13, for the International Military Pilgrimage at the Basilica of St Pius X in Lourdes.



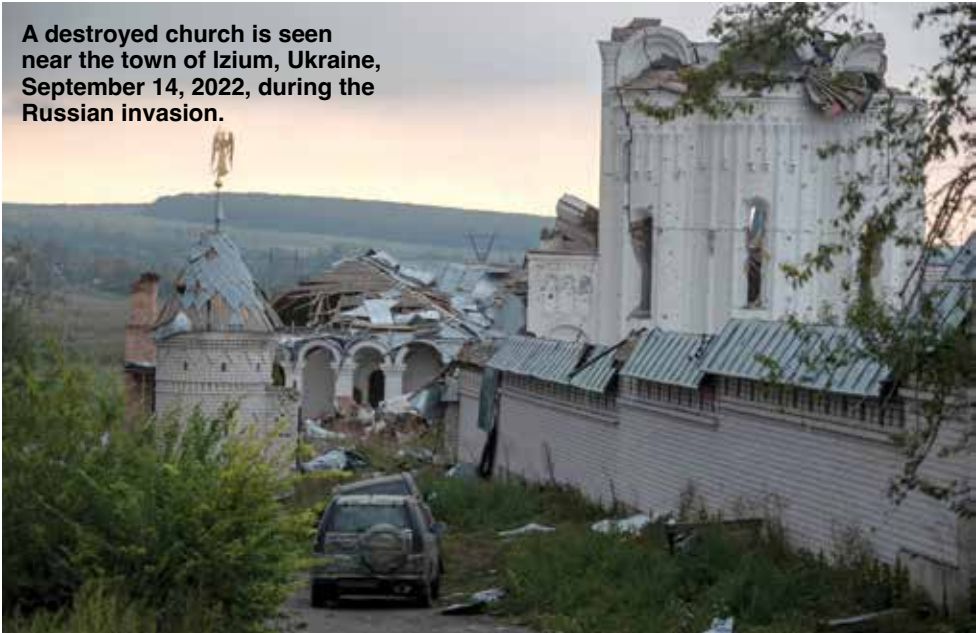
Catholic faithful dressed in traditional clothes take part in the annual Corpus Christi procession in Crostwitz, Germany, June 16.



Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Vatican secretary of state, greets a sick woman during his meeting with religious congregations in Kinshasa, Congo, July 4.



A plain-clothes law enforcement member holds a tear gas launcher as protests erupt after the presidential election results were announced, in Kisumu, Kenya, August 15. Kenya's Catholic bishops called for peace after a dispute emerged in the presidential election.



A destroyed church is seen near the town of Izium, Ukraine, September 14, 2022, during the Russian invasion.



A priest sprinkles holy water at dogs during a drive-through pet blessing in Manila, Philippines, October 2, ahead of World Animal Day. The day coincided with the feast of St Francis of Assisi, October 4.



Drones in Doha, Qatar, display welcoming words above the skyline November 14 ahead of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.



The Nativity scene and Christmas tree decorate St Peter's Square after a lighting ceremony at the Vatican December 3.

2022 Review of the Year

JANUARY

The New Year started grimly, as 22 Catholic church workers were murdered in 2021, according to Fides, the Vatican's missionary news agency. Some 13 priests, one religious brother, two religious sisters and six laypeople were killed in the course of their ministry in situations of extreme poverty, war or civil tensions.

One of Ireland's most-senior prelates insisted that the synod process on the future of Catholicism must be open to all voices if it is to bring meaningful reform to the Church here. Archbishop of Tuam Francis Duffy warned that the process would only be worthwhile if Church leaders can reach out to those who are not involved with the Church.

The Government's decision to apply VAT to devotional candles used for personal prayer was announced at the start of the year. It was described as "mean spirited" and parishes warned it would have a significant effect on churches that struggled during the pandemic. The addition of the dramatic rise of the cost of fuel made the timing of the decision "really unfortunate", said Msgr John Byrne of Portlaoise parish.

As the pandemic slowly began to wind down, bishops called for all the Faithful to be welcomed back to parishes as excitement grew. Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey said the lifting of restrictions is a "great opportunity" to welcome people back "to experience what the heart of the Church is. 'That sense of gathering on a Sunday... is so, so important,' Bishop Dempsey told *The Irish Catholic*.

Vatican pays tribute to the 22 missionaries murdered last year



Parishes criticise Govt 'mean spirited' tax on Church candles



Turn no-one away from synod, archbishop pleads

Time to welcome everyone back to parishes – bishops



FEBRUARY

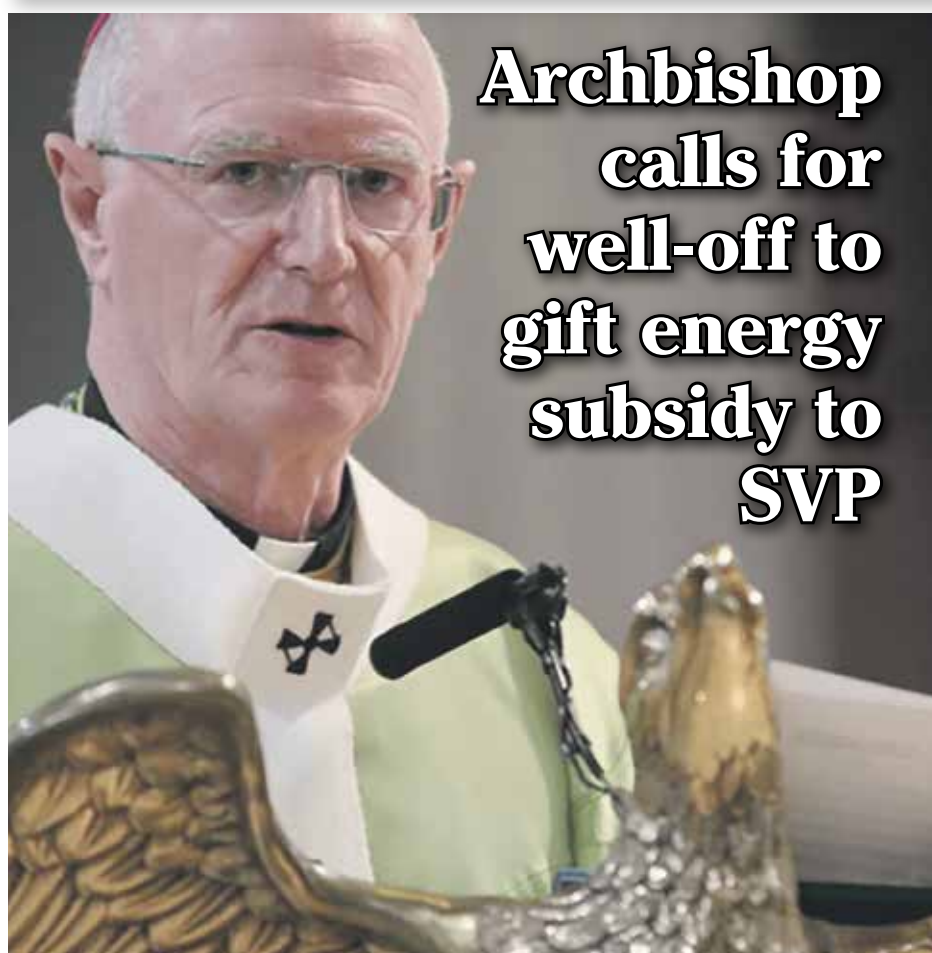
The voices of the silent majority of parents who want to send their child to a local parish school must be heard in the ongoing debate on education, the head of a group representing Catholic schools has insisted. A survey showed 78% of people support the Church having a role in school ethos. Meanwhile, Fr Vasyl Kornitsky, chaplain to the Ukrainian community, praised the support shown by Ireland as Russian troops crowded the border with Ukraine.

Co. Cavan parishioners expressed delight that local woman Leona Maguire put the community in the global spotlight after she became the first Irishwoman to win the ladies' PGA tour in Florida. On the same front page, *The Irish Catholic* reported that Retired Pope Benedict XVI (94) said he is conscious he will soon stand before the judgement of God as he answered claims that he mishandled abuse allegations during his time as an archbishop in Germany.

Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell pleaded with people who didn't need a new Government subsidy aimed at tackling the spiralling cost of living to gift it to their parish St Vincent de Paul group. His call came amidst fears that some families and older people were facing the stark choice to eat or heat their home in the face of rising prices.

Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown accused President Michael D. Higgins of stoking division over "unhelpful" comments from the president characterising Catholic schools in the North as sectarian. Mr Higgins described as "shameful" the fact that parental choice is central to education in the North and that Catholic schools continue to be overwhelmingly popular with parents.

78% back Church role in schools



Archbishop calls for well-off to gift energy subsidy to SVP



Pride of the parish: Delight over Leona Maguire win



Schools 'resent' president's attack on parents' education choice



Parishes rejoice as Easter celebrations return with gusto after three-year wait

Ukrainians in Ireland 'overwhelmed' by show of support from Irish parishes

Parishes unite for besieged Ukraine



Parish schools 'pull out all the stops' to welcome children from Ukraine

Ireland must 'fight harder' for Middle East Christians



Ireland legend pleads with young people to make more time for God

MARCH

The banner of *The Irish Catholic* was blue and yellow March 3, as parishes across the country rallied to prepare to receive Ukrainian refugees fleeing Russia's bombardment of their homeland. A week into the invasion, Vladimir Putin's troops were stepping up the campaign despite vows by Ukrainians to fight to the death.

Heartbroken Ukrainians living in Ireland were "overwhelmed" by the support they received from parishes across Ireland as the brutal Russian invasion of their homeland intensified. It came as desperate efforts were being made to accommodate up to 100,000 mostly women and children who were fleeing the onslaught in the largest movement of people in Europe since World War II.

Irish Catholics have a special onus to "fight even harder" to defend embattled Christians in the Middle East because of Ireland's history of persecution. Multi award-winning war reporter and senior fellow at Yale University Janine di Giovanni told *The Irish Catholic* that Christian communities face an existential threat across Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine, and soon may "vanish".

Catholic schools across the country saw "significant numbers" of children fleeing the Russian onslaught of Ukraine and pledged to do whatever it takes to make places for them. Parish school leaders north and south said the situation was moving very quickly with more than 200,000 refugees expected – tens of thousands of them children of school-going age.

Former Ireland international and Birmingham City player Keith Fahey urged young people to keep God at the centre of their lives. He told *The Irish Catholic* that he was on a "crash course of self-destruction" before he found his way back to God.

'We need rehab not more prison'

Bombs to birdsong - Frontline religious praise Irish generosity to Ukraine

Religious orders quietly lifting hundreds out of homelessness

Pope to Irish Catholics: don't get stuck in the past



APRIL

Pleas to help those suffering from addiction are falling on deaf ears as jail rather than rehab becomes the default option, a nun working with prisoners' families warned. Presentation Sister Imelda Wickham urged the Government to stop letting reports on justice reform "gather dust" on shelves and address the need for a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system.

While religious orders often get a bad press, *The Irish Catholic* revealed that the same congregations are quietly housing hundreds of people who would otherwise be homeless as the Government continued to struggle to come to terms with the accommodation emergency. Religious orders in Ireland have "unlocked the barriers" to housing for many families with "under the radar" support that lifts people out of a cycle of poverty, said a housing charity, Sophia Housing. Meanwhile, the Latin Mass community in St Kevin's, Harrington St, had an unlikely visitor in the form of Tánaiste Leo Varadkar.

Religious in Poland praised the Church in Ireland's response to the Ukraine crisis after €3.25 million was raised by parishes. *The Irish Catholic* visited several sites where Church-charity Caritas and religious orders operate on the ground in Kraków and the border town of Przemyśl, witnessing donations being put into action.

Pope Francis pleaded for Irish Catholics not to cling to past ways of doing things in unscripted remarks after receiving a group of Irish people involved in Catholic education and being presented with a copy of a new Irish book on the synodal process.

2022 Review of the Year

MAY

The Church in Ireland will continue to shrink, the new Bishop of Galway predicted, but with the help of young people engaging with the synodal process it can be renewed afresh. Bishop Michael Duignan was speaking as he took on the leadership of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora in addition to remaining as Bishop of Clonfert.

A number of Irish bishops engaged in a listening process with gay and lesbian Catholics as part of the synodal process, *The Irish Catholic* revealed. It followed commitments from the organisers of the Irish synod – which aims to hear from diverse voices about the future direction of the Church – that what they describe as “hot button” issues would not be off the agenda.

As the Government signed off on the deal to transfer ownership of St Vincent’s Hospital, Dublin, the Religious Sisters of Charity were fearful of the media and felt bewildered that they have been so badly portrayed in the public eye. “You would think we were evil,” a source close to the sisters told *The Irish Catholic*. “In no way do they want the Church involved in any way [in the running of healthcare].”

The country’s largest diocese prepared for “radical change” and consolidation of parishes as part of its ‘Building Hope’ process. The commitment to change came as statistics revealed a steep decline in Mass attendance – even before the pandemic – with some parishes seeing a drop of almost two-thirds of regular Mass-goers over the period from 2014-2019.



‘We need your idealism’ – new bishop appeals to young Catholics on synod

Irish bishops in talks with LGBT Catholics



Dublin Diocese is bracing for ‘radical change’ - Mass attendance down by two-thirds in some parishes

‘We’ve been treated like monsters’ - Sisters of Charity in fear of media and bewildered by negative coverage

JUNE

Despite the challenges, Massgoing Catholics continue to find their parishes life-giving and hugely value the role of their hard-working priests. This is one of the key trends emerging in synodal reports as the 26 dioceses forwarded their summaries to Maynooth at the start of June.

One of Ireland’s leading priest-exorcists warned that the country urgently needs trained teams of people to lead so-called ‘deliverance ministry’ for people who feel they are oppressed by evil spirits, a leading priest-exorcist warned. Fr Pat Collins CM said that the need is pressing and “The demand is much greater than the supply”.

Irish missionaries called on President Michael D. Higgins to visit suffering Christians in Nigeria, after the president was accused of blaming a slaughter of Catholics at Mass on climate change rather than anti-Christian persecution. The local Bishop Jude Arogundade criticised the president insisting that his comments rubbed “salt to the injuries of all who have suffered terrorism in Nigeria”.

The Church in Ireland hosted a national pre-synodal gathering in Clonmacnoise in late June, where the need for an ambitious plan of adult faith formation emerged as one of the key themes. Church leaders described as “heartening” the appetite parishioners displayed to deepen their faith.

A Catholic primary schools’ body criticised Minister Josepha Madigan for subjecting four Catholic schools to “trial by media” by publicly “naming and shaming” them. The minister for special education’s decision to put schools in the spotlight over disputes regarding provision of special education classes was “strongly objected to” by the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA), along with many other stakeholders.



Huge appreciation for priests revealed in synodal reports

Synod lays down the challenge to invest in faith formation

Minister strongly criticised for subjecting Catholic schools to ‘trial by media’



Exorcist: Trained teams needed in parishes to fight evil spirits



‘Come and see for yourself, Mr President’ - Irish missionaries call on Higgins to visit suffering Nigerian Christians



Controversial law could ban pro-life march in capital



From Ukraine to Croagh Patrick 'Thank you, Ireland'

Hopes 'heroic' Irish martyrs can renew faith as cause goes to Rome

Lay-led funerals on the way under radical shake-up

Changes to 'awkward' language at Mass could be on the cards



JULY

As refugees continued to flee the war in Ukraine, the Ukrainian community in Ireland praised the "outstanding" welcome they received from Irish parishes, as the Church considered establishing mission communities to care for the influx of refugees. There is a "huge demand for pastoral care" from the almost 40,000 refugees from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the chaplain to Ireland's Ukrainian Catholic parish Fr Vasyl Kornitsky said.

Plans unveiled during July by Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy warned that parishioners will have to get used to laypeople leading burials and other funeral liturgies due to the shortage of priests. With few ordinations and an aging clergy, laypeople will become a key part of the jigsaw in providing ceremonies for grieving families, said Bishop Leahy.

For the second time in just over a decade, Irish parishioners could be facing changes in the words used during the Mass. Bishop of Raphoe Alan McGuckian SJ said that he would "love" to see some of the prayers at the Mass changed to make some of the language less "awkward". Bishop McGuckian said he would like to see changes made "in the light of the new principals of translation" outlined by Pope Francis.

The example of Irish missionaries martyred by communist forces during the Korean war could help renew the Faith in Ireland, a priest working on their cause said. Six Irish Columban fathers and two missionaries of Irish descent died during the conflict in Korea which lasted from 1950-1953. The case to have them declared as saints has now gone to the Vatican for approval.

Young Catholic group challenges synod on liberal reform agenda - Letter insists younger faithful embrace Church teaching

'Humble icon' Bro. Kevin hailed as he retires



Ireland is a 'haven' for human trafficking

Irish Govt decries the 'alarming' crackdown on Church in Nicaragua

AUGUST

Hundreds of young Catholics signed a letter to Church leaders challenging the widespread perception that younger people in the Church want teachings to change. The organisers of the letter – which attracted more than 500 signatures in less than a week before being sent – warned the synodal submissions give the impression that Catholics "unanimously" want to change Church teaching.

Tributes poured in for the "humble" Bro. Kevin Crowley OFM Cap. who retired after decades of feeding the poor. Bro. Kevin said he will miss working with the homeless "who I love so much". The 87-year-old handed over the reins of the Capuchin Day Centre in Dublin, which he founded in 1969, to someone who will give the poor "the same care, same love and service that we have been giving them for the last 50 years".

Ireland is a "haven" for human traffickers, with a "huge number" of them exploiting women, children and men, Irish charities and religious working with survivors warned. They expressed serious concern at the failure of authorities to identify victims of child trafficking. Sr Eilis Coe RSC warned that there is a "huge demand" for the buying and selling of victims of trafficking in Ireland.

The Irish Government decried the "alarming" crackdown on the rights of the Church in Nicaragua under President Daniel Ortega's regime. The Irish bishops' conference is also being urged by Irish missionaries to show solidarity with Nicaraguan Catholics. Repression of freedom of religion and expression in Nicaragua caused a "deterioration in human rights", with several priests and a bishop arrested under the regime.



2022 Review of the Year

SEPTEMBER

Parishioners across the country with spare rooms near universities were asked to take in hard-pressed students struggling to find accommodation as third-level institutions across the Republic warned of an unprecedented crisis. Meanwhile, Indian Catholics in Derry were “heartbroken” after the tragic death of two teenagers in a drowning accident.

The record number of 31 candidates for the permanent diaconate starting in Maynooth in autumn was a “welcome sign of hope” for the Church in Ireland, *The Irish Catholic* heard. However, this news came as just a handful of new seminarians entered the Irish college.

The country’s largest diocese announced “crucial” plans to make First Holy Communion ceremonies simpler and more parish-based, despite fewer priests and parish pastoral workers. Dublin Diocese was reacting after priests and parishioners reported that smaller ceremonies were better because they focused on the importance of the Sacrament.

Comments made by Irish MEP Mick Wallace about a bishop detained by the Nicaraguan regime were dubbed “inexcusable” and “reckless” by an Irish missionary. In a debate in the European Parliament he alleged that Bishop Rolando Álvarez – arrested for criticising the Nicaraguan president – was “heavily involved” in what he claimed was a CIA-backed coup in Nicaragua in 2018 which led to “death and destruction”.

Church leaders moved to ensure those teaching religion in Catholic schools will have a good grounding in Catholic theology. It came after the teaching council – the State body which regulates the teaching profession – lowered the level of understanding of Catholicism necessary to be employed to teach religious studies at second level.

Plea for parishes to come to the aid of desperate students

Record numbers train to be permanent deacon



Church moves to protect quality of Catholic teaching in schools

Dublin parishes moving to end over-the-top Communion

Irish MEP blasted over ‘reckless’ claims on jailed Nicaraguan bishop



OCTOBER

A prominent Irish theologian warned that the legacy of Irish religious could be “betrayed” by the gifting of third-level Catholic institutions to the State. Prof. Eamonn Conway called on the Vatican to investigate several deals made by the Church in Ireland to hand over Catholic colleges in recent years. Meanwhile, the Catholic Police Guild said the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) is not doing enough to recruit Catholics.

Parishes were left in limbo regarding Government help with the rocketing cost of fuel. A Government scheme allowed Church-owned properties to avail of additional funds only if it is being used for a “community service”. However, there was confusion as to what constitutes a community service and disappointment more support is not being offered.

Wealthy countries like Ireland shouldn’t wait for famine to be declared to act on the food crisis in the Horn of Africa, the Church in Ireland’s aid agency said. Trócaire’s call came amid a warning that drought-ravaged countries in the region face a “devastating” human disaster. Meanwhile, an impoverished view of the importance of family life was at the root of calls to remove the so-called ‘women in the home’ clause from the constitution, female Catholic activists insisted.

Irish peacekeepers who were prevented from entering the US after serving with the UN in the Middle East said they are being “punished” for their work with vulnerable communities overseas. A priest serving as a chaplain with the Irish Defence Forces was among the latest to be refused permission to enter by US immigration officials due to having served in Syria.

Vatican called to investigate third level handovers to State

Parishes left in limbo on energy bill support plans



Trócaire pleads for world to act on Horn of Africa famine - One person dying every 36 seconds

Irish peacekeepers barred from US after serving in Middle East



Irish visit 'one of most heated trips' Pope says

What's Christmas without a crib – plea to Lord Mayor

Dublin diocese receives €10 million Covid-19 pandemic insurance payout

Bishop warns Catholics of the dangers of 'narrow nationalism'

'Great relief' as councils drop new tax on churches



NOVEMBER

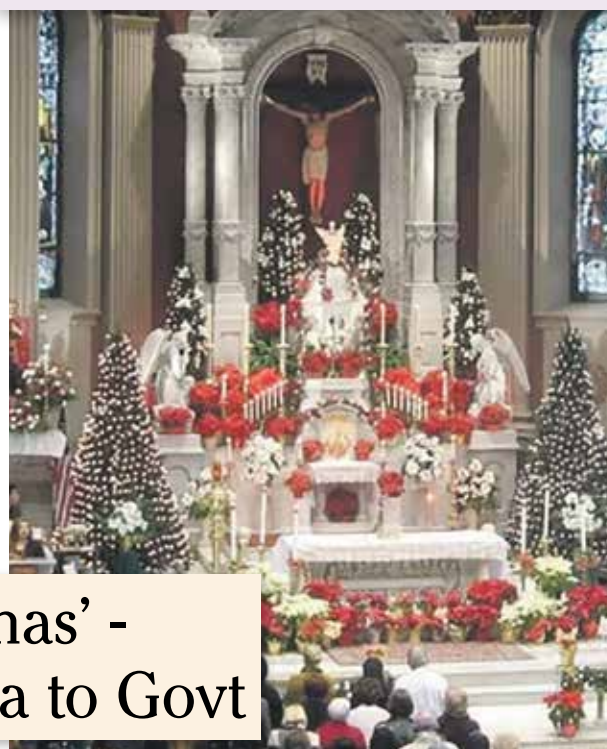
What's the point of Christmas without Christian symbols like a crib, Dublin-based priests asked after the cancelling of the traditional nativity scene outside the Lord Mayor's residence in Dublin. The live animal crib was replaced by a "winter wonderland" by Green Party Cllr Caroline Conroy. Meanwhile, a prayer campaign encouraged people to come forward with information about the 'disappeared' – people who were abducted, killed and secretly buried by paramilitaries in the North.

Dublin Diocese received an almost €10 million payout from insurance companies to cover money lost due to Covid-19 church closures. The money received was mostly to cover 2020, opening up the possibility of a further payout for 2021. Meanwhile, Bishop of Derry Donal McKeown warned that a lack of political leadership in the North could leave space for paramilitary activity.

The message of an Irish army chaplain set on the road to sainthood can combat a narrow sense of nationalism in Ireland that seeks to "exclude and scapegoat", the Bishop of Meath said. Bishop Tom Deenihan hailed Fr Willie Doyle SJ, who died in 1917 during World War I, during a Mass to mark the opening of Fr Doyle's cause.

There was "great relief" among parishes across the country, as local councils dropped a new tax on churches that could have cost Mass-goers thousands every year. Maps released by local councils in November placed some churches in areas that would leave them liable for a new Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT). However, many of the churches may have been included by mistake and were to be quietly rezoned.

Call for parishes to seize Christmas moment to invite people back to Mass



Don't kick Christ out of Christmas, politicians plead

'Set prisoners free for Christmas' - Reformer nun hails papal plea to Govt

DECEMBER

As we moved into Advent, senior Oireachtas members criticised the "lack of respect" shown for Christians as publicly funded agencies increasingly use 'winter' instead of 'Christmas' to speak about the celebration of the birth of Christ. The exclusion of Christian sentiments was "not only lacking in respect, but it's distasteful", said former justice minister Charlie Flanagan. Meanwhile, in a new interview, Pope Francis described meeting survivors of abuse in Ireland as "one of the most heated situations I have had to face". The Pope was referring to the meeting in 2018 during the World Meeting of Families which took place a day before the Mass in the Phoenix Park.

As parishes struggled to re-engage communities following the forced closure of churches during Covid-19 lockdowns, Bishop Tom Deenihan said Christmas is a time to invite people who may have stopped coming back to the weekly worship. In grimmer news, and at a time when people struggle to feed their children and heat their homes, Westminster was determined to impose "the undermining of the right to life of unborn children", Archbishop of Armagh Eamon Martin said. His comments came as Britain's secretary of state for the North, Chris Heaton-Harris demanded that officials fast-track the funding of abortion.

A plea by Pope Francis for a Christmas clemency for prisoners was hailed as "powerful and courageous" by Irish nun Sr Imelda Wickham, who has dedicated her life to supporting prisoners and their families. The Pope asked world leaders to grant leniency to "those of our brothers and sisters deprived of their liberty whom they deem fit to benefit from such a measure".

Christmas comes to the City of Water



A floating Nativity scene designed by Francesco Orazio brings Christmas to Venice's lagoon, near Barano Island in Venice. Photos: CNS





The important role of silence in Catholic spirituality



“There's nothing so much like God in all the world as silence,” 14th Century German mystic and theologian Meister Eckhart is reported as saying. Whether he said it or not, it certainly sums up a certain vein of the Church's spiritual tradition, which sees God intricately connected to silence.

This is why some of those powerhouses of prayer and spirituality – monasteries – have a rule of silence, where many of the inhabitants pass their days without words, but for communal prayer. Reading that, it may seem a strange, otherworldly practice – perhaps it seems totally undesirable! And yet, there's a deep wisdom



Silence plays a mysterious and important role in a healthy spirituality, writes Jason Osborne

to be found there, otherwise it wouldn't have persisted through to today.

Cardinal Robert Sarah, in his book, *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*, writes “silence always forces man to reflect upon his own life”. The key with silence, it seems, is that it makes the human condition unavoidable. So much of our time is usually spent devoted to busy

activity, flashing screens and loud noises that we have little time to turn our minds to the “one thing” that's “needful,” as Christ puts it to Martha in the Gospel according to Luke.

‘Silence’ in the spiritual sense doesn't refer only to a lack of audible noise, although that's obviously a part of it, but to a sort of clearing of the senses – a returning to the essentials.

That is to say, it's as much about removing visible distraction as it is about retreating from noise. Only once that's done can our often inattentive minds focus on that, or he, who is most important – God.

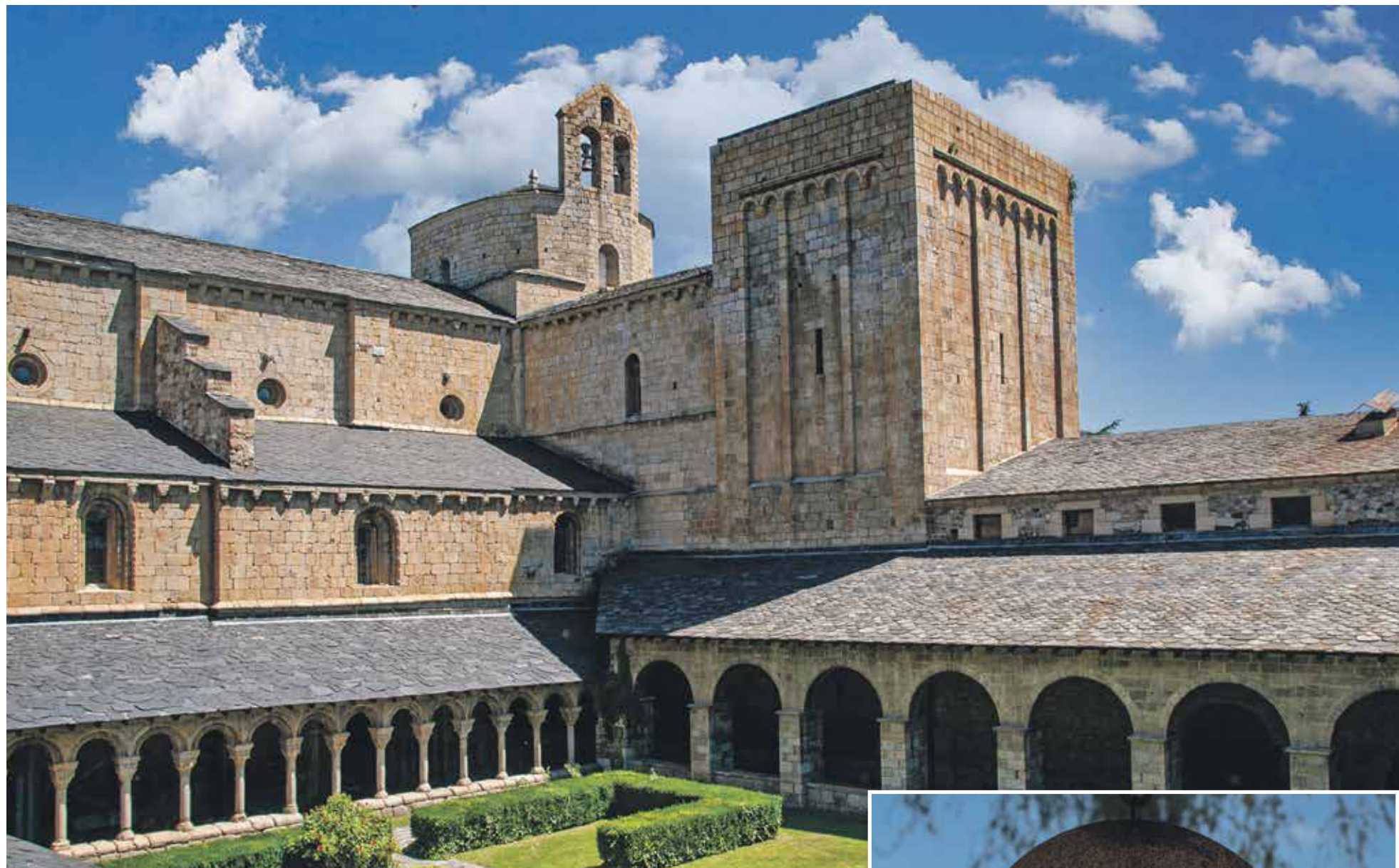
C.S. Lewis in his insightful book, *The Screwtape Letters* outlined a conversation between two demons, which went, “We will make the whole universe a noise in the end. We have already made great strides in this direction as regards the Earth”. It's in this that we hit upon the real harm and damage done by noise and endless distraction – it has spiritual effects. Lost in the cacophony, we find it near impossible to hear God's voice and follow his direction.

However, silence is such a universally beneficial reality that it's not recognised only by the Church. An entire industry has grown up around the positive power of silence in your life, with ‘self-help’ and philosophy books positively falling off the shelves in bookshops, such is their number.

It's not without reason; research has revealed all sorts of insights into the therapeutic and positive effects of immersion in auditory and visual, if you can call it such, silence, or absence of distraction as well as into noise's detrimental effects. These include:

- Noise pollution's detrimental effect on our health, with a number of reports linking expo-

» Continued from Page 29



sure to noise pollution to higher blood pressure, heart disease, and tinnitus.

- Exposure to continuous noise affects our stress levels by raising adrenaline.

- Exposure to silence has been observed to lower blood pressure and increase blood flow to the brain.

- Exposure to silence before bed, and the minimisation of distraction, are linked to a better night's sleep.

These are just a selection of the findings that have migrated into the realm of common sense, and there are many more. The popularity of the practice of 'mindfulness' is also traceable to an increased understanding of the importance of silence and stillness.

“The Church has always upheld silence as a healthy reality, and as one of the primary settings for encountering God”

As mentioned, silence is often linked with stillness, especially in the Church's tradition. However, in present times, this knowledge has come from an enhanced understanding of the detrimental effects of excessive distraction, being distracted as never before with smartphones, social media, and instant access to most films and TV.

In a strange way, the complex web of distraction we've woven around ourselves has opened our eyes to the importance of spiritual realities as never before in recent times.

An awareness of the necessity of stillness arises from an awareness of the need to slow down mentally and spiritually. Opening new windows on a laptop or phone every few minutes or seconds, swapping rapidly between videos and articles on different topics, and cycling the news endlessly (particularly when the news is as grim as it often is), has unparalleled potential to set our minds racing.

Healthy reality

The Church has always upheld silence as a healthy reality, and as one of the primary settings for encountering God. This is set down first and foremost in Scripture. The prophet Elijah hears God in “a still, small voice” upon Mount Horeb, following gusts of wind, an earthquake and fire. Moses went up on the mountain alone to enter into dialogue with God, just as Jesus would travel into the wilderness, first during the 40 days, then at various times throughout his public ministry.

Cardinal Sarah comments on this in his aforementioned book. He says, “No prophet ever encountered God without withdrawing into solitude and silence. Moses, Elijah, and John the Baptist encountered God in the great silence of the desert. Today, too, monks seek God in solitude and silence. I am speak-

ing, not just about a geographical solitude or movement, but about an interior state. It is not enough to be quiet, either. It is necessary to become silence.”

Silence is above all about trust and humility. Much of the reason we're so busy, active and distracted is because we don't really trust God to take care of everything if he's left to his own devices. To slow down, to cease your restless efforts, without becoming lazy, is to cast your life into God's hands. As Psalm 46:10 says, “Be still, and know that I am God”.

“We must see that we can trust our lives, and the world, not to fall apart if we're not constantly engaged and distracted”

If we wish to see God's action in our lives, we have to make space for him. This is a lesson Moses and the Israelites learned the hard way as they fled Egypt and Pharaoh's forces. Panicked as they were about the pursuit, God tells them in Exodus 14:14, “The Lord will fight for you and you have only to be still”.

So how do we trust God more, just as the prophets did, and as so many continue to do around the world today? By trusting silence more. We must see that we can trust our lives, and the world, not



to fall apart if we're not constantly engaged and distracted. A couple of resolutions that might result in better health, both physical and spiritual, include:

- Giving up or reducing social media, Netflix, and/or TV usage.
- Checking the news on a weekly basis.
- Taking up 'slower' activities, like reading, painting, walking, etc.
- Practicing a daily holy hour.
- Incorporating auditory silence into your day, whether by leaving your earphones behind, or

by engaging in silent, contemplative prayer.

- Turning off electronics after a certain time of the night (e.g. 10pm)

These practical steps should go some way towards immersing us in some therapeutic, holy silence – if it's combined with some deep prayer, as recommended. Of course, our ability to take up or drop activities and practices depends on our personal situations, but any effort in God's direction is always rewarded.

Encouraging a 'revolution of tenderness' across generations

Faith in film



Ruadhán Jones

The Christmas and New Year's period is a great time to sit down as a family and watch a film. But it's not always easy to agree on what to watch, or to know what is suitable for younger children and what isn't.

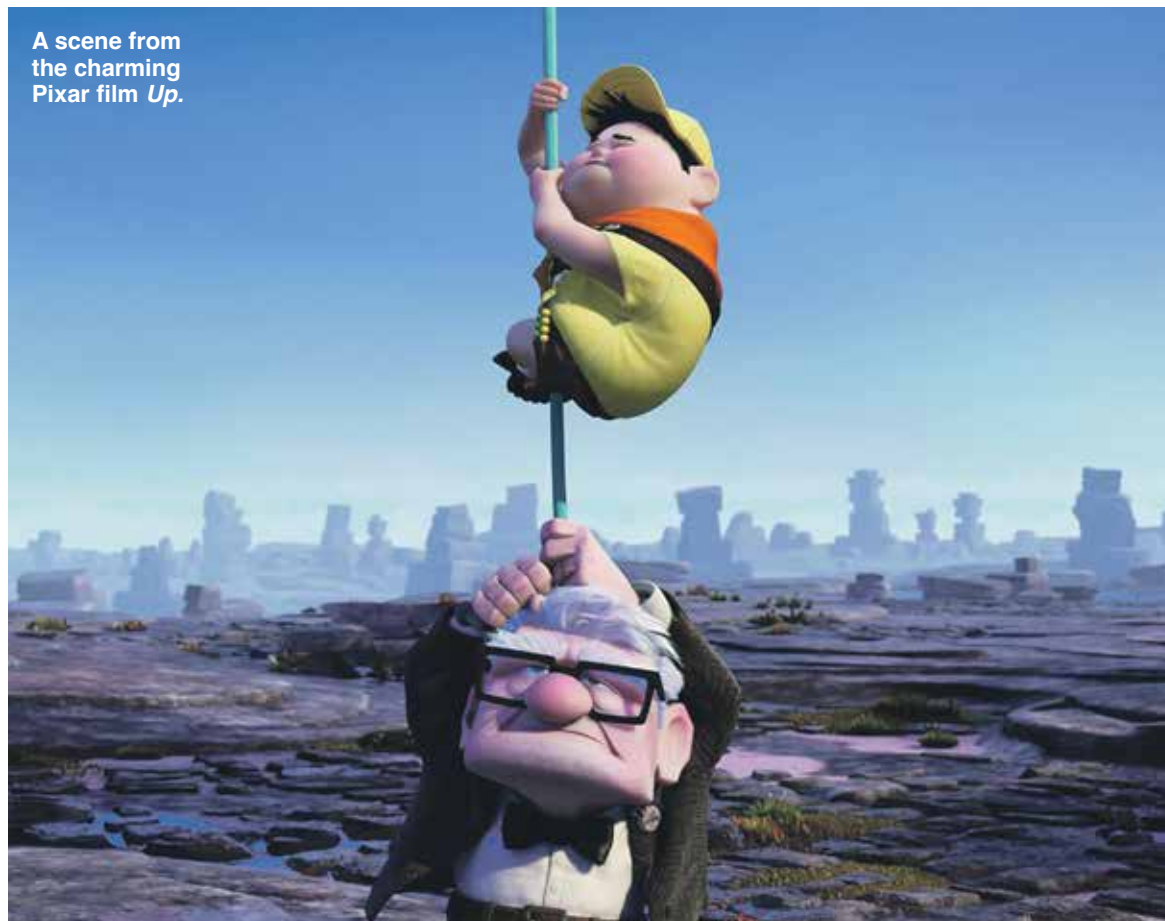
So here's a suggestion, a lovely animated film which makes heroes of a nerdish little boy and a cranky old man. The whimsical and moving film *UP* came out a little more than a decade ago and deserves to be rewatched regularly. It is ideal family viewing for the Christmas season, available on Disney's streaming service, on DVD or through YouTube Movies.

“So many films effectively talk down to children, expecting them to accept flashy and uninspired filmmaking”

This beautiful film mixes realism with fantasy, as a grumpy old man – Carl Fredericksen – turns his house into an airship to fulfil a promise he made to his deceased wife to bring her to Paradise Falls in Venezuela. In the process he comes to learn if we hold too tightly to the past, we miss the good of the present.

We know just how much Carl loved his wife, Elie, having seen a poignant and humorous montage that shows them first as children, then as husband and wife and finally as a contented couple

A scene from the charming Pixar film *Up*.



entering old age together.

This sequence, which is silent except for the score, is as clever as anything you would expect to see in an 'arthouse' film. It doesn't try to impress you, it just expects that you and your children will understand and accept what's going on and will be moved by the graceful way the film treats life, death and love.

It sets the tone for a film that refuses to take its audience – predominantly young children – lightly. So many films effectively talk down to children, expecting them to accept flashy and uninspired filmmaking. In *UP*, Pixar studios – famous for films like the *Toy Story* franchise – invest their craft with care and attention, so that children and adults can both enjoy their work.

Another example of the intelligence and maturity they expect of children is that the film doesn't skirt around the reality of death, as it's Elie's death that leaves Carl a lonely and bitter old man. This as much as anything inspires his flight of fancy to take his house to Venezuela.

Nerdish scout

Along the way, he accidentally picks up a young boy, Russell, who is a nerdish scout. He is sweet and ingenuous, with a heart of gold. But he's also precocious and inquisitive, as young children often are, and gets on Carl's nerves.

To begin with, the two have an odd-couple relationship. But Carl comes to understand Russell better when he realises that he

is the product of a broken home, with a father who doesn't have time for him. An unlikely friendship develops as the two lonely figures grapple with the inhospitable environment they find in Venezuela.

This forthright mixture of whimsy and reality make this a very enjoyable and constantly surprising film. The cute talking dogs and large, multicoloured bird will no doubt appeal to a young audience, as will the *Indiana Jones* style action-adventure. Comedy and adventure are a fine mix when done well.

But it also has a menacing villain consumed by his own pride, who challenges the bravery of Russell and the love of Carl. While Russell must grow up and become more independent, Carl must go

the other way.

His heart has become cold as he clings to the past life of love he lived with Ellie. He is independent, but in his case this has become a bad thing; he has actually become selfish, refusing to care for those around him. As he says it himself, he's "stuck" with Russell, caring for him is not something he takes on voluntarily.

Russell is just a little boy looking for a father-figure, someone good, solid and there for him. It's nothing special he's looking for. In a touching reflection, Russell describes the things he liked to do with his father and they're all small things. "That might sound boring, but I think the boring stuff is the stuff I remember the most," he tells Carl.

“Russell and Carl finally team up and conquer their demons to save the exotic bird from the rapacious grasp of the villain”

If Carl doesn't learn from Russell's own simple affection and love him in return, then he could become like the villain, hardened, cruel and obsessive.

The film builds to a wonderful climax involving a battle amid the clouds on a giant, blimp-like airship. Russell and Carl finally team up and conquer their demons to save the exotic bird from the rapacious grasp of the villain.

This is a gentle, moral tale about childhood and old age, about fatherhood and affection. At a time when our "throw-away culture" often ignores the virtue of old age, this is a film that brings one of Pope Francis' messages for the elderly to life: "Dear grandparents, dear elderly persons, we are called to be artisans of the *revolution of tenderness* in our world."

Saint — of the — week

By Jason Osborne



St Stephen

The Church's first martyr: St Stephen

One of the most famous poets in history, Dante, in his masterwork, the *Divine Comedy*, glimpses a moving scene: the stoning of a young man, who, while dying, asks forgiveness for those casting the stones at him. Dante chose to commemorate the unparalleled charity of the man often held up as the Church's first martyr.

We're most familiar with St Stephen through our celebration of St Stephen's Day December 26, but he's also paid extensive tribute to first and foremost in the Bible. The Acts of the Apostles has granted the Church many insights into Stephen's life, including the fact that he was one of the first people to follow the Apostles. A Greek, or a Jew educated in Greek culture, Stephen was held in high esteem by the earliest Church in Jerusalem.

Stephen, "a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit", is first mentioned as one of the seven men chosen by the Apostles to aid them in their mission. As was usual in the age of the early Church, Stephen performed "great wonders and signs" among

the people, although we're not given the details of these. Regardless, they caused enough disruption to see members of the synagogue stirred up against him, leading to his arrest.

Dragged before the Sanhedrin, Stephen's accusers said "this man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us". Remarkably, immediately after the charge is delivered within his hearing, the council notes that his face "was like the face of an angel".

Following this, Stephen delivers the longest recorded speech in the Acts of the Apostles, in which he reviews the history of salvation for those present. God, he said, had prepared for the coming of his Son, but the leaders of Israel had resisted the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers had persecuted the many prophets that God sent.

Towards the end of his speech, as those assembled raged and "ground their teeth against him",

Stephen finished with words of truth that would cost him his life, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

Too much for his accusers, they cried out and rushed upon him, dragging him out of the city and stoning him to death. Perhaps most striking of all of Stephen's final words, though, were those he spoke even as the stones were hurled at him. Choosing to direct his attention beyond the hostilities directed at him, he prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them". None other than Saul (soon to be St Paul) stood by watching as Stephen was brutally killed, with Scripture noting, "Saul was consenting to his death".

Stephen's death marked the beginning of a surging persecution against the Church, but his manner of death has continued to be an example later Christians could look to. He exemplified the meekness and the forgiveness Christ asks us to pour out upon the world – especially upon those who hate us.

Beginning a new year by bringing about the family of God

Sr Josephine Garrett CSFN

New Year's celebrations can be a mixed experience. On one hand, the holidays have brought us opportunities to be renewed in our relationships with family and friends. On the other hand, secular media can present this sort of 'new year, new you' approach that may not really jive with our actual experiences.

“ Catholics must stand with a foot in the temporal world and with a foot in eternity”

We can feel this pressure for January 1 to be a miraculous reset; all the struggles and sufferings of the previous year automatically at midnight lose their

impact in our lives.

As we head into 2023, I wonder if this pressure is even more profound. We are carrying large individual and communal burdens into the new year.

How do we remain open to God's desire to make all things new and the inherent invitation in a new year to begin anew, and also be realistic about the fact that at the stroke of midnight our struggles will not automatically diminish?

Struggles

I believe the answer is by looking to the struggles, sufferings and heavy burdens that we are carrying with us over the finish line of 2022 and finding in them God's invitation.

Some of us have reached new horizons in our prayer and relationship with God, yet some of us have strayed from prayer and into a life of subtle

pride and self-sufficiency, which is the fruit of a life lacking prayer.

Is there a thematic invitation to not only begin anew but strive for the newness that is the promise of the kingdom contained in all that we will carry with us into the new year?

I believe there is. We sometimes struggle with the two-world stance that is required of a Catholic. Catholics must stand with a foot in the temporal world and with a foot in eternity.

We cannot place both our feet in whatever matter has garnered our attention over the past years; be it the pandemic, cries for justice, political strife, family dynamics or whatever it has been for you. We will do ourselves a grave injustice.

If we are to begin anew this year, we must take a proper stance in all that we are facing as individuals and as a community of God's children.

One foot in the world, which is full of brokenness, and one in eternity, which is the source of constant conversion and renewal, even as we struggle. This renewal is always about bringing about the family of God.

For example, what did the pandemic prove to us? That we are painfully interconnected. As Pope Benedict XVI once said, "No one sins alone. No one is saved alone."

Likewise, cries for social justice over the past two years have been filled with the same message.

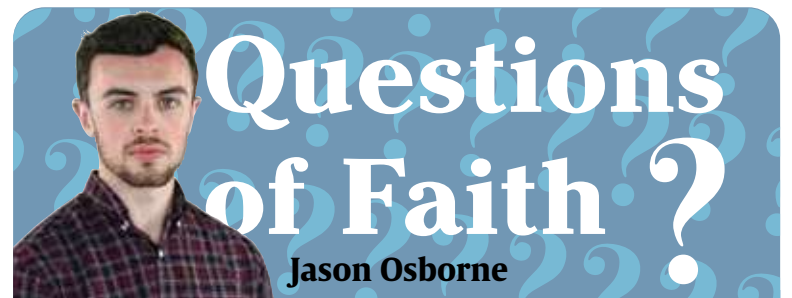
“ The way we begin anew is to, in all things, in all our resolutions, keep our eyes fixed on the glory of the coming of the Lord and the building up of God's family in Christ”

Whatever it is you are called to be renewed in with this coming year - physically, mentally or spiritually - let it be for and about encounter. To aid you in increasing your capacity to show up in the family of God, bringing your whole self as a gift to the family of God, come what may; in the midst of struggles and also joys.

We know that it is only through a sincere gift of ourselves that we will know ourselves, and it is only in this dimension of gift, as Bishop Robert E. Barron once called it, that the family of God, which we long for, will be built up and realised.

The way we begin anew is to, in all things, in all our resolutions, keep our eyes fixed on the glory of the coming of the Lord and the building up of God's family in Christ.

Sr Josephine Garrett is a Sister of the Holy Family of Nazareth.



Jason Osborne

Is morality objective?

The Catholic Church teaches that moral values are objective – that is to say, certain actions are always good or always bad, regardless of the circumstances or what anybody thinks about them. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states this quite explicitly in CCC 1756:

“There are acts which, in and of themselves, independently of circumstances and intentions, are always gravely illicit by reason of their object; such as blasphemy and perjury, murder and adultery. One may not do evil so that good may result from it.”

Is this the case, though? After all, lots of people argue it today. Some argue that morality can be reduced to a by-product of evolution, while others argue that morality doesn't exist at all but has been created to allow for a functioning society. Whether they know it or not, many people hold to a “relativist” view of morality, which makes the claim that moral judgements are true or false only relative to a particular standpoint – such as a specific cultural or historical setting.

The common thread running through all of these arguments is the idea that morality isn't objective – contrary to what the Catholic Church teaches. So who's correct? It turns out that it's quite hard to argue against the Church's case, that moral values exist independently of our opinions of them.

Our entire experience of the world is underpinned by the understanding that morality is objective, or that there's a moral law that applies equally to all people, at all times, in all places. It's highly likely that at some point in childhood, we cried out in indignation at the way we were being treated by a sibling or a friend – something along the lines of, “It's not fair!” or “Give that back, it's mine!” We still do the same today as adults, although maybe with a little less screaming and crying. Or to take a more serious line, every serious person who grows up in the world today knows the Nazis committed horrendous crimes, and that the allies were ‘right’ to stand against them.

The interesting thing about all of these judgements, whether of unpleasant childhood transgressions or condemnations of crimes against humanity, is that they aren't simply expressions of personal displeasure, but appeals to a universal standard we expect others to know about. And that expectation is usually correct, as people rarely ignore



it, but argue their own case on the basis of the same standard. A child who's just taken your toy might respond, “No, it's my turn!”

C.S. Lewis says that this universal standard used to be known as the “Law of Nature” because it was widely understood that everyone knew it intuitively and didn't need to be taught it. It's this assumption that allows for widespread condemnation of the Nazi's conduct, for if they didn't share the same moral universe as us, how could we condemn them? If ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ weren't the same for us as for them, we would have no grounds upon which to argue against their actions – we might not like those actions and still fight against them, but we couldn't blame them for it.

The idea of a universal standard or ‘law’ to use the traditional language is understandably connected to the idea of a ‘law-giver’, for if there were no authority behind such a standard, why should anyone obey it? While it's possible to believe in morals without believing in God – indeed, many people do – only in relation to a good God do the notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ have any weight.

The Church teaches that moral values can all be traced back to God, who is goodness itself, and the more closely our behaviour conforms to God and his ways, the better it is. We learn about how to conform ourselves to God and his ways in Scripture, the Tradition of the Church and from the lives of those who've gone before us in God – the saints.

While these things refine our sense of right and wrong, and are necessary for fully understanding the moral nature of the world, they aren't necessary in order to know that morality exists. For that, we have our consciences. By paying close attention to a well-formed conscience, we can observe the moral law that God has written on our hearts.





Christmas cannot be taken for granted

Swiss theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar, once wrote: "After a mother has smiled for a long time at her child, the child will begin to smile back; she has awakened love in its heart, and in awakening love in its heart, she awakes recognition as well... In the same way, God explains himself before us as love. Love radiates from God and instills the light of love in our hearts."

“The God who is born into our world at Christmas is not the God of power, but the God of helplessness and vulnerability”

That could be the caption inside a Christmas card. It expresses a spirituality of Christmas.

In the incarnation, at Christmas, God doesn't enter the world as some superhero who arrives in great power and blows away all that's bad, so that all we have to do is watch, enjoy the show, and feel smug as evil gets its due. The drama of the incarnation is not a movie to be watched but a real-life event within which we are meant to be players. Christmas doesn't happen automatically, it needs our participation. Why?

Because God doesn't enter the world like a Hollywood hero who rescues innocence and goodness at the last minute by a show of physical force. Indeed, at Christ-



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mas, God doesn't even enter the world as an adult, but as a baby, helpless, needing to be nurtured to come to adulthood. The God who is born into our world at Christmas is not the God of power, but the God of helplessness and vulnerability.

But that has to be understood. There's power by worldly standards and power by divine standards and a great paradox and irony is that divine power exhibits itself as vulnerability and helplessness, the power of the baby rather than that of the strong man. Ultimately though that power, helplessness and vulnerability, is the greatest power of all because it, and it alone, can transform hearts. You don't soften hearts by overpowering them. You transform hearts through another kind of persuasion.

Christ doesn't eradicate evil by overpowering it. Happy endings

inside the kingdom of God work themselves out quite differently than in the movies, as we can see from Jesus' refusal to come down off the cross to demonstrate his power. What Christmas brings into the world is the power of a baby which works not so much even through the power of innocence (beautiful as that is) but through the power of what Scripture calls (in Greek) *exousia*. There isn't an exact English equivalent for that word. It has connotations of a number of things all mixed together: transparency, vulnerability, defencelessness.

Julie Polter, one of the editors at *Sojourners*, describes it this way:

"The power of the universe became a babe in arms, not to teach us about the sweetness of love (although that is real too), but to teach us about its vulnerability and tangible expression and

practical demands; and to teach us that on such as this, kingdoms are built. In a child, any child, the wealth and righteousness of a society, a nation, a world can be read. This isn't fuzzy sentimentality; this is the law of the universe and the word of the prophets... What are we waiting for? For the one who has come and comes again, the child who will lead us."

“What comes back is the power of Christmas, a baby's power to transform a heart, divine power hidden in human weakness”

We will be led into the messianic time, the prophets assure us, by a child. The Christ-child is that child. But, the power of Christmas is not automatic. It can't be taken for granted. It has to be given birth, nursed, coaxed, and lovingly cajoled into effectiveness. The baby Jesus doesn't save the world, the adult Christ does and our task is to turn the baby Jesus into the adult Christ. We need to do that in our own bodies and with our own lives. As Annie Dil-

lard once put it, the Christ we find in our lives is always found as he was found at the first Christmas, a helpless infant, lying in the straw, someone who needs to be picked up and coaxed into adulthood. To make Christ effective, we need, ourselves, to become "the body of Christ".

To put it metaphorically, the Christ-child has to be awakened by us. We need to go to the manger and awaken the child. How? It's here that Von Balthasar's comment is so insightful: We awaken the child by inducing it to smile. How's that done? Where is the Christ-child? In terms of an icon, the Christ-child is in the crib, but, in terms of spirituality, the Christ-child appears in our lives in a different way.

If Mary became pregnant by the Holy Spirit – defined as charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, longsuffering, fidelity, gentleness, and chastity – then obviously the child she gestated will radiate those qualities. We awaken the Christ-child when we smile at charity, joy, peace, patience, goodness, longsuffering, fidelity, gentleness, and chastity until they begin to smile back. What comes back is the power of Christmas, a baby's power to transform a heart, divine power hidden in human weakness.

We have to help make Christmas happen.

“Happy endings inside the kingdom of God work themselves out quite differently than in the movies, as we can see from Jesus' refusal to come down off the cross to demonstrate his power”

Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church

The liturgical celebration of Mary, the Holy Mother of God, has been ascribed to several different dates down through the ages. The liturgical reform which prepared the way for the Second Vatican Council prompted the restoration of the feast to January 1, the completion of the Octave of Christmas, the eighth day, on which the child Jesus was circumcised and officially given the name which the angel gave him before his conception. Restoring this feast to the Octave of Christmas rightly celebrates Mary's participation in the mystery of salvation.

“The Gospel of John is very different to the other three which are called synoptic, a Greek word which literally means seeing in the same way”

In the first three centuries after the life of Christ on earth, there were many different explanations of the unity, diversity and relationships of the Blessed Trinity, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some said Jesus was divine but only seemed to be human. Others said he was human but not divine or that he became divine at some stage of his life. Similarly, there were multiple speculations regarding the Holy Spirit. The Council of the Church in Ephesus in 431AD clarified the dogma that Jesus was truly divine and truly human. It followed then that Mary, the mother of Jesus, could be called Mother of God.

The people of Ephesus had a special devotion to Mary because it was to their town that the beloved disciple St John brought Mary, having been asked by Jesus on Calvary to care for her. There is a tradition that when word came out of the council that Mary was recognised as Mother of God, people began to dance and sing, “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners”. The story goes that this was when the second half of the Hail Mary was added.

The Gospel of John is very different to the other three which are called synoptic, a Greek word which literally means seeing in the same way. John, writing later, sees in a different way, with more emphasis on the divinity of Jesus than on his

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap.



humanity. He does not have the story of the human birth of Jesus at Bethlehem but he begins his Gospel calling Jesus the Word of God, existing even before creation.

John mentions the mother of Jesus in two places, at the wedding in Cana and at the foot of the cross on Calvary. There are deliberate parallels which connect the two episodes. We will reflect on three of these connections.

John's Gospel

Seven is a very important number in John's Gospel. He recalls seven miracles, called signs. The first sign was at the wedding in Cana when Jesus changed water which was stored for purification into the wine of celebration. The seventh sign would be on Calvary when blood and water flowed from Jesus' side, anticipating the sacraments of Eucharist and Baptism. The second connection is the hour of Jesus. At Cana, he said that his hour had not yet come. At the beginning of his Passion, he said that now his hour had come.

The third parallel is that at Cana and Calvary, Mary is not introduced by name but as the mother of Jesus. And in each place, when Jesus speaks to her, he calls her ‘woman’. It sounds very cold to us but at that time it was a noble title. It recalls the promise immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve that a woman would come whose offspring would crush the head of the servant.

Had Jesus addressed her as mother he would have referred to her as his own mother, but in calling her woman he opened up a worldwide sense of motherhood. On Calvary, seeing the disciple he loved, Jesus said to his mother, “woman, behold your son”. Then to the disciple he said, “Behold your mother.” And from that hour the disciple took her into his home. The disciple is not named so that all who love Jesus and follow his ideals are invited to take Mary into their lives as Mother of the Church.

Her universal motherhood was foreshadowed at Cana. She showed a maternal instinct when she sensed the family's embarrassment at the impending



A mosaic of Mary as Mother of the Church is seen above St Peter's Square at the Vatican. Photo: CNS

shortage of wine. In bringing their need to Jesus she interceded on their behalf. To intercede literally means to stand between parties. When Jesus said that his hour had not yet come, she disregarded his hesitation as only a mother might. Totally confident that her son would accede to her request, she told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Mary always directs people towards the will of her Blessed Son.

“The number of disciples multiplied rapidly and the number of Christians today is more than a billion”

“This was the first of the (seven) signs given by Jesus...He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him” (John 2:11).

What about Mary? When did she believe? Her approach to her son, and confidence in him, shows that she believed before

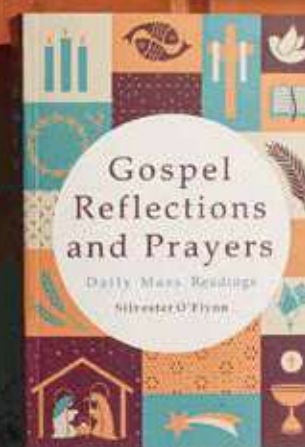
the miracle. There is an old principle in theology that what God wants to effect in many people is first accomplished in one. At school we learned to write by copying a headline. Mary was the first believer whose faith drew the miracle from her son. Life in the womb begins when one cell is fertilised. This cell expands, divides and multiplies. Different organs are formed. What amazes me with a newborn baby is the tiny fingernail! Having seen the sign, the disciples believed. The one cell had become many, and the new body began to develop. After the Ascension of her Son, Mary was with the disciples prayerfully awaiting the descent of the Holy Spirit. Then, under the power of the Holy Spirit, the direction-less and timid disciples emerged from the womb and the living Church was born. The number of disciples multiplied rapidly and the number of Christians today is more than a billion. She is Mother of the Church, a title rarely used before the Second Vatican Council.

Prayer

On the first day of the New Year we celebrate Mary as the Mother of God and Mother of the Church. We pray that she will intercede for us as she did at Cana. May it be a year of justice and peace...peace in Ukraine, peace throughout the world, peace in our families and peace in our hearts. Holy Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, pray for us.

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ALL KINDS OF EVERYTHING

A film year in review

Gingerly we stepped out of Covid-19. We were hit with films that were delayed – but not derailed – by the virus: *Munich*, *Cyrano*, *Memoria*, *Cow*.

February brought *A Journal for Jordan*, *The Eyes of Tammy Faye* and a blockbuster, *Jurassic World*. I seemed to be watching these kinds of movies since...well, since dinosaurs ruled the earth. Wasn't it time to call a halt?

We got 'women's' films – for want of a better world – with *Wheel of Fortune and Fantasy*, *The Woman King*, *She Said*, *Where the Crowdads Sing*.

There was animation in *Belle*, *Turning Red*, *Chip 'n' Dale: Rescue Rangers*. We had biopics (*Benediction*, *Weird: The Al Yankovic Story*, *Vicki*) and arthouse movies (*Vortex*). There was robotoid bromance in *Brian and Charles*; offbeat catharsis in Asghar Farhadi's *A Hero*. We even had food films – *Boiling Point*, *The Menu*.

There were prequels (*Orphan: First Kill*), sequels (*A Quiet Place Part II*, *Sing 2*) and remakes – *Night-*



Aubrey Malone

mare *Alley*, *Death on the Nile*, *West Side Story*, *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

We got Viking epics – *The Northman* – social satires (*Triangle of Sadness*), challenging documentaries – *Navalby*, *Nothing Compares* – volcanic (literally) love stories (*Fire of Love*)... and a different type of epic in *The Batman*.

Magic

There was magic in Ken Branagh's *Belfast* and the equally emotional *Living* where a terminally-ill civil servant (Bill Nighy) decides to make up for a meaningless life with a kind act.

George Clooney and Julia Roberts were predictably frothy in *Ticket to Paradise*. Michael Flatley appeared in a vanity venture, *Blackbird*. What next – Arnold Schwarzenegger in *Riverdance*? (Michael: Don't give

up the day job).

Paul Mescal got rave notices for the father/daughter drama *Aftersun*. So did Renate Reinsve for her quirky turn in *The Worst Person in the World*. And Penelope Cruz for *Parallel Mothers*. There were two disturbing films about abortion: *Lingui* and *Happening*.

“There was magic in Ken Branagh's *Belfast* and the equally emotional *Living*”

I liked *Top Gun: Maverick* despite myself. If you can't beat 'em, join 'em. Nostalgia was catered for in *Licorice Pizza* and *Vinyl Nation*. Fans of sci-fi grooved to *Crimes of the Future*, David Cronenberg's first feature for eight years.

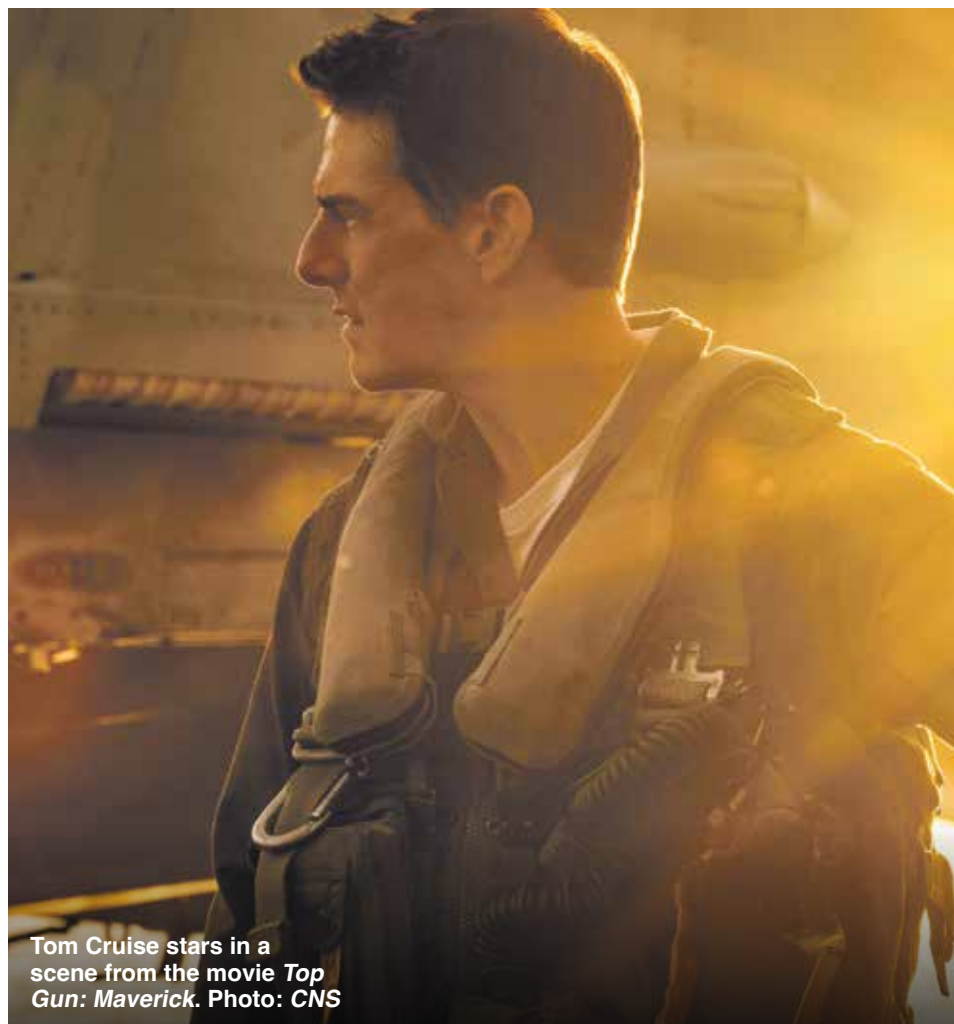
There were thrillers by the score: *Kimi*, *Prey*, *Emily the Criminal*, *Deep Water*, *The Gray Man*, *Don't Worry Darling* – and an interesting sports movie, *Hustle*. (Adam Sandler is always better when he isn't gurning.)

One of the highlights of the year was Baz Luhrmann's *Elvis*. A rollercoaster ride through the life of a man who seemed to define the country he lived in from the revolution of the 50s to the conformity of the 60s – and a seventies renaissance – it was a tour-de-force of style. Luhrmann played fast and loose with the facts but excellently depicted El's relationship with Colonel Tom Parker (who was neither a Colonel, a Tom nor a Parker.)

Loneliness

It is in Us All was a beautifully modulated film about guilt, loneliness and heritage. Best Irish film of the year for me was *An Cailín Ciúin*. It said more in its silence than so many other films say – or rather don't say – with wadges of dialogue. When have we ever seen a more evocative film about the loss of a child? Or the neglect of a child? The closing scene broke my heart.

Many stars sadly died during the year – Angela Lansbury, Robbie Coltrane, Leslie Phillips, Anne Heche (in a horrific car accident), Olivia Newton-John (after



Tom Cruise stars in a scene from the movie *Top Gun: Maverick*. Photo: CNS

a long battle with cancer), Ray Liotta (on the set of the ominously-titled *Dangerous Waters*) William Hurt, Sally Kellerman (immortalised in *M*A*S*H*), Yvette Mimieux, James Caan, David Warner. And the ground-breaking director Jean-Luc Godard. Louise Fletcher also flew over the cuckoo's nest – to coin a phrase. She was warned that great film would destroy her career. Instead, it made it.

Retired

Bruce Willis retired after being diagnosed with aphasia. I always found him a bit self-satisfied but I can't deny having enjoyed the *Die Hard* films, especially the early ones, childish and all as they were.

Will Smith won an Oscar for *King Richard*. He said in his acceptance speech that God was driving him in his life. This was just after he slapped the show's presenter, Chris Rock, for making an ill-judged gag about his wife's alopecia. I hope he didn't think God was driving him in that too.

It's always nice to see a

person of colour winning an Oscar but after 2016, a year in which African-Americans were totally ignored, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences – the most transparent body in the world – has been trying to make up. Giving someone an Oscar because of their colour is as racist as refusing them one for the same reason.

“It is in Us All was a beautifully modulated film about guilt, loneliness and heritage”

“Woke” behaviour was apparent in other situations too. Was *Coda* the tokenistic “cause” movie to win an award this year? I can see the planners going, “Hey y'all, let's be PC and please the hard-of-hearing.”

The same thing is at play with the way AMPAS treats (and mis-treats) women. A woman has won Best Director for the past two years: Chloe Zhao in 2021

for *Nomadland* and Jane Campion this year for *The Power of the Dog*. It seems like someone is trying to repay the historical debt of sexism with interest. When #OscarsSoWhite meets #MeToo you get Viola Davis.

What else?

What else happened? Well Ben Affleck tied the knot with Jennifer Lopez 18 years after their original engagement. Sounds a bit like an old Irish courtship. She's going with his name instead of her own. I'm not so sure about the advisability of this. “J. Af” doesn't have quite the same ring to it as “J. Lo,” does it?

One of the most talked about films of the year was *The Banshees of Inisherin*. I thought it was potentially brilliant, as I said in my review, but marred by its farcical overtones. Martin McDonagh needs to make up his mind if he wants to be Samuel Beckett or Bob Monkhouse.

And Colin Farrell is still doing most of his acting with his eyebrows.

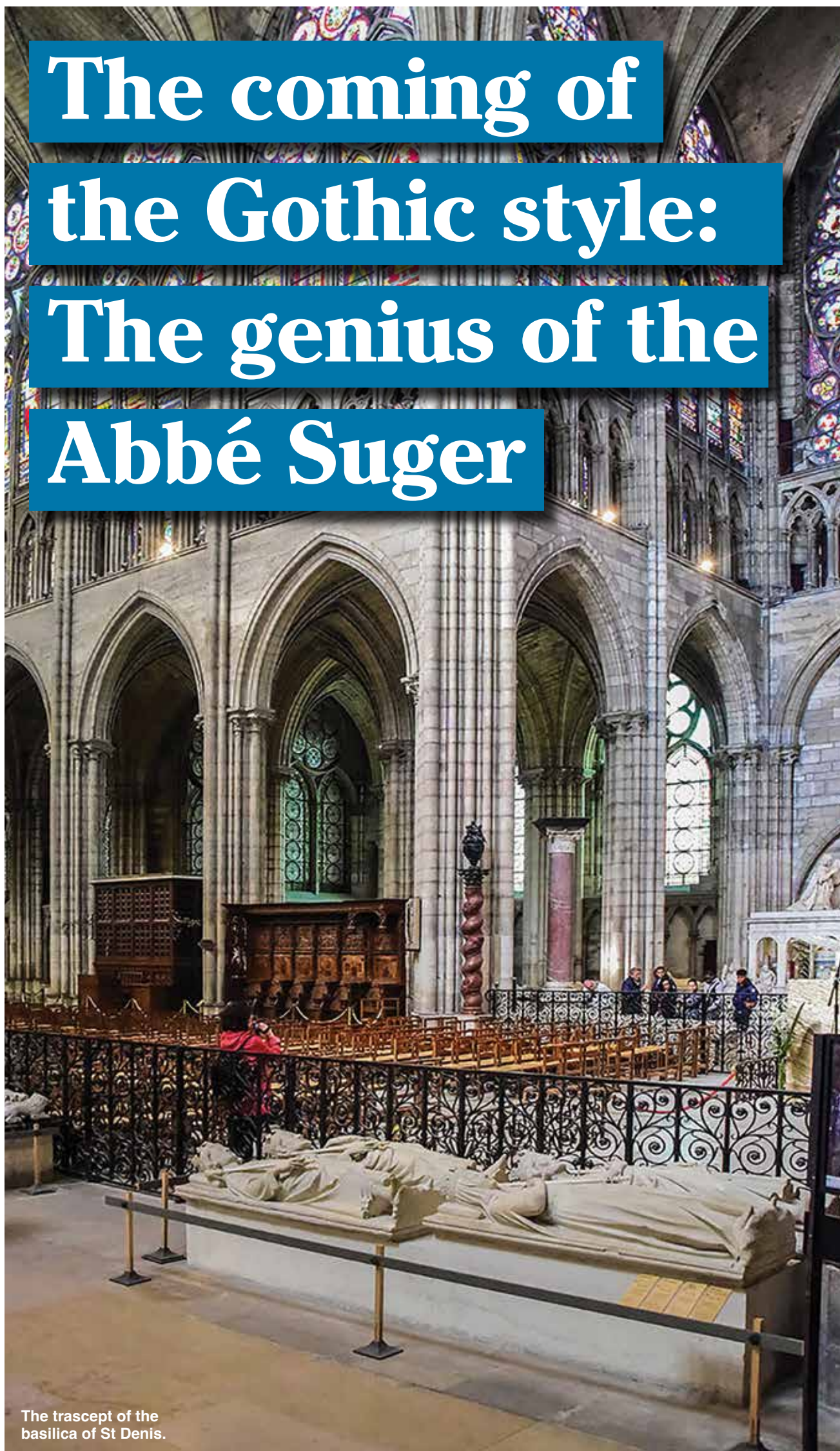


BookReviews

Peter Costello



The coming of the Gothic style: The genius of the Abbé Suger



The transept of the basilica of St Denis.

Peter Costello

The gothic cathedrals of Europe are recognised as one of the glories of European art. Every year hundreds of thousands, in some cases even millions, visit such places as Notre Dame de Paris, Amiens, and Chartres – indeed the great rose window of Chartres is one of the wonders of human ingenuity in praise of God that are for many a “once in a life time’s” experience, rather akin (in my experience anyway) to my first sight of the walls of Carcassonne.

I could not believe that such a complete city of the middle ages could have had survived in such a way – and indeed it had not. The hand of the great Eugene Viollet le Duc had passed over it, as it had also passed over Notre Dame and many other places, ensuring that the relics of Europe’s past survived into an age more heedless of faith.

Significant

Yet one of the most significant places in the development of gothic architecture is largely unvisited, not because it is difficult to get to (like St Bertrand de Comminges in the Pyrenees). No, the abbey church of St Denis, the shrine of the Patron saint of France, Paris and the French monarchy, dating back to Third Century it is thought, over which was erected a great basilica in Sixth Century, can easily be reached by a short bus or train ride, for the march of time and history has left this once famous place stranded in a neglected industrial suburb of north Paris.

“I could not believe that such a complete city of the middle ages could have had survived in such a way”

The place had been given a bad name since Victorian times: Augustus Hare remarked that “the way to St Denis lies through a manufacturing suburbs of Paris, and is very ugly” (*Days near Paris*, London 1875, page 161).

But what there was to see then was very different from the basilica in its days of glory.

In 1790 the anti-clerical Republican revolutionaries passed a decree closing all religious establishments. A mob descended on the basilica and tore out the royal tombs and broke them up, the building was unroofed and left to decay.

In 1800 Chateaubriand wrote a vivid account of a visit there. However the fragments

were gathered up through the energy of a single individual and placed in a museum. Later, when the thrilling days of revolution passed into decades of bourgeois respectability, an effort was made to restore the tombs. These can be seen today, but often the tour is rushed, so that only a vague impression can be gathered of the place.

However, the shattered history and now neglected basilica has an important place in architectural history. In summary, the church was built in 475, and later reconstructed by Dagobert. This church was replaced in the middle of the Eighth Century. Given the later changes, of his actual work only the west porch, one tower, and the apse of about 1144 survive.

The work of the Abbé Suger initiated the Gothic style. In later centuries his work was, as noted, changed as well, and the development from Romanesque can be followed in the changes made in the basilica over the centuries, though not in all details. The restoration under Napoleon I was deemed to be in bad taste, but during the reign of Napoleon III, Viollet le Duc was entrusted with the further restoration and under his hand the basilica “regained much of its ancient magnificence” (Karl Baedeker, *Handbook to Paris*, 1894, page 325).

Exploration

The Basilica of St Denis, despite the vicissitudes of its history, is the ideal place to begin an extended exploration of gothic architecture and the religious outlook of the middle ages in Europe. The style, many think, was the initiation too of that change of feeling from the classical Romanesque of the Mediterranean, replacing the brick and tiles of the south, with the soaring style in wood and stone of the north.

The change of mood was perhaps the earliest impulse towards the Reformation and then the Counter Reformation; a sort of premature ‘break with Rome’. (Here in Ireland the gothic is associated with the Church of Ireland, the classical with the Catholic Church, so much so that Dr McQuaid seems to have considered the Romanesque basilica to be the only possible style for the huge churches he had built in the long years of his administration of the Catholic diocese of Dublin. He distrusted the gothic.)

It is often said that the names of builders of the cathedrals of Europe are unknown. This is true, but the initiators are often recorded, and their names have been passed down. The Abbé Suger is one

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.

“The architecture of the middle ages, in all its details, all its vigour, its intellectual apprehension, its truth to nature”

of those. He was not, of course, the actual architect. He was the initiator. It is clear that he was a very remarkable man, a priest of an all-encompassing energy and effect, the kind of churchman quite unknown today.

But to return to the cathedral builders, the men responsible for St Denis, Notre Dame and Amiens; their names often unknown, but what they did and how they might have gone about it are very fully recorded in illustrations, drawings and illuminations. And these scenes in their activity have their own special interest.

Another kind of exploration of Europe might also be commenced at St Denis. Its great fame was as the necropolis of the kings of France since the time of Dagobert (who died in January 639). But it is not the only such place in Europe.

“It is often said that the names of builders of the cathedrals of Europe are unknown”

Next door to us, Westminster in London has been a place of royal association since the time of the Anglo-Saxons kings. In time it came also be the place where the great and the good were buried, even Charles Darwin found a place here (but not Thomas Huxley his advocate; but then Darwin had once aspired not to be a naturalist, but an Anglican priest.)

On a visit to Denmark some years ago my wife and I took the trouble to visit Roskilde in the heart of East Zealand. This has a direct link with Dublin for in the Viking boats in the inlet of the sea on which the city stands, were found the remains of a Norse ship made of Irish, perhaps, in fact, of Wicklow wood. But other kinds of boats and ships can also be seen in the Roskilde ship museum as well. However, high on the bluff of the hill overlooking the harbour stands the gothic cathedral finished in 1275, where some 39 Danish monarchs are entombed. Their names are unfamiliar, as the more powerful nations of the continent, Britain, Germany and France,

have now little interest in learning about the countries of Scandinavia.

There yet remains on our ‘must do’ list a visit to Vienna, and the Capuchin Crypt in which are laid up the remains of a long line of 150 Hapsburg Kings and Emperors, an extraordinary maze like series of vaults crammed with the tombs, a treasury of 400 years of religious art.

The Capuchin Crypt too has a link with Ireland, for here is the tomb too of the Empress Elizabeth, the wife of Emperor Franz Joseph, a horsewomen of skill who loved to pass a few months when she could, hunting in our midlands. She gifted Maynooth College with a set of wonderful vestments, which are still treasured by that much changed place and can be seen in the college museum. This misfortunate beauty was stabbed to death by an anarchist on the quayside of Genève in 1898, a forewarning of the political violence that has engulfed the continent ever since.

But to return to St Denis, and the origins of the gothic style. This was the creation, as some French historians say, of the genius of Abbé Suger (1080-1151), priest and statesman, very much in the medieval style. During the crusade of St Louis after 1248 he was the actual ruler of France.

It was here that Jeanne d'Arc offered up her arms and armour on the altar to God in 1429. Here Henri IV in 1593 renounced his Protestant faith, remarking (legend claims) that “Paris is worth a Mass”.

Here also in 1810 Napoleon I was married the Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria, a daughter of the Austrian Emperor; she was his second wife. Napoleon intended that his imperial line would be buried in St Denis, but this never came about.

Napoleon

It was Napoleon who began the reconstruction of the basilica, but it was taken to completion by Napoleon III in the middle of the century. He engaged Viollet le Duc to work on the shrine and other churches in the quarter. But with the creation of the Third Republic in 1870, the attraction of the place began to fail. The city centre of Paris had

become the theatre of French history and not this industrial suburb.

Some years ago a parish priest of St Denis wrote an article for *Le Monde* about the difficulties of the shrine today, which had become run down and is inhabited by emigrants of many cultures with little interest in Christianity. Few others, either Parisians or tourists made their way to the basilica whether out of interest or respect. It was an article that made for sad reading.

The history of the gothic style is almost the history of modern Europe. There was in time a classical revival, followed by a gothic revival, and then a neo-gothic movement, which was eventually overtaken by modernism.

What admirers of the continent's gothic cathedrals overlook is the remarkable fact that when first erected they were painted; the raw stone was coloured. Today the effect is often achieved by *son-et-lumiere* effects. But no one has, I think, dared to restore a church to its original condition. It would be a remarkable sight if one were.

But aside from what they looked like when they were first built, that bright fresh stone work and smell of new wood, we all too often overlook just how they were built. However, through those illustrations, drawings and illuminations we have a remarkable record of the architects, masons and carpenters at work.

“What admirers of the continent's gothic cathedrals overlook is the remarkable fact that when first erected they were painted”

These like the images of rural life through the season to be seen in the *Very Rich Hours of the Duc de Berry*, which records in detail rural life in all its detail and charm in the middle ages. But the scenes of church building work are some of the liveliest medieval images we have.



The gothic interior of Abbe Suger's St Denis.

Anyone like the Abbé Suger setting out to erect a cathedral had to take some import first steps. The first step of all, supposing the site, having been chosen for existing reasons of policy, was to secure a large, nearby and accessible source of stone.

After that, but almost equally important, was a supply of useable timber from a nearby forest. But timber has to be seasoned and cared for before it is used. This too takes time and money. Then when the edifice is complete it had to be decorated and fitted out, which demanded large supplies of fabric and tapestries for the hanging.

Then there was the highly skilled matter of creating and installing the stained glass windows. Visitors today are stunned by the Rose window at Chartres, or by the sheer glass wall of an interior like the Sainte Chapelle in central Paris. There the panels showing the saints rise up the roof.

Someone like myself whose sight is a little stunted has to wonder about the vision of the middle ages – they seem to have been able to apprehend small details at a distance and a height that eludes the modern eye. They also gave to the carving of the saints and figures from life, the angels of God and the saints, and also to strange and varied beasts, creatures and monsters of creation.



Builders at work in the middle ages.

These details capture the imagination and engage our minds in way which very few modern churches (aside from creations like Gaudi's in the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona).

The architecture of the middle ages, in all its details, all its vigour, its intellectual apprehension, its truth to nature,

and deep religious fervour, is a life's time engagement. It's never too soon, or indeed too late, to start.

i With acknowledgement, among other sources, to Quand les cathedrales étaient peintes, by Alain Erlande-Brandenburg (Decouvertes Gallimard, (c) Gallimard 1993)

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

To join in Sr. Stan's vision please contact cian.dikker@focusireland.ie or phone 01 881 5962

FOCUS
Ireland



Please remember GOAL in your Will

45 years on we continue to deliver lifesaving support to the most vulnerable people in our world. Leaving a gift in your Will is priceless.

Contact Courtenay on 01 2809779 or via email at cpollard@goal.ie

Registered Charity No. 20010980; CHY 6271

Operation Smile

Charity Regulatory Authority No. 20054588 Revenue Number: CHY 15661

By remembering Operation Smile in your Will, you are leaving the gift of a lasting smile for a child born with a cleft condition.

Operation Smile envisions a future where health and dignity are championed through safe surgery.

Get in touch with Natalie Madden, Legacy & Fundraising Manager, on

01 667 6659 or natalie@operationsmile.ie or visit operationsmile.ie/LastingSmile

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- Pope John Paul II

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info@christiantvireland.ie

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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

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to be in a relationship?

Seeking...

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Finding...

it difficult to meet the right person?

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01 568 6558

Ireland's Foremost Introduction Agency for Catholics
www.heavenlypartners.ie



By choosing to leave a gift or a donation at any time, you are choosing to share God's love with those who need it most.

To learn more about the Holy Father's official charity for overseas mission, call Fiona on 01 497 2035 or visit www.missio.ie

MISSIO
IRELAND



A WORLD WITHOUT HUNGER

A gift in your Will is an act of kindness that has the power to help end hunger and extreme poverty for generations to come.

Your legacy could help families overcome the life-threatening challenges caused by climate change and the devastating effects of poverty and hunger, by providing the tools needed to support themselves long into the future.

Your compassion today could change the future.

For more information, please request your free copy of Concern's legacy guide. Contact Siobhán on 01 417 8020, email siobhan.oconnor@concern.net or visit www.concern.net/legacy - finding out more does not, of course, oblige you to leave a gift.

Concern Worldwide, a company limited by guarantee. Registered Company Number: 39647, Registered Revenue Number: CHY 5745, Registered Charity Number: 20009090, Registered in Ireland, Registered address is 52-55 Lower Camden St, Dublin 2
Image: Roge Wavio (29) of Kalacha, Marsabit, Kenya holds produce she has grown with support from Concern. Photographer: Jennifer Nolan / Concern Worldwide

Will the MSC Missions

Missionaries of the Sacred Heart bring hope to the poorest people living in over 48 countries worldwide.

Please help us with a gift in your Will

Contact:

MSC Missions Office, PO Box 23 Western Road, Cork.
Tel: 021-4545704 Email: info@mscmisions.ie

www.mscmissions.ie

When you remember
Trócaire in your
Will, you bring hope
to people living in
the world's
poorest places

trócaire

It's easy to get started, and we'll help you every step of the way. Call Grace Kelly on 01 629 3333, email grace.kelly@trocaire.org or write to me at Trócaire, Maynooth, Co Kildare.

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

The Gift Of A Lifetime Be there for others after you're gone.

A gift in your will to Irish Hospice Foundation is a meaningful way to help ensure no-one faces death or bereavement without the care and support they need.

Email Anna Sadlier at anna.sadlier@hospicefoundation.ie or call 01 679 3188

Irish Hospice Foundation

www.hospicefoundation.ie



MQI

Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

You're Invited

Come for a FREE, behind-the-scenes tour of Merchants Quay Ireland's homeless drop-in centre.

See first-hand how your kind donations and legacy bequests work to bring hope and relief to people who've slept rough overnight.

To find out more please ring Shauna at 01 524 0139.

We'd love to meet you

A hot meal. A helping hand. A fresh start.

CENACOLO COMMUNITY

CENACOLO is a residential community offering FREE help for men and women with addictions. Visit www.communitycenacolo.ie or phone 094 9388286.

SERVICES

ALL UNWANTED home waste removed. Cookers, fridges, beds, suites, wardrobes, carpets etc. Removed and disposed of in a proper manner. No job too small or big. Contact Tommy, 087 6406015.

Win a trip to Lourdes

- ACROSS**
- 1 Full ceremonial form of Tridentine eucharistic service - the English for Missa Solemnis (6,4)
- 6 Australian hitchhiker (10)
- 11 Large marine crustacean (7)
- 14 In the Bible, he was swallowed by a great fish (5)
- 15 Treacherous underfoot (8)
- 17 French award for bravery, whose name translates as "Cross of War" (5,2,6)
- 19 Encounters (5)
- 20 Stir spar-oil in order to see the North Star (7)
- 23 Take wing (3)
- 24 Bricks and mortar (7)
- 25 Snooker stick (3)
- 26 Female sheep (3)
- 28 Melodies (4)
- 30 Appropriates unjustly (6)
- 33 Soothing ointment (4)
- 36 Explosive cold-symptom (6)
- 37 Mr Reeves, star of the Matrix trilogy of films (5)
- 38 City on the Loire associated with St Martin (5)
- 39 It is flown at a pristine beach (4,4)
- 40 More moist (6)
- 43 Skin adornment sometimes merely called 'ink' (6)
- 45 Hat associated with Tommy Cooper (3)
- 46 On the first floor of the house (8)
- 48 The county town of Tyrone (5)
- 49, 56a & 74a Have a party to welcome 2023 (4,2,3,3,4)
- 50 Flightless birds of Australia (4)
- 51 They may be cumulus or nimbus, for example (6)
- 54 Yellow meadow flower (9)
- 56 See 49 across
- 57 Make a stand against (6)
- 58 Reverberate (4)
- 59 Bathroom fitting (5)
- 61 The Scottish Grand National is traditionally run on this racecourse (3)
- 62 Small mammal (5)
- 65 Item of neckwear (3)
- 66 Point a weapon at a target (3)
- 67 Hangman's knot (5)
- 68 Eggs (3)
- 70 & 12d "Urbi et Orbi" is an example of this (5,8)
- 74 See 49 across
- 75 Distress signal deriving from the French for 'help me' (6)
- 77 One employed to carry 104 down (6)
- 78 Nashville and Memphis are in this US state (9)
- 79 Bird which steals shiny objects (6)
- 80 Knock senseless (4)
- 83 Absolve (6)
- 84 Fortunate (5)
- 86 Desert creature with a deadly tail (8)
- 88 Happiness (3)
- 89 See 100 down
- 93 Vote (6)
- 95 Traditional fairground ride (8)
- 97 Stage whisper (5)

- 98 Complete overhaul (5)
- 100 Urban music, rap (3-3)
- 101 Earnest entreaty (4)
- 103 Assistant (6)
- 105 Take a drink from a hip flask (4)
- 106 Insect which lives in a colony (3)
- 108 Meadow (3)
- 110 Female big cat (7)
- 111 Regret (3)
- 112 Vocation (7)
- 113 Fractured or destitute (5)
- 116 Is this designer of infrastructure always polite? (5,8)
- 117 Living alone (8)
- 118 Question (5)
- 119 Harvested what other harvesters have left behind (7)
- 120 Make the toucan leap about for a melon (10)
- 121 Courageously, with no thought for one's own safety (10)
- DOWN**
- 2 Easily identified natural feature, perhaps mentioned in directions (8)
- 3 Composer Gustav was born in 1860 in Bohemia (6)
- 4 Old Testament Israelite leader (5)
- 5 Captain (7)
- 7 The Northern Lights (6,8)
- 8 Shakespearean character or the 'king' of Killorglin (4)
- 9 Bird with black or grey plumage (4)
- 10 Overnight flight (3-3)
- 11 Vegetable with a pod (6)
- 12 See 70 across
- 13 Italian dance associated with a particular spider (10)
- 14 Traditional pantomime with a huge plant (4,3,3,9)
- 16 Tablets (5)
- 18 River beloved of Geordies (4)
- 21 Derision (5)
- 22 Spider's trap (3)
- 23 Replete (4)
- 27 Thin biscuit you might have with ice-cream (5)
- 29 Dispatched (4)
- 30 Not deserving of respect or attention (8)
- 31 Take legal action (3)
- 32 Advanced showing of a film, etc (7)
- 34 Chasm (5)
- 35 Wall painting (5)
- 36 Espied (3)
- 41 Occupant with a lease (6)
- 42 Novel by Graham Greene whose title comes from the Lord's Prayer (3,5,3,3,5)
- 44 A score in American football (9)
- 46 Bring to nought or untie (4)
- 47 Planet best known for its rings (6)
- 48 Port on the Black Sea (6)
- 52 Secret agent (3)
- 53 The message of the parable of the broken molar (5)
- 54 Rafter (4)

Christmas Crossword No. 2

Marian Pilgrimages, Ireland's group pilgrimage specialists to shrines throughout the world for over 30 years, are delighted to offer readers of *The Irish Catholic* the opportunity to win a pilgrimage for two to Lourdes during 2023.

Along with Lourdes, Marian Pilgrimages also offer pilgrimages to Medjugorje, the Holy Land, Italy, Fatima and Camino de Santiago, all available to view on www.marian.ie. For more information, please call them on 01 878 8159 or email info@marian.ie.



How to enter the competition

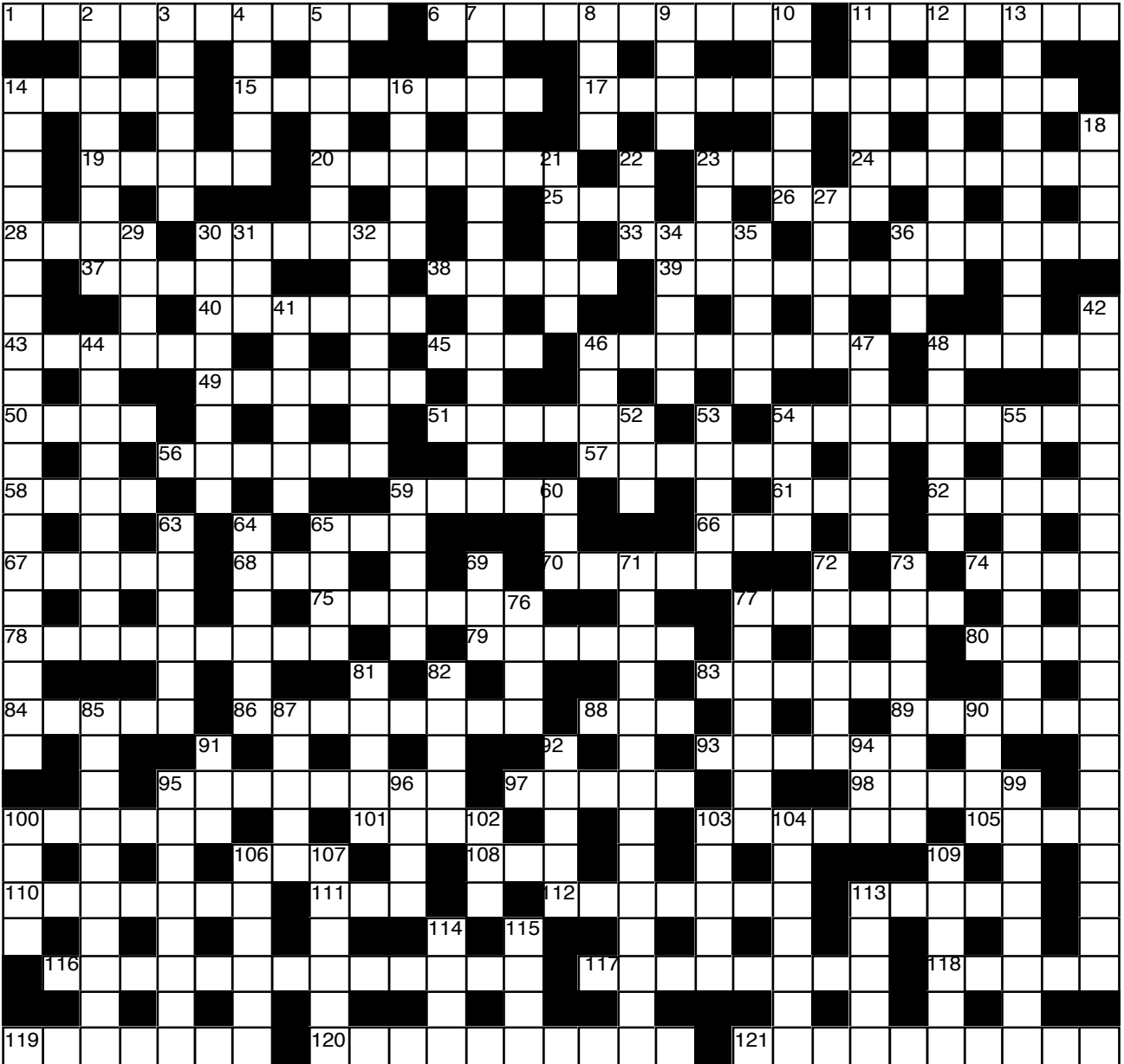
The competition consists of **TWO** crosswords. Crossword No. 1 which was published in last week's edition and Crossword No.2 which is published this week. All you have to do is answer all the crossword questions correctly on **BOTH** crosswords and your name will be entered in a draw for the pilgrimage. Remember, even if you don't manage to complete the crosswords correctly you will be entered in the draw to win one of the three runner-up prizes of a **signed copy of Mary Kenny's The Way We Were**. When you have completed the crosswords send CROSSWORD No.1 and CROSSWORD No.2 before **Friday, January 13, 2023 to:**
LOURDES COMPETITION
Marian Pilgrimages, 38 Pearse St, Dublin, D02 DD83.



NAME

ADDRESS

PHONE



- 55 Saint Joseph was such a tradesman (9)
- 59 Hard mineral or girl's name (5)
- 60 A sharp bite (3)
- 63 Cure (6)
- 64 Brags (6)
- 65 Domesticated (4)
- 69 A preserve (3)
- 71 Watery solution of organic compounds from which all life on the planet developed (10,4)

- 72 Relating to a lady on her wedding day (6)
- 73 Our Eastern province (8)
- 76 Tall tale (4)
- 77 Appease (7)
- 81 This piece of snack food might have a cheese and onion flavour (5)
- 82 Move laterally (5)
- 85 A happy medium (10)
- 87 A king or queen may wear it (5)
- 90 Part of the eye, or a flower (4)

- 91 Bark sharply, as a small dog may do (3)
- 92 In the Bible, the only son of Abraham and Sarah (5)
- 94 Metal-bearing rock (3)
- 95 Funny performer (8)
- 96 Australian model Ms MacPherson (4)
- 99 You may use this instrument to pluck your eyebrows (8)
- 100 & 89a The third person of the Blessed Trinity (4,6)
- 102 Beer (3)

- 103 Swiss heroine of a novel by Johanna Spyri (5)
- 104 Suitcases etc (7)
- 106 Rise or climb (6)
- 107 Distressingly sad (6)
- 109 Islamic place of worship (6)
- 113 Purchaser (5)
- 114 Skilful (4)
- 115 In such an exam, the answers are spoken, not written (4)

Notebook

Fr Billy Swan

Be blessed with good friends this New Year

ON MONDAY, January 2, the Church celebrates the joint feast day of Sts Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzen. Both men were 4th Century bishops in the Christian East, Basil in Caesarea and Gregory in Constantinople. The men were close friends and on their feast day, the Office of Readings offers us a beautiful insight into the depth of their friendship. It also informs us about the features of a healthy friendship that Christians ought to enjoy and cherish.

Childhood

In a sermon, Gregory tells us that he and Basil were friends since childhood, but then went their separate ways before finally re-uniting in Athens. Gregory interpreted this reconnection as part of divine providence and a gift from God: "We were united again as if by plan, for God so arranged it." Did you ever feel that a friend was sent into your life for a good reason? Do you believe that meeting friends and making friends is not by chance but is directed by a providential power greater than your own? If so, then you join with Gregory in seeing things this way. Friends make us better people and are sent by God to



Good friends Sts Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzen help us become better people – to encourage us, protect us and sometimes to challenge us in a way that says "you can do better; you can be better".

The friendship between Gregory and Basil was not possessive. As Gregory writes: "I sought to persuade others, to whom he was less well known, to have the same regard for him". Here was a man who did not cling to his friendship in an exclusive or possessive way but wanted others to enjoy the gift of friendship with Basil too. Here is the antidote to friendships that can become too

possessive and not open enough to include others.

Bond

Gregory describes the bond with Basil as both of them possessing a "single spirit". Their unity was not one of feeling only or shallow sentiment: "Our single object and ambition was virtue and a life of hope in the blessings that are to come". Do we encourage our friends to grow in virtue and holiness? Do they encourage us? Gregory concludes the passage by saying that "our great pursuit, the great name we wanted, was to be Christians". Note here that for these friends in God, to be Christian was their greatest identity.

On the night before he died, Jesus said to his disciples: "I no

longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends" (John 15:15). A friend shares the secrets of their heart with another friend. This is what Jesus did with us. As his followers, each of us enjoy his friendship; but because of our friendship with him, we become friends of one another too. I hope that the Christmas period has been a time when you were nourished by the gift of friendship in family and beyond. As we continue to walk the synodal path as Church and cross the threshold of a new year, may all of us be blessed with good friends whom we treasure as gifts from God. May the reward of our friendship, be the joy of friendship itself.

What's another year?

As we prepare to welcome another year, I join with all the staff of *The Irish Catholic* in wishing you all a very happy and peaceful 2023. As a Church, our calling is now as it always was – to witness to God's transforming love as the greatest power in the universe. We pray that we have the courage and trust to speak of God in new and life-giving ways. In the words of T.S. Eliot: "For last year's words belong to last year's language. And next year's words await another voice" (*Little Gidding*). Our hope is the ability to hear the music of the future. Our Faith is the courage to dance to it today.

COP27 and climate justice

The recent COP27 conference ended in Egypt last month with an historic decision to set up a fund to help developing countries who suffer from the effects of climate change. The establishment of this international fund was a clear recognition that the actions and habits of countries have global consequences that affect all humanity. At the heart of this fund are two principles at the heart of Catholic social teaching – justice and solidarity. It is giving poorer countries their due and recognising that they who contribute least to climate change are suffering most. It is also a recognition of solidarity and the human brotherhood/sisterhood called for by Pope Francis.



YOUR NEW YEAR GIFT COULD SAVE A CHILD'S LIFE

Millions of children throughout the world are suffering from hunger and malnutrition due to conflict, disease, displacement, and other factors. And the situation in Africa is only getting worse. Millions of women and children are struggling with inadequate diets which can lead to stunting and other health problems. Countless children are dying of malnutrition each day.

The Little Way Association is receiving requests from missionary priests and Sisters who urgently need funds to purchase sacks of wheat flour, sorghum, maize and beans for their people and for medical needs of their clinics such as intravenous feeding of children and babies. For a helpless child, prolonged hunger is a devastating, bewildering, intensely painful experience.

Your New Year gift will assuredly help a missionary to relieve a child's suffering. It could save a life. Whatever you can spare will be sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION and will be gratefully received.



"Insofar as you did this to one of the least of My brethren, you did it to Me".



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 all the blessings and graces you need for 2023.

Daily Mass for your intentions

You and your intentions are remembered in a special Mass offered in the Missions for all Little Way benefactors and friends.

It was St Therese's vocation to be "love in the heart of the Church, and to assist priests, missionaries and the entire Church", and this has been the continuing inspiration of The Little Way Association. Ever since St Therese's death on 30th September 1897, countless priests and missionaries have given witness to the extraordinary way in which she has helped them. Let us pray for the fulfilment of her desire that the Gospel message would be spread throughout the world.

As 2023 begins, please consider making a gift to The Little Way Association's fund for children.

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

Thank you, and may God reward your generosity.

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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€..... **NEEDS OF MISSIONARIES**
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☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss)

(Block letters please)

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