

The Irish Catholic

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Time for Change in the Irish Bishops' Conference

Editorial Comment

Pope Francis famously said we aren't only living in changing times, we are living through the change of an epoch. He also said "Change is necessary to grow. If we do not change, we do not grow." Leadership renewal is essential in any institution, and the Pope has led by example with some very high profile offices in the Vatican being staffed with religious and laity.

The Irish Catholic Church too needs to embrace change at leadership level and yet the Bishops' Conference remains much the same as it has for many decades. Since 2014, the presidency of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference has remained unchanged. In a time when the Church faces both internal challenges and the pressing need for engagement with an evolving society, fresh leadership is not just desirable—it is necessary.

Unlike many aspects of Church governance that

require Vatican approval, the statutes governing the Irish Bishops' Conference are within its own power to amend. This means that the conference itself can implement reforms to ensure a more dynamic, accountable, and representative leadership structure.

At present, the presidency is not an elected position in the way one might expect in a democratic institution. Instead, a change in leadership largely depends on internal arrangements and tradition rather than a clear, structured process that encourages rotation. This risks stagnation and an over-concentration of authority, neither of which serves the Church well in a rapidly changing Ireland.

The solution is simple: the president of the Bishops' Conference should be elected by the bishops, with a set term limit to allow for regular renewal. Such a change would bring several benefits.

It would ensure that different voices and experiences shape the direction of the conference, reflecting the diverse realities of dioceses across the country. It would also demonstrate a commitment to openness and adaptability—qualities the Church must embrace if it is to remain a relevant force in Irish society.

This is not a radical or unprecedented suggestion and in fact has been discussed among many of the Irish bishops. Many bishops' conferences around the world have elected presidents who serve limited terms, ensuring a steady infusion of new perspectives. Leadership should not be about holding on to a position indefinitely but about serving the Church at a particular moment in time, then stepping aside to let others bring their energy and vision to the role. Voices within the conference have for a long time called for renewal of the often

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Climate change ruined my homework



Pictured are 6th class students from St Brigid's Primary School, Kildare Town, (L/R) Orlatih (12), Isabelle (11), Ella (12) and Clara (12) on a Dublin beach to launch this year's annual Trócaire box appeal for Lent and raise awareness of the incoming education washout due to climate change. Climate change is denying a quarter of a billion children an education across the globe. The iconic Trócaire Box – which has been a firm Lent feature in Ireland for over 50 years – will be rolled out to almost 635,000 homes, schools and churches. Photo: Mark Stedman. See page 3.

JORDAN PETERSON SAYS HE BELIEVES IN THE RESURRECTION

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MY LIFE FLIPPED ON PANCAKE TUESDAY

Martina Purdy

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Time for Change in the Irish Bishops' Conference

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unwieldy conference and now some are suggesting that with Rome pushing hard for more dioceses to merge and an Irish Synod on the horizon, a new President could bring a fresh vision and renewed energy.

At a time when the Church in Ireland is reckoning with declining vocations, changing societal attitudes, and the need to rebuild trust, symbolic and structural reforms matter. If the Bishops' Conference is serious about renewal, it must start from within. Implementing a democratic, time-limited presidency would be a small but significant step in that direction.

The power to make this change lies with the bishops themselves. The question now is whether they are willing to embrace the spirit of renewal or whether they will let inertia dictate the future.

Changes in Cork's First Communion celebrations result in disagreements

Staff reporter

Changes planned for Communion and First Confession celebrations in Cork have repeatedly caused disagreements between primary school teachers and Bishop Fintan Gavin.

Recently, Bishop Gavin sent a letter to parish priests asking for Communion to only take place on weekends, and First Confessions outside of school hours. The request was not received well by teachers who would have to give up their free time to participate in the events.

The changes followed a workshop between priests, teachers and school principals, when it was agreed that to highlight the role of the family, the candidates should have the opportunity to have their families present instead of their class groups.

Speaking to the *Irish Independent*, Fr Tom Hayes said: "When Bishop Fintan wrote to parishes recently about First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion, he wished to remind people that these key moments in the lives of the children have always been celebrated with family present and in the local parish church with the wider faith community also present."

Mick Finn, Former Cork City councillor who sits on a number of school boards said "Moving ceremonies to weekends is likely considered by teachers as infringing on their own lives and many already go above and beyond with outside of hours work with teams, homework clubs etc."

'Take heart' this Lent, Archbishop Eamon Martin

Renata Milán Morales

One of the four pilgrim statues of the Sacred Heart blessed by Pope Francis was recently welcomed by Archbishop Eamon Martin to the Archdiocese of Armagh. The statue was received at St Patrick's Cathedral at the 11am Mass on March 2. This day, Temperance Sunday, is linked with the Pioneers and their offering to the Sacred Heart.

Archbishop Eamon Martin explained on the day that the 'Sacred Heart Crusade' is now underway, with the four pilgrim statues, blessed by the Holy Father, journeying across the country. In his homily the prelate encouraged everyone to read the encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, "It is very clear that Pope Francis sees the love of the heart of Jesus as a source of mission, a mission to change the world, with all its empty



Archbishop Eamon Martin received one of the Statues of the Sacred Heart blessed by Pope Francis to Armagh Cathedral. Pictured is Archbishop Eamon Martin and faithful in Armagh.

consumerism, war and violence, its selfishness and exploitation where human life can be so easily thrown away."

Archbishop Eamon consecrated the parish to the Sacred Heart, asking Jesus in song to "inflamm" hearts. He invited the faithful in Ireland to "Take Heart" with the approach of Lent.

This Jubilee Year coincides with the 350 anniversary of the revelations of the Sacred Heart to St Margaret Mary Alacoque

in France, to whom the 12 promises of the Sacred Heart and the First Friday devotion emerged. "Hoping its short stay will help to reignite love for the Sacred Heart during the Jubilee Year and also mark the 350 anniversary of the revelations to St Margaret Mary Alacoque at Paray le Monial in France," said the archbishop.

"The devotion to the Sacred Heart remains strong in Ireland and is expected to be further invigorated by Pope

Francis' recent encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, released in October. This document served as a key inspiration for the Crusade," explained the Crusade organising team.

The four pilgrim statues of the Sacred Heart are currently traveling across the dioceses of Ireland. They will come together at Knock Shrine on June 22, where the relics of St Margaret Mary and her confessor, St Claude la Colombe, will be present.

Day of prayer for survivors of abuse happens this Friday

Renata Steffens

The annual Day of Prayer for Survivors and Victims of Abuse 2025 happens tomorrow, March 7, which is also the first Friday of Lent.

On the day, blessed candles, also called 'Candles of Atonement', will be lit in parish churches and diocesan cathedrals across the country, "as a reminder to the faithful of the need for atonement and to symbolise repentance; light in the darkness and hope," the Irish Bishops said in a statement.

The lighting of the candles and the prayer for the day are based on the Penitential Rite composed and prayed by the Pope at the final Mass of the '9th World Meeting of Families' on August 26, 2018 at Phoenix Park, Dublin. During that rite, the Pope prayed for mercy for the crimes of abuse and asked for forgiveness.

To support survivors of physical, emotional, sexual and spiritual abuse who suffered in an institutional, clerical or religious setting in Ireland, the spiritual support service 'Towards Peace' was funded by the Irish Bishops' Conference and the Association of Missionary and Religious in Ireland.

The support service offers a safe supportive space for victims and their families. The Towards Peace Spiritual Support Service is free of charge and for more please see www.towardspeace.ie.

Six of the best



The St Mary's College students Cara, Hannah, Alisha, Emily and Olivia led by Ms Rice recently shared their musical talents at the St Eugene's Cathedral's 'Cathedral Club'. The Cathedral Club meet in the Cathedral Hall, Infirmary Road, Derry each Thursday after the 10am Mass and everyone is welcome to join.

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242 million children’s education suffered due to climate change – Trócaire



Launch of Trócaire’s Lenten campaign. Photo: Mark Stedman

Garry O’Sullivan

More than 242 million students in 85 countries had their schooling disrupted by extreme climate events in 2024 according to Trócaire as it launched its Lenten campaign this week.

Caoimhe de Barra, Trócaire’s CEO, says “The deep injustice of this is that those who have done least to cause the climate crisis, and who have the least capacity to absorb and recover from its impact, or adapt in response, are suffering most severely from its impacts. As many of these rural communities rely on growing and selling crops to earn an income, the

loss of livelihood has knock-on effects for families. Often families can’t afford to pay for classes, books or transport. This is aside from the very direct effects when schools are destroyed by floods or cyclones and roads become unpassable for children travelling to school.”

A 12-year-old Guatemala girl, Miriam, features on this year’s Trócaire Box with her family. “Her mother and father, Ilma and Julio, grow cardamon and corn to earn money for the family. They used to plant crops twice a year but now only plant once because of the extreme weather conditions. A drought devastated their crops which meant they had no income. Miriam was due to go to secondary school, an hour’s drive away, but her parents now cannot afford the €5 a week for the bus that would take her there,” added Ms de Barra.

She added: “This Lent we are asking the public in Ireland to help us support communities like Miriam’s as they mitigate and adapt to the effects of the climate crisis so that they can continue farming, protect their homes from flooding, make a fair living from their crops, send their children to school and become more resilient,” said Caoimhe de Barra.

Meanwhile, the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio visited Guatemala this week as the US Agency for International Development is being essentially dismantled. Guatemala has agreed an increase in deportation flights back to Guatemala from the US of illegal immigrants. He announced plans to invest in Guatemala’s ports and roads but the extent of the cuts to the USAID programme is not clear and how it will affect the 200 workers.

Donations can also be made online at trocaire.org or by calling 1800 408 408.

Ireland prepares for national Eucharistic Procession

Renata Milán Morales

On the eve of Ireland’s patron saint’s feast day, a Eucharistic Procession will take place in Athlone, “the heart of Ireland”. The procession will start at St Mary’s Church, Athlone, at 3pm, “on the hour of our mercy,” explains Anto Crossey, key organiser of the event, speaking to *The Irish Catholic*.

“Jesus calls his children to walk with him, uniting our hearts to his Eucharistic heartbeat, which within burns a

fire, a flame, the perfect flame of love, of fairness for the love of humanity for Ireland and the whole world. Just as Christ chose our beloved St Patrick,” said Mr Crossey.

“Heaven once again calls Ireland to rise up and to become the modern-day Saints to be a witness proclaiming the gospel. So that Ireland once again will be a light and people of light to all the nations not only to Ireland but to all the nations and to the whole world,” he continued.

In September 2024, the people of Ireland joined together with Christ processing through the streets of Dublin. Recently, thousands walked through the streets of Derry praise the Lord. And once again, on the eve of St Patrick, “Heaven calls the faithful of Ireland to walk through the streets of Athlone, the heart of Ireland.” The Eucharistic Procession will be followed by Adoration and Holy Mass.

To prepare “our souls for the event,” the organisers have prepared a 33 hour Eucharistic Adoration based in Clonmacnoise March 14-16.

Mayoman represents the spirit of Lent



Pedro Esteva

A young man from Co. Mayo has started a 5500km journey across Europe, beginning in Istanbul, Turkey, with plans to reach Claremorris, Co. Mayo, in the next nine months. Eammon Keaveney, who pre-

viously conquered Ireland’s ten highest peaks in ten days, will be walking barefoot and carrying all his gear. This journey, which began the day before Ash Wednesday, is being undertaken in support of Jigsaw, the mental health charity for young people.

Irish Church in Rome to celebrate 400 years

Renata Steffens

St Isidore’s College, founded in 1625, is marking its 400th anniversary this year. Located in Rome, the College has long been the heart of the Irish Franciscans in Rome and will celebrate the milestone with a series of events throughout 2025, including a symposium scheduled for May.

The Irish Church in Rome will also host the annual St Patrick’s Day Mass on March 17 at 10am. As Guardian Fr Mícheál MacCraith OFM explained, “St Isidore’s College was founded by Waterford man Luke Wadding in 1625 and remains the oldest Irish institution in Rome.”

Dedicated to St Isidore, patron saint of Madrid, the Church is the Irish National Church in Rome. Today, it is home to an international community of Franciscan friars and is the formation house for Irish friars. The College’s core activities include academic research, scientific publications, the education of friars, and the management of two major research libraries.



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A day of hope – new deacon ordained in Dublin Archdiocese

Renata Steffens

Archbishop Dermot Farrell celebrated the ordination to the diaconate of Patrick Corkery SJ in the Gonzaga College Chapel, on March 2.

During his homily, the archbishop said, “It is a joy for me to be with you today to ordain Patrick Corkery to the Diaconate. This is a day of hope. Any day when we make a profound commitment is a day born of hope, a day rooted in hope.”

It can be any type of commitment, the archbishop

said. “A solemn profession, or a marriage, or an ordination: it is a day of witness to hope, a day when we put flesh on hope.”

Deacon Corkery’s ordination marks an important moment in his journey to priesthood. The archbishop said that priesthood has many dimensions, and “if you seek to lead, this is what you must attend to. It is not that diaconate and priesthood do not have ministerial dimensions, but there are other dimensions which, when priesthood is seen

exclusively in a ministerial key, risk remaining hidden.”

Archbishop Farrell said that before one can lead others, they need to look at themselves, and what is in their own hearts with honesty. “Overcoming pride and self-sufficiency and self-justification demands a particular humility and openness,” he said.

Bishops and priests are no exception to the effects of their own weakness and fragility, the archbishop said.

“Recently, the [Jesuit] Society made a courageous

decision publicly to name some deceased members of the Society against whom credible accusations of abuse had been made. It is right that these crimes be brought to light—that the plank in our own eye be seen, that the pain, injustice, and trauma caused be accepted, and that the long journey of healing be undertaken and supported.

“To bring this to light, is not only a work of justice and truth, it is also a witness to authentic Christian hope... Authentic Christian

hope is an engagement with the world in its brokenness and blindness. It is a commitment born of the power that is given to us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the power to risk living in another way.”

Deacon Corkery vowed to that ‘authentic Christian hope’. “Our shared hope is

the gift of the God who creates us out of nothing,” the archbishop said. Addressing the new deacon, Archbishop Farrell said: “You formally put flesh on that hope today... May He who is calling you to priesthood keep you close to Himself, may He keep you, and your Jesuit confrères, close to the poor.”

Clondalkin choir brings their Vatican music to Limerick

Staff reporter

One year after performing in St Peter Basilica in the Vatican, the North Clondalkin Community Choir

will sing in St John’s Cathedral, Limerick on March 9. The Choir’s Musical Director, Noel Collins said this is an opportunity for the people of Limerick “to hear the

music we performed in the Vatican” during Mass led by Bishop Brendan Leahy.

“The Gospel reading for this coming Sunday recalls the temptation of Jesus in

the Desert,” Mr Collins said and continued, “our greatest temptation that we face as a choir is to give up despite the positive difference that music can have in the community and world around us.”

The Music Director said that “music is food for the soul. With the war in Ukraine continuing, the world needs examples of harmony more than ever. Our choir provides a small model of unity that has the potential to send ripples far and wide.”

The choir has currently 63 member and 58 will sing in Limerick on the weekend. Mr Collins said the choir “started after Covid. There was a lot of isolation and loneliness because of the multiple lockdowns.” So they created the choir “to try and bring people together.”

Mr Collins has only realised in the past few years how important it is to have a group to come together sharing their love for music. “How important it is in terms of mental health... And it puts faith into practice, it makes [it] much more interesting and it involves kids and adults. We are an intergenerational community.”

Those interested in joining the choir do not need experience with music. Mr Collins has been a post-primary music teacher for over 20 years and will teach anyone with a passion how to read music sheets. Just email northclondalkincommunitychoir@gmail.com.

Clogher youth prepare for Lourdes

Pedro Esteva

Clogher Diocese’s youth and young adult ministry office ‘Clogher don Óige’ gathered last weekend to begin their preparation for the Pilgrimage to Lourdes which will happen in July.

James McLoughlin, Youth Ministry Director told *The Irish Catholic* that “starting preparations so many months in advance gives us the chance to ensure that everything is well-organised and that the participants are well-prepared for the journey, both logistically and spiritually.”

He said that the “enthusiasm among the youth was palpable. They are truly excited about the pilgrimage, as it represents an opportunity to meet new people, experience new

things and for spiritual growth, community building, and personal reflection.”

For the Youth Director, the pilgrimage preparation is “also a wonderful way for the youth to bond and form connections that will enhance their experience during the pilgrimage, the getting to know each other and team building is extremely important.”

The group will be meeting once a month until July in “regular meetings leading up to the pilgrimage to keep the momentum going and to address any questions or concerns that arise.”

“This continuous engagement will help maintain the excitement and ensure everyone is ready when the time comes,” Mr McLoughlin concluded.

Brazilian women gather



The Encontro de Mulheres 2025 (Women Gathering 2025) of the Brazilian community took place on Sunday, March 2. The women were joined by the Sisters Poor of Jesus Christ, from Waterford for a moment of faith, prayer, sharing and friendship.

Maranatha 2025 – Cork youth singing with faith

The Maranatha 2025 is happening in Cork this week in Cork City Hall is expecting to gather up to 500 students for a full day of activities, including catechesis and music.

Maranatha is a faith-based day full of high energy music for young people from across the diocese of Cork and Ross attending post-primary schools. The event was

created to bring young people together to celebrate their faith through music and have fun together as a community.

The day will lead to a concert happening from 7.30pm to 9.30pm. The concert consists of liturgical and inspirational contemporary music, the doors open at 6.45pm.



Young people gather for the pilgrimage talk.

Why Russia steals children

One of the points that Volodymyr Zelensky made in the now infamous Oval Office confrontation with Donald Trump and JD Vance, was that 20,000 Ukrainian children have been abducted by Russia. No further discussion ensued about this terrible statistic, which is confirmed by other sources. Indeed, *Radio Free Europe* claims the number of Ukrainian children kidnapped by Rus-



Mary Kenny

sia is much greater – estimating it at 700,000.

Pattern

And while this is evidently an act of war, it may also be rooted in a pattern emerging almost all over the world: the shrinking of the child population.

Le Monde Diplomatique – a meticulous information source for French diplomats – recently claimed that Russia is experiencing a huge problem with depopulation, and a shortage of manpower because of its low birth rate. (Russia's death rate is one and a half times the

rate of births.) Ethnic groups which used to provide Russia with manpower – people from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan where birth rates are higher – are increasingly migrating to the Arab Emirates and Turkey.

“America, once a pronatalist society, has seen its birth rate crash, down currently to 1.6 children per woman”

Russia isn't, we know, alone in facing this child famine. *The New Yorker*

magazine, for long the essence of a liberal East Coast elite, is devoting its current issue to the chilling prospect of “The End of Children”. America, once a pronatalist society, has seen its birth rate crash, down currently to 1.6 children per woman; while South Korea has the world's lowest birth rate – 0.7 children per woman, effectively demographic collapse.

South Korea

Strollers for dogs outnumber sales of baby-buggies, and there are South Korean towns where no child has been born for years, reports Gideon Lewis-Kraus. There are schools with only five pupils, which once had a thousand. And when low birthrates become the norm, it gets ever more difficult to recover the situation: there are fewer young people around to have babies. (A leading Finnish demographer, Anna Rotkirch, says that most

young people today have never actually held a baby.)

“Sex education teaches contraception, but more rarely fertility awareness”

The obstacles to child-bearing are said to be housing, the long investment in education, and the cost of child-care. There has also been an immense amount of propaganda favouring a “child-free” lifestyle, and many reports that children are expensive, tie you down, and disfavour “personal development” and “self-actualisation”. Sex education teaches contraception, but more rarely fertility awareness.

And a state like Russia is reduced, it seems, to stealing children, which is a twisted acknowledgement that maybe kids are the richest resource of all.

“Russia's death rate is one and a half times the rate of births”



Lviv, Ukraine – March 3, 2022: A young boy in a crowd of people transiting through Lviv stand outside the Lviv train station. Photo: Joel Carillet/ISTock

Discipline and self-control

Cardinal Dolan, Archbishop of New York, has expressed the hope that “Holy Ramadan” – commenced on March 1 – might motivate Christians to be more proactive in observing Lent, which, as we know, started this past week. He went so far as to suggest an ecumenical alignment. “Let's unite with our Islamic brothers and sisters in prayer and fasting” in this common season.

It's an interesting idea, and perhaps it's worth considering. But there are

real differences between the approach to Ramadan and the approach to Lent.

For Muslims, the fast is a community effort in which each individual feels supported in the endeavour. Last year, when I was visiting Jordan, I marvelled at the discipline and self-control of Muslims to go without food or drink all day, until sunset. But doing this is more achievable when nearly everyone around you is in concord. A collective spirit is a great enabler, and an encouragement.

Whereas for Christians – well, we

most of us now live in a secularised society in which there is almost no special discipline around food, let alone a context for fasting. Easter eggs are on sale before Lent begins, and the only restrictions on meals are health-related (or faddish, like veganism.) If we fast, we do so more or less alone and isolated.

Even the Church itself seldom emphasises the boundaries around fasting any more – but perhaps that's a point that Cardinal Dolan is also making, in a roundabout way.

Henry Kelly, who has recently died aged 78, once told me that what best prepared him for his career in television was performing in Gilbert and Sullivan operas at Belvedere School in Dublin. “You should have

seen my Nanky Poo!” he bragged – never shy about his starring role in *The Mikado*!

Henry was also a classics scholar, brilliant in Latin and Greek, an incongruous background for a celebrity TV host of game shows.

But I think what also favoured him was his father's paternal dedication. Henry was an only son, born many years after his sisters, and a late surprise to his parents. His father, a successful civil servant who had worked with Kevin O'Higgins, idol-

ised the boy and gave him undiluted attention and motivation. Perhaps it made Henry a little cocky, but it also gave him lifelong confidence. In recent years, Henry had been affected by a stroke but his high spirits remained undiminished.

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The Rosary, Ukraine and the



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and US President Donald Trump argue as they meet at the White House in Washington February 28, 2025. Photo: OSV News/Brian Snyder via Reuters.



Maria Steen

The All Ireland Rosary Rally kicked off in Knock last weekend with over 200 in attendance for the launch. Despite grey skies and the biting cold, those in attendance were enthusiastic – not least the children who gathered for the children's rosary at the end of the afternoon. The Rally, organised by Fr Marius O'Reilly, will be held on 7 June in Knock and thousands are expected to attend. I spoke at the launch of the importance of the rosary for Ireland today. The rosary offers us an opportunity to grow in the interior life, which cannot help but strengthen us and bring peace when we become disheartened at the state of the world.

Disheartened

One of the things that often triggers us into feeling disheartened or hopeless is the endless cycle of bad news, fed to us by media which often misrepresent some

stories and hide others. I was struck at the truth of this in relation to the Trump Zelenskyy meeting in the Oval Office last Friday. For those who might have missed it, the Ukrainian President met with the President of the United States, before the assembled media reporters and cameras to discuss an agreement in relation to mineral rights in Ukraine, which was apparently a “done deal” and seems to have been viewed by the Americans as important to efforts to broker a peace between the combatants. The agreement was scheduled to be signed after the press conference and the two leaders and their delegations were to have lunch with each other. None of that happened though; instead a total diplomatic breakdown ensued.

“Most people had only seen a snippet of the meeting – which is just as the media outlets wanted it”

Having taken part in a number of public debates and interviews, I am very aware of the “spin” that broadcasters and journalists can put

on things – in my experience often unfair and untruthful – so I am always interested to listen to what they have to say and then to find an alternative report and try myself to figure out where the truth lies. It came as no surprise to me that the Irish media overwhelmingly sided with Zelenskyy and denounced Trump and Vance. And because RTE and the broadsheet papers still carry much sway in this country, many conversations I overheard at the weekend mirrored their views. However, it was obvious to me that most people had only seen a snippet of the meeting – which is just as the media outlets wanted it. Based only on the footage of the final, heated exchange in isolation, Trump and Vance were made out – and indeed did appear – to have staged a setup. However, watching the whole meeting in its entirety – some 50 minutes in length – put a somewhat different complexion on the whole affair.

Utter folly of provoking Trump and Vance

President Trump opened the meeting by saying it was an honour to meet with the Ukrainian President and that he appreciated working with him very much. He said that they had worked out a deal

“This was not about discussing matters with the US President, it was about using an opportunity to bring pressure to bear on his host in front of the world media”

that was advantageous to both the US and Ukraine – essentially that the US would invest in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Ukraine in exchange for “rare earth” or natural mineral deposits. Trump made the point – valid from an American perspective – that US taxpayers had to be protected in respect of the investment they had made in helping Ukraine to repel Russian forces. However, ultimately it was in the interests of Ukraine, Russia, America, and the world generally, that peace be made, rather than face World War III. While the exact terms of the final agreement are unknown, it is understood that Americans would have a (possibly non-military) presence on the ground as part of the deal.

Although Trump made a number of critical remarks about the previous administration under President Biden, saying if he had been in office, the war would never have broken out, he was very complimentary about the Ukrainian peo-

ple, especially their soldiers whom he called “very brave”. He invited President Zelenskyy to speak at considerable length and deferred to him a number of times during the conference.

“It is objectively rude and disrespectful to try to undermine the President on his own turf”

It is worth noting at this point that although Trump is well known as a television personality in the US, Zelenskyy's own professional background before he came to politics was also as an entertainer and senior television producer in Ukraine. However the two have had a very different experience of media reception over the past few years – with Zelenskyy being lionised and Trump being villainised. Both men know how to use the media, and

it seemed to me that Zelenskyy had planned in advance what he was going to say and what he wanted the media to hear. This was not about discussing matters with the US President, it was about using an opportunity to bring pressure to bear on his host in front of the world media – to “litigate” the issues, with all their sensitivities, in front of the American media, as Vice President JD Vance said. This was a bad idea from the start. Not only was it objectively rude and disrespectful to try to undermine the President on his own turf, while asking for his support, it was an unforced error given Trump's – by now, well-known – personality, his reputation as a negotiator, and his long experience of being treated disrespectfully by a hostile establishment and media.

Pathway

This was supposed to be a meeting attempting to find a pathway to peace and a permanent ceasefire to end the war in Ukraine. However, towards the end of the meet-

Irish Media's predictable take

ing, Zelenskyy interjected to hold forth on the futility of diplomacy directed to President Putin, making a number of inflammatory remarks and demanding security guarantees before there could be any cease-fire. No-one is under any misunderstanding about how Zelenskyy feels about Putin, and no-one doubts that he has good reason to distrust him. However, it is more difficult to understand why he thought it was useful to call him a "killer and terrorist" while in the Oval Office in front of the world media. That he chose to do it in front of the US President, who to everyone's knowledge is attempting to act as a broker or mediator, while also asking him for financial and security support, just seemed like utter folly.

“He was operating in a language that is not his native tongue, with the eyes of the world upon him”

However, President Zelenskyy didn't stop there. He flatly – and repeatedly – contradicted Trump's assurances to the media that he would be able to broker a peace deal between the two sides, saying that Putin had broken his promises before and doubting Trump's ability to secure a meaningful promise from Putin.

One has to feel sympathy for President Zelenskyy. His country has been invaded, thousands have been killed, many more displaced. Here, he was operating in a language that is not his native tongue, with the eyes of the world upon him. His beliefs may well be sincerely held, but the question, at the highest political and diplomatic level, is whether it was useful to ventilate them in public. His remarks immediately made Trump's job much harder to do and, as became painfully obvious, succeeded in totally alienating Trump and the entire US delegation. The last straw came when Zelenskyy said that the US didn't have problems now but intimated that if the US didn't do as he suggested, they would “feel it in the future”. Trump's response was blunt but not unpredictable: don't tell us what we will feel. While it is possible that Zelenskyy was playing a longer game than I can imagine, I find it difficult not to conclude that he lost control of his emotions in a way that may prove very costly for his people.



Ireland will have to play smart when the Taoiseach visits Trump on St Patrick's Day. Photo: Philip Rozenski/Istock

“His remarks immediately made Trump's job much harder to do and, as became painfully obvious, succeeded in totally alienating Trump and the entire US delegation”

Armed with a bowl of Shamrock

Micheal Martin is scheduled to visit the Oval Office next Wednesday 12 March, rather than the customary 17 March, for St Patrick's Day. Martin, who in the past has called Trump's comments “outrageous” and “ridiculous”, has made his views about the Israel Palestine war and the Russia Ukraine war known, and they do not align with Trump's

views. He would do well to note Zelenskyy's mistake. Anyone with an ounce of diplomatic sense – or manners for that matter – doesn't go to visit the residence of the US President and proceed to insult him or denounce his political decisions, particularly when they seem to be made with the intent of securing peace. Being armed with only a bowl of shamrock is unlikely to provide adequate protection for what might follow if he does.



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Getting housing policy right for Catholics gets it right for everyone



Dualta Roughneen

The new programme for Government informs that it will “prioritise a radical step change in housing supply to rise to that fundamental challenge” and “build on the momentum generated to achieve our target of delivering more than 300,000 new homes by the end of 2030”. Considering there were just over 30,000 homes built last year, a decrease of 6.7pc compared to 2023, according to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), it is unclear what momentum has been generated.

Opposition parties accused the Taoiseach and Tánaiste of setting out to “mislead the public” over claims that 40,000 new homes would be built last year to “win votes” in the general election. The election was held in December so it is unclear how the Government could be so wrong in their estimates.

There is a housing crisis in Ireland. The total homeless population surpassed 15,000 for the first time since the figures began to be compiled more than a decade ago in January this year. This includes 4,658 children in 2,168 families. The rise seems inexorable.

Families

It should be obvious that housing shortages impact families the most. Shortages mean higher prices. Families need bigger homes and more expensive dwellings. Families, with children, also have more outgoings than single people or couples, thus less disposable income, or income to put towards housing – whether renting or for a mortgage.

An Amarach survey commissioned by Accord, the



Catholic marriage care service, finds that “84pc of adults in Ireland say that the housing crisis is causing some couples to delay getting married and/or having children.” The same poll found that “48pc of couples planning to get married would have married sooner if it weren’t for the housing situation; and 60pc of couples planning to have children would have done so earlier if it weren’t for the housing situation”.

“Many initiatives are cited through the document, but it feels like a case of ‘fiddling while Rome burns’”

Data shows that those who attend religious services weekly have more than two children each on average. For those who never attend, the figure is below 1.5. Therefore, it is clear that housing shortages and rapidly increasing prices are going to impact religious families more than others.

The problem is that no one seems to agree on what the solution to the crisis is. The programme for Government says it will “take the

lead in driving down costs, reducing red tape, overhauling our planning system and supporting direct delivery.” Many initiatives are cited through the document, but it feels like a case of ‘fiddling while Rome burns’.

One major area of controversy is Rent Pressure Zones. These barely get a passing mention in the document aside from a vague commitment to reviewing their effectiveness, yet the issue was propelled to top of the news when the review was mooted by An Taoiseach. A major new report on Ireland by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) called for rents to be freely adjusted between tenancies rather than a complete removal of RPZs. The report criticised other government initiatives such as the Help to Buy and the First Home Schemes, both of which fund first time buyers but can “translate to higher house prices or rents over the medium term”.

Prolonging

Chair of the Housing Commission, John O’Connor claims that RPZs need to stay in place for two more years until something better is found. But the question is, is this prolonging a failing policy? The introduc-

tion of RPZs has resulted in unintended consequences of existing landlords leaving the rental market as rent increases are capped below the market rate, reducing supply, and thereby increasing the rental prices. It is a fallacy that RPZs are protecting tenants. Rather than a median market rate, landlords exit, and tenants then enter the market and pay more (much more) than what they would be paying if RPZs did not exist. Anyone I have talked to about this has a story of family or friend they know that found staying in the rental market was just not worth their while. People who are once-off landlords are not the caricatured vultures the lazy narrative makes ‘the landlord’ out to be, preying on vulnerable tenants. Often, they have invested in an asset for their future which, because of government policy, is no longer an asset worth holding on to.

“While the document claims that ‘we’ (the State) will provide 300,000 houses by 2030, the reality ought to be that the State plays the role of enabler and facilitator of a functioning housing market”

Private landlords are leaving the market in large numbers. These are the grease that keeps the market fluid while developers may provide the big numbers, the market can’t

function without small landlords, yet they are ignored in current policy. In order to improve supply by incentivising private landlords, a reduction in the tax-rate applicable to rental income for single-dwelling landlords would make rental a more financially viable means of income generation and suppress market exit. This has not been considered at all.

An additional problem is the growing role the government has taken on in the housing market. While the document claims that ‘we’ (the State) will provide 300,000 houses by 2030, the reality ought to be that the State plays the role of enabler and facilitator of a functioning housing market. But the housing market is dying. In 2023, more than 50% of homes built (16,200) under housing schemes, through approved housing bodies, who sub-contract to developers, who achieve a negotiated profit of more than 15% on their government contracts, more than would be achievable in the open market or for other construction projects, disincentivising large developers from investing in the private market. Why work for tighter margins when the government can offer much wider ones?

Challenge

One final area worth considering that has not been proposed to date relates to the real challenge that renters cannot afford to save to buy their own house in the current climate. A government supported deposit saving scheme where tax-relief on rent is provided to renters and placed in a deposit saving scheme that they can only access when they seek to buy within a fixed period of time, to support them to move toward home ownership.

20% tax-relief on rental

costs would allow an individual in Dublin to save a minimum of €400 per month or €4800 a year, alleviating the challenge for many of achieving minimum deposit levels while spending up to 60% of income on rent, as is currently the case, particularly in urban areas. Putting a time limit on drawing down on savings will incentivise renters to enter the property market once a significant level of tax-relief savings were accumulated otherwise risk loss of the savings to the exchequer.

“It should be clear that the more the government inserts itself into the market instead of focusing on allowing the market to work, the more problems it creates”

There are no easy solutions because the market has been distorted by poor policy decisions in the past, meaning that there will be pain for some existing dwellers as the government seeks to extricate itself from the unintended consequences of previous bad decisions. It should be clear that the more the government inserts itself into the market instead of focusing on allowing the market to work, the more problems it creates and ultimately those that suffer are the little people, whether single dwelling landlords, tenants or would-be house buyers. And if you are trying to start a family, or find a house for a growing family, you are doubly penalised. And that means Catholics, Christians and other religious, are disproportionately affected.

“The housing market is dying. In 2023, more than 50% of homes built (16,200) under housing schemes, through approved housing bodies, who sub-contract to developers, who achieve a negotiated profit of more than 15% on their government contracts”

There are currently 163,433 vacant homes in Ireland. In the last five years, approximately 40,000 landlords have left the Irish housing market in five years according to the Residential Tenancy Board. Imagine being tied to renting a house for €1,100 in Dublin while your next-door neighbours who are newly entering the market can look for the market rate of anywhere from €1,800 to €2,500. This is the reality of the RPZs. And considering that landlords – often portrayed as vultures but quite often single-building landlords – are paying 40% tax on the rental income, it becomes self-defeating to continue, and choose to leave the rental market, often selling up. But then a new buyer who may end up with a mortgage of €1,500 is tied to the RPZ rate of €1,100 which is taxed at 40%. There is no incentive to buy to rent. Houses are being left vacant, supply reducing as demand increases, further driving up the market rate. Is it wise to wait another two years before doing anything?

Crossmaglen's guardian: From oppression to glory



Éanna Mackey

Growing up in Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh during the turbulent 1980s, Paul Hearty's world was shaped by more than just Gaelic football. The shadow of the Troubles loomed large, with the border town finding itself at the very centre of the sectarian conflict.

The colossal British army barracks also cast a dark cloud over the very heartbeat of the town. It was built adjacent to the GAA field, a stone's throw from the town square, a symbolical invasion and occupation striking at the very core of Crossmaglen's Catholic Irish identity.

And so daily life became marked by military presence, car searches, and oppression—with regular skirmishes between the British Army and the South Armagh IRA. Yet, within this environment, faith, and an immense community resilience was forged — qualities that would go on to define Hearty and the town both on and off the field.

"When I was growing up during the 80s with the Troubles, it was a hard time for a lot of people. It was a very tight-knit community, and everyone relied on one another to get through day-to-day because you had to," Hearty recalls.

Foundation

This sense of togetherness was not just a survival mechanism, but it became a foundation that supported his journey; from a young boy forced to confront the apex of a brutal sectarian war on a daily basis into a legendary Armagh and Crossmaglen All-Ireland winning goalkeeper.

Hearty enjoyed a remarkable playing career, winning six All-Ireland Club titles, 11 Ulster Club Championships, and 19 Armagh Senior Football Championships, including an astonishing 13 in a row with Crossmaglen Rangers. At the inter-county level, he was a key part of the Armagh squad that claimed the 2002 All-Ireland Senior Football Championship, along with five Ulster titles and two National Football League victory.

This success is only measur-

able to the enormous difficulty that he and his teammates faced in their formative years—living under the boot of the British Army. Their military presence was an everyday reality growing up, making ordinary tasks nearly impossible.

"When we were going down training during those times, you would have gotten that sort of bullying and intimidation—car searches, your stuff thrown out on the road. They just thought that everyone was a terrorist or part of the IRA, but sure we were the ones being oppressed."

"I come from a family where we always went to Mass. We were always heavily steeped in it, my wife would be the same. It's a really important part of how we live our lives in this part of the world"

"Having to face that every day, it was ingrained into you to be tough and stand up to that sort of intimidation. That definitely lent itself to our sporting career as we matured into a football team. We felt invincible. If we could face guns, camouflage, and army checkpoints, what could an opposition do to us on a football field?"

Such experiences could have bred fear, but for Hearty and his teammates, it built a unique kind of resilience. Central too, however, was his faith. It has and continues to be a guiding light through both personal and collective hardships.

"I come from a family where we always went to Mass. We were always heavily steeped in it, my wife would be the same. It's a really important part of how we live our lives in this part of the world."

Faith was more than ritual for Hearty. It became a refuge from the madness and hardship of everyday life during the Troubles—a space for reflection amidst chaos.

"Having faith is having something to rely on when times are tough, and you definitely needed it during those days. Your weekly visit to the church was a step back and a time to reflect on the week. You're always going to come out of Mass refreshed and ready to go into the week ahead."

Now a father of four, he hopes to pass his faith on to

his children.

"I want them to know that God is important in their life and there is a path through faith to reflect and deal with stuff in life. It's one of a number of ways to deal with life's challenges, and it's something that my wife and I would like to instill in our children as they grow up," he said.

Now retired, Hearty has picked up a role as a goalkeeping coach with the Louth minor footballers. He finds fulfilment in nurturing the next generation whilst being cognisant of the challenges and pitfalls facing youngsters at the beginning of their intercounty journey.

"It's very rewarding to help young people and bring them forward and improve, but I think that too many have their heads stuck in their phones, and they're not present in the moment. Making the most out of stuff—that's what counts," he said.

"I know that for me, my biggest obstacle in life and off the field is laziness and complacency. It's too easy to get caught up in things, be it looking at your phone screen or watching the telly; you have to bring a bit of enthusiasm and a zest to both life and sport," he said.

"You cannot just let stuff pass you by. Take every day and moment and try to get something out of it. It's not all about taking big leaps and bounds. It all has a knock-on effect, and you can intertwine it into all aspects of life."

Transformation

Hearty still lives in Crossmaglen, and he often finds himself reflecting on the town's transformation since the days of his youth. Central to that has been the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. That peace coincided with Rangers' breakthrough and resounding success, something he believes is no accident.

"The difference in this town is incredible. There are businesses on every corner nowadays, and that's only because of the peace process. We went on to do spectacular stuff as a football team, but the core of that team went through some really hard things growing up as young kids. When peace came, people were just allowed to live their lives without being oppressed."

"We had to have resilience, a strong mind, and a strong character. But above all, we had to have faith; all of that culminated with us having a truly great football team."




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An almost Christian coalition forms in London



David Quinn

An enormous event took place in London last month that was fronted by the Canadian psychologist and academic, Dr Jordan Peterson, who has made a huge name for himself since he first emerged on to the world stage in 2016 for criticising a pro-trans ideology law in his home country.

The three-day event, held under the auspices of an organisation called the 'Alliance for Responsible Citizenship' attracted over 4,000 delegates from around the world, including some from Ireland.

Among the notable figures who spoke at the conference, aside from Dr Peterson himself, were the former Australian Prime Minister, Tony Abbot, the current leader of the Conservative Party in Britain, Kemi Badenoch, the Speaker of the House in the United States, Mike Johnson, and the former British Education Secretary and current editor of the influential political magazine *The Spectator*, Michael Gove.

Aside from present and former politicians it also attracted well known academics like Prof. Niall Ferguson and Arthur Brooks, famous writers and journalists such as Douglas Murray and the *New York Times* writer and columnist, David Brooks. Bishop Robert Barron of Word on Fire also spoke at the event.

Another notable speaker was tech billionaire, Peter Thiel.

Audience

In the audience were hundreds of delegates from pro-life and pro-family organisations from around the world.

This was the second conference of its kind. The first was held, also in London, in October 2023. Besides Jordan Peterson, one of the main guiding lights behind initiative is Baroness Philippa Stroud, who is a long-time member of the Conservative party and a campaigner on pro-family causes, among other issues.

Jordan Peterson.
Photo: Gage Skidmore

The Alliance for Responsible Citizenship is deliberately named partly to arrive at the acronym, 'ARC', as in Noah's Ark. The aim is to build up a movement of people committed to what might be loosely called 'traditional values' that can see us through the current societal and cultural turmoil.

Although ARC itself is not explicitly Christian, many of its leaders are, and so were many of the speakers and delegates at the conference in London.

“Little enough was said about immigration. This seemed like a deliberate choice, especially when there was so much about energy policy”

There were talks on the necessity of self-sacrifice (by Jordan Peterson), on the science of happiness (by Arthur Brooks), several on the environment and the necessity of not rushing to green energy until we are sure it does not undermine our economies, and there was several on the future of Western civilisation.

There was an excellent talk by Stephen Shaw on the demographic crisis most of the world is now headed towards. There was a debate

between speakers in favour of free trade and speakers who favour tariffs to protect jobs from what is often unfair trade in practice, not free trade.

Curiously enough, little enough was said about immigration. This seemed like a deliberate choice, especially when there was so much about energy policy. Perhaps the organisers didn't want to spend too much time on that extremely divisive issue because perhaps they felt it would distract from some of the other things they were trying to do.

Ambitious

What struck me most about the event, and ARC itself, is that it is an extremely ambitious attempt to build a worldwide coalition of people committed to broadly traditional values as the surest foundation of the West, and indeed the world.

Baroness Stroud strongly emphasises that the vision must be a positive one and that ordinary people will hopefully come to view it as a

much better alternative than the highly individualistic and relativistic vision offered by modern-day liberalism.

Where does Christianity fit into the picture? Several speakers were totally explicit about their Christian faith, including Bishop Barron and Os Guinness, another of ARC's leading lights. Dr Guinness is an Evangelical Christian and a member of the famous Guinness family.

“Jordan Peterson himself is extremely sympathetic to Christianity, and is almost a Christian, but does not seem able to quite make the final step”

Other speakers were Christian-sympathetic, but not actually Christian, such as the aforementioned tech billionaire, Peter Thiel and the journalist/writer, Douglas

Murray. Interestingly, Thiel and Murray are both gay men but are still sympathetic to traditional values, broadly speaking.

Jordan Peterson himself is extremely sympathetic to Christianity, and is almost a Christian, but does not seem able to quite make the final step. He says he believes in the Resurrection, but it is not 100% clear (not to me at any rate), whether he believes the Resurrection is an actual literal event or more of a metaphor.

His wife, Tammy, has converted recently to Catholicism so perhaps at some point in the near future he will also be formally received into the Catholic Church as well.

Appeal

A question is whether this would increase or decrease his appeal to his many fans, who are predominantly young men. Some of his appeal seems to be based on the fact that he is Christian-sympathetic, but not quite a Christian, and a great part of his audience would culturally Christian at best. So, what

would they think if he took the final step, and formally became a Catholic (which seems the most likely Church for him to join)? And would that cause others to do the same?

Os Guinness worries that some traditionalists are willing to embrace a form of cultural Christianity, but not the faith itself. That is, they see Christianity as a necessary foundation stone for our societies but leave it at that. They do not embrace the faith itself.

He told the conference: “The Christian faith will do nothing for civilisation if it's viewed as useful. It will only be true and effective if it's understood to be true and you have enough people as citizens who have a loyalty to ultimate reality.”

“Dr Guinness is correct that cultural Christianity will only take a society so far unless there are enough actual Christians living in it, otherwise Christianity will only be a pale imitation of itself”

Mind you, it has always been the case, right through the history of the Church, even when it was at its peak, that many were only outwardly Christian and never really embraced Christianity as a personal faith, as something of the heart and mind, rather than just as something exterior, or as useful in certain respects.

But Dr Guinness is correct that cultural Christianity will only take a society so far unless there are enough actual Christians living in it, otherwise Christianity will only be a pale imitation of itself, or maybe something worse, an expression of an aggressive national identity. (Incidentally, the question of nationalism, like immigration, barely came up at the conference).

However, the ARC conference, and the organisation itself, should not be expected to become explicitly Christian, because it is a broad coalition of people who are Christian, almost Christian, who belong to other religions and to no religion but are sympathetic to many of the values that Christians espouse, and there is definitely a place in the world for such a coalition.

“The Christian faith will do nothing for civilisation if it's viewed as useful. It will only be true and effective if it's understood to be true and you have enough people as citizens who have a loyalty to ultimate reality”

A change of era only for the women?



Martina Purdy

Five words, delivered during a homily on Ash Wednesday, have never entirely left me: "You all have to change," the priest declared rather prophetically on March 6, 2019. He did not know that four women in our Falls Road congregation had been told the previous night that their vocation as Sisters of Adoration was over. I was one of them. How odd that Pancake Tuesday was the day our lives flipped. Indeed my life has been one of upheaval ever since.

The catalyst, you might say, was Pope Francis, who once declared: "We are not living in an era of change, but a change of era."

He presided over changes that sealed the fate of my own congregation. The new rules were rooted in two documents designed for religious women: *Vultum Dei Quaerere* (2016) and *Cor Orans* (2018). Significantly, convents with fewer than five professed sisters would have to close or merge with another. There was some logic in this. Small numbers, top heavy with elderly sisters, struggled with governance issues. And in some cases a handful of sisters occupied massive properties, worth tens of millions.

I still have many questions - some answered by the Holy Spirit - and I read with interest a few days ago, a story from Spain where Poor Clares are facing the same issues we did.

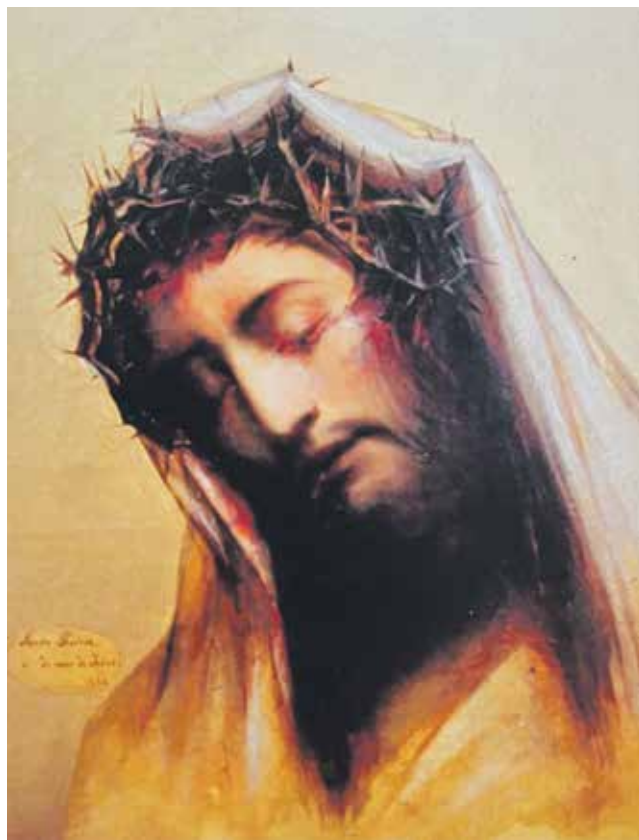
However, the Abbess of the Monastery of Santo Cristo de Balaguer has taken a different attitude from the lamb-like response of my own congregation (which had convents in Paris, Belfast and Wexford).

Merging

In the magazine *Catalunya Cristiana*, the Abbess cited the recent closure of a 700-year-old monastery in Barcelona - an event which left people "hurt and perplexed". "It affects women's monasteries, not men's," she said of *Vultum Dei Quaerere*.

The Abbess also hinted that the new rule may be opportune in "normal circumstances" rather than a time of crisis in vocations and values. She gently noted that these rules affected the confiscation of church property - and felt it should be up to the nuns themselves whether they wanted to close their doors. "The men get off lightly," a male religious remarked to me.

To be honest I did not real-



Holy face of Christ.

ise this double standard even existed until a few days ago. And frankly it opened wounds that I hoped had healed. Why the difference? Surely the rules of governance affect men as well as women?

Frankly, it hurts deeply that these rules are applied only to religious sisters. For now anyway. Perhaps Sr Simona Brambilla, the newly appointed prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Institutes of Consecrated Life, will change that - though I am not advocating that the men in monasteries should automatically face the same fate.

“In those circumstances we would likely have to start again as postulants”

I was quite oblivious to all of these machinations when I was invited by my congregation to take vows at St Peter's Cathedral on the Feast of St Pio in 2017, with the late Bishop Noel Treanor presiding. It was an unusual first profession and Sr Elaine Kelly, a former barrister, was also making her first vows.

Nine months later, we were informed, along with two others in temporary vows, that we might not be able to make our final profession as Sisters of Adoration, as the congregation may have to merge with another order. In those circumstances we would likely have to start again as postulants. It was like a bad game of 'Snakes and Ladders', but, after around five years, we were all four com-

mitted and prepared to begin again, come what may. In the meantime it was a wait by the cross for a further nine months.

Decision

To be honest, I initially dismissed the issue as Vatican bureaucracy, as I had no doubt about my own vocation, and Elaine Kelly had received her call in our chapel. Before the Blessed Sacrament on Sunday March 9, 2014, she had felt a strong touch on her heart and heard the words: "You will be a sister of adoration." She left everything for Christ.

Billionaire Elon Musk has just welcomed his fourteenth child. He is not married to the child's mother. What is astonishing is that the same people, who are condemning his rather complicated relationships, would have no problem with him paying for an abortion.

I was sorry to hear of the deaths of Hollywood actor Gene Hackman and his wife Betsy. This fine actor was very private about his own religious views. I watched one of his films, *Hoosiers*, at the weekend. A heart-warming story of redemption in a small Indiana town. One inspiring scene has Hackman, a basketball coach, waiting patiently while one young player prays before a big match. "God wants you on the court," he finally says.

Elaine was wiser than I was. She understood this was more than bureaucracy, and that there was a poverty of governance. But trusting in God's will, she was hoping for help from the men in power in Mother Church, not legalism, closure and the painful death of the congregation.

“Many Catholics still share how desperately they miss this little oasis of peace”

In the end, the decision was out of our hands. The congregation was not going to defy the Vatican; none of us were. Having failed to find a suitable partner to merge with, the fully professed congregation members, many of them elderly, felt they had little choice and decided to release us and not receive the newcomers waiting to come and see. I was shocked. More so when someone actually suggested to Elaine and I that we might sue. Sue God? I

don't think so. Instead I meditated on Mary's words to the Angel Gabriel: "How can this be?"

Our departure was effectively the beginning of the end of the congregation, even though one Vatican official at the time agreed "there was authentic life" in Belfast.

The Congregation of Adoration Reparatrice had come to the Falls Road during the Hunger Strike of 1980/1. It had a rich and fruitful history. Even today I'm asked: "What happened?" Many Catholics still share how desperately they miss this little oasis of peace.

Adoration

Elaine and I - mindful that the Lord sent them out in pairs - have found new life in Christ, who is always faithful to his covenant. We strive to share the gifts of adoration and evangelisation which we received along with the gift of the Holy Face of Christ, painted by our Foundress, Ven Marie-Thérèse in 1848.

This pious woman, born Théodelinde Bourcin-Dubouché, was an accomplished portrait artist in post-revolutionary France, but grew tired of painting the rich and famous. In adoration, she was given a divine

mission; she saw a vision of Jesus enthroned on the altar and a golden stream went from his heart to hers, and she heard the words: "I want souls before me always to receive my life and communicate my life to others."

“I too have come to see: by his wounds, we are healed”

Perpetual Adoration was still a novelty when her congregation, Adoration Réparatrice, was founded on the Feast of the Transfiguration, 1848, in the poorest part of Paris. She is buried in the large convent she designed on Rue Guy Lussac, situated in the now affluent and fashionable Latin Quarter.

Ven Marie-Thérèse was also blessed with a vision of Christ's Holy Face in his passion. She painted the image over and over again, and more and more I too have come to see: by his wounds, we are healed.

The Congregation's motto - *Fortis est ut mors dilectio* - is still a steadfast source of strength: 'Love is strong as death', in a mission, not ended, but changed utterly.

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Diary of a parish Pastor

Notes in haste – February 2025

Re-instating St Valentine?

Saint Valentines Day was a hard day for me this year. It was a Friday, remember, an 'ordinary' weekday. And in my rural parish, weekday Masses are not big hits: usually it's the sacristan and me and one or two others who con-celebrate the liturgy. This means that strange feasts like that of 14 February cause no distress.

This year it was different. The Mass had been booked for a significant anniversary of a significant person, so people attended in their droves. And the crowd attending was 'inter-generational' – which meant that many attended for whom St Valentine would be a significant character, a day for heart-shaped boxes of chocolates and cards, as well as many for whom 14 February launched a weekend of love-themed adventures. These

attendees would expect St Valentine to be celebrated in the church too.

So it was a heavy heart that I tried to explain that poor Valentine was making no appearance in our liturgy on his day, and worse, that he had been supplanted by the unknown (to them) apostles to the Slavic people.

I was tempted to use that verse for Valentine's day beloved of Catholic liturgists:

"Roses are red,
Violets are odious;
So won't you be –
My Cyril-and-Method-
ius!"

It hasn't quite got the 'Be-my-Valentine' ring to it, but it's the best we can do. Maybe some wise person might suggest to the higher-ups that St Valentine be re-instated on 14 February and the Slavic saints given an adjoining date? We can but dream...

Building Bridges

Every parish is different. Every parish has its own cast of characters who blend together in a unique way. And every parish has achievements of which it is proud. In some places it might be victory at the (GAA) county final; for another it might be laurel wreaths won at the Young Scientist of the Year contest; for another it might be a television focus on a local historical landmark or the anniversary of a glorious victory in a past war.

Every parish deserves an annual celebration of what makes it special, but how this celebration is framed varies much. My idea was a Parish Thanksgiving Mass, with thanks rendered to God, the ultimate origin of all achievement. In the hands of the pastoral council, this very soon became a Parish Achievements Mass (slightly different focus, though most didn't notice). And in some minds it then became a "Why-our-parish-is-much-better-than-the-neighbours" Mass.

And yet, despite all the obstacles, re-routing and diversions, it succeeded. The Mass brought a cohort of people not usually seen at Mass. It didn't bring the victors in local sports leagues, but it brought their parents and their children, which is more than most Sundays bring. And it helped build a bridge to the local community, something taken for granted in the past, but no more. Bridges have to be purposely built now, so that the things we have to work on as a church community mean more in the long run.



Banning Alleluias

Lent is coming, and choirs and singers are trying to pick out hymns that suit. It is the time of year when alleluias are banned, which seems to make them all the more anxious to appear. A favourite Lenten hymn seems to hit all the right notes. The first line speaks of 'seeking first the Kingdom of God', which penitents try hard to do. The second reminds us not just to seek the Kingdom of God, but also his righteousness as well. Then come the promise that "all these things will be given unto you". But for the fourth line, we collapse into guffaws, with its fulsome alleluias, then followed by a whole verse of them! And red faces all round. And it recurs each Lent, a peculiar parish achievement in my peculiar parish....

Domestic visitations

In February, I visited an elderly gentleman recently released from hospital. I brought a pyx with Holy Communion "just in case" and some Holy Oil in the car for a similar reason. I didn't want to push myself or our sacraments on this gentleman, but wanted to make the sacraments available if desired. It's balancing act well familiar to pastoral priests.

In the event the gentleman in question was delighted to see me. While weakened by his hospital stay and thus not fit for a long chat, he was happy not to be forgotten and my gingerly suggestion of sacraments went down well.

My only difficulty lay in the enormous heater that dominated the kitchen. Every now and then, it kicked into hyper-audible life, and while its noise

level had no effect on the elderly man, I could neither hear a word he said nor be sure I could be heard whenever it boomed out. I calculated that it powered into life every five minutes or so, with one full minute of inaudibility following. So I would have to begin prayers immediately after it boomed and be sure to have completed the prayers before its next intervention.

I succeeded, just about, but it was a push. I don't think I was ever prepared in the seminary for the vagaries of home visitation, but pastoral life has been a great teacher. I have learned how important it is to locate a clock visible to me during a pastoral visit, so I don't have to check my watch too visibly. And I have also learned to beware of domestic objects that make a lot of noise, which hard-of-hearing elderly folk may not notice at all, but which entirely blot out my end of the conversation.

Signing a pre-nup

Another February task for me involved filling in pre-nuptial enquiry forms for sending abroad. The young couple seeking to marry had, in their foolishness, thought

that a marriage is a far-flung corner of Europe was just what they needed, in a country with a language unknown to them, and in which Catholic churches were as rare as hens' teeth.

As a pastor, this was not what concerned me (that was all their choice, so they would have to make the best of it), it was the fact that the pre-marriage forms would not only be scrutinized in

the diocesan office in the far-flung country, but would be gone through with a fine tooth comb by our curia, in a diocesan office where fine tooth combs are widely deployed. This meant that my easy-going approach to form-filling had to be smartened up considerably.

Usually with pre-nuptial forms, I set great store by a

personal conversation with the couple. If they seem "sound" to me, the form itself is filled speedily. The paperwork only becomes heavy weather when I am not sure that all is well with the couple. But when the paperwork goes through the hands of another, in a place where gnats are regularly strained, all "I"s had to be dotted and "t"s crossed.

Baptismal and confirmation forms had to be correctly filled, dated, sealed and sent, as well as evidence of a proper pre-marriage course. Supplying my name and phone number and inviting a call if all was not in order, I held my breath, crossed my fingers and hoped for the best. The relief when I got a 'all-clear' email was palpable.

Relentless Ministry

What does it mean to be a priest in today's world?



Fr Joe Mullen

I once heard an amusing description of the three stages of priestly ministry. Seemingly it begins at ordination with a big head, continues in middle years with a big belly and concludes when the Lord calls one home with a big funeral! As so often with the dig of gentle humour, there is a hint of truth, which triggers our laughter. I am close to my 40th ordination anniversary, a clerical life which began by entering Clonliffe College in 1979, days after Pope John Paul II's visit to Ireland, then six years later with diaconate in the College Chapel in Maynooth and finally a year later, in 1986, with a beautiful ordination celebration in my home parish, of St Joseph's, Ballymartin, Co Down. The memories of both those days celebrated alongside my parents, family and friends remain with me and sustains me ever since.

Beginning

The Diaconate was organised by highly competent liturgists, accompanied by excellent musicians and was an expression of all the talents and gifts which abounded in the Maynooth of that time. The student body numbered in the hundreds and we were so many for ordination that each one had a limited number of invited guests, just enough for the family and a couple of close friends. We had recently completed our



The shortage of priests is particularly acute in the Dublin Archdiocese. Photo: iStock.

Divinity degree and that 'big head' came from years of study, essay writing and exams. But the formation also had a spiritual dimension and pastoral placements to ensure that we had a rounded preparation for a celibate life of service. There was an overarching sense of being part of a big, busy and engaging church, with a need for priests and which offered work alongside many colleagues and friends, lay and clerical.

“From his perspective influence could be exerted with a cheque book”

The ordination to priesthood was permitted in my home parish, in a diocese far from where I was to serve as a priest, requiring

“Every now and again people would ask for something that we don't quite do, and if a request is refused, and the parishioner is upset, then life is not just so comfortable”

a certain amount of negotiations with bishops and diocesan offices. This was an early introduction to the reality that as a priest you are not self-determining, choices and preferences are filtered through the hierarchal structures and the bishop decides what's permissible and allowed. During these negotiations my uncle from Chicago was visiting, the permission to have the ordination in my home parish was still pending. When he heard this he asked, “Doesn't the church need a new roof, get your dad to make a donation to the building fund!” From his perspective influence

could be exerted with a cheque book, gladly this didn't prove to be necessary in this case.

Transition

The ordination was a first in our little local church and the whole community embraced the occasion and excelled in hospitality, welcome, music and liturgy, not in the same formal tone as Maynooth a year earlier, but as an expression of joy and wellbeing of the parish. The Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, Des Williams travelled North and conducted a warm and prayerful celebration. In the homily he spoke of my becoming a priest of the Dublin Diocese and he assured all present that I was joining one of “the best clubs in the world.” Looking at the sanctuary that day, packed with priests, young and old, each coming forward first to lay hands on my head as part of the

ritual and then for a firm hug, and back slap at the sign of peace, you could see what he meant. As a newly minted priest, who had been called from his place with the family in the pew, who now stood at the altar to concelebrate the Mass, the transition was clear, life would be lived in the sanctuary looking out at the people, no longer sitting with them. The ritual that day emphasised priestly ministry as service to God's holy people, a life of sacraments, prayer and obedience to the bishop, here called ‘your ordinary’ and his successors. The whole preparation for priesthood took seven years of seminary life, and was shaped by the local community, school and friends, priests who made an impact and my grandmothers with their quiet devotion and total commitment.

The early years of priesthood flew by, it was great

to minister in a school, help out in a parish, head off to the States each summer and learn to fit into the hopes and expectations of parishioners and others. I say that because so much of a priest's life is centred on pleasing people, doing what they need, when they need it, in a personable and pleasant way. The ‘can do’ response to almost every request wasn't so difficult in those early years when there were a lot of us around, and I recall often handing on some of the more challenging requests to my senior colleague, a man who had ministered in the Philippines for decades, and to put it nicely he wasn't as concerned with the rules and regulations as I was back then. It didn't happen often, but just every now and again people would ask for something that we don't quite do, and if a request is refused, and the parishioner is upset, then life is not just so comfortable. In those first 10 years alongside all the parish work, post graduate study, seminary teaching there was still plenty of time for bike rides, golf, holidays, walks with friends, meals in an out and I don't think I ever experienced pressure, undue tiredness of any sense of being overwhelmed. The belly was still firm! Life was good.

“This was my first conscious exposure to the reality of the abuse of children”

Around the time I was celebrating that 10th anniversary I went back to a parish in States where I had been previously for a six week summer stint. On that first visit I enjoyed the company of a retired Monsignor, who had been the pastor and had stayed on in retirement at the parish rectory. However on my return

“It is hard to express just how much we have all been affected by this grim reality which has diminished the Church, disheartened priests and caused many people to walk away”

A new series written by Priests exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today

I discovered that he had been moved to a diocesan facility far from the parish. His name wasn't mentioned often and the reason for the unexpected move never discussed. I learned later that there were historic accusations against him, involving the sexual exploitation of children. Some years later he was dismissed from the clerical state and died a layman. This was my first conscious exposure to the reality of the abuse of children, the church's modality for dealing with offenders and how a much loved priest, with a great parish community, could do harm, fall from grace and leave with everyone disappointed, defensive and struggling to learn to be victim centred in their response.

Pressure

From that day, until the present moment, the story of abuse has been told over and over again, here in Ireland, and across the world. So much suffering has been revealed, so many priests

have fallen far short of ordinary human decency and those entrusted with authority over them failed victims again and again and again. It is hard to express just how much we have all been affected by this grim reality which has diminished the Church, disheartened priests and caused many people to walk away in anger, sadness or despair. During the disclosures about my own diocese of Dublin, in the Murphy Report, I was interviewed on the Vincent Browne show. Live television is always demanding and after listing a litany of the failings of priests, bishops and church people, Vincent glared at me and snapped, "So Father Joe Mullen are you proud or ashamed of the Church you serve?" He barked the question over and over, wanting only a one word answer, proud or ashamed. I answered, that I was proud of all the good the Church does, and deeply ashamed of the harm, but he wasn't having it, nuance and finesse were weasel words,

I was to accept or reject the whole package. It's not hard to understand why so many people have simply walked away from the church, parish and sacraments, for some people the progress is too slow, the hurt unbearable and they have quietly shut the door.

“As long as complacency doesn't take hold, this will be for the lasting good of all”

The Murphy Report was a blessing in disguise, having the facts laid out in public about the various men whose ministry was tainted with degrees of abusive behaviour, and seeing how it was dealt with, created a culture where we could embrace Child Protection Policies and involve many professional and lay people in our common task to make the church a safe place for children. Priests and all with access to children now are Garda vetted, safeguard-

ing committees abound and quality training for all church members is promoted. Victims have been heard, their stories believed and the suffering of both the victims and their families acknowledged and compensated for. The landscape of church has changed, for the better, and as long as complacency doesn't take hold, this will be for the lasting good of all.

Support

But it's been a lot of pressure for me personally and I believe for priests in general. There have only been very limited ways to process anger and disappointment, both with the offending priests and the Church authorities. We are a fraternity of men in ministry and as a diocesan family, expected to know, care and support each other, but the confusion, hurt and loss makes it difficult to untangle the feelings and emotions, and sometimes they just get suppressed or denied. Maybe that big belly has come in this era as much from stress, anxiety and overwork as from the over indulgence of food and drink for pleasure. Celibacy has become an ever more demanding aspect of my priestly life as time unfolds. A cancer diagnosis, surgery and recovery left a lot of time to dwell on the lack of intimacy in the day to day clerical life. Going to a myriad of appointments in the Urology department gave me time to observe my fellow patients, all men with some form of Prostate cancer and most accompanied by a very caring and attentive woman. The men often looked dazed, stressed, uncomfortable, even sad as they came and went from rooms where bad news is shared, uncomfortable procedures happen and sometimes instructions are made. It seemed to be the woman who took it all in, offered the quiet supportive word, squeeze, hug, and hope. I didn't have a mirror, but I guess I was just as challenged as the others, but there was no partner to hold my fear, anger and distress. Priest friends were fantastic for offering encouragement, coming to visit, bringing tasty meals to heat at home and supporting recovery and rehabilitation, but in general they didn't talk much about the cancer itself and what the surgery had taken away and the post operative trauma. How could they



“The Murphy Report disguise, having the fa about the various men tainted with degrees o

Fr Joe Mullen speaking to *The Irish Catholic* podcast *State of the Na*

when we rarely talk about these things when everything is still working normally!

“As with dioceses all over the world we are busy with trying to match resources, manpower and mission”

Passing through first a 25th, than a 30th and hurtling towards a 40th anniversary of priesthood is to realise of course that there is just limited time left. In a perfect world these last 10 years of ministry would be a bit more relaxed, sharing duties and responsibilities with younger men, full of energy, who would carry a lot of the workload. Recognising that here in Dublin we closed our seminary 25 years ago, on account of a dwindling number of students for ministry, it's no surprise that ours is an aging cohort of priests, declining in number and energy. As with dioceses all over the world we are

busy with trying to match resources, manpower and mission, to sustain and meet the demands of every day and to face the uncertain future. Our programme is called 'Building Hope' and offers resources for the discussions that have to happen locally involving people, priests and the diocesan authorities. In this Jubilee Year 2025 all of the faithful are invited to be Pilgrims of Hope, which is both inspiring and uplifting. Yet I can't help feeling torn between the myriad of responsibilities managing the three parishes in my pastoral care, the celebration of sacraments, for both the daily and regular mass goers and those who come with good intent, for the occasional and special family moments, sometimes captured under the banner of 'hatch, match and dispatch.' It is exhausting celebrating funeral after funeral, tailoring the liturgy of the church to the hopes and expectations of families where there is little or no contact or participation in the faith community. Each year an increasing number of requests come to baptise seven year olds as they are

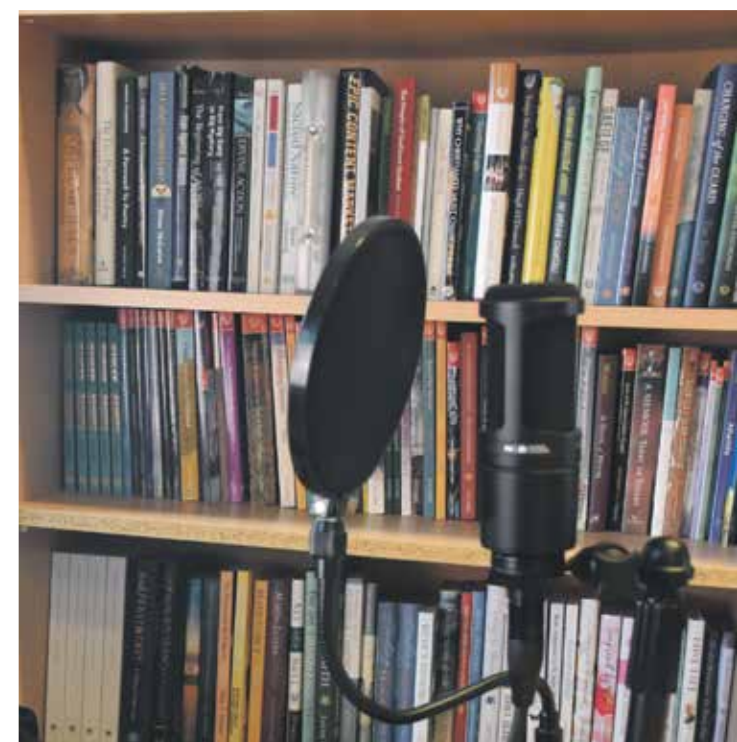
“I answered, that I was proud of all the good the Church does, and deeply ashamed of the harm, but he wasn't having it, nuance and finesse were weasel words”



A funeral takes place in a Dublin church.

The Irish Catholic

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**was a blessing in
acts laid out in public
whose ministry was
of abusive behaviour”**

tion.

now going into the ‘Communion Class’, and naturally want to have their special day. Ministry in and around schools is as always a real privilege and pleasure, but their almost total absence from the Sunday assembly questions what it means to be a catholic family in today’s world.

Support

As a priest among priests I have always enjoyed the company of my brothers in ministry. If you look back at the photo from Ballymartin all those years ago and ask about the men who were present that day there is still much to say. They are all remembered by name, some were teachers and mentors and long since gone to God. Some are classmates and contemporaries, most are still alive, some happily

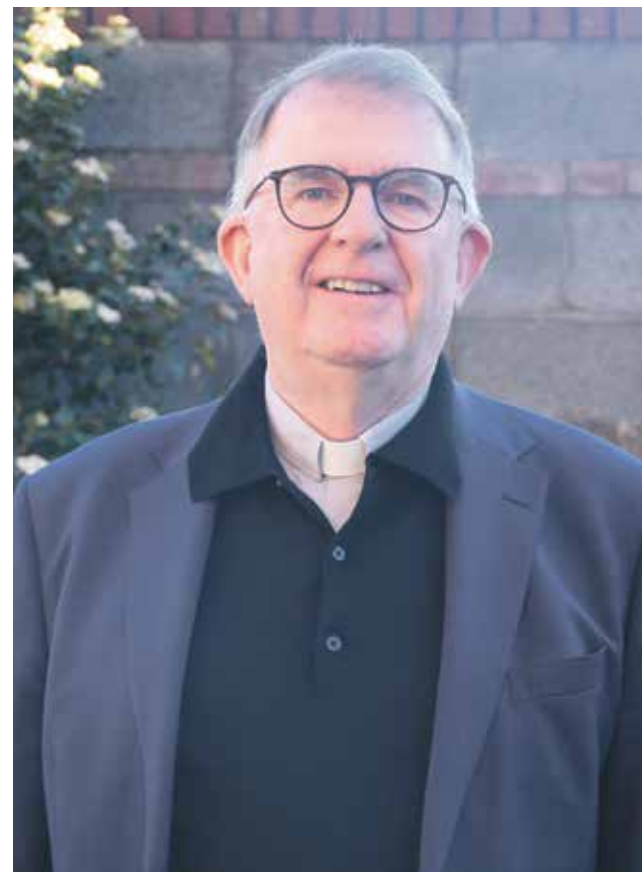
married, others struggling with health issues, none are currently in jail, some are bishops and the remainder, like myself, carry on in ministry wherever we are sent, and just do the best we can. In that picture all the men are white, not a single brother priest from Africa, India or born overseas was present that day. In the unfortunate circumstances that my ‘big funeral’ were to occur in the near future that would be one of the biggest changes in the sanctuary. I’d imagine there would be priests from overseas among the concelebrants, certainly given that most of the young priests in Dublin now are born overseas, at least seven have worked with me in this appointment during the last six years, and they have been the greatest blessing imaginable. There are challenges

managing the inculturation of these men into our ministry here, and it takes an effort for the people to play their part in making their ministry fruitful, but there is no doubt that we would be totally lost without them and we are blessed in so many ways by sharing in their exuberance, faith and fidelity to the Gospel. I listened to one of them introduce the liturgy at the main Sunday Mass on the Feast of the Presentation recently. In front of him a basket of candles to be blessed, a congregation more at a distance than up close. “At home” he said “our people gather with candles and dance in a procession to the church for this celebration.” My heart really went out to him, as he struggles to understand the Irish Catholic way of quietly marking religious moments with silent prayer, little animation and very few processions, how does he keep going with such energy and enthusiasm?

“Now that we are few we have to take the hands and hearts of men and women of faith and carry on together”

When I was in London for a year after school, contemplating entering the seminary a friend gave me Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* it’s a novel set in Mexico in the 1930’s when priests were being persecuted. The central character is a struggling priest, he had an illegitimate child, drinks heavily and is being pursued relentlessly. At a certain point in the novel he goes to the assistance of a parishioner in act of selfless love, knowing that he will likely be caught and killed. The novel explores themes of faith, redemption, and human imperfection, portraying the priest as both deeply flawed and, paradoxically, a vessel of grace. Reading Greene, and knowing my own human limitations and some of those of the priests around me I con-

tinue to believe in the ‘Power and Glory’ of God, his Son Jesus Christ and the Spirit that dwells in the hearts of the baptised. It’s clear to me that God calls shepherds to ministry, that the Lord walks with us and that only from the grace of the Holy Spirit are we able to serve, despite our limitations. When we were many priests I believed in the complimentary of gifts, that together we could meet most challenges in the world. Now that we are few we have to take the hands and hearts of men and women of faith and carry on together. For relentless ministry to subside a balance has to be worked out, one that asks the people of God to live out their baptismal calling with full, active and conscious participation in their church. We priests can then discern an activity level commensurate with age and energy, as we all travel on as pilgrims of hope bringing the joy of the Gospel to a world that hungers for truth.



Fr Joe Mullen.

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‘What we were doing was right’



Msgr Raymond Murray had an uphill battle exposing human rights abuses, writes Martin O'Brien

This in depth interview with Fr Raymond Murray was first published on November 14, 2013. It is being republished following the death of Fr Murray on February 25, 2025.

“It was all about breaking the wall of silence,” explains Armagh priest Msgr Raymond Murray as he reflects on more than 50 years of ministry dominated by dogged campaigning for those at the receiving end of state violence during the Northern conflict.

Fr Murray (75), a native of Newtownhamilton, recently retired from full-time ministry, was speaking in his home a short distance from St Patrick's Cathedral where he was Administrator under Cardinal Tomás Ó'Fiaich and Cardinal Cahal Daly from 1985-93. Later he was parish priest in several places including 11 years in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone.

He is still on the Sunday Mass rota and helps out the priests of Armagh City and surrounding district in various pastoral capacities.

A story in *The Irish Catholic* two weeks ago under the headline 'More will emerge on collusion – NI priest' prompted this feature on Fr Murray whose human rights work over more than 40 years is nothing short of phenomenal.

In that story he praised Pat Finucane Centre researcher

Anne Cadwallader's important new book *Lethal Allies: British Collusion in Ireland* (Mercier Press) documenting collusion between loyalist paramilitaries and the British State resulting in, it is believed, the murder of 120 people in Armagh and Tyrone in 1972-76 alone.

Tireless advocate

Fr Murray, a distinguished Irish scholar and author of three published books of poetry in Gaelic, is well qualified to assess Cadwallader's work. With the late Mgr Denis Faul and the late Fr Brian Brady he has been a tireless advocate of human rights and a brave critic of state violence since 1971.

One former Northern civil rights activist said: “With collusion back at the centre of public debate and Dr Richard Haass [the American diplomat] about to deal with the huge unresolved issue of the past, we must never forget the courageous and determined work of Fr Murray and his colleagues in trying to hold the British security forces and Government to account against all the odds.”

Torture

In the period 1972-84 Fr Murray and Fr Faul jointly wrote 30 books and pamphlets documenting a litany of human rights abuses including torture, internment without trial, individual killings of civilians by the British Army, the lethal use of rubber and plastic bullets, and miscarriages of justice including most infamously the Birmingham Six.

Their 82-page 1977 booklet *The Birmingham Framework* was a powerful statement proclaiming the innocence of the six men after the dismissal of their first appeal against their conviction for the 1974 pub bombings. But few listened then. It would take another 14 years for justice to be done and Fr Murray's and Fr Faul's case to be vindicated.

Fr Murray has also written a monumental book *The SAS in Ireland*, and two other substantial books: *State Violence Northern Ireland 1969-1997* and *Hard Time: Armagh Gaol 1971-86* (all Mercier Press).

His human rights work began in December 1971 after



Monsignor Murray in discussion in his home in Armagh. Photos: Mal McCann

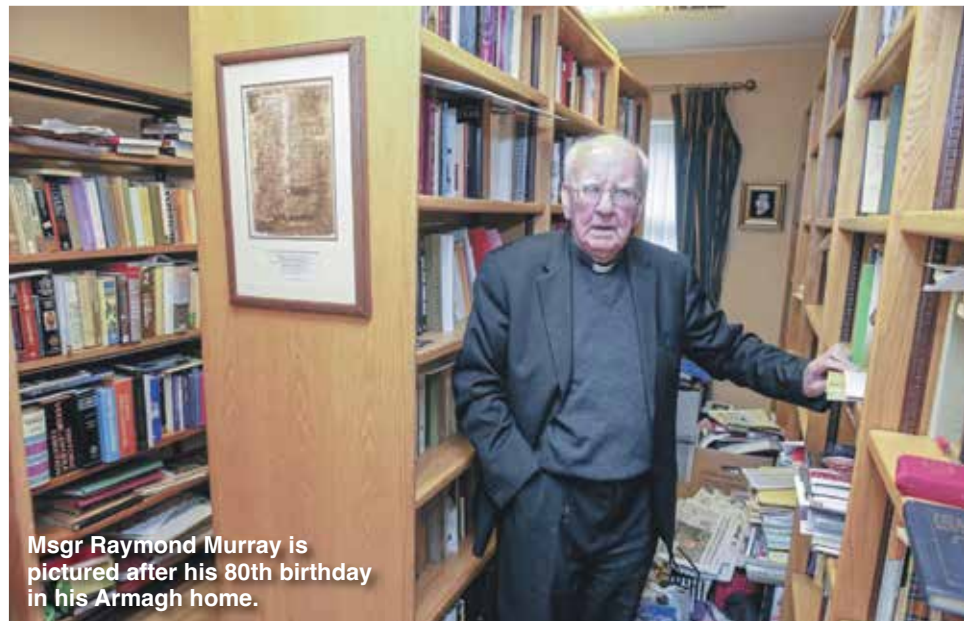
a phone call from Fr Faul telling him that 130 internees, many of whom had been ill-treated, were on their way from Crumlin Road Prison to Armagh Gaol – where he was chaplain. The gaol usually accommodated about a dozen women and 40 borstal boys in separate wings.

He was not prepared for what happened next. “It was very very frightening.”

“These men were arrested under emergency law, interrogated and tortured until they signed statements”

Many of the prisoners “had been very badly beaten” and he asked him to take down their trousers and lift their shirts to reveal their wounds. He was shocked to find injuries over their bodies including the privates.

Some had been subjected to electric cattle prods and one prisoner, Joseph Rafferty “had an electric fire held close to his stomach and it was all burned and he had to be taken



Msgr Raymond Murray is pictured after his 80th birthday in his Armagh home.

to hospital”.

“These men were arrested under emergency law, interrogated and tortured until they signed statements.”

Fr Murray took signed statements from the men and the world got to know.

Testified

He visited 10 countries including the United States, Australia and New Zealand highlighting human rights abuses in the

North and testified to congressmen in Washington DC and later to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin.

Amid outrage at the ill-treatment the Irish government took a case against Britain and the European Commission on Human Rights stated that the treatment of the “hooded men” subjected to “five techniques” of interrogation did “amount to torture”. These techniques were ‘wall-standing’, ‘hooding’,

continuous loud noise, sleep deprivation and deprivation of food and drink. On appeal, the European Court of Human Rights in 1978 qualified this to “inhuman and degrading treatment” in breach of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Brave

His work was brave, difficult and misunderstood in some quarters and there were those

in the Catholic Church who were not always comfortable with it.

But to what extent did the violence of the IRA and their cruel and widespread violations of human rights thwart and undermine his work and Fr Faul's?

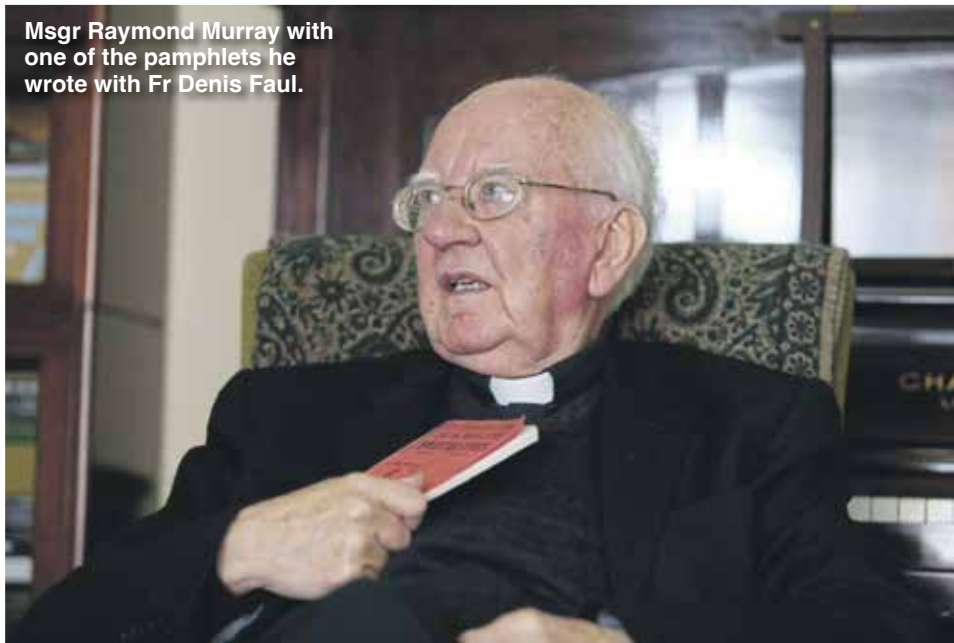
“The Pope and the bishops could speak very wonderfully for justice and principles. For us on the ground it came down to the individual, the human being, the person with a name”

“Of course it did. The IRA were doing atrocities such as Bloody Friday and it was easy for anybody to condemn the IRA atrocities and we condemned them from time to time. But all the politicians and all the Churches condemned the IRA. There were 100 condemnations of the IRA for one condemnation of torture.”

He says “there was total silence from the Protestant churches” on issues such as torture and ill-treatment and that campaigners such as himself “were only a little minority”.

Fr Murray admits the Catholic hierarchy “stood back at

Msgr Raymond Murray with one of the pamphlets he wrote with Fr Denis Faul.



“Dr Murray’s courage in confronting state violence and fighting for the rights of those particularly vulnerable must mean there are many in his debt and more inspired by his example”

times, yes” but to their credit “did not stop us because they knew what we were doing was right”.

He says the bishops collectively issued some “strong statements on peace on a wider scale”.

“The Pope and the bishops could speak very wonderfully for justice and principles. For us on the ground it came

down to the individual, the human being, the person with a name.”

Plastic bullets

There were times when he lost patience with the bishops, recalling for example their slowness in issuing a statement on plastic bullets which he effectively forced out of them. “Seventeen people

were killed by rubber and plastic bullets, eight of them were children and one was a woman.”

The conferral of the title Monsignor on both Fr Faul and Fr Murray in 1995 when Cardinal Daly was Archbishop of Armagh was seen as an endorsement of their human rights work from the highest level in the Church.

Fr Murray paid a price for his perseverance in that work. He recalls many instances of harassment and threats. On one occasion in broad daylight in the centre of Armagh he was subjected to a public humiliation by British soldiers who “held the barrel of a gun to my neck for almost an hour” until another priest alerted the RUC who intervened to free him to continue his walk to Armagh Gaol where he was chaplain for 19 years until 1986.

“He wouldn’t hesitate to get into his car and drive to Cork to help someone in trouble”

Fr Murray recalls an uphill battle engaging the media, particularly the Dublin based media which had “an inferiority complex” about responding to such revelations. He says although Dublin papers had the evidence “two weeks before” they waited until brave figures in the British media such as John Whale and *The Sunday Times Insight* team publicised abuses first. He says that BBC Northern Ireland waited years to interview Fr Faul whom he describes as “very intelligent, very compassionate and very concerned”.

“He wouldn’t hesitate to get into his car and drive to Cork

to help someone in trouble.”

Breakthrough

He describes as “a major breakthrough” journalist Peter Taylor’s 1980 Penguin Special *Beating the Terrorists? Interrogation in Omagh, Gough and Castlereagh* which documented the inside story of RUC interrogation from 1976-79 and the accompanying political cover-up.

Fr Murray is critical of the North’s two universities and trades unions for not standing up strongly enough for human rights while praising individual academics, principally the late Prof. Kevin Boyle.

He sees his work seeing as a profoundly moral issue. “Those who were in charge of the law were breaking the law and acting immorally.”

Irish learning

Fr Murray regrets that his campaigning meant he has had less time to satisfy his thirst for Irish learning. As the holder of a Queen’s University PhD in the work of the 19th-Century Mullaghbawn poet and historian Art MacBionaid, whose Irish poems were edited by the late Cardinal Ó Fiaich, there is little doubt he would have had much more to contribute.

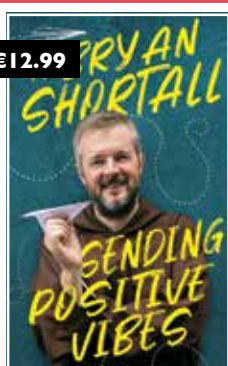
But Dr Murray’s courage in confronting state violence and fighting for the rights of those particularly vulnerable must mean there are many in his debt and more inspired by his example.

COLUMBA BOOKS: STILL TURNING PAGES, STILL GOING STRONG



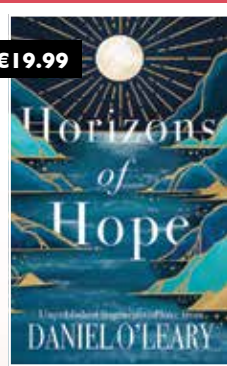
Holistic Healing
Fr Pat Collins

Healing is one of the most beautiful gifts in God’s treasure chest of blessing. Pat Collins describes how the gift of healing has been rediscovered in recent years and sheds light on the therapeutic power of the Eucharist.



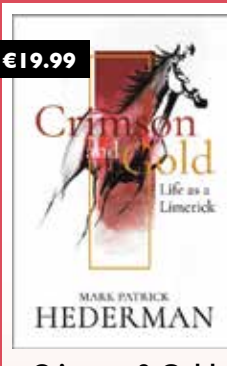
Sending Positive Vibes
Fr Bryan Shortall

Fr Bryan’s memories and reflections are interspersed with prayers, stories of Saints, and gives a rare insight into the lives of the priests and religious who work so tirelessly about us.



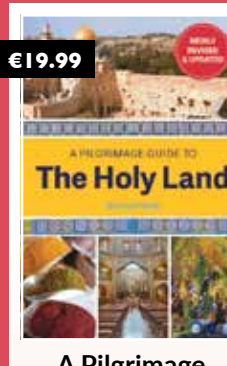
Horizons of Hope
Daniel O’Leary

This book is an invitation from the author to open our hearts and minds to a loving God. A celebration of Daniel O’Leary’s unrelenting conviction that life itself is God’s love eternally unfolding before us.



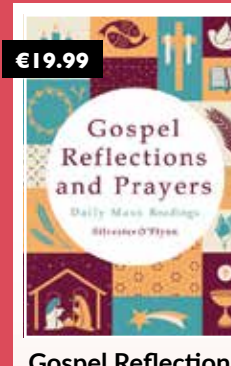
Crimson & Gold
Mark Patrick Hederman

A Benedictine Monk of Glenstal Abbey, Fr Hederman continues to explore how we as Irish Roman Catholics can hone in on the most precious aspects of our faith and cancel the surrounding noise.



A Pilgrimage Guide to the Holy Land
Michael Kelly

In this unique guidebook, Michael Kelly takes readers to the sites associated with the earthly life of Christ from Bethlehem to Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee to Jerusalem.



Gospel Reflections and Prayers
Silvester O’Flynn

This book offers two short reflections on the daily gospels. These simple and clear reflections would take two minutes at most and a preacher might use either one or both.



The Way We Were
Mary Kenny

Mary Kenny’s approach is a balanced and measured recollection of the Ireland of our times – and of times past, since the foundation of the Irish state a hundred years ago.



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A unique Dominican way of living



The house in Harold's Cross.



Sr Eileen O'Connell and Sr Eilís Ní Mhongáin.



Renata Steffens

It is just standard for students to share houses/apartments with other students while in college, however, that's not the only option. The Dominican Sisters, Cabra are providing an alternative to that, opening a house in Harold's Cross to young women who would like to live in community with Sisters.

Sr Eileen O'Connell and Sr Eilís Ní Mhongáin are the ones responsible for the community, welcoming the women and making sure the place and the project are running smoothly. They had a third sister living with there, but she moved out.

The house became available three years ago, but the idea came much earlier than that. "We discerned it for a long time as the Congregation," Sr O'Connell said. The idea came first from herself and another sister, "and then we discerned it with the Congregation as it's just that we don't make that type of decision on our own."

Demand

The sisters believed this would meet a need for some younger Catholic women. The sisters talked to various people, including young people, sisters and brothers in other congregations and groups who are doing some-

thing similar in Ireland or in Europe and realised many young Catholics are looking for sharing living in a lay Catholic community way.

They spoke with the Dominican Friars in Cork who were "doing something for young men" and discovered that the Jesuits in Dublin support the Faber Companions, which is a group of young men who live and pray together in community. When discerning the new community, Sr O'Connell also met a young woman who formed a community with friends because they wanted to live as Catholics together, and there was nothing similar to the Faber Companions for women, the sister explained.

“When it was all ready to receive some women, they started advertising the rooms”

Knowing there was a demand for this type of living and having the support of the Congregation, it was just a matter of implementing the idea. Three years ago, when the house in Harold's Cross became available, the Congregation Council asked if they would like to try and start the community there, the sister explained.

The sisters moved into the house, and when it was all ready to receive some



Arts, crafts and a chat.

women, they started advertising the rooms. They have three rooms available, but usually only rent two, as they keep the third one available in case another person comes to visit.

"We advertised using the accommodation hubs for the universities because that was a good place. We also shared it with friars we knew, Dominican friars. [And] other places [like] WhatsApp chat groups, and asked people to share it with anyone they thought might be interested," Sr O'Connell explained.

Connection

They are not looking for people who 'will not be a problem' or 'will be no disturbance'. They "want someone who is present," someone who will share meals and spend quality time with the sisters and each other.

They look for women who

are between 18 to 45 years of age, preferably students. "Students make more sense ... I suppose part of our thing is sharing and building community together for a period of time. It's not forever." They are not looking for someone who "would be here for six years, that's not how we envision it."

“It is up to the women to choose to keep contact or not after they move out”

For the first year, they had two women staying for the full academic year, and one other for half of the year. In the second year, they had two and for the third they had two up until

Christmas. Currently, they only have one woman living with them.

The Sisters said it is up to the women to choose to keep contact or not after they move out. They still keep close contact with some. The second woman, living with them up until Christmas, was there for two years. She is Indian and got married close to Christmas in her home country. Sr O'Connell attended the wedding.

Community

One of the rooms on the ground floor has a big table for them to do jigsaws or play board games together as a community. Sr O'Connell mentioned they are watching *The Chosen* together now. They also go for hikes, "if it's a fine weather on a Saturday ... It's not really planned," they said. "The weekend is going to be free, we're both free,

and we're going to go for a walk, if you [the lay women] want to come, great. If you don't, obviously it's not a problem."

“One of the rooms in the house was converted into a chapel, where they pray daily”

As a community, the women are invited to share the cleaning and cooking responsibilities, and care for the house. "Anyone who is here receives an invitation to join us for prayer, but there isn't an expectation," they said. "If somebody doesn't turn up for prayer, that's not a problem because



Back garden of the house in Harold's Cross.



Oratory's entrance.



Oratory.

we're not asking them to live a fully Dominican life," the Sisters explained.

They even had a Muslim woman living with them "for a very short period". She was moving apartments, and her lease was ending on the old place, but the new place was not yet available, so she stayed with the sisters for a bit more than two months.

One of the rooms in the house was converted into a chapel, where they pray daily. The woman living with the sisters now has a group who sometimes meet in the house, and sometimes they ask to use the chapel to pray the rosary together. They have their meeting in another room, but then move to the Chapel for the rosary, Sr Ní Mhongáin explained.

Sharing

For the cleaning responsibilities, Sr Ní Mhongáin

created a list of the areas of the house that needed to be cleaned, "so if you've done it, you tick it. It's not the case of saying 'she didn't do anything this week'. If you've cleaned the area, you tick it so then everybody knows. 'I don't need to clean the kitchen because it's cleaned'."

“You don't have to have the answers, you just have to give people time”

This experience of sharing the home with lay women taught Sr O'Connell "the importance of just being present. Just being present with people and being open is enough to allow people to

do their own searching and seeking. You don't have to have the answers. I never would have thought I had the answers to anybody anyway. But you don't have to have the answers, you just have to give people time."

Conversing

They have dinner with each other and sometimes they would sit at around 6.30pm and still be there at 9pm. "We haven't got up from the table, apart from filling our cup... We talk about the deep meaningful stuff and then about 'what's your favourite song' or 'can you identify someone's colour by their name?', which was a really weird conversation," Sr O'Connell said.

"We would throw out a random name. For instance, the three of us who were in the conversation, all knew Eilís who wasn't there at that meal, so she wasn't being made uncomfortable

by this. It was like, 'Okay, what colour is Eilís?'... 'Oh, green, 100% she's green'. I mean, it was so random. The conversation went from really important things, talking about your day, talking about what's your favourite Gospel, to very random things."

“I find it absolutely amazing to be living with young people”

The Sister said that "the conversation went all over the place. But I think what you learn from that is just the value of time because those very almost nonsense conversations can allow the space for someone to eventually ask a question that's really burning." Questions

like "I don't know what I want to do with my life", 'my friends have all it worked out and I don't. What's wrong with me?' Nothing. You just haven't worked [it out yet]. That's the value of just time and presence and openness and availability."

Sr Ní Mhongáin said that for two generations you could tell when someone didn't want anything to do with the Church, "so we'd be more reticent about talking about things. I find it absolutely amazing to be living with young people on their search. Very different searches and finding answers in different ways. But just to find that 'faith' is so much part of their life and their commitment. That has been very, very enriching and a real eye opener."

The Sister said that the women who live with them "all have links with other young people. So, you suddenly realise 'okay, there may be two generations lost, but there's something happening now'. That whole sense of God being active in their lives again and being listened to - that has just been tremendous."

Change

Sr Ní Mhongáin entered the Dominicans when the congregation was still cloistered, she thought that would be her life forever, living among the other sisters inside the walls of the convent. Little did she know that years later she would be living in a community with young lay women.

The Sister told this paper she's seeing "a shift in the thinking" and that

things are possibly going to change, maybe even including the founding of more communities bringing lay people and religious to live together. "We had been an enclosed congregation, so a lot of the sisters that are older than me lived that for a lot of their life. Then there was a phase where a lot of the sisters moved out of the big houses and they lived in parishes," Sr Ní Mhongáin explained.

“It's not what sisters or friars or brothers are used to doing”

Sr O'Connell "would encourage every congregation to try it [living in community with lay people], if they have the willingness to. I certainly think it has been extremely enriching for us. Because they have written to us when they left, we know that, for those who have lived with us, it was something very important too. We keep in contact with women afterwards if they want that. I think living this type of community is definitely worth it. It might be a risk, because it's not what sisters or friars or brothers are used to doing, but it's definitely worth it. Definitely 100% worth it."

📌 If you or someone you know are interested in living with the Sisters or want more information, contact Sr Eileen on dominican-hive@gmail.com.

Out&About

A Faithful and happy occasion



LIMERICK: St Brigid's School, Singland Confirmation class pictured after the ceremony with Canon Joseph Shire and Bishop Brendan Leahy.



MAYO: The Friars in Wexford recently climbed Croagh Patrick with volunteers to raise funds to fix the friary's roof. Led by Fr Robert Cojoc, Father Guardian, the group celebrated Mass on top of the mountain.



ROME: Pictured are the members of the Knights of St Columbanus Omagh, their wives and Fr Peter O Kane, Provincial Chaplain who made The Holy Year Pilgrimage to Rome. During their trip they visited the four Papal Basilicas. The highlight of the pilgrimage was the celebration of Mass at the Tomb of St Peter.

IN SHORT

Cavan woman granted Inspiring Person Award

A Cavan woman facing a rare cancer won the Audience Choice Award at the *Outsider.ie* Olly O'Neill Most Inspiring Person 2024 awards. Brenda O'Keeffe is battling an incurable form of bone marrow cancer but hopes to run her 600th marathon by June this year.

It was Ms O'Keeffe's brother who nominated her for the *Outsider.ie*'s award. The award recognises normal Irish people who, despite being faced with difficulties, go above and beyond to encourage others to share their love for outdoor and adventure pursuits.

Ms O'Keeffe was diagnosed last August at the University College Hospital in London. She had been having a series of spontaneous bleeds to her neck, liver and spleen and spent months in hospital, but the doctors couldn't find the exact cause of her illness. She was

then diagnosed with Amyloidosis AL of the heart, kidney, liver, bone marrow and spleen.

She told the *Anglo Celt* she hopes to inspire others suffering with an illness to look beyond their diagnosis.

Waterford woman awarded the Benemerenti Medal

A Waterford woman was awarded the Benemerenti Medal for her services with church choir. Mae McGrath was presented with the Papal medal in recognition of her work and services provided to the choir in Ballybricken Church. She was awarded alongside member of the choir and her family.

The Benemerenti Medal is an award presented by the Pope to clergy and laity to recognise their services to the Catholic Church.

The current version of the medal was designed by Pope Paul VI and is a gold Greek

Cross picturing Christ with his hand raised in blessing. On the left arm of the cross is the tiara and the crossed keys symbol of the papacy. On the right arm is the coat of arms of the current Pope.

Over €20,000 raised for Cork boy with Hodgkin's Lymphoma

Over €20,000 raised for 12-year-old boy diagnosed with Stage 3 Hodgkin's Lymphoma. In Cork, Elliott McLoughlin was diagnosed in December 2024 and has been undergoing intense treatment at Crumlin Hospital and Cork University Hospital.

The boy's father, Conor McLoughlin is recovering from a stroke he suffered in 2019, and the mother Franziska is unable to work, as she needs to care for both, her husband and son. The fundraiser had an original target of

€3,000 but raised more than €22,000 so far.

In the fundraising description, Nina Rath, who set the GoFundMe for the family said: "The family's main goal is to get Conor back driving, as he has not been able to drive since his stroke. This would be life-changing, providing the independence they desperately need to manage hospital visits, school runs, and daily life while Elliott is undergoing treatment."

"To make this possible, the family needs to cover the costs of insurance, motor tax, and any necessary vehicle modifications. This is their top priority, as it will greatly improve their ability to support Elliott and maintain some semblance of normalcy."

The family said that any extra funds raised by the GoFundMe will be donated to Childhood Cancer Ireland, Cork University Hospital and Children's Health Ireland in order to support other families faced with similar challenges.

Edited by Renata Steffens
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



If you have any stories, photos, or events you wish to be considered for publication, email a week in advance of publication



LAOIS: Fr Paul O'Boyle PP Clane Parish joined staff and John Paul II students of Scoil Mhuire Clane on a retreat day to St Brigid's Well and Stradbally Mass Rock.



ANTRIM: SDLP Councillor Roisin Lynch spoke to members of the Catholic Chaplaincy at QUB on the role of Christians in politics and public service in a talk was facilitated by Focolare.



CLARE: Kilrush Parish recently hosted a celebration of thanksgiving. Response through religious life, with the Sisters of Mercy, Missionary Franciscan Sisters of Immaculate Conception and the Christian Brothers and Fr Michael O'Sullivan, acknowledging their contribution to our community, celebrated by Bishop Fintan Monahan.



DUBLIN: Irish Franciscan Friars alongside Fr Willie Purcell (National Diocesan Vocation Director) at the Capuchin stand in the RDS for Divine Mercy.



WICKLOW: Recently, the retired missionaries of St Patrick's Missionary Society (Kiltegan Fathers) received the visit of owls and a hawk. The priests watched demonstrations and interacted with the animals in a fun afternoon.



ANTRIM: Recently the All Saints Ballymena Vocations Society of St Joseph celebrated Mass to mark their 30th anniversary. Pictured are Fr Michael McGinnity PP, John Croskery, President, Yvonne Downey, Vice President and a founder member and committee members.

ANTRIM

'Day of prayer for victims and survivors of abuse' on March 7. This is not just for the victims but also for family, friends and community. Mass will take place in St Patrick's Church, Donegal Street, Belfast at 1pm. Pray for and remember victims and survivors of abuse within the Church.

CAVAN

Positive Age St Patrick's Day Party happens on March 16 from 2.45pm to 4.45pm in Castlemanor Community Centre. Music provided by Dessie Ronan. To book contact 049 438 0725. All welcome. Refreshments served. €5 per person with raffle on the day.

CORK

'Jubilee Year Conference of Prayer and Healing' facilitated by Mir Ministries takes place on March 15 and 16 from 9.30am to 5.30pm at the Rochestown Park Hotel. Guest speaker is Maria Vadia. All Welcome for Prayer, Praise, Teaching and Sacraments. No booking necessary. The event is free. For more info contact Pat on 087 250 5528.

DONEGAL

The Sacred Heart Statue recently blessed by Pope Francis will be in Kincasslagh Parish from March 8 to 10. It will be in St Columba's Church for Mass on March 8 at 6.30pm and in Kincasslagh Church on March 9 for 10am Mass, then it returns to St Columba's for Sunday Mass at 11.30am.

GALWAY

'Poor Clare Galway Monastic Experience Day' for women aged 18-35 happens on March 15 from 10am to 5pm. For more information contact events@poorclares.ie or vocations@poorclares.ie.

KERRY

The next Mass for the Relics of Blessed Carlo Acutis will be on the March 18 at 7.30 pm at the Holy Cross Dominican Church, Tralee.

KILDARE

Weekly Lent programme starting on March 12 and concluding on April 16 takes place in Our Lady's Parish Centre, Leixlip. The gathering happens from

8/8.30pm to 9/9.30pm and is followed by tea. All welcome. For more information access www.oLn.ie.

LOUTH

The Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal's 'Upper Room Youth Group' for ages 12-18 takes place on Thursdays from 7.15pm to 8.45pm in St Mary's Pastoral Centre, Dublin Road, Drogheda.

MEATH

'Light the Fire 2025', St Patrick's Day with the CFR Sisters takes place on March 17 with Vespers at 5.00pm on the Hill of Slane, and at 6.15pm Mass in St Patrick's Church celebrated by the Papal Nuncio Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor and Bishop Tom Deenihan. For more info access www.franciscansisterscfr.com/st-anthony.

SLIGO

'Special Jubilee Year of Hope Nightfever' happens on March 28 at 7pm in the Holy Cross Dominicans Friary. Mass with Fr Joseph Mary Deane. Come for adoration, candlelight worship, confession and ministry.

TIPPERARY

As part of the Jubilee Year, Nenagh Holy Spirit Prayer Group and Nenagh Parish will host Maria Vadia from Florida, US on March 29 at the Scouts Hall, Ashe Road Nenagh from 10am to 5pm. Come for joy, healing, conversations and more.

WEXFORD

'World Day of Prayer Service' takes place on March 7 in Clonard Day Chapel at 7pm. This year's theme is 'I made You Wonderful'. All welcome.

WICKLOW

Bethany Bereavement Support offers a safe, compassionate space where you can share your grief among others who understand. Trained listeners provide emotional, practical support which is confidential and free. Meetings happen at 8pm on the last Tuesday of every month in the De La Salle Centre in Wicklow. For more info call or text at 086 835 9148.

“Synodality is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium” – Pope Francis

The Irish Synod must ask harder questions to secure the Church’s future



Bishop Daniel E. Flores of Brownsville, Texas, responds to questions from US university students about the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican October 18, 2024. Photo: CNS/Pablo Esparza. The plans for the Irish Synod show no signs of tackling the hard questions around youth such as are we willing to make the cultural and liturgical changes necessary to meet them where they are at?



Garry O’Sullivan

The National Synodal Team has released a list of themes and resources for proposed Spring Gatherings at local level nationally. Revisiting the generalised themes that emerged from the parish focus group stages of the Universal Synod in Ireland is useful, but three years after initial focus groups identified broad themes for discussion, the upcoming Synod of the Irish Catholic Church must move beyond generalities and face the urgent realities of decline, leadership, and the Church’s future role in society. While the themes outlined—Baptism, Liturgy, Co-Responsibility, and others—offer a foundation for discussion, they lack the specificity and

urgency required at this critical moment. If the Synod is to be meaningful, it must ask the difficult questions that will determine whether the Church in Ireland can thrive or continue its trajectory of decline.

A Church in Decline: What’s the Plan?

For years, we have seen dwindling congregations, aging clergy, and a younger generation that is increasingly disengaged. The numbers paint a stark picture, yet there is little evidence of a coordinated plan to address this existential crisis. How can the Church respond to the reality of fewer priests? What is the strategy for maintaining faith communities in areas where parishes are closing? Are we prepared to accept a smaller, more

committed Church, or do we have a vision for renewal? These are the questions the Synod must tackle if it is to be taken seriously.

Leadership: What Kind Do We Need?

The Irish Church’s credibility has been damaged by scandals and a failure to engage meaningfully with modern society. Leadership must be at the forefront of any synodal discussion. What qualities should we seek in our future bishops? What supports do they need as they take on more merged dioceses? Should lay leadership take on a greater role in the governance of the Church? How do we ensure that leadership is truly connected to the lives and struggles of the faithful rather than removed from them? A Synod that does not

engage in a frank conversation about leadership will have failed before it begins.

Moving Beyond Vague Themes to Concrete Action

The themes identified for discussion—such as Youth, Family, and Education—are important, but they lack a sense of direction. Take youth, for example: How do we bring young people back to the Church in a meaningful way? What kind of Church do they want to belong to? Are we willing to make the cultural and liturgical changes necessary to meet them where they are? Similarly, the conversation around women in the Church must move beyond mere recognition of their contributions and toward a serious exploration of their expanded role in leadership and ministry.

Instead the Synod team want us to revisit the “Proposals from the 2018 ‘Synod on Young People’”. If they haven’t been enacted in seven years, they won’t be enacted now. Far better to evaluate the inaction and draw learnings from that evaluation, rather than do what the bishops have been so publicly

“The upcoming Irish Synod is an opportunity to embrace reform, not to be wasted on merely affirming well-worn platitudes”

clear on avoiding, merely having a talking shop. As any insider will tell you, there are shelves of plans in Maynooth and elsewhere that were never implemented.

Facing Reality with Honesty

Various diocesan gatherings have been happening for more than forty years. Practically all of these have identified the issues now being listed for the Synodal processes. The question needs to be asked: is there any prospect that listing them again will effect action? Perhaps, a basic question that needs to be asked is: why has there been such a failure to take serious action on pastoral issues that have been identified so often and for so long? This question of evaluation may get to the heart of the matter. Generating similar

answers without action will only lead to further frustration and indifference.

The Irish Church has long been slow to respond to change. But we can no longer afford to delay. The decline in Mass attendance, the crisis in vocations, the shifting cultural landscape—these are not theoretical concerns. They demand immediate and thoughtful action. The upcoming Irish Synod is an opportunity to embrace reform, not to be wasted on merely affirming well-worn platitudes.

If this Synod is to matter, it must be brave. It must be willing to challenge entrenched ways of thinking. It must ask the hard questions, even when the answers are uncomfortable. Otherwise, it risks becoming yet another missed opportunity in the long decline of the Church in Ireland.

“For years, we have seen dwindling congregations, aging clergy, and a younger generation that is increasingly disengaged”

‘Carlo Acutis, I am in your hands’: Catholic paediatrician recovers from cancer



María Dolores Rosique, known as ‘Lola’ by her family members and friends, is pictured here when she was hospitalised. A second-class relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis accompanied her at her bedside. Photo: Lola Rosique.



Lola holding the relic of Blessed Carlos Acutis just before entering the operating room. Photo: Lola Rosique.



Diego Lopez Marina

With a radiant smile, paediatric physician María Dolores Rosique, known as ‘Lola’, to family and friends, recounted her testimony of healing after overcoming aggressive abdominal cancer. She believes her recovery began after visiting the tomb of Blessed Carlo Acutis in Assisi, Italy, placing herself completely under his care.

“I always say that the illness gave me more good than bad. It reaffirmed my faith. Today I know that without the Lord, I am nothing,” she told *ACI Prensa*, CNA’s Spanish-language news partner.

Turn

In 2022, Ms Rosique, a 44-year-old Spanish paediatrician, was enjoying a wonderful period in her life with her husband, Pablo, their three teenage daughters, and their 7-year-old son. However, during a family

trip to Tuscany, she experienced a sudden turn of fate.

She had been feeling unwell earlier that year. “I had digestive discomfort, underwent ultrasounds and an endoscopy, but everything seemed fine,” she recalled. Yet one night on their trip, she felt a sudden pain in her abdomen. “The moment I touched the area, I knew I had cancer. I wasn’t sure if it was in the liver or pancreas, but our lives changed in an instant.”

“We went from paradise to feeling like we were falling into hell,” she said.

“The real miracle is not just that I’m alive, but the spiritual impact this has had”

Despite the hardship, she describes the journey as “a wonderful one,” filled with support, love, and prayer. “It’s been a tough process: two aggressive surgeries, intraperitoneal chemotherapy, many difficulties.

“Ms Rosique did not ask Blessed Carlo Acutis for miraculous healing but simply that her illness not be too severe so she could see her daughters grow up”

But it’s been two years, and thank God, I am now free of illness,” she said with a smile.

Ms Rosique did not ask Blessed Carlo Acutis for miraculous healing but simply that her illness not be too severe so she could see her daughters grow up. “The real miracle is not just that I’m alive, but the spiritual impact this has had on me, my family, and many friends who were far from the Lord. Many have returned to God. That is the true miracle.”

Fears

At the time of her diagnosis, her family life was joyful and stable. When she shared the news with her husband, he remained calm and gave her two options: return to Spain immediately or stay a few more days. She chose to stay, asking God for strength. “Three days wouldn’t change anything, and at least we could enjoy our time together,” she reasoned.

On their way to Rome, Pablo suggested an unplanned stop in Assisi. “Now I know it wasn’t a coincidence. The Holy Spirit

leads you when you least expect it,” she reflected.

Her greatest fear was leaving her children motherless. “Lord, do it for them. I want nothing for myself,” she prayed.

While in Assisi, Pablo noticed Carlo Acutis’ image everywhere. Curious, he researched and found that Carlo’s body was only 300 meters away. Exhausted, Ms Rosique initially resisted visiting but was urged by her daughters. “In the end, I think it was the Holy Spirit, or even Carlo, who dragged me there,” she admitted.

“‘Be calm, you are not alone.’ In that moment, she knew she would be healed”

At the Church of St Mary Major, where Carlo’s body lies, she collapsed onto a bench. “I asked for many things, but above all for my children. I told Carlo, ‘I don’t know what I’m doing here, but God knows. I place myself in your hands.’” She wrote two intentions: that her children remain close to the Eucharist and for her illness to not be too severe.

After praying, as she walked out of the church, she experienced an immense spiritual peace and, for

“Appendix cancer, while aggressive, has a better prognosis because it doesn’t spread to the brain or lungs”

the first time in months, physical relief. “It was like a caress from the Lord, telling me: ‘Be calm, you are not alone.’” In that moment, she knew she would be healed.

Support

Back in Spain, medical tests confirmed a widespread abdominal tumour. The initial prognosis was grim: six months to a year to live. However, after an initial surgery, doctors discovered the cancer originated in the appendix, not the ovary. This new diagnosis dramatically changed her outlook. “Appendix cancer, while aggressive, has a better prognosis because it doesn’t spread to the brain or lungs,” she explained.

When she shared the update, her sisters asked if they could spread the news to request prayers. She agreed, and soon a worldwide prayer chain formed. “That is the communion of saints. When one person can’t do it alone, the whole Church unites in prayer. It was incredible to see the power of prayer reach people I didn’t even know,” she marvelled.

Her parents also sought

prayers at their local church, where the priest suggested she receive the anointing of the sick. “I am quite docile, so I decided to go,” she laughed.

“She continues to share her testimony, grateful for the intercession of Blessed Carlo Acutis”

Throughout her illness, Ms Rosique felt God’s presence guiding her. “It has been a blessing. It has deepened my faith, united my family, and brought others back to the Lord. I wouldn’t change a thing.”

Now fully recovered, she continues to share her testimony, grateful for the intercession of Blessed Carlo Acutis and the overwhelming power of faith and prayer.

❗ This story was first published by ACI Prensa, CNA’s Spanish-language news partner.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Faith communities advocate for reparative justice for Africa

● Religious and ethical leaders from across the world have gathered in Ethiopia to advocate for healing and long-term solutions to the damages caused by these past injustices on the African continent.

In a statement from the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), the two-day workshop slated for February 27-28 seeks to raise awareness of "reparative justice within faith communities and the public."

The workshop also "aims to establish a coalition of faith-based and ethical organisations dedicated to this cause and to develop policy recommendations and an action roadmap in partnership with the African Union." As well as building "on such efforts by amplifying the voices of faith-based and ethical organisations in the pursuit of justice."

Mexico's bishops urge unity as church struggles to assist those deported under Trump policies

● Mexican bishops called for national unity in face of the new administration's policies, calling them "worrying." In a February 24 statement, Mexican bishops said that given the series of measures Trump has been taking since the first day in office, "it is clear that (he) aims to pressure our country to achieve very concrete goals in his government plans," such as tackling organised crime and addressing migration.

Meanwhile, countries like Panama and Costa Rica face an influx of deported immigrants.

Catholic groups in the region, including Jesuit Migrants Service and Red Clamor, are advocating for the protection of the deportees' rights. Many deportees fear persecution if sent back to their home countries.

Human rights groups are urging governments to uphold international protection laws and respect the dignity of migrants. As deportations continue, organisations are rallying to provide support and pressure governments to improve conditions for immigrants in transit.

Three months into reopening, Notre Dame witnesses record crowds, confessions

● Three months after the reopening of Notre Dame Cathedral, some Catholics in France worry the influx of tourists has overshadowed its religious essence.

But Auxiliary Bishop Emmanuel Tois of Paris sees it differently, viewing the high number of visitors as an opportunity to expose more people to the Catholic faith. With 29,000 visitors daily, up from 23,500 before the 2019 fire, the cathedral attracts a number of visitors comparable to the number the Louvre Museum draws.

Bishop Tois often celebrates Mass and hears confessions at Notre Dame, witnessing many tourists, some even unbaptised, inquiring about the faith – as well as many Catholics asking for confession after years of avoiding the confessional.

Despite concerns about the cathedral's transformation into a monument, Bishop Tois insists its primary function remains alive, with visitors respecting the Masses and liturgical services.

Poor Clare abbess criticises Vatican order to close convents with fewer than 5 nuns

● The Poor Clare abbess of the Monastery of Santo Cristo de Balaguer in Lérida, northeast Spain is criticising a 2018 rule established by Pope Francis that dissolves communities of women religious with fewer than five nuns, a rule that does not apply to male communities.

Asked about the reason for the closure, "which people, hurt and perplexed, address to some of the Poor Clares every day," the nun explained that the Holy Father published the apostolic constitution *Vultum Dei Quaerere* in 2016 but emphasised that the document "did not affect monks."

In her opinion, it should be the nuns who "when the time comes, can take the options of continuing or closing according to their real situation, like men's monasteries, for which no limits are set."

Original statue of Our Lady of Fatima headed to Rome for Jubilee of Marian Spirituality

On the occasion of the Jubilee of Marian Spirituality, scheduled for October 11-12, the original statue of Our Lady of Fatima will be taken to Rome.

The famous image of Our Lady, known to the faithful throughout the world and a symbol of "hope that does not disappoint," will be present among the pilgrims who participate in the Mass in St Peter's Square on Sunday, October 12, at 10:30am local time to "further enrich this moment of prayer and reflection."

This will be the fourth time the statue has left the shrine at Fatima to be taken to Rome, as it only happens at the express request of the Pope. The first time was in 1984, on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of the Redemption, when on March 25 Pope John Paul II consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

The second was during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 and the third was in October 2013 on the occasion of the Year of Faith with Pope Francis.

The Dicastery for Evangelisation said in a statement that access to St Peter's Square for the Eucharistic celebration will be free and no ticket will be required. Registration to participate in the jubilee event is already open on the jubilee website and will end on



Pope Francis prays in front of the original statue of Our Lady of Fatima during a Marian vigil in St Peter's Square at the Vatican in this October 12, 2013, file photo. Photo: CNS photo/Paul Haring.

August 10.

"The presence of the beloved original statue of Our Lady of Fátima will allow everyone to experience the closeness of the Virgin Mary," said Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the pro-prefect of the Dicastery for Evangelisation.

"It is one of the most significant Marian images for Christians throughout the world, who, as the Holy Father points out in the bull of indiction of the jubilee *Spes Non Confun-*

dit, venerate her as 'the most affectionate of mothers, who never abandons her children.' At Fatima, Our Lady told the three little shepherds the same thing that she continues to assure each of us: 'I will never leave you. My Immaculate Heart will be your refuge and the path that will lead you to God,'" the prelate said.

"This statue leaves the shrine at Cova da Iria in a totally exceptional manner and only at the request of the

popes," said Fr Carlos Cabe-cinhas, the rector of Fátima shrine.

"In this time of the jubilee, Our Lady of Fatima is the woman of Easter joy, even in the painful times that the world is experiencing. Once again, the 'lady dressed in white' will be a pilgrim of hope and, in Rome, she will be with the 'bishop dressed in white,' as the little shepherds of Fátima affectionately called the Holy Father," he said.

Pew: US Christianity downturn levelling, but Catholics suffer 'greatest net losses'

Christianity's decline in the US may have stalled, but signs of a long-term downward trend remain, according to a new Pew Research Centre survey.

On February 26, Pew released the results of its 2023-2024 Religious Landscape Study, which polled nearly 37,000 US adults on a range of topics regarding religious belief and practice, as well as issues such as abortion, homosexuality, immigration and the role of government.

The report showed that 19% of the nation identifies as Catholic, although

just 29% of that number attend religious services weekly or more often. It also showed that for every one person received into the Catholic Church, another 8.4 individuals have left the faith, either altogether or for another worship tradition. Catholics have also "experienced the greatest net losses" due to what Pew researchers called "religious switching," with 43% of the people raised Catholic no longer identifying as such, "meaning that 12.8% of all US adults are former Catholics."

It is important to note that 1.5% of US

adults are converts to Catholicism. And though the number of those who say they've left the Catholic Church still outnumbered those the number of converts – that's still millions of people who've joined the Church. "That there are more converts to Catholicism than there are members of congregational churches," said Pew researchers.

In addition, support among US Catholics for legalised abortion, homosexuality, and other stances at odds with Church teaching has increased over the past decade and a half.

Iraqi Church open to Christians and Muslims in the sign of Abraham and the Pope

The upcoming inauguration of a Church in Ur of the Chaldeans, four years after Pope Francis' visit, is a 'message' of openness, says Cardinal Louis Raphael Sako, Patriarch of Baghdad.

The site, he hopes, will

become a place of pilgrimage for Iraqis and believers from all over the world, Christians and Muslims, for Abraham "is their common father."

Originally set for March 6, the opening has been postponed until after Easter,

Ramadan, and Lent to accommodate the participation of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani and other Muslim leaders.

This church is "important for Iraq and Iraqis." It is "a Christian 'sign' in a place

with a huge Muslim majority, which will help others understand Christians and respect their faith, looking at the points of union and accepting the elements of diversity, to live in peace and stability."



Edited by Pedro Esteva
Pedro@irishcatholic.ie

Prayers for the Pope continue



A prelate carries a crucifix during a procession St Peter's Square at the Vatican on February 28, 2025, as Pope Francis continues his hospitalisation. Photo: OSV News/ Guglielmo Mangiapane, Reuters.

Indonesian scholars and religious leaders discuss Pope's impact on religious landscape

Indonesia's Minister of Religious Affairs, Prof. KH Nasaruddin Umar, emphasised the importance of religious tolerance and interfaith harmony during a colloquium and book discussion at Atma Jaya Catholic University of Indonesia on February 25.

Titled 'Salve Peregrinans Spei!', the event focused on perspectives from 33 prominent Indonesian Muslim figures regarding Pope Francis' visit. In his keynote address, Prof Nasaruddin stressed the need to strengthen interfaith relationships in an increasingly complex world.

"Our challenge today is to create spaces that foster unity rather than division. The

education curriculum we've designed aims to instil strong religious understanding, free from hatred," he said.

A former Grand Imam of Istiqlal Mosque, Prof. Nasaruddin recalled his meeting with Pope Francis at the mosque, describing it as a pivotal moment in interfaith dialogue. The Pope's visit to Indonesia last year was widely recognised as a milestone for religious tolerance. His interactions with various faith communities reinforced Indonesia's pluralistic society and the power of dialogue in maintaining unity. The minister also took the opportunity to ask attendees to pray for Pope Francis, who has been

experiencing health issues. Sharing a personal anecdote, he noted that he was hospitalised on the same day the Pope fell ill.

Prof. Biyanto from the Ministry of Education commended the event's organisers for their commitment to fostering dialogue. "May the ideas in this book inspire many and strengthen our sense of brotherhood," he said, expressing hope for continued collaboration.

Atma Jaya Catholic University President, Prof. Dr Yuda Turana, echoed these sentiments, calling the event a bridge for universal values like love, peace, and solidarity. "These values must serve

as the foundation for a harmonious future for all Indonesians."

Bishop Antonius Subianto Bunjamin, OSC, President of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference (KWI), highlighted the event's role in advancing fraternity and the Pope's message of compassion. "We must ensure this spirit thrives, bringing tangible benefits for unity and social justice."

Stefanus Ginting of the Frans Seda Foundation expressed hope that the discussion would deepen public understanding of the Pope's visit, calling it a "moment of grace to foster fraternity, humanity, and peace in Indonesia."

Trinitarian Order quietly helping persecuted Christians for 800 years

A new documentary, *Ocho Siglos Después* (Eight Centuries Later), sheds light on the plight of persecuted Christians in regions like Syria, Nigeria, and northern India, where faith remains a source of resilience amid oppression.

The film, produced by Fascina Producciones, was screened on February 25 at Madrid's Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum. The event featured remarks from Fr Antonio Aurelio, vicar general of the

Trinitarian Order, and the film's director, Alfredo Torrescalles.

Originally, the Trinitarian Order was established in the Middle Ages to free Christian captives held by Muslims during the Crusades. Today, in a context of "modern crusades," where Islamic fundamentalism continues to persecute Christians for their faith, the Trinitarians remain a beacon of hope for those who remain firm in their commitment

to Christ. Continuing their mission today through Trinitarian International Solidarity (SIT), established 25 years ago, the Trinitarians provide quiet but vital aid to persecuted Christians worldwide.

The documentary aims to amplify the voices of those facing religious persecution, showcasing the ongoing relevance of the Trinitarian Order's work in a modern world where faith-based violence persists.

Vatican roundup

Archbishop Gallagher: Nuclear weapons pose existential threat

● The Conference on Disarmament "has been held hostage to a stalemate" that has continued year after year "without the adoption of a proper negotiating mandate," said the Vatican's Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Paul Richard Gallagher. Who, in his remarks to the High-Level Segment of the UN's 2025 Session of the Conference on Disarmament, expressed the Holy See's "deep concern" over the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons.

Archbishop Gallagher noted, "Immense military expenditures that often go far beyond what is necessary to ensure legitimate defence, foment the vicious circle of an exhausting arms race that diverts vital resources away from poverty eradication, justice, education, and healthcare."

Otherwise, he warned, the alternative "is the perpetuation of conflicts, violence, increasing inequalities, and environmental degradation, from which ultimately benefits no one but the arms lobby."

From hospital, Pope creates commission to aid cash-strapped Vatican

● Despite his ongoing stay at Rome's Gemelli Hospital and his precarious health status, Pope Francis has established a commission aimed at boosting donations to the Vatican as it faces a crippling deficit, including a looming crisis in its pension system.

In a papal chirograph dated February 11, three days prior to his admission to the Gemelli Hospital, but issued on February 26, the Pope established the Commissio de donationibus pro Sancta Sede, which is a new

commission aimed at promoting financial donations to the Vatican and the Roman Curia.

Led by Msgr Roberto Campisi, Assessor for General Affairs of the Secretariat of State, the commission's main task is to promote fundraising campaigns among Catholic faithful, bishops' conferences, and other potential benefactors.

The emphasis is on providing financial assistance to the Church's missionary and charitable work.

Pope establishes commission to boost donations to the Holy See

● "To support the service of the Apostolic See and considering the current economic situation," Pope Francis established a permanent Vatican commission dedicated to boosting donations to the Holy See through targeted campaigns. The newly created "Commission of Donations for the Holy See" will "encourage donations by means of special campaigns among the faithful... emphasising their importance for the mission and the charitable works of the apostolic see," read a decree instituting the commission.

The commission will also "find funding from willing donors for specific projects presented by the institutions of the Roman Curia and the Governorate of Vatican City State," the decree said.

Additionally, the commission will coordinate other existing avenues of fundraising for the Holy See, such as well as Peter's Pence – a collection taken up in parishes each year that supports the work of the Roman Curia and funds the charitable activity of the Pope.

Pope gives Sr Petrini two assistants for running Vatican City

● The office governing Vatican City State was set to have a new president March 1 and, while in the hospital, Pope Francis changed the office's statutes to give the new president two top-level assistants.

As he had announced on an Italian television program in January, Pope Francis appointed Franciscan Sister of the Eucharist Raffaella Petrini as president of the Vatican City State government beginning March 1. She had been secretary-general of the office since late 2021 and will be the first woman to lead the office.

The Vatican press office announced February 25 that Pope Francis had slightly moderated the "Fundamental Law of Vatican City State" to appoint two secretaries-general to assist Sister Petrini rather than just one.

Ireland's military neutrality in the cross hairs



Perfectly reasonable for academics to call for Ireland's neutrality to be kept under active review, writes **Michael Sanfey**

There's a song that used to be sung by football fans to taunt the rival team's supporters – 'Oh you're all very quiet over there'. This ditty applies well to some Irish academics and public intellectuals who have long been supportive of Ireland joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

However, the situation regarding NATO's future is so uncertain that any suggestion that Ireland would join it at this time looks downright ludicrous.

The changed political climate is due in large part to President Trump's overall approach of 'weaponised uncertainty' and outlandish 18th Century Right of Conquest 'diplomacy' – e.g., his plans for the Panama Canal, Greenland, and the idea to 'clean out' Gaza.

Defence

Not long before taking office for his second term, he called for NATO members to spend 5% of their GDP on defence. This is simply not going to happen. Italy for example, currently spends 1.5%, set to reach 1.6% in 2027. Thus the 5% target is for most current NATO members an utter pipe dream. And if you were an ordinary NATO member, why would you ramp up NATO-related military expenditure when it looks increasingly unlikely that the US under President Trump would honour its Article 5 NATO Treaty obligation to come to the aid of a fellow member who suffers attack.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on February 15, President Zelensky of Ukraine called for a European army. This seems



unlikely to happen in the short-to-medium term and speaking on the margins of the Munich conference Taoiseach Micheal Martin said that a European army was not on the agenda. President Trump has initiated talks with Russia to end the war in Ukraine but has totally sidelined other NATO members – including EU NATO members – in the process.

“They appear unable to influence a situation crucial to their own security in a meaningful way”

France – the EU's only nuclear power since the departure of the UK following Brexit – convened an emergency meeting of 'select' European leaders in Paris to discuss the situation, but increasingly European Heads of State and Government (HOSGs) have an 'All the King's Horses' look about them – i.e., they appear una-

ble to influence a situation crucial to their own security in a meaningful way.

Critical

A head of steam had been building on the part of those who are highly critical of Ireland's long-standing policy of military neutrality. But when you ask them what precisely they want Ireland to do, or what organisation(s) they would like Ireland to join, they tend to be rather vague. Take the example of UCD Prof. Ben Tonra. In a recent column for the *Irish Times*, Prof. Tonra argued in favour of Ireland revisiting its policy of military neutrality. He rightly contended that in Ireland's case military neutrality has not equated to political neutrality. However, he sees our policy of military neutrality as being selfish, and not only that – in Ireland's case he believes we have elevated that policy into 'myth making'. I followed-up with Prof. Tonra in an effort to clarify exactly what he wanted us to do. In his reply he said he did not advocate joining any alliance, but that he felt it behoved us to engage more directly in EU

security and defence structure and planning.

I also contacted Prof. Eunan O'Halpin of TCD and he told me that he is not suggesting that Ireland would suddenly join NATO "in full combat gear" as he colourfully put it. But he does believe that Ireland needs to have as close a relationship as possible with those who defend us against military, air and naval threats. He also raised a question about how proponents of Irish unity would address the question of how best to protect all-island security.

“He doesn't believe Europe can any longer count on the United States. Importantly he also thinks that this won't end with Trump”

Prof. John O'Brennan of Maynooth gave me a detailed response. He told me he had been very much in favour

of Ireland joining NATO for most of the last two decades, not least on the basis of his knowledge of the Baltic States and Central and Eastern Europe. However, he said that he had somewhat changed his mind about NATO membership, to a large extent because he doesn't believe Europe can any longer count on the United States. Importantly he also thinks that this won't end with Trump.

Fraud

Prof. O'Brennan said he saw our neutrality as an imaginative fraud which we stumbled into but then embraced with vigour. He thinks we should cease the sanctimonious and holier than thou attitude when most of our peer states in Europe do more than we do in respect of money spent on international development and also commitments to international peacekeeping.

He would like to see Ireland participate in a new EU defence and security alliance, resourced by new EU borrowing, which includes a security guarantee similar to NATO's Article 5. He cited what he described as significant movement within the European Commission, with the appointment of a new Commissioner for defence plus significant resources being potentially moved into defence from unspent EU Multilateral Financial Framework (MFF) and 'Next Generation' funds.

Dan O'Brien of the Insti-

tute of International and European Affairs (IIEA) – a noted advocate for Irish NATO membership, could not be reached for comment – likewise Prof. Trine Flockhart of the EUI School for Transnational Governance who last year in an article for International Affairs noted that as well as being a military alliance, NATO also had a role as a community of shared values – which clearly no longer holds.

For now, Ireland should continue with its existing policy.

“The 'holier than thou' argument lacks traction, and in any event there is arguably plenty of 'holier than thou' sentiment to go round”

It is perfectly reasonable for academics and others to call for Ireland's policy of military neutrality to be kept under active review. The thing is that one can rest assured that the relevant Irish authorities are already doing that. After all, what are Brussels-based EU working groups for? The 'holier than thou' argument lacks traction, and in any event there is arguably plenty of 'holier than thou' sentiment to go round, including on the part of some of those clamouring for us to end our military neutrality.

For perfectly valid reasons Ireland didn't join NATO when the organisation was set up in the late-1940s. Back in the 1980s, I recall that the then Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs, Sean Donlon – hardly someone given to holier than thou attitudes – spoke to a group of young diplomats before they embarked on their first posting. Asked about Ireland's military neutrality, he saw it not as an article of faith but rather in pragmatic terms as a policy that had served the country well. That was sensible then and is sensible now, always allowing that we are in a much less settled period, geopolitically.

The best course for Ireland is to maintain military neutrality at least for the time being, while playing an active part in EU negotiations on new security and defence-related structures.

“It is perfectly reasonable for academics and others to call for Ireland's policy of military neutrality to be kept under active review. The thing is that one can rest assured that the relevant Irish authorities are already doing that”

Letters

Post to: Letters to the Editor, The Irish Catholic,
Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,
Dublin 18, D18 K277 or email: letters@irishcatholic.ie

Letter of the week

Being Irish and respecting minorities

Dear Editor, I was listening to RTÉ recently and heard the article on the Gay Pride protest march in Cork. The Gay Pride person being interviewed commented that she was not impressed by the number of pubs displaying pride flags, who had no interest whatsoever in the gay movement, but were cashing in on the event. We have come a long way from the time when only certain pubs were known as “gay bars”. She complained that the march was being commercialised. Surprise, surprise. The flags being displayed outside the pub set me thinking about minority groups. I came to the conclusion that in fact we are all members of one minority group or another. I recall being barred from well-known pubs for singing. Then I remembered there

were certain premises who declared themselves as “singing pubs”. I realise now, when I hear about the flags outside the pubs in Cork, they were only cashing in on the balladeers and the wandering minstrels. Now I realise, I have been a member of various minority groups and have been discriminated against, all my life, and never realised it.

As young fellas, we joined the local scouts and every week going to the meeting in uniform we were waylaid by a gang of youths who did not like us being different, as they saw it. At 12 years of age, when we were being confirmed as young Catholics, we made a promise [called the pledge] to abstain from alcohol. We were known as Pioneers and I kept that promise until I was 30 years of

age. The abuse and ridicule we had to endure included being referred to as being straight laced, judgmental, kill joys, wet blankets and incredible sulks. Next we joined the youth hostel association [An Óige] and headed off into the open air at weekends. We were laughed at as being friends of the earth, and tree huggers of the Glen Of The Downs type. At home we were an Irish speaking family. Like the lad from Cork, speaking on RTÉ we were very reluctant to come out until we found kindred spirits. Irish speakers were called the “Tá Sé’s” and accused of speaking Irish just to stay apart. But gradually we extended the network until we discovered the The Gaelic League [Conradh na Gaeilge], a safe haven in Hardcourt St. where we could speak Irish among ourselves

and not risk ridicule. We wore a gold ring in our lapel called “The Fainne”, so as to let other Irish speakers know we were prepared to speak the language. The scoffers referred to the fainne, [the gold ring] in pejorative terms too. We progressed to playing Irish traditional music. It was then that that we really came in for derision. People would pretend to play a fiddle on their arm and call us hillbillys for playing that awful diddily dye music. Like Gay Pride, Trad. Music eventually came out of the shadows and now boasts of Fleadh Ceoil na hEireann. If you think that litany of discrimination is bad enough, try and admit that you are a practicing Catholic. You will hear vitriol the likes of which you never heard before. If the Gay community feels it's a chilly place

for them, then Catholics are in the freezer. As I said we are all members of one minority or another. Majorities are made up of minorities coalescing together and forming a majority to oppress selected minorities. Think of it, we are all capable and sometimes have been guilty of forming a majority to oppress some group that we perceive to be out of step with what we regard of as the norm. Let us make a promise [take the pledge], whether we are Gay, Gaelgóir, Fiddler, Faith goer, Traveler or Teetotaler that we in our minority will not form a majority to discriminate against or oppress any group but embrace and celebrate diversity.

*Is mise, le meas,
Donnchadh Mac Aodha.
Roosky, Co. Leitrim.*

Open Letter to RTÉ

Mr Kevin Bakhurst
Director General RTÉ,
Dublin 4

Saturday March 1, 2025

Dear Mr Bakhurst,

As you know, I sent you an “open letter” the other week protesting on behalf of my colleagues in this Centre and myself at RTÉ's unbalanced coverage of the Ukraine war over the past three years, and the station's failure to inform its viewers/listeners of the historical background to that event.

If RTÉ had done the latter it would have shown that the Ukraine war need never have occurred but for USA and EU encouragement of the 2014 Maidan coup and their support for the Zelensky Government's determination to spurn Russia's legitimate concern over Ukraine's joining NATO, and its discriminating against its own citizens in its Russian-speaking eastern provinces.

I am writing now to tell you that that “open letter” has been posted to some two-hundred local media and opinion formers. It has been e-mailed to all the members of the Oireachtas. It has been sent also to the US Embassy here and to the offices in Washington of the American President and Vice-President, as it is relevant that they should know how one-sidedly Ireland's national broad-

caster is covering the peace efforts vis-a-vis Russia of the current Trump administration.

As a coda to my earlier letter, may I say that RTÉ current affairs programmers should be aware that such of their staple guest commentators on the Ukraine war seem quite incapable of giving a realistic analysis of these events. Worthy as these people no doubt are, your programmers should realise that they are Eurofederalist ideologues, advocates of EU militarization, and wholly unsympathetic to any meaningful Irish neutrality policy.

They are all, moreover, advocates for abolishing the solemn Triple Lock guarantee to the Irish people that was made by the Bertie Ahern and Brian Cowen Governments at the time of the 2002 Nice Treaty and the 2008 Lisbon Treaty referendums respectively – a guarantee that was recognised by the EU in the Seville Declaration.

It seems to be a reflex amongst RTÉ current affairs programmers that when it comes to covering the Ukraine war – or indeed international politics generally – they go out of their way to seek out foreign commentators who are sympathetic to NATO and to EU militarization, who are advocates of ever higher military spending, and are either explicitly or implicitly hostile

to Irish neutrality.

If I may repeat the key point of my earlier letter: it is about time that RTÉ joined the ranks of the peace-makers rather than the warmongers, and supported the traditional Irish State policy of a meaningful neutrality in foreign conflicts – a policy most Irish people desire and support.

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



Yours sincerely
Anthony Coughlan
(Associate Professor
Emeritus in Social Policy,
TCD)
Spokesman
The National Platform EU
Research and Information
Centre
Crawford Avenue,
Dublin 9

Catholic Mass deserves respect in media

Dear Editor, In the course of his article on the construction of the Panama Canal (*The Irish Catholic*, February 13, 2025) Peter Costello makes an interesting observation on the use, or abuse, of the “noun”. He cites two examples. Writing Jew for Jew reveals a “prejudice” and black American for Black American hints of racism.

We are not immune from such practises in print media, in some publications the Catholic Mass is always referred to as “mass”.

Firstly, the use is poor grammar, a common noun in place of a proper one, a bias perhaps? But certainly, to borrow Peter Costello's words in the above context, a “lack of real respect.”

Yours etc,
Patrick Fleming,
Glasnevin, Dublin 9

Letters to the Editor

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

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, March 6, 2025

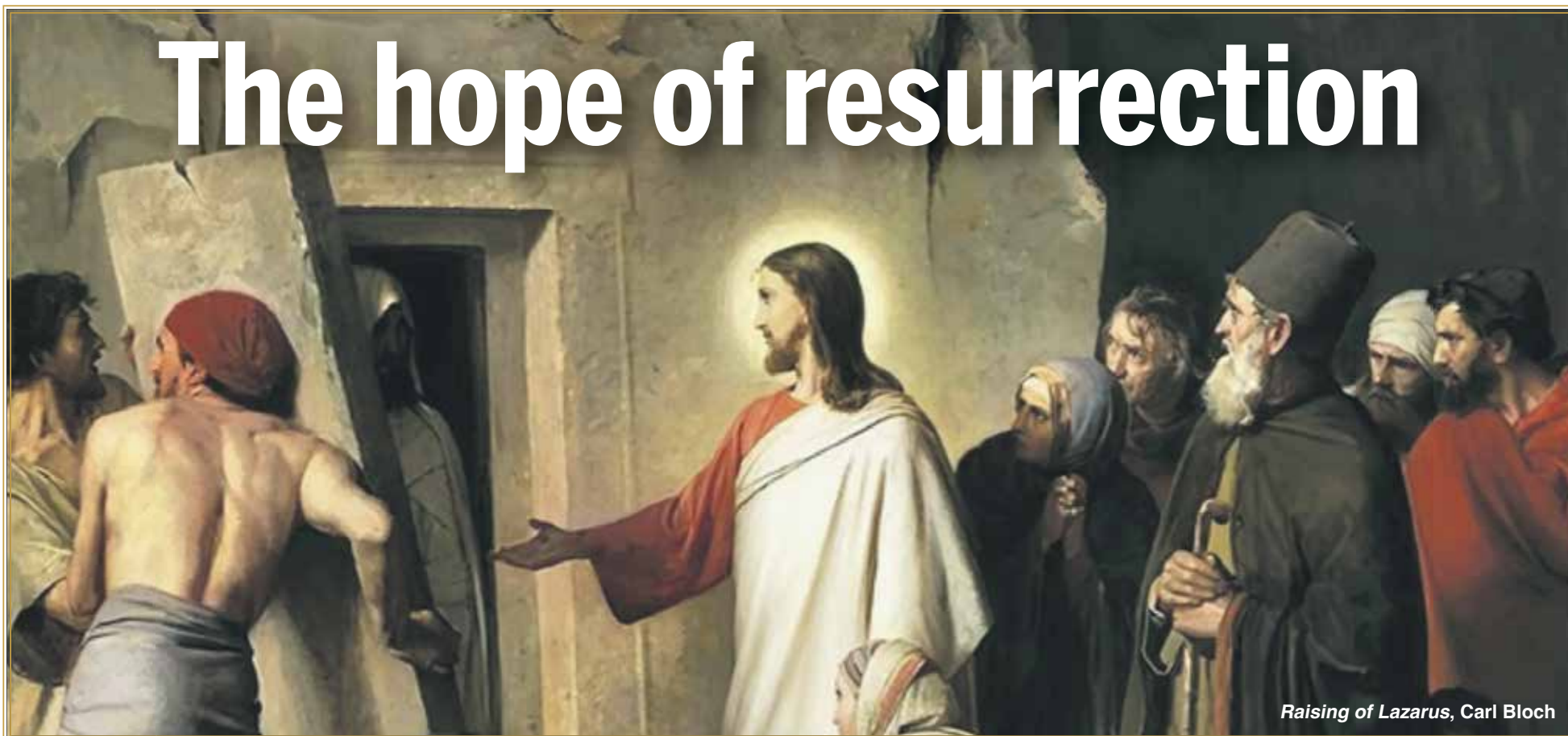
Love and
Faith as
fidelity

Ron Rolheiser

Page 32



The hope of resurrection



Raising of Lazarus, Carl Bloch

As a priest, I have the privilege of accompanying the dying, from the bedside to the graveside. Recently, while proclaiming the Gospel of John (11:1-44) at a funeral, a phrase stood out to me: “Come and see”. This phrase appears earlier in John’s Gospel (1:39) when Jesus invites the first disciples to follow him. But is there a connection between these two moments?

In John 1:39, Jesus invites his first disciples: “Come, and you will see”. This is more than a call to follow; it is an invitation to dwell with him, not in a physical place but in a deeper, interior reality. The Greek verb *horáo* in John’s Gospel conveys a deeper spiritual perception—a transformative vision—rather than mere physical sight, as implied by the verb *blepo*.

Communion

The disciples remain with Jesus, stepping into a communion that shapes their discipleship. This echoes his later words at the Last Supper: “Remain in my love” (John 15:9) and his promise that those who love him will become a dwelling place for the Father, Son, and Spirit (John 14:23). Jesus’ invitation is not to a geographical location but to a place of the heart—a state of abiding in him.



Discipleship is a journey of trust in Christ’s sacrificial love says, Fr Barry White

This abiding presence foreshadows a discipleship that involves walking with Jesus from intimacy, akin to that at the Last Supper, through the hour of the Cross to the empty tomb. John’s Gospel (1:39-41) states that the disciples stayed with him until “about the tenth hour” (around 4 pm), symbolising not only an entire day spent with him but also the very timeframe associated with his death on the cross and the time of his burial. This suggests that true discipleship calls for more than communion with Christ; it requires a willingness to journey with him through suffering, death, and ultimately, to the tomb in hope of resurrection.

In John 11:34, the phrase “Come and see” (*horáo*) appears again, but in a starkly different context. In contrast to John 1:39, where Jesus invites the disciples into communion with him, here, Martha and Mary invite Jesus into a place of

death: the tomb of their brother, Lazarus. In John 1:39, “seeing” is an entry into a deeper experience of Christ; in John 11:34, “seeing” does not just mean Jesus experiencing the tomb of Lazarus on a sensory level, enduring the smell, the sight of the stone and the body; it means Jesus perceiving our human experience of suffering and loss. This moment is significant: Jesus, the Word made flesh, does not observe pain from a distance but steps fully into it, embracing human experience.

Dialogue

Discipleship is a dialogue—a dynamic conversation between these two “Come and See” calls. It is a dialogue between Jesus calling us to life with him (John 1:39) and our invitation for him to encounter our experiences of darkness (John 11:34). In John 1:39, the disciples begin a transformative journey

with Jesus, while in John 11:34, he enters into human sorrow, showing that true discipleship requires us to welcome him into both our joys and our struggles. The Gospel calls us to communion with Christ, allowing the hope of his resurrection to speak into our moments of despair.

As Jesus approached Lazarus’ tomb, we are invited to welcome him into the dark corners of our lives—our pain, our wounds, and the “tombs” where we have trapped ourselves. The beauty of the Christian journey is that Jesus does not observe our suffering from afar; he enters into it and transforms it. The raising of Lazarus points toward the ultimate resurrection. The same Jesus who invites us to “come and see” in life stands before death and declares, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). In embracing both life and death, discipleship is a journey of trust in Christ’s sacrificial love, which triumphs over suffering and leads to new life.

Just as Jesus shares in our grief, the Church’s funeral rites mirror that compassion—revealing Christ’s presence in our experience of dying and rising. In their beauty, these rites encapsulate a hope that resonates with the transformative journey of baptism. The sprinkling of holy water recalls the waters of

baptism, the incensing of the coffin honours the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit, and the white pall reminds us that we are clothed in Christ. Yet, one often-overlooked ritual speaks profoundly to both our mortality and our hope—the tossing of clay onto the coffin at the Rite of Committal. As I gently let the clay fall, I recite the words from Genesis: “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. These same words resound in the liturgy of Ash Wednesday, as we receive the sign of the cross in ashes upon our foreheads—a reminder of our frailty and our need of God’s mercy.

Powerful

This simple yet powerful gesture grounds us in the reality of our weakness, our very being formed from the Earth. And yet, the clay also whispers of something greater—the promise of re-creation, the hope of resurrection. Just as Christ rose from the tomb, from the Earth, so too will we be raised. This paradox—of death and life, of dust and glory—is woven throughout the Gospel of John, calling us, again and again, to “Come and see”. In this Lenten season, may we embrace the journey with renewed faith, trusting that even from the dust, God will bring forth life.

The call to religious life



Bro. Denis Aherne
OFM

I'm a Franciscan OFM originally from Listowel in Co. Kerry. I want to share with you how God has worked in my life. On Sunday, February 2, I shared my vocation story at the Cork Cathedral for the Jubilee Mass of consecrated life.

"I write this as a witness to the fact that God is still calling people to religious life. We may be far fewer in number, and the religious life of the future will be very different. But that is all part of God's plan"



Icon made by Bro. Denis Aherne OFM

I was born totally deaf in the right ear and with only slight hearing in the left ear. When I was 7 years old, my mum and some neighbours brought me on a pilgrimage to Knock. They prayed with me at the wall of the Chapel of the Apparition, touching my head against the wall.

Fields

Three months later, I was out in the fields near home. Suddenly, I heard the birds singing! I was so startled by this new world of sound that I hid until my mother found me. She took me to the doctor and the specialist, who were amazed and said it was a miracle. So, even as a child, I had an experience of

God's love and healing.

At the age of 18 years, I went on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje. This is where my interest in religious life really began. I saw many friars in brown habits praying around the shrine. I remember thinking I will not join the Franciscans, because I do not like their habit.

Our God has a sense of humour. Not only did I join the Franciscans, but for a time I even ended up as a tailor, making habits for the friars.

I joined the Order in Killarney. I did my Novitiate in the United States. I studied in Maynooth and Canterbury, and I have ministered in Galway, Athlone, Rome and Assisi.

I was assigned to Cork in 2021.

"I have pursued my interest in art and Iconography. The Order has encouraged me to develop my gifts, talents and interests"

I love the Franciscan charism. As a group of brothers, we follow Jesus, in the spirit of Francis. The Friars serve God's people in so many different ways. I have worked with young people, and I have been a carer for the elderly. I have pursued my interest in art and Iconography. The Order has encouraged me to develop my gifts, talents and interests. For example, now I am pursuing a course in Horticulture. This is based at the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of the Apostles at Ardfoyle. The course is so important to me, especially given Francis's love of God's creation and the challenge given to us all by Pope



Bro. Denis Aherne OFM icon painting

Francis in *Laudato Si* to care for the Earth – our common home.

Witness

I write this as a witness to the fact that God is still calling people to religious life. We may be far fewer in number, and the religious life of the future will be very different. But that is all part of God's plan. "Speak Lord, your servant is listening" (1 Sam 3:9).

I began with a story of my healing from deafness, as a

child. That was a physical healing. But many of us today can be a little spiritually deaf. We can be so busy and distracted that we can shut out God's call. Let's pray for the grace to really listen to God during this Jubilee year and to encourage each other in our different vocations.

That would be a real sign of hope for the world.

So, let's continue to pray for each other as we all try to witness to Christ, our hope.

Has God stopped calling people?

Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

Praying for vocations usually means praying for more priests. That's a good and necessary effort, of course, because without priests, there is no Eucharist.

But there's another vocation that may be even more endangered. And what's been happening in the Church – and in our culture – over the past few decades should prompt us to ask, Is monasticism disappearing from the Catholic Church?

Sure, most things run their course and few things last forever. But there have always been people who wanted to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ to its fullest degree, and monasticism has been the beating heart of the Church from the patristic age. St Anthony, considered the father of monasticism, left for the Egyptian desert around AD 270. He was not, however, the first to renounce the world to seek God in solitude.

Anthony first learned how to live as a monk from others who had gone before him. That wisdom has been passed down through the centuries. These holy men embraced the call to Christian solitude wholeheartedly. Along the way, they enriched monastic tradition and adapted it to answer the challenges of their own times. We may wonder why no one seems to be doing that today.

I recently spent the better part of a week there with the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, staying in one of the hermitages, and participating in the rhythms of their life. Because lauds, vespers and daily Mass are already part of my routine, I didn't expect to experience many differences when it came

to prayer. But there was something qualitatively different about praying the liturgy with people whose lives are centred around it.

When I returned to my simple hermitage, where there was no cell or wireless signal, both prayer and work came easily. Simply put, the life being cultivated there provides space to breathe. It provides a framework that facilitates divine encounter and spiritual growth.

Monasticism first emerged as a lay movement focused on cultivating a deep and radical love for both God and neighbour. Offering a concrete path to those who aspired to perfection in following Christ, early monastics lived lives marked by penance and asceticism.

Has God stopped calling people into solitude? No. But we have created a culture in which it is nearly impossible for people to hear that calling or answer it. Today, most of us struggle equally with community and solitude. Our radical individualism, deeply disordered attachments, and insatiable appetite for attention make it harder to consider a monastic vocation.

The future of monasticism in the Catholic Church is doubtful, even dire. That is a tragedy because the culture we live in is destructive to the human search for God, the interior quest that has been safeguarded by monasteries throughout history. As we struggle with complexity and division, the Church needs monastics more, not less. And the world? Even more so.

i Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is a Catholic convert, freelance writer and editor, musician, speaker, wife and mom.

We must look up to the cross



Peter Kasko

I was in the shop earlier this week. As I was putting the items away, I nearly walked out without paying. A funny conversation ensued and at one point the cashier said: “Nothing in this life is for free.” I simply nodded while tapping my card away, and she continued: “Or in the next life, for that matter.” As I walked out of the shop and back to real life, her words lingered in my mind.

Every major religion has a teaching about the afterlife. There is something after, there is something more. What intrigued me was the notion that, whatever the afterlife may be, it may come with certain conditions – as the cashier suggested, nothing is for free. Looking at this from our Catholic perspective, it would simply mean that I cannot fully enjoy the fruits of Heaven without giving something back, without having to pay for it. But is this true? Our understanding of Heaven is, in simple terms, that of eternal joy and love, closeness with our Creator while looking at Him face-to-face. No veil, nor cover. Only songs of praise with the heavenly choir of angels and saints.

However, our work is carved out in this life. That enjoyment of Heaven is indeed paid for, not in the next life, like the cashier suggested – it is hard-fought and worked for on Earth. It is a combination of acceptance, forgiveness, faithfulness, boldness and perseverance.

To avail of the ‘discount’, I must accept that there is something to be acquired. In our case, that something is eternal life. Accepting that I alone am not enough to reach Heaven, that I alone cannot overcome the hurdle of sin and ultimately spiritual death. Yes, life is the price you pay, and death is the prize you gain. What then is the discount if not Christ’s death on the cross?

Answers

We must look up to the cross for some answers. We take our daily crosses and journey through this life. As you have surely been told before, acknowledging our sin and sinfulness is the metaphorical first step. The important bit that comes after is not to dwell on those shortcomings. Being able to forgive oneself is an essential part to gain true freedom from shackles of bondage. Admit your sin, reconcile with yourself and then seek forgiveness.

Seeking God’s forgiveness is part of

“As far as salvation is concerned, the power of man is shown to be limited in itself”



Vicente López Portaña,
Adoration of the Trinity.

being faithful. God said it through the prophet Jeremiah: “I am a God close at hand, and not a God who is distant” (Jeremiah: 23, 23). God yearns for our companionship, he wants us to talk to him, to have a chat like we would with a friend. That is the intimacy and depth the God is willing to offer. All we need is to extend our hearts and accept. Faithfulness is also about trust – trust in God’s providence and mercy. Which leads into the image of being bold!

“Be like children”, Jesus told His apostles. I like to think of this as childish boldness. In two ways. First, be like a daughter and son that fully and

unconditionally relies on their parents. Feeling of security; when my parents are around, I am not afraid.

Secondly, boldness in asking. We are told time and time again to ask and we shall receive. “A good measure, packed together, shaken down and overflowing.” (Lk 6) Of course, the challenge is to accept when we are told no, like a child being denied sweets before dinner. We don’t always understand ‘the why’, but keeping in mind ‘the where’, ie. Heaven may help in accepting the rejection.

Perseverance

And the circle is coming together in perseverance. In other words, learning to push the ‘repeat’ button. Samuel Beckett famously wrote in his story *Worstward Ho* (1983): Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. In

our case, I would suggest to ‘fail closer to God’. Every time we fall and stand again brings us closer to God. Or at least so it should!

And what a better time of the year to practice this cycle than this Lent? St Gregory of Narek, abbot, simply lays out what we all know: “As far as salvation is concerned, the power of man is shown to be limited in itself.” Yes, the cross comes into play as I, a simple human being, cannot do it alone. Just as Advent brings us closer to the mystery of God’s incarnation and coming to this world, Lent is the period set aside to dwell on the topic of salvation. Life, death and resurrection – the necessary cycle.

I invite you this Lent to reflect on the ‘repeat’ button. To reflect on your sinfulness and to accept

Smile, it’s Lent

Bill Dodds

How are you supposed to have a happy Lent, a liturgical season that, to quote the glossary of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “is the primary penitential season in the Church’s liturgical year, reflecting the 40 days Jesus spent in the desert in fasting and prayer”?

The point is learning how to see. We’re like the blind man that Jesus had to work on twice. “The point,” the New Jerome Biblical Commentary explains, “is that the man’s return to sight is gradual, at first not completely perfect.”

We understand what we’re supposed to do for Lent, but what Lent can do for us may be a little fuzzy. And as that comes into better focus, as our own ‘blind spots’ grow smaller, happiness and joy become more apparent. You may notice:

1. You can be God’s little helper. Lent isn’t just a time for repairing what you’ve failed to maintain. It can be a time for refurbishing, revising and revitalising.

The praying, fasting, abstaining, almsgiving and private, personal sacrifices can help you better see not just who you are, but who you can be.

2. You can finally conquer that small, pesky, stubborn, sinful habit of yours. Well, maybe not conquer but at least tame.

3. You can enjoy a daily sense of accomplishment over those 40 days. Each day, with each prayer said or each latte skipped, is a victory – brick after brick in the road that can lead you forward in wisdom and grace.

And then that string of repeated good actions becomes a deeply ingrained virtue. You rely on daily faith, hope and love. On kindness, patience, temperance and so many others.

i Bill Dodds is the author of *On Your Pilgrimage Called Grief: A Guide for Widows and Widowers*.

God’s forgiveness. To reflect on your faithfulness and accept the childlike boldness hidden in each of us. St Columbanus invites you and me to go deeper in our relationship with God. To be more personal, intimate even, because God is close at hand and he, like our heavenly Father, gives us that undivided attention and provides us with much needed relief.

Finally, I invite you to persevere in prayer. And I pray with you that this period of reflection may be fruitful and encouraging, overflowing with graces and blessings, in your journey to Heaven.

i Peter Kasko is a core team member of Living Water prayer group, which meets every Wednesday at 7:15pm in St Teresa’s Church, Clarendon Street, Dublin, and has a passion for Theology and Patristics.

The Catholic artist, custodian of the Beatitudes



Songwriter Sarah Kroger sings during Eucharistic adoration for Life Fest at the DC Armory in Washington January 19, 2024. Photo: OSV News/Jeffrey Bruno, Knights of Columbus.



Pedro Esteva

In the rapid turns of the news cycle, it is easy for some stories to be overlooked. Recently, the Catholic world has focused on the hospitalisation of Pope Francis—and rightly so. Yet amid these headlines, another message quietly emerged: a declaration of the Jubilee for Artists.

In a homily written for the occasion, Pope Francis called for artists to be “custodians of the Beatitudes”, referencing the version from the Gospel of Luke, which includes both blessings and warnings:

“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh... But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.” (Lk 6:20–21, 24–25)

Beauty

Pope Francis highlighted this contrast between blessing and woe, urging artists to inhabit this tension. Artists are those who recognise the echo of God’s grandeur in creation and reveal truth through beauty – called to be prophets, witnesses, and guides. The Pope makes clear that “Artists engage in discernment about the various echoes of the events of the world and help others to do the same.”

Similarly, Marshall McLuhan, the ‘prophet of the digital age’ and a devout Catholic, described artists as “probes” who venture into the uncharted and blaze new trails. Art then is not a luxury but a spiritual necessity. And the mis-

sion of the artist is not one of distraction or fanciful escape but one deeply rooted in reality.

A press dedicated to fostering such artists is Wiseblood Books, a Catholic publisher committed to cultivating works that engage with truth, beauty, and the great literary tradition. Mary Finnegan, Deputy Editor of Wiseblood Books, emphasises this vision:

“The role of art is to reflect reality... And reality is sometimes shocking and terrifying, it is sometimes excruciating, filled with sorrow and suffering and loneliness.”

This is why Catholic artists have never shied away from depicting the harsh reality of humanity in a fallen world. From Flannery O’Connor’s darkly comic and grotesque yet grace-filled stories to Graham Greene’s psychologically rich portrayals of conflicted faith, their works refuse sentimentality, embracing instead an often shocking yet ultimately redemptive portrayal of grace—grace as something to be grappled with.

“True hope is interwoven within the drama of human existence. Hope is not a convenient refuge, but a fire that burns and irradiates light, like the word of God”

Even in imaginative worlds, Catholic writers have confronted the weight of history, free will, and redemption. JRR Tolkien’s legendarium reveals the slow, costly triumph of good over evil, while Walter M. Miller Jr.’s *A Canticle for Leibowitz* explores faith and human folly in the post-apocalypse. These works, though vastly different, share a fundamental understanding of the fall and the possibility of grace—a grace that, as Chesterton says, may at any

moment respond to the twitch upon the thread.

For Pope Francis: “True hope is interwoven within the drama of human existence. Hope is not a convenient refuge, but a fire that burns and irradiates light, like the word of God. Otherwise, ‘woe to us!’ The Lord’s warning is stern.” Ms Finnegan echoes this idea stating that both artists and audiences must be on guard against false hope in a world which promises us comfort and ease.

Art is not a solitary endeavour; it thrives in relation to a community. When asked about the role of patrons in the arts, Ms Finnegan said:

“We need to nurture communities that support artists and makers, as well as audiences... It is certainly important for Catholics to work towards creating a better world through politics, education, and charitable work, but the Church and her patrons have always provided support for the greatest art. Today, those with the means often focus on politics to the exclusion of the arts, which is, I think, imbalanced. Both are important, and nurturing good art can help create a culture that enhances human flourishing.”

Herlad

To conclude his homily, Pope Francis offered a call to both artists and audiences:

“Let the Gospel of the Beatitudes guide you, and may your art be a herald of a new world. Let us see your poetry! Never cease searching, questioning, and taking risks. True art is never easy; it offers the peace of restlessness. And do not forget that hope is not an illusion; beauty is not a utopia. Yours is not a random gift but a calling. Respond, then, with generosity, passion, and love.”

The invitation is clear. We are called to co-create with God. To make art that does not shy away from suffering but transforms it into hope. In this way, Catholic artists remain what Pope Francis calls them to be—custodians of the Beatitudes.

Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

Why can't non-Catholics receive Communion?

Q: We know that Our Lord loves everyone and thus would want to be as close to each person as possible. Can non-Catholics receive Holy Communion since this would help achieve the Lord's ultimate desire to be within the heart and soul of every human being? My spouse is an Episcopalian and refuses to receive Holy Communion with me at Mass because she feels the Church prohibits it. I have been unable to convince her otherwise. Is her position the prevailing one within the Catholic Church?

A: Your wife is correct here. Under ordinary circumstances, the Church does not allow non-Catholics to receive Holy Communion. But this discipline is not meant to “keep people away from Jesus.” Rather, it is intended to safeguard the integrity of the Church’s teaching on the Eucharist and to respect the conscience of everyone involved.

Starting with the root of the issue, the Catholic Church believes in the doctrine of the ‘Real Presence’, meaning that we believe that the bread and wine offered at Mass are changed into the body and blood of Christ in a literal sense. In technical theological terms, this process is called “transubstantiation.”

Most non-Catholic Christians do not understand Holy Communion in these terms. Many Protestant denominations believe that the bread and wine used in their Communion services undergo no change and all, but remain simply bread and wine in every sense, so that Communion is merely a reminder of Jesus’ last supper. Other denominations do have some concept of a real presence, but in a less full sense or in a less defined way than the Catholic teaching.

As practicing Catholics know, the Church has many laws and customs designed to reverence and safeguard the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and in the reserved Blessed Sacrament. For instance, we genuflect before the tabernacle when we enter a church, and we fast an hour before receiving Communion. And in the Latin Catholic Church, children are generally not admitted to Holy

Communion until they are old enough to understand what and who it is that they are receiving.

Reasoning along these lines, it is common sense that the Church would not want to administer Holy Communion to an individual – even another baptised Christian – who was not aware or did not believe that they were receiving the actual, literal body and blood of Christ. This would not be respectful to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, even if such a person approached Holy Communion in a spirit of goodwill.

And on the other side of the coin, the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is a fairly radical belief, and it would be unfair and ultimately un-pastoral to “force” this on someone who was not ready to accept it.

Looking more concretely at the Church’s law on the subject, Canon 844, 1 plainly states that: “Catholic ministers [i.e. priests and deacons] may lawfully administer the sacraments only to Catholic members of Christ’s faithful.”

Yet this same canon does go on to carve out a few limited exceptions. Most relevant to your question, Canon 844, 4 tells us that Protestants may potentially receive Communion or the other sacraments if they are “in danger of death” or if the local bishops discern that there is some “grave and pressing need.” But this is only “provided that they demonstrate the catholic faith in respect of these sacraments.”

This sort of situation, where a Protestant actually believes fully in our Catholic teaching on the Eucharist and is also at the point of death or in some similarly extreme circumstance, is certainly not the scenario you would see in an average Sunday Mass. But if a Protestant did believe fully in the Real Presence and wished to receive Jesus in Holy Communion in their ordinary everyday life, logically it would seem that the best thing for them to do is to begin the process of entering fully into the Catholic Church.

i Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News.



Love and Faith as fidelity



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

Several years ago, a friend of mine made a very unromantic type of marriage proposal to his fiancé. He was in his mid-forties and had suffered several disillusioning heartbreaks, some of which by his own admission were his fault, the result of feelings shifting unexpectedly on his part. Now, in mid-life, struggling not to be disillusioned about love and romance, he met a woman whom he much respected, much admired, and with whom he felt he would like to build a life. But, unsure of himself, he was humble in his proposal.

In essence, this was his proposal: I'd like to ask you to marry me but I need to put my cards on the table. I don't pretend to know what love means. There was a time in my life when I thought I did, but I've seen my own feelings and the feelings of others

shift too often in ways that have made me lose confidence in my understanding of love. So, I'll be honest, I can't promise that I will always feel in love with you. But I can promise that I'll always be faithful, that I'll always treat you with respect, that I'll always do everything in my power to be there for you to help further your own dreams, and that I'll always be an honest partner in trying to build a life together. I can't guarantee how I will always feel, but I can promise that I won't betray you in infidelity.

Fidelity

That's not exactly the type of marriage proposal we see in our romantic movies and novels, predicated as they mostly are on the naïve belief that the passion and excitement we initially experience when we fall in love will remain that way forever. His

is a mature proposal, one that doesn't naively promise something it can't deliver.

Moreover, beyond pointing us toward a more mature understanding of love, this is also a good image for how faith works. Faith too, in the end, is more about fidelity in our actions than it is about fervor in our feelings. Here's an example.

“I only need to be faithful in my actions, to not betray what I believe in”

When I was in the seminary, a classmate of mine set off one summer to make a thirty-day retreat. His aim was to try to acquire a faith that he would feel with more fervor, which would more affectively warm his heart. He suffered from what he described as a “stoic” faith, a gut-sense of God's reality and love, but one which didn't much translate into warm feelings of security about God's existence and love. By

his own admission, he lacked affectivity, fire, emotion, and warmth about his faith and he went off in search of that.

He returned from the retreat still stoic, though changed nonetheless: “I never got what I asked for,” he said, “but I got something else. I learned to accept that my faith might always be stoic, and I learned too that this is okay. I don't necessarily have to have warm and imaginative feelings about my faith. I don't need to be full of emotion and fire. I only need to be faithful in my actions, to not betray what I believe in. Faith for me now means that I need to live my life in charity, respect, patience, chastity, and generosity. I just need to do it; I don't need to always feel it.”

Feelings

Faith and love are too easily identified with emotional feelings, passion, fervour, affectivity, and romantic fire. And those feelings are part of love's mystery, a part we are meant to embrace and enjoy. But, wonderful as these feelings can be, they are, as experience shows, fragile and ephemeral. Our world

“We can't guarantee how we will always feel, but we can live in the firm resolve to never betray what we believe in”

can change in fifteen seconds because we can fall in or out of love in that time. Passionate and romantic feelings are part of love and faith, though not the deepest part, and not a part over which we have much emotional control.

“Love and faith are shown more in fidelity than in feelings”

Thus, unromantic though it is, I like the stoic approach that's expressed in the marriage proposal of my friend, particularly as it applies to faith. For some of us, faith will never be, other than for short periods of time, some-

thing that fires our emotions and fills us with warmth. We know how ephemeral feelings can be.

Like my colleague with the “stoic” faith, some of us might have to settle for a faith that says to God, to others, and to ourselves: I can't guarantee how I will feel on any given day. I can't promise I will always have emotional passion about my faith, but I can promise I'll always be faithful, I'll always act with respect, and I will always do everything in my power, as far as my human weakness allows, to help others and God.

Love and faith are shown more in fidelity than in feelings. We can't guarantee how we will always feel, but we can live in the firm resolve to never betray what we believe in!

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milán Morales

Conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

The Annunciation to Mary inaugurates “the fullness of time”. Mary was invited to conceive him in whom the whole fullness of deity would dwell bodily. The divine response to her question, “How can this be, since I know not man?”, was given by the power of the Spirit: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you.”

The Holy Spirit, “the Lord, the giver of Life”, is sent to sanctify the womb of the Virgin Mary and divinely fecundate it, causing her to conceive the eternal Son of the Father in a humanity drawn from her own.

Born of the Virgin Mary

“God sent forth his Son”, but to prepare a body for him, he wanted the free co-operation of a creature. For this, from all eternity God chose for the mother of his Son a daughter of Israel, a young Jewish woman of Nazareth in Galilee.

Throughout the Old Covenant the

mission of many holy women prepared for that of Mary. At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise that she will be the mother of all the living. After a long period of waiting the times are fulfilled in her, the exalted Daughter of Zion, and the new plan of salvation is established.”

To become the mother of the Saviour, Mary “was enriched by God with gifts appropriate to such a role.” The angel Gabriel during the annunciation salutes her as “full of grace”. For Mary to be able to give the free assent of her faith to the announcement of her vocation, it was necessary that she be wholly borne by God's grace.

The Immaculate Conception

At the announcement that she would give birth to “the Son of the Most

High” without knowing man, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Mary responded with the obedience of faith: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Thus, giving her consent to God's word, Mary becomes the mother of Jesus.

The Gospel accounts understand the virginal conception of Jesus as a divine work that surpasses all human understanding and possibility. The deepening of faith in the virginal motherhood led the Church to confess Mary's virginity even in the act of giving birth to the Son of God made man. Christ's birth “did not diminish his mother's virginal integrity but sanctified it.”

Jesus is Mary's only son, but her spiritual motherhood extends to all men whom indeed he came to save. Jesus is conceived by the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb because he is the New Adam, who inaugurates the new creation. From his conception,

Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit, for God “gives him the Spirit without measure.”

Divine life

By his virginal conception, Jesus, the New Adam, ushers in the new birth of children adopted in the Holy Spirit through faith. “How can this be?” Participation in the divine life arises “not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God”.

Mary is a virgin because her virginity is the sign of her faith and of her undivided gift of herself to God's will. It is her faith that enables her to become the mother of the Saviour: “Mary is more blessed because she embraces faith in Christ than because she conceives the flesh of Christ. At once virgin and mother, Mary is the symbol and the most perfect realisation of the Church.

From paragraphs 484 – 511.

Write your lenten Creed

Dt 26:4-10
Ps 91:1-2, 10-11, 12-13,
14-15
Rom 10:8-13
Lk 4:1-13

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Dominik Domagala



On this first Sunday of the new Lenten season, the Church, as always, presents the narrative of the three kinds of temptation that the Lord faced in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). The differing approaches of the Devil symbolise the various efforts the evil one employs to tempt and deceive us from what truly matters—namely, faith in God Almighty above everything else. While analysing today's Gospel from that perspective would undoubtedly be beneficial, may I offer you, dear reader, a different introduction to the Season of Lent this Sunday?

In today's sermon, I wish to reflect on a positive aspect of our Lenten observances rather than discuss how we might be tempted or deceived. The act of professing faith is present in all three readings; thus, it seems that this is where all our efforts should ultimately lead us.

The first profession of Faith

A faithful Israelite, who stood before a priest in the early spring, did so to offer the very first fruits of the Earth: "the priest shall take the panner from your hand and lay it before the altar of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 26:4). These words, along with what follows in the First Reading, express a marvellous Creed of the People of God, Israel, containing the three great promises of the Almighty.

The first is this: "My father was a wandering Aramaean," which a devout Jew is to recite during prayer (Deuteronomy 26:4). What does it signify? These words about the father of every Jewish person evoke the moment when God called the ancestors of the Israelites—the people without a land—to accept the promise of receiving one in the future. The second fact recalls the event when God liberated His people from the humiliating and devastating exile in Egypt. Lastly, the third invocation remembers the offering of the Promised Land to them, a place of freedom, fulfilment, prayer, and abundant life: "a land where milk and honey flow" (Deuteronomy 26).

The first five books of the Old Testament (Pentateuch, Torah) mainly discuss these three events in the history of the Israelites. Together, they express one ultimate truth: God entered human history. The Lord desired to become one with us, the Emmanuel. From

that point forward, a good Israelite, and subsequently every human person, should seek together for God who wished to become one with us along the way. I think this first profession of faith reminds us of what biblical faith truly looks like: it is not faith in a distant God, a God who is secret and impossible to be known, but rather, it is God close to His people, accompanying them and listening to their prayers and cries. It is God who "stands at the door and knocks."

The second Credo

This second profession of faith is articulated by Jesus himself and is directed towards the father of all lies: Satan. The latter is consistently unsuccessful in diverting Jesus from placing his entire trust in Heavenly Father. The pinnacle of that faith and confidence is encapsulated in Jesus' second response: "You must worship the Lord your God and serve him alone" (Luke 4:1-13). These words of the Saviour are a perfect paraphrase of the entire Decalogue and the essence of biblical faith (Exodus 20:3-5).

“Jesus’ profession reflects his total trust and surrender in the Father. Jesus obeys Him always because he knows that the Father loves him”

Subsequently, Jesus acknowledges not only the existence of God, the Creator of all things, but also reveals that His Father is the Only One, the Almighty! Moreover, this Heavenly Father is not distant from any of us! Jesus demonstrates and professes his faith in the Father! He also stands against everything that is inaccurate and unauthentic about God. The Lord rejects all the lies and deceptions imposed upon us by the Devil. Jesus' profession reflects his total trust and surrender in the Father. Jesus obeys Him always because he knows that the Father loves him.

Profession of St Paul

The final biblical Credo is presented to us by St Paul, who, in his Epistle, writes: "Jesus is the Lord" and "God raised him

from the dead" (Romans 10:8-13). That is what Christians of all centuries believe! We believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, in his Resurrection, and that he frees us from every sin, death, evil, and the one who always deceives. This most ancient profession of faith, expressed today by St Paul, is repeated in every Mass and liturgy as the ultimate witness of the true faith of the Church. The same God who, throughout the centuries, spoke and directed human paths towards the fulfilment of all promises is now visible and fully discoverable in the Resurrected Christ.

Your Creed

These forty days of our Lenten observance serve a particular quest: we should actively use this time to renew our faith. Yes, we must always purify it of everything that makes it a caricature of what is true. But especially now, we need to cultivate a more constant care for our faith and to eliminate those aspects that weaken and distort it. How can we make this happen?

It is abundantly clear: we **MUST RETURN TO THE CENTRE!** Our faith is akin to using a magnifying glass on an object. Notice that only when you look through its centre is the object clear and sharp. If you slide and observe from the edges of the glass, the object becomes increasingly distorted. The same applies to our faith.

Only Jesus Christ can be, and indeed is, the centrepiece of our faith. Only by looking at and reflecting on our lives and experiences through Him can we truly understand and see clearly. The more we distance ourselves from this centrepiece, the more distorted our view of faith becomes. Consequently, we fixate all our attention on what is secondary, distant, and distorted, far removed from what is truly relevant.

However, when we draw as close to Jesus as possible, we begin to see the world around us without deceit. We grow strong and bold, not afraid of what we may observe inside and outside. Why? Jesus removes everything that makes us fearful and anxious. He conquers the evil one who seeks to deceive us. Ultimately, He directs our gaze toward what we pray for, fast for, and give alms for. And you? Who do you believe in?

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St Paul, Antonio del Castillo Saavedra

What does Hope mean?

Dermot Byrne

As we approach the month of March and the much longed for stretch in the evening begins to make its presence felt, we can justifiably start to think about spring. Awaiting tender shoots, daffodils and the subtle hint of green that will soon return to the canopies of the woodlands, our minds are cast ahead to the coming months. Some may even be bold enough to hope for a warm and balmy summer, although based on the last few summers that may be foolhardy, nonetheless one can hope!

This human propensity to mentally vacate the present to imaginatively dwell in some future time is emblematic of our nature as creatures of hope. While people vary greatly as to how hopeful or pessimistic they are, I reckon even the self-professed pessimists among us secretly hope that the disappointments they anticipate might not come to pass.

2025 is a Jubilee of Hope in the Catholic Church and so it seems an opportune moment to reflect on hope itself. What is hope? Is it something you have, or something you do, a noun or a verb? What is Christian hope? In general, it is probably fair to say that hope is thought to be a good thing, but not always. In the aftermath of some disappointment, say losing a sporting final, a manager or player might be heard to say, 'it is the hope that kills you'.

Sentiment

This sentiment is one that chimes with the thought of 19th Century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche when he proclaims that hope is, "the worst of all evils, because it protracts the torment of men." What I understand Nietzsche to mean by this is that hope deceives people with the illusory promise of a better future. Even more vehemently, Nietzsche rejects religious, and specifically Christian, hope. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* he writes, "remain faithful to the Earth and do not believe those who speak to you of extra-terrestrial hopes... they are despisers of life" Is

Nietzsche right or does he at least have a point? Can thoughts of eternal bliss spoil or degrade the present?

“This hope is something transcendent, something which can never be fully realised in the here and now, nor can it disappoint in the here and now”

Another 19th Century philosopher and theologian, Søren Kierkegaard, wrote extensively on despair and anxiety but perhaps unsurprisingly this also led him to reference hope on many occasions. He made a distinction between what he called "earthly hope" and "heavenly hope." Earthly hopes are the everyday hopes that a person might have. This hope is a future oriented sentiment that seeks a positive outcome. The hope of passing a driving test, meeting the love of your life, or winning a turkey in a Christmas raffle. These hopes are totally fine and normal to have but for Kierkegaard they cannot ultimately be an adequate basis for an enduring hope. This makes sense, if you pass your driving test you cannot continue hope in that. If the raffle has concluded and someone else has won the turkey you don't continue to wait and hope that you might somehow be heading home with it anyway. Earthly hope, in Kierkegaard's perspective, is something that can only lead to despair. Misfortune, loss, and disappointment teach us time and again that earthly hopes are deficient and intermediary. We need something better.

Heavenly hope on the other hand is something different and better. Kierkegaard calls it "the voice of eternity" which dwells within us. This hope is something transcendent, something which can never be fully realised in the here and now, nor can it disappoint in the here and now. The various disappointments that we endure through our earthly hopes

Pope Benedict XVI greets pilgrims on Mary Ward 400th Jubilee, October 2009.



point us towards heavenly hope, the more we understand the deficiency of our everyday hopes the more we realise we need transcendent hope. For Kierkegaard this transcendent hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is Christian hope.

Hope

In his New Testament Epistles, St Paul makes frequent references to hope. One of the notable things about Paul's description of hope is that he mainly refers to it as something to have, rather than something to do. In this sense it comes across more as a noun than is the case with everyday earthly hope which is more of a verb. In his earliest letter, written to the Church in Thessalonica, Paul addresses the concerns of those whose loved ones

have died before the much anticipated second coming of Christ. He reassures them that when Christ does come again those who have predeceased them will be the first to be raised up to be with the Lord forever. He tells them this, "so that you may not grieve as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Additionally, in his Letter to the Romans, Paul outlines, "For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Romans 8:24) This verse somewhat confusingly refers to waiting patiently in hope but also having already been saved in hope. A broader reading of Romans will make it clear that having been saved through the death and resurrection of Christ is the basis for having hope. Patiently waiting in hope for the second coming of Christ is something that can only be done because we already have hope because of His first coming.

The Letter to the Hebrews refers to hope in Jesus as a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul." (Hebrew 6:19)

If eternal life and communion with God is the object of our hope then Hebrews has an existentially significant promise to make which really does transform our present reality.

“Faith draws the future into the present. Our hope is one of confident expectation from the position and perspective of having already received”

It announces that, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi* gives a highly sacramental interpretation of this verse. He states that if the things that we hope for are eternal life and communion with God, then through faith in some tentative and embryonic way, these things are already present within us. The things of our future, our true and com-

plete life with Christ, come to inhabit us in our present time. Faith draws the future into the present. Our hope is one of confident expectation from the position and perspective of having already received.

Effect

As for suggestions that this sort of hope would cause one to become indifferent to the present and to engage in mental escapism, it should have the polar opposite effect. The promise that this sort of hope is based upon should be an impetus for action in the world. When through faith and hope one has glimpsed the true and full life, the privations of the present are viewed as aberrations which must be addressed. To paraphrase CS Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, the Apostles who converted the Roman Empire and the English Evangelicals who abolished the slave trade all left their mark on the world precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven.

i Dermot Byrne is a carpenter and theologian. He is a graduate of KU Leuven and Yale University and writes on religion, politics, and culture.

“If the things that we hope for are eternal life and communion with God, then through faith in some tentative and embryonic way, these things are already present within us”

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



Epic and dramatic tales of Faith

It's a tale of beginnings and endings this week!

I enjoyed the first episode of the new biblical series **House of David**, launched on *Amazon Prime* last Thursday. I'm not a great fan of biblical epics – they often opt for spectacle rather than spirit, so the Bible, I'd suggest, is better read than seen! Much is made of the clash with Goliath – it starts the first episode but then we get flashbacks to David's earlier life and a retelling of the history of King Saul and his prophet Samuel. It can be confusing at times, but that keeps the brain working. The production values are high and the cinematography impressive, but there is a little slackness in the pace, while the dialogue can be a little stiff, but it is considerably more engaging, so far, than Amazon's *Rings of Power*.

While the battles scenes are relatively restrained there's still quite a bit of bloodletting and slaying, much of it in the name of God. I'm not so sure if the series will inspire young people today towards faith, though they might enjoy the adventure, especially in a time where epics like *Lord of the Rings* are so popular. What is it about swords and sandals? On the plus side there is a lot on search for mean-



A scene from *House of David*

ing as David tries to discern his purpose in life. There are people eager to do the will of God and to make sacrifices in the process. Samuel gets tough with King Saul who has let power go to his head and effectively turned his back on the Lord. He accuses him of twisting the throne to his own glory and withdraws the blessing of God from him. The theme has obvious resonance for current day politics. In the scene where Samuels lambastes him in public, King Saul says "speak with me alone", and when they are alone says "You scold me like a boy". I was reminded of last Friday's bust-up in the Oval Office, one of the most dra-

matic and depressing scenes of the week.

Last week saw the end of the 6th season of Chris Lang's drama series **Unforgotten** (ITV), though it will probably turn up soon on an Irish channel, so I'll avoid significant spoilers. The usual pattern is for a past crime to be unearthed and an investigation to follow, leading to a range of possible culprits who thought they had got away with it. One of the key moments in every series is when the detectives catch up with the suspects – imagine seeing your past walking up the driveway to hold you to account! Apart from being well plotted the show is full

of genuine humanity. For example, in this series there's a touching reconciliation scene between two sisters. The villains are rarely if ever malevolent nasties, rather three-dimensional characters who took very wrong paths and may have rebuilt their lives, but on sand.

I felt there was a jaundiced edge towards religion in this latest series. One of the characters lives in Cork, she goes to church and prays, but is having a casual affair with the local priest – he's quite an unpleasant character. She's a part vulnerable, part brash anti-abortion right-winger with a mouthy slot on a channel resem-

PICK OF THE WEEK

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday March 9, 11:30am

The Lord's Prayer: Sean Fletcher explores the depth of meaning in the prayer spoken by billions every day and meets people whose lives have been profoundly changed by its words.

MOTHER CABRINI

EWTN Sunday March 9, 9pm

An EWTN original movie on the life of St Frances Xavier Cabrini, who founded the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and established missions around the world.

FILM: A HIDDEN LIFE

RTE 2 Friday March 14, 10:15pm

Based on real events, the story of an unsung hero, Blessed Franz Jägerstätter, who refused to fight for the Nazis in World War II. Director: Terrence Malick.

bling *GB News* – not subtle! It's rather preachy with its political points, heavy with its LGBT support, and while, surprisingly, it seems to be critical of cancel culture, it is ultimately rather ambiguous about it. On the plus side Irish actress Sinéad Keenan does really well, again replacing Nicola Walker from earlier series, while Sanjeev Bhaskar is consistently engaging as DI 'Sunny' Khan.

Finally, another drama series **Miss Austen** (BBC One) also ended last week. This was a wonderful tale of Jane Austen's sister Cassandra trying to retrieve letters from Jane to a friend when the latter has died. The let-

ters form the basis of several flashbacks to Jane and Cassandra's younger days. In many ways it's an old-fashioned costume drama with all the minor intrigues and shaky relationships of any Jane Austen novel. It is slow moving but very emotionally intense. Keeley Hawes holds the screen as the older Cassandra – another marvellous performance from her. Like many Austen novels, it features a silly young clergyman (remember Mr Collins!) but there are some good, though older clergy as well.

Keep a lookout for this as it will probably turn up on an Irish channel before long.

Music

Pat O'Kelly



A gentle and charming approach to music

One of the Czech Republic's leading ensembles – the Prague Symphony Orchestra – was founded in 1934. The band made its first Irish appearance at the NCH earlier this month in a programme that, not surprisingly, made the music of Antonín Dvořák its main feature under the baton of principal conductor Tomáš Brauner.

The evening opened with Dvořák's symphonic poem *The Noonday Witch* and ended with his *Symphony No 9* (From the New World). In between Russian violinist Alexander Sitkovetsky was the soloist in the *Tchaikovsky Concerto*. The event was part of the NCH's 2024/25 Interna-

tional Concert season.

While the audience was enthusiastic in its response, I confess I found the concert something of a damp squib. Maybe the orchestra's current taxing tour was taking its toll on the musicians, but I was certainly disappointed with performances that I considered to have a 'lack lustre' quality.

The programme began with Dvořák's *The Noonday Witch*, a short symphonic poem of 1896 that rarely gets an airing here. It re-creates a tragic sequence of fairy-tale events where a mother is anxiously preparing lunch. She is being constantly distracted by her annoying brat and threatens to call the witch who immediately answers

the summons and demands the child.

A clock strikes noon and the 'small, brown and wild-looking' creature disappears. The father arrives home to find his wife unconscious with their child suffocated in her arms. Maybe the musicians were becoming bored with the repeated playing of the tragic tale. I know I was even after hearing the piece once. Not the best Dvořák, I thought.

Fortunately the Prague musicians' playing in the *Symphony* had far more panache and the orchestra's reaction had a spring in its step even if I am sure it has played the *New World* far more often than any other work in its extensive rep-

ertoire. Maestro Brauner's interpretation had an agreeable lightness of touch.

Tchaikovsky's completed his *Violin Concerto* in a four-week period in 1878 and that included writing a second slow movement when the composer and a number of his friends were dissatisfied with his first thoughts. He later published his original ideas separately.

Alexander Sitkovetsky took a gentle approach to the music with his atmospheric opening particularly affecting. There was plenty of genuine delicacy in his slow movement with an expressive beauty in his phrasing. The flashing finale brought a definitive rise in excitement.

Sitkovetsky used an Anto-

nio Stradivarius fiddle of 1679 loaned to him by a very generous and anonymous sponsor. Maybe the delicacy of the instrument had something to do with the soloist's sound momentarily disappearing from time to time.

This year has a special significance for the French composer Maurice Ravel as it celebrates the 150th anniversary of his birth in 1875. The NSO honours the occasion with a concert of his music on March 7th at the NCH. The programme includes his *Mother Goose Suite*, *La Valse* and *Bolero* – a piece loved by my late father. The soloists in a number of Ravel's songs will be mezzo Julie Boulianne and baritone Lionel Lhote. Speranza Scappucci conducts.



Tchaikovsky



BookReviews

Peter Costello



The journey of faith reflected in insightful and moving poems

**This Glowing Place:
New & Selected Poems**
by Pádraig J. Daly
(Scotus Press, €15.00 /
£12.50)

John F. Deane

This exceptional book has been long awaited, and thoroughly rewards the reader. The cover image, of the Liffey and the city in the glimmering twilight, reflects the ecology of the poet's life and imagination, the inner urban parish where he serves.

A Waterford man from Dungarvan, now an Augustinian friar who works in the Liberties of Dublin, Pádraig J. Daly offers perhaps the most sustained attempt at serious religious poetry in Ireland.

And the mystery of the Incarnation, it's heartening results and promises as well as its sense of painful absence in our real lives, is at the core of this poet's seeking. And that seeking is done through a bright and truth-telling poetry, through the insights that a poem will throw up, even to the poet who has written it.

“Embedded in the work is a willed and constant sense of loyalty to the faith this poet/priest was born into”

The early poems offer an easy nostalgia for that innocent land we knew in our youth, when Roman Catholic Ireland moved like a 'Titanic' through untroubled waters. Daly's work, however, moves quickly into the Augustinian concept that all our living, and all creation, is praise of God.

In this sense he has offered his public a view of the Earth which has always been ecologically aware and anticipated the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*. Embedded in the work is a willed and constant sense of loyalty to the faith this poet/priest was born into; phrases from the work tell the tale: "in dogged loyalty"

"clinging to the myth". Then there is the title of some of the collections: "The Last Dreamers", "Afterlife", "Glimpsing More".

This may suggest that the dream of pilgrimage, of that voyage to a place apart, to a place within, has stalled: and that what is now needed is a willed loyalty to the early dream. Poems in the mid-life of the work, present the one deep and moving constancy that remains: the absent, or hiding, God, is still being addressed, with sadness and joy, a steady will to love, anger, or a transcendent hope.

Those of us who pray, "I believe, help my unbelief", will find consolation in the company of this poetry. Daly explores the task of the priest, aware of its difficulties in our time: "We belong out by the side of things;" and even more difficult in a deeply secular age, the work and prayer that keep the priest alive in hope, even in moments of great doubt: "though we / Point to Him and shout, / No one has any wish to hear."

Collection

The poems in this large and generous collection, are unique in offering, from the inside, the story of a journey in faith, from bright beginnings, through an acute awareness of the sufferings and wars of humankind, through periods of darkness, to new, almost mystical, trust and certainty.

This journey, charted by accessible, integrate, and beautifully wrought poems, constitutes a great treasure in this Selection of poems. This, from a poem called "Trust":

I am grateful for my life:
The kindness I feel, giving,

The kindness I feel, getting;

Sometimes strongly too and sometimes weakly,

I believe the life after life, the hosting of the dead,

A now, eternal, of rapture.

Daly's work as a priest has brought him an awareness of the details of his parishioners' hopes and problems, and the poems exhibit a sympathy and

empathy that has made him "a people's priest". This from "Love Letter":

Having no power to lift you from sorrow

I put my hope in Him who madly loves each living thing,

Who watches fretfully above our billion beds.

There is also a great source of pleasure to be found in the precise description of the joys of creation, grounding these faith-filled poems that brim with visioned details of the flora and fauna of both city and countryside, with a fine awareness of the darkness and suffering in the world.

“The poetry is finely and gracefully formed, carries within it a richly memorable language and metaphorical magic”

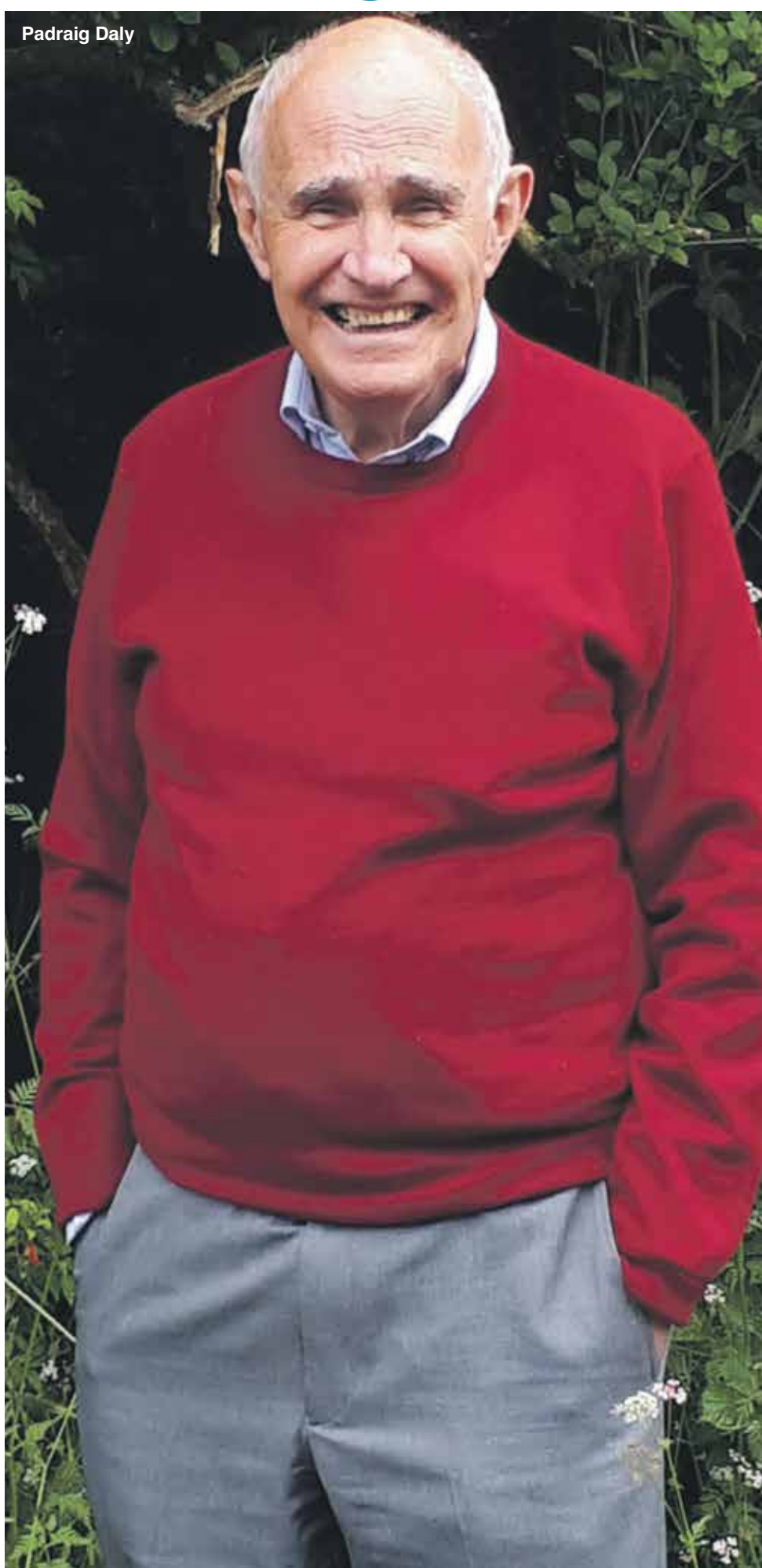
The new poems here bring about a most wonderful development in this priest/poet's faith and service, an almost serene and mystical hope in God in the midst of his own and our world's darkness. He writes how "some trivial trouble / Sweeps me back to You / And a certainty of Your nearness" ('Christos') and "Sitting in merciful shade, / I find You, / Unconfined by word or formulae, / Bursting through the glint and shadow / Of our dappled world."

In Daly's *New and Selected Poems*, the reader, believer or doubter, will find all the challenges and the joys of contemporary living presented in a human and unvarnished story of a life lived in the service of others.

The poetry is finely and gracefully formed, carries within it a richly memorable language and metaphorical magic; the book is beautifully produced, the span of the work magnificent.

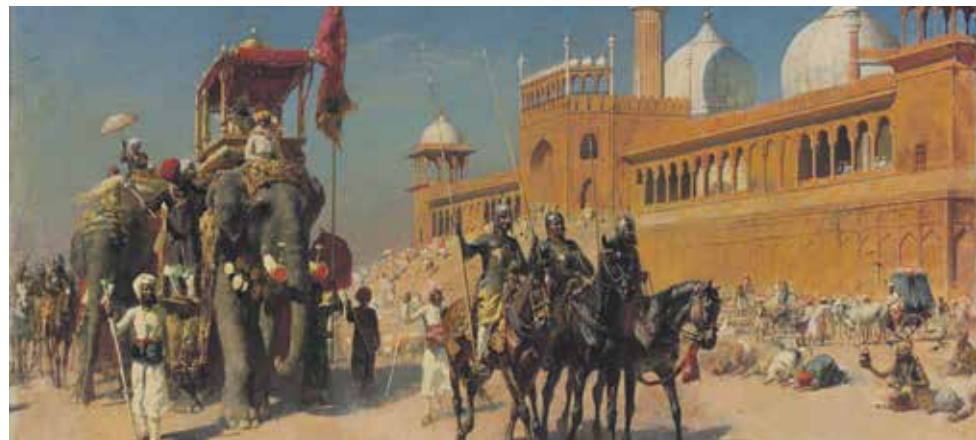
i John F. Deane is the founder of Poetry Ireland; his latest publication is *Selected and New Poems from Carcanet.co.uk* in 2023

Padraig Daly



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 impact of Asia on the first European travellers to reach India



Travellers in the Golden Realm: How Mughal India Connected England to the World, by Lubaaba Al-Azami (John Murray, £25.00 / €30.50)

Peter Costello

This is a most arresting book, though not always for the reasons the author may have hoped for. It was, it seems, originally to be published under a different title *First Encounters: How England and Mughal India Shaped the World*. Dr Al-Azami has worked on the intersection of English literature with the Orient in many areas, including Shakespeare.

Near the very start of the book the author describes the act of John Felton who posted up on the door of the bishop of London's palace the bull excommunicating Queen Elizabeth I, which he had brought from France, and was distributing secretly.

He was arrested and eventually done to death: "England's Catholic subjects had their first martyr", the author remarks. But Felton was very far from being England's first martyr under the Tudors - as indicated by the fact that his act of faith is recorded in the second volume of Bede Camm's *Lives of the English Martyrs*. The first volume was devoted to the martyrs under her father Henry VIII.

Disturbs

A small point perhaps, but it disturbs one: some history books are made up of small points, others of rapidly moving narratives. This book, a highly coloured account of the glories of Mughal India being its main intention, is one of the latter.

But the persecutions that some Catholics faced in England are not irrelevant to the

story the author tells. Her narrative is arranged around her accounts of a series of English men who travelled to India, some for trade, some for knowledge, others to spread the word of the gospels in an Islamic state; state rather than country, for India then as now, was a subcontinent with many varied religions, mostly polytheistic.

“The most interesting aspect of his four decades in India was his absorption in Indian culture and poetry - this is of course quite in keeping with Jesuits elsewhere, as in China”

Among her first travellers is Thomas Stephens, who went out on a Portuguese ship to India, later becoming a Jesuit. Avoiding the dangers of living as such under the rule of Queen Elizabeth he naturally preferred India. This was in 1579. The fleet he was on was attacked by English pirates, for in those days the English preyed on the Spanish and Portuguese ships coming from the New World, this was seen at home as patriotism; but by their victims as simple crime: such is the way of the world.

The author remarks on the violence of the Portuguese and Jesuits in striving to gain and sustain converts. Much, it might be said, as the Queen, back in England also used violence to sustain the established Church there.

But by far the most interesting aspect of his four decades in India was his absorption in Indian culture and poetry - this is of course quite in keeping with Jesuits

elsewhere, as in China.

He even wrote in an Indian language a long poem about the salvation history of the world called the *Kristapuran*, which Dr Al-Azami notes is still much admired by Indian litterateurs to this day. An account of India by Stephens was included by Richard Hakluyt in his famous compendium of English explorations in 1589, so laying the groundwork for further English incursions into these realms of gold and scent.

And it is to these later travellers and adventurers that the bulk of her book, with its vivid evocations of the India of the day, is devoted.

Attitude

Yet there remains a curious matter of attitude on the part of the author. Her book is dedicated "To Gaza", where she explains "Colonial violence continues to burn", which is fair enough.

But this rightly denounced Colonial violence belongs to the British, the Spanish, the Portuguese, Dutch and French Empires. Other empires whose record for violence is just as brutal, the Arab Conquest itself, the Ottoman Empire, the Central Asian Mughals in their descent upon and conquest of India, all are seen in a more benevolent light. Surely this cannot simply be that she considered the Muslim empires were among the "good things" of history irrespective of the cruelties involved.

The real heirs of Mughal India were indeed the British, when Queen Victoria was raised by her home government in 1877 to the grand title of Empress of India, a realm that had come into existence *de facto* in 1855. Irish readers will need little guidance to fit these dates into the course of Irish colonial history.

Sweetening the pill of economic change in Ireland



New men and new machines: Sugar Company workers in the mechanised mid-1970s.

The Carlow Sugar Factory: The Extraordinary Story of an Irish Industrial Icon,

by Christopher Power (Created by Alhaus for Carlow County Council Centenary Committee, supported by the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media; available gratis from Carlow Public Library; email library@carlowcoco.ie)

Peter Costello

To mark the centenary of the creation of the sugar factory at Carlow in 1924, in the first days of the Irish Free State, a County Council Centenary Committee has commissioned and published this important little book.

It is, however, one in which I have to declare an interest: this reviewer is a nephew of the late Lieutenant-General MJ Costello, who after his retirement from the Army was appointed the managing director of the Irish Sugar Co.

The story of that great national enterprise, created in one era of national pride, disappeared in the changed circumstances after 1970 when the first affects of what we now call globalisation began to be felt, is an important one. This book relates an important part of it through local history.

Sugar, of which the heavy tea drinking Irish put away substantial amounts, was originally imported largely from the British possessions in the West Indies. It was decided by the new state that it would be better if this imperial connection could be lessened. The technology of making sugar from beet was imported from Soviet Russia, which had no sugar producing colonies.

The Irish Sugar Co. had a set of factories. To an existing factory at Carlow were added new factories at Mallow, Thurles and Tuam. The author perhaps misses the full significance of the appointment of General Costello. Though he had indeed played a part in the revolutionary days of the founding of the state in the early 1920s, he had more importantly a more significant role in the defence of Ireland in what was known as "The Emergency".

He was one of the key men who moulded the new Irish army through three decades. He was a born leader and one of the few men in Ireland who had the experience and skill to command and lead large bodies of people to successful outcomes. The passage from military commander to

company director was a clear one. He was simply one of the few effective man managers on a large scale that the country had at its disposal.

Christopher Power gives a succinct and well informed account of the difficult early days of the original sugar firm. But in the late 1940s the new sugar company 'campaign', as it was called with carried over military terminology, was to lead on to new things, especially to the founding of Erin Foods, and the development of accelerated freeze-dried vegetables as the basis of new products for both the domestic market and for export. A range of vegetables were effectively added to the beet production.

The slow demise of the Sugar Co. is a sad business passed over here with discretion. He is more interested in what the firm meant over two generations to the people of Carlow, than with providing a verdict on famous international players so to speak.

In his final pages, the author writes, "This book has endeavoured to outline the development and background of the Carlow Sugar Factory. What is more difficult than relying on the basic facts is describing the human experience of thousands of people of every age who over eight decades operated this mighty enterprise."

Industry

Agriculture was then seen as the dominant industry in Ireland. Much thought and effort went into developing the social life of people on the land, in a way consistent with the social teachings that lay behind the creation of the new state, derived in many way from the insight of *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. These in time would come into conflict with ideas in the wider world in more recent days.

Mr Powers's book tells a part of the story, as did Michael Foy in his 1976 book on the industry as whole in Ireland. But as more materials come to hand to hand a much fuller story will eventually be told, which in effect will be the story of the modernisation and economic development of Ireland as a whole.

The Carlow factory closed in March 2005, following earlier closure of the other factories. Though many lament its passing, it seems that the feeling both in government and farming circles today is that there will be no future revival of what had been over those eighty years a world class industry.

Classifieds

The deadline for advertising in the classifieds is 10.30am, the Friday before publication. Contact the Classified Team on 01 687 4028 or email advertising@irishcatholic.ie

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Crossword Gordius 705

Across

1 & 10a Beautiful case-ment seen in most churches (7,5,6)

7 Perform a role in a play or film (3)

9 Quaint (4)

10 See 1 across

11 Hymn title "How Great ____ Art" (4)

14 Members of a gaggle (5)

15 Sign of a heartbeat often felt at the wrist (5)

16 Grew older (4)

18 A Cox's Pippin, per-haps (5)

21 The privileged few (5)

22 Which which you shave (5)

23 Group of 14 across in flight (5)

24 Corpse (4)

25 Take a sum owed (5)

26 Account or score (5)

29 Verdi opera (4)

33 Daggers or stilettos (6)

34 Minuscule particle (4)

36 Colorant (3)

37 With which to eat the sweet course of a meal (7,5)

Down

1 Old French coin (3)

2 The last word of most prayers (4)

3 Amphibian (4)

4 Move to music (5)

5 Has a glance (5)

6 It is worn round the waist or over one shoul-der (4)

8 Noisy bit of bad weather (12)

9 Film-making equip-ment used at the begin-ning of a take (12)

12 On the same side in a conflict (6)

13 Roman goddess of agriculture (5)

14 Prayer said before and after meals (5)

17 Small, ornamental garden building(6)

19 Sterling coin of small value (5)

20 Wear away (5)

27 Female relatives (5)

28 Hepatic organ (5)

30 Action (4)

31 Egyptian goddess (4)

32 International military alliance (1.1.1.1.)

35 Possess (3)



SOLUTIONS, FEBRUARY 27

GORDIUS No. 704

Across

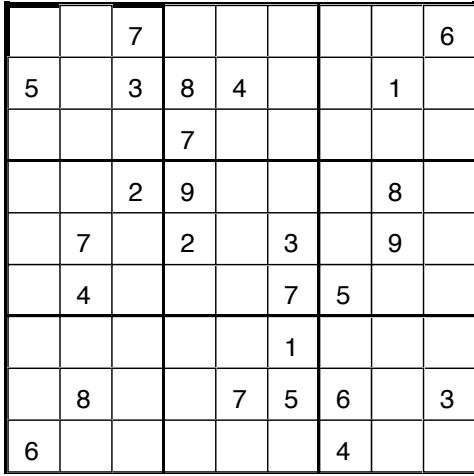
1 Set 3 Stone circle 8 Rarely 9 Arrogant 10 Olive 11 Snoop 13 Moses 15 Academy 16 Trample 20 Suing 21 Scarf 23 Fry-up 24. Memorial 25 Violin 26. Documentary 27 The

Down

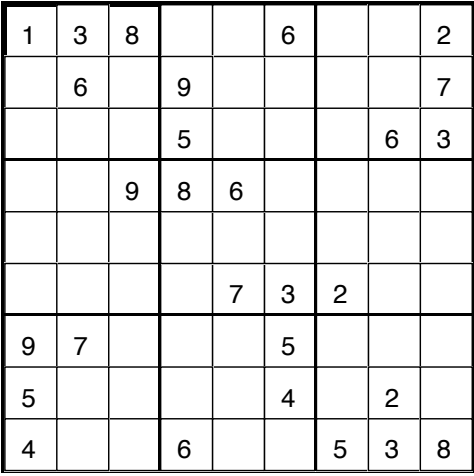
1 Sarcophagus 2 Tortilla 3 Salve 4 Nearest 5 Irons 6 Crayon 7 Eft 12 Peter's Pence 13 Mumps 14 Sprig 17 Poly-glot 18 Singlet 19 Tarmac 22 Forum 23 Fairy 24 Mad

Sudoku Corner 573

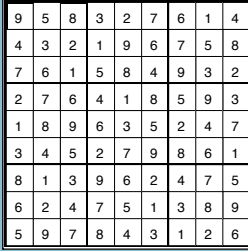
Easy



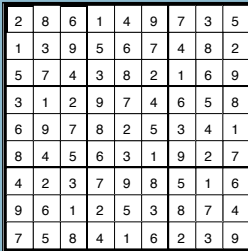
Hard



Last week's Easy 572



Last week's Hard 572



Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney

We have to be in this together

Back in the days of the Wild West in the United States, the primary means of transportation was the stagecoach. We've seen people riding in stagecoaches in Western movies. What we might not know is that the stagecoach had three different classes of tickets. However, the distinction between classes had nothing to do with the size of the seat or the kind of food served. Instead, it was about what was expected of the ticket holder in the event of the stagecoach encountering a difficult situation, such as a deep bog of mud or an incline too steep to negotiate.

If you had a first-class ticket, you could remain seated during the entire trip, no matter what happened. If you had a second-class ticket, you could also remain seated until there was a problem, but then you would be expected to get out of the coach until the issue was resolved. You didn't have to get your hands dirty – you simply watched as others did the work. However, if you had a third-class ticket, not only would you have to get off the coach, but you also had the responsibility of solving the problem. You had to help fix a broken wheel or push the coach through the mud or up the hill.



If I use the stagecoach as a symbol of our parish communities, it offers a striking—and perhaps somewhat harsh—reflection on the state of the Church today. The journey is difficult and challenging. Many of the reliable 'wheels' of the past have fallen off. It is harder to find drivers, at least the ones tra-

ditionally considered qualified. The only way we can get through this difficult journey is if everyone plays their part. Unfortunately, it seems to me that we may be carrying too many first- and second-class ticket holders.

Appreciate

I appreciate that there is a growing number of people who don't want to be on the coach at all and have chosen other forms of transport for their spiritual journey. Nevertheless, a significant number hold first- and second-class tickets, using the stagecoach to take them to their children's baptisms, First Communions, and Confirmations. The stagecoach

brings them to their weddings, their family funerals, and many other occasions and rites of passage. However, as holders of first-class tickets, they don't see it as their concern to help repair the coach or even to provide financial support to keep the show on the road.

Based on my own experience, I suspect that fewer than 25% of the passengers on the stagecoach contribute financially to the upkeep of the parish. While they expect all church facilities to be available when they request them, the other 75% assume that it is someone else's responsibility to shoulder the financial burden for all the passengers.

Beyond the financial aspects, there are quite a few first- and second-class ticket holders who are committed to their faith journey. Many of them attend Mass every

he doesn't mind pulling."
Prayer of St Teresa of Avila
Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours.
Yours are the eyes with which he looks compassionately on this world.
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.
Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands.
Yours are the feet.
Yours are the eyes.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.
Amen

weekend. They may even be among the 25% who financially support the parish but have no inclination to get involved when the stagecoach runs into mucky territory or faces an uphill climb. Not only do they shy away from participating in parish life, but they can also be very critical of those who do step up and live out their baptismal commitment.

Yes, priests were the traditional drivers of the stagecoach, but we all know that the pool of drivers is getting smaller and smaller. Our parish communities can only find new life if more people take up the challenge and develop a sense of responsibility for the future of our Church. Otherwise, we will be left with only first- and second-class passengers – either sitting idly in the stagecoach, going nowhere, or standing outside, watching the wreckage when the horses and drivers have all bolted or collapsed from exhaustion.

Team spirit

A man got lost while driving through the countryside. As he reached for a map, he accidentally drove into a ditch. Though uninjured, his car was stuck in the mud. He walked to a nearby farm for help.

"Warwick can get you out of that ditch," said the farmer, pointing to an old mule. The man was sceptical but agreed. The farmer hitched the mule to the car and shouted, "Pull, Fred! Pull, Jack! Pull, Ted! Pull, Warwick!" The mule pulled the car out with ease. Amazed, the man asked, "Why did you call all those names before Warwick?" The farmer grinned. "Old Warwick is nearly blind. As long as he thinks he's part of a team,



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In South Darfur, MSF is seeing one of the worst maternal and child health emergencies in the world. "Thousands of children are on the brink of death and starvation," writes MSF. "Newborn babies, pregnant women, and new mothers are dying in shocking numbers. And so many of these deaths are due to preventable conditions, but almost everything has broken down. The scarcity of functioning health facilities and unaffordable transportation costs mean many women and children arrive at hospital in critical condition. With the conflict now well into its second year, the needs remain enormous."

PLEASE HELP US TO CONTINUE PROVIDING VITAL CARE TOGETHER. WE CANNOT DO IT ALONE.

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

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In many places the only roofing chapels have is made of straw or other flimsy material which, as you may imagine, is easily damaged or destroyed in bad weather.

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