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Thursday, February 6, 2025

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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'Young religious couples will be our only hope'

Ireland's coming population crisis will not be solved by secular people new study claims

Garry O'Sullivan

Young people who embrace religions like Christianity that strongly value marriage and having children will form the future core of Ireland's dwindling population as their secular counterparts are less likely to marry and have children, the *Iona Institute* has said.

Ireland's fertility rate is just 1.5, below the replacement level of 2.1 and projected by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to fall further as marriages decline and couples, if they marry, get married later.

In a research paper released this week called *'Religion, Marriage and Fertility: Shall the Religious Inherit Ireland'* the Iona Institute, using CSO figures, argues that secular Ireland needs religious people to have children to stave off population collapse. It also argues that for society religion "promotes some of the most pro-social behaviour, that is, behaviour beneficial to society".

"There is now a wealth of evidence showing that religious practice is

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Derry Girls



The 18th Annual Pope John Paul II Award Ceremony was held in St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry on January 29. Bishop McKeown presented the award to 420 young people from all over the Diocese of Derry and beyond. This year, six people also received the Papal Cross Award. These young people came from 22 secondary schools across the diocese. They represented 47 parishes in the Diocese of Derry and 13 parishes outside the diocese.

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Young religious couples will be only hope in Ireland's coming population crisis

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associated with improved mental and physical health; lower rates of crime, lower rates of alcohol and drug abuse, more giving of time and money to charity, higher rates of marriage, lower rates of divorce and higher fertility levels."

CEO of the Iona Institute David Quinn says the coming demographic crisis has not received enough attention and it's time to talk about the positives of religious practice in our society. The report states that the outcoming of the "family" referendums point to the "influence of religiosity in anchoring people in a social outlook that is broadly supportive of the institution of marriage and the role of mothers in nurturing and raising the next generation."

Parishioners talk tradition on St Blaise Feast Day

Renata Steffens

On Monday, February 3 the Feast of St Blaise was celebrated, patron of throat illnesses, animals, wool combers and wool trading. In Ireland it was also the bank holiday for St Brigid. Parishioners gathered in St Canice's Church, Finglas Parish for 10am Mass and blessing of the throats afterwards.

Laura Maguire, a parishioner from Ballymun attending Mass told *The Irish Catholic* she thinks it is very important to keep alive Catholic traditions such as St Brigid's Cross making and the blessing of throats.

"Especially in this day and age, we need to go back to the old traditions. Don't fix what isn't broken," Ms Maguire

said. To keep these traditions alive and passing from generation to generation, it is important to bring more young people to Mass, she believes. A way of attracting young people is "music. [To bring] music into the church. Even the old sounds, old hymns. I enjoy Mass better when there's music."

Ms Maguire believes parishes need to advertise more. "Not a lot of people go to Mass, they will go into parades," like St Patrick's Parade and St Brigid's events. She believes the reason is that people don't know what the parish offers, like the blessing of the throats after Mass. "You only get the newsletter when you go into the church." For her, the parishes should send the

newsletters around by post.

Another parishioner said she is the only one of seven siblings who still attend Mass regularly. "Not even my children do," she said. Many representatives from the Syro-Malabar community were present for the Mass, many young families with children. The parishioner said that she feels the immigrants are more involved in Church life and "maybe their children will be the ones to teach Irish kids to go back to church."

One of those young families told this paper they go to Mass in the Syro-Malabar community but travel to Finglas every week for the weekly Mass in St Canice's. "We teach our children to frequent Mass," the couple said.



A student from St Joseph's CBS Nenagh, Co. Tipperary is pictured receiving the blessing of the throat from Fr Rexon. Fr Jofin and Fr Rexon of Nenagh Parish visited the school on January 31 and offered the opportunity for students and staff, to have their throats blessed, in advance of St Blaise's Day.

Irish healthcare attacks human dignity says Bishop Router

Renata Milán Morales

Bishop Michael Router, Chair of the Irish Bishops' Conference Council for Healthcare, has expressed his support for Pope Francis' message for the 33rd World Day of the Sick, to be celebrated on February 11. In his message, the Pope encourages the faithful to offer presence and care to those suffering. Bishop Router has commented on this idea, adding that "the

presence of caregivers, medical professionals, family members, or friends, is a tangible expression of God's love for those who are sick."

Bishop Router has also voiced his concerns over what he sees as an attack to human dignity in Irish healthcare, "with the introduction of a liberal abortion regime that has led to the deaths of over 30,000 children in the womb. The last Dail began exploring the possibility of introducing

Cork consecrated celebrate in Cobh



Bishop William Crea of Cloyne diocese was joined in celebrating the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life on Sunday by members of religious of the diocese from the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, Presentation Sisters, the Sisters of Bon Secours, Poor Servants of the Mother of God, Missionaries of Charity and the Congregation of the Adorers of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Montmartre as well as Fr Sean Cotter PE, Episcopal Vicar for religious, Fr Eamonn McCarthy, co-ordinator for Jubilee 2025 celebrations for the diocese, Fr Tom McDermott Adm and parish clergy were also in attendance at the event in St Colman's Cathedral Cobh, Co. Cork.

assisted suicide in Ireland." The bishop warned that this last move "would fly in the face of the underlying principle of medical interven-

tion - 'Do no harm'."

Bishop Router calls for an increased focus on palliative care, calling it "the only compassionate and

ethical way to approach end-of-life issues." He also advised the focus on pastoral care services in health-care facilities, which "look

after the spiritual needs of people who are sick or suffering and are essential to the well-being of so many people."

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Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €199. Airmail €320. Six months €105.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic, Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandymford, Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Dublin.

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Lessons from storms need to be learnt says Knock priest

Renata Steffens

Almost two weeks into the aftermath of Storm Éowyn the country is still recovering. Fr Richard Gibbons PP and Rector of Knock Shrine said there are still people out there without power and people still need to “keep an eye and keep watch.”

With all the work being done to recover “shredded” cables and transformers, Fr Gibbons believes the storm resulted in “an awful lot of lessons that need to be learned for the next time that this happens.”

After the storm left many households without power, heat and water, the Parish of Knock opened the doors of St John’s Rest Care Centre to those in need of a hot drink or phone charging.

Fr Gibbons said the Care

Centre was damaged during the storm. They worked to secure it first and then “decided to turn [it] into a soup kitchen.” People joined not only for a hot meal and warm place, the priest said, “we gathered for company as well.”

Knock Shrine has its own generator, which allowed them to receive the community in need. “There was a great sense of camaraderie and a great sense of cooperation and looking out for one another, especially the older people of the parish, because we have quite a lot of elderly people living in this parish,” the priest said.

Knock House Hotel set aside two shower units for people, “and the rest of the hotel was occupied with people that couldn’t live on their own because they were elderly and vulnerable. So,

the hotel catered for them,” Fr Gibbons said.

Fr Gibbons said that “people came together, they did what they do best in a time of crisis: they looked out for each other.”

Fr Tom Grufferty, who lives in the Carrowmore Meadows Retirement Village said they also “cooked meals where possible for others, visited homes and spoke to one another.” For him, “Christianity has a glorious future... this is just one example of the Church of the future.”

Another example of the solidarity experienced in Ireland in the past month, Glenstal Abbey said in a statement that it was thanks to the maintenance crew, kitchen team and colleagues that they were able to keep open throughout the snow and storms of January.



Fr Richard Gibbons, Rector of Knock Shrine at Knock Basilica

Storm hit priest writes letter to God to restore power and water

Staff reporter

A west of Ireland parish priest has written a letter to God to restore the power and water to his cold and weary parishioners who have had to face hardship in the face of the aftermath of the January storms.

Writing from Parochial House, Lisdoonvarna, Fr Robert McNamara read the letter at Sunday Masses. It began: “Dear Lord, the power is gone, the heat is gone, and I’m under the duvet reading John B. Keane’s letters with the light of a battery-operated torch. Thank God for Dolly’s shop! John B. Keane put it into my head to drop you

a line myself.

“These days of –hopefully– spring, we are thinking of that great and wise woman St Brigid. I’m sure as a fellow Irish person she’s delighted with Nicky Considine’s crosses he made for the parish. We also celebrate your Presentation, that rather mysterious event when, just like many’s another mam and dad, Our Lady and St Joseph brought you, as a little lad, to the temple to be blest...”

“So speaking of ‘presentations’, today we present ourselves to you after that terrible storm. Thank God we made it. We present to you all the poor creatures who suffered so badly from it, not just loss and damage to homes

and businesses and livestock but loss of life, and especially the seriously sick who needed ventilators, dialysis machines and the like. We present to you those who are still affected, still without power, and we present to you the workers striving to restore it, and the generous people in our localities who made facilities available. But I am left with a question, Lord. Why did you allow it? What did you want us to learn from it? I suspect we must all work that one out for ourselves.”

Anyway Lord, at this stage, we get it! Please restore the power and the water! Your friend, Robert.”

Reggae gets religious with British sisters

Chai Brady

A group of sisters in England have teamed up with two Christian musicians to produce a ‘reggae pop’ version of the Jubilee Year of Hope 2025 hymn.

A music video of the cover of the song was posted on YouTube by the two-piece band Ooberfuse on the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life, February 2. They collaborated with the Community of our Lady of Walsingham.

Cardinal Vincent Nichols, head of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales,

appears at the beginning of the video saying said: “I want to introduce you to this beautiful rendition of the Jubilee Year’s anthem. It’s going to be heard all over the world, but here it’s presented in a lyrical and lovely way.”

Cardinal Nichols added: “And it tells us the story of being pilgrims in hope, or actually better – pilgrims into hope. There’s one part of this song that I hope you listen to very intently, which describes a person journey from their tears into hope, and it’s Jesus who wipes away our tears.”



A sister in the Community of our Lady of Walsingham in England pictured with an electric guitar.

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St Pauls to open two new bookstores in Derry and Letterkenny

Renata Milán Morales

St Pauls, an international religious bookstore chain, is set to open two new branches in Ireland. One store will be located in Derry, and the other in Letterkenny, counties that have been seeking a replacement since the closure of Veritas.

The opening of the two stores is especially meaningful for the people of Letterkenny, as the former Veritas location was not just a place to purchase religious items – you could also find a small chapel and relics for visitors to pray inside the shop. The closure of Veritas left many wondering whether any company would step in to fill that

gap in the local community.

Former Veritas manager Sheila Macken shared her excitement about the new project with St Pauls. “St Pauls will offer a different range of religious goods and books compared to what we had at Veritas. Obviously, we couldn’t stock everything, but St Pauls has many of their own publications, which is brilliant.”

The first St Pauls store is expected to open in Letterkenny before the end of February, with Sheila playing an active role in the new project. The exact opening date for the Derry branch is still to be confirmed. St Pauls’ expansion into these locations comes as an answer to local customers who have been ask-

ing about the future of religious goods and literature since Veritas closed its doors.

During the Mass held in December at the Letterkenny branch to mark the closure of Veritas, the retired Bishop of the Diocese, Philip Boyce, praised Sheila Macken, stating that she “took it on as a labour of love, and under her leadership, it grew and prospered, strengthening year after year.”

The new stores will provide a wide selection of books, religious goods, and publications that will respond to the needs of the community, ensuring that the locals in Derry and Letterkenny have access to faith-based resources close to home.



Sheila Macken

NEWS IN BRIEF

Queen discusses AI ethics

Recently, the Catholic Chaplaincy at Queen’s University Belfast (QUB) received Fr Philip Larrey, a leading philosopher and ethicist in the field of artificial intelligence (AI) and emerging technologies.

Fr Larrey is a professor at Boston College, US and is recognised for his work in AI ethics. During the visit to the Belfast university, the priest shared his insights on how AI can be developed responsibly for the good of humanity. The talk happened in the Lanyon Building and sparked discussions among the present.

The priest event coincided with the release of Antiqua et nova, a Vatican’s document on AI highlighting the importance of the ongoing conversations on the ethics of new technologies.

The event concluded with dinner at the Chaplaincy, where the discussions on how Catholic thought can guide the development of AI and technology in an ethical direction continued.

Over 50 young adults gather for theology

Over 50 young adults aged 18-35 in the Diocese of Cork and Ross are participating in 10-week formation programmes. The programmes called ‘Foundations in Theology’ and ‘Sycamore’ take place on Wednesday nights at Mardyke Huse.

The programmes are a collaboration between the Diocese of Ross and Cork, UCC Chaplaincy and the Presentation Brothers LEAF Project.

The participants are not in both programmes simultaneously, but both groups meet on Wednesdays from 5.45pm to 8pm. The events start with all participants gathering for pizza and fellowship before separating for their respective sessions.

‘Foundations in Theology’ is an introductory programme about the fundamentals of the Christian faith, while ‘Sycamore’ is a video-based formation series which provides an accessible starting point for those interested in learning more about the Catholic faith.

The night concludes with both groups together for Compline in the Presentation Brother’s oratory.

Dioceses discuss priests’ work-life balance in Co. Clare

Renata Steffens

The third annual gathering of the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and Diocese of Clonfert recently took place in Spanish Point, Co. Clare. Over 60 people from both dioceses took part in the event facilitated by Nicola Mitchell from the Knock Shrine Development Office.

The gathering was divided in three sessions over two

days. This is the first year that all clergy from both dioceses participated along with diocesan staff.

In the session led by Fr Hugh Lagan SMA, he gave a “very valuable input on how priests can thrive and flourish mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually in these changing and challenging times,” said Fr Diarmuid Hogan, Communications Officer for Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora.

Fr Hogan said that “one of the fundamental guiding principles for our parish and diocesan restructuring and renewal has been a commitment to promoting an appropriate workload for all priests and faith community workers which would help ensure a fulfilling and joyous work/life balance. The gathering focused on how ministers and people can flourish and not just survive.”

Bishop Michael Duignan

led another session, and “outlined [the] progress made to date in readying ourselves for a different although hope-filled future,” said Fr Hogan.

Bishop of Limerick Brendan Leahy also led a session, talking about his experience and insights into the ongoing Universal Synod and on the concept and potential for the Church of the process and charism of Synodality.

Fr Hogan said that

“Another guiding principles of the ongoing process has been desire ‘to create faith communities where priest and people work and minister together in a spirit of synodality, co-responsibility and collaboration for the good of the whole faith community, where children and the vulnerable are safeguarded, and where all, especially those on the margins of Church and society, are included.”

Irish religious praise American Episcopal bishop

Staff reporter

The Association of Leaders of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI) have written a letter of congratulations to the American Bishop, Mariann Budde, of the Episcopal Church after her sermon during an inaugural prayer service in front of President Trump urging him to show mercy towards LGBTQ+ and migrant communities.

In the letter AMRI explained that “Despite our ageing profile... we, as many around the world, are stunned by the escalating global challenges that are taking place under chaotic circumstances, which impact on the most marginalised.” The Irish missionaries and religious continued praising the bishop, “AMRI wish to thank you for your courage in publicly conveying the truth, grounded in the Gospel, that reminds us all of our duty of care.”

Auxiliary bishop of Armagh, Michael Router, also commented on the event, “It is amazing the negativity that a simple, sincere statement of Christian beliefs can engender. It is a wake-up call to all of us on the challenges inherent in trying to live out our Christian faith in today’s fractured world.”

Consecrated life: the gift that keeps giving



Sr Pascal Jones of St Xaviour’s Mercy Convent in Ennis and Bro. William OCSO, Our Lady of Silence Abbey in Roscrea, are pictured during the World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life on Sunday February 2, and the Feast of the Presentation of our Lord, in the Cathedral of Ss Peter and Paul in Ennis Co. Clare. Bishop Fintan Monahan of the Diocese of Killaloe welcomed 64 religious from 11 different congregations and communities in the diocese to the cathedral. Photo: Pat Hanrahan photography

A sideways look at 'diversity'

I am a fan of a BBC TV series called *Silent Witness*. It's somewhat macabre in that it focuses on a forensic pathologist (played by Emilia Fox) who is seen gruesomely cutting up dead bodies – those murdered in unknown circumstances. The 'silent witness' is the corpse. In essence, it's a murder-mystery – 'whodunnit' – with added medical edge.

One of the aspects of this TV production is that the casting involves obvious diversity. In the current series, an older actress – Maggie Steed, aged 78 – is part of the forensic team. And a younger actress, Francesca Mills, aged 27, plays a crime analyst at the pathology clinic.

Francesca Mills is very pretty: she also has



Mary Kenny

achondroplasia – that is to say, dwarfism. But if she's small, she's also portrayed as bright, with the kind of mental curiosity which pursues clues to their logical conclusion.

Previously, *Silent Witness* scored a success with another disabled actress, Liz Carr, as the redoubtable Clarissa, again solving crimes with persistent sleuthing logic. (Liz Carr has subsequently become a strong campaigner against 'assisted dying'.)

Employment

This programme has made me reflect on the whole point of 'diversity' in employment practices – the "d", in the

famous trio of 'DEI' (diversity, equity and inclusion) that President Trump has now moved to ban from U.S. hiring policies.

There probably are injustices arising from DEI, as David Quinn analysed last week. I am told, for example, by insiders in the London publishing trade that it's becoming ever more difficult for a 'straight white male' to get his book published.

Authors from minority backgrounds, authors of colour or from sexual minorities are much more favoured. Women also have an advantage – but only an acceptable sort of woman. A conservative woman who penned a novel about

a happy marriage would not be on-trend. (Novels by Irishwomen who hate the Catholic church are particularly fashionable these days.)

Agendas

So, within this DEI philosophy there are still plenty of hidden agendas – as there often have been in the past. Who doesn't know of someone who secured a job because of social connections, or because they were going out with the boss's daughter, or who had a political hotline? It's always been said – I can't prove it, but I haven't seen it denied either – that RTE was a hotbed of 'Stickies' (fellow-travellers with Sinn Féin-The Workers Party) and that was one route to get hired.

DEI surely needs to be carefully examined and assessed as a policy. But

President Trump's far-too-hasty claim that DEI contributed to the terrible airplane-helicopter collision over Washington DC on January 30 struck me as unacceptable: there should be solid evidence before such a statement is made. (It is claimed, in some quarters, that capable white males are being rejected in flight operations so as to advance women and ethnic minorities – but I'd like to see more hard evidence before accepting this as factual.)

Hiring should be fair,

and the ability to do the job – especially when risk to the public is involved – must always be a prime consideration. DEI shouldn't be rigidly applied. But showing imagination about inclusiveness and diversity – all other factors being equal – to individuals who might, in the past, have been automatically excluded is admirable, and indeed Christian. The visibility – and, as it happens, beguiling charm – of Francesca Mills seems to me to be very cheering.

The Seanad has some strong independent voices

It's refreshing to see a revived interest in the Seanad elections, and congrats to hard-working re-elected Senators like Rónan Mullan, Michael McDowell and Sharon Keogan.

A few years ago, it seemed that the Upper House might be destined for abolition – political leaders often regard a revising chamber as a nuisance, and not wholly democratic, since it is not elected by direct vote.

It is not easy to devise a perfect parliamentary second chamber. There are usually anomalies in the system. But the key test is: does it work? Does it attract strong independent voices who are not beholden to being subdued by the party system? I'd say – yes.



Sharon Keogan

The centenary of Jack Lemmon's birth is being marked this weekend of 8 February, and one of his best-known movies, *The Apartment*, is being re-released in a re-mastered

version. It's a superb 1960 Billy Wilder film about the pangs (and pains) of love in a corporate world.

I heard an RTE commentator recently say that this film showed that adultery was no big deal and 'eve-

ryone' was doing it back in the day. To me, the storyline illustrates how miserably unhappy a young woman (Shirley MacLaine) becomes in an adulterous affair with a married man. There's also a telling

scene when Fran is ill, and her family is shocked at the (false) suggestion she might have had an abortion.

In the end, the good guy, Lemmon, wins the heart of the broken-hearted girl.

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Carmelites open arms to ‘lonely’ and ‘disconnected’ young men



Carmelites Fr Jimmy Nyangadi O. Carm and Fr James Eivers O. Carm, Prior of Whitefriar Street Church on Aungier Street in Dublin, are pictured in front of the church's Calvary Shrine inside the entrance hallway. Photo: Chai Brady

Chai Brady

A parish church in the centre of Dublin has been helping an “amazing number of young men” who are struggling with “serious loneliness” and a feeling of disconnection.

While the church regularly welcomes faithful of all ages and ethnicities, there are many young men searching for someone to speak to, according to Fr James Eivers O. Carm, Prior of Whitefriar Street Church in Dublin City Centre.

Fr Eivers told *The Irish Catholic* in particular the friars meet a lot of university students from nearby colleges such as the Royal College of Surgeons, Trinity College Dublin and DBS.

He said: “It’s amazing the amount of young men coming into the church. You talk to them, and you find there’s serious loneliness out there... there’s a sense of community that’s missing. Sometimes they come here just really struggling and looking for quiet, a lot of them not even knowing why they are here.” Sometimes they come in to light

a candle and ending up in the line for Confession, “and they haven’t been to Confession since their Confirmation maybe, and they’re saying ‘I don’t even know how to do this, but I just feel I need to talk to someone about what’s going on in my life’”, according to Fr Eivers,

The fact that there is a community of 10 Carmelites living on-site means there is extra availability, the prior noted. Fr Eivers added that many of the young men in university are “struggling with a lot of the pressures of college, particularly in their first year and their second year, struggling to find their niche, struggling to find where they’re going”.

“And it is the same story, ‘I picked a course, I didn’t know why I picked it and now I don’t know what I’m doing’. Then there are all the pressures that come with that. Increasingly you are seeing that with younger people, coming in and just wanting someone to listen, not even give them answers – just to listen.”

Fr Eivers also drew attention to “serious increase” in

the number of people looking for financial support from the parish.

He said: “It’s all over the media in terms of the homelessness crisis but it’s literally on our doorstep every night here – homelessness, drug addiction, alcohol addiction, family issues, all of that. It is being written about, but it is all being played out within this square around the Church, that’s part of it as well. You have a lot of people coming in, really struggling with life: you must be present to them as well.”

NEWS IN BRIEF

Missionary Sister receives Presidential Award

A missionary Religious Sister is one of ten recipients of the 2024 ‘Presidential Distinguished Service Awards for the Irish Abroad’. The ceremony was held at Áras an Uachtaráin on January 30, 2025 and Sr Teresa McKeon, a member of the St Joseph of Cluny congregation, was recognised for her continuous work with education and development of women in Sierra Leone.

In 2024, the Sister celebrated 70 years of mission work in the country, and in 2017 she received the ‘Order of the Rokel’ from the President of Sierra Leone, which is the highest civilian award in that country.

During the Sierra Leonean Civil War, Sr Teresa was forced to move to Guinea to carry on her work, providing continued service to Sierra Leonean refugees living in camps along the border between the two countries. She lived five years in exile, supporting women and children.

Returning to the country after the war, she established and delivered adult education courses in the areas of business, financial management, nutrition, catering and tailoring to thousands of women and men, providing them with access to jobs and economic opportunities in a challenging economic context.

Sr McKeon was unable to travel to attend the ceremony, so Sr Angela Mbalu Bangura collected the award on her behalf.

Bishop blesses Millennial saint Shrine

Staff reporter

The Shrine of the soon-to-be saint, Carlo Acutis was blessed recently in the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore. The event was held at the Church of the Holy Family, Ardfinnan, Co. Tipperary as Mass was celebrated on the upcoming canonisation of Blessed Carlo Acutis on April 27, 2025, during the Jubilee of Teenagers.

Fr Michael Toomey, PP,

talked about the inspirational message and witness of this 15-year-old, specially about his love for the Eucharist. Fr Michael said: “We are really looking forward to celebrating Mass with a number of parishioners as part of the parish pilgrimage in early April at his tomb in Assisi.” Fr Michael will also be concelebrating Carlo’s Canonisation Mass with Pope Francis on April 27 at St Peter’s Basilica in the

Vatican.

Over 1,000 people, travelled from right across the country to Ardfinnan to celebrate the Mass, and to learn more about this soon-to-be Saint. All the local schools in the Pastoral Area including members of Carlo Acutis Youth Ireland took part in the Mass, which was also viewed by over 3,000 online.

Bishop Cullinan, of Waterford and Lismore, blessed the statue and

shrine of Blessed Carlo installed by the parish in the Church, and the huge numbers of people of all ages were given the oppor-

tunity to venerate a relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis. Bishop Cullinan was also presented with a special custom-made Chasuble by the parish.

IC Columnist and Senator re-elected to Seanad

Senator Ronan Mullen, of this parish, was safely and comfortably elected on the 8th Count to Seanad Éireann on the NUI graduate panel with 9,107 votes.

Senator Mullen said “I am honoured to have been elected to a 5th term in Seanad Éireann where I will continue to speak up for the protection of human life and dignity in all areas of policy and law. I would like to thank all those who voted for me or who supported my campaign in any way.”

He added: “I remind all degree graduates of designated institutions of

higher education in the State that it is necessary to have registered afresh online at www.seanad-voter.ie in order to receive a ballot at the next Seanad election in what will be the 6-seat Higher Education Constituency. Please spread the word about this. That register will reopen soon and I will be in touch with people to let them know. Ná bíodh leisce ort riamh gaoch a chur chugam nó téacs nó teachtaireacht ríomhphoist a chur chugam.

Guím gach beannacht ort, agus le míle buíochas.”

Archbishop Farrell praises the involvement of laity

Renata Milán Morales

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin expressed hope for the future of the Church in Dublin during a homily given on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. He praised the active involvement of the laity in the Diocese and their commitment to their parishes. Archbishop Farrell noted that in every parish across the Diocese the faithful is playing key roles.

“This year, we have fifty people who are completing a year-long certificate in

catechesis. They will help to prepare our people for the sacraments of Baptism, First Penance, First Holy Communion and Confirmation in the years ahead. The majority of those who now offering pastoral care to our sick in hospitals and those in prison are laity,” said Archbishop Farrell acknowledging the contribution of laypeople in the formation of future generations.

Archbishop Farrell emphasised the gifts that laypeople bring to the Church, noting that “this is the Body of Christ alive, with its members using their unique gifts for the good of all.”

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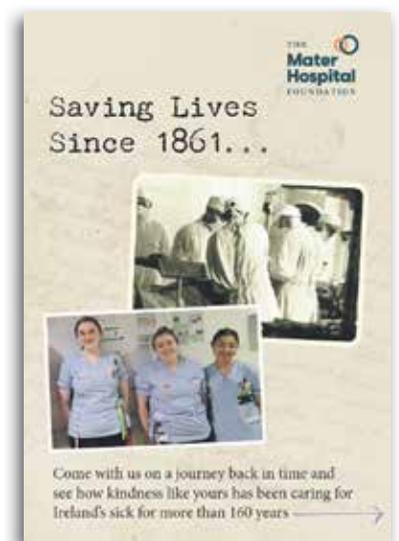
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Anger can be good



Breda O'Brien

Anger seems to drive our world. People were understandably and rightly angry when they were left without power or water for weeks after recent storms. However, much more toxic anger is weaponised to generate profit for cynical operators.

It has been known for a long time that engagement with online content and therefore online advertising is greater when rage is involved.

There is even a name for this phenomenon - rage-baiting. For example, Winta Zesu, originally from Ethiopia, posted satirical videos, such as returning poached eggs and salmon in a restaurant because the poached egg was beside and not on top of the salmon.

People took them seriously and posted really nasty comments. These clicks and engagement generated \$150,000 in revenue for Zesu last year. The more anger she generates, the more money she makes.

Zesu seems to be a perfectly nice person despite her online posing as the most entitled young woman possible. She appears a bit bewildered by how people could possibly take her videos seriously.

“Women, in particular, have been socialised to be afraid of appearing angry”

While many of us could do with reducing our consumption, it is becoming increasingly difficult to live without being immersed in the internet. Less benign people than Zesu are cynically stoking our anger to generate clicks, engagement, advertising revenue, and sometimes political capital.

Yet anger long pre-dates the internet. It is one of the more complicated emotions, often entangled in our minds with aggression.

Women, in particular, have been socialised to be

afraid of appearing angry. Christians, too, have had hard time understanding how to relate to anger. Often, anger is seen as solely negative.

Yet Our Lord was angry, such as when he turned over the tables in the Temple, saying that his Father's House had been turned into a den of thieves.

Energy

Anger is a kind of energy, which is generated when a boundary is violated. It can motivate us to change situations. We can think of the righteous anger of a Martin Luther King at the conditions of his fellow Black Americans - yet he insisted on strict pacifism. Anger should lead to change but not through harm of others.

The function of anger is to incentivise us to take action, to stand up for our rights and the rights of others.

“When we lose our temper, we invariably makes things worse because we say or do things we regret”

There is a difference between rage and anger. It is possible to feel righteous anger but rage is like a red mist which descends, cutting off our rationality.

While anger can have a protective function for ourselves and others, rage is destructive. When we lose our temper, we invariably makes things worse because we say or do things we regret.

I recently came across a journal entry from a long time ago when I had small children. I had given my daughter not one, but several slaps. She came back to me, held out her arms and asked: 'Is it all over now?'

Reading that entry, even decades later, makes me feel so much shame that

“We should be angry when people in rural areas receive lower priority than in Dublin after a storm but we should direct our anger towards positive action rather than at the hapless ESB man or woman who is working flat out”



I lashed out at a child in a moment of anger and so much gratitude that my daughter was so forgiving.

I don't think I did this kind of thing very often but it reminded me how easy it is to vent anger on the wrong person at the wrong time.

In Chapter four of the Letter to the Ephesians,

what St Paul says about anger seems at first glance to be contradictory. He tells us to 'be angry, but sin not. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.'

Malice

But later on in the same chapter, it says 'Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along

with every form of malice.' In one sentence we are told that is OK to be angry, and not long after, to get rid of all anger.

“It is the work of a lifetime to become virtuous enough to be angry in the right way”

I think the clue is in the context. Bitterness, rage, brawling and slander are all the result of anger that is out of control. Perhaps we need to teach our children, in particular by our example, that anger is a form of energy that can be harnessed for good ends. (And

when we fail to give good example, be thankful that we can always ask forgiveness and begin again.)

We should teach our girls in particular, that anger can be good, like a Mama bear protecting her cubs from predators.

We should be angry when people in rural areas receive lower priority than in Dublin after a storm but we should direct our anger towards positive action rather than at the hapless ESB man or woman who is working flat out.

Anger in itself is not bad. What we do with that anger is what matters. It is the work of a lifetime to become virtuous enough to be angry in the right way, with the right person or institution, at the right time.

Faith and family help bookseller endure during tougher times



Chai Brady

The closure of Ireland's biggest religious publisher and retailer hit devoted customers, staff and publishers hard, with many still wondering what will replace Veritas.

Finding a dedicated source for books and booklets for church racks, along with perhaps Divine Word cards, inspirational sacramental supplies, book printing and all the plethora of seasonal material needed in addition is a gargantuan challenge. With fewer priests as well as volunteers, tasks can stack up and seem overwhelming.

This is where Paul Daly's PD Books is stepping in, aim-

ing to fill the gap in the religious market left behind by Veritas by doing all the above.

Mr Daly began his journey started working in the Veritas communications centre from 1992- 1997 where he recorded many conferences and attended book displays.

“The only sector that are still going strong are the Charismatics”

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, he says: “In 1997 I took the big leap and left Veritas to start my own recording company ‘Eist Audio’. I took on a couple of employees and we were up and down the country recording. I had the pleasure of recording some amazing speakers in Milltown Institute, All Hallows, Knock and almost ever hotel and prayer centre nationwide. Times were busy, thank God.

“I’m still recording to date

but a lot less events are being held. The only sector that are still going strong are the Charismatics around the country,” he adds. All the material that Eist has recorded over the past 27 years is available on their new website www.hearinggodsword.com where they can be purchased on CD, USB or digitally downloaded for half price.

Flexibility

Regarding PD Books, Mr Daly says they listen to customers and supply them accordingly – taking on a one-stop shop model, which is the reason he believes they are still in operation.

Mr Daly says: “Diversify or die is what they say. Parish office secretaries and priests are so busy they need help and ideas proposed to them. This is where we work best, tell us what you require and we will work with you. We try to understand your parish vision and needs and how best a parish can reach out and evangelise. We work

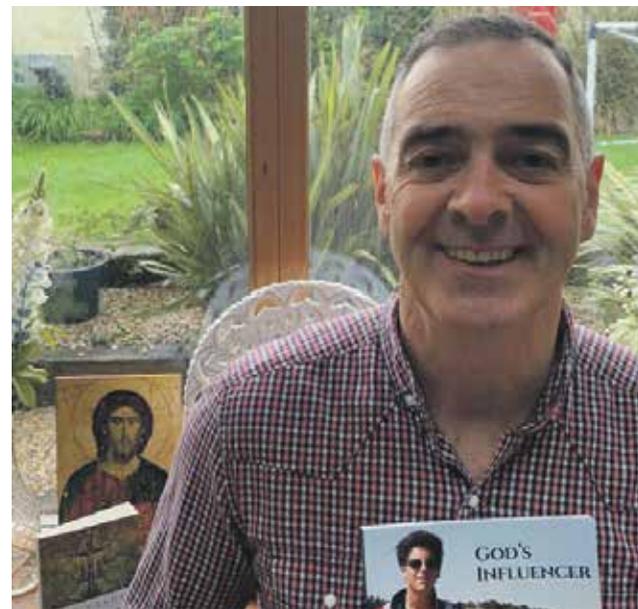
closely with our Irish and UK suppliers in order to provide the quickest and best service to all our customers.

“Going forward we would like to reach out to many more churches, book clubs, conference organisers, prayer groups etc and look after your supply needs.”

“I am so lucky to have an office with the St Columban Sisters”

Times have not always been easy, with Mr Daly having to vacate his business premises during the Covid-19 pandemic. “I was in trouble, no business and no premises, what do I do?” he recalls. Two things in particular helped him through.

“I went to Fr Donal Roche who was PP in Wicklow (Now Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin) and told him my plight. Immediately he offered me

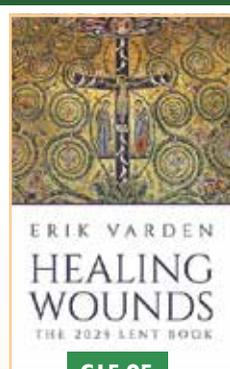


new temporary premises to get me up and running, no questions asked. He was a saviour. After two years I had to move again and now I am so lucky to have an office with the St Columban Sisters in Magheramore, Wicklow,” Mr Daly says.

The second saviour? “My

family and my Faith - I’m blessed to have both,” he adds, “I would be delighted to continue doing my job and keeping the Faith alive because I love it. I regularly tell my wife when I come home ‘I work with the best people in the world’, and I mean it.”

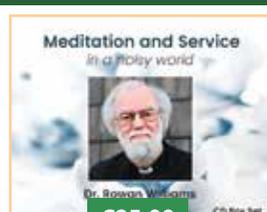
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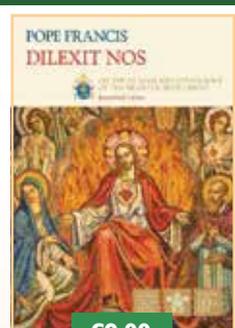
Healing Wounds

In this 2025 Lent Book, Erik Varden starts by examining the New Testament where it spells out why Christ's wounds were efficacious for the healing of humankind. He contends that while this theological perspective is fundamental, it often falls short of addressing the emotional and spiritual needs of believers.



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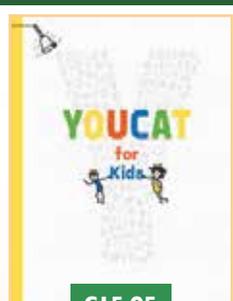
Details for the Meditation and Service CD Recorded recently in Dublin. Three amazing talks on Contemplation, The Holy Spirit and Justice. Available on CD, USB €25 or digital download from www.hearinggodsword.com for just €10. All digital downloads are less than half price of retail price! All Dr Rowan Williams books are available from PD Books.



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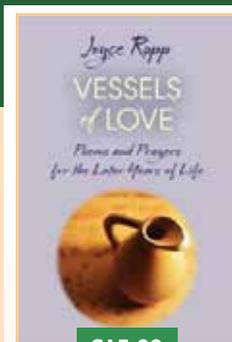
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For all enquiries, email paul.daly@eist.ie call 087 2789390 or visit www.hearinggodsword.com

We don't need more stories of adults who choose not to have children



Dualta Roughneen

For years I never paid much attention to the growing narrative around childfree couples – and more visibly – childfree women. I was living my life and hadn't really got that call to have children. I am still suspicious of whether men ever really get the call the way women do. It is rare that a man choosing to be childfree is considered newsworthy. My wife certainly felt the calling and it was not easy for her nor for us as a couple. I was on the verge of assuming it would never happen. But it did. 18 months ago to the day as I write this, our brilliant daughter was born.

My life was changed in an instant. Not just my life but how I thought of my life. To be flippant, it was like getting a George Foreman grill. I didn't know how much I would like it and now I would never give it up. I don't know what I would do if she was not in our lives. The song goes 'You don't know what you've got till it's gone'. For children it is more like 'You don't know what you've not got till it's here'.

Struggling

For the years where we were struggling, it was difficult to hear of other friends and family who were having children. Some were married and nine months to the day later, a little baby arrived. But that is life. Other people's happiness and good fortune can hurt but there is nothing you can do about it. We tried not to be envious but to be honest we were. But you can't hide away from the world or expect other people to censor their good news because of how it might make us feel.

This is why I find the recent phenomenon of never-ending celebration of the childless-by-choice couples – both men and women – to be tone deaf to people who struggle with the sadness of infertility.

I wonder do the editors, the authors, and the self-publicising never-to-be-parents give any consideration to the couples, the women, who are trying to deal with the fact that they may never be able to be parents despite it being the deepest desire of their hearts?

Twenty – maybe forty – years ago announcing to the public that one did not wish



ever to be a parent and had made that lifestyle decision by free choice was possibly brave, dealing with the reactions of family and friends at a time when having families – and large families – was seen as the default position.

Reported on the *BBC*, Caroline Mitchell always knew she never wanted children, she wasn't prepared for how hard reaching "child-bearing age" would be ... she had not anticipated the barrage of personal questions she would face as friends and acquaintances started to have children.

“Fertility rates continue to drop below replacement level across the ‘western’ world. Growing numbers of adults/couples are choosing not to have children at all”

“I have felt like a freak because of it.”

“I feel like my perspective and my experience is just not acceptable.”

“You realise how you're quite excluded from a lot of life,” she said.

“It's really hard for me to meet people, because it's all about the women you meet at the school gates or the writing clubs for mums.”

There is no reason at all not to take her at face value. But in Bristol where she is from, Bristol Childfree Women exists

as a social group with more than 500 members. It is not as isolating as it used to be. It is certainly not as isolating as the journey of infertility. Plus, Caroline, like others, is pleased to state that she is “100% certain” and “very comfortable” in her decision (which the *BBC* calls her ‘identity’).

More than half (50.1%) of women in England and Wales born in 1990 were without a child when they turned 30 in 2020. Research by the Pew Centre says 57% of adults under 50 who say they're unlikely to ever have kids say a

major reason is they just don't want to; 31% of those ages 50 and older without kids cite this as a reason they never had them.

Outlier

Choosing to be childless is not the outlier it used to be, yet it continues to be presented as newsworthy. This is at the same time as an increasing number of couples who desire to be parents are struggling. It may not be the intention, but it is certainly hurtful. ‘Look. Here is my choice. I chose not to do

something you so desperately want. I have what I want but I am exposed to societal norms that make me feel bad.’

Now, as times change, the reality is truly the opposite. Parents struggling to have children, whose choice is denied by nature, misfortune and sometimes poor life decisions (often attributable to the male delaying growing up – *mea culpa*) are the ones who have to endure happy families and newborn babies all around them at the same time as being hit with the hardluck stories of adults who choose

to be childless and seek validation.

The Irish Times speaks to one woman who claims the fear of motherhood and its shackles is far beyond any fear felt by first-time mothers.

“This fear was an existential warning within these women's systems saying motherhood is not the right path for me, I will lose my life if I become a mother. I will lose my identity if I become a mother. There is nothing to gain at the end of this for me. It's not that common story of natural fear of

first-time mothers and then the baby being the reward that changes their life. That's not how these women felt about motherhood.”

I am not sure how it is possible to compare the feelings to claim one is ‘far beyond’ the other. The narrative of the put-upon childless adult in a society apparently directed towards parenthood continues to gain traction as the reality has moved in the opposite direction.

Replacement

Fertility rates continue to drop below replacement level across the ‘western’ world. Growing numbers of adults/couples are choosing not to have children at all. It is not just that family size is reducing but more couples are choosing not to have children. Governments are not doing a lot to stop it and those that are trying, are still failing.

It is no longer brave to speak out about how difficult it is to be an outlier. It is no longer *avant garde*. Choosing to be childless is no longer an oddity. People who make that choice are supported by society. They are supported by government policy that does the minimal in supporting parents who have children: childcare options are limited; tax-breaks are limited; tax individualisation forces parents into the workforce.

Society is very much directed towards the working

individual. Cultural norms have shifted significantly as well. Larger families are looked upon with much more suspicion than childless families. Restaurants and such spaces are designed for couples by default rather than families. The noise and furor of children is frowned upon.

“The fear of no motherhood is far beyond the fear of motherhood”

Now we are where we are, it would be a kindness for adults struggling to become parents, not to have to listen to other adults saying how difficult their choice not to have children has been. The latter have what they wished for. Society supports it. Some people do not have what they wish for most in the world. A little more self-awareness and consideration of how that narrative impacts want-to-be parents would be welcome.

To paraphrase the *Irish Times* above, the fear of no motherhood is far beyond the fear of motherhood. The pain of childless couples deserves some sensitivity from those who are childfree by design, and should trump the need for self-validation for choices that are now fairly standard in modern society.

Why the faithful might eventually inherit Ireland again



David Quinn

At some point in the next 20 or so years, there will be more deaths than births in Ireland, and from there, things are only going to get much worse. There is one big reason for this; we are no longer having enough babies. We have transformed in very little time from a country famous for its big families, to one where families will be very small indeed.

One cause of this transformation is the sharp decline of religious practice. Secular Ireland will need religious people more than it ever believed because religious people are more highly motivated to get married and have children than their secular counterparts. A country that needs more babies also needs more religion, for reasons to be explained more fully further on.

The number of children a couple must have to replace themselves is 2.1. Without immigration, population will decline if a country's fertility rate drops below this figure.

Our fertility rate fell a little below replacement level in the 1990s, but in the last few years it has been falling very fast indeed. Currently it sits at 1.5 and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) says it will fall to 1.3 in the next few years. A tad optimistically, in my opinion, it believes it will stabilise there, but in other countries, the fertility rate is falling faster than anyone predicted.

If a country's fertility rate stays at 1.3, its population will be cut in half in just 50 or 60 years, unless there is very high immigration.

The other thing that is going to happen is that there will be far more retired people in the not-too-distant future.

Projecting

Last year, the CSO published a report projecting Ireland's



population to the year 2057. It assumed low, medium and high immigration, and low fertility rates. Under every scenario the number of retirees aged 65 and over is going to grow enormously. In 2022, it stood at 781,000 people. By mid-century this will have grown to almost 2 million. The percentage of people in this age group will grow from 15pc now, to around 30pc by mid-century.

“Societies are not supposed to have far more old people than children. Who will look after the elderly if there any not enough young people?”

Meanwhile, the number of young people will dwindle in both absolute and percentage terms. Those over 65 will outnumber children aged 0-14 by over one million. Currently children in this age bracket still comfortably outnumber the retired.

Never in history have we seen anything like this. Societies are not supposed to have far more old people than children. Who will look after the elderly if there any not enough young people? How will we pay for our health and pension systems? What will happen to youthful creativity and energy? What does a society look like when there are few children and very small families?

Not so long ago, it was common for a couple to have four children, and now two is much more common. The reason the fertility level is less

than two, at 1.5, is because a growing number of people aren't having any children or all, or just one.

This very sharp fall in fertility is happening all over the world. Two-thirds of people now live in countries with below replacement fertility. China is well below 2.1, and even India has dropped below this level. The main part of the world with well above replacement level fertility is sub-Saharan Africa.

Immigration

Immigration will only solve the problem of an ageing population somewhat. The number and percentage of retired people is going to explode no matter what (I will be one of them), and eventually immigrants also age and the number of children they have also declines. Additionally, in the future, there will be immense competition between countries for immigrants and we might not get our 'fair' share.

A big part of the reason for the fall in fertility rates is rising prosperity. As societies become wealthier, they have smaller families. But in the end, this is self-defeating, because prosperity depends on a minimum number of working age people compared with pensioners.

There is, however, a group of people without our societies that is bucking the trend, and that is the religious. Religious people, on average, have more children than their secular counterparts. In the United States, for example, those who attend religious services regularly have on average a little over two children each, while those who never or rarely go have about 1.4.

The Iona Institute (which I run) has just come out with a new report called: 'Religion, Marriage and Fertility: Shall the Religious Inherit Ireland?'

“We are going to very badly need couples who are more highly motivated than the average to marry and have children, and in general those people will be religious”

It draws attention to the fact that those who practice religion are the most likely to marry, stay married, and have children.

As the decades pass, and the country ages, family size falls and childlessness grows, we are going to very badly need couples who are more highly motivated than the average to marry and have

children, and in general those people will be religious.

Disparaged

Religion is constantly disparaged here in Ireland, and in most of the Western world. Its intolerant and authoritarian side is constantly highlighted. But religious practice also promotes behaviour that is extremely beneficial to society, and this is constantly overlooked or taken for granted.

Those who practice religion, and in Ireland that still overwhelmingly means Christianity, have better mental and physical health than the average, are less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, are less likely to commit crime, give more time and money to charity, and above all in the context of what we are discussing here are more likely to marry, stay married and have children.

This is an incredibly important cohort of people, and its importance is only going to grow over time as society ages.

In fact, it is possible that over time, the religious share

of the population will grow again. If religious people have more children and become better at keeping their children 'within the fold', this must happen as the decades pass. The process could accelerate. As secular people look at our ageing population, a subset of them might become attracted to pro-family religions like Christianity again as an antidote.

We are in an age of religious decline. But that decline is helping to trigger an overall demographic decline which will turn in due course into a full-blown crisis. The pro-social benefits of religion will be needed more badly than ever. Secular societies, it is turning out, need religious people very badly, because they are the ones who will be having the most children. The formula is very simple; no children, no society. To turn around the coming demographic crisis, we need a religious revival. Secular people might not like this message, but it is true.

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Friday 21st

18.00 - 18.30 Praise and Worship
18.30 - 19.00 Róisín Doherty-Testimony
19.00 - 20.00 Fr. James Blount - Adoration
20.00 - 21.00 Fr. Brendan Walsh - Holy Mass

Saturday 22nd

10.00 - 10.20 Blessing of Divine Mercy Image
Morning Prayer of the Church
10.20 - 11.00 Fr. Pat Collins C.M.
11.00 - 11.30 Break
11.30 - 12.30 Fr. James Blount, SOLT
12.30 - 13.00 Dr. Clíodhna Donnelly, (End of Life)
13.00 - 14.30 Lunch
14.30 - 15.00 Reconciliation Service
15.00 - 16.30 Dcn Don Devaney/Róisín Doherty, Stations of the Cross / Confessions
16.30 - 17.30 Fr. James Blount - Holy Mass
17.30 - 18.30 Break
18.30 - 20.00 Fr. Brendan Walsh Eucharistic Healing Service
20.00 - 20.15 Night Prayer of the Church

Sunday 23rd

10.00 - 10.20 Morning Prayer of the Church
10.20 - 11.00 Fr. Pat Collins C.M.
11.00 - 11.30 Break
11.30 - 12.00 Róisín Doherty
12.00 - 13.00 Fr. James Blount - Holy Hour
13.00 - 14.15 Lunch
14.15 - 14.30 Glorious Mysteries of the Holy Rosary
14.30 - 15.00 Fr. Brendan Walsh
15.00 - 15.15 Divine Mercy Chaplet
15.15 - 17.00 Archbishop Dermot Farrell, D.D. - Holy Mass

Aidan Byrne, B.Div. (Hons.), MA (Maryvale, UK), is a member of St. Patrick's Prayer Group in Co. Carlow. He has been a co-presenter on Radio Maria Ireland since 2023. Aidan is married and is engaged in a full-time prayer apostolate. His work takes him all over the world as a Consultant Lecturer, and in his apostolate of healing and liberation.



Deacon Don Devaney is a Permanent Deacon in the Archdiocese of Dublin, Ireland. He is married with seven adult children and eleven grandchildren. He is Chairman of the Divine Mercy Conference in Ireland for the last 33 years. He is a presenter with Radio Maria Ireland of the Divine Mercy Hour, God's Healing Power Hour, The Healing Power of the Sacraments, Can we Be Saints, The Cell Communities (for prisoners) and a weekly Catachresis Programme Seeking Truth. He holds a MSc in Education and Guidance Counselling and an MA in Pastoral Theology and Chaplaincy.



“As secular people look at our ageing population, a sub-set of them might become attracted to pro-family religions like Christianity again as an antidote”

The Divine Mercy Conference will be viewable free on www.divinemercyconference.com, churchservices.tv, www.ShalomWorld.org, audio-only on www.RadioMaria.ie, Saorview 210 or dial-up listening service at 01 437 3277. Donations welcome via the DONATE button on the website or by sending a donation to 22 Castle Grove, Clondalkin, Dublin D22 Y2W9, or to the Divine Mercy Conference Account, IBAN: IE91IPBS99060620173532. Any further queries to 085 221 6128

The largest display of Faith Derry has seen

Renata Milán Morales

Over 4000 people gathered in the streets of Derry on February 1 for a powerful Eucharistic Procession, an event that surpassed the initial expectation of less than 1000 attendees. The procession, described by Anto Crossey, who took part in the procession, as “a great spectacle” and “a powerful witness,” displayed the city’s religious fervour.

James Tourish, who attended the procession explained to *The Irish Catholic* that it was “a true demonstration of a growing force” in the diocese. He noted the participation of youth, including school and parish groups, that witnessed the involvement of younger generations in the faith. He added, “It was the largest display of the Catholic faith that the city has seen in a long time,” point-

ing to the recent declaration of Sr Clare Crockett as a Servant of God, which has strengthened the Catholic community. The late Derry nun’s cause was represented, with many holding banners, flags, and prayer cards in her honour.

The procession also saw many passersby genuflecting as the Blessed Sacrament passed, a gesture of deep reverence. Mr Tourish described how the event, which “may have seemed out of place in today’s secular society,” was “an extremely reverent occasion” that made participants and observers think about their own faith. It was a reminder that Catholic traditions remain strong. “These types of events are needed,” Mr Tourish concluded, as they show that “there are many likeminded Catholics who seek to honour their faith in a way that is genuine and dignified.”



Carlo Acutis and Sr Clare Crockett banners were displayed during the Eucharistic Procession in Derry.



Thousands gathered in the streets of Derry for a Eucharistic Procession.



The Blessed Sacrament leading the procession.



Eucharistic Adoration in the streets of Derry.



Thousands gathered in the streets of Derry for a Eucharistic Procession.



St Columb’s College past and present students attended Derry’s Eucharistic procession. Pictured are Jonah, Tiago, John-Óg, Conan, Mr O’Connor and past pupil, James Tourish.

The Irish need to choose life not death



Martina Purdy

It's almost 300 years since the Dean of St Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin penned his famous satirical essay, *A Modest Proposal*. The Anglo-Irish writer Jonathan Swift famously suggested the impoverished Irish, burdened by parenthood, need not go hungry. All they had to do was sell their own babies as food, like livestock, to wealthy English landlords. I read with interest Mary Kenny's recent column that the new Irish government may formally mark the essay's anniversary in 2029. The anniversary is mentioned in the draft Programme of Government, entitled *Securing Ireland's Future*. How appropriate I thought. After all, it would do us no harm to reflect on how we deal with our own children these days: more and more are being killed off before birth.

While most Irish people voted for constitutional change to pave the way for abortion, it was quite different in the north. It was 'decriminalised' in 1919, not by any vote by the Irish people but by kindly, mostly English, female MPs at Westminster. They claimed women in the north of Ireland were being deprived of the right to kill their own children.

Figures

New figures, north of the border, reveal that 2,792 little boys and girls were aborted in 2023/4. That's roughly the population of Skibbereen, Cork. In fact, those figures represent a 28% rise over the previous year: an average of eight boys and girls per day. Most of these little ones perished through the abortion pill. Imagine if these children had the right to be born? They might have been given the most popular boys and girls names in Ireland today: Jack, Noah, Rian, Oisín, Fiadh, Grace, Emma, Sophie.

Sadly, there has been little political commentary on the rise, which has been highlighted by Precious Life and other pro-life campaigners. The Traditional Unionist Voice



MP Jim Allister called the figures "deeply troubling" while the abortion lobby lamented that access was still a problem for "abortion seekers".

Indeed, a spokeswoman for Alliance for Choice cited travel problems and childcare issues, and suggested the abortion figures might have been higher had it not been for misinformation and "rogue crisis pregnancy" centres (such as Stanton Healthcare which actually tries to help women keep their child with practical and material support.)

Imagine missing out on the opportunity to kill your own child. Tut, tut, Jonathan Swift might have written had he been around today. Would he, in true Swiftian style, have proposed improving train services to advantage these women?

“As the number of families struggling to keep a roof over their heads and put food on the table increases, inevitably so do the number seeking abortions”

Academic and pro-choice campaigner Goretti Horgan told the Belfast News Letter that the sharp rise in abortion is happening across the UK, with the majority of women having abortions for 'financial reasons'. "As the number of families struggling to keep a roof over their heads and put food on the table increases, inevitably so do the number seeking abortions," she said.

Ms Horgan called for an end to the British government's two-head cap on child benefit, demanded more childcare and the slashing of house prices.

I would, along with Ms

Horgan, laud any government measures that would make it easier for a woman to keep her child. But let's face it, there is more than finances involved in the decision to end the life of your baby.

One of the reasons that abortion is on the rise is that making it legal has made it seem normal. It has become a form of contraceptive after conception of a life.

Many have bought into the lie that abortion is compassionate and empowers women. In fact, it wounds women, kills children. Abortion also wounds men, but it also suits quite a number of them: abortion is a one-way ticket out of responsibility. "It's your choice," is much easier than "Let me help you."

Our culture has bought into the lie that this is an acceptable lifestyle choice, even if you can afford to keep your child. "It is a poverty to decide that a child must die so you may live as you wish," Mother Teresa famously said.

Spiritual

Abortion is not so much a financial problem as a spiritual one. What we really need is a change in attitude and culture. We need a spiritual awakening if we are to cast off the dreams of darkness. I remember discussing abortion about ten years ago with a well-educated young Catholic woman. I told her that I was pro-life. "But," she protested. "What if I get drunk and have a one-night stand and end up pregnant?" I told her not to get drunk and have a one-night stand. She was as surprised at my response as I was at her question.

The vast majority of the NI abortions were the "DIY" variety - using abortion pills at home. It is a grim fact that nearly 3,000 tiny bodies had

to be disposed of. Were they flushed down the toilet or dumped in the rubbish? Who wants to talk about that? It is simply too horrible to contemplate. Maybe think of that next time you hear the Green Party advocate for extreme abortion while complaining of pollution and demanding a clean water supply.

“President Donald Trump is no Mother Teresa but there are signs that under his new administration that the United States is beginning to turn away from abortion”

On a global scale, around 75 million babies yearly are destroyed through abor-

tion. Most of these are black children - around 38%. Of course, the same people who claim "Black Lives Matter" are the same people who support abortion. I once pointed this out on a podcast. I still remember the response of the female journalist: her lips actually curled.

Deforms

Mother Teresa, now St Teresa of Kolkata, famously told the American people that abortion deforms a nation.

President Donald Trump is no Mother Teresa but there are signs that under his new administration that the United States is beginning to turn away from abortion. Since taking office, he has defunded Planned Parenthood and pardoned twenty-three anti-abortion activists who were prosecuted for their peaceful pro-

life stance. Among them was Fr Fidelis Moscinski, a priest.

Perhaps if we will not end abortion for moral reasons, we may do so eventually out of our own self-interest, to prevent our own destruction as a people.

The Belfast abortion figures coincided with the news that the birth rate is falling in Northern Ireland in line with the rest of Ireland. By 2031 there will be more deaths than births. Actions have consequences.

It's made clear to us in Deuteronomy, Chapter 30, that we as individuals and as a nation have a choice between life and death. We are called to choose life and prosperity rather than death and destruction.

The number of Irish babies killed through abortion is well over 40,000.

When is enough going to be enough?

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‘Pray for strength, receive trials’ All-Ireland winning goalkeeper



Éanna Mackey

As an athlete, being second choice is never easy. But when the man ahead of you is often regarded as the greatest of all time, the challenge becomes both humbling and motivating.

Now retired, thirty-five-year-old Barry Hennessy had spent nearly a decade as part of Limerick’s golden generation, a key member of one of the greatest hurling squads in history. Yet, despite his incredible medal haul and contributions to a record-breaking team, he has often flown under the radar.

With a stellar club career for Kilmallock, where he has been the netminder since 2008, and a Limerick panelist since 2014, Hennessy’s resumé is nothing short of impressive.

Four Munster titles, four All-Ireland’s, two National League crowns and four Limerick championships make for an enviable list of achievements. Yet Hennessy made just two championship appearances during the course of his intercounty career, his path shaped by both the challenges and the brilliance of teammate Nickie Quaid.

Struggle

But his story is about far more than the games he played. It’s a story of incredible resilience, growth, and finding purpose beyond the pitch.

For much of his 20s, Hennessy battled a struggle that few knew about—a debilitating eating disorder that consumed years of his life.

“It started after my parents separated when I was in school, and I just never



Barry Hennessy pictured with Aaron Gillane.

dealt with it. At the same time, my progression with Limerick wasn’t going the way I wanted either, and I got a bit lost between my sporting life and my private life.”

“If I hadn’t made a change, I would’ve been left with no one in my life”

The disorder, later identified as bulimia, was both isolating and exhausting. Barry was consumed by self-doubt and feelings of secrecy and paranoia, which began to seep into his relationships and daily life. Some of his darkest moments were when he found himself in the solitude of his bathroom floor, purging his stomach to keep his weight down.

“I’d be down in the bathroom, looking up and asking, ‘Why is this happening to me? Why am I being punished?’ That probably caused a lot of resentment,

and it pushed me away from everything—including my faith.”

“At that time, I wasn’t a pleasant person to be around,” he admits. “I treated people terribly, and I didn’t give back to those who gave me so much. If I hadn’t made a change, I would’ve been left with no one in my life.”

Isolation

Barry admits that his inability to open up made him feel even more isolated. It was only when it became unbearably overwhelming that he decided that something needed to change, and so he took the first step in doing so and started a conversation. Central to his healing journey was the guidance of parish priest Fr

Chris O’Donnell.

“It was only when I spoke openly about it and spoke to the likes of Fr Chris that I realised that there was always someone there for me if I just hadn’t turned a blind eye,” he said.

“It’s about finding the courage to seek help”

“You just need to speak to someone, start a conversation with anyone - whether it’s a friend, family member, or a professional. I know mental health is still a bit taboo in Ireland, and people might be embarrassed about what others think, but the

people who care about you will always want to help.”

Restarting his journey with his faith didn’t erase his struggle, but it helped him to find the strength to face it. Looking back, he is reminded that resilience isn’t about enduring hardships alone—it’s about finding the courage to seek help and trust in the people and the faith that stand beside you.

“If you can get through something as bad as this, it’s something that I feel you can draw enormous strength from. To think of the power and confidence in the resilience that you’ve shown to get through it, it’s massive,” he said.

“Since then, I’ve become a lot more aware of things. You know that if you’re praying for strength, a challenge is going to be put in your path to learn the lesson that you’re looking for. If it does happen again, you’re just praying for that guidance to navigate it; it’s all God’s timing and God’s plan.”

Faith

As Barry’s faith grew stronger, so did his understanding of his role within the Limerick squad. Spending much of his career as a backup goalkeeper might have frustrated him in earlier years, but it became an opportunity to give back to the team.

“When I first joined, I wasn’t a great panel member,” Barry admits. “I was fiercely competitive, and I’d nearly be hoping Nickie might make a mistake so

that I could get my chance, but I soon realised that that mindset didn’t serve anyone.”

“I’m humble enough to know that he’s a generational talent, and I know that I gave everything that I could, and he still absorbed it. I then changed my mindset to how I can help contribute to the group and to help Nickie be more prepared.”

“I know that I’m a lot different from who I was in my early twenties”

Now retired from intercounty hurling, Barry’s journey has taken a new direction. He is pursuing a master’s in business at SETU Waterford while also stepping into a coaching role in Kerry - all while balancing life as a father to three young children.

“I know that I’m a lot different from who I was in my early twenties. Back then I would have always been known as and defined as Barry the Hurler. Now I want to be known as Barry the Dad to Hope, Pippa, and AJ, or just Barry the person.

“I don’t want to force it on them, but I’d like to bring my kids up in the Church and to have that relationship with God because there is huge power in having faith - as long as you go looking for it.”



Barry Hennessy pictured with his daughters.

“As Barry’s faith grew stronger, so did his understanding of his role within the Limerick squad”

The Irish Pastor writes

Notes in haste – January 2025

We have a new school principal in our Catholic school, which rejoices in having our bishop as its patron. The chair of the board of management almost crowed at the Catholic attributes of the new principal; he would be a squeaky-clean leader of our school, in addition to already being a resident of our parish and having a daughter in

First Communion class. I wonder how his Catholic credentials were explored by the board of management? What kinds of questions can an interview board ask to establish the faith qualities of an applicant for such a position? I have never chaired a Board of Management, which means I have never sat on such an interview board. (I did have a brief period as a patron's

representative on a board, but this did not exactly whet my appetite for chairing the board, what will all the considerations of plumbing issues and electrics, and with ethos or faith-related issues never on the agenda.)

I only ask about the mechanics for determining the faith-stance of an aspiring principal because a flaw emerged a little while later. The afore-mentioned child

had indeed been enrolled for First Communion in the school to which her parent had just been appointed, and was looking forward with her class to receiving the sacraments. The only problem was: she hadn't been baptised. A discreet phone call from the slightly embarrassed principal revealed this troubling bit of information.

I know that our school principal is not unique in

finding himself in this situation. Each year seems to bring forward at least one or two unbaptised children seeking sacraments, and I expect we will see more of them as the COVID children come of age. But this causes a little problem in small rural parishes without an RCIA group in place to process applicants for the 'Rite of Christian Initiation for Children of Catechetical Age', as the rite is

laboriously titled. Some of us are inclined to baptise discreetly and hope the religious education programme in the school will take the place of the catechetical element of the rite. But when we are allowing these children to be taught in 'Catholic schools' where the principal has himself neglected to have his child baptised, what hope of Christian formation is there?



Iwould like to thank *The Irish Catholic* for allowing priests to write anonymously on this page, thus giving us a voice. This allows us to be honest in a way we rarely get to be. I just hope lay people will not be overscandalised at our forthright

honesty. So often pages in *The Irish Catholic* are full of nice and worthy thoughts, with the result that what priests really feel may go unreported. Our honest feelings may not be as well varnished as is read on other pages – readers, tolerate this please!

There was a time when the First Friday was a special day in Catholic parishes. Not only was it the day when Communion was brought by the priest to the housebound, it was also a day on which many people tried to attend Mass (and Confession too, many many more years ago), as part of the 'Nine First Fridays' devotion, now largely disappeared.

In a more recent development, the First Friday seems to be becoming the day on which marriages are held in the church. Certainly that was the case in December, and I hear of it happening in the months of spring too. Friday of course facilitates those who travel to attend and who hope to enjoy the three-day event marriages have now become.

But marriages on the First Friday mean that the traditional faith observances fall apart. Communion cannot be brought to the sick because the marriage held at 12 or 1pm disrupts the monthly schedule of calls (and what priest wants to be greeted with "You're late" when he calls with Communion!). The first Friday Mass is disrupted too, as flower-masters need the church to themselves on the wedding day morning, to transform the church into a flower-filled paradise, which the regular weekday mass would surely interrupt.

In December I attended one marriage in a 'flower-potting' capacity, looking beautiful while merely observing – and I got to actually "do" one marriage too. Actually presiding is a more fulfilling experience, an opportunity to evangelise a group and an age of people rarely seen in church. It works when one is in good form. The priest not in

good form will surely get into an argument with someone – photographer, videographer, overzealous amateur photographer, unable-to-read Reader etc. May God send the grace to approach every wedding in a state of calm and grace – and may God thus prevent a marriage at which I preside from being remembered for all the wrong reasons!

January is one of those months with a holy day of obligation in it, one of those few which occurs when the school is open. Only the Immaculate Conception shares this fate. (The Assumption always falls during holiday time and All Saints often falls during midterm.)

Holydays that fall in school time give the school children the opportunity to attend the Mass, something

that probably would not happen if the children were not in school. The unfortunate corollary of this is that if the holy day Mass is celebrated during school time, none of the parents can attend, in these days of full employment. Only the retired and the unemployed can fill the church, along with the children, which is hardly completely desirable either. And no sane pastor will have two Masses on a holy day now, since the one

Mass is so poorly attended.

Of course, things were even less simple on January 6 past. The weather intervened and snow-ice warnings dotted the country, many lasting till noon or after. The question was asked whether the Mass times should be changed to account for the fact that many children would not be arriving in school till noon because of the warnings, and if the Mass time were changed, how would the

word be got out to the rest of the parish?

The pity is that schools open at all on church holydays. Holy days are part of what makes our Catholic faith distinctive; opening schools on holy days implies that holy days aren't that special really. Whoever agreed to this in some far-distant bishops-and-Department-of-Education negotiation dropped the ball.

There is one further

aspect of holy days that seems to have slipped from our memory. At some stage in the past, there was a suggestion that holy days occurring on Saturdays or Mondays might not continue to have the obligation to attend Mass attached to them. I don't know what happened to that most commendable idea; it was never implemented in Ireland, even though it seems permissible in other parts. Priests who spend a

week preparing their Sunday homily, only to have another homily expected of them the following day, with no time to prepare for it, would surely shout "Hurrah" if those holy days were dropped. (The more radical among us would probably prefer to reduce holy days to public holidays; I am sure we would get along quite well if holy days were reduced to St Patrick's Day and Christmas.)

A new series
written by Priests

Relentless

The fate of our churches

Ronan Doheny

The issue of closing churches has been grappled with so far in a seemingly haphazard way that needs to be tackled sooner rather than later. The costs of upkeep of churches takes up far too many resources for parish priests and bishops, not only financial but also time and energy. With declining Mass attendances and lack of ordinations, there are vastly too many churches, over 2,600, for the actual number of practicing Catholics. Cultural Catholics that once filled the pews at Christmas, Easter, Communion and Confirmations are becoming less numerous even at these times of the year. The next generations will have even less of a pull to attend church occasionally than previous ones. This is evidenced by the fact that soon there will be more civil ceremonies than Catholic marriages taking place in Ireland. But with so many churches no longer needed in Ireland, what will happen to them?

Crisis

For many the closure of churches is already a reality. Churches have closed across the country but in so few numbers that the difference is negligible. In a few years, if measures are not taken, we will face a crisis of empty churches, many of which will either be sold in a chaotic fire-sale or need to be demolished like the Church of the Annunciation in Finglas. According to Canon Law, when a church is no longer used for divine worship it can be relegated to profane but not sordid use. Examples of profane use might include office space, a library or accommodation. However, the issue arises, what is a profane or sordid use? If not categorically stated what the building can be used for, the grey area between the two will lead to developers taking advantage which will inevitably leads to abuses. What if a church used as an art gallery displays sacrilegious art? What if a church used as a performance area or theatre shows a sacrilegious play? Some will be happy that

the buildings are being used at all. But this isn't good enough. It isn't good enough for sacred places where the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass has taken place thousands of times.

“Individual churches could be cherrypicked but the Government won't come to the rescue”

Other uses of former churches across Europe include: swimming pools, health clubs, gyms or rock climbing halls. But there are increasingly examples of former churches, mostly Protestant for now, around the world being turned into bars, breweries and night clubs. This is the fate awaiting many Irish churches if steps aren't taken. My own personal view is that, if churches aren't listed buildings, or important for historical/

“The grey area between the two will lead to developers taking advantage which will inevitably leads to abuses”



A former monastery complex at Esker in Co. Galway being sold by the Redemptorist Order. Photo: The Irish Times

“I have sympathy for Bishops who are already overworked and have a litany of problems to attend to but this is a ticking time bomb that, if left unaddressed, will result in bad, avoidable mistakes”

artistic reasons, many should be bulldozed rather than have them used and abused by bad faith actors. Churches that can be given to fellow Christians such as Coptics or the Orthodox should be. There are relatively not many churches that would be of interest to the OPW, most that would be in the hands of the Church of Ireland. Individual churches could be cherrypicked but the Government won't come to the rescue.

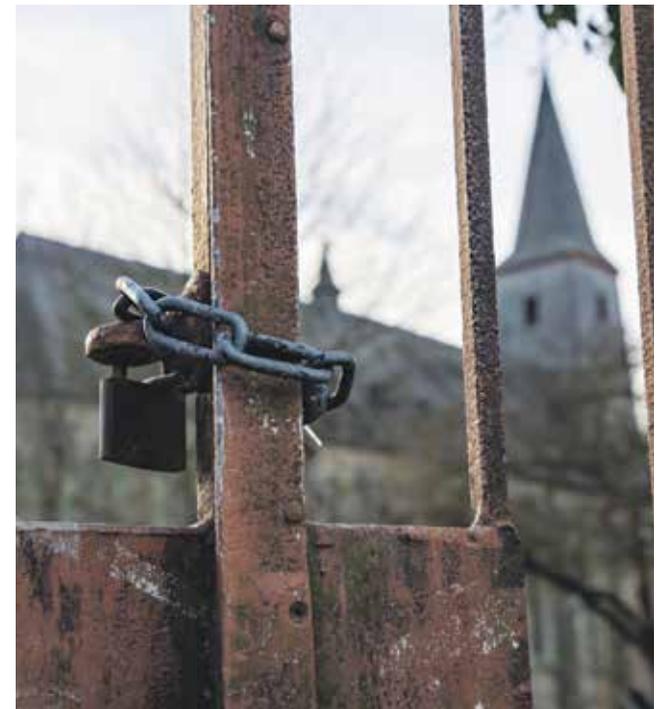
Strategy

Dutch Cardinal Eijk has taken a lead in showing the necessity of restructuring Dioceses to better suit the needs of the future. Eijk believes spending money on maintaining near-empty churches is unjustified and

limits the missionary outreach of the church. Bishop Cullinan of Waterford and Lismore has expressed similar sentiments in the past. Closing churches won't win popularity contests as Eijk and examples closer to home have found. I have sympathy for bishops who are already overworked and have a litany of problems to attend to but this is a ticking time bomb that, if left unaddressed, will result in bad, avoidable mistakes. Ultimately, the decision comes down to a local bishop and their bravery to invite criticism. One can understand the hesitation to court unpopularity when he is just starting in his role or else a couple of years from retirement. But the time has come, bishops need to be brave in the face of the predictable local backlash for the long term good of the Church.

“Tough decisions are needed which will result in loud condemnation and backlash”

Reviews looking at the island as a whole and in each diocese need to take place, looking at long term plans based on where population centres will be in the future, where churches and resources are best placed. Decisions will need to be based on a series of criteria, the most important of which should be the strategic location of churches for the reevangelisation of Ireland. The current solution in many areas of elderly priests serving several rural churches will come to a shuddering halt in a couple of years. The practice of



“When a church is no longer used for divine worship it can be relegated to profane but not sordid use”

keeping things ticking over and plugging leaks is holding the Church back. Part of the issue is that when attempts are made to close churches, local parish communities have the right in Canon Law to object. The relegation of a church to profane use must be done with their 'consent' which is why church closures should be planned with dialogue. But perhaps most importantly, a vision for how closures would aid a diocese or community is needed to get buy in. Tough decisions are needed which will result in loud condemnation and backlash. But the alternative is much worse.

Reasoning

As with so many other issues facing the Church in Ireland, sticking our head in the sand is not an option. Efforts to save churches are often just stays of execution, delaying the inevitable by a handful of years. The Church is not a democracy. If there are legitimate, considered reasons coupled with a plan

for the future, the laity should humbly accept that maybe their local church might be the one that will have to close. What is more important, your own personal reasons to keep 'your' church open or the long term good of the Church in Ireland?

Wasting resources can't continue, the Church can't continue throwing good money after bad. With the resources and money saved and gained from sale of land, money can be put towards victims of child sexual abuse, reevangelisation and tackling other hefty expenses such as caring for priests in retirement. For the Church to become the missionary church of the Second Vatican Council, it must shed part of the infrastructural baggage that it holding it down.

ⓘ Ronan Doheny is an archivist and is involved with his parish as well as conducting historical research on the 1932 Eucharistic Congress.

Ministry

Exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today

Traditional approaches versus newer realities



Fr Andrew McMahon

Listening to priests around the country - and reading what some have written - there is a discernible sense of the 'end of an era' in how many interpret the position of the Church in contemporary Ireland and, by implication, the context for their own ministry.

Concrete signs of the passing of that era are unmistakable across the country's landscape. Imposing convent buildings often lie vacant, or have been adapted for purposes other than those for which they were intended. Male religious congregations have similarly scaled back and are gradually withdrawing from town-centre friaries and from that cherished place the 'orders' traditionally occupied in our larger urban settings. Long established monasteries, too - known and respected throughout the land - are having to close their doors and merge with communities elsewhere. The national seminary at Maynooth, meanwhile, has leased much of its former facilities to the adjoining university - and there has been talk of a small, purpose-built replacement, somewhere within the College's grounds. These are all symbolic and telling developments, symptomatic of the wider demise of a Catholicism and religious culture many of us knew well.

Replacements

In mainstream parish life, however, this 'end of an era' can be - at least outwardly - less

obvious. Certain factors help obscure it: The understandable affinity which local people have with their church buildings, and related sites, means there has been little attempt to rationalise in terms of physical plant at parish level. Continuity can appear, therefore, more evident than change. Sacramental ministry and Church involvement in common rites of passage also continue to a considerable degree - and, for the most part, along broadly traditional lines. The increasing availability of priests from abroad and the emergence of the Permanent Diaconate here have enabled such continuity, despite the dramatic fall-off in home-grown vocations to the priesthood.

“Overall responsibility and accountability for the parish remains, ultimately, with the figure of the Parish Priest”

One tangible indicator of the overall decline, nonetheless - which growing numbers of our parishes do experience - is the absence of a resident PP or of a priest devoted specifically to that parish. When diocesan 'changes' are publicised, in summer or autumn time annually, they follow a now predictable pattern: The retirement of certain parish priests will likely be their initial emphasis. The entrusting of the parishes these are vacating to existing PPs will generally follow - with, perhaps, notice of the arrival of a priest from abroad, effectively assuming the role formerly fulfilled by a diocesan curate.

A notable consequence of this approach to appointments

is that Irish parish priests are increasingly likely to be assuming additional duties and expanding their areas of responsibility as they, themselves, move further into either middle or old age. The practice contrasts with the pattern of most working lives, where people generally shed responsibilities after they pass their peak years and as their capacities begin to diminish.

The demands this practice can give rise to are further intensified by the fact that - within the parochial system and clearly articulated in Canon Law - overall responsibility and accountability for the parish remains, ultimately, with the figure of the parish priest. This has significant implications at various levels, not least in the fact that - in a growingly bureaucratic age - the administrative and managerial duties attached to a parish are potentially doubled for a PP who takes on more than one parish. Even where he can competently adapt, and draw on skilled lay support, a priest in these circumstances will often find his availability for pastoral, catechetical and other areas of ministry constricted - areas likely to prove fruitful if he had more quality time to devote to them.

Revision

Our parishes were designed and established around the expectation of at least one resident priest and, while it does provide for other exigencies, Canon Law still assumes this to be the norm. One wonders, therefore, about a seeming reluctance on the part of Irish dioceses to revisit the whole parish system in light of this awareness, and in light of the fact that circumstances on the ground are moving us further and further away from this norm. Clusters, groups of parishes and families of parishes, are just some of the terms which have been devised - in the course of the past two decades - to describe

“Parish Priests are increasingly likely to be assuming additional duties and expanding their areas of responsibility as they, themselves, move further into either middle or old age”



Dutch Cardinal Eijk believes spending money on near-empty churches is unjustified.

arrangements which have put in place because of the unsustainability of the conventional model. Perhaps it is time for a more fundamental review and rationalisation to be considered?

“Reinforcing of local identity can shelter communities from wider realities and rather entrench them”

The maintaining of existing parish boundaries and the expectation that priests should traverse these has obvious benefits. It affirms the strong sense of community and pride of place which will have typically grown within a parish over several generations, while enabling parishioners to experience themselves as the local

“Even the most committed begin to wonder as to the value of what they are doing and question the worth of much of what they are busy about”

Church and take fuller responsibility for Church on their own home patch. Its limitations lie in the risk that the reinforcing of local identity can shelter communities from wider realities and rather entrench them in their sense of themselves.

I have heard, at least a few times in recent years, of local congregations opting or expressing a preference for having their own 'Communion Service', in the absence or potential absence of a priest - rather than travel a relatively short distance to join a neighbouring congregation for Sunday Mass. An admirable attachment to the local can gradually undermine one's commitment to the 'Catholic', without the congregant ever intending or, maybe even, noticing it.

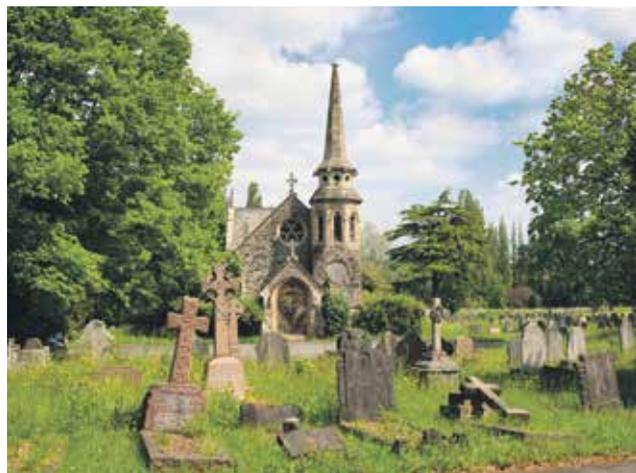
Consequences

An inevitable consequence, however, is the growing practice of priests finding themselves moving between small and shrinking congregations, in the course of a weekend, to celebrate a number of Masses within a relatively limited geographical area. Parish Priests are frequently preoccupied,

meanwhile, with the financial and related challenges of keeping various church buildings safe, warm and in sufficiently good repair to facilitate the continuance of this pattern of worship and ministry.

'Relentless Ministry' is the title which *The Irish Catholic* has chosen for this series of reflections on parish life today. The relentlessness, I would propose, derives not solely - perhaps not even primarily - from the amount of work to be done, but from the pressures which accumulate where traditional approaches persist regardless of newer realities, and custom and practice prevails in the absence of meaningful change. Where this happens, even the most committed begin to wonder as to the value of what they are doing and question the worth of much of what they are busy about. Such reservations can undermine one's sense of purpose and sap energy and enthusiasm at a time when both are much needed.

i Fr Andrew McMahon is a priest of the Diocese of Dro-more.



Catholic emancipation was a light to the world, we must celebrate it



We shouldn't be so intoxicated by the narrow view of an 'all-powerful Church' that we forget freedoms for Catholics were hard won, writes **Michael Kelly**

Just four years from now, these islands will mark the bicentenary of Catholic emancipation. We're used to seeing it almost exclusively as an Irish celebration, but we shouldn't forget that the act as well as a huge breakthrough for Catholics in Britain, was the first great measure of Westminster reform of the 19th Century.

The marking of such an important occasion is a strange omission from the list of events that the new programme for government commits the State to celebrate, particularly given that the incoming Government has vowed to mark the 250th anniversary of the US Declaration of Independence.

It would be a pity if the Church here did not commit to an important programme of events to mark the 1929 bicentenary, especially since just three years after that we will see the 1,600th anniversary of the arrival of St Patrick.

History

We take religious liberty and equality before the law for granted in 2025, but it wasn't always thus – and we can and should recall that fact. Catholic emancipation was a pivotal movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to dismantle the legal and social restrictions imposed on Catholics in both Britain and Ireland from the Reformation onwards. The culmination of this movement was the Roman Catholic Relief Act (1829), which significantly transformed the political and

social landscape for Catholics. Catholic emancipation had a profound impact for Catholics in Britain and Ireland, particularly on their civil liberties, political participation, and social integration.

To set the scene, following the Reformation, a series of penal laws were enacted in Britain and Ireland that severely restricted the rights of Catholics. These laws prohibited Catholics from – among other things – purchasing land, holding civil or military offices, sitting in parliament, inheriting property, and practicing their religion freely without incurring civil penalties. The intent, of course, was to suppress Catholicism and ensure Protestant dominance in political and social spheres. This was largely successful in Britain and Catholics were reduced to a negligible minority. In Ireland, however, the Reformation was a substantial failure and the vast majority of people held to their faith, at huge cost.

“This event intensified the push for emancipation”

Like all great reforms, the journey toward Catholic emancipation was gradual and fraught with challenges. Initial relief came with the 1778 Papists Act, which allowed Catholics to own property and inherit land. Further progress was made with the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1791, permitting the free practice of Catholicism under certain conditions. In Ireland, the Roman Catholic Relief Act of 1793 granted Catholics the right to vote and access to most civil offices, marking a significant breakthrough.

Two years later, what was to become the national seminary at Maynooth, was opened as the Royal College of St Patrick. But, before one thinks this an act of generous benevolence, the opening of Maynooth arose out of a concern that if Catholic priests continued to be educated on the Continent, they may imbibe some of the zeal of the French Revolution and disturb the peace of the British Empire. Better, it was



Daniel O'Connell church, Cahersiveen, Ring of Kerry. Inset: O'Connell Monument, the memorial to Daniel O'Connell on O'Connell Street Dublin. Photo: IStock

felt, to be able to keep an eye on them: close enough to Dublin to supervise, but far enough away not to have any influence.

A key moment occurred in 1828 when Daniel O'Connell, 'the liberator', won a by-election in Co. Clare but was barred from taking his seat in parliament due to his Catholic Faith. This event intensified the push for emancipation, eventually leading to the passage of the 1829 act. This landmark legislation allowed Catholics to sit as members of parliament and hold most public offices, although certain high-ranking positions remained restricted.

Reflection

So, why is it important to mark the bicentenary both in Ireland as well as in Britain? Well, the importance of Catholic emancipation for Catholics in Britain and Ireland cannot be overstated. Politically, it enfranchised a significant portion of the population that had been excluded from the political process. Catholics could now participate in governance, influence legislation, and advocate for their interests within the political system. This inclusion fostered a sense of belonging and encouraged active citizenship among Catholics, particularly in Britain – in Ireland, it provided leaders of the nationalist movement bolstered by the achievement.

Socially, emancipation facilitated the integration of Catholics into broader society. The removal of legal disabilities reduced religious discrimination and allowed Catholics to pursue careers in various professions, including

law, education, and the military. This integration helped to break down sectarian barriers in Britain and promoted social cohesion.

Religiously, the ability to practice their Faith openly without fear of legal repercussions was a profound change for Catholics. It affirmed their religious identity and allowed for the public expression of their beliefs, contributing to a more pluralistic and tolerant society.

“These gains were slow and uneven, and discrimination persisted in employment and access to resources”

Daniel O'Connell reflected on the achievement, stating, "It is my boast that Catholic emancipation, and every achievement of my political life was obtained without violence and bloodshed." This sentiment underscores the peaceful means by which emancipation was achieved and its profound impact on Irish society.

Reactionary responses to Catholic emancipation arguable contributed to the atmosphere where Catholics were widely discriminated against following the foundation of Northern Ireland in the 1920s. The passage of the act was met with significant resistance from

“The legislative change was a significant step toward equality and inclusivity in British society”

the Protestant community in Ireland. Though a tiny minority, Protestants had almost exclusive control of the professions and the historic dispossession of Catholics that followed the Reformation had hugely enriched Protestant families. Fearing that Catholic political empowerment could undermine Protestant interests and threaten the union with Britain, Protestants organised to protect their dominance. The Orange Order, founded in 1795, became more vocal and active in its defence of Protestant supremacy. Irish Protestant reaction to Catholic emancipation deepened sectarian divides in Ulster, where unionists were in a majority. Ulster Protestants sought to counterbalance what they perceived as a rising Catholic threat, thus in discussions about 'home rule' Protestants in the north were determined to become dominant.

The ability of Catholics in what was to become Northern Ireland to pursue professional careers and engage more fully in public life created opportunities for upward mobility. However, these gains were slow and uneven, and discrimination persisted in employment and access to resources, particularly in predominantly Protestant towns and cities like Belfast. This discrimination was institutionalised at the time of partition, encapsulated in the

famous words of the north's first prime minister that Stormont was a "Protestant parliament for a Protestant people".

Transformation

Overall, Catholic emancipation was a watershed moment for Catholics in Britain and Ireland. It marked the transition from a period of systemic discrimination to one of increased civil rights and social inclusion. The movement not only transformed the lives of Catholics but also contributed to the broader development of a more equitable and pluralistic society.

More broadly, the legislative change was a significant step toward equality and inclusivity in British society, one that would undoubtedly be marked across the water in 2029 – it would be a pity indeed if a one-dimensional view of our history, that sees the Church merely as a 20th Century power broker, means the State does not have the maturity to reflect on and mark the momentous occasion that was Catholic emancipation, not just on these islands – but as a beacon for the world.

At a time when religious freedom is under threat in many parts of the world, shining a light on the fight for freedom in Ireland would be a service to oppressed people everywhere.

Lament for Melleray

‘Trappist’. The very word cries out prayer, work, focus on the things that endure writes **Maurice Kiely**

It takes time, they say, to get used to an idea. It is now two or three months since I heard of the closure of Mount Melleray and like many others, I am still trying to get my head around it. The closure is, I suppose, inescapable but the final, definitive announcement of such an historic event always comes as a big shock. How can I imagine that great icon of Cistercian architecture, with its characteristic monastic church and cloister, empty, doors closed, monks scattered like their predecessors of the 16th century Dissolution and all the other dissolutions and expulsions since the end of the medieval centuries? French Revolution, Kulturkampf, Communism. Melleray is gone and not a trace in sight of a Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell, Voltaire, Bismarck, Stalin – only a generation that no longer feels able to take up the Trappist burden. Oh, that it should come to this, the great imposing abbey no more, the same abbey that can trace its origin back, not just to 1833 when the Trappists came to Melleray after yet another expulsion from their French homeland, but right back to the beginnings of the Cistercian Order in 1098. Their antiquity, like the antiquity of the Benedictines and the Orders of Friars is mind-blowing. They have been reflecting, *sub specie aeternitatis*, on the vicissitudes of human life for an exceedingly long time.

Melleray

I have always been quietly proud that Melleray is in Co. Waterford. We considered it our Melleray and the monks our monks. We could go there quite easily, meet the monks, and benefit from the many human and spiritual gifts that a monastic visit can bring to the complicated thicket of our lives. “I was over in Melleray last Sunday” is a refrain from my childhood. It was a kind of shorthand that the speaker had celebrated



Monks at prayer in the fields

“In short, where there was unruly and chaotic land, from Middle Age to modern age, there was Cistercians to put order and smacht on it”

Mass and some hours of the Divine Office with the monks, had a thoughtful stroll in the monastery garden, a cup of tea, and above all, had confession and heard a Cistercian voice say the ancient words “... through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” Who will we go to now when we seek relief from the burden of guilt? Who will we turn to when we need forgiveness for the transgressions of our youth? Who will speak words of consolation to us as we encounter illness and prepare for death (though we know not when or how)? It is only when the likes of Cistercians and Friars, and indeed our local parochial clergy, are more or less gone that we will miss the things of God

about which they spoke to us season in season out. Their absence is sensed already. A lot more of that absence is fast coming down the line.

“He is always aware of God’s nearness and that is the heart of his spiritual life”

‘Trappist’. The very word cries out prayer, work, focus on the things that endure. The motto of the Cistercian Order is *Laborare est Orare* (To work is to pray). That short phrase, seemingly innocuous, contains the whole of the spiritual life. It means that as we

go about our daily work, in office, school, factory, farm, we do it more or less consciously in the sight of God. A life of prayer is a life lived in the presence of God. No strain, no sweat, no long words – just a consciousness that God is near us. When we live with this awareness, we are à l’écoute de Dieu, tuned in as it were, on God’s wavelength. When the Trappist works in the field and the milking parlour (I helped a monk there once!), he is always aware of God’s nearness and that is the heart of his spiritual life.

Cistercians

To think of Cistercians is to think of their great contribution to agriculture, clearly evidenced in Mount Melleray. In the course of their life on the mountain, they have turned the unruly wilderness that was into a beautiful, green field.

They are God’s farmers. Other orders in the history of the Church have aimed in various ways at serving the society around them; the Cistercians fled from it. Given their agricultural vocation, they needed land but they did not want it in places where the chaos of nature had already been tamed by cultivation. They needed it in the untamed places, the wild, frontier terrain not yet touched by the sacred plough. Melleray in early 19th century Ireland was such a place. It was a characteristically austere locus for Cistercian life. In short, where there was unruly and chaotic land, from Middle Age to modern age, there was Cistercians to put order and smacht on it.

“How I regret now that I did not go more often to Melleray”

I stayed at Mount Melleray for a couple of days on two occasions. A retreat – where better

to take stock of life, surrounded by monks daily living the 1,500-year old Rule of St Benedict, day punctuated by Mass and Divine Office, atmosphere fite fuaite with prayer and silence. In such a place, human consciousness can hear the voice of God calling us to our true selves. How I regret now that I did not go more often to Melleray to imbibe more deeply this privileged way of being human! I made excuses, busy life, etc. but the feeling of loss remains. There are other monasteries, other numinous places, but perhaps only for the time being. Because are all the spirit-full places destined inevitably to be gobbled up in the general drama of post-Christian spiritlessness? After all, could the holy mountain of Melleray end up a luxury hotel pampering to what is least worthy, and not what is most worthy, in us?

Thank you, Cistercians, and may St Bernard of Clairvaux and the host of Cistercian saints go with you!

Maurice Kiely is from Dungarvan Co. Waterford and is a retired civil servant

Out&About

Limerick Dominicans gather



LIMERICK: Fr John Harris OP and the Dominican Sisters with members of the Dominican Laity chapter in Limerick. Recently, some members of the chapter took perpetual promises, others temporary promises and three new members were received.



FRANCE: Participants in the Legion of Mary Annual St Andrew's Ski trip to the French Alps with spiritual director Fr Declan Lohan CC Renmore Parish, Galway.



CORK: Fr Michael O'Leary SMA Wilton Parish joined by his parish team recently raised €12,000 donated following a Christmas appeal. Proceeds raised will support Trócaire who work directly with Caritas Jerusalem who are on the ground in Gaza providing basic needs for the citizens.

INSHORT

Parish archive opens in Gorey

The parish archive of St Michael's Parish, Gorey, Co. Wexford has reopened in St Patrick's Presbytery on January 24. The project was initiated by Fr William (Billy) Flynn PP who completed it with the help of James Grannell and other parishioners.

Fr Tommy Curran, who was baptised in 1945 in St Michael's and celebrated his first Mass in the same church in 1970, officially launched the archive.

"Today we have a special event here in Gorey when we reach another important milestone in our history, as we inaugurate this archive," Fr Curran said during the launch. "St Michael's has been an integral part of our town over the past 180 years. It's been here in times of famine and of revolution, in times of rebellion and war, in times of want and prosperity."

Fr Curran invited parishioners to search sheds, attics and boxes for pictures, photographs and memorabilia and donate or lend the items

to the archive to share their history with the community.

With a collection of items showcasing the history of the parish and town the archive will be open every Wednesday from 10.30am to 2pm.

Cork parish raises money for Gaza

Wilton Parish in Co. Cork has raised €20,000 to support humanitarian aid in Gaza. Fr Michael O'Leary PP and his parish team raised €8,000 last summer with a 'parish blanket raffle' and in January a further €12,000 donated following a Christmas appeal.

Proceeds raised will support Trócaire who work directly with Caritas Jerusalem who are in Gaza providing basic needs, food, water, medicine, blankets, shelter as well as psychosocial support for the citizens.

Speaking at the presentation of the €12,000 cheque, Janet Twomey, Trócaire's Centre and Volunteer Officer, thanked the people of the

Wilton parish and all who contributed so generously during 2024.

Ms Twomey said that over 90% of the population of Gaza have been displaced multiple times, 87% of housing units have been destroyed and only 36% of primary health centres are functioning while 625,000 students have no access to formal education.

Today, she said, on top of almost 47,000 dead, thousands more lie beneath the rubble and UNOCHA estimate that there are more than 100,000 wounded people in Gaza, More than 17,000 children are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Clonard Monastery pays tribute to volunteer after his death

The Redemptorist Community in Clonard Monastery, Belfast paid tribute to Sean Curley a volunteer and friend who worked with the Redemptorist Community for many years.

The congregation said in a statement that

"Sean dedicated over 30 years of his life to volunteering at Clonard Monastery, where his unwavering commitment to the Church and his faith was truly inspiring."

They said that Mr Curley's contribution to the Clonard Community was "remarkable", and he selflessly volunteered in the car park during the Solemn Novena. "He also led the St Vincent de Paul Conference of the Most Holy Redeemer, devoting countless hours to helping those in need."

The congregation said that "in recent years, Sean's service expanded as he helped in the sacristy and served as a Eucharistic Minister, demonstrating his deep devotion to his faith and community. Beyond Clonard, Sean was a dedicated member of St John's Ambulance and a Knight of St Columbanus, reflecting his lifelong commitment to serving others."

The Clonard Community, offered their "deepest sympathy to Sean's family, his brothers, sisters, his children and grandchildren... Sean's kindness and dedication touched the lives of so many, and his love for his family was evident in all that he did."

Edited by Renata Steffens
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Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



KILDARE: Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty received a delegation from St Brigid's Church, Noorbeek, Netherlands at Solas Bhríde on January 22. The pilgrims came for the flame of Brigid, which was taken from the flame that never goes out at Solas Bhríde.



CORK: (L/R) Bishop Ray Browne, Bishop Brendan Leahy, Bishop Martin Hayes, Archbishop Kieran O'Reilly and Bishop Fintan Monahan at the Laudato Si' conference 'Seeds of Hope: Returning Biodiversity to Our Parishes', which took place in Mallow, Springfort Hall Hotel on January 25.



LIMERICK: Canon Joseph Shire PP, Sarah Ryan, School Principal, Bishop Breandan Leahy and Cathriona Mc Namara on the occasion of the Bishop Leahy Pastoral visit to St Brigid's Primary School, Singland.



CORK: Kerry Diocese Pastoral areas' representatives with Bishop Ray Browne attending 'Seeds of Hope: Returning Biodiversity to Our Parishes', a Laudato Si' conference for the Dioceses of Kerry, Killaloe, Limerick and Cashel and Emlly. The event took place on January 25 in Mallow, Springfort Hall Hotel.



CAVAN: (L/R) Sr Anne Gray SSC, Bishop Martin Hayes and Toni Pyke, AMRI at the final public display of the photographic exhibition Daring to Hope Irish Religious Sisters Embracing the Unknown (1923-2023) in the Cathedral of St Patrick and St Felim on January 19.



LIMERICK: Bishop Breandan Leahy pictured with teachers Michaela Dolan and Aine O'Connell on the occasion of the bishop's visit to St Brigid's Primary School, Singland.

ANTRIM

Belfast regional launch of the book *The Rock From Which You Were Hewn* takes place on February 16 at 12.30pm following 11am Mass. Dom Basil Mary MacCabe OSB will launch it at the Church of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Antrim Road. Refreshments provided.

CAVAN

'Breathwork for Wellness' 6-week introduction starting on February 12 from 8pm to 9pm in Killinkere Leisure Centre, Virginia is suitable for adults. Drop ins welcome. Voluntary contribution accepted. For more information contact Maria on 087 421 9911.

CLARE

Boher National School Parents Association is organising a 'family fun bingo night' (suitable for all the family) on February 7 at 7pm in the Lakeside Hotel and Leisure Centre. Tickets are €10.

CORK

New Springtime Community are holding an afternoon of Ecumenical Prayer and a Healing Service in Halla Baile Bhuirne, Ballyvourney, P12 HW02. It will take place from 2pm to 4 pm on February 15. Speakers include members of New Springtime Community Janice Carrig and Barbara Harris. All are welcome.

The Annual Lourdes Mass takes place on February 7 in St Gobnait's Church, Ballyvourney at 7.30pm. Bishop William Crean will be the Chief Celebrant.

DONEGAL

A 'Quis By Jim' will be held in The Railway Inn on February 7 at 8.30. All proceeds raised in aid of Scoil Náisiúnta Cholmcille, Baile na Finne. Teams of 4. Entry is €5 per person. There will be raffle and refreshments served on the night. All welcome!

MAYO

Join the Marian Franciscans in Knock for a Traditional Latin Mass on February 7 at 4pm in the Adoration Chapel. Meet-and-greet afterwards.

DUBLIN

Pure in Heart's 'Authentic Love Conference' takes place on February 8 from 12pm to 4pm at 23 Merrion Square, Dublin 2. Speakers are Fr Alan O'Sullivan OP, Trinity Chaplain and Spiritual Director, Sean Flack, Regional Director of FOCUS in

Europe and Michelle Kelly, General Manager at Pure in Heart. Booking is essential on info@pureinheart.ie. €20 per person.

GALWAY

Day conference 'The Kingship of the Christ and Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary – 100 years of Quas Primas' takes place in Galmont Hotel on February 8 at 9am. The event is free, but places are limited. To register email info@roundtower.org. Band and dance in the evening.

MONAGHAN

Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Monaghan Charismatic Prayer Group take place from February 7 at 6.30pm to February 9 in the 4 Seasons Hotel. Opening Mass will be celebrated by Bishop of Clogher Laurence Duffy. Talks will be given by many guest speakers. Admission is free but donations accepted. More information on 087 9717447.

SLIGO

'Baby Bonding Classes' are sessions with gentle and playful activities to help you build a strong bond with your baby. Learn how babies develop and how you play a role in it. Dates to be decided. Suitable for newborns to 8-months-old. Cost is €10 and places are limited. Bookings on 071 918 6926.

TIPPERARY

A retreat for young adults (18-40yrs) takes place from February 14 to 16 in Mt St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea. Step aside from the busy world to focus on the love of Jesus. Full meals and a single room are offered. Admission is a donation. More information with Michael on 086 2453123 or Sr Una 090 6481666.

TYRONE

Termonmaguirc Parish Triduum of prayer takes place from February 26 to 28. The Triduum will be led by Fr Damian Polly who is a Dominican Friar from Dublin and is the Prior of the Dominican Community, Kilkenny.

WATERFORD

An afternoon of Prayer takes place on February 16, from 2pm to 5.30pm in the Edmund Rice Chapel, celebrating Charismatic Renewal in the Catholic Church. All welcome! More information with Síle on 086 8590394.

Grandparents flock to schools for a celebration day in Limerick



Renata Steffens

To celebrate the Catholic Schools Week 2025, two schools in Doon, Co. Limerick organised a 'Grandparents Day'. Pupils from Doon C.B.S. Primary School and Doon Convent Primary School enjoyed a nice day with their families.

The event took place on January 28 with the grandparents and children attending Mass celebrated by Fr Jimmy Donnelly PP in the morning in the Parish church.

Music and song for the Mass was provided by the children under the guidance of Breda Dervan, Doon Convent NS (Choir), Vice Principal who also organised the

ceremony, Ellie Diggins Doon Convent NS, (Piano), Donal O'Connell, CBS(Guitar).

Grandparents, children and school staff enjoyed refreshments in the Convent Primary School organised by the Parent Associations of both schools.

Audrey Crowe, C.B.S. Primary School's Secretary acted as photographer for the occasion. Following the Mass pupils got an opportunity to meet their grandparents, show them their classrooms and many showed their projects and favourite books. "Getting home early with Nanny and Granddad" was cited as being the highlight of the occasion for many.

It was a great social and spiritual occasion for grandparents to meet, reminisce about their own school days and say a prayer. Pakie O'Brien of Carrigbeg, Doon, and Seanie Fox, were among the oldest grandparents present and former students of the C.B.S.



Alex Mahoney pictured with his mother Aisling. Convent Primary School.



Cormack Murphy pictured with his grandparents. C.B.S. Primary School.



Ella Mc Cormack pictured with her grandparents, Martina and Tom Mc Cormack. Convent Primary School.



Robbie Ryan pictured with her grandparents. Convent Primary School.



Fiona and Joseph with their grandparents Ann and John Hayes. Convent Primary School.



Freya Bourke pictured with her grandfather Donal Mc Kenna. Convent Primary School.



The Stapleton Family with their Grandmother Bernie Harty. Convent Primary School.



Emily Ryan pictured with her grandparents. Convent Primary School.



Cousins Fionn O'Brien and Harry Butt pictured with their grandparents. C.B.S. Primary School.



Sean O'Dwyer pictured with his mother and grandmother. C.B.S. Primary School.



Sienna Ryan pictured with her mother and grandmother. Convent Primary School.



Abbey and Lauren Hartnett and Ava Mc Loughlin pictured with their grandmother Peig Mc Loughlin. Convent Primary School.



Joseph Ryan pictured with his grandparents. C.B.S. Primary School.



Beibhin and Nora Treacy pictured with their grandparents. Convent Primary School.



Luke Nolan pictured with his family. Convent Primary School.



Tommy Quinlivan pictured with his grandparents. C.B.S. Primary School.



The Cliffords and Fitzgeralds pictured with their grandmothers and parents.



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

Pope leads global summit on defending children’s rights



Elise Ann Allen

Pope Francis on Monday hosted an international summit on the rights of the child, lamenting the millions who daily endure war, poverty, abuse, exploitation, depression and a lack of hope for the future.

The February 3 summit, held in the Clementine Hall of the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace and titled, ‘Love them and protect them’, featured keynote speeches by Pope Francis and Vatican Secretary of State Italian Cardinal Pietro Parolin, as well as from the Vatican’s Secretary for Relations with States, British Archbishop Paul Gallagher, among others.

It drew high-level participants from across the world, including former US Vice President and Nobel Peace Laureate Al Gore, Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan, and a slew of government representatives from Italy, Gambia, Indonesia, Egypt, and South Africa, as well as representatives of institutions such as the World Food Program, FIFA, Interpol and Mary’s Meals.

Lamented

In an opening address, the Pope, lamented that throughout the world, children’s rights “are daily trampled upon and ignored.”

He noted that many children experience poverty, war, a lack of access to healthcare



Queen Rania of Jordan (left) signs a document during the world leaders’ summit on children’s rights at the Vatican, February 3, 2025. Sitting and looking on are Pope Francis (centre) and former US Vice President Al Gore, right. Standing from left to right are: Angelo Chiorazzo, founder of the ‘Auxilium’ social cooperative; Franciscan Fr Enzo Fortunato, president of the Pontifical Committee for the World Day of Children; and Aldo Cagnoli, vice president of the same committee. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

and education, as well as injustice and exploitation, and that even in wealthier countries, “little ones are not infrequently vulnerable and suffer from problems that we cannot underestimate.”

“A culture of efficiency looks upon childhood itself, like old age, as a ‘periphery’ of existence”

Children across the world have to deal with various difficulties, he said, and those in developed nations often experience anxiety and depression, and many are “drawn to forms of aggression or self-harm.”

“Moreover, a culture of

efficiency looks upon childhood itself, like old age, as a ‘periphery’ of existence,” the Pope said, and noted that many young people struggle to find hope in themselves and their circumstances, calling this “sad and troubling.”

“What we have tragically seen almost every day in recent times, namely children dying beneath bombs, sacrificed to the idols of power, ideology, and nationalistic interests, is unacceptable,” he said, saying, “nothing is worth the life of a child.”

Future

Pope Francis stressed that “To kill children is to deny the future,” and lamented that where war is absent, other problems such as drug and gang related violence are prevalent, as well as a destructive

of adequate medical care and schooling.”

He called the situation a “global moral crisis” and urged summit participants to not let these situations “become the new normal.”

The Pope condemned what he said was a general lack of mercy and compassion before the plight children face, noting that 40 million children throughout the world have been displaced by conflict, while around 100 million are homeless and others endure slavery in the forms of trafficking, child labour, abuse and compulsory marriages.

There are also millions of migrant children, including many who are alone, he said, noting that a significant number of children “live in limbo” because they were not registered at birth. Some 150 million children are in this situation, he said, meaning they are essentially “invisible” and lack education and healthcare.

“We can think of the young Rohingya children, who often struggle to get registered, or the ‘undocumented’ children at the border of the United States,” he said.

These children, he said, are “those first victims of that exodus of despair and hope made by the thousands of people coming from the South towards the United States of America, and many others.”

This situation is nothing new, he said, pointing to the fact that many elderly people have experienced similar difficulties and tragedies during times of wars and conflicts of the past.

Strengthen

Hearing stories of past violence, injustice and exploitation, he said, “serves to strengthen our ‘no’ to war, to the throwaway culture of waste and profit, in which everything is bought and sold without respect or care for life, especially when that life is small and defenceless.”

Francis also reiterated his condemnation of the practice of abortion, saying, “In the name of this throwaway mentality, in which the human being becomes all-powerful, unborn life is sacrificed through the murderous prac-

tice of abortion.”

“Abortion suppresses the life of children and cuts off the source of hope for the whole of society,” he said.

He closed urging participants to make the most of the summit and voiced hope that the discussion would “help to build a better world for children, and consequently for everyone!”

“For me, it is a source of hope that we are all here together, to put children, their rights, their dreams, and their demand for a future at the centre of our concern,” he said.

“Childhood, he said, is ‘often wounded, exploited and denied’”

Participants spoke in seven different panels throughout the day, dedicated to themes such as the rights of the child, including their right to resources, education, food, healthcare, and family, as well as their right to leisure and to live free from violence.

Pope Francis, who sat in various panels throughout the daylong summit, in closing remarks voiced gratitude to participants for their contributions, saying the halls of the apostolic palace had become an “observatory open to the reality of childhood throughout the world.”

Childhood, he said, is “often wounded, exploited and denied.”

Participants’ presence, experience and compassion, he said, “have given life to an observatory and above all a ‘laboratory’: in various themed groups you have developed proposals for the protection of children’s rights, considering them not as numbers but as faces.”

“All this gives glory to God, and we entrust it to Him, so that His Holy Spirit may make it fertile and fruitful,” he said, and announced his intention to write a document, an apostolic letter or exhortation, dedicated to children.

With this document, he said, he hopes “to give continuity to this commitment (to children) and to promote it throughout the Church.”

“Abortion suppresses the life of children and cuts off the source of hope for the whole of society”

Polka dancing, Hershey's Kisses and novenas for World Marriage Day in US



Zoey Maraist

A sea of heart-shaped cards, candy and decor reminds couples that Valentine's Day is around the corner. But at the same time, many Catholic parishes are preparing to celebrate a related but different memorial to love – World Marriage Day.

The holiday began in Baton Rouge in 1981 when marriage enthusiasts declared on February 14 'We Believe in Marriage Day'. The Catholic organisation Worldwide Marriage Encounter adopted and spread the celebration, now held on the second Sunday of February. The US Conference of Catholic Bishops picked 'Marriage: Source of Hope, Spring of Renewal. Pursue a Lasting Love!' as the theme for this year's World Marriage Day, February 9 and National Marriage Week, Feb. 7-14.

In College Station, Texas, St Thomas Aquinas Parish is celebrating World Marriage Day with a blessing over all the married couples at the February 8 vigil Mass followed by a parish dinner dance. This year's dance has a Polish wedding theme, complete with kielbasa, sauerkraut, a traditional cookie table and polka dancing. Each table will have bread and salt, a Polish wedding custom symbolising the saltiness of life and a prayer for continued sustenance.

Community

The whole parish pitches in to make the event a success, said St Thomas Aquinas' pastor, Fr Albert Laforet Jr.

"We try to make it very family friendly and inexpensive so



This file photo shows some of the more than 100 couples who renewed their wedding vows on World Marriage Day at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels in Los Angeles. World Marriage Day is observed February 9. Photo: OSV News/Victor Aleman, Via Nueva

our young families can participate," he told OSV News.

"We have a group of parishioners called the St Lawrence Grill team to prepare the food -- smoking meat is a great Texas tradition. Another group of parishioners formed a band for the dancing. The American Heritage Girls do the decorations," he said.

“Marriages are an outward sign of God's grace to us”

A strong marriage and family culture in the church fosters vocations, said Fr Laforet. He shared that St Thomas Aquinas has several parishioners in formation, including four seminarians and one woman discerning religious life.

"We encourage our families to promote all the vocations in their family life," he said.

As World Marriage Day coordinators for Worldwide

Marriage Encounter, Tom and Julie Gennaro are promoting the holiday by sharing ways parishes can mark the occasion.

"It can be as simple as asking your priest to pray over married couples to handing out Hershey's Kisses as people leave the parish," said Julie Gennaro.

Other ideas include running a bulletin announcement celebrating marriage, posting a video message with testimonies from married couples, celebrating a liturgy honouring marriage or hosting a marriage enrichment event.

"Our marriages are an outward sign of God's grace to us and it's incumbent on us to celebrate our marriage and celebrate the sacrament of marriage," said Tom Gennaro.

Recognition

Worldwide Marriage Encounter also promotes marriage throughout the year with its annual Longest Married Couple Project, an initiative to find and honour longtime married couples across the country.

“We encourage our families to promote all the vocations in their family life”

Recent winners include Charles and Goldia Sasse from Fairbury, Illinois, who had been married 79 years.

“The mentor couple commits to walk alongside the engaged couple”

"We personally love recognising couples that inspire us in our community... and letting them know we think their longevity has been an inspiration to us as a married couple," said Julie Gennaro.

Thirteen years ago, Louisiana Catholic couple Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret, co-authors of *The Road to Family Missionary Discipleship: Forming Marriages and Families to Share the Joy of the Gospel*, wanted to help marriages by connecting couples more meaningfully to their church community. So they founded the Witness to Love marriage ministry.

Their marriage formation programme is modelled on the catechumenate and has engaged couples also pick their mentor couple (using specific criteria) that they know and respect. The mentor couple commits to walk alongside the engaged couple throughout

their entire marriage.

"We were trying to do a two-for-one evangelisation effort, and by allowing the church community to get involved in marriage preparation, it just changed the whole parish," Mary-Rose Verret told OSV News.

The Witness to Love program is now in 85 dioceses and has been used by thousands of couples and their mentors.

Much like when seminarians give their testimony at the end of Mass, Ryan and Mary-Rose Verret hope married couples can take to the pulpit to share their story on World Marriage Day.

Jubilee

During this Jubilee Year, which Pope Francis has given the theme "Pilgrims of Hope," the Verrets are also encouraging parishes to reach out to civilly married couples.

One small parish in a remote part of Texas launched Witness to Love's Civil Marriage Initiative and had 20 couples and their mentors have their marriages convalidated on the same day, said Mary-Rose Verret.

"Exactly a year later they had another 20 couples," she said. "They just decided they were going to make this a priority -- they're being evangelical, they're being missionaries. It's really beautiful."

On their social media, Witness to Love will be sharing a novena for the sacrament of matrimony. Each day of the nine-day prayer will have a patron saint couple and special intentions including for widows and widowers, couples experiencing infertility and couples in challenging marriages.

"Married life can be difficult, especially in today's culture (so) we're just trying to wrap every married couple in a prayerful hug with this novena," said Mary-Rose. "You can never pray enough for marriage."

Zoey Maraist writes for OSV News from Virginia.

Aid organisation reports restrictions for Christians in Syria

KNA

Compulsory veiling for women, appeals to convert to Islam – according to Aid to the Church in Need, this is what Christians in Syria have to put up with. Overall, however, the mood is "cautiously optimistic".

According to a report by the Catholic aid organisation Aid to the Church in Need, Syria's Christians are occasionally struggling with the fact that Islamists want to restrict their religious freedom. In some places, for example, radical groups have been able to enforce separate seat-

ing for women and men on public transport and the obligation for women to wear veils, the aid organisation reported on Monday in Munich, citing local sources. The observers attributed the success of these measures to the lack of a unified administration following the change of power.

The most difficult situation for Christians is in the cities of Homs and Hama in western Syria, an interlocutor told Aid to the Church in Need: "People avoid going out on the streets after 5pm. There are jihadists on the streets who use megaphones to call on people to convert to Islam." Women who do not wear a veil in public

are being publicly criticised.

In the "Valley of the Christians", around 60km from Homs near the border with Lebanon, the situation is largely peaceful, the contacts explained. So far, there have only been incidents on the access roads: "There are cases where Christians have been asked to convert to Islam at roadblocks. If they refuse, they are prevented from travelling on." Occasionally, travellers have been robbed.

As the capital Damascus is in the media and political spotlight, the new authorities there are "keen to project a positive image", the report continued. "Nevertheless, there are individual

incidents such as the call for women to wear a veil or the ban on women and men not going out on the street together if they are not related to each other." There are similar reports from Aleppo in the north of the country.

Meanwhile, church representatives have expressed their willingness to cooperate with the new rulers. In several talks, the political leaders had assured the Christians that their rights would be fully respected. The talks are primarily about securing the status of Christians as an integral part of Syrian society. The overall mood among Christians is "cautiously optimistic".



World Report



Edited by Brandon Scott
brandon@irishcatholic.ie

Let the pilgrimages begin



Pilgrims make their way through St Peter's Square toward the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica during the Jubilee of the World of Communications at the Vatican. Photo: CNS/Lola Gomez.

Bishop Barron applauds Trump's order banning minors' sex-change surgeries

Bishop Robert Barron has released a statement commending President Donald Trump's recent executive order banning federal funding for "transgender" medical interventions for minors.

"I welcome the president's executive order," Bishop Barron said in a statement in his capacity as chairman of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life, and Youth.

"So many young people who have been victims of this ideological crusade have profound regrets over its life-altering consequences, such as infertility and lifelong dependence on costly hormone therapies that have significant side effects," Bishop Barron said.

In his statement, the Minnesota bishop who is also the founder of the Catholic media apostolate Word on Fire condemned the widespread promotion of "transgender" medical interventions for minors that came into vogue under the Biden administration, calling them "unacceptable".

Referencing Pope Francis' 2024 papal declaration *Dignitas Infinita*, Barron emphasised that "we are all called to accept the gift of our bodies created in God's image as male and female" and to recognise the inherent beauty of sexual difference as the foundation of marriage.

"I also applaud the executive order's aim to identify and develop research-based therapies to aid young people

struggling with gender dysphoria," he continued. "These individuals are loved by God and possess the same inherent dignity that all persons do. They deserve care that heals rather than harms."

At the USCCB fall meeting in Baltimore last year, Bishop Barron spoke about his committee's "Love Means More" initiative based on *Dignitas Infinita*. The effort is intended to share the foundational principles of Church teaching about love in such a way that Catholics and non-Catholics alike can understand.

"Helping young people accept their bodies and their vocation as women and men is the true path of freedom and happiness," he concluded.

Less than 1% of the population over the age of 13 in the

US are transgender, according to a study by the UCLA Williams Institute, and the number seeking medical care is smaller.

The gender order states that it will "defend women's rights and protect freedom of conscience by using clear and accurate language and policies that recognise women are biologically female, and men are biologically male".

It requires that the federal government use the term 'sex' instead of 'gender', and directs the State Department and the Department of Homeland Security to "require that government-issued identification documents, including passports, visas, and Global Entry cards, accurately reflect the holder's sex".

New data looks at clerical abuse of minors in the Philippines

At least 82 priests and religious brothers associated with the Philippines have publicly accused of sexual abuse with minors, according to a new data provided by BishopAccountability.org, a leading anti-abuse organisation.

The database now on their website includes Filipino priests accused of sexually abusing minors in the Philippines,

Filipino priests who served part of their priesthood in the Philippines but who are accused of sexually abusing minors while working in the US, and accused clergy from other countries – specifically, the United States, Ireland, and Australia – who served part of their priesthood in the Philippines.

At least seven of the accused priests

continue to serve in parishes across the Asian island nation, some as recently as last month, according to Anne Barrett Doyle, co-director of BishopAccountability.org said last Wednesday.

She told journalists the Philippine bishops have a "deep sense of entitlement" in withholding information on the abuse of priests in their diocese.



Elon Musk's brother pitches jubilee year drone show in Rome

● Kimbal Musk, entrepreneur and younger brother of Elon Musk, met with Rome Mayor Roberto Gualtieri over the weekend to propose a drone-based musical light show for the Catholic Church's 2025 Jubilee, according to Italian media.

Donning his signature cowboy hat, Musk discussed the concept at the Palazzo Senatorio on January 25, aiming to create a privately sponsored event featuring drones choreographed to music.

The previous day, he had met with Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at Palazzo Chigi, accompanied by Andrea Stroppa, Elon Musk's representative in Italy, and Veronica Berti, the wife of tenor Andrea Bocelli.

Musk is also expected to pitch the idea for the musical drone show to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, the Vatican's chief organiser of the jubilee, according to the Italian newspaper *La Stampa*.

Prominent cardinal denies allegations of sexual abuse

● The director of the Holy See Press Office, Matteo Bruni, confirmed on Sunday the disciplinary measures that were taken in 2019 against Cardinal Juan Luis Cipriani, archbishop emeritus of Lima, Peru, as a result of "the accusations [of sexual abuse] formulated against him".

Cipriani broke his silence on Friday, January 24, denying the accusations of sexual abuse against him published by the Spanish newspaper *El País* and

revealing that the Vatican imposed sanctions on him in 2019, the same ones that the Vatican confirmed to *ACI Prensa*.

The accusations published by *El País* are based on the testimony of a 58-year-old man who said that Cipriani — who was an Opus Dei priest from 1977 to 1988, when he was named bishop by Pope John Paul II — abused him in 1983 when he was between 16 and 17 years old at an Opus Dei centre.

Pope, American bishops offer prayers following deadly midair collision

● Pope Francis has expressed his "spiritual closeness to all those affected" by the midair collision of a passenger plane and military helicopter at Ronald Reagan National Airport near Washington DC on January 29.

"In commending the souls of the deceased to the loving mercy of almighty God, I offer my deepest sympathies to the families who are now mourning the loss of a loved one," Pope Francis said in a January 30 telegram addressed to President Donald Trump.

"I likewise pray for those involved in the recovery efforts and invoke upon all in the nation the divine blessings of consolation and strength," he continued.

Around 9pm local time on January 29, an American Airlines flight carrying 60 passengers and four crew members from Wichita, Kansas, collided with an army helicopter as it was landing at Ronald Reagan National Airport. There were three soldiers aboard the helicopter.

Pope Francis offers condolences after death of Orthodox Archbishop

● Pope Francis sent his condolences to the Orthodox Church in Albania on Monday following the recent death of Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, who led that church for nearly 33 years.

Praising Anastasios for his "profound dedication to the Gospel", the Holy Father expressed his fraternal esteem for the 95-year-old prelate who helped revive Christianity in the former communist country and who died on January 25.

"The faith of the Orthodox community of Albania was certainly embodied in the life of our dear brother, whose zealous pastoral service helped the people rediscover its richness and beauty following the years of state-imposed atheism and persecution," the Pope said in his January 27 message.

Letters

Letter of the week

It seems clear that many priests are hurting

Dear Editor, Many thanks for opening a debate about the ministry of priests in Ireland today in the 'Relentless Ministry' section [*The Irish Catholic* – January 16, 2025]. It seems clear that many priests are hurting very badly, and this may be partly as a result of a reluctance on our part to speak to each other directly about our concerns and our real needs. As priests we are called to preside at the Eucharist and to be pastors, but we do so for the people we are called to serve. Perhaps we can

somehow help and support one another at a more personal and local level.

When I was ordained for the Dublin Diocese in 1964 I could not have imagined what life there was in store for me. Now in 2025 I can only thank God for the life journey which has somehow been gifted to me. It was certainly not what I had foreseen, but it was certainly much more joyful than I could have expected, and despite the very real challenges. Somehow the graces were given to me as and

when I needed them, and the presence of God seemed to be somehow everywhere.

Now being listed as a retired priest indicates that I am no longer expected to fulfil any further public ministry in the diocese. However, I remain a priest, and still a 'minister of the word and work of Jesus Christ'. While I am no longer in a public role in the church, I am somehow better able to sense the concerns of my lay catholic friends, and especially of my own family

members, who somehow are sad to see the Church here in Ireland in such a poor state. Certainly we all need hope, but we also need some indication of a possible way forward, and in the near future.

I certainly look forward to reading the contributions of others, and hopefully sharing some of my own here in *The Irish Catholic* with God's help.

*Yours etc.,
Fr Paddy Gleeson
Mount Merrion, Co. Dublin*



Priests must say yes and trust the Lord

Dear Editor, I was astonished at the article written by Garry O'Sullivan [*The Irish Catholic*, January 23, 2025]. Our bishops are the teaching authority of the Church and not managers of a business. Time and time again they have been blamed for all the ills in the Irish Church.

It is time now that all our priests take a look back over the years of their ministry and look at all the times that a lay

man or woman came to them offering to organise adoration, recitation of the rosary, Bible study groups, catechesis for children, parish missions, or even to paint the Church, fundraise for new windows, the list in endless and they said no. The laity are also made in the image and likeness of God and we too by our baptism have a role to play in evangelising our country. For every time a priest says no to a lay

person a chance is lost for the Holy Spirit to work in the parish. I have no doubt vocations have been lost, indeed souls have been lost because the laity have not been let play our part in building up our Church. I only heard last night how a group of parishioners had to fight to be able to Adore the Blessed Sacrament!

I urge all our priests to not be afraid. Step out on the water with us! Say yes and

trust in the Lord. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. I promise you your burden will be lighter. If you think you don't have active laity, pray with your parishioners and ask them to come to you with their ideas. The Body of Christ was never meant to have just one active part.

*Yours etc.,
Fiona Kiely
Bartlemy, Co. Cork*

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.

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

Christianity in Ireland has a glorious future

Dear Editor, Many people firmly believe that the Catholic Church is coming to an end. I would like to share with you just one example where I think that Celtic Catholicism is alive, vigilant, inspiring and driven by the Holy Spirit. As a result of the Eowyn Storm which struck Co. Mayo in the early hours of Friday, January 24, there was a complete blockage of power and internet until the following Thursday afternoon January 30.

Immediately after the darkness in our streets and homes began, the Parish of Knock exercised its synodal duties. The St John's Rest Care Centre lived up to its title and became a place of hospitality and warmth. Everybody was welcome to light refreshments each day from 10am to 6pm. The staff were exceptionally welcoming and friendly. While we enjoyed hot drinks many people charged their mobile devices and there was internet accessibility. We interacted with each other. We got to know pilgrims from Eastern Europe and America. What a unique pilgrimage they had!

You could stay in the warmth of the care centre for as long as you wished. Members of the pastoral council interacted with the visitors daily.

We were also told that two shower units are available free of charge at Knock House Hotel.

Fr Richard Gibbons, Parish Priest and Rector of Knock Shrine invited all the priests who work at the Shrine to transfer to Knock House Hotel for accommodation, warmth and meals. That was a unanimous gesture, other priests in the area were also invited to the evening meal in the hotel.

But the generosity was not just on parish property. In the retirement village where I live, we cooked meals where possible for others, visited homes and spoke to one another. The Order of Malta, the civil defence people and the Garda toured the estate. They checked how people were. There was real fraternity and fellowship.

So long as pastoral events such as these take place in the name of Jesus, Christianity has a glorious future... this is just one example of the Church of the future. Who does not want to love and be loved?

There are many words and theories about who we are, but this is real. Jesus walks with us in events I have outlined.

I am sure there are many other examples of love and fellowship in parishes across Ireland and it would be great to see how the Church of 2025 walks the synodal pathway.

*Yours etc.,
Tom Grufferty
Knock, Co. Mayo*

Reach out to skills and talents of parishioners

Dear Editor, Regarding the 'Relentless Ministry' article in this week's issue, it seems to me that there is a direct correlation between how overloaded a priest is and how much he is willing to let his parishioners take on. In my experience, whilst every priest is coming under more and more pressure, those who have engaged wholeheartedly with a pastoral council are better able to cope than those who have little regard for such councils and persist in trying to do everything themselves. Garry O'Sullivan describes how "many feel entirely unsupported by their superiors, especially as the workload grows". Some who feel like that might find it more productive to reach out to the skills and talents of their parishioners rather than relying on help from bishops who are themselves struggling to move the various pieces around the board.

*Yours etc.,
Martin Harran
Castlefinn, Co. Donegal*

Campaigning to remove 'mother'

Dear Editor, The two main Government parties recently campaigned for the removal of the word 'mother' from the Irish Constitution.

Why would anyone be

now surprised at their failure to appoint more women to ministerial rank?

*Yours etc.,
P.J. Mathews,
Drogheda, Co. Louth*

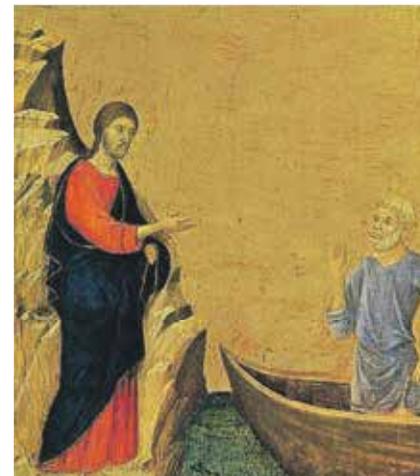
Your Faith

Our worthy unworthiness

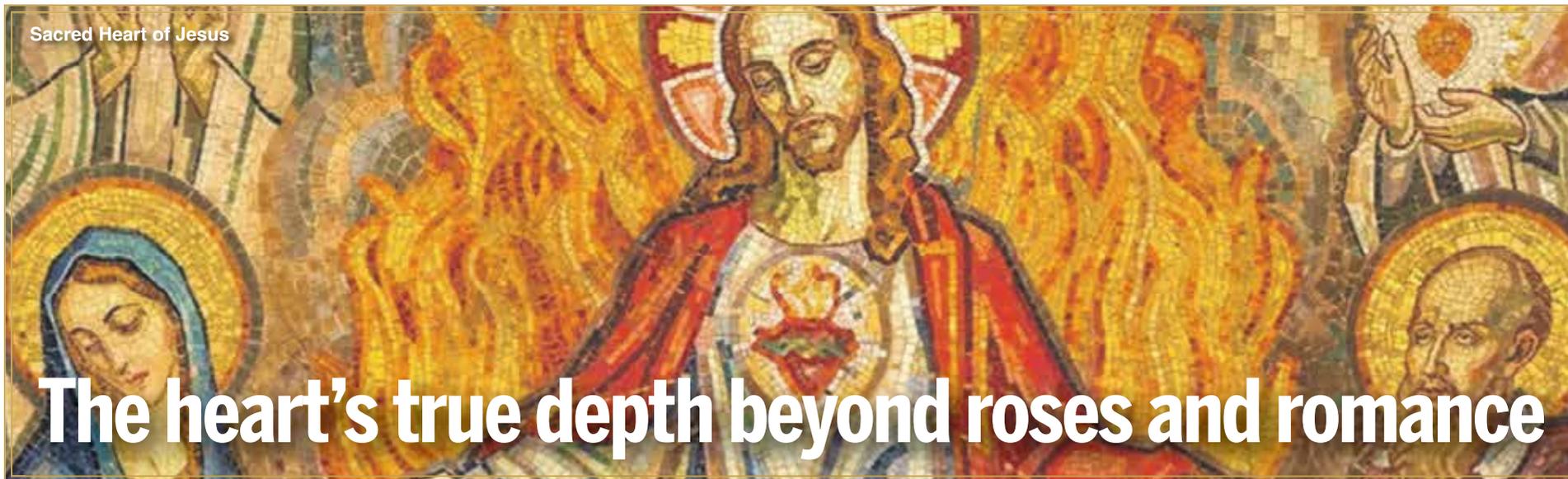
Fr Dominik Domagala

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The Irish Catholic, February 6, 2025



Sacred Heart of Jesus



The heart's true depth beyond roses and romance

As St Valentine's Day approaches, February 14 brings to mind red roses, love hearts, chocolates, candlelit dinner for two and couples escaping on weekend city trips. Meanwhile, those of us who are celibate quietly mark the feast of Sts Cyril and Methodius. Love, in all its facets, takes centre stage - songs, poems, sitcoms, and reality shows attempt to capture its dizzying highs and devastating lows. From unrequited love to heartbreak, from Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet to Ross and Rachel in Friends, the emotional depths of the heart have long been a symbol of intimacy, affection, and profound connection. More than just a bodily organ or metaphor, the heart is a "symbol of personal intimacy, affection, emotional attachment, and capacity for love" (Pope Francis, *Dilexit Nos*, 53).

At the heart of our Faith is the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who reveals God to us (excuse the pun!). Joseph Ratzinger writes that in Jesus, God "has a face and seeks our face; he has a heart and seeks our heart." In Christ, we encounter God's heart made visible, expressing divine love in human ways. John's Gospel depicts Jesus dwelling in the Father's heart (John 1:18) and making it known to us. At the Last Supper, the beloved disciple rests on Jesus' chest (John 13:23-25), symbolising intimacy with God. Sighing in prayer for healing (Mark 7:34), and weeping at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:33).

Rediscover

Pope Francis' encyclical *Dilexit Nos* urges us to rediscover the Sacred Heart and the human heart. He warns that our technocratic age risks eroding authentic connection and reminds us that, despite its complexities, the heart defines



Allow our hearts to be transformed on St Valentine's day, says Fr Barry White

our humanity and capacity for love and truth. While Scripture cautions that the heart can deceive (cf Jeremiah 17:9), it is also the seat of sincerity, revealing true intentions. The Catechism teaches that the heart is the "dwelling-place where I am, where I live"; it is the place of decision, encounter, and covenant (CCC 2563).

"In an age dominated by efficiency and autopilot routines, the dialogue between heart and mind is increasingly muted"

Throughout history, writers and thinkers have wrestled with the heart's significance. Whether in literature - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* lamenting, "Two souls dwell, alas, in my breast" - or music - Bruce Springsteen's *The River* with its lyrics, "Everybody's got a hungry heart" - the heart transcends science, expressing humanity's deepest experiences of love, grief, despair, hope, and courage. Beyond romance, the heart reveals itself in the passion and determination of sport, as we're witnessing in the 6 Nations, the courage of choosing a career, or the searching experience of discerning a vocation. Yet,

in an age dominated by efficiency and autopilot routines, the dialogue between heart and mind is increasingly muted.

Evolved

The idea of the heart has evolved over time, from ancient Greece to modern thinkers. In Homer's *Iliad*, the heart is where reason and emotion meet (*Iliad* X, 244; XXI, 441). Plato, in the *Phaedrus* (246a), compares the soul to a charioteer controlling two horses - one noble, one unruly - symbolising our higher aspirations and lower base passions. The heart is where reason tries to balance these forces, guiding us toward virtue.

In the medieval scholastic tradition, particularly in Thomism, the heart is linked to the sensory appetite and passions. Thomas Aquinas (*STI-II*, q. 22, a. 3) incorporates Aristotelian anthropology, emphasising intellect, will, and sensory appetite. While not a distinct faculty, the heart is central as the seat of passions - responses of the sensory appetite to perceived good or evil.

Modernity's emphasis on reason and science often marginalised the heart's role in philosophical anthropology. The scholastic tradition and early modern philosophy largely neglected the heart, perhaps because emotions were seen as unpredictable, subjective, and erratic - akin to Plato's unruly horse representing base passions. Thus, François

de La Rochefoucauld (1613-1680) observed, "The heart is forever making the head its fool". However, Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), in *Pensées*, defended the *logique du cœur*, emphasising the heart's intuitive grasp of deeper truths inaccessible to reason alone.

John Henry Newman, a 19th century theologian and philosopher, further rehabilitated the heart within a personalist framework. For Newman, the heart is the seat of the affections, essential for true happiness and spiritual life. He contended that movements of the heart, such as love, hope, and reverence, are fundamental to human flourishing - "heart speaks to heart" (*cor ad cor loquitur*).

"For von Hildebrand, the heart is the core of the affective sphere, indispensable for genuine responses to moral value and the integration of emotional and spiritual life"

Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977), building on the personalist tradition, offers a defence of the heart as a central dimension of human existence. He challenges the traditional philosophical emphasis on intellect and will, arguing that the heart is equal in dignity and, together with these faculties, forms a triad essential to the human person. For von Hildebrand, the heart is the core of the affective sphere, indispensable for genuine responses to moral value and the integration of emotional and spiritual life (cf *The Heart*). He critiques Thomism for its limited recognition of spiritual

affective action, advocating instead for a more balanced view that fully honours the heart's role in moral and spiritual growth.

Drawing on the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), von Hildebrand illustrates how authentic moral action integrates heart, intellect, and will. The Good Samaritan's compassion compels his selfless response, transcending mere duty. As John B. Keane writes, the heart is "that great institute of compassion and repository of human hope". Von Hildebrand critiques Kantian ethics, which grounds morality in duty rather than love. Guided by mercy, the Good Samaritan recognises the value of the injured man and translates this recognition into action. Pope Francis, in *Fratelli Tutti* (88), describes this as a "law of ekstasis", where love expands one's existence. Von Hildebrand affirms that love unites heart, will, and intellect, enriching moral action.

Profound

In a world shaped by efficiency and technology, the heart remains the profound seat of human experience - where love and truth converge. We are invited to treasure life's mysteries in our hearts, harmonising intellect and emotion into a deeper understanding of truth. Whether in theology, literature, or philosophy, the heart reveals our shared longing for connection and meaning. Allow your hearts to be transformed by the fullness of love and truth this St Valentine's day.

Fr Barry White, based in Mullingar Parish, studied Philosophy, History and Theology at the Pontifical University, St Patrick's College, Maynooth and holds a Licentiate in Canon Law.

The challenging journey of Faith



I promised myself that I would never live a life full of regrets, writes **Rohith Kinattukara**

Faith is a transformative journey. Often, people lose heart and start blaming Faith and God for the instability in their lives. From my own experience, my belief and trust in Faith have only made me stronger, in mind and spirit. Each day, I wake up knowing that whatever challenges lie ahead, I will face them with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I want to share my personal story of how Faith has helped me stay grounded and sheltered from the distractions and evils of the 21st century.

Strength

My journey began at my lowest point, specifically in 2020. The impact of COVID-

“There is nothing more caring and beautiful than knowing you are taken care of by God”

“Why should I make my own plans when the Creator has already made one for me? All I need to do is trust it”

19 had taken a heavy toll on many, and I was no exception. There were moments when I felt like giving up, and with each new achievement, I became complacent, drifting further away from God. Then, everything changed when I contracted the virus. It was the worst week of my life. I will never forget it: my vision blurred, my heart rate skyrocketed, I had fever chills, and my body trembled for relief, while my family tried to get me to the hospital. That night, I prayed - really prayed - and in that moment, I felt strength wash over me. I saw the Holy Spirit descend and heard a clear message: “Believe, and you will be healed.”

“The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit”

This kind of strength can't be found anywhere else. Miraculously, within hours, I started to feel better, leaving my family bewildered. I

made a promise to myself that I would never live a life full of regrets. Psalms 34:17-19 speaks to the power of faith: “When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and rescues them from all their troubles. The Lord is near to the broken-hearted and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all.”

Trust

I was completely lost, with no sense of direction or vision for where I wanted to be. I had always been someone who planned, but no plan ever seemed to work out. This was frustrating. After two years of trying to make progress in life, I started to believe I was simply ‘unlucky’. Then, one day, I saw an Instagram reel where someone said, “I trust in God more than anything else, that’s why I am where I am today.” That changed my perspective entirely. Why should I make my own plans when the Creator has already made one for me? All I need to do is trust it.

Trusting in God has led me to make some of the most important decisions of my life. It’s helped me form better connections and take actions I know are right for me, without thinking twice. Placing my faith in God has brought more positivity into my life, lifting the heavy



Rohith Kinattukara pictured in front of the Galway Cathedral

burden of searching for my purpose. Because, in truth, my purpose was already set the day I was born, and there is nothing more caring and beautiful than knowing you are taken care of by God.

Temperance

In the 21st century, especially as a young adult, there are plenty of temptations around us. But Faith helps us resist any of these distractions. It clears your

“I saw the Holy Spirit descend and heard a clear message: ‘Believe, and you will be healed’”

mind and gives you a kind of strength that can overcome any evil, making you feel unstoppable. Why give in to unnecessary temptation when God’s presence within you provides all the positivity you need? Having Faith will also bring people into your life who share the same mindset, helping to keep you focused and away from sin. Our God is a forgiving God, and He doesn’t want any of His creations to stray down the wrong path.

“With Faith guiding and strengthening you, nothing can stop you”

Sometimes, especially during your journey of Faith, you might ask, “Why did God take this person from my life?” or “Why is this happening to me?” The truth is, He sees things we can’t. He knows what’s best

for you and who is best for you. Fighting temptation is never easy, but with faith guiding and strengthening you, nothing can stop you.

Conclusion

Having Faith is a spiritual journey that doesn’t happen overnight. For me, it took five years to reach the level of Faith I have today, and I know this journey will continue with me for the rest of my life. As I conclude, let me remind you of what Jesus said about Faith. He told them, “Because of your little Faith, truly I tell you, if you have Faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” God bless!

📌 Rohith Kinattukara is a Catholic student from Griffith College Dublin studying MSc in Procurement and Supply Chain Management who loves to write and breathes tech.

The answer, ‘total immersion’

Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

Some cradle Catholics that might have been away from practicing the faith for a while, can find returning to it beyond reach. All those people in the pews repeating the responses without a second thought can be intimidating to those who haven’t been to Mass for a while. To them, the whole experience might feel more like visiting a foreign country.

Sometimes, all it takes is the right kind of motivation. An unexpected opportunity to help lead a pilgrimage to France later this year gave me the push I needed to sign up for classes at the local Alliance Française language school. I placed myself in Level 2 with the intention of reviewing the Level 1

texts before the course began. Once inside, though, everything changed. Everything was conducted *en français*. And while this approach requires time, tolerance and temerity, most educators agree that immersion is the best way to learn a language.

Immersion

The same can be said for the Christian life. Faith in Christ cannot be learned or lived solely in hourlong Sunday sessions. Mere exposure is not enough; only total immersion will be.

If we are to absorb the truths of our faith and genuinely practice them, we must learn how to dive into the deep end of the font. Challenging ourselves and each other to venture where the water is way over our heads shouldn’t be exceptional or unusual. It’s how we learn to rely on

grace. It’s how the saints became holy.

Instead of asking that everything be translated into the languages we already speak, we should commit ourselves to listening until we understand enough to attempt a response. We must cultivate the willingness to be disoriented and clueless, awkward in how we express ourselves and prepared to keep trying. And we should anticipate the need to accept correction along the way.

Being Catholic isn’t an extracurricular, or even a program of instruction. Nor is it merely a way to live our lives. Following Christ is life, and it comes with a language and culture all its own. Those who become truly conversant - even fluent in the language of God’s love - learn it the same way we learned our first language: through immersion.

Our past does not define us



Theresa Bonapartis

“We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father’s love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son Jesus”, St John Paul II. You can call me post-abortion. I am secure in both my healing and my relationship with God to know that my abortion is something I did, not who I am, but I am a woman living ‘post’ an abortion experience.

Abortion does not define me. I know I am a child of God. I know He loves me and forgives me, and I have dignity and worth, yet, it certainly is the one thing that has impacted my life more than any other. I am living ‘post-abortion’, and that major life event has influenced many other aspects of life like no other. Sometimes it still does, even in the present moment, and that is okay.

Trust

I trust in His perfect will. Does that mean I am not healed? No. It just means it is a wound that I will carry with me to Heaven. A wound that still sometimes gets in the way of how I think and act in the present, making me pause to be sure my reactions are not from the trauma of abortion I experienced in the past. God accepts me where I



am in every moment. In the good moments and the bad. In the joys, the sorrows, and in the sufferings, He allows me to experience. One striking aspect for me is the deep pain of abandonment reflecting my abortion experience of being kicked out of my family because I was pregnant. A time when I needed them most. Perhaps God allows this so I will never forget my need of Him or that He never abandoned me but is always there

waiting for me in that place of pain when it comes up. Can He take it away? Of course He can. But if it is His will for me to have it pop up now and again, I trust it is for my good. A reminder that I am healed because of Him and what He has done, not anything I have or can do. A dependence on Him and His will, and even a place of our deepest intimacy. For many of us who have experienced abortion, dependence can be a difficult feat. Lost in the trauma of our experiences

many women come out of it not wanting to have to need anyone, even God.

Self-reliance

But that is not healing, that is self-reliance, instead of depending on the One who saves us. The One who experienced total abandonment on the cross so that we can find Him there in the nothingness of our own abandonment. In the end, it is important to recognise that the trauma of abortion is something that will probably stay with you all your life to some degree. That does not mean you do not have dignity or worth - any more than meditating on the Passion of Christ or

looking at His wounds takes away His dignity.

“I have witnessed countless miracles of God’s mercy”

“We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father’s love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son Jesus”, Pope John Paul II. Yes, I am not the sum of my weakness and failures, including my abortion but it is certainly in the equation that brings me to the sum of the Father’s love for me so I can become the image of Jesus.

Sometimes that image may be on the cross, wounded and bloody, the place of His total abandonment and the place of our redemption.

Ministry

Over twenty five years ago I developed a ministry of healing with The Sisters of Life named ‘Entering Canaan’, conducting Days of Prayer and Healing and weekend retreats for those suffering the trauma of abortion (see www.enteringcanaan.com). I am grateful, and blessed that through it, I have witnessed countless miracles of God’s mercy. He waits and longs for us for us in His love. He is Mercy Itself! A video testimony is at www.tiny.cc/TBVIDEO.

“We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father’s love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son Jesus”

Our main duty

Elizabeth Scalia

“You are not being asked to be anything other than human...”
That was uttered by a colleague during a meeting. It was a mere aside to the room, but my lectio-antenna prompted me to write down the words before I lost them, for the truth seemed almost unbearably poignant in its plainness - so simple that we routinely miss it,

as we do with most heavenly pleas. It hit me with the same sorrowful simplicity as Jesus’ lament to Jerusalem, “How often have I longed to gather your children together,” (Mt 23:37) or the watchful ache of Eleanor Rigby’s “Ah, look at all the lonely people.”

True to my antenna, the words have echoed through my brain, and informed my prayer lists, acting like an acid or a cleansing agent dissolving so many newsy distractions down to this stark reality: You are not being asked to be anything other than human.

The mercy of God

Fr John Catoir

The most important concept to remember when you’re studying Scripture is this: The New Testament is not the Old Testament. That’s an important distinction for any child of God to remember.

The literal depiction of God in the Old Testament can indeed be frightening. People living in primitive times often thought that every cruelty of nature was a form of direct punishment from God. Jesus, however, brought mitigating words of mercy, as

he taught us about God’s love. We must also remember that God’s mercy also is revealed in the Old Testament.

Remember that the words, ‘Do not be afraid’, and similar phrases of comfort, are repeated hundreds of times in the Bible. Jesus taught us to interpret sacred Scripture with mercy. We must never forget that God is love and that justice must always be tempered with mercy.

Fear is not a bad thing. We need to respect God’s almighty power. He is after all a God of justice, and life is consequential. But love is the central message of the Gospel.

The mission of the Laity

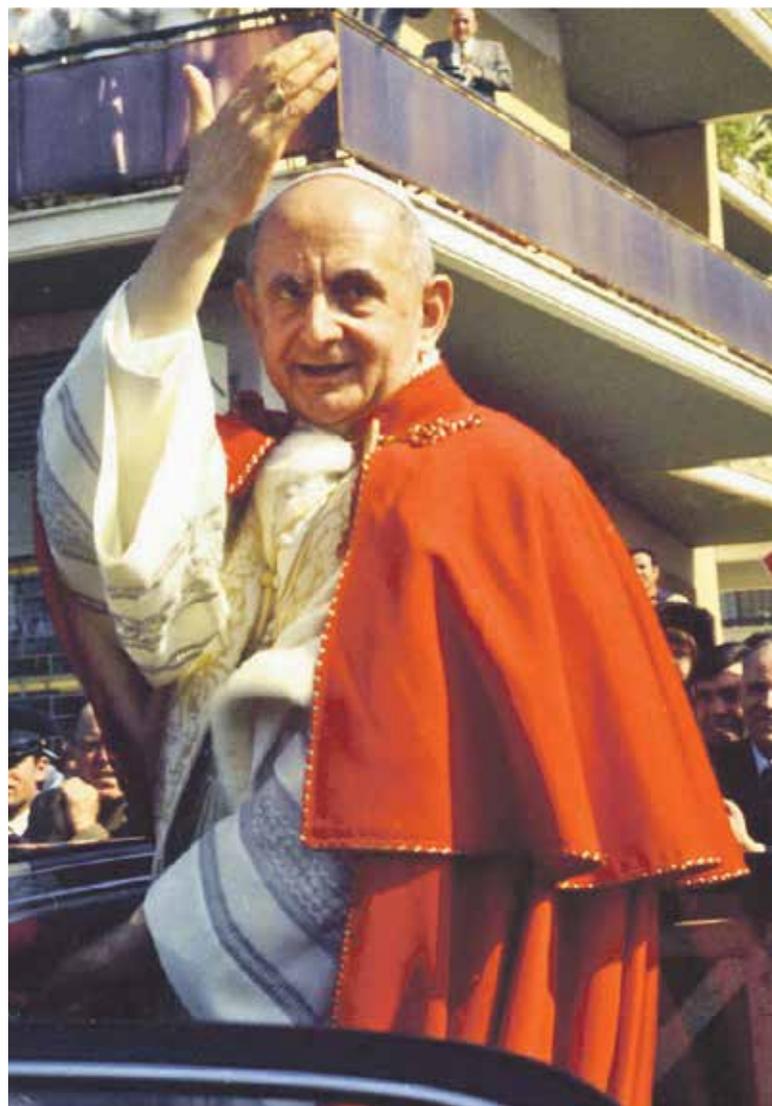


Pope Paul VI

You are not hermits withdrawn from the world in order to better give yourselves to God. It is in the world, in action itself that you must sanctify yourselves. The spirituality which should inspire you will therefore have its own characteristics... Suffice it to say it in a word: only your personal and profound union with Christ will ensure the fruitfulness of your apostolate, whatever it may be. You find Christ in Scripture, in active participation both in the liturgy of the Word and in the liturgy of the Eucharist. You find him in personal and silent prayer, irreplaceable to ensure the soul's contact with the living God, the source of all grace.

The commitment to the apostolate in the midst of the world does not destroy these fundamental presuppositions of all spirituality, but presupposes them, even demands them. Who was more 'committed' than the great St Teresa, celebrated every year on this day of October 15? And who, more than her, knew how to find the strength and fruitfulness for her action in prayer and in a union with God at every moment? We intend to recognise her one day, as we did St Catherine of Siena, as a Doctor of the Church. [...]

Called to address your second World Congress in 1957, under our predecessor Pius XII, we thought we could say to you: "Have confidence: Rome goes ahead and the Pope leads her". Let Us repeat it to you today with a humble awareness of Our limits, but with the same joyful certainty, strength-



“With his authority, we impart to all of you from our heart our apostolic blessing”

ened by the splendid experience which the Church has lived through in these ten years.

May in Our voice resound all the fervour of St Peter's faith, all the ardour of St Paul's charity. With his authority, we impart to all of you from our heart our apostolic

blessing, which we extend to your families, to your countries, to the Catholic laity of the whole world.

From a Homily of the late Pope Paul VI during the Third World Congress for the apostolate of the laity on Sunday, October 15, 1967.

Meditations on the interior life

AC

Your enlightening words

What am I doing with my life? Am I whole-hearted about it? Doing my best? I know how powerful You are, one word of Yours is sufficient to create anything. Am I open to You? One "let there be" and there is a sky-full of stars, from nothing. You don't need a palette to paint the sky blue. What do You think of us? A motley crew. It surprises me sometimes the coldness of our hearts.

I walked my old suburb this morning, remembering many old friends, old acquaintances. It has changed a lot. Everything changes, governments change, society changes, culture changes.

I take Your words to my heart. They are sown in us like wheat by You. You speak to us, You are not a silent God, non-communicative, but You adapt to our language, our concepts. You speak helpful, enlightening words, for if anyone is wise, You are Wisdom, if anyone can inspire it is You. I trade my ideas for Yours, far superior, our ways can be angry, bitter, grumbling, divisive. Your ways are peace, love, joy, generous, and

patient and long suffering. Your way is forgiveness and helping others, humbly serving, a refreshing goodness.

Thankful for life

Lord, I have life! It's a great thing, a great gift. And I have also another life, a life with You, a relationship with You. This gives meaning to my days. And this life is fueled by praye - communication with You. You are my life!

Giver of Life, thank You! My life is a limited lovely thing. It has been great but it is not the ultimate. We are only passing through, like sparrows through a castle hall.

Of all relationships I have in life, this is the greatest. This relationship with You, my God. It gives me joy, hope and understanding. You understand me. You know me. Even if I fly to Australia, You are with me. If I am plunged in despair and suffering, You are there too, You know it. My life has been wonderful Lord, I cannot deny it. Wonderful because You have been in it, and with me, through it all. You watch over me. You call me. You help me again and again. One thing I ask, let me not disappoint You! Let me love You like a child loves his mother or father.

Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

Is non-alcoholic church wine valid for consecration?

Q: I'm a parish priest and recently, when I went to order hosts and sacramental wine for my parish, I noticed the company I usually shop from was offering something called "non-alcoholic church wine." I told the lady on the phone that I imagine this isn't valid matter for consecration at a Mass and advised her to look further into this. She said some priests have been asking for it. I've been doing a bit of my own research now, but it doesn't sound like that question has been faced before. Maybe I am wrong? Is a wine that has been produced using the normal fermentation procedure, but then has its alcohol removed, valid matter for consecration? (Ireland)

A: The short answer is that it depends on exactly what the church supply company is referring to as "non-alcoholic church wine."

As you know, for sacraments to be valid - that is, for them to "work" - there must be both a valid formula (i.e., the words of the prayer to be said) and valid matter (the physical 'stuff' used in a sacrament).

Canon 924 of the Code of Canon Law discusses the valid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist, noting that "the wine must be natural, made from grapes of the vine, and not corrupt" (with "not corrupt" in this context meaning "not spoiled"). In a nutshell, Canon 924 is telling us that the wine, which is to become the blood of Christ, must be something which can truly be considered "wine" in a strict sense.

To start with an obvious example, even though some people use ginger ale or sparkling apple juice as a non-alcoholic wine substitute in some social situations, these are not "made from grapes of the vine" and therefore cannot validly be used as wine in the Eucharistic celebration. Likewise, a wine-flavoured beverage that was chemically engineered in a laboratory with artificial flavours also could not be used for the Eucharist as it clearly is not "natural." And a beverage that was wine-based but contained other non-wine additives like flavourings or preserva-

tives, would not be considered valid matter for the Eucharistic celebration.

Furthermore, for wine to be truly "wine," there must be at least some level of fermentation and thus alcohol content, however minimal. So even though grape juice is made from the same basic ingredient as wine, it cannot be used in place of wine at Mass. Unlike wine where the grapes are crushed, grape juice is usually made by boiling grapes down, which prevents any fermentation. Typically, the grape juice you would find in grocery stores is pasteurised and possibly made from a concentrate, which makes it insufficiently "natural" in the sense that it is of a fundamentally different nature than true wine.

In a similar vein, boiling wine, or using some other process to remove the alcohol from the wine after it was already fermented and bottled, would alter the nature of the beverage to the point where it would be technically something other than wine, and hence would not be valid matter for the Eucharist.

But there is one acceptable form of what could be called 'non-alcoholic wine', which is something called 'mustum'. Mustum is the juice of grapes which have been crushed in the manner of wine-making, but which has not yet fermented to the point where it would have the alcohol level of normal table wine.

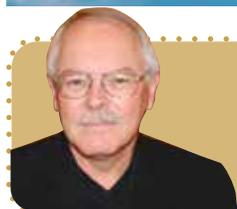
As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (the future Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in a 2003 letter from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith: "Mustum, which is grape juice that is either fresh or preserved by methods that suspend its fermentation without altering its nature (for example, freezing), is valid matter for the celebration of the Eucharist."

So, if the "non-alcoholic church wine" your church supply company is offering is actually mustum, it would be valid matter for the Eucharist. Anything else would be invalid matter and therefore should be avoided.

Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist.



Ecumenism, wholeness inside the body of Christ



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

For more than a thousand years Christians have not experienced the joy of being one family in Christ. Although there were already tensions within the earliest Christian communities, it was not until the year 1054 that there was a formal split, in effect, to establish two formal Christian communities, the Orthodox Church in the East and the Catholic Church in the West. Then, with the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century, there was another split within the Western Church and Christianity fragmented still further. Today there are hundreds of Christian denominations, many of whom, sadly, are not on friendly terms with each other.

Division and misunderstanding are understandable, inevitable, the price of being human. There are no communities without tension and so it is no great scandal that Christians sometimes cannot get along with each other. The scandal rather is that we have become comfortable, even smug, with the fact that we do not get along with each other, no longer

hunger for wholeness, and no longer miss each other inside our separate churches.

Wholeness

In almost all our churches today there is little anxiety about those with whom we are not worshipping. For example, teaching Roman Catholic seminarians today, I sense a certain indifference to the issue of ecumenism. For many seminarians today this is not an issue of particular concern. Not to single out Catholic seminarians, this holds true for most of us in all denominations.

But this kind of indifference is inherently unchristian. Oneness was close to the heart of Jesus. He wants all his followers at the same table, as we see in this parable.

A woman has ten coins and loses one. She becomes anxious and agi-

tated and begins to search frantically and relentlessly for the lost coin, lighting lamps, looking under tables, sweeping all the floors in her house. Eventually she finds the coin, is delirious with joy, calls together her neighbours, and throws a party whose cost no doubt far exceeded the value of the coin she had lost. (Luke 15, 8-10)

Why such anxiety and joy over losing and finding a coin whose value was probably that of a dime? Well, what's at issue is not the value of the coin; it's something else. In her culture, nine was not considered a whole number; ten was. Both the woman's anxiety about losing the coin and her joy in finding it had to do with the importance of wholeness. A wholeness in her life that had been fractured, and a precious set of relationships was no longer complete.

Indeed, the parable might be recast this way: A woman has ten children. With nine of them, she has a good relationship, but one of her daughters is alienated. Her nine other children come home regularly to the family table, but her alienated

daughter does not. The woman cannot rest in that situation, cannot be at peace. She needs her alienated daughter to rejoin them. She tries every means to reconcile with her daughter and then one day, miracle of miracles, it works. Her daughter comes back to the family. Her family is whole again, everyone is back at the table. The woman is overjoyed, withdraws her modest savings, and throws a lavish party to celebrate that reunion.

“Together we make up a whole Christian number – and that is still not a whole faith”

Christian faith demands that, like that woman, we need to be anxious, dis-eased, figuratively lighting lamps, and searching for ways to make the Church whole again. Nine is not a whole number. Neither is the number of those who are normally inside our respective churches. Roman Catholicism isn't a whole number. Protestantism isn't a whole number. The Evangelical Churches aren't a whole number. The Orthodox Churches aren't a whole number. No one Christian denomination is a whole number. Together we

make up a whole Christian number – and that is still not a whole faith number.

And so, we are meant to be anxious around these questions: Who no longer goes to church with us? Who is uncomfortable worshipping with us? How can we be comfortable when so many people are no longer at table with us?

Maturity

Sadly, today, many of us are comfortable in churches that are far, far from whole. Sometimes, in our less reflective moments, we even rejoice in it: “Those others aren't real Christians in any case. We're better off without them, a purer, more faithful church in their absence. We're the one true remnant.”

But this lack of solicitude for wholeness compromises our following of Jesus as well as our basic human maturity. We are mature, loving people and true followers of Jesus, only when, like Jesus, we are in tears over those “other sheep that are not of this fold”. When, like the woman who lost one of her coins, we cannot sleep until every corner of the house has been turned upside down in a frantic search for what's been lost.

We too need to solicitously search for a lost wholeness – and may not be at peace until it is found.

“This lack of solicitude for wholeness compromises our following of Jesus as well as our basic human maturity”

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milan Morales

Male and Female, He created them

Man and woman have been created, willed by God, in perfect equality as human persons. ‘Being man’ or being ‘woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God. Man and woman possess a dignity which comes to them immediately from God and both have one and the same dignity “in the image of God”. In their being-man and being-woman, they reflect the Creator's wisdom and goodness.

God is not in man's image. He is neither man nor woman. God is pure spirit in which there is no place for the difference between the sexes. But the respective “perfections” of man and woman reflect something of the infinite perfection of God: those of a mother and those of a father and husband.

God created man and woman together and willed each for the other. “It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him.” The woman God “fashions” from

the man's rib and brings to him elicits on the man's part a cry of wonder, an exclamation of love and communion: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Man discovers woman as another ‘I’, sharing the same humanity.

Communion

Man and woman were made “for each other” – not that God left them half-made and incomplete: he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be “helpmate” to the other, for they are equal as persons and complementary as masculine and feminine. In marriage God unites them in such a way that, by forming “one flesh”, they can transmit human life. By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents co-operate in a unique way in the Creator's work.

In God's plan man and woman have the vocation of ‘subduing’ the Earth as stewards of God. This sovereignty

is not to be an arbitrary and destructive domination. God calls man and woman to share in his providence toward other creatures; hence their responsibility for the world God has entrusted to them.

The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him. The Church, interpreting the symbolism of biblical language in an authentic way, teaches that our first parents, Adam and Eve, were constituted in an original “state of holiness and justice”. This grace of original holiness was to share in “divine life”.

Harmony

By the radiance of this grace all dimensions of man's life were confirmed. If he remained in the divine intimacy, man would not have to suffer or die. The inner harmony of the human person, the harmony between

man and woman, and finally the harmony between the first couple and all creation, comprised the state called ‘original justice’.

The ‘mastery’ over the world that God offered man from the beginning was realised above all within man himself: mastery of self. The first man was ordered in his whole being because he was free from the weakness that leads him to the pleasures of the senses – earthly goods and self-assertion – contrary to his reason.

The sign of man's familiarity with God is that God places him in the garden. There he lives “to till it and keep it”. Work is not yet a burden, but rather the collaboration of man and woman with God in perfecting the visible creation. This entire harmony of original justice, foreseen for man in God's plan, will be lost by the sin of our first parents.

i From the Catechism of the Catholic Church paragraphs 369-384.

Our worthy unworthiness

Is 6:1-2a, 3-8
Ps 138:1-2, 2-3, 4-5, 7-8
1 Cor 15:1-11 or 1 Cor
15:3-8, 11
Lk 5:1-11

The Sunday Gospel

Fr Dominik Domagala



The question I hear most frequently from those I meet for the first time is this: “Why did you become a priest, and how did it happen?” To which I typically provide a quick and insightful response: “Well, it’s complicated.” Indeed, the journey of anyone who has chosen to enter religious life and priesthood, is intertwined with mystery, great expectations, discernment, and a sense of unworthiness. It is a path filled with questions and a search for answers, some of which emerge only after a lengthy exploration. This entire process and more can be encapsulated in a single word: ‘vocation’ which, surprisingly, extends beyond just priests and nuns.

Discernment

Whether somebody enters the path of serving God in the abovementioned ministry - the priesthood in my case - or chooses a family life and professional career, a similar question can be asked of the latter: “Why did you become a Christian, and how did it happen?” Of course, most of us, in that case, would be confused about what answer to give. After all, the majority of us have been baptised as babies. Somehow, that decision was imposed on us; it came from our parents’ faith rather than our free and conscious decision. We would

“I hardly deserve the title of apostle; but by God’s grace, that is what I am”

probably have to think about giving a reasonable answer. And above all, we would have to provide that answer first to ourselves.

After the initial stage of discerning what we are doing in life as Christian beings, when we come to a genuine appreciation of the faith inherited from our parents and ancestors, the thought that usually occupies our minds is this: “Am I worthy of being called ‘a Child of Almighty God?’”

Unworthiness

I genuinely believe that the feeling of unworthiness to uphold the title of a Christian - whether one is a woman or a man, a priest or a nun, lay or religious, and so forth - is a positive thing. Why? Firstly, because this sentiment is not unfamiliar to most biblical characters. For instance, let us consider the figures mentioned in this Sunday’s liturgy. The first reading, from the Prophet Isaiah, references King Uzziah (Isaiah 6:1), right in its opening sentence. About eight centuries before Christ, this king (also referred to as Azariah) reigned over the Southern Kingdom of Judah for more than 50 years. Ascending to the throne at a young age, he implemented many beneficial reforms in the kingdom. However, in the latter part of his life, he endured an unspeakable affliction. He

became a leper. How might this king have felt when individuals of a similar position regarded him as unworthy of the throne due to his illness? Objectively speaking, this type of ailment, which signified an imminent death sentence for him, would be sufficient to cast doubt on the significance of his election as king from that point onward.

“Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man”

But let’s continue! The main character from our first reading remains filled with that sense of unworthiness: the prophet Isaiah speaks of himself, “What a wretched state I am in! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5). On the previous Sunday, we listened to the moment when Isaiah was called and chosen as a prophet. Today, however, we can see what his prophetic work involves. Indeed, the prophet Isaiah was personally and directly called by the Lord! He was the one who understood what the will of God is towards his people and the nation. Yet, he was also keenly aware of his limitations and shortcomings, recognising that the people, authorities, and religious leaders would resist him immediately if he were to preach God’s will. All this, and certainly more, led him to express the abovementioned words of doubt, reflecting a profound sense of his own unworthiness to respond to God’s call.

But let’s proceed to examine the *grande finale* of the main ‘characters’ in the biblical narrative presented before us this Sunday. The second reading from the First Letter to the Corinthians is



The calling of the apostles Peter and Andrew, Duccio di Buoninsegna.

“Our blind spots, weaknesses, and omissions can sometimes prove to be worthwhile. They can illuminate who we are and who we are not”

also quite fascinating. There, we hear the words of good news about Jesus Christ, proclaimed by none other than the Apostle Paul, who concludes with a rather poignant statement: “I am the least of the apostles; in fact, since I persecuted the Church of God, I hardly deserve the title of apostle; but by God’s grace, that is what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:9). No explanation is required. The truth regarding Paul’s past is well recognised. He was a persecutor of the Church, a man devoted to the Old Law until innocent blood was shed.

Lastly, on the list of biblical characters from this Sunday, we must include the one mentioned in the Gospel. Although others were also on the lake, it is Peter whom the Gospel predominantly dis-

cusses. In response to a significant miracle performed by the Lord, Peter simply states: “Leave me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Luke 5:8) as though he understood that for him, there was no possibility of advancing further with THIS MASTER.

Great faithfulness

And yet, oh blessed fault, God’s goodness and faithfulness reveal themselves, especially through our infirmities, weaknesses, limitations, shortcomings and omissions.

You see, God does not call you to be the greatest. No, He does not even want you to be the most effective servant or preacher. But He certainly wants you to rely on Him entirely. To “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not depend on your own under-

standing” (Proverbs 3:5). That is precisely where King Uzziah, Prophet Isaiah, Apostle Paul, St Peter, and many others eventually arrive. And that is where they come to the acknowledgment of who they truly are. They are Christians, the people of Salvation. Salvation is something they do not earn by themselves, but which they freely and undeservedly receive from their loving Father in Heaven.

And so, dear readers, it appears that even our blind spots, weaknesses, and omissions can sometimes prove to be worthwhile. They can illuminate who we are and who we are not.

Do you realise what God calls you to? Do you appreciate this?

Fr Dominik Domagala OMI serves in *Inchicore, Dublin. Studied Theology in Poznan (Poland) and currently is working on a Licentiate in Sacred Scripture. Author of the sermon-video-blog “The Social Oblate.” Send your questions to thesocialoblate@icloud.com*

Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milan Morales



St John of the Cross

St Scholastica: A soul centred on things above

The life of this saint started four years after the final sack of Rome. St Scholastica, twin sister of St Benedict was born in Nursia, Italy in 480 AD. When she was a young girl, Scholastica consecrated her life to God. When St Benedict moved to Monte Cassino to lead a monastery, Scholastica decided to found a convent for women five miles away, turning her into the first benedictine nun, taking spiritual and practical direction from her brother.

St Scholastica visited her brother

regularly. She was not allowed to enter his monastery, so they met in the company of some of his brethren at a house some distance away. These visits were spent in conferring together on spiritual matters. On one occasion they had passed the time as usual in prayer and pious conversation and in the evening, they sat down to take their reflection. St Scholastica, sensing this could be her last encounter on Earth, was reluctant to leave, and she begged her brother to continue the conversation until the next day. St Benedict refused to spend

the night outside his monastery. She had recourse to prayer as they were sitting at the table. The saint held her brother’s hands and placed her head in between them and a furious thunderstorm burst so that neither St Benedict nor any of his companions could return home. Her brother, confused, asked his sister “what have you done?” To his surprise, St Scholastica replied, “I asked a favour of you, and you refused. I asked it of God, and he granted it.” They spent the night in spiritual and heavenly talk.

As we find in the Dialogues of

Pope St Gregory the Great, “After three days [from the storm] St Benedict was in his cell. Looking up to the sky, he saw his sister’s soul leave her body in the form of a dove penetrating the secret places of Heaven.” For this reason, St Scholastica is represented holding a dove.

When the saint died, St Benedict sent his brothers to bring her body to his monastery and laid it in the tomb he had prepared for himself. She died about the year 543, and St Benedict followed her soon after. Her feast day is February 10.

A virtue truly owed to Him



Peter Kasko

In the opening paragraph of the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) we read the following: “God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek him, to know him, to love him with all his strength. He calls together all men, scattered and divided by sin, into the unity of his family, the Church.” (CCC 1)

Virtues

I see this as a beautiful image. God comes close to allow me to seek him, know him and love him. Two important conclusions can be drawn from this short statement. Firstly, this shows that God is approachable. He is not some ‘distant deity’ that ought to be worshipped. Rather, he “draws close” and shows himself, if I am willing to do the necessary work. Which brings me to the second conclusion: freedom. God does not force himself into my life. He invites me into a relationship where I am allowed to walk away. This freedom is essential as it is foundational to human dignity, moral responsibility and love for God and neighbour.

As God created us to share in his own blessed life, he also created us in his own image. He created us with higher and lower faculties. Focusing on the higher faculties, shared also by the angels, these distinguish us from animals and their instinctual behaviour. Specifically, we talk about faculties of intellect and will. All faculties, as created by God, need to be properly ordered and ordered towards good, ultimately beatific vision of

“In every area of life, there are specific rights and responsibilities. From this perspective, we can further refine justice into a particular virtue of worship”



Disputation of the Holy Sacrament, Raphael. Source: Wikipedia common use

Heaven. (As opposed to sin: a result of a faculty used not towards good.)

“Justice can be broken down into different forms depending on our roles in life”

When it comes to these faculties being properly ordered, we rely on virtues. Found in CCC 1803, “a virtue is habitual and firm disposition to do good. It allows the person not only to perform good acts, but to give the best of himself.” As St Gregory of Nyssa said: “The goal of a virtuous life is to become like God.” (*De beatitudinibus*). We talk about cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The intellect aligns with the virtue of prudence, which involves right judgment and practical wisdom. Justice is about giving each person their due. Some scholars argue that justice

can be broken down into different forms depending on our roles in life - for instance, the parent-child relationship, employer-employee, or president-citizen dynamic. In every area of life, there are specific rights and responsibilities. From this perspective, we can further refine justice into a particular virtue of worship.

Worship

As mentioned above, we ought to love God with all our strength. What does it then mean to love God with all my strength? To love is to give and to give is to worship. The word worship comes from an old English word *weorthscipe* meaning to give someone their worth, to give a person what he is due, or an acknowledgment of their worth. In this context, we borrow the word and use it for the purposes of rendering onto God what is his due. Though this may seem like a lengthy explanation, it is something many of us understand instinctively. Indeed, St Basil the Great says, that “the Spirit is the one who prepares the Church for worship. He is the one who makes us capable of receiving the divine mysteries.” God is due a worship of highest degree but not only that.

Catholic scholars often speak about not only worship of the highest degree

“In this case, representing Christ’s sacrifice is not only good but in fact the right form of worship to God”

but of the highest kind, namely sacrifice. This can only be rendered onto God and God alone. We often praise other people for their achievements. Mother Mary called herself “blessed”. While we do give honour and respect to Mary and saints, sacrifice is reserved only for God. In *City of God*, St Augustine wrote the following: “Putting aside for the present the other religious services with which God is worshipped, certainly no man would dare to say that sacrifice is due to any other but God ...”. (10.4)

“It is making present his unique sacrifice for us to receive”

The Mass is commonly called the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving as we offer ourselves to God through worship. And it is much more than that. The Catechism speaks of the Mass as Eucharistic sacrifice in paragraph 1361: “The Eucharist

is the sacrifice of praise by which the Church sings the glory of God in the name of all creation. This sacrifice of praise is only possible through Christ: he unites the faithful to his person, to his praise, and to his intercession, so that the sacrifice of praise to the Father is offered through Christ and with him, to be accepted in him.”

As early as the second century, St Irenaeus of Lyon wrote: “The Eucharist is the body and blood of Christ, by which the Church is made one with him and with one another.” As illustrated above, during the Mass, the priest, together with the congregation, represents the one and only perfect sacrifice of Christ in the form of bread and wine. It is making present his unique sacrifice for us to receive.

Reflection

Having said all this, I recognise that, as a finite human being, I do not have the capacity to render to God what is truly due to Him. Yet, with the help of the

virtues, and specifically the virtue of worship, and with the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit, I can try to be in the habitual disposition to do good, and to take part in the Church’s liturgy as a member of one body of Christ.

I was raised to believe that it is neither right or polite to return a gift or present once received. However, in this case, representing Christ’s sacrifice is not only good but in fact the right form of worship to God.

You are all invited to reflect this Sunday when reciting or singing the words of Gloria, especially the words “we praise you, we bless you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for Your great glory.”

📍 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.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



What are we exposing our children to?

Self-consciously smart commentators can sometimes sneer at moral panics, and some people are truly prone to over-catastrophising, but I fear that in relation to children's access to all sorts of depravity online, the worriers may be justified.

The issue was raised on **Mornings with Wendy** (Spirit Radio, Friday) when Wendy Grace spoke to Alex Cooney, CEO of Cyber-SafeKids. The host suggested the creation of a new Government offered an opportunity for a new impetus on the matter and Ms Cooney was glad that there were relevant commitments in the programme for government. However, she was right to suggest that the Government would have to be held to account on this – a report-card style approach was suggested. She was also positive about the supportive nature of parents' WhatsApp groups on the issue of children having smartphones – with the aim of having smartphone free childhoods. She found this 'grassroots movement' gathering momentum quickly. She also favoured digital literacy education, and practical steps like keeping internet use public in the home and keeping smartphones out of bedrooms at



night.

Some of the more severe consequences of unfettered smartphone use and hard-core porn in the hands and minds of children was also discussed on **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Friday) when Peadar Tóibín of Aontú spoke of his concerns and what could be done. Unsurprisingly he was critical of Government inaction. The item was in the context of Garda Commissioner Drew Harris saying that online pornography is driving violence against women,

normalising it in fact. Peadar Tóibín suggested that all this exposure was "rewiring" children's brains and creating unreal expectations. His party had introduced a bill in the last Dáil to try and make Internet Service Providers more responsible for the content they hosted. He said children were now accessing material that was illegal for adults not too many years ago. Pat Kenny put to him the libertarian argument that adults should be allowed to view what they liked, but also

said the evidence was there that hard core porn leads to aberrant behaviour. He also suggested that "there's got to be some limits to what people can actually put online even for the availability to adults."

The precious innocence of children was central in **First Communion** (BBC Two NI, Thursday). This was a marvellous, moving and thought-provoking documentary that followed the First Communion preparations of four engaging children – one boy and three girls, two from Northern Ireland and two from England. I felt what it presented was true to life, and had a respectful approach, an unobtrusive camera, with subtle and minimal narration from Hannah McLean.

The children were endearing, serious and thoughtful, running the gamut of emotions from excitement to nervousness. We have a lot to learn from Tia, Niall, Seren and Magdalena. Their teachers and priests were presented in a very positive light, all doing their best for the children in their care, helping them to concentrate on the spiritual aspects of the big occasion. The parents varied from those not still practicing at all, to those who valued the tradition in their Catholic families, to those who took their

PICK OF THE WEEK

SONGS OF PRAISE

BBC One Sunday February 9, 1pm

Claire McCollum is in Belfast, discovering some of the hidden religious gems in the churches of her home city.

FIRST COMMUNION

BBC Two NI Thursday (night) February 13, 1:35am

Four Catholic families prepare to celebrate their children's First Holy Communion, one of the biggest days of their lives so far. It's a sacred ceremony but also a time to celebrate. See review over.

OUR DIVINE SPARKS

RTE Radio 1 Friday February 14, 10:05pm

Topical religious affairs with Dearbhail McDonald.

faith and practice seriously. Like the priests and teachers, they had the best interests of the children at heart and had their own struggles to deal with. Niall's Granny, who had a somewhat jaundiced attitude to the Church, received a cancer diagnosis, which moved her tentatively towards prayer. Niall said he prayed and cried at the same time after hearing the news. Magdalena's younger sister had a serious illness, and she reflected honestly on the why of it.

In some cases, there was dubious understanding of the sacrament (I dislike the phrase 'holy bread!'), though Church teaching on Eucharist was accurately presented overall. There was an acknowledgement that many of the children would

not be returning to church very regularly, which was a pity. Inevitably there were cases of material excess and unnecessary expense – there was a princess carriage with two white ponies, elaborate hairdos, large sums of money in white envelopes. Interestingly there was no mention of children getting smartphones.

This is life as it is lived now – a mix of commitment, tradition, faith, spirituality, distraction and materialism, well captured in this special programme, produced, directed and filmed by Laura Martin Robinson. It will be broadcast again late on Thursday night, February 13, on BBC Two NI at 1:35am. Stay up or record!

Film

Aubrey Malone



Touching evocation of broken lives

We're an hour into Mike Leigh's *Hard Truths* (12A) before a character says to Pansy (Marianne Jean-Baptiste), "Why are you so angry?" It's a question you're entitled to be asking yourself from the first minute of the film. Leigh doesn't spoon-feed us with answers to it.

Hurt people hurt people. There's a suggestion she may have been mistreated by her mother.

I'm always filled with a sense of excitement when I see the words "Written and directed by Mike Leigh" on the credits of a film. Compassion has been seeping

from his pens and lens for many moons now.

Hard Truths is no exception. With his customary deft touches, he presents us with a cross-section of people of colour. We get to know them resoundingly well from short vignettes.

Leading them is the vituperative Pansy. She has a tongue like a razor-blade. Suffering her outrageous behaviour (emphasis on the "rage") is her plumber husband Curtley (David Webber) and overweight son Moses (Tuwaine Barrett).

Curtley has been the brunt of her anger for so long he's zoned out. Moses stays in his room listening

to music, at least when he's not going on his mysterious walks. Where are they to? I won't say.

There's also Pansy's hair-dressing sister Chantelle (Michele Austin) and her two daughters Kayla and Aleisha (Ani Nelson and Sophie Brown). Their sunny dispositions throw Pansy's sourness into high relief.

So does a doctor, a dentist, and various people from shops. Most of them roll their eyes as she erupts. Some take her on. This makes her worse.

If you were to ask me what *Hard Truths* was 'about,' I would say 'It's about 97 minutes long.' I'm



A scene from the film *Hard Truths*

not trying to be clever. One doesn't go to Mike Leigh films expecting messages or explanations. What he does is present situations. End of.

Most of the cast was unfamiliar to me. Leigh has always worked "off Broadway" with casts of little-known actors – at least until he makes them famous. In his films you always feel you're watching people from the real world rather than a studio set.

Jean-Baptiste, who first acted for him in *Secrets and Lies* in 1996, is sensational, capturing a woman so abusive she almost becomes funny at times. We keep wondering if there's any way through that rock-like personality.

There's a Mother's Day scene where her behaviour suggests a catharsis is loom-

ing – think Gena Rowlands from *A Woman Under the Influence* – but Leigh cuts it off in mid-stream. Life doesn't have such neat resolutions. Why should films?

This is a study of people from Main Street, Anywhere. Though taking place in London, it could equally have been set in Tallaght or Timbuktu. Art is universal. So is suffering.

The ability to see diamonds in the rough is Leigh's trump card. There's an aching beauty to the fragile, troubled souls he presents to us.

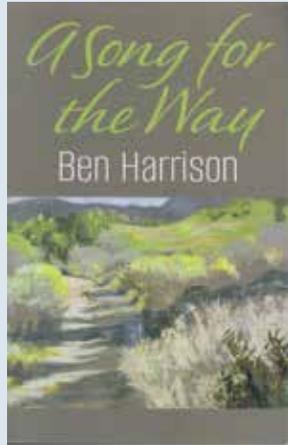
He's nearing the end of his career now. Let's celebrate what's left of it.

BookReviews

Peter Costello



On the road to a new life with Brother Ben



A Song for the Way,
by Ben Harrison
(Dominican Publications,
€12.00 / £10.00)

Peter Costello

Over the years parts of this book have appeared as articles in journals, but being brought together here they provide readers new to the author's work with a very vivid reading experience. In a strange way it recollects the Beat Generation for rather than a settled calm experience it describes a long life spent as the Beat Generation 1950s would have had it, "on the Road".

Where the road was leading him to did not matter much to Harrison at first. Just being on it was what was important. As he describes it, his life has not been an easy one.

He was born and reared in the Shenandoah Valley in West Virginia, and grew up with an interest in life outdoors. But his mother died when he was young and life afterwards with his step mother seems to have been difficult.

In the Vietnam Years, 1955 to 1975, he was called up for two years of military service. This in the American Army of those days was never intended to be a pleasant experience, and though he never saw combat, he did not care for the militarised form of regulated life.

After this he travelled around, which gave him, to say the least, a very different view of the experiences that life can give an individual. However, his life then took a definitive turn, when he joined the Missionaries of Charity, the order founded by St Mother Teresa in 1950.

He knew that he was himself an addictive per-

sonality. This gave him insight in to the lives of others he met on his mission, especially in prison work, which he very much favoured. Many of those who ended in jail he found were homeless, addictive, and abused by life in one way or another.

“He sees himself here as being in the service of others, of following in a very modern way, the essential nature of Newman’s motto, of heart speaking to heart”

In an era when religious life seems to many observers to be in permanent decay, the appeal of monastic life is very striking. Just like the army it is a regulated and strictly ordered life, but to the ends of giving life and hope a chance to flourish rather than aiming to destroy it through brutal action.

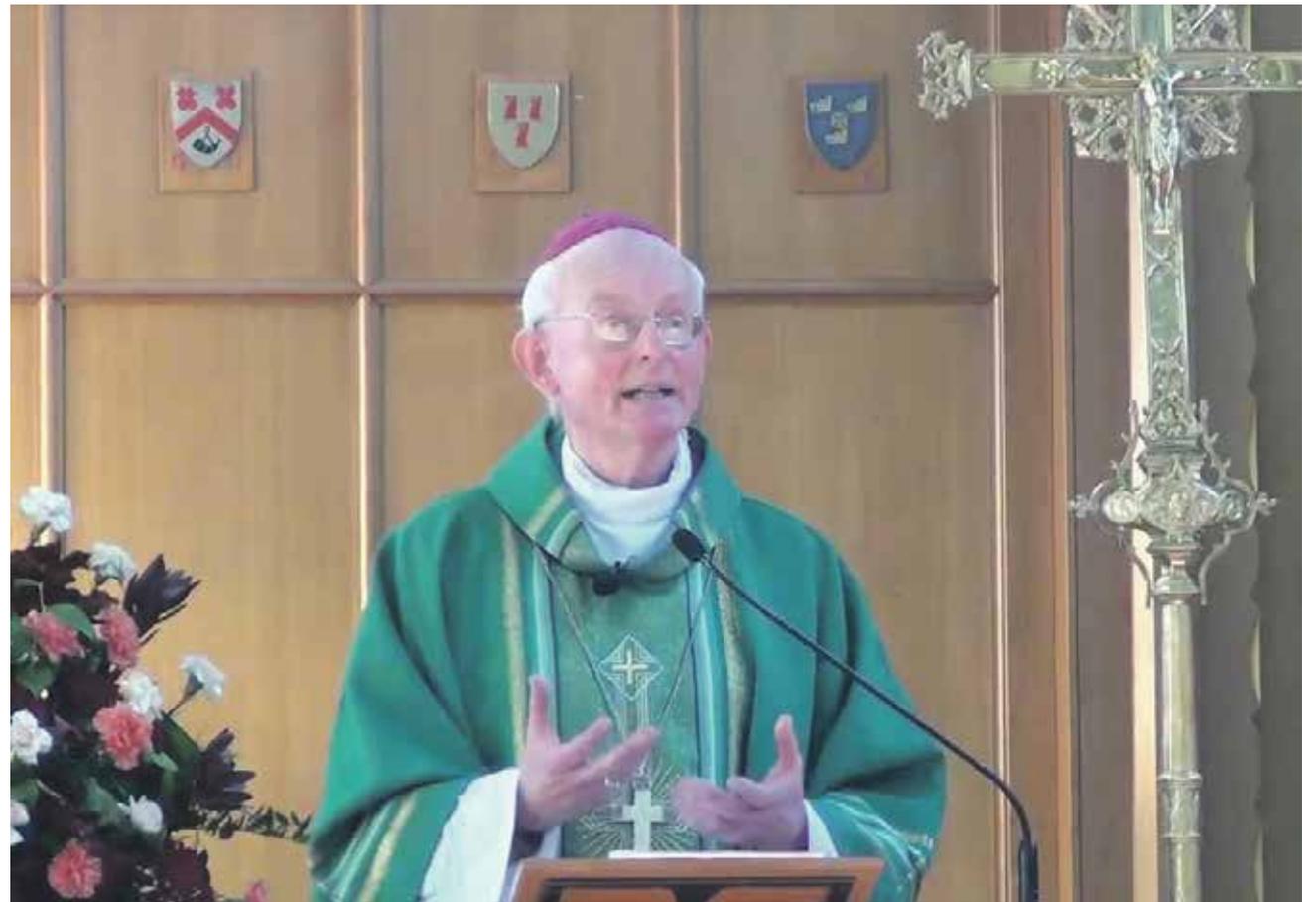
But in that ordered life he has found, as he describes, a personal encounter with Jesus. He describes this in what you might call a very impious way. Indeed what he had seen and heard of life as whole makes him a singularly impious man.

He sees himself here as being in the service of others, of following in a very modern way, the essential nature of Newman's motto, of heart speaking to heart. Indeed in one passage he describes the experience of seeing his very own heart beating away on the screen during a medical examination which will be familiar to many readers, I suspect.

That experience of seeing inside a person pertains to other aspects of his career, or rather his vocation, for what he describes is very much a call in the life of the world today, a different sort of Route 66 to a different kind of promised land.

Many readers will find this a revealing and deeply felt book, which will inspire them too to see this vagrant life which so many lives today in a very different light, even the light of love.

Measuring out the days of our lives



Hugh Gilbert, Bishop of Aberdeen, preaching a homily

All Time Belongs to Him: Seasons and Feasts of the Lord,
by Hugh Gilbert OSB
(Gracewing, £20.00 / £23.99)

Peter Costello

This book is quite a contrast to the spiritual adventures of Ben Harrison. The author Hugh Gilbert OSB has been a Benedictine monk of Pluscarden Abbey near Elgin, in Moray in northern Scotland. This is, surprisingly, given the religious history of Great Britain, a community "living in the only medieval British monastery

still being used for its original purpose".

Bishop

However, in 2011 Hugh Gilbert was selected by Pope Francis to be the Bishop of Aberdeen. He chose as his motto the phrase of St Paul *Omnia in Ipsos*, "all things are held together in Christ" - an idea which echoes also much that is said in Ben Harrison's book.

Bishop Gilbert is aware of the ruling hours of the monastic day, week and year. There is a time and a place for everything, with everything in its place - what a contrast to the rather chaotic life so many of us

seem to follow these days.

These sermons preached by Hugh Gilbert Bishop of Aberdeen are just as conscious of the canonical divisions of the year in its regular round, regular in the sense of being structured.

“In earlier times such collections were very popular, but since the nineteenth century they have faded away in importance”

This book is basically a collection of sermons, covering the course of the whole of the

Church year. In earlier times such collections were very popular, but since the nineteenth century they have faded away in importance.

So though at one time they represented some of the finest teaching there was to be had and were widely read as such, today it is rare indeed to find people going out of their way to read sermons. Indeed the huge collection of homiletic literature from the 17th century onward housed in the Central Catholic Library in Merrion Square is little called upon.

But Bishop Gilbert, while bringing these former forms to mind, is also a bishop of the present day. He expresses himself clearly and encouragingly in a modern manner. There will be many people who will in fact find his style and treatment is greatly superior to what they get every Sunday in their local church.

These days when bishops seem to be seen more as administrators than teachers or advocates, this book will seem to many refreshingly traditional. As an accomplished work of pastoral teaching *All Time Belongs to Him* can be warmly recommended.

“Though at one time they represented some of the finest teaching there was to be had and were widely read as such, today it is rare indeed to find people going out of their way to read sermons”

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.

Unicorns in the Holyland: an exhibition in Marsh's Library

Gutenberg's Cradle : Incunables at Marsh's Library, Dublin, a catalogue compiled by Sara D'Amico (Marsh's Library with the support of the Consortium European Research Libraries and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, €20.00; can be ordered directly from information@marshlibrary.ie)

Peter Costello

We are continually told that living as we do in an era of immediate electronic communication, the era of the book as we have known for approaching 600 years, is dead. In the very near future books, like newspapers, will simply disappear. So they say.

But as someone raised in a house filled with the books of several generations, into which five newspapers a day came for business reasons, all of which I looked into growing up, I am one of those who are firmly convinced that the age of print on paper is far from dead.

The current exhibition at Marsh's Library is, for anyone interested in the beginnings of the printed book, quite a delight. Marsh's Library itself, though seemingly tucked away in an obscure corner of the city behind St Patrick's Cathedral, is in actuality one of the most visited places in Dublin.

Founded

Marsh's is the country's oldest public library, having been founded back in 1701 under special legislation. Its historic collections, which can still be read by those making application in advance, are of immense interest for the rare items they contain.

This catalogue which has just appeared, one of the

irregular publications of the library, is a wonderful piece of Irish book design and production. It is full of interesting things for the bibliophile and the historian. It is accompanied by an exhibition of a select number of these earliest examples of the printer's craft, which everyone can enjoy who has ever wondered about the transition from such manuscript treasures as the Book of Kells into a printed book.

Visitors to Trinity College are often overwhelmed by the extraordinary art of the Book of Kells. The interest of these books in Marsh's Library is more intellectual than purely artistic.

“Many of the books on display reveal their kinship with the western manuscript tradition, for the first printers from Gutenberg in 1450 onwards”

These are 75 exceptionally early books out of a collection that runs to over 26,000 volumes. They are in a way the real treasures at the heart of the library's collections. As each year passes their importance increases, yet their audience becomes ever more specialised.

Many of the books on display reveal their kinship with the western manuscript tradition, for the first printers from Gutenberg in 1450 onwards simply adapted the make-up of manuscripts as the format of the new printed volumes.

The Italian scholar who has written the catalogue records detailed information on each one, giving the reader indications of the online resources

which give far fuller details of the book that would be reasonably possible in a mere catalogue.

There are times though when one's curiosity is aroused and one would like to have been told more. But what she does have to say underlines just what a literary treasure house Marsh's Library truly is.

It was not always possible for the early printers to provide their books with illustrations. But some of those on display are quite fascinating. Some are quaint, such as a wood cut from a world chronicle by Werner Rolewinck in 1494, showing the burning of Troy in 1184 BC, showing those “topless towers of Ilium” in flames, alluded to by Marlowe's devil raising Doctor Faustus about 1592.

Quite charming too is an image of Noah's Ark again from Rolewinck, (Genesis 8:10-11) anxiously waiting for the return of the dove to the Ark, from which the animals also peer out. This was in 2348 BC, according to Bishop Ussher of Armagh's famous calculation of the dates of Creation and the Flood.

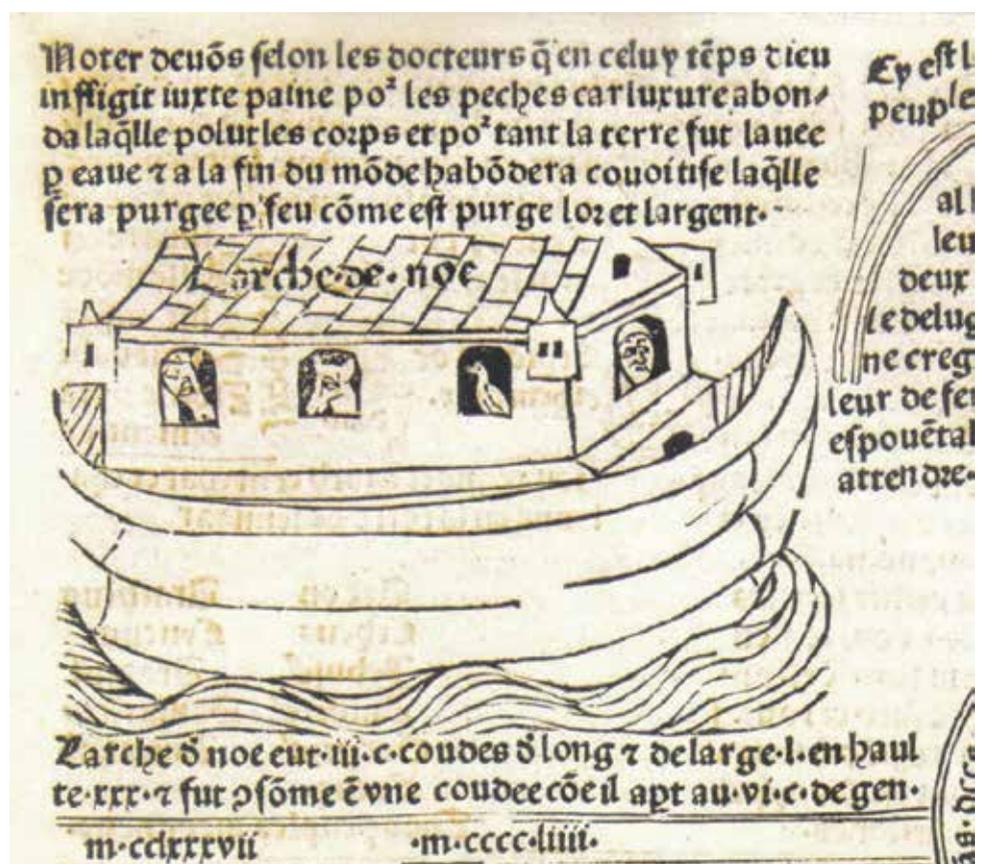
Remarkable

But the most remarkable is a woodcut of Venice from Breydenbach's record of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land (printed in 1486). Another picture of his (not illustrated) shows the wild animals of the Holy Land, among, remarkably enough, is a unicorn. I have written about this elsewhere: the unicorn was perhaps not quite the complete creature of fancy as is often supposed today.

The introduction of printing (“invention” is a contested term for some scholars) plays an important part in both the rise of the Reformation, and afterwards the Catholic Counter Reformation. A page from the Roman Index is illustrated,



The original shelves of Marsh's library have stood the test of time



Noah on the Ark awaiting the return of the dove from Werner Rolewinck's world history, 1483.

the valiant if useless effort on the part of the Papacy to control the extraordinary explosion of opinions and ideas of all kinds, with a dramatic expansion of printers, booksellers and libraries.

“The first item printed in the new font in 1571 was an ‘Irish ballade’ on the Day of Doom written by a Catholic poet”

There are no samples of Irish printing in either the catalogue or the exhibition. The German historian of printing from 1450 onwards, S.H. Steinberg, noted that “in connection with the Elizabethan settlement of the national church, the Irish language was drawn into the orbit of the printing press”.

In or before 1567 Queen Elizabeth I ordered the cutting of a special font of Irish

types for editions of the New Testament and the Anglican catechism.” Actually the first item printed in the new font in 1571 was an “Irish ballade” on the Day of Doom written by a Catholic poet.

“As has not infrequently happened with the English government's activities in the affairs of Ireland,” Steinberg observes tartly, “the result was very different from the intention.”

Saved

Indeed, it may well be that printing saved the Irish language. The same scholar remarks that the other Celtic language, Cornish, “became extinct for lack of a printed literature”. Thus printing, it seems, lies at the heart of the survival of that essential element of our native identity, our ancient language.

The story of the rise and achievements and accomplishments of printing overall in Ireland is a fascinating one, to which this fascinating book makes a due contribution.

Marsh's Library from time to time mounts exhibitions on aspects of the making and the preservation of books in Ireland well worth looking out for.

The creator of the book, Sara D'Amico, took an MA in Library Science at a university in Rome before going on to the Vatican School of Library Science, founded as recently as 1934, as an indication of the scientific and scholarly developments in that ancient library, famous since the Renaissance for its holdings of Greek and Roman classics, itself an historic library of major importance.

D'Amico is presently working for a PhD at the University of Alicante. In cataloguing the incunables at Marsh's Library she set herself a neat little problem which had wide reverberations.

i (Marsh's Library, St Patrick's Close, Dublin 8; Mon.-Fri. 9.30-5; tel. 01-454-3522; tickets, €47.00 (full fee), €4.00 (concession rate); email: information-marshlibrary.ie.)

“It may well be that printing saved the Irish language. The same scholar remarks that the other Celtic language, Cornish, “became extinct for lack of a printed literature”

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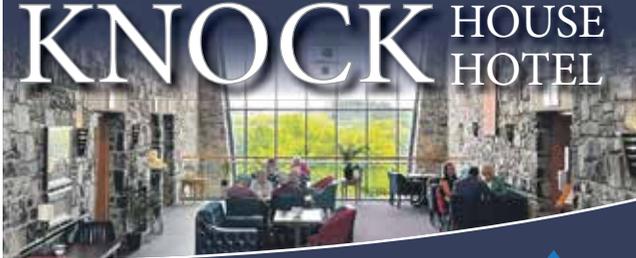
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PRAYER AND HEALING

NEWSRINGTIME COMMUNITY CORK are holding an afternoon of Ecumenical Prayer & a Healing Service in Halla Baile Bhuirne, Ballyvourney, P12 HW02 Co Cork.

This takes place from 2 to 4 pm on Saturday February 15th .

Speakers include members of Newspringtime Community, Cork; Janice Carrig & Barbara Harris. All are welcome.

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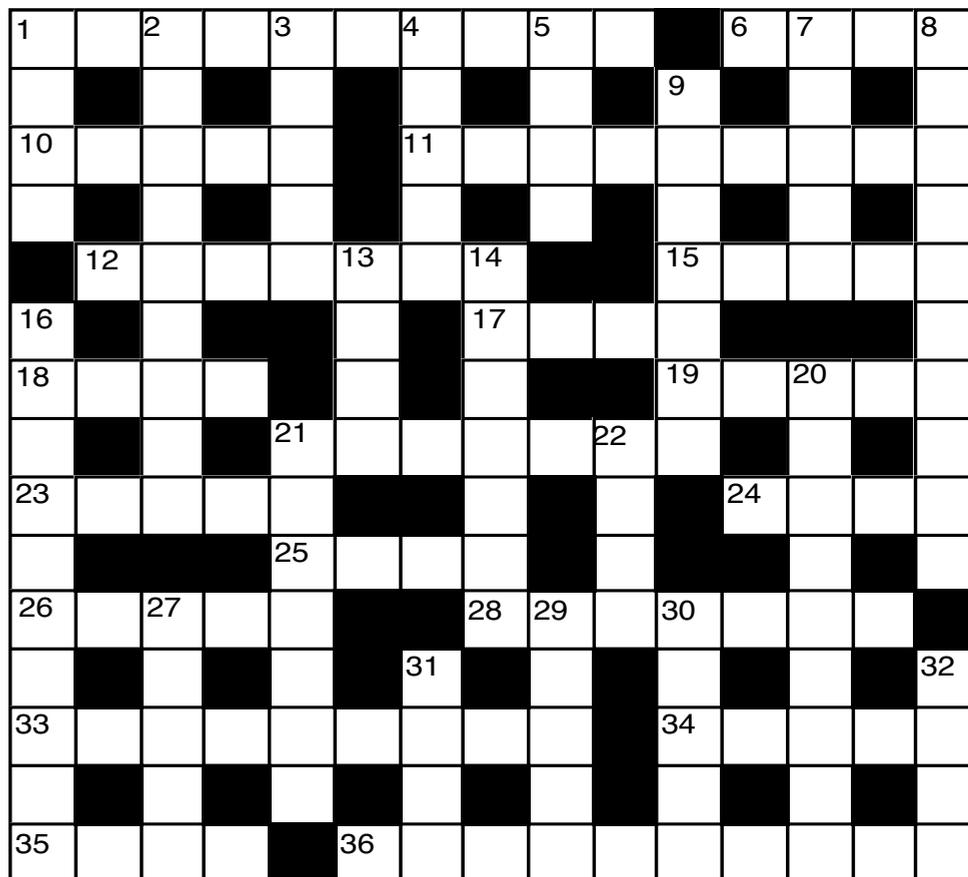
Registered Charity Number (RCN): 20006716

Crossword

Gordius 701

Across

- 1 Centre of Third Level Education (10)
- 6 Stay until someone or something shows up (4)
- 10 Simple song (5)
- 11 The practice of spying (9)
- 12 Former musical group known as the Fab Four (7)
- 15 Historically, a classroom fool (5)
- 17 Bird with black or grey plumage (4)
- 18 Salver (4)
- 19 Descriptive of a burnt smell (5)
- 21 This legal person might examine the cause of someone's death (7)
- 23 Powerful light beam (5)
- 24 Type of sword (4)
- 25 Shout (4)
- 26 Homes of our earliest ancestors (5)
- 28 Suffocate (7)
- 33 Any one of the seven type of occasion that are outward signs of inward grace (9)
- 34 Encounters (5)
- 35 Here, you hope to get a bargain (4)
- 36 Type of fly (10)



- 2 Looking the worse for wear (2,3,4)
- 3 Land of the pharaohs (5)
- 4 One from Malmo, perhaps (5)
- 5 Use a keyboard (4)
- 7 Once more (5)
- 8 & 14d Famous collection of ancient writings

- (3,4,3,7)
- 9 Conflict between East and West in the middle of the twentieth century (4,3)
- 13 Company symbol (4)
- 14 See 8 down
- 16 No matter what it takes (2,3,5)
- 20 Stand in for someone

- (9)
- 21 Fine glassware (7)
- 22 The longest river entirely in Spain (4)
- 27 Outspoken (5)
- 29 Bishop's headgear (5)
- 30 Beat, rhythm (5)
- 31 Breed of duck (4)
- 32 Eyot, small island (4)

SOLUTIONS, JANUARY 30

GORDIUS No. 700

Across

- 1 Mind-reader 6 Chic 10 Child 11 Bilingual 12 Charmed 15 Tithe 17 Arch 18 Took 19 Egret 21 Cadaver 23 Larch 24 Taco 25 Edge 26 Wiped 28 Sangria 33 Trafalgar 34 Metal 35 Reed 36. Reinforced

Down

- 1 Mice 2 Neighbour 3 Rider 4 Amble 5 Ella 7 Haunt 8 Collection plate 9 Another 13 Maya 14 Damages 16. Still water 20 Realistic 21 Cheddar 22 Eton 29 Aaron 30 Gumbo 31 Ogle 32 Clad

Sudoku Corner 569

Easy

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

Hard

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

Last week's Easy 568

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

Last week's Hard 568

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

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



The unspoken reality of appointments

Sometimes I wonder about Rome. Not Rome as a tourist destination, which is a venue unsurpassed. With apologies to Samuel Johnson, when a person is tired of Rome, that man or woman is tired of life. I don't deny Rome's importance as a goal for pilgrims either, though no doubt in this Holy Year some of its hoteliers will be as tempted to price-gouge pilgrims as might happen in Dublin around the time of a concert or a match.

I do wonder about Rome, though, in the sense of Rome as the Holy Father's See, the place from which we get our ideals, our challenges, our encouraging words. Rome must always be a significant place for us Roman Catholics, and I sometimes wonder about its inconsistencies: it seems to say one thing and do another.

For example, look at the current Roman way of appointing bishops. Our Holy Father tells us bishops should have the smell of the sheep. Those of us who work in parish ministry agree, for we know from experience that bishops who provide guidance and leadership to parishes need to have some experience of what it is like to minister on the coalface, to realise the impact of their pastoral decisions.

But while the Holy Father says

this, under his leadership those being made bishops move from one end of the country to another – not just in Ireland but all over the world. It seems to be rare for a priest in any particular diocese to be called on to lead the diocese with which he is most familiar, the diocese in which he most likely has the smell of the sheep.

Culture

There may be places in the world in which culture seems 'much of a muchness' in each place. In the United States, for example, it might well work for a priest associated

with a rural area in one state to fit in the rural area of another as its bishop. Urban areas in the States may have similar likenesses. But this does not obtain in Ireland, where two sides of one small parish can have dramatically different cultures, not to mention places in different counties and provinces. A pastor may be well familiar with the sheep in the hills of Donegal from his parish ministry there, but that does not mean he will be a natural fit in the Wicklow mountains.

And yet the practice of appointing strangers to lead dioceses seems to continue unabated. I hope someone somewhere is critiquing this current method of appointing bishops, as I am not sure it is working out that well.

These thoughts on bishops' appointments were spurred by the



St Ambrose of Milan

biography of St Ambrose, whose feast was on December 7. Ambrose, the civic leader of Milan, was chosen by the people to be their bishop before he was even ordained. If any

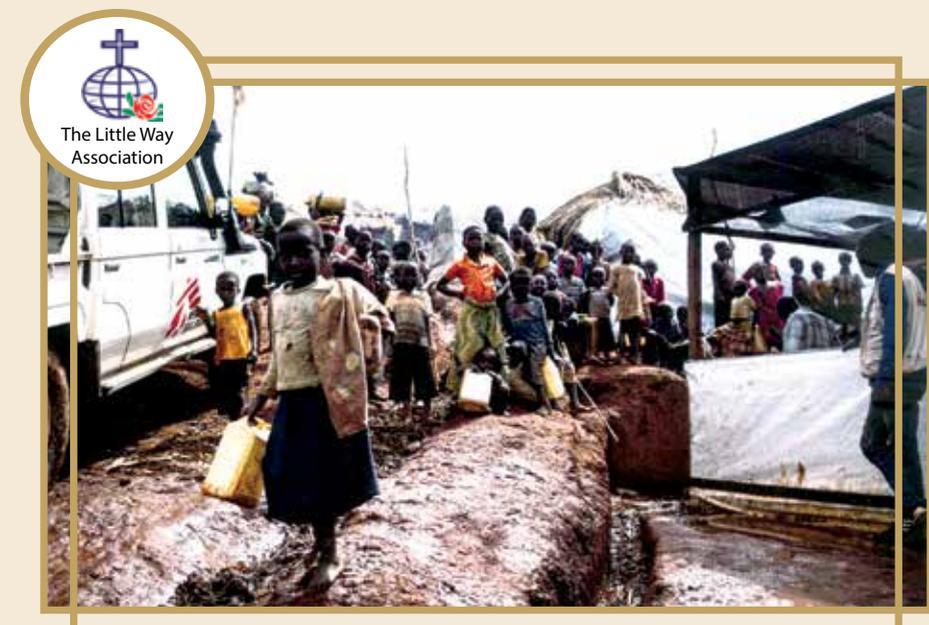
similar recommendation was made to Rome today, the choice of the Milanese would probably end up as bishop somewhere in Sicily - with very different sheep!

On the fourth weekend of each month, I preside at Masses in our cathedral in Skibbereen, where a joke goes down well at the start of the homily. Here's my January joke:

"A parish holds a summer party out on the lawn, with a long table covered with food. At one end is a big bowl of apples, to which the Pastor has attached a sign: 'Take just one, God is watching'. At the other end there are bars of chocolate, sweets, cookies. And a child has added a sign: 'Take as many as you like, God is watching the apples!'"

I used to avoid rehearsals for couples getting married. Doubtless I had some bad experiences early on, at those terrible endless sessions attended by so many people, each one chipping in their own ideas on how a wedding should be organised. It put me off rehearsals. Nowadays I am inclined towards

gathering just a few in the church; the couple, their witnesses, maybe a sacristan or another local minister. It doesn't take long, but it helps to establish rapport with the couple, a vital ingredient which helps ensure a smooth experience on the wedding day. I sincerely recommend these slimmed-down rehearsals.



EMERGENCY IN SUDAN: Please help The Little Way Association to ensure that medical help and care reaches thousands of those in need

Some time ago, our Association was pleased to be able to assist Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) in their vital medical work in many places in Sudan. As Pope Francis has often reminded us, a forgotten tragedy has been unfolding away from the eyes of the public. Civil war has devastated the health care system and left millions of children and adults in desperate need of medical care. Over 4 million children have fled from their homes.

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.

Every euro you send will be gratefully received and sent WITHOUT DEDUCTION to enable MSF to continue to provide life-saving medical care to thousands of malnourished children, pregnant women, new mothers and their babies in South Darfur.

PLEASE BE AS GENEROUS AS YOU CAN, AND PRAY FOR THE PEOPLE OF SUDAN. THE NEEDS ARE IMMENSE.



"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

MISSION CHAPELS

St. Therese, our patroness, wished to spread the Gospel throughout the world "until the end of time". We receive many requests for help from bishops and priests to build, renovate or complete their mission chapels. We are often asked for funds to provide a permanent roof for a chapel. 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.

Your donation will help a priest in a mission country to provide a decent chapel for his congregation, a fitting place for the celebration of Holy Mass.

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- €..... **WELLS / CLEAN WATER**
- €..... **MASS OFFERINGS** (please state no.)
We ask for a minimum of €7 or more for each Mass
- €..... **LITTLEWAY ADMIN. EXPENSES**

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