

# The Irish Catholic

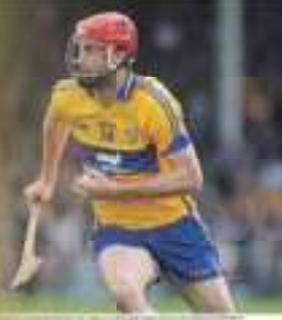
**RELIGIOUS ORDERS  
COULD SELL ASSETS  
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## 'Religion far from a museum piece' says top female theologian and Vatican advisor

Garry O'Sullivan

"Thirty years ago, the secularisation thesis taught us that religion was heading toward museum piece status in the West. That thesis has not aged well, Dr Anna Rowlands has said, adding "religion is far from a museum piece and continues to exist, in evolving forms, as a complex, multi-layered and dynamic reality in our current world. It is far more interesting a picture than the secularisation thesis would have led us to imagine."

Dr Anna Rowlands was speaking in Maynooth this week as she delivered the Trocaire Lent Lecture 2025.

She told those gathered; "Not only is the political significance of religion rising, but new forms of religious and post-religious practice are emerging in both the global North and South."

She added: "Religious communities also remain among the major humanitarian providers globally, 'localising' aid and integral development more effectively than many secular agencies. Furthermore, religious belief and practice continue to provide grounds for meaning-making, resistance and resilience to many with limited economic or political resources."

Dr Rowlands, a Vatican advisor and theologian said that looking at religion in 2025, it is true to say that it has defied secular theorists.

"Many of us have also been raised on some version of the philosophy of liberalism that told us virtue language, especially the Christian language of faith, hope, and love, was a legitimate matter of private belief but had no place in a neutral, secular public space. The acquired virtues, including justice and prudence, remained relevant yet became more harmonious when separated from their connection to the infused theological virtues. And politicians traded in a language of secularised hope that was closer to that of simple

» Continued on Page 2

### Welcome to the Catholic Church



The Rite of Election of Catechumens and the call of Candidates for the Easter Sacraments took place in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral, Archdiocese of Dublin on March 9. Pictured are the candidates and Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin, main celebrant. Photo: John McElroy. See pages 16-17. (Inset) During the ceremony each Catechumen signed their name in the Book of the Elect in the presence of their Godparents and Patricia Carroll, Director for Mission and Ministry for Dublin Diocese. Photo: John McElroy.

**WE NEED TO REDISCOVER OUR  
LOVE OF IRISHNESS**

**Senator Rónán Mullen**

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**ST JOSEPH AND A  
BULLET-RIDDEN PRAYER CARD**

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**ENDANGERED:  
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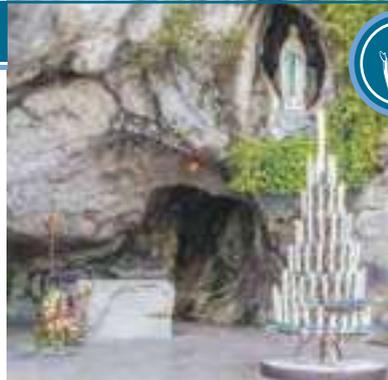
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## 'Religion far from a museum piece' says top female theologian and Vatican advisor

» **Continued from Page 1** optimism. That form of political hope has not stood up well, and has been replaced by a politics of anger and resentment. And so, here we stand in early 2025 in a moment when religion has defied secularisation theorists, politics has defied the philosophers of liberalism, and the virtue language of faith, hope, and love is resurgent, although as contested and irascible as ever."

She said it is significant that the resurgence in political claims of faith across the political arena occurs at a time of huge hunger for hope and reports of people struggling with social hopelessness.

"The hunger for hope and the absence of hope are critical indicators of our moment's health. As a small illustration, social science researchers have convincingly charted that having some sense of hope for the future correlates with engagement in civil society, voting, and nurturing health and friendships. Correspondingly, those who are vulnerable to feelings of social despair are much more susceptible to misinformation and conspiracy theories. Hope and trust are deeply related. Hope is connected to social trust, participation in all aspects of social life, and a sense of connection to near and distant neighbours."

"For all of these reasons, Pope Francis' choice to dedicate this Jubilee year to the theological virtue of hope is especially timely – pastorally, spiritually, and politically."

See full address on pages 12-13

# National launch of 'Ministry of Catechist' expected this year

Chai Brady and Garry O'Sullivan

The national launch of the 'Ministry of Catechist' is expected this September with a six-month preparation phase before candidates enter formal formation in 2026, *The Irish Catholic* has learned.

Dr Alexander O'Hara, who was the National Director for Catechetics until a few weeks ago told *The Irish Catholic* the role is a formal lay ministry that is "akin to the permanent diaconate" and goes further than just teaching the Faith. He said that "there will be a discernment phase for dioceses in terms of making it open to candidates. I believe that's planned for September 2025... and then people will enter formation for September 2026".

Dr O'Hara explained:

"It is a vocational lay ministry, so it's open to men and women. Catechists are very important in the Church in Africa and Latin America, you may not have many priests there so the catechists play very much a leadership role. So, this ministry is really working under the bishop in a diocese, they are given a public ecclesial mandate and are instituted for life."

Pope Francis established the lay ministry of catechist in 2021. Since then national guidelines prepared over the course of three years have been published, so "basically the work has been done, it's just up to the bishops now to roll it out and to push it," according to Dr O'Hara.

"There's a difference between people that are doing catechetical activity versus people that feel it is a vocational calling that is

coming from the Holy Spirit, and they want to discern this and like any ministry, is conferred and confirmed by the Church – by the bishop," he said.

Dr O'Hara said that the guidelines around instituting catechists are "quite flexible" and that ultimately it is up to each bishop. If they believe a person already has the requisite training, they can be made lay catechists.

"So there is that flexibility in terms of the bishop having the ultimate authority in terms of who he institutes for this ministry. You're instituted for life, but you should be given a public ecclesial mandate by the bishop for one-three years and that can be renewed," he said.

"If the bishops conference properly run with this and implement it, it has exciting implications for the

Church. I do hope they follow through and implement it because a lot of work has gone into this, very much consulting with dioceses and various working groups that we had."

Looking to the future, and his hopes for the ministry and what it can achieve particularly for the Irish Church, Dr O'Hara said: "The focus should be on adult catechises and adult faith formation, and if you look at what came through from dioceses in terms of the synod consultations, a lot of it was about adult faith formation.

"Traditionally in Ireland we focus too much on sacramental preparation of children, but actually if you look at the directory for catechises published by the Vatican, the focus should be adult faith formation. That's where we need to put out focus now. A lot of people need that formation, that's where the ministry of catechist could play a really important part."

The National Guidelines called 'Fan into a Flame' and more information about the Ministry of Catechist are available at: [religionseducation.ie](http://religionseducation.ie)

## Dublin diocese welcomes 80 Catechumens

Renata Milán Morales

Eighty adults from different backgrounds were welcomed to the Catholic Faith at the Rite of Election in the Pro Cathedral with Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin on March 9.

Dublin diocese witnessed an increase of 100% from the 40 catechumens elected in 2024. "Something is happening in Dublin diocese as more young people want to join the Catholic Church," said Patricia Carroll, Director for Mission and Ministry for the Dublin Diocese. "It's clear that young adults want to know about the Catholic faith and want to join us. So, in this year of hope, it's a big, big, hopeful message."

Vincent Dupont, one of the candidates, told *The Irish Catholic* that, "There was a lot of enthusiasm within the church. Everybody seemed really happy." Ariane Martinez, soon-to-be baptised, was an example of this joy: "I cannot wait... I'm sorry for those who have not encountered God yet," she said.

The candidates agreed that the most challenging part of this journey is the commitment to "become more Christ-like." Alan Maizon, a candidate for Confirmation told this paper that "the most challenging part is the commitment itself... To be a good Christian depends on how much you commit to your church and your community." Another catechumen, Elisa, said, "I'll try to increase even more prayer and trust in all of what Jesus wants me to do."

When asked what they would say to those who have not encountered God yet, the overall response was to "respond the call". Vincent said, "Just have faith and open your eyes, open your ears." Following the words of Colossians Alan said, "set your mind on things above." Elisa explained that "God is always calling us, and it's never too late."

See pages 16-17.

## Centenary of Irish WWII hero's ordination

Staff reporter

Members of the Hugh O'Flaherty Memorial Society recently flew to Rome to be present at the commemorative Mass of the Irish priest who saved 6,500 lives during World War II.

The Mass was celebrated at the Propaganda Fide College, where Hugh O'Flaherty was ordained 100 years ago in 1925. This special Mass was Celebrated by Archbishop John Kennedy (Vatican Holy Office), Rectors from a number of Colleges in Rome and four priests from Kerry: Canon Tom Looney, Fr Donal Looney, Fr John Ahern and Fr John Joe Spring.

Special guests included the Ambassadors from the United Kingdom, Germany, Netherlands and Ireland. In attendance



Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty Memorial Statue, found in the town of Killarney, Co. Kerry.

were also representatives from the O'Flaherty family and the family of Henrietta Chevalier, one of the brave women who provided safe houses for Hugh O'Flaherty's Escape Line.

Among those invited was Princess Gesine Doria Pamphilj, granddaughter of one of the Monsignor's most important benefactors, Prince Filippo

Andrea Doria Pamphilj. It was from Prince Andrea's Palace that Hugh O'Flaherty evaded capture by the Gestapo when he escaped from the coal cellar disguised as a coalman. Finally, the Irish Ambassador to the Holy See, Frances Collins, hosted a reception for the group in the Irish Embassy to the Holy See at Via dei Corridori.

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# Priest criticises An Post's St Patrick's Day stamp, calls it a sign of growing secularisation



St Patrick, patron of Ireland. Photo: OSV/Gregory A. Shemits.

## Pedro Esteva

The snakes have returned to Ireland—at least, that's the concern raised by Fr Patrick Moore, who sees An Post's latest St Patrick's Day stamp design as a troubling sign of the country's increasing secularisation.

In a letter to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Moore PP of Castlepollard, Co. Westmeath lamented that despite St Patrick famously driving out the snakes of pre-Christian paganism, modern Ireland

appears to be inviting them back in, replacing faith with what he calls a secularised approach to Irish history. "Poor St Patrick, even after driving out the snakes of pre-Christian paganism, here, they reappear, in the form of our annual An Post contribution for the feast—or rather now, the festival—of St Patrick's Day, as they call it."

A longtime member of An Post's Philatelic section—the division dedicated to the study of stamps—Fr Moore expressed disappointment that major Catholic figures

like St Oliver Plunkett, Ven. Matt Talbot, and St Laurence O'Toole have been overlooked in recent commemorative stamp releases. Instead, he noted, the postal service has chosen to honour late musicians Shane MacGowan and Sinéad O'Connor, remarking wryly that both have been "blessed" with a place in An Post's collection.

Fr Moore also pointed to what he sees as a broader cultural shift, similar to the recent push to equate St Brigid with a pre-Christian Celtic goddess. "The very valuable stamp commemorations should be holistic and not narrow-minded," he

urged, calling for a more balanced representation of Ireland's history.

An Post, however, has defended the stamp series as a celebration of the 'adventurous spirit' associated with Ireland's national holiday. The design, unveiled at the GPO by Ministers Patrick O'Donovan and Charlie McConalogue, incorporates the image of a snake as a playful nod to the legend of St Patrick. "This creative design incorporates the snake into a set of four stamps capturing the event's fun, energy, and playfulness," An Post explained in its press release.

Minister McConalogue

emphasised that the stamps are meant to be "a fitting accompaniment to the festival, with the artwork recognising a piece of mythos in Irish tradition," while St Patrick's Festival CEO Richard Tierney described them as a tribute to Ireland's cultural heritage in a way that resonates with the global Irish diaspora.

Whether An Post will reconsider its approach remains to be seen, but Fr Moore's criticism highlights a growing debate over the reshaping of Ireland's past—and the role faith should play in its national identity.

# Survival expert Bear Grylls to speak at sold out Flame youth congress

## Pedro Esteva

Renowned adventurer Bear Grylls will headline Flame 25, a sold-out gathering of 10,000 young Catholics at OVO Wembley Arena on March 15. The event, themed Unstoppable: Fan the Flame of Hope, is a celebration of faith featuring powerful worship, dynamic performances, and uplifting talks.

Bear Grylls, OBE, known for his survival skills and a former member of the British Special Forces, will share his own faith journey as well as introduce his new book - *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, a retelling of the Gospels told through a series of eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life. Every attendee will receive a copy.

Other featured speakers include Bryan Enriquez, a founding member of the Hallow App, the world's leading Catholic prayer app, as well as Isaac Harvey, MBE, a disability advocate and content creator who has modelled for London Fashion Week and in *Vogue*, promoting adaptive fashion and inclusivity.

The day will culminate in Adoration led by Cardinal Vincent Nichols. Music performances will include Guvna B, Lily-Jo, World Youth Dance Crew, One Hope Project, and Adenike Adewale, ensuring a vibrant and uplifting atmosphere.

Fr Dominic Howarth, co-chair of the Flame Core Group, emphasised the event's significance:



Bear Grylls. Photo: Monty Wates / The National Churches Trust.

"Flame 2025 is a testament to the hard work and dedication of teachers, chaplains, priests, and youth leaders. Some will be leaving at 4 am and returning well after midnight! The programme is packed with speakers and musicians offering a joyful vision of Christ-centred hope."

With a sold-out crowd and a dynamic lineup, Flame 2025 promises to be a powerful experience of faith, hope, and unity for young people across the country.

# Over 200 Confirmed in Killarney

## Renata Steffens

Killarney Parish in the Kerry Diocese celebrated 215 Confirmations of boys and girls from five primary schools on March 7 in St Mary's Cathedral. The Confirmations occurred in two separate ceremonies led by Bishop Ray Browne, one in the morning when 120 children were Confirmed and one in the afternoon for the remaining 95.

Fr Kieran O'Brien (Adm.)

told *The Irish Catholic* the ceremonies did not have Mass. The confirmation ceremonies do not have Mass in Killarney Parish since Covid, "to focus on the Sacrament of Confirmation... The church was beautifully decorated, the children participated in every way with singing, music, prayers, readings. As a priest, I was uplifted by the whole ceremony."

The children and family were invited to attend Sunday Mass. "It's a family occa-

sion as well and some people had travelled from overseas even, to be with their families."

Fr O'Brien said that all children being Confirmed across Ireland are "making the promises now for themselves and hopefully they would live out the sacrament for the rest of their lives. I was encouraged by the participation and by the preparation that the children have had, so it's not a day that they're going to forget."



An Post has issued a set of four colourful stamps to mark the St Patrick's Festival and the national holiday which honours the feast day of St Patrick. Photo: An Post.

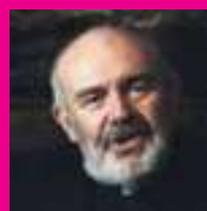
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ALL WELCOME

# Religious orders could financially support evangelisation – Baroness

**Renata Steffens**

Baroness Nuala O'Loan has said that religious orders could help parishes and dioceses by selling assets to financially support evangelisation.

She said that some people find strength during difficult times by simply sitting in a church or taking part in community activities. However, maintaining those

churches and resources open can be a financial difficulty to the parishes.

"Many of these activities will need resources, and parishes can find raising money simply to maintain clergy and church a challenge. Many of the laity make great contributions, but more is needed," the Baroness said.

She said that "Religious orders have played a very

significant and very positive role in the life of the Church for hundreds of years." Today, many of these Orders are suffering from reducing numbers and some are looking for a new role or charism.

Ms O'Loan also said that "it is well known that they often have large capital resources." So, the Baroness questioned "Could they help the local Church, which

operates now in such a secular society, by making a deliberate decision to fund diocesan and parish activities, selling some of their capital assets to enable others to carry on the work which they themselves did in bringing people to God?"

She mentioned the Code of Canon Law which says: "Taking into account local conditions, institutes are to strive to give, as it were, a

collective witness of charity and poverty and are to contribute according to their ability something from their own goods to provide for the needs of the Church and the support of the poor."

Today, the Baroness said, there is a need to act, to evangelise. This action needs to come from every person. "It is a challenge for all of us."

See page 11.

## New law will 'safeguard' unmarried father's rights

**Staff reporter**

Senator Sharon Keogan has announced that the Government has given a summer deadline to enact a law which would ensure the right of unmarried fathers to be named on their children's birth certificates.

Senator Keogan said that after more than a decade of delays and repeated inquiries last week the Minister for Social Protection, Dara Calleary, "told us that he expects that the law will be put into action 'before the end of quarter two this year'".

In 2014, the law regarding Civil Registration was updated. It required that unmarried mothers would be obliged to provide the

details of the child's biological father if he was not present.

The Senator said: "To date, however, the government and the HSE have not put this law into practice.

"This has meant that for the past decade, in the case of unmarried parents, the registration of the child's father was near-totally at the discretion of the mother. Unmarried fathers who were not registered on their children's birth certs could only be included if they pursued court action," she said.

"The application of this law will help to safeguard the rights of unmarried fathers and ensure that children will be aware of their parentage."

## Charity supporting Lesotho criticises Trump's 'bullying'

**Chai Brady**

An Irish charity which supports two religious orders that help Lesotho's poor has said Trump's derogatory remarks at Congress last week were 'inappropriate'.

Mr Trump described Lesotho as a country "nobody has ever heard of" as he defended aid cuts, noting in particular a past US aid project of "eight million dollars to promote LGBTQI+ in the African nation of Lesotho".

Seamus Collins, Misesan Cara's Learning and Development Manager, lived in the landlocked nation before apartheid ended from 1989-91. He told *The Irish Catholic*: "A throwaway remark that nobody has ever heard of Lesotho is inappropriate... it's always been a small country surrounded by a very big country and it's ironic to see while its relationship with South Africa has changed since the end of apartheid now it is again being bullied by a big country in the form of the United States."

Mr Collins said that Misesan Cara has supported Salesian sisters and Oblates who assist vulnerable women and children in the country, adding that missionaries were crucial in establishing health and education infrastructure there.

Ireland has had a partnership with Lesotho since 1975, it has contributed to education, health, infrastructure development, agriculture, rural water supply, and governance.

Asked about Irish Aid's recent investment in the country, a spokesperson for the Department of Foreign Affairs said: "Our embassy in Pretoria provided €100,000 in 2024 to UNDP in Lesotho for their programme, 'Renewable Lesotho: Access to Affordable and Renewable Energy'.

"The project aims to increase renewable energy generation capacity and energy efficiency, promote more equitable and gender-transformative access to clean energy, and improve Lesotho's energy sector and leadership and institutional capacity."

## New diocesan appointments in Clonfert

**Staff reporter**

The Bishop of Clonfert Michael Duignan has made clerical changes to the Diocese. The new appointments are:

- Rev. Gregory Shinvo, CC (Diocese of Jalingo, Nigeria) to replace Rev. Charles Nyameh, CC (Diocese of Jalingo, Nigeria) as curate St Michael's and priest available to the Ballinasloe Faith Community Area along with providing sacramental services to Emmanuel House of Providence, Clonfert. Fr Gregory will also serve on the Diocesan Committee for the Sacraments of Initiation and the Diocesan Youth Committee.
- Bishop Emeritus John Kirby, PP to retire as Parish Priest of Cappataggle and Kilricke and to become

curate at the Cathedral of St Brendan, Loughrea.

- Very Rev. Iomar Daniels, PP, EV, Leitrim and Ballydugan, Teacher at St Joseph's College, Garbally to also minister as Non-Resident Parish Priest of Cappataggle and Kilricke.
- Very Rev. Michael Kennedy, PP, St Cronan's Parish, Lusmagh to retire as Parish Priest and to continue until June 2025 as Administrator of St Cronan's Parish, Lusmagh.
- Very Rev. Kieran O'Rourke, PP, VF, Woodford and Looscaun to also minister as Administrator pro tem of the Parish of Eyrecourt, Meelick and Clonfert.
- Very Rev. Ian O'Neill, PP, VG, Claregalway to replace Fr Aidan Costello as Vocations Director now for both the Dioceses of Clonfert and Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora.

## A new member for the Franciscan family



The first member of the Traveller community to be professed into the Third Order of the Franciscan family, Siobhan Ward, made her Solemn Profession into the Secular Franciscan Order on March 7 in the St Mary of the Angels Friary Church. (L/R) Fr Sean Kelly, OFM, Cap Provincial Minister, Siobhan Ward (Solemn Profession) and Fr James Connolly, OFM, Cap SFO Spiritual Assistant.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Waiting list for 'home chalice'

A new initiative to bring a tangible element to family prayer in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh is being organised by the Vocations Society of St Joseph, formerly known as St Joseph's Young Priests Society, with president Pat Clarke and spiritual director Fr Raymond Donnelly.

Parishioners can keep in their homes a blessed chalice called 'Chalice Outreach Prayer for Vocations' for a week (Monday-Sunday) as a "focal point because it's a tangible reminder of the Eucharist and priesthood... And say just a little, very simple prayer that we provide each day either as an individual or a family, but it would be a good intentional prayer for vocations to the priesthood," said Fr Donnelly who is also CC, St Michael's Parish Enniskillen.

"I think people like the idea of having the tangible kind of thing in front of them that they can hold and touch. Is sacred, but they know what the sacredness of it means," the priest said.

This is the second week the chalice is going around, and Fr Donnelly said the waiting list has already filled 16 weeks, but "this is going to go forever." So, any person/family interested to receive the chalice can contact the parish office on 02866322075 (option 3) and give their details to be added to the list.

# Prostitution: Compassion, yes - Normalisation, no

There is a long Christian tradition – rooted in the Gospels – of showing compassion for women who work as prostitutes. Christian women and early feminists took up this cause in the 19th century – the anti-slavery Christian campaigner Josephine Butler sheltered prostitutes, and halted young girls from being trafficked into prostitution, too.

Compassion and empathy towards women in prostitution is well-established. But so is recognising that women in this trade – now usually called ‘sex workers’ – can be helped to escape from the fate of selling their bodies.

The mainstream culture has a more ambiguous approach. There is condemnation of the exploitation and trafficking of young women – and by definition, the sex trade seeks to employ young and nubile females. On the other hand, there is also a certain level of glamorising sex workers, even of advancing their activities as a career opportunity for young women.

George Bernard Shaw’s play, *Mrs Warren’s Profession*, first staged in 1902, suggested this theme – brothel-keeping as a business like any other, although as a socialist Shaw also intended a critique of capitalism. (He also predicted – wrongly, it turns out – that there would be no more prostitution once women had other job opportunities.)

**“While compassion and kindness are right and just, is it acceptable to advance prostitution as just another career choice, as some do?”**

The success of the movie *Anora*, which won five awards at the recent Oscars, has generated sympathy for sex workers, and its garlanded star, Mikey Madison, has also praised the sex-worker practitioners and “community”. She said, at the awards, “I want



Mary Kenny

to recognise and honour the sex worker community. I will continue to support you and be your ally... You deserve respect and human decency.”

In the movie, which features some explicit scenes, Ms Madison plays a stripper who also works as prostitute, and marries the son of a Russian oligarch. She pre-

pared for the part by spending time with sex workers. Fair play to her for feeling gratitude towards this group of women who assisted her research.

But while compassion and kindness are right and just, is it acceptable to advance prostitution as just another career choice, as some do?

Would most people really want their daughters or grand-daughters, nieces or god-children, to choose this path?

## Monto

It’s interesting to observe the way in which the closing of Dublin’s ‘Monto’ is being marked. A hundred years ago, in 1925, Dublin’s ‘Red Light’ district – originally in Montgomery Street, now Foley Street, near Connolly Station – was shut down by the police and public pressure. Frank Duff

and the Legion of Mary played an active role in closing the Monto brothels, and from what I have read, his campaign was overwhelmingly supported by young women.

**“The old prostitution area can be revisited as a theme park”**

Duff himself was compassionate towards women caught up in the sex-trade – and tried to rescue them from a way of life that involved not only degradation but disease.

But Monto’s closure is now being re-interpreted as an oppressive move by the power of the Catholic church, and the Madames who ran the brothels revised as grand old Dublin characters. One such, May Roberts, was known as the ‘Queen’

of Monto, profitably commanding a cast of sex workers in her bordello.

Tourists can now take a ‘Monto Walking Tour’, with knowledgeable local historian Terry Fagan. The old prostitution area can be revisited as a theme park.

## Hypocrisy

There’s been plenty of social hypocrisy around prostitution: women at the higher end of the activity were called courtesans, and often gifted with jewels, carriages, and splendid residences. But at street level, prostitution has involved poor girls, often inveigled into selling their bodies by ruthless pimps – or mobster networks. Compassion and care, yes: but normalisation of sex work as a career? I think not.



Mikey Madison at the 2024 New York Film Festival

## Time travelling

King Charles has chosen his favourite musical playlist, heavily drawn on Commonwealth performers from Dame Kiri Te Kanawa (New Zealand) to Daddy Lumba (Ghana). I’m glad to see he has

included the old-fashioned, sweet-sounding Al Bowlly, who grew up in South Africa and who crooned so successfully in the 1930s. Al Bowlly was set to be the new Bing Crosby – until he was sadly killed during the London blitz in 1941.

He (The Very Thought of You) had that light tenor voice popular at the time, like Charles Trenet and Jean Sablon in France (all on YouTube). Ah, when popular music was tender and gentle, and now strikes such a nostalgic note!

The new Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney has solid Irish roots and a Catholic education. His siblings, Seán, Brenda and Brian have distinctly Irish names, and schooling at St Francis Xavier High School in Edmonton brought Mark to Harvard.

Critics have called Mr Carney a woke

globalist with the usual trendy views but Trump’s policies of threatening tariffs and even territorial appropriation are putting some backbone into political leaders. They are coming to realise that defending your own country means drawing on patriotism, and even some of the values bestowed by St Francis Xavier.

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## Senator Rónán Mullen

A view from the Seanad



# We need to rediscover our love of Irishness

**T**he Trump/Vance vs Zelensky dust-up in the White House was widely portrayed as an ambush of a tired and strained war-hero by a cynical and narcissistic duo bent only on self-aggrandisement. But with the wisdom of hindsight, it seems that Zelensky played his hand very badly that day.

In old-style diplomacy people overlooked small differences in order to focus on higher-level goals. But this new US administration insists on respect.

They get shirty if you don't wear a suit to the Oval Office. Johnny Cash's 'Man in Black' wore black "for the thousands

who have died, believin' that we all were on their side". Zelensky would have done well to have had that response to hand when the question came from a hostile journalist.

It seems obvious now, unfair though it may be, that Ukraine must lose some territory if there is to be a peace settlement. And any deal must include security and financial guarantees for this to make sense.

### Elusive

Peace is elusive, and war-mongering abounds. There was a time that we in Ireland would have watched these events from a distance, prayed for

peace, but not seen ourselves as affected by the outcome. Now in an interdependent world we are part of the EU, on whose Eastern side are countries that fear invasion. What's more, our political leaders are starting to nudge at our national pride, and to whisper that we mustn't be security freeloaders, that we should abandon our military neutrality, arm-up, and, by implication, prepare to go to the Eastern front if necessary.

I think, 'Not so fast', must be the answer to that push as we reflect this St Patrick's Day on what it means to be Irish and where our obligations actually lie.



Maybe it was our island nature, or history, or culture, our common Celtic roots, or even our vulnerability, that drew St Patrick back to Ireland, leading him to subsume the druidic pagan culture of his time into something greater and infinitely more inspiring. The Christian spiritual heritage we inherited from Patrick and other great saints has made us what we are, if not in our eyes then in the sight of others who observe our country.

We need to rediscover our love of Irishness, consider the true sources of its value, and agree what our responsibilities are.

**“Citizens must be allowed shape these rules and not be treated as mere bystanders to the solutions proposed by administrative bureaucracy”**

Patriotism has standards. It is generous. We Irish, influenced by our Christian heritage, have been good in the world and we know we ought to be. But patriotism also realises that there must be universally applied rules for successful integration of newcomers to our land and culture. Citizens must be allowed shape these rules and not be treated as mere bystanders to the solutions proposed by administrative bureaucracy.

Inner faithfulness to one's identity is what shapes a country. Ireland has something valuable to share with people who

come to our shores, who in turn have shown us that they are happy to receive, in their own ways, what we offer. We are not just a bucket which can be empty or full, but a living community which can continue and develop only if we keep our shape. Integration is possible when people fully acknowledge the value of that into which they wish to integrate.

Around our country are many Irish people who are proud of their local heritage and of often hard-won cultural and moral standards, people who have sought to sustain strong community bonds, people who are not ready to have these values dismissed by international treaty-speak.

### Families

We are proud of our families, despite modernist attempts from at home and abroad to redefine them out of existence.

We are proud of the democratic and market economy principles we espouse, which helped us emerge from the dire poverty of a century ago to becoming one of the world's best economies today.

Many of us are still proud of our religious heritage, and its contribution to upholding democratic ideals. We expect to enjoy free thought, free expression and free movement and not to have these legislated, surreptitiously, away.

We expect our Government, too, to be patriotic and not trade away our well-established international neutrality, one slice at a time, and not to talk down to us, without involving us in the discussion. We should certainly re-invest

in our army, not for military engagement abroad but for internationally-sanctioned peace-keeping missions. And for skilled support in times of crisis and want at home, including those brought about by drastic weather events or other crises. At the same time, we can be the small country whose envoys are trusted because they are non-aligned honest brokers, from a tradition of Christian missionary and lay voluntary engagement makes Ireland a fit for the delicate work of bringing warring parties together.

**“We'll be at our best when we reflect on how fortunate we are economically, consider the onus that this places on us morally”**

We need all this identity to be encouraged and expressed – in stories, history, music, song, dance, language, folklore, community festivals, in the honouring of national saints and religious gatherings. We'll be at our best when we reflect on how fortunate we are economically, consider the onus that this places on us morally, stop lecturing other countries from our safe perch on the Eastern Atlantic but work actively for peace and reconciliation, even and especially when hope is scarce.

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# Darach Honan: A life beyond hurling



Eanna Mackey

**B**orn and raised in Clonlara, Co. Clare, Darach Honan's life has been shaped by both his love of hurling and the strong sense of community that defines his home.

The once towering full forward, one of the most recognisable of Clare's All-Ireland winning team in 2013, is known not just for his black and red helmet and his skill and physicality on the pitch but also for his strength off it. Darach's journey has seen him navigate the highs and lows of hurling at the highest level whilst facing head-on the challenges that come with it.

Nine years into retirement on the back of a career cruelly cut short by injury, Honan now finds purpose as the father of a young family while forging a career for himself in the financial service.

"I was forced to stop because of my hips; I've had 3 surgeries to date. I haven't had them replaced, but that might be something that I have to do at some point," he said. "It's good that in day-to-day life I'm unaffected, but if I was to turn up my intensity at all in terms of my training, it would start to break down."

## Transition

His last appearance came in 2016, when he played his final season and helped Clare to win the league. After an injury sustained in the first round of the Munster championship, Darach's inter-county playing days came to an end. The last game he played was the Clare county final that year, which ultimately ended in heartbreak after a replay.

With his career being cut short in his prime, the transition from player to spectator was a very hard one. For years, Darach struggled with

the mental toll of his forced retirement.

"It's nine years ago now, and it's mad to think because hurling was such a big part of my life for so long, it's just crazy to think that it's been that long since I played," he reflected.

"I found it really mentally tough for probably three or four years. I found it hard going to games; I was in bad form generally, and it was probably all tied up in that. So much of my identity was being a hurler, and I'd invested so much time in it, and I loved doing it."

"If there was ever something going wrong personally or if I was ever getting anxious about anything, hurling would have been my release. When that was no longer an option, it was a huge adjustment for me," he confessed.

**“Surrounding yourself with good people and having faith that things can come right can help you stay positive”**

Yet despite the challenges, time, family, and faith allowed Darach to find his balance again. Though he still misses the game he loves, he has learnt to embrace his new role, enjoying watching games and supporting his teammates while being a role model for his two young girls and community.

"I think it takes time to get over these sorts of things, but I think surrounding yourself with good people and having faith that things can come right can help you stay positive," he said.

Darach's community in Clonlara is something very close to his heart. He still lives in the area not far from the village and leaned on the support of his community when at his lowest.

"We have a very strong parish and community here in Clonlara; it's something

that we are very proud of," he said. "Even when I was going through what I did in having to retire early, it was huge in having that local connection with people, being able to feel supported and valued within the community even though I couldn't take to the field."

Now, Darach's time is consumed by his business—he runs a financial planning company—and his growing family. Married to Louise, with two daughters, Leah, who is 6 months old, and Molly, who is 3 and a half, his priorities have shifted.

"I'm delighted to have a family, even though it brings its own challenges. I've a great relationship with my wife, and I'm mad about the kids, and they help to motivate me to be the best that I can, either do the best with my business or to be as good a possible husband and father as I possibly can be," Darach shared.

## Faith

Faith has also become a more significant part of his life. Though it wasn't something that featured prominently in his upbringing, having children brought Darach back towards it.

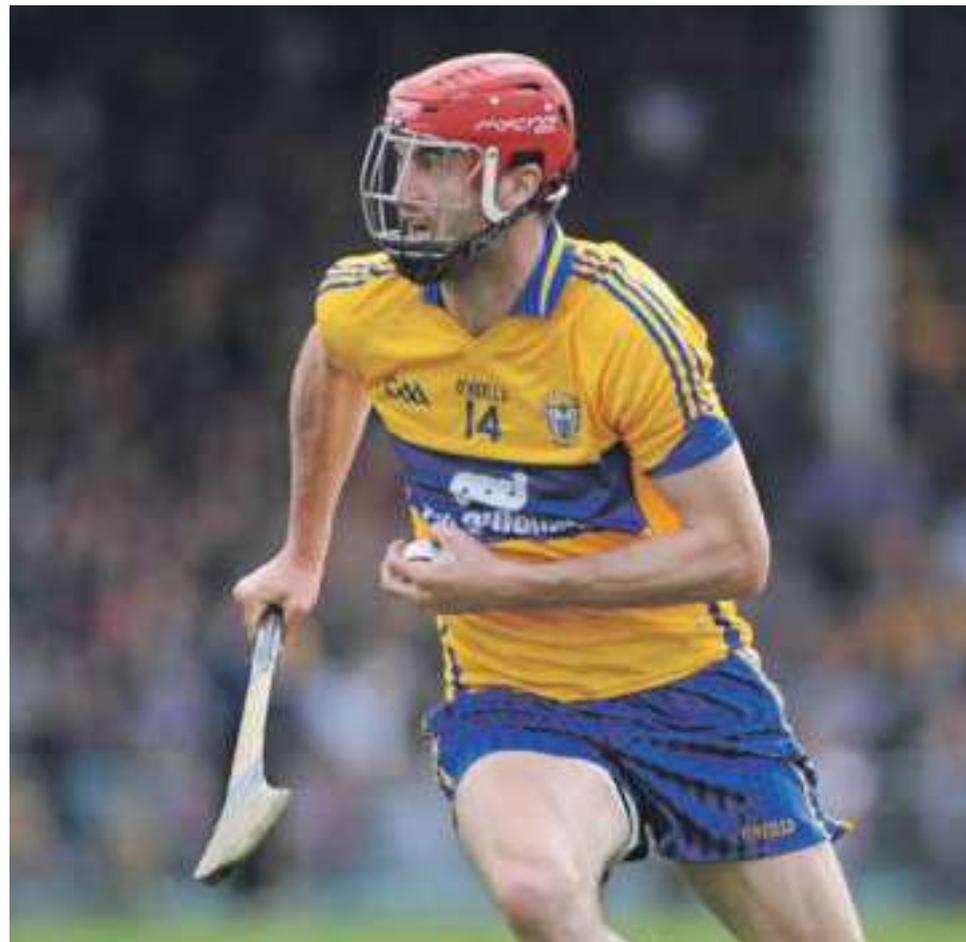
"Faith wasn't a huge thing in my family, but with my grandparents it was. It's something that I found once I had a family of my own; it brought me back towards it, whereas when I grew up, it just wasn't part of my routine."

"Having a family made me think about it more, and it's more to the forefront of my mind now - even thinking about their future and wanting the best for them."

"I find myself praying for them now, and that's kind of how it plays a role in my life. It's definitely something that I'd like to instil in my family. Praying, using the power of positive energy, those values of kindness and generosity, it all ties in together, and it's something that I'd love to incorporate in our family a bit more going forward."

As he reflects on his career, Darach's gratitude shines through, and despite the struggles he faced, he remains resolute in his faith and his love for his family. The path that he's forged is a reminder that, while sports can define much of a person's identity, it is their values and connections to community and family that shape who they really are.

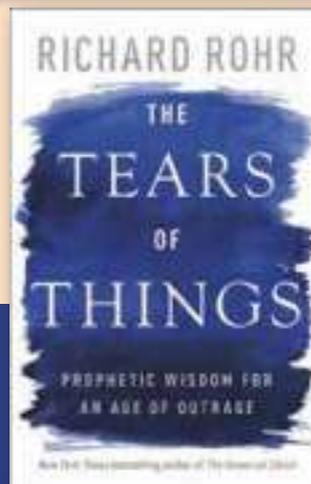
"While it took me a while to reach that mental state, it was something that I endeavoured to do for a long time, and I'm in a great place now, thankfully," said Honan.



Darach Honan of Clare in action at the Munster GAA Hurling Senior Championship Semi-Final, Clare vs Tipperary, Gaelic Grounds, Limerick on June 19, 2011. Photo Matt Browne/Sportsfile.

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**“Though he still misses the game he loves, he has learnt to embrace his new role, enjoying watching games and supporting his teammates while being a role model for his two young girls and community”**

# St Joseph and a bullet-ridden prayer card



Martina Purdy

It was on the way to Mass that I first heard the story of St Joseph and Bobby Clarke. My friend's aunt, Ann Kelly, needed a lift, and the pair of them were catching up, as I listened from the back seat. "As you know," said Ann, "I fell out with St Joseph for 33 years."

At first, I thought she was just joking. But she was very serious.

How could anyone fall out with St Joseph, not least a devout Catholic?

I eventually heard the whole story over a cup of tea after Mass last Ash Wednesday.

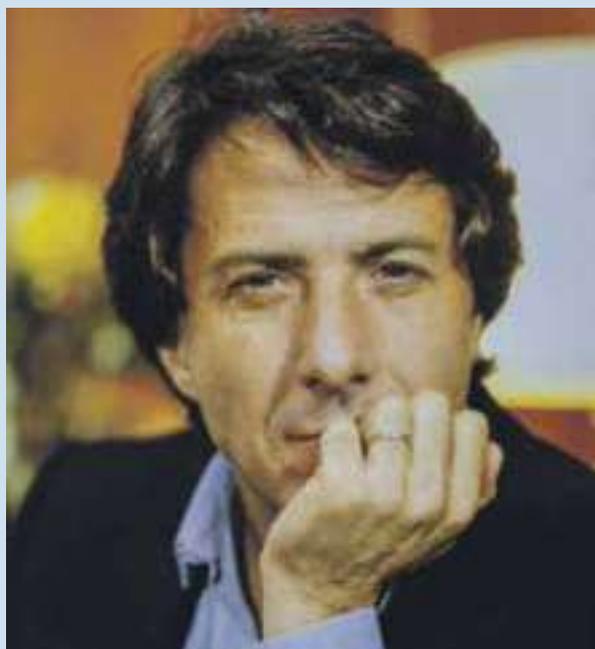
## Attack

Ann, a grandmother with a charmingly girlish voice, recalled the events of July 5, 1973, events that have been burned into her very soul.

"My daddy," said Ann, "went out to work that morning just before eight. He drove a big lorry and a fellow named Eamonn Largey had been killed in an accident at the roundabout at Eastwood's scrapyard and he said to my mammy, 'Kate will ye get my clothes ready and I will go tonight to the wake.'"

## Thanks for no birth control...

Oscar speeches are not what they used to be. And to be honest I did not bother watching this month's ceremony. In fact, I haven't bothered for years, though as a kid growing up in the 70s and 80s, The Oscars were unmissable. The other day I came across a speech by Dustin Hoffman, who won the Best Actor award in 1980 for *Kramer v Kramer*. One line really struck me. "I want to thank my parents," he said. "...for not practising birth control." Amen to that!



Dustin Hoffman.

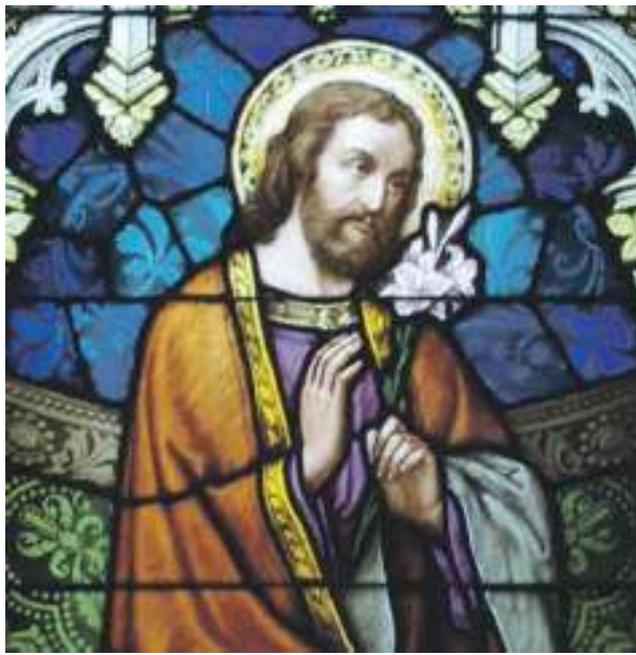
Bobby planned to pay his respects after he finished off his last shift as a contract lorry driver for Briggs of Pembroke Street, in the Village area of Belfast. It was a fiercely loyalist district and Bobby was the only Catholic worker. He drove into the yard, as usual, but this time he was set upon by a gang of loyalists, linked to the Ulster Freedom Fighters.

**“They were taking him to the back hall to hang him, but something went wrong, whatever it was”**

"My daddy was the size of nothing," said Ann. "He used to sit on two pillows when he drove the lorry into the yard."

"This guy pulled him out and my dad thought it was a 'hold up' for the wages. They gave him an awful beating but I think my daddy gave as good as he got because his wee hands were all black and blue."

"They were taking him to the back hall to hang him, but something went wrong, whatever it was. They shot him, and they shot him right through - I think it was the left side. But in the pocket was a picture of St Joseph 'to protect you from the hands of the enemy'. And the bullet went right through the



St Joseph.

picture."

"...and then they finished him off by putting a bullet straight through the temple of his head. That was at twenty past eight on July 5, 1973."

Although Bobby's murder was on the news fairly quickly, Ann, just 21, and newly-wed with a little baby, was oblivious to what had happened. "We didn't know until half four that day. Everybody knew except me and my mammy."

That afternoon, Ann met a young girl at the local van shop who blurted out the news: "That was awful what happened to your daddy!"

"No," said Ann. "My daddy is at work."

But the girl insisted: "No, Ann, your daddy was found dead'..."

## Grief

Ann, one of seven children born to Bobby and his wife Kathleen, fell into shock and deep grief. "I was very, very angry. I could not tell you what way I felt, and I just hated St Joseph..."

Later she added: "...I don't know if it was hate. I don't know what to call it."

She had eventually confided her feelings about St Joseph to a priest who told her: "You don't hate him. You

are hurt."

While Ann focused her anger on St Joseph, her widowed mother, devastated by the loss of her husband, raged against the killers. "God curse the ones that killed your daddy", she would say," said Ann who would often pray to God for her mother's healing with the words: "Oh, please don't let mammy die with that on her heart."

**“Her mother received a shortened pension because her father died on a Thursday”**

The family's grief was compounded when, six months after Bobby was killed, his brother Vincent, another innocent Catholic, who refused to pay the loyalists protection money, was also shot dead. The killers put ten bullets into him outside his mother's West Belfast home on February 4, 1974.

Ann recalled that her mother received a shortened pension because her father died on a Thursday, rather than a Friday, when his work week began. She was given

## Thousands to gather to 'Light the Fire'

Some good news, as we approach St Patrick's Day. Singer-songwriter Dana and her husband Damien Scallan have confirmed plans for a massive Light the Fire event on Sunday August 3. Archbishop Eamon Martin is set to 'light the flame' at Slane, where St Patrick defied the High King of Tara and lit up the ancient hill in 433AD. Dana, who was inspired to write a song for Patrick called 'Light the Fire', said 2025 is a time of great grace on our island. "It is a crucially important year for Ireland. It is the Year of Hope, and the 400th anniversary of the martyrdom of St Oliver Plunkett, the Centenary of the death of Venerable Matt Talbot, and Ireland has just launched a Sacred Heart Crusade. And it all came from St Patrick bringing the faith." Many thousands are set to gather for Mass, praise and worship and Eucharistic healing. Our parish has already booked a bus. Save the date!



A photo of Bobby Clarke.

**“Ann did not say if she now believed St Joseph, patron of a happy death, had perhaps protected her father's soul, rather than his body”**

relatively little by way of state compensation. "Six thousand pounds for my father's life. My mother called it 'blood money' and would not touch it."

Years later, she gave it to a family member in distress.

"My daddy was only 54 and we lost so much," said Ann. "I lost my daddy and my daddy never even knew his grandchildren."

## Solace

Her mother however treasured the bullet-ridden prayer card of St Joseph, a card she had given to her husband for his protection. She carried it in her handbag, along with a packet of Park Lane cigarettes that Bobby had on him when he was murdered. But even the prayer card and cigarette packet were taken, when the poor widow had her handbag snatched outside a West Belfast shop.

Ann was a long-time church volunteer, arranging the altar flowers at Clonard Monastery for the Redemptorist community. But she stubbornly refused to honour the statue of St Joseph on his feast days, March 19 and May 1. "I would not put a flower on his shrine for years and years."

One time, she went on a bus-run to Knock where there was a ballot and one of the prizes was an 18 inch statue

of St Joseph. "I am not sure if I won the ballot or my friend Patsy won the ballot but I came home with a statue of St Joseph I didn't want."

Eventually after 33 years she found it in her heart to put a yellow and white flower at St Joseph's shrine at Clonard.

**“‘My daddy never went to Mass,’ she recounted. ‘But he was a very good person’”**

And, last Ash Wednesday, at the 7am Mass at our parish of St Michael the Archangel, she was struck by Fr Ciaran Feeney's prayer after an intercessory Hail Mary: "St Joseph, pray for us."

Ann did not say if she now believed St Joseph, patron of a happy death, had perhaps protected her father's soul, rather than his body.

But during our conversation she shared what happened in the days before he was murdered. "My daddy never went to Mass," she recounted. "But he was a very good person. And the week before my father died, he went up every night to the mission in Turf Lodge."

# Religious orders could sell assets to help parishes evangelise



Nuala O'Loan

Each time we leave Mass we are told to “go in peace” Our mission is “to love and serve the Lord”. What does this mean for each of us?

The recent final document of the Synod last November tells us what it is to be a Catholic “each according to their diverse roles – within the family and other states of life; in the workplace and in their professions; engaged civilly, politically, socially or ecologically; in the development of a culture inspired by the Gospel, including the evangelisation of the digital environment - walk the paths of the world and proclaim the Gospel where they live, sustained by the gifts of the Spirit”.

It is a very clear statement of the call to evangelisation. Yet it sometimes seems to me that we can think of evangelisation as the work of others; while we can help materially, we really do not know how to evangelise. That is not our role.

## Enabled

The Synod document, however, tells us how we are enabled to do this, what God through His Church does for us, and what we as Catholics ask of our Church. It says that each baptised person “asks to be nourished by the bread of the Word and the Eucharist, as well as by the familial bonds of the community. They ask that their commitment be recognised for what it is: Church action in light of the Gospel, and not merely a personal choice. Lastly, they ask the community to accompany those who, through their witness, have been drawn to the Gospel”.

At this year’s annual St Brigid’s Day lecture in Down and Connor, I heard our Bishop, Alan McGuckian, put to us a very simple question which, he said, had been put to him. He described a friend, a committed Catholic, active in her parish, who found herself accompanying another mother whom she had met at the school gate.



The other lady’s story involved domestic violence, debt, and the mental health issues which can accompany these things. Bishop Alan said that his friend was supporting this lady well “and I have no doubt that it was a response to the Holy Spirit”. Yet, he said, she started asking herself, “Why am I not inviting her to come to our Church?”

Saying it was a very good question, Bishop Alan asked us another question “I wonder how many of us are convinced that the best thing we could do for someone in trouble is to bring them to our parish, to our Church?”

“Simply sitting in the church listening to others pray can bring unanticipated peace and the strength to carry on”

It is a very interesting question, for what could help anyone more than being held by God, coming closer to His son, Jesus Christ as part of a loving, inclusive, caring community, inspired by the Holy Spirit. Other things would follow, yet perhaps the most important thing which such a person in distress can know is the peace that can come so unexpectedly from the loving Lord, and the comfort that should be part of belonging to the community of the Church.

I am sure that everyone has experienced as I have, times when things have been so difficult, whether through bereavement or otherwise, that prayer has seemed impossible, yet simply sitting in the church listening to others pray can bring unanticipated peace and the strength to carry on. It is extraordinary; the gift undoubtedly of the Holy Spirit. If the heart is at peace, knowing that God is there, all things can seem possible, even those which, otherwise, seemed overwhelmingly awful and insoluble.

## Inviting

This is what we can bring people to if we think, when trying to help others, that part of that helping should involve inviting people who have no connection with our Church or who have lost that connection, simply to come to church with us. To do this is an act of faith and love and hope.

Bishop Alan also told us about the words of an English priest, Fr Stephen Wang, talking about youth ministry who said, “The goal is not to put on a good show, or to increase the numbers who turn up to your events. That is a kind of spiritual vampirism where you seek out young people because you want them to give your community new life. No, the goal is to touch their hearts, to enlighten their minds, to help them know the love of Jesus Christ and to find their home in the community of the church. The goal is to save

love of Jesus Christ and to find their home in the community of the Church?”

“There can be no doubt that there is now an almost overwhelming need to act, to evangelise”

There are many ways to help others come to the Lord, but probably most of them involve the Holy Spirit speaking through ordinary people in a way which enlightens the mind of others. This can happen through simple interactions between individuals, and through activities in parishes.

Many of these activities will need resources, and parishes can find raising money simply to maintain clergy and church a challenge. Many of the laity make great contributions, but more is needed.

Religious orders have played a very significant and very positive role in the life of the Church for hundreds

of years. Yet now things are changing, and many of them suffer from reducing numbers and are looking for a new role, a new charism. It is well known that they often have large capital resources. Could they help the local Church, which operates now in such a secular society, by making a deliberate decision to fund diocesan and parish activities, selling some of their capital assets to enable others to carry on the work which they themselves did in bringing people to God? As the Code of Canon Law says: “Taking into account local conditions, institutes are to strive to give, as it were, a collective witness of charity and poverty and are to contribute according to their ability something from their own goods to provide for the needs of the Church and the support of the poor.”

There can be no doubt that there is now an almost overwhelming need to act, to evangelise, and to help people to come to know and love God with all that that entails. It is a challenge for all of us.

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The Leinster Singers under the direction of Ann Fetherston sing at the Vigil Mass twice monthly and also on Christmas Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter Sunday and on 4th October for the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Mr. Ken Tuohy accompanies our liturgies on Mondays and Sundays.

Many friends of Adam & Eves perform regular concerts throughout the year. Our Lady's Choral Society, the RTE Concert Orchestra, The Pipeworks Organ Festival, Dublin City Concert Band and Tempo, a medieval choral quartet are just some of the friends who visit us during the year. Check our website for upcoming events.

#### BUILDING COMMUNITY

*The Friary Centre*

The Friary Complex houses a small hall with kitchen and refreshment facilities on the Cook Street entrance to the Friary. This attractive space has been recently refurbished and blessed by the Minister General of the Franciscan Order, Br. Massimo Fusarelli when he visited us last October. The Friary Centre is currently used by various choirs for weekly rehearsals and by prayer groups for weekly meetings. There is still availability for similar groups looking to hire the hall.

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#### NATIONAL SHRINE

*to St. Anthony*

Our Church is home to the National Franciscan Shrine in honour of St. Anthony. St. Anthony's chapel is a place of prayer and petition for many people countrywide. The Novena is celebrated weekly on Tuesdays at 12 Noon and 7pm.

Each year the Annual Novena in honour of St. Anthony is celebrated from 4th - 13th Of June. This year our guest preacher is Fr. Tom Ryan from the Cathedral parish in Ennis, Co. Clare. Archbishop Dermot Farrell will celebrate the Feast Day Mass at 7pm on the 13th June. All are Welcome!

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“Religious orders have played a very significant and very positive role in the life of the Church for hundreds of years. Yet now things are changing, and many of them suffer from reducing numbers and are looking for a new role, a new charism”

# Government policy driving the housewife to extinction



David Quinn

The anniversary of the two most recent referendums came and went last weekend. Do you remember them? I'm not sure you're meant to. One was about inserting the concept of 'durable relationships' into the Constitution alongside marriage. The other was an attempt to remove from the Constitution the requirement that the State should seek to protect mothers from being forced out of the home by economic necessity.

The two referendum proposals were massively defeated, as you may recall. But as quickly as possible the political system and the

media put what happened down the memory hole. They didn't want to remember them, and they didn't want the rest of us to remember them either. The reason is because the Government, and nearly all of the opposition parties (minus Aontú and eventually Independent Ireland), plus almost the whole of the NGO sector, led by the National Women's Council were all line up on the same side; they wanted us to vote 'Yes' in both cases.

**“The attempt to ditch the word ‘mother’ was never going to pass”**

Almost the entirety of the media was also on the Yes side. One of the main reasons that both referendums were defeated was the opposition of figures like Senator

Michael McDowell, who had voted Yes in the marriage referendum of 2015, and the abortion referendum of 2018. He could not be dismissed as a stick-in-the-mud conservative, and this seemed to swing a lot of voters. His opposition persuaded many people that you could vote No and still be considered 'modern'.

The referendum on mothers in the home also attracted the opposition of people who supported the replacement of the word 'mothers' with 'carers', but did not think it went far enough in committing the State to helping carers.

However, the defeat was so massive – 74% vs 26% – that the attempt to ditch the word 'mother' was never going to pass.

## Choice

This stunned the establishment because for years they had attacked Article 41.2 of the Constitution on the grounds that it was both sexist and outdated. It was

mischaracterised as claiming that a mother's place is in the home, when it did nothing of the sort. The aspiration was to try and ensure that mothers would not be forced out of the home in order to make ends meet, that is, to give mothers a choice between home and work.

That choice is increasingly denied to them, as is clear from new figures from the Central Statistics Office. These show that in 2010, there were around 500,000 women of working age in Ireland described their 'Principal Economic Status' as "engaged in home duties", meaning in almost every case that they are housewives (to us an old term).

But that figure has now plummeted to just 200,000, which is a 60% drop in just 15 years. Only about 13% of women of working age are now stay-at-home mothers.

The new CSO report is called 'Women in the Labour Market 2023-2024' and what most media picked up from it is the fact that the number of women in the workplace has almost doubled since 1998 to about 1.3 million.

**“The answer is obviously a resounding no”**

However, this is something to be lauded and welcomed only if it is what women themselves want, and especially mothers.

A poll conducted by Amarach last year on behalf of The Iona Institute in the run-up to the referendums found that 69% of mothers would stay at home with their children if they had the economic freedom to do so. This was almost identical to a poll commissioned by Sudocrem a few years before.

But does it seem like this Government, or any Government over the last few decades could care less about those women? Does it look like the Government is making an effort to protect mothers from the forced out of the home by economic necessity? The answer is obviously a resounding no.

This attitude dates back to at least Budget 2000 when the then Finance Minister, Charlie McCreevy, introduced tax individualisation which meant that a two-income married couple would pay much less in tax than a single-income married couple next door on the same income.



This could run to thousands each year.

There was uproar at the time, but it quickly died down when a sop was introduced called the Homecarers Credit, which does not come close to balancing out the unfair effects of tax individualisation.

## Day-care

Now the Government is all about day-care which explicitly favours those who go out to work and put their children in day-care.

The Government wants to make day-care as cheap as possible. It is committed to reducing the cost of full-time day-care to around €200 per child per month, which will involve massive State subsidies.

As at Budget 2024, under then Children's Minister, Roderic O'Gorman, €1.1 billion was being funnelled by the State into day-care, with this figure set to increase fast. Next to nothing is being done for stay-at-home parents even though only about 20% of parents actually want to put their children into day-care. The rest want to either mind their children themselves or else have a relative do so.

In other words, the Government is expressly channeling parents towards a 'choice' (day-care) most of them would prefer not to make.

How is this in any way meeting the State's Constitutional duty to try and protect mothers from being forced out of the home due to economic necessity? It is doing the opposite. Is such a discriminatory policy even Constitutional?

In 2008, during the period of austerity, the Govern-

ment abolished something called the Early Childcare Supplement which was paid to mothers of children aged under the age of 6 on top of Child Benefit. It amounted to €1,000 per annum.

If the Government restored that benefit and reallocated the subsidy it is currently putting into daycare towards this instead, it would come to around €3,000 per child under 6, which is the equivalent of three-monthly mortgage payments. What mother would refuse that?

**“The Government is not about to do that because it wants all mothers out working”**

Daycare providers couldn't complain because if parents wanted, they could take this €3,000 payment and use it to reduce their day-care costs. In other words, it would be a much fairer and less discriminatory policy than the current one of heavily favouring day-care over minding your own children at home.

This would also put meat on the bones of last year's referendum result. But the Government is not about to do that because it wants all mothers out working and it is probably very pleased that the number of stay-at-home mothers has fallen by 60pc since 2010. It would probably be very happy if it fell by another 60% in the next 15 years. Certainly this seems to be the aim of its policies.

## POPE FRANCIS

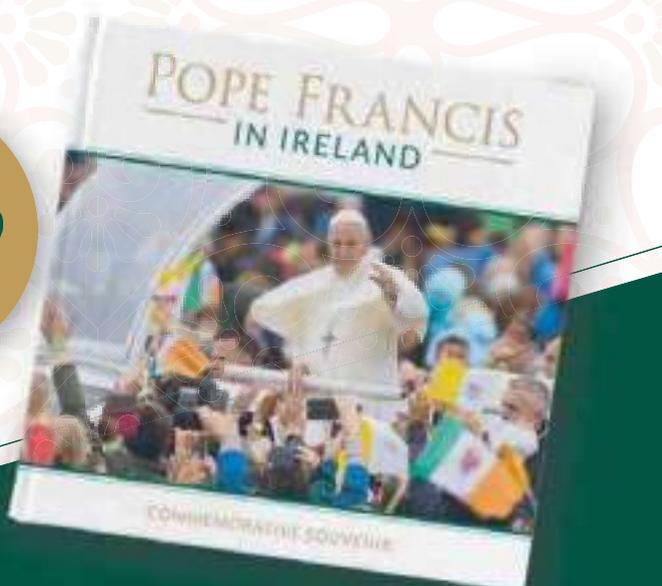
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# Catholic social teaching as a guiding light



Christian social justice work has generally become more politicised over the last decade, Dr Anna Rowlands warns

A month ago, the new US Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic convert, achieved what most theologians fail to do in a lifetime: to make Thomas Aquinas and St Augustine headline news. Following an interview on *Fox News* and an extended online spat with the British political commentator and podcast host Rory Stewart, he launched his version of patristic-medieval idea of a Christian order of love into the febrile media stratosphere. His case was that placing the love of our family and nation first

and only having loving obligations to others beyond kin, neighbourhood, and nation if there is moral and material resource left over when this duty is completed is not only a 'natural' instinct but also core Christian teaching. Vance presents this as the political theology of MAGA, coinciding with the announcement of huge cuts to the US international aid budget, a move with global ramifications, and severe criticism of the motivations of the US Catholic Church for its migrant support. In this context, the withdrawal from current forms of international humanitarianism is presented as an ordered Christian virtue.

**“Christian social justice work has generally become more politicised over the last decade”**

This is a dramatic and significant shift in the way that Catholics in public office have talked about commitments to local and international social

justice in recent decades. It is also diametrically opposed to the vision of universal siblinghood (fraternity) and social friendship that both *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti* have promoted as the basis for a politics of hope. In fact, it is a case study in the diagnosis *Fratelli tutti* offers of a dis-integrating politics that is turning in on itself, promoting a notion of competing, even narcissistic localisms and globalisms, failing to see the constant relationship between the local and the universal.

This is a global phenomenon, not solely an American one. Christian social justice work has generally become more politicised over the last decade. Caritas Internationalis, the Jesuit Refugee Service, and many other actors can testify to this reality. The works of mercy, the commitment to structural work for justice, humanitarian relief, and development work are increasingly politicised and weaponised as part of wider cultural, economic, and political conflicts.

## Evolution

I say this starkly at the outset for several reasons: firstly, it highlights the reality that when we talk about Christian



A file photo shows a Zimbabwean man walking through his drought-affected corn field outside Harare, March 20, 2024. Photo: OSV/Philimon Bulawayo, Reuters

**“Theologically, hope is born of a trust that we can always change our direction, that crises take us deeper into a recognition that we depend on God and each other, and that no one is saved alone”**

visions for social living, we are talking about ideas already in circulation and subject to argument in our public life, not ideas we are proposing in a vacuum. Christian visions are already present and actively contested, even if not always in a well-informed way. Secondly, any account we give of Christian hope needs to be able to communicate itself clearly in this increasingly fraught context. We cannot be naïve about the political deployment of faith, nor risk countering it with a cheap hope. We live in a moment when the choice is not to have a political theology or not to have one, but one between rival political theologies whose accounts of love, hope, and justice differ widely, and indeed sometimes violently.

**“Political hope has not stood up well, and has been replaced by a politics of anger and resentment”**

Thirty years ago, the secularisation thesis taught us that religion was heading toward museum piece status in the West. That thesis has not aged well, for while formal institutional religious affiliation levels continue to fall in the global North, the political significance of religion rises, and new forms of religious and post-religious practice emerge in both the global North and South. Religious communities also remain among the major humanitarian providers globally, 'localising' aid and integral development more effectively than many secular

agencies. Furthermore, religious belief and practice continue to provide grounds for meaning-making, resistance and resilience to many with limited economic or political resources. In all these ways, religion is far from a museum piece and continues to exist, in evolving forms, as a complex, multi-layered and dynamic reality in our current world. It is far more interesting a picture than the secularisation thesis would have led us to imagine.

Many of us have also been raised on some version of the philosophy of liberalism that told us virtue language, especially the Christian language of faith, hope, and love, was a legitimate matter of private belief but had no place in a neutral, secular public space. The acquired virtues, including justice and prudence, remained relevant yet became more harmonious when separated from their connection to the infused theological virtues. And politicians traded in a language of secularised hope that was closer to that of simple optimism. That form of political hope has not stood up well, and has been replaced by a politics of anger and resentment. And so, here we stand in early 2025 in a moment when religion has defied secularisation theorists, politics has defied the philosophers of liberalism, and the virtue language of faith, hope, and love is resurgent, although as contested and irascible as ever.

## Social

Significantly, this resurgence in the political claims of faith, hope, and love on all sides of the political arena occurs when many people report struggling with feelings of social hopelessness. The hunger for hope and the absence of hope are critical indicators

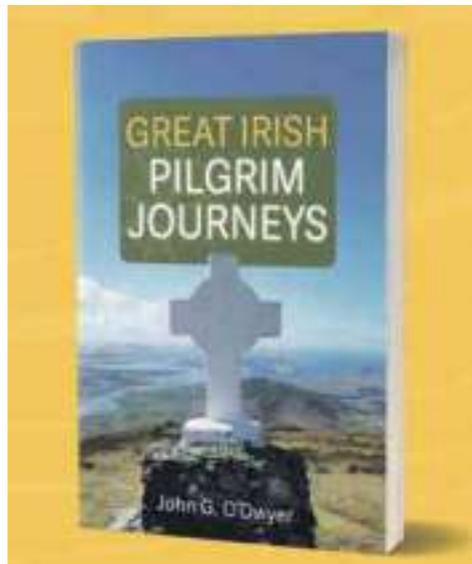
of our moment's health. As a small illustration, social science researchers have convincingly charted that having some sense of hope for the future correlates with engagement in civil society, voting, and nurturing health and friendships. Correspondingly, those who are vulnerable to feelings of social despair are much more susceptible to misinformation and conspiracy theories. Hope is connected to social trust, participation in all aspects of social life, and a sense of connection to near and distant neighbours.

For all of these reasons, Pope Francis' choice to dedicate this Jubilee year to the theological virtue of hope is especially timely – pastorally, spiritually, and politically.

**“Hope is not a cognitive decision or expectation, but rather a desire or appetite that all humans have for the good”**

In what follows, I will highlight three themes central to Pope Francis' decree for the Jubilee year are: that hope is to be understood first and foremost as a gift rather than something we have to originate within ourselves, that hope is, for Christians, a habitual practice – a way of doing and being, nor merely a feeling, and that maintaining the habit of hope is connected to our capacity to discern the signs of hope as part of our Christian duty to read the signs of the times.

To return for a moment to



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Sixth class students from St Brigid's Primary School, Kildare Town, (from right) Ciara (12), Ella (11), Orlaith (12) and Isabelle (12) on a Dublin beach to launch this year's annual Trócaire box appeal for Lent and raise awareness of the incoming education washout due to climate change. Photo: Mark Stedman.

the very source JD Vance was so keen we air, St Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas treats hope at some length in his writings, and what he has to say is, I think, quite useful. It is also the ground on which modern Catholic social teaching on hope, including the writings of Pope Francis, stands.

### Hope

For Aquinas, hope is not a cognitive decision or expectation, but rather a desire or appetite that all humans have for the good. Aquinas considers hope to be an appropriately self-ish virtue – it is for ourselves and for others who share our human condition. While love is the truly benevolent virtue because it desires good without expecting anything in return or counting the cost, hope remains the appropriately selfish virtue. It speaks to what we, ourselves, need in order to persevere. It is the deep-rooted desire in every human soul that, throughout our lives, good and not harm will come to us, and that, even if the pathway is not smooth, we can strive toward some form of real fulfilment for ourselves and others. Aquinas describes hope as not only an appropriately selfish but also an irascible passion because it represents a desire for a worthy good that is notably difficult to attain. If the good longed for were easy to achieve, it would not constitute hope. If it were something we could accomplish effortlessly and without God's assistance, it would not be hope. Hope takes us through a path of difficulty, struggle, loss, failure, and sometimes suffering. Yet, it remains hope because although it is difficult to attain, it is still possible to attain. We see injustice but know it is not invincible, as *Laudato si* states. This represents the cru-

cial tension within a Christian understanding of hope – the difficulty and the possibility of reaching what is good. Here, recognizing hope as part of our pursuit of the good, albeit arduous, it is essential to comprehend what makes hope 'possible' from a Christian perspective.

What makes hope possible is not a belief in human progress or the assumption that things will resolve in the end if we merely relax and let events unfold. Indeed, Aquinas refers to such assumptions as the enemy of true hope. What makes the good things we rightly hope for possible is that hope is not something initially generated by human beings; rather, hope is a divine gift infused in us. In a sense, this should provide relief in a world where creating feelings of hope on our own can seem impossible.

**“I can tell myself a story which creates a connection between my past, present and future”**

To illustrate this briefly, five years ago, I conducted a series of interviews with refugees living in asylum destitution in London. For protracted periods of up to a decade, those I interviewed had been living without formal immigration status and without recourse to a right to work or to welfare support. They existed on charitable assistance and networks of other refugees. In talking to them about religion's role in their stories, the same passage was quoted repeatedly to me: Jeremiah 29. 'I have a plan for

your welfare and not for your harm, for a future with hope.' I was told God has a plan for me, for my welfare and not for my harm. If I have not yet reached that place where the plan is clear to me, it is because my story is not yet complete. I have hope because there is a promise that no powers of this world can completely destroy and because I can tell myself a story which creates a connection between my past, present and future. Talking about these interviews at a conference, I was approached afterwards by two prison chaplains who told me of the power of the same Jeremiah narrative those experiencing incarceration.

It was striking to sit with people living hand to mouth, without status, and experiencing the extreme brutality of the modern nation state and to be told that hope remained a meaningful construct. In fact, the difficulty of their experience intensified, not diminished, hope's meaning. Hope was intensified ultimately because it was first and foremost a sustaining theological category, a category of God's action that invites us to a certain kind of response from God's creatures.

### Agency

Those I interviewed clearly stated that hope leads to agency. Hope, which is a gift, invites us into an active reception. It draws us into the great drama of the cooperation between God and humanity. Hope infused in us, leads us into hope's actions. As an aside, it is interesting that social science treatments of hope also make this connection to agency – those who feel they have no agency in the world, no capacity to really act, are likely to be most without hope, those with a sense of their agency, retain more

hope even if it is stretched in difficult circumstances. So we seem to have some natural sense of what Aquinas hints at. For Aquinas it is a question of what we hope in, and what we hope for. The Christian question of hope is a matter less of feeling hopeful, than of centering ourselves in hope's

actions, thinking about hope's agency through us, in Christ, for a broken world. *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti* lay out the practices of hope we are called to: theologically, hope is born of a trust that we can always change our direction, that crises take us deeper into a recognition that we depend on God and each other, and that no one is saved alone. They also call us to political actions of hope: learning to distribute power, wealth, status differently, practicing a priority for the needs of the poorest, localising power and globalising compassion.

**“Each act of hope is a participation in what is lasting and eternal”**

To this tradition of thinking about hope, Pope Francis adds a further dimension in his Jubilee writings, suggesting that part of being signs of hope to others, is undertaking together a discerning of the signs of hope as part of reading the signs of the times. This is a particularly tricky and counter-cultural ask, I think. Media saturates us with news that makes us feel despair; leaving us with a Hobson's choice of ignoring it to restore some

mental balance or engaging with it, but knowing the very thing we engage with is a distorted mirror of a wider reality that is so difficult to capture an image of.

One final feature of social despair is challenged by this distinctively Christian tradition of reflection on hope. We can tell ourselves that our efforts, however well-meaning are in vain. Foolish in the eyes of the world. We do not yet see all the fruits we long for. A final word from Josef Pieper helps us reinterpret those sentiments in a Christian register. He argues that all attempts to act in faith, hope and love do not merely keep us going for now, lost or won in the moment. Rather, each act of hope is a participation in what is lasting and eternal. He writes “nothing good, true or beautiful is ever lost; rather, it is folded into eternity. Apocalyptic prophecy tells us, in the words of Von Balthasar, that “[t]he world will be harvested and the harvest brought home”. A politics of hope acts now, in the gap, based on the promise that is inalienably ours and our neighbours, for both time and eternity.

**i** This abridged talk by Dr Anna Rowlands 'A Politics of Hope and Catholic Social Teaching as a Guiding Light' was the St Patrick's College Maynooth Annual Trócaire Lent lecture, delivered on March 11, 2025.

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# Relentless

# More than just th



For many priests, some of the most draining moments of their ministry are encounters with Catholics who approach faith and parish as a resource to be used, Fr Chris Hayden writes

**T**he concept of 'relentless ministry' is not without limitations. It's an entirely valid notion, of course, and if I were to suggest that 'relentless ministry' was a fiction, I expect that some of my colleagues might well want to take out a contract on me! There's absolutely no denying that ministry can be, and often is, truly relentless.

That said, the notion of relentlessness may need some thought and refinement. Is it just the 'work load'? Just the constant rushing from pillar to post? Just that there are only twenty-four hours in the day? It can be all of the above, for sure, yet it's something more. The relentlessness of 'relentless ministry' is more than a function of our limited resources of time and energy. It is also – I would argue more so – a cultural, mental and spir-

**“Relentless opposition should come as no surprise. We were promised it by Christ himself”**

itual relentlessness.

A while back, a priest-friend told me that he was “tired of being on a war footing.” He was experiencing something more than physical fatigue: he was experiencing battle fatigue. He was experiencing his ministry as relentless because it was routinely an uphill struggle, a swimming against the tide, a wrestling match, not with those he would have expected to be opponents, but with some of the very people he had been assigned to serve.

**“Opposition, resistance and misunderstanding from the prevailing culture is relatively bearable”**

We needn't be surprised at opposition – even relentless opposition – from contemporary culture. We preach what is in many respects a counter-cultural message. In and to a culture of death, we proclaim, or should be proclaiming, a culture of life. In the face of the sexual revolution, we proclaim, or should be proclaiming, the sexual counter-revolution, the life-giving wisdom of a coherent and hopeful vision of sexuality. In and against a culture of individualism, we proclaim, or should be proclaiming, a message of communion and social justice. Relentless opposition should come as no surprise. We were promised it by Christ himself: “In the world you have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

I would suggest that opposition, resistance and

misunderstanding from the prevailing culture is relatively bearable. The kind of opposition that is more likely to feel relentless and unbearable is opposition from within, opposition from those who adhere to a kind of disgruntled, acculturated Catholicism, opposition from those who are Catholic enough to make demands but not committed enough to have an overall sense of the Church and its mission. Lest anyone think I'm indulging in a dismissive swipe, let me add that this is precisely the constituency we need to be reaching, in and through that grand and pressing challenge that has been named the New Evangelisation. The details of that may wait for another occasion, but here, it's worth noting that for many priests, some of the most draining moments of their ministry are encounters with Catholics who approach faith, religion and parish not as a way of life, but as a resource to be used, dipped into as and when desired.

## Guidance

This is seen most clearly, perhaps, in those who desire sacraments but who do not have a sense of what they are asking for. The fact is that for a significant proportion of Catholics, faith, religion and sacraments are something like generic aesthetic resources, perhaps in much the same way that flowers are, or music is. When people buy flowers, they don't expect the florist to tell them what they can and can't do with those flowers, or where they may and may not be displayed. Or when people hire a band, they don't want the musicians to tell them who can and can't dance and when, or whether there should be a period of silence, or what songs – however popular – are not to be played. The Church, in contrast, has numerous rules, regulations,



guidelines, edicts, positions, expectations, requirements. Such contrariness! What sort of generic aesthetic resource provision is that?

**“Many a priest finds himself wrestling with those whose motivation for sacraments is desperately poor and partial”**

It's important to note that in all of this, there can

also be an abundance of pastoral opportunity, and in our preparation for and celebration of the sacraments, we priests need to be intentional about spotting and taking advantage of opportunities for evangelisation and catechesis. I would not for a moment suggest that those whose primary motivation appears to be aesthetic or social have no authentic desire for the things of God. That would be a gross and uncharitable over-interpretation, whereas true pastoral charity urges priests to seek and build upon openness to

faith. The fact is, however, that many a priest finds himself wrestling with those whose motivation for sacraments is desperately poor and partial, and this can lead to considerable tension. Even when we're not wrestling or wrangling, the inner tension, the sense that we are not doing justice to the sacraments, to what is holy, to faith as such, can begin to gnaw – relentlessly.

## Friction

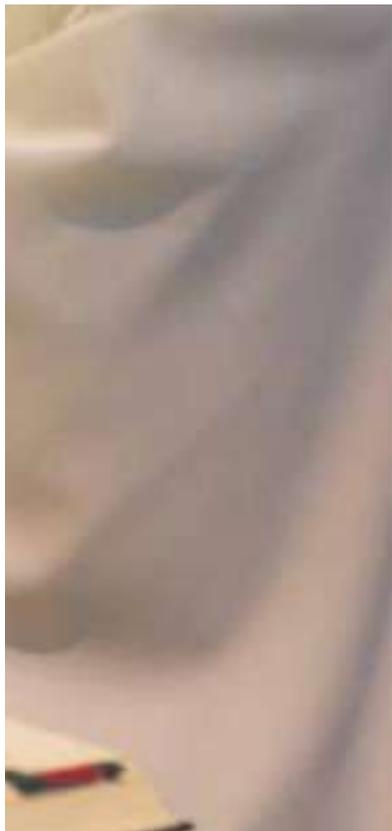
Part of what is at issue here is that people looking for Catholic 'services' (in the broad, secular sense of that

**“He was experiencing his ministry as relentless because it was routinely an uphill struggle, a swimming against the tide, a wrestling match, not with those he would have expected to be opponents, but with some of the very people he had been assigned to serve”**

# Ministry

Exploring the challenges of being a priest in Ireland today

# The workload



result is that every requirement, every observance, every limitation (and logically, all requirements and observances entail limitations) is perceived to be random, out-of-the-blue. The Church is then perceived to be fundamentally awkward, if not downright neurotic: miserable herself, she seeks to share that misery with others, largely by ordering them around.

**“Faith and practice get perceived as a series of prohibitions, and the Church as a great naysayer”**

‘Why shouldn’t we have *Brown Eyed Girl* as one of our wedding hymns, for Heaven’s sake? Just what harm would it do?’ ‘What do you mean, *Lady in Red* is not a hymn? It’s slow, and it’s set in a church yard!’ ‘Why can’t I remove the crucifix from the altar to make more

room for flowers?’ ‘Why can’t we have three or four – or, for that matter, six or seven – godparents for our child’s baptism? I thought you guys were trying to get people involved?’ ‘The photographer can’t what? You should be grateful that he shows an interest in how the ceremony is being conducted!’ ‘What on earth is the problem with bringing up a bag of golf clubs at the offertory? He used to love golf.’ ‘We can’t scatter the ashes along her favourite river walk! Why ever not?’

And so it goes. Faith and practice get perceived as a series of prohibitions, and the Church as a great naysayer. And the priest, who, chances are, is a pretty regular, agreeable sort, finds himself having to choose between the role of dour, iron-fisted liturgical enforcer, and that of nice, unquestioning provider of generic aesthetic resources. And if, as is likely, neither of these roles suits him terribly well, then sooner or later it all starts to feel a bit, well, relentless.

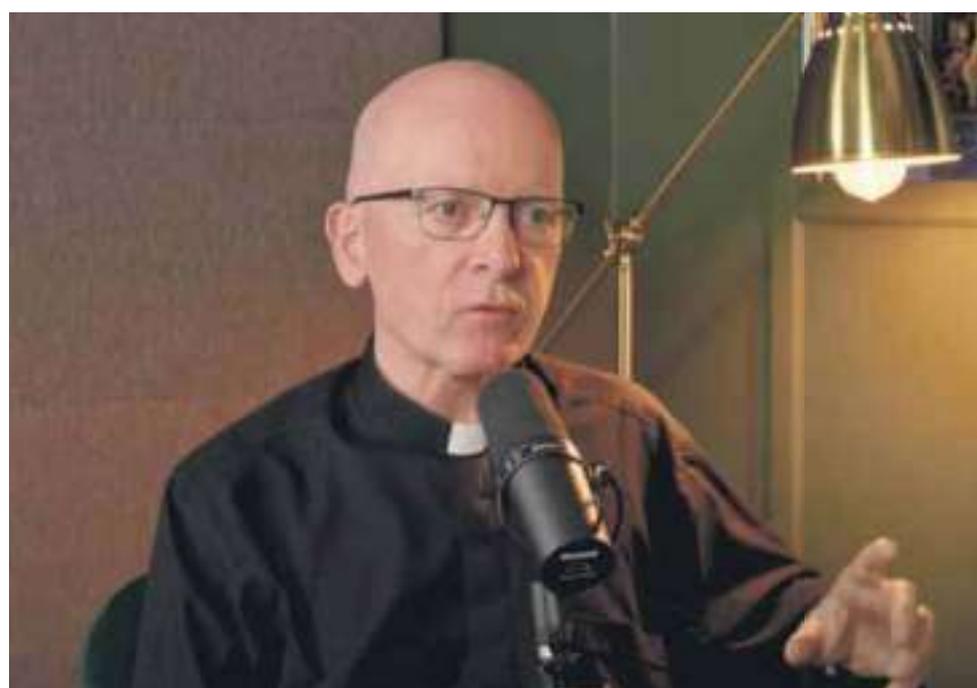
For many priests, that awkward pastoral space between liturgical freefall and liturgical exactness is a difficult space to inhabit. It is difficult because liturgy is not just about ceremonies or running orders; it is about faith. Routinely finding ourselves on the back foot, having to defend, justify, explain, plead or compromise, can be subtly corrosive of morale. This insidious form of relentlessness is one we need to guard against, while avoiding any hint of self-pity, and pursuing every pastoral opportunity that presents itself.

**i** See page 28.

**i** Fr Chris Hayden is a priest of the Diocese of Ferns.

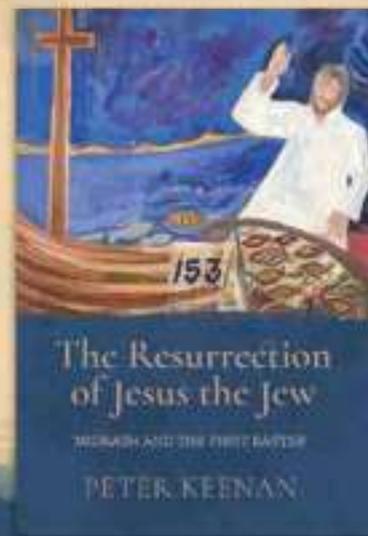


word) don’t know the worldview, the story, the narrative that gives an overall shape to worship and practice. The



**“For many priests, that awkward pastoral space between liturgical freefall and liturgical exactness is a difficult space to inhabit”**

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# Hope in Ireland as Dublin doubles catechumens



Renata Milán Morales

**D**ublin Diocese has recently seen 80 catechumens being elected for the Easter sacraments. Archbishop Dermot Farrell, who witnessed this occasion on Sunday, March 9, shared his joy at the growing number of individuals seeking to deepen their faith. During his homily, the archbishop expressed that this is a sign of hope for the Church in Dublin.

## Catechumens

Patricia Carroll, the Director for Mission and Ministry for the Dublin Diocese, was moved by the growth in cat-

echumens. She said, "The numbers have doubled from last year, and it's clear that young adults want to know about the Catholic faith and want to join us. So, in this year of hope, it's a big, big, hopeful message."

Among the new catechumens is Alan Maizon, a candidate for confirmation who shared his feelings about the ceremony. "Everything was perfect. The ceremony and the presence of the Bishop. I feel the presence of the Holy Spirit and indeed, I'm excited about this journey," Alan said. "I just know that the love of Jesus is for everybody, and we are all sons of God, and the love is His presence in His Church and all the people."

For Alan, the journey toward confirmation is about more than just participating in a ceremony. It's about making a firm decision to commit to God and to the community. "The confirmation is my decision to be committed to God and just show love to all my

brothers and sisters," he said. However, Alan recognises the challenges that come with this commitment, particularly in staying true to one's faith when facing worldly temptations. "The most challenging part is the commitment itself," Alan reflected. "To be a good Christian depends on how much you commit to your church and your community. Don't get isolated and don't fall into the temptations of the world. Be more charitable. Set your mind on things above."

For Thiago Santos Vinhas, another candidate on the path to joining the Catholic

**“The journey toward confirmation is about more than just participating in a ceremony. It's about making a firm decision to commit to God and to the community”**

Church, the ceremony is a moment that will stay with him forever. "My hope is committing to pray more, to be entirely committed to the Church, and to keep learning about my faith," he said.

Raul Oliveira Franca, another catechumen, expressed his gratitude for the experience, particularly the words of the Bishop. Raul also acknowledged the struggles he faces in his spiritual journey, "The most challenging thing has been praying every day," he said.

Ariane Martinez Gregorio told this paper, "I didn't know what to do during the cer-

emony, but it was so beautiful," she said. Ariane is eager for the moment when she will receive her baptism and confirmation. "I cannot wait," she said. "I'm sorry for those who have not encountered God yet. They're losing their time because there is no better life than to be with God."

**“Just have faith and open your eyes, open your ears, and let yourself be embraced by God”**

Elisa Margareth described the ceremony as "blessed" and expressed her desire to deepen her connection with God. "I'll try to increase even more prayer and trust in all of what Jesus wants us to do," Elisa said. "I would say it's always time, because God is always calling us, and it's never too late."

For Daniel Vicario Alcobendas, after this ceremony will start a time of reflection

and spiritual preparation. "My hope is that the Lord will prepare my heart for the sacraments of baptism and communion that I'm taking on the Easter vigil," Daniel said. "I hope this period could be a true conversion period."

Vincent Marie Dupont, also shared his joy and anticipation for the upcoming sacraments. "It was lovely. There was a lot of enthusiasm within the church. Everybody seemed really happy, including the sponsors," he said. "I'm about to receive baptism and follow the path of the faith... Just have faith and open your eyes, open your ears, and let yourself be embraced by God."

## Hope

The energy and enthusiasm of these catechumens, along with the encouragement of their mentors and spiritual leaders, as Archbishop Farrell and Patricia Carroll said, are a sign of hope for the future of the Church in Dublin.



Each Catechumen comes forward with their godparents and signs their name in the Book of the Elect. Photos: John McElroy.



Large attendance at the ceremony on Sunday.



Raul Oliveira Franca.



Vincent Marie Dupont.



Daniel Vicario Alcobendas.



Thiago Santos Vinhas



A sponsor places his hand on the shoulder of a candidate at the ceremony on Sunday.



Alan Maizon.



Ariane Martinez Gregorio.



Elisa Margareth Lowen.



Each Catechumen comes with their godparents and sign their name in the Book of the Elect. Pictured on the right is Patricia Carroll.

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# Female scientists celebrated on new An Post stamps



Renata Steffens

To mark International Women's Day on March 8, An Post launched two new special stamps celebrating the achievements of women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math). In Ireland, women still only represent 25% of STEM jobs according to data from the OECD, 2018.

The two Irish scientists featured in the stamps are the geneticist, Prof. Aoife McLysaght and the astrophysicist, Prof. Jocelyn Bell Burnell. The stamps are designed by Detail Design agency and feature portraits of each woman by artist Steve Doogan. Along with the portraits, graphics representing the two scientists' fields (a classic double DNA helix with a diagram of the molecule and a radio telescope) are also depicted in the stamps.

"Recognising the vital role of women in STEM, which has historically been underreported, is an important aspect of the ongoing work of supporting gender balance across STEM disciplines, ensuring that all our research and innovation talent has the scope to see and realise their full potential," said Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Minister James Lawless during the launch.

Prof. Bell Burnell, a native of Co. Armagh discovered pulsars as a PhD graduate in Cambridge in the 1960s by accident. She was using the radio telescope to study effects of radio waves passing through the solar system when noticed what she described as a 'scruff' coming from one part of the sky.

## Discovery

The then student and her supervisor tracked the signals and found out it was coming from the remains of supernova explosions called pulsars. Pulsars are super dense objects about the size of a small city with mass larger than the sun. That discovery opened a new branch of astrophysics and was recognised by the award of a Nobel Prize to her supervisor.

In 2008, she became the first female President of the Institute of Physics for the UK and Ireland and in 2014 the first female President of the Royal Society



of Edinburgh. She was one of the small group of women scientists that set up the Athena SWAN scheme. Now, she is a Visiting Academic in Oxford, Department of Astrophysics.

In 2018, Prof. Bell Burnell received \$3 million from a Breakthrough Prize for discovering a new type of star and donated the money to a fund for access to science education for under-represented groups.

The *Vatican Observatory* published some articles throughout the years remarking Prof. Bell Burnell's accomplishments in 'faith and science'.

**“I am honoured and delighted to have a stamp issue in my honour; thank you An Post”**

In one of them, the author says, "Jocelyn Bell Burnell is a person of strong faith. She is an active Quaker. And in 2013 she wrote a short book about her faith and astronomy. The title of book is *A Quaker Astronomer Reflects: Can a Scientist also be Religious?*" The book is featured in the Vatican Observatory Faith and Science pages.

Prof. Bell Burnell was featured in a few other stories about astronomy in Catholic media about her work and discoveries.

Regarding the stamps launched, she said: "I am honoured and delighted to have a stamp issue in my honour; thank you An Post."

## Researchers

Prof. McLysaght is one of the world's leading genetics researchers and led a research group focusing on Molecular Evolution since 2003. She was a member of the international consortium that published the first draft of the Human Genome sequence in 2001, she was the first to discover novel human-specific genes in 2009, identified links between gene duplication patterns and human disease, and has made significant contributions to the understanding of the human genome, as well as the genomes of other animals, plants and viruses.

As professor of Genetics at Trinity College Dublin, she led a research group for over 20 years and managed cumulative research income from competitive awards of more than €5.5 million.

A frequent contributor to radio discussions, live TV panels, science programmes, newspapers and online media, she has given many talks at public events, including music festivals and at the Royal Institution. In 2016, Prof. McLysaght was awarded the UK Genetical Society Haldane Prize for communicating



genetics to a general audience.

**“It is wonderful to see An Post celebrating the contributions of Irish women in STEM, even if the two stamps represent just a small sample of the vast body of amazing work to choose from”**

In 2024, Prof. McLysaght was appointed Government Sci-

ence Advisor, which made her Chair of the new National Science Advice Forum. The Forum is comprised of up to twelve experts drawn from those with internationally recognised scientific expertise in a range of key disciplines.

"I am deeply honoured and humbled to be featured in this special stamp series alongside Prof. Jocelyn Bell Burnell, a true pioneer in astrophysics," she said. "It is wonderful to see An Post celebrating the contributions of Irish women in STEM, even if the two stamps represent just a small sample of the vast body of amazing work to choose from."

"Each person brings a unique perspective, and these

stamps help highlight the value of diversity in STEM. I hope these stamps inspire future generations of women to pursue careers in STEM and to know that their contributions are valued and recognised."

According to a study from 2010 titled 'Why So Few? Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics', Prof. McLysaght is right. Having more females in STEM roles can inspire future generations, providing role models and breaking down stereotypes. A UNESCO publication from 2017 also said that fostering gender diversity in these fields is key to developing well-rounded, inclusive solutions to global challenges.

# ‘The Rosary and mission go hand in hand’ – preparing for the 40th All Ireland Rosary Rally

**Pedro Esteva**

In preparation for the 40th All Ireland Rosary Rally on June 7, a group of around a hundred people gathered in Knock for a launch event. The gathering featured various speakers to encourage participation and spread awareness. Fr Marius O’Reilly, who introduced the program, recalled over 10,000 attendees in the past two years and jokingly set a bold goal of 2 million for this year.

The event began with the Rosary, led by Fr Pat Lombard, followed by an introduction from Angela McMorrow, a key organiser. In his introduction, Fr O’Reilly spoke of the Rosary’s deep spiritual significance, citing Blessed Carlo Acutis, who called it “the Bible on beads.” He cautioned against rushing through the prayer like an auction, urging instead a contemplative approach that engages

heart, mind, and soul. He also highlighted Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary, whose devotion to the Rosary and daily Mass fuelled his ministry’s success.

Maria Steen reflected on the Rosary’s importance in modern Ireland, calling it “the antidote to the poison of despair and anger.” She warned against nostalgia for a seemingly stronger past, referencing Frank Duff’s writings, which criticised the shallow faith of many Catholics in earlier times. While many attended Mass and received the sacraments, their faith lacked depth, leaving them vulnerable to modern challenges. Similar to today.

Ms Steen likened the Rosary to the equipment of a spiritual warrior—providing training and nourishment, armour, and medicine. She invoked the image of Mary as a leader in battle, teaching us how to fight through her unwavering yes to God. She also stressed the

Rosary’s role in nurturing the interior life, encouraging deep reflection on how its mysteries apply to personal faith and mission.

Fr Eamonn McCarthy spoke extensively about the Rosary’s role in Frank Duff’s ministry. He described the early Legion of Mary’s efforts in outreach to prostitutes and their work to counteract Protestant-run soup kitchens that required conversion for aid. Mr Duff responded by opening Catholic shelters and soup kitchens, offering both material and spiritual support.

Quoting Duff’s pamphlet *Can We Be Saints?*, Fr McCarthy said, “Show me how you say your Hail Marys, and I will show you how you love God.” He concluded by emphasising that prayer and action are inseparable. “We begin with the Rosary in hand, on our knees in humility and faith—then ask, ‘Now, what can I do? Use me, direct me, I am at your service.’”



Fr Marius O’Reilly launching the program for the 40th All Ireland Rosary Rally in Knock.



Attendees gather in Knock to prepare to spread the message of the upcoming rally.



Maria Steen discussing the importance of the Rosary for modern-day Ireland.



Fr Eamonn McCarthy detailing the life and mission of Frank Duff, native of Dublin and founder of the Legion of Mary.



The event featured a variety of booths including Children’s Rosary. Aid to the Church in Need, Radio Maria, and the Fr Peyton Centre, were also present on the day.

# Ash Wednesday across the Island

**Renata Steffens**

Lent began last week, with many gathering to celebrate the Catholic Faith on Ash Wednesday. Starting the 40-days journey not only with Mass, but also with priests going to the streets to meet the faithful.

Queen's University Belfast gathered over 2,000 people (students, staff and friends) across three Masses celebrated on Ash Wednesday. Fr John Harris was the guest preacher at all three Masses, and Bishop Alan McGuckian celebrated the last one, Fr Dominic McGrattan, Catholic Chap-

lain at the university told *The Irish Catholic*.

The priest said that Ash Wednesday is the busiest day for the university's chaplaincy, so 2,000 attendees is not an unusual number. "I think the real measure of active participation is the growing number of students in those small group activities. We're on target to reach around 150 students coming to small group Bible study every week by the end of this semester," he said.

The university was one of many education organisations to gather students for Ash Wednesday. Many primary and post-primary

schools across the Island of Ireland celebrated the start of Lent. The Post Primary school for boys and girls Trinity Belfast received Fr Eugene O'Neill of St Patrick's Parish and Fr Michael Spence of Holy Family Parish to distribute ashes to the pupils and staff.

In Waterford, Bishop Alphonsus (Phonsie) Cullinan stood on the streets of Waterford City distributing Holy Ashes to the community for six hours, according to *Catholic Arena*. While in Tipperary, two young priests, Fr Nicholas and Fr Paul were on the streets of Clonmel bringing their ministry to the community.



Children received the Holy Ashes in Ballyroan Parish, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin. Photo: Deacon Frank Browne.



The post primary school for boys and girls Trinity Belfast received Fr Eugene O'Neill of St Patrick's Parish and Fr Michael Spence of Holy Family Parish to distribute ashes to the pupils and staff. Receiving the ashes are Riley Loughlin, Derin Ombassi and Stephen McKinney



Bishop Alan McGuckian was the principal celebrant for the final Mass on Ash Wednesday in the Queen's University Belfast. Photo: Nicola Brennan.



Liam McLarnon, pupil from the post primary school for boys and girls Trinity Belfast on Ash Wednesday.



The post primary school for boys and girls Trinity Belfast received Fr Eugene O'Neill of St Patrick's Parish and Fr Michael Spence of Holy Family Parish to distribute ashes to the pupils and staff. Children receiving the ashes are Usher Chimutumbira, Fionnlach McCullough and Shanara McDermott.



Janvi Johny and Katye Carey pupils from the post primary school for boys and girls Trinity Belfast after Mass on Ash Wednesday.



Roise Eastwood, Leah Tierney with Mr Carr on Ash Wednesday at the post primary school for boys and girls Trinity Belfast.



Near 2,000 people among students, staff and friends gathered in the Whitla Hall, Queens University Belfast for Ash Wednesday. Photo: Nicola Brennan.



Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus (Phonsie) Cullinan was on the streets of Waterford City blessing the community on Ash Wednesday. Photo: Catholic Arena.



Marking the beginning of Lent, three Masses were celebrated on Ash Wednesday in Queens University Belfast. Photo: Nicola Brennan.



Students and staff of Queen's University Belfast received the Holy Ashes for mark the beginning of Lent. Photo: Nicola Brennan.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell distributes the Holy Ashes during Mass in the Inter Faith Centre, DCU, Glasnevin Campus. Photo: Kyran O'Brien.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell celebrated Mass in the Inter Faith Centre, DCU, Glasnevin Campus to mark Ash Wednesday. Photo: Kyran O'Brien.



Marking the beginning of Lent, Mass was celebrated in the Inter Faith Centre, DCU, Glasnevin Campus, led by Archbishop Dermot Farrell. Photo: Kyran O'Brien.



Archbishop Dermot Farrell celebrated Mass marking the beginning of Lent in DCU, Glasnevin Campus. Photo: Kyran O'Brien.



Fr Nicholas and Fr Paul, St Oliver Plunkett Parish, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary were on the streets bringing their ministry to the people of Clonmel on Ash Wednesday. Photo: Billy O'Riordan.

# THE SYNODAL TIMES

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

## Women in the Church on International Women’s Day



Sts Edith Stein, Teresa of Ávila, Thérèse of Lisieux and Catherine of Siena are represented in stained glass at St Thérèse of Lisieux Church in Montauk, NY. The Catholic Church needs women saints, Pope Francis said in a message to a conference in Rome on “Women Doctors of the Church and Co-Patronesses of Europe.” Photo: CNS /Gregory A. Shemitz, Long Island Catholic.



Noelle Fitzpatrick

**M**arking International Women’s Day on March 8 is a good moment to reflect again on the history of women within the Church and to imagine a different future. I recently came across the story of St Mary of Egypt, who ran away from her home to Alexandria at the age of 12, spending the next 17 years reportedly living off prostitution, begging and flax spinning. She travelled to Jerusalem from where a profound spiritual experience led her into the Jordanian desert with three loaves

of bread, to live as a hermit for 47 years. She died in 522 AD becoming one of the few Desert Mothers known to us by name. She reportedly told her story to a monk from Palestine whom she met in the desert during the season of Lent. Kept alive by oral tradition, the story was eventually documented by a Patriarch of Jerusalem in the 7th Century as the Vita of St Mary. This is a good example of how the history we have of women from antiquity to the medieval age comes to us largely through the mouths, pens and perspectives of men. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this and

the implications we have been living with.

The short English translation of the Vita of St Mary makes for hair raising reading. In the Roman Empire at that time, a girl passed from the authority of her father to that of her husband at the age of twelve. How might that fact have informed Mary’s ‘choices’? Through the social sciences, our understanding of human development, of social and cultural conditioning and of trauma, especially in childhood, have evolved. What we now know compels a reinterpretation of her story, one that restores her dignity as a human being and

**“What we now know compels a reinterpretation of her story, one that restores her dignity as a human being and as a woman. One that also reflects critically on the confinement that likely drove her from home”**

as a woman. One that also reflects critically on the confinement that likely drove her from home, into prostitution, finally leading into the desert.

### Women: A History of Confinement

The history of women in the Christian tradition has been a history born out of confinement in one way or another. Whether by the walls of home or cloister, or the invisible walls imposed by systems of ethics or education, there has been a history of confinement and containment. It has militated against the full flourishing of the potential and contribution of women. It did not begin with the institutional Church, but it has certainly been deepened and perpetuated by it. Too many of us as women have also blindly appropriated it. A systemic imbalance has been created and sustained, that manifests in both blatant and subtle ways. It diminishes us all. For example, how many of us have noticed that most of the readings

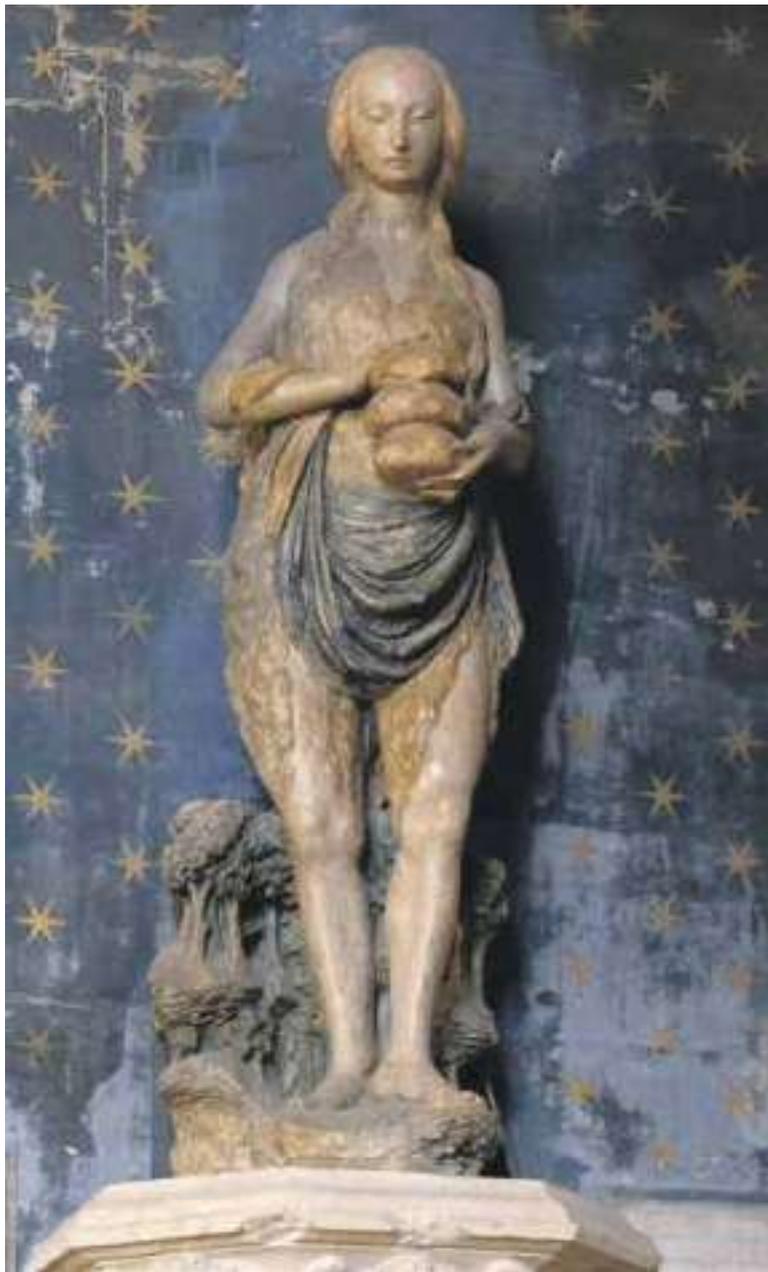
about women in scripture happen during weekdays, rather than at weekends? It is sobering and eye opening to reflect on the life choices and legacy of any of the key female figures within our faith tradition from a perspective of this confinement.

**“They could not preach and learn as men were permitted to. They shared ‘insights’ rather than wrote theology”**

Catherine of Siena, one of only four female Doctors of the Church is a good example. She was born as the twenty sixth child of her mother and father.



St Brigid of Kildare is pictured in a stained-glass window in St Brigid's Church in Crosshaven, a village in County Cork. Photo: CNS/Cillian Kelly.



A statue of St Mary of Egypt in the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, Paris. The figure depicts her clothed only with her long hair, and holding three loaves of bread, which, according to her legend, allowed her to live for sixty years in the Egyptian desert. Photo: Mbzt.



A woman prays with a rosary at a stone cross during a pilgrimage to the holy well of St Brigid in Liscannor, Ireland, February 1, 2017. Photos: OSV News /Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters.

**“Imagine an institutional Church that takes much more seriously the female experience and contributions to the development of theological reflection on sexuality, on childbirth and motherhood, fatherhood and everything that pertains to our existence”**

Her mother was only forty years of age when she gave birth to her twenty sixth child. Personally, I would have run in the opposite direction from such a confined vision for my future as a woman. Until quite recently, women were not permitted to study theology formally. Treasured figures like Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila got their hands on texts, they read and conversed about these texts but, they could not preach and learn as men were permitted to. They shared ‘insights’ rather than wrote theology, drawing on their lived experience of God which was deeper than the institutional Church often allowed. They remained extremely guarded in their writings, always under a particular risk of sanction in a period when up to 80% of those killed during the witch hunts in Europe were reportedly women.

#### Language Matters

The story of St Mary reminds me of a couple of wonderful days last summer spent in a Benedictine Abbey. The guesthouse was filled with women. There was only one man among us. On June 3 we celebrated the feast of St Kevin. At the start of the Mass, the priest presiding commented on how the monastic movement in Ireland had taken its inspiration from the Desert Fathers. There was no mention of the Desert Mothers despite a guest house full of women. I don't believe it was an intentional omission. It simply did not occur to him. The examples are frankly endless. At a recent ordination, where the majority of the congregation was female, a long Liturgy of Saints was read out. It included just a handful of women and only two of the female Doctors of the Church. Again, at a Mass celebrating the Feast of St Blaise and St Brigid, the lovely celebrant talked about St Blaise as martyr, leader and bishop of the Church, and about St Brigid as healer and protector. Brigid was indeed a healer and protector, she was also a visionary and strategic leader, the founder and Abbess of a dual monastic settlement for men and women in Kildare, and most likely also a Bishop. What accounts for the failure to be suitably conscious and to give women their full due?

Our liturgies need work to be respectful of the presence and experience of women. Other things too need work. In the nativ-

ity scene on the Christmas cards I wrote this year Mary and Joseph stood serenely over the manger. The depiction was highly idealised. Mary had just given birth to her first child and would still have been bleeding. She had spent the previous days perched on the bony back of a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, heavily pregnant. She was in a barn and exhausted. I am sure Joseph was a bit the worse for wear too!

‘It is a representation’ you say, what does it matter if it is a bit idealised? It matters because it risks putting Mary out of reach of the experience of many women. In an episode of *Gogglebox Ireland* a group of women shared that they found it difficult to relate to Mary, precisely because of her idealised image. This matters. Instead of finding encouragement and resonance in the depth of her human experiences lived in faith, these women found her alienating. How do we show sensitivity and respond to the mismatch between what is idealised and what is real in service to faith?

**“For every one man, two women had to witness an event for that witness to be accepted”**

Gender blindness and unconscious bias is deeply rooted within our patriarchal Church. How could it be otherwise? As women and men of faith, ordained and lay, we have a responsibility to sensitise ourselves to it and call it out, consistently and firmly. At grassroots level, it is beyond dispute that women propel the Church. Right around the world women assume the burden of responsibility in faith sharing with the next generation. Women assume many of the roles that keep parishes functioning day to day. Women occupy most of the space in the pews. Despite this, women have little or no space in places where real decisions are made. We sit, week in and week out at Sunday Mass absorbing all the language, imagery, and trappings of a patriarchal Church, listening to interpretations of the readings informed by male experi-

ence and learning. This is insufficient to meet any holistic reading of the sign of the times in the 21st century.

Jesus encouraged Martha to cease from all her activity and join Mary to listen and learn together as disciples. Jesus chose first to appear to Mary of Magdala after the resurrection. This is deeply significant as under Roman law the witness of women was not valued. For every one man, two women had to witness an event for that witness to be accepted. Jesus related to women in a seismically different way even within the confines of his time. We women need to ask ourselves at what point our altruistic doing actually dishonours Jesus, the Christ of our faith and his vision for women as disciples?

#### Imagining a Different Future - Together

Imagine an institutional Church that takes much more seriously the female experience and contributions to the development of theological reflection on sexuality, on childbirth and motherhood, fatherhood and everything that pertains to our existence? Imagine a scenario where many more of the key ‘go to’ theological and spiritual works in bookcases in parochial houses, religious communities, and places of formation around the country are authored by women?

The Spirit has spoken powerfully through the institution of the Church over the ages - despite its wings being badly clipped. That Spirit will always find ways to manifest despite the barriers we set in her way. What we have inherited in terms of patriarchal bias we have all inherited as women and men. Can we move together now to a new place, moving beyond fear, ego and every other thing that is not rooted in love. There is a vision for our Church in the world that has been trying to emerge for 60 years now, since the second Vatican Council. It can be realised through all people of faith - equally. Jesus trusted and empowered women in discipleship and ministry accepting the limitations of his time. In this Jubilee year of Hope, for the times we live in, no lamp can be left under a bushel. We must enable all to shine. This means each of us, in our own patch and place questioning the ways we might be helping to perpetuate a deeply limiting and unsustainable patriarchal culture within our Church. It is inconsistent with the vision of the Christ of our faith for our world. The time is now.

**1** Noelle Fitzpatrick is the former South Sudan Country Director for Jesuit Refugee Service - leading their teams in Juba, Yambio and Maban.

**“We sit, week in and week out at Sunday Mass absorbing all the language, imagery, and trappings of a patriarchal Church, listening to interpretations of the readings informed by male experience”**



# World Report



Edited by Pedro Esteva  
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## IN BRIEF

### Catholic Relief Services' Rice Bowl turns 50 this Lent

● Catholic Relief Services' (CRS) Rice Bowl program marks 50 years of combating global hunger while inviting Catholics to deepen their Lenten practice through prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Launched in 1975 as a response to famine in Africa, the initiative has since raised over \$330 million to support anti-hunger efforts worldwide.

Each year, millions of Catholics participate by donating money saved from Lenten sacrifices, with 75% funding global development projects and 25% aiding local food programs. The program also provides educational resources, encouraging a spirit of solidarity with the poor.

As hunger and poverty persist, CRS emphasises the continued need for action. This Lent, participants are urged to reflect on their blessings and contribute to lasting change. The Rice Bowl serves as both a spiritual practice and a tangible way to help vulnerable communities, embodying Pope Francis' call to care for the least among us.

### Poland set to build one of the tallest statues of the Virgin Mary

● Construction is now underway in Kikól, Poland, the site where a towering 55-meter statue of the Virgin Mary is being built. The monumental project, spearheaded by billionaire Roman Karkosik and his wife, will surpass Brazil's famous Christ the Redeemer statue which is 30-meters in height.

In looking at the plans for the ambitious undertaking, the future statue will feature a 15-meter crown with Mary herself standing 40-meters tall, with her hands open in a welcoming pose. At its base

will be a panoramic viewing terrace.

Religious monuments like this serve as powerful symbols of faith and cultural heritage. Poland's Marian statue will join other record-breaking Catholic landmarks, such as Argentina's 48-meter Our Lady of the Valley and Venezuela's 46-meter Virgin of Peace.

Once completed, the Kikól statue will become a major pilgrimage site, further strengthening Poland's deep Marian devotion and Catholic identity.

### Indianapolis Archdiocese investigates possible Eucharistic miracle

● The Archdiocese of Indianapolis is currently investigating a possible Eucharistic miracle.

The investigation began after a member of the Corpus Christi for Unity and Peace organisation reported that a host, dropped during Mass, was placed in water to dissolve. Hours later, another host was found and placed in the tabernacle. The next day, the sacristan found spots of blood in the dish, described as a thin piece of skin with blood.

Representatives of St Anthony of Padua declined to comment on the possible occurrence of a Eucharistic miracle following a request from the archdiocese to refrain from further comment. After confirming that an investigation is underway, the archdiocese also declined a request for more information about the investigation.

### 25,000 pilgrims to gather in Rome for Jubilee of Volunteers

● This past weekend, the fifth major Jubilee event brought together NGOs and volunteer organisations from five different continents. Around 25,000 pilgrims from over 100 countries were in attendance with nearly 15,000 from Italy alone. After a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the pilgrims engaged in a series of dialogues and meetings discussing a wide range of issues and themes from family-related work, to working with children, to engaging with art workshops. To cap off the weekend, pilgrims attended a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Michael Czerny, SJ, Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, where he read a homily prepared by Pope Francis for the occasion. "In the deserts of poverty and loneliness, small gestures help a new humanity blossom in God's garden," he wrote, praising volunteers for their solidarity and service.

## Church leaders condemn killings, urge prayers amid horrific Syria violence

Syria's top Christian leaders have condemned the recent killing and wounding of hundreds of Alawites, many civilians, by security forces and Islamist gunmen linked to the country's new rulers.

The pontifical charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) issued an urgent appeal for prayers, warning of escalating violence that has targeted innocent civilians, including women and children.

A joint statement from Syria's senior Christian figures—Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Youssef Absi, Greek Orthodox Patriarch John X, and Syriac Orthodox Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II—denounced the deadly attacks that began March 6. They called for an immediate end to the violence and urged reconciliation among Syrians.

The attacks have been concentrated in Tartus, Baniyas, Jabla, and Latakia, the Alawite heartland and former stronghold of the Assad regime, which ruled for 53 years until President Bashar Assad was overthrown last year. Some observers describe this as the worst violence in Syria's 14-year civil war.

Syria's interim government, led by President Ahmed al-Sharaa, claims



People demonstrate at Marjeh Square in Damascus, Syria, March 9, 2025, to protest the killing of civilians and security forces linked to Syria's new rulers, following clashes between the forces loyal to the new administration and fighters from Bashar Assad's Alawite sect. Photo: OSV News/Khalil Ashawi, Reuters.

it is fighting an insurgency from Assad loyalists. The church leaders condemned all acts threatening civil peace, stressing the need for a political system based on equal citizenship and inclusion.

According to ACN sources in Latakia, March 7 was described as "a very black and painful day." Reports indicate that more than 600 civilians, including university doctors, pharmacists, women, and children, were killed. Among them were Christians, including a father and son from an evangeli-

cal church in Latakia and a priest's father in Baniyas. Homes and vehicles were looted, and terrified families sought refuge with Sunni friends.

Lauren Homer, of the International Religious Freedom Forum, linked the violence to a failed Alawite uprising against the HTS-led government. Retaliatory killings have since surged. While some claim the violence is political rather than religious, International Religious Freedom Secretariat President Nadine Maenza noted that political and reli-

gious tensions are deeply intertwined.

Franciscan Fr Bahjat Karakach of Aleppo warned Syria is on the brink of another civil war. He stressed the need for true inclusivity in the new government to ensure stability.

With Alawites making up 10% of Syria's population, their persecution remains a grave concern, as radical Sunni Islamists view them as apostates. The al-Sharaa government has vowed to bring those responsible for the violence to justice.

## Sri Lankans unite to protect elephants after train tragedy

People across Sri Lanka have united to protect elephants, an animal revered in Buddhist culture, after increasing deaths from collisions with passenger trains. The issue garnered widespread attention after a passenger train truck a herd, killing six elephants in Habarana.

In response, the Centre for Environmental Justice petitioned Sri Lanka's Supreme Court urging coordinated efforts from forest, railways, transport, and wildlife officials. The petition highlighted the petition highlighted 151 elephant deaths from train collisions over 13 years and a declining elephant

population—from 5,879 in 2011 to 3,130 in 2024. It called for better driver visibility, security force involvement, and modern technology to prevent further losses.

Religious unity has been central to conservation efforts. Nihal Gamlath, a Christian environmentalist from Habarana, noted that activists across faiths proposed solutions, though action was slow. Following the tragedy, the government rescheduled trains and cleared railway lines for better visibility.

Mr Gamlath emphasised elephants'

deep cultural and religious significance, legally protected yet often kept as status symbols. Elephants are sacred in Buddhism, symbolising wisdom and peace, with Queen Maya's dream of a white elephant marking Buddha's miraculous conception. They feature prominently in temple rituals and processions.

Nimal Kodithuwakku, a Buddhist activist, expressed grief over the recent deaths, recalling a young elephant's two-day struggle for survival. The tragedy has united Sri Lankans across faiths, reinforcing the shared duty to protect these revered animals.

## Bishops express concern Congo's war could unravel into a regional conflict

As conflict continues to devastate eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa (ACEAC) has warned of potential regional spillover.

At a meeting in Tanzania, bishops from Burundi, DRC, and Rwanda called for peace,

denouncing what they termed a growing "culture of death." The M23 rebel offensive, backed by Rwanda, has escalated violence, capturing key cities in North and South Kivu. At least 7,000 people have been killed, and 450,000 displaced since January. Hospitals are overwhelmed, and reports of

widespread human rights violations persist.

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo of the DRC stressed that the conflict is not just about resources but reflects a deeper loss of empathy. The bishops urged armed groups to end violence and turn "swords into ploughshares."

Regional peace efforts seek to mediate between the Congolese government and armed groups. However, challenges remain, with foreign militias continuing to destabilize the region.

The bishops reaffirmed their commitment to fostering peace through dialogue and reconciliation.

# Questioning rearmament in a world increasingly incapable of diplomacy

The 'ReArm Europe' plan proposes 800 billion euros of arms spending in the Old Continent. But would this really guarantee our security?



Andrea Torielli

**“T**he increase in economic resources for armaments has once again become an instrument of relations between states, showing that peace is only possible and achievable if it is based on a balance of their possession. All this generates fear and terror and risks overwhelming security because it forgets how a ‘conflagration could be started by some chance and unforeseen circumstance’”.

These words were spoken less than two years ago by Pope Francis on the 60th anniversary of *Pacem in Terris*, and they are just as relevant today, in light of the situation in Europe. The European Commission has announced a plan that will mobilise around 800 billion euros for the defence of the EU. ‘ReArm Europe’ is the name of the plan, which evokes tragic moments of “fear and terror” from the recent past.

## Inability

Over the past three years, Europe has, unfortunately, also demonstrated an inability to take diplomatic initiatives. It has only seemed capable of supplying arms to Ukraine, which was unjustly attacked by Russian troops, but not of proposing and pursuing concrete negotiating paths to end the bloody conflict. And now, following similar initiatives by other world powers, Europe is preparing to invest the exorbitant sum of 800 billion euros in weapons. These funds are not being used to combat poverty, to finance programmes that could improve the living conditions of those fleeing their countries due to violence and misery, to enhance welfare, education, and schools, to ensure a humane future for technology, or to support the elderly. Instead, they are being used to fill arsenals and thus the pockets of arms manufacturers, even though military spending by EU countries already surpasses that of the Russian Federation. Is this



French soldiers carry a very short-range air defence weapon system Mistral during a live mobility demonstration to present France's military capabilities in Versailles in 2020. Photo: CNS/Benoit Tessier, Reuters.

really the path to ensuring a future of peace and prosperity for the Old Continent and the entire world? Does the arms race truly guarantee our security? Is this really the key to rediscovering and retrieving our roots and values?

**“Rather than striving for an active and constructive role in peace efforts and negotiations, the European Union risks becoming unified only in the escalation of rearmament”**

Instead of establishing a global fund to finally eliminate hunger and promote sustainable development worldwide

**“Authentic peace arises from the involvement of all parties. Everyone must have something; in a compromise, no one can have everything, and everyone must be willing to negotiate”**

- using a fixed percentage of military spending - as proposed by the Pope for the Jubilee Year, plans are being made to stockpile new weapons, as if the nuclear arsenals already in storage were not enough of a threat to unleash a catastrophe capable of destroying humanity many times over. As if the “Third World War fought piecemeal” prophetically evoked by the Pope a decade ago were not the real threat to avert. Rather than striving for an active and constructive role in peace efforts and negotiations, the European Union risks becoming unified only in the escalation of rearmament.

## Pattern

This reflects, yet again, what Pope Francis in April 2022 called the “pattern of war,” which leads to “making investments to buy weapons” while saying “we need them to

defend ourselves.” The Pope pointed to the loss of the “surge of goodwill” for peace that had characterised the period immediately following World War II. He bitterly observed that “Seventy years later, we have forgotten all that... the pattern of war has imposed itself again. We are incapable of imagining another pattern. We are not used to thinking of the pattern of peace anymore.”

**“The contribution that a structured and vital Europe can make to civilisation is indispensable for the preservation of peaceful relations”**

Wouldn't it be necessary to have leaders who,

instead of focusing on rearmament, revive that spirit and commit to dialogue to end the war in Ukraine and other conflicts? Two years ago, speaking in Budapest, Pope Francis posed a crucial question to European and global leaders. He echoed the words spoken by Robert Schuman in 1950: “The contribution that a structured and vital Europe can make to civilisation is indispensable for the preservation of peaceful relations,” because “world peace cannot be ensured except by creative efforts, proportionate to the dangers threatening it.” The Pope then asked: “At the present time, those dangers are many indeed; but I ask myself, thinking not least of war-torn Ukraine, where are creative efforts for peace?”

## Initiative

The expected and foreseeable geopolitical shift with the change of leadership in the White House could have led to a common initiative along the lines suggested by the Pope, aimed at ending the carnage tak-

ing place in the heart of Christian Europe. Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Parolin recently stated in an interview: “Authentic peace arises from the involvement of all parties. Everyone must have something; in a compromise, no one can have everything, and everyone must be willing to negotiate. Otherwise, peace will never be stable and lasting. We must return to this approach; otherwise, the world will become a jungle, with nothing but conflicts and their terrible consequences of death and destruction.”

**“From here, war appears even more absurd”**

Instead of ‘ReArm Europe,’ shouldn't the only real plan, the only realistic appeal to launch today be ‘Peace for Europe’? We ask this while echoing the Pope's words, spoken last Sunday from his room in the Gemelli Hospital: “From here, war appears even more absurd.”

# Catholic bishops meet in tense situation

## Bundestag election fallout and the World Synod



Bernward Loheide (KNA)

Two weeks after the Bundestag elections, the German Catholic bishops are meeting to discuss the consequences. What is not on the agenda, but will provide plenty to talk about, is the anxious look to Rome and the future of the Church.

Overshadowed by the Pope's serious illness in Rome, the Catholic bishops in Germany will be discussing the state of the Church next week in Steinfeld Monastery (North Rhine-Westphalia). At this spring plenary meeting, they will also discuss the consequences of the recent federal elections which took place, February 23. The far-right party, Alternative for Germany (AfD) made significant gains in



Bishop Georg Bätzing, president of the German bishops' conference, speaks during a new conference at the end of the bishops' fall assembly in Fulda, Germany in 2022. Photo: CNS /Harald Oppitz, KNA.

Catholic regions overall doubling its result to 20.8%.

### Unelectable

Previously, the bishops had labelled the AfD as unelectable for Christians. Shortly before the election, they also criticised the Christian Democratic Union

(CDU) and the Christian Social Union's (CSU) plans to tighten migration policy and warned against drafting legislation with AfD approval. The Church's traditionally good relationship with the CDU/CSU has been strained ever since. Likewise, there has also been irritation

and controversy within the German Bishops' Conference.

Though the consequences of the Pope's serious respiratory illness are not an official topic of the conference, its influence remains. Given that Pope Francis has had several acute respiratory crises and has been in the Gemelli Clinic in Rome for three weeks, there is speculation around the world as to whether and when the 88-year-old will be able to resume his work in the Vatican. That being said, two members of the Bishops' Conference could take part in a possible papal election: Cardi-

nals Reinhard Marx of Munich and Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne.

### Agenda

On the agenda of the General Assembly there are two highlights of Pope Francis' pontificate: his environmental encyclical *Laudato si*, which was published ten years ago, and the results of the World Synod, which ended in Rome last October.

Opinions within the Bishops' Conference differ as to how the final document of the world meeting of the Catholic Church should be assessed and what consequences should be drawn. The chairman, Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, sees himself strengthened for the reform process of the Church in Germany: in the Synodal Committee, bishops and lay people discuss issues such as power and the separation of powers and the role of women in the Church. On the other hand, Archbishop Woelki of Cologne and Bishops Rudolf Voderholzer of Regensburg, Stefan Oster of Passau, and Gregor Maria Hanke of Eichstätt reject the Synodal Committee. They also see themselves confirmed by the World Synod.

Along with this, the Church in Germany is also responding to the abuse scandal with the

reform process. Coming to terms with the sexual abuse of children and young people by clergy has been a topic of the plenary assemblies for many years, and this time is no exception.

### “The General Assembly of the Bishops' Conference is meeting for the first time in the diocese of Aachen”

The bishops will also address the political situation in the Middle East. The Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Homs, Jacques Mourad, is expected as a guest. He will report on the difficult life of Christians in Syria following the fall of the Assad regime to Islamist militias. Mourad was kidnapped by jihadists in 2015 and held captive for five months.

The General Assembly of the Bishops' Conference is meeting for the first time in the diocese of Aachen. Around 60 bishops and auxiliary bishops from the 27 German dioceses are taking part. The monastery in Kall-Steinfeld looks back on more than 900 years of history. The former Premonstratensian abbey has been owned by the Salvatorian Order since 1923.

## “Two members of the Bishops' Conference could take part in a possible papal election: Cardinals Reinhard Marx of Munich and Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne”

## German bishops report progress in women's leadership on International Women's Day

Bonn (KNA)

Just in time for International Women's Day, the Catholic bishops in Germany are highlighting the significant contributions women make to the Church with a new showing the proportion of women in Church leadership positions has increased.

The Catholic bishops in Germany believe they are making good progress in promoting women in Church leadership positions. In 2018, the bishops set a goal for women to hold “one-third or more” of leadership positions in Church administration within five years. A study published in Bonn by the Office for the Pastoral Care of Women confirms that by 2023, women occu-

piated 34.5% of middle management positions across the 27 dioceses. Of 551 positions, 190 were held by women.

At the upper management level, 59 of 214 positions were held by women, increasing representation from 19% in 2018 to 28% in 2023. Women now hold senior roles in 25 dioceses, and in 10 dioceses, three or more women serve in top leadership. According to the study, 25 out of 27 dioceses now have women at senior management level. Ten out of 27 dioceses are headed by three or more women.

The study highlights female theologians and religious educators as the largest group in leadership, making up 33% at the senior level and 24% at the middle level. Other leading women include lawyers, canon lawyers, and those with business management

backgrounds.

The Pastoral Commission of the German Bishops' Conference welcomed the results of the study. The target of “one third and more women in management positions” has triggered a cultural change in the Church vicariates general and ordinariates. However, this must continue - both in Church administrations and in other areas of Church leadership.

The German Bishops' Conference welcomed the findings, stating that the target has driven cultural change in diocesan administrations. The study's authors note that middle management serves as a key recruitment pool for upper leadership. With continued efforts, the proportion of women in top leadership could reach one-third or more in the coming years.

## Missionaries of synodality in Rwanda

About fifty delegates (bishops, priests, men and women religious, laymen and laywomen) from all the dioceses of Rwanda met from March 2 to 6 in Mbare to reflect together on ‘how can we become more and more a synodal Church in mission in Rwanda, starting from the orientations proposed by the synodal path?’.

Accepting the invitation of Pope Francis, Msgr Edouard Sinayobye, Bishop of Cyangugu and member of the Assembly, organised this ‘school of synodality’ so that the participants could deepen, starting from the *Final Document*, some key themes that emerged in the synod process, and experience the synodal style of listening and discernment also through ample time dedicated to *Lectio Divina*.

“The synod process in our dioceses has been welcomed and experienced as a *kairos*, a time of grace and renewal,” said Msgr. Sinayobye. “The Church of Christ that is in Rwanda thirsts for communion and unity, and really wants to walk together, taking care of everyone. Together with my brother bishops, we have convened this assembly to form true ‘missionaries of synodality’ in our Christian communities, and for this shared journey to become a style of ecclesial life. This session was itself an authentic synodal experience: a time of mutual listening and community discernment to understand, in the light of the guidelines of the Synod's *Final Document*, where the Holy Spirit is leading the Church in Rwanda”.

# Letters

## Letter of the week

### An Post is bringing the snakes back to Ireland

**Dear Editor,** The snakes are back! Poor St Patrick, even after driving out the snakes of pre-Christian paganism, here, they reappear, in the form of our annual An Post, contribution for the feast or rather now, the festival of St Patrick's Day, as they call it. They are multicoloured and long. What is this for?

I am a member of the Phila-

tetic section of An Post for many years. I have great regard for their work, but, of late, they have become secularised in a big way, ceasing to represent an holistic picture of our country. Spiritual matters seem to be ignored. I wrote to An Post, recently, to suggest that we should have a stamp in honour of 400th anniversary of the birth of St Oliver Plunkett. The

courteous reply I received, told me, it was not in their plan. I did notice they had space for Blessed Shane McGowan and St Sinead O'Connor! This is a big miss out.

Indeed they should also be commemorating Ven. Matt Talbot, St Laurence O'Toole, and Daniel O'Connell, on their centenaries in this current year. The very valuable stamp

commemorations should be holistic and not narrow-minded. They have brought the snakes back, but they can be eliminated more swiftly, by good Christian witness, better thinking, and civilised protest. Let us work earnestly in that vein.

*Yours etc.,  
Fr Patrick Moore  
Castlepollard, Westmeath*



### Jesus didn't just talk about nonviolence but practiced it

**Dear Editor,** Mary Kenny proposes that the claim of the 'Four Masters' – that Irishmen are naturally fitted to be soldiers or monks – is worthy guidance in moral matters [*The Irish Catholic* – February 20, 2025]. I think this is rather glib and stereotypical.

The Sunday gospel of February 23 provided true and definitive direction in moral matters: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly" (Lk 6:27-28). This teaching is from the 'Sermon on the Mount' which is seen as the 'Gospel within the Gospel' because of its overall importance.

Jesus didn't just talk about nonviolence but practiced it in the most extreme circumstances. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter attacked with a sword one of the guards sent to arrest Jesus and cut off his ear. Jesus rebuked Peter for his use of violence and miraculously reattached the man's ear.

### Examples of a master craftsman

**Dear Editor,** Week after week the excellence of Peter Costello's book reviews marks him out not just nationally but also internationally as an outstanding critic. None more so than the issue dated February 27 reviewing the Festschrift to History Professor Joe Lee and Peter's accompanying analysis

This was the last miracle of his earthly life.

One of his seven last words was "Father forgive them for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). In this Jesus was praying for his executioners and mak-

ing excuses for them. of an early John Ford film on Abraham Lincoln from 1915 on the surrender of Confederate General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Court House in 1865.

Both are classic examples of a master craftsman.

*Yours etc.,  
John Cooney  
Terenure, Dublin 6W*

ing excuses for them.

How can there be any true Christianity if Jesus who is God isn't Lord of our lives and decision making?

*Yours etc.  
Máire Mhic Fhearghusa  
Greenhills, Dublin 12*

### A prayer to counteract the present loss of Faith

**Dear Editor,** I would like to comment on Jim McCarthy's letter on the dilemma of the Church with the growing number of lapsed Catholics [*The Irish Catholic* – February 27, 2025], and his excellent suggestion that we should say the prayer which the Angel of Peace gave to the three children of

Fatima in 1916, to counteract the present, and apparently increasing, loss of Faith.

In June 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger (later to become Pope Benedict XVI), published an important "Theological commentary" on the Message of Fatima. In it he referred to a meeting he had with Sr Lucia

(October 14, 1996) in which she said that "It appeared ever more clearly to her that the purpose of all the apparitions was to help people to grow more, and more in faith, hope and love".

So let's all respond to Jim's suggestion and say daily the Angel's prayer: "My God, I believe in you, I adore you. I

hope in you and I love you, and I ask pardon for those who do not believe in you, do not adore you, do not hope in you, and do not love you"

This prayer could be used as a morning offering prayer.

*Yours etc.,  
Lauri Duffy  
Howth, Dublin 13*

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

### Ramadan and Lent: A bridge between two faiths

**Dear Editor,** As the days of Ramadan arrive, as an Irish man who follows Islam, memories of my youth flow back. In these past two years Ramadan, which travels according to the lunar calendar, that being shorter than that Solar one, crosses paths the Catholic holy days of lent. When I was a boy Lent for me was a time for giving up one love for the sake of another, giving up your sweets for the love of God, in the desire that doing so would bring you closer to your creator who has given you so much. And during those days of Lent, we also paid more attention to our prayers and being good little boys and girls towards our parents, not to lie or quarrel. It ended of course with the celebration of Easter in which we broke our 'confectional' fast with a large chocolate egg and of course Easter Mass thereafter.

Like Lent, during the Holy Month of Ramadan we Muslims give up one love for another, a greater love, the love of God. And we do so not in protest but in eager, childlike joy, knowing that the spirit is being filled while the belly lies empty. Of course there are many who are exempt from fasting, children, those who are ill, the elderly and pregnant women as well as those who are on a journey or cannot fast due to some other extenuating circumstances. However, they can also fulfil their Ramadan desire as this is not just a month to abstain from food from morning until sunset, but to abstain from any words or deeds which are morally and ethically wrong, to increase in prayer, the reading of scripture, charity and the remembrance of God.

Ramadan as with Lent therefore also offers us a time to slow down. Switch off the TV, laptop, tablet and mobile device and let the world be. A wise man once said that 'silence is the language of God' and it is in that silence that we can finally find Him, patiently waiting for us to talk, to ask, to listen and to receive.

*Yours etc.,  
Chris 'Yusuf' Pender  
Co. Galway*

### A baby's life and a family's heartbreak

**Dear Editor,** I could not help but be struck by two similar news stories recently with very different endings.

*The Echo* reported about a family in Dublin whose daughter was born several years ago. Her family describe the little girl as a determined and affectionate "warrior", in contrast to how doctors said she would not survive after birth or be in a "vegetative state" if she did, and offered to refer her for a late abortion (25 weeks). For her Italian-born mother this was a "brutal" perspective and she was able to get a second opinion in Italy where doctors, unlike their Irish counterparts, "eventually encouraged her to take the pregnancy forward".

Another recent report tells of a pregnant mother in the UK who was advised to abort her daughter after being told she had a lethal form of dwarfism. She reluctantly took her doctors' advice, and was devastated when a post-mortem after abortion found that baby Keira did not in fact have the dwarfism condition. Inexplicably, the hospital had failed to consider the possibility that the unborn baby might have the same condition as her two older siblings

who are small for their age.

These are by no means the first reports of doctors telling parents their unborn babies were diagnosed with a condition which they did not have, or wrongly predicting their condition would be fatal, both in Ireland and abroad. Doctors predicting how long babies in the womb will live, and how severely disabled they will be, are not doing so with a crystal ball that is anywhere near infallible.

I wonder how many of the mothers of the nearly 500 babies killed before birth in Ireland on grounds of severe disability were given information on the possibility of other outcomes. For those who were not, the basic medical principle of informed consent would seem to have been sacrificed on the altar of promoting abortion and dismissing the right to life of people with disabilities. Surely women and their babies deserve honest information about the limits of what medicine can not predict, when a baby's life and a family's heartbreak are at stake.

*Yours etc.,  
Anna O'Donoghue  
Mullahoran, Co. Cavan*

# Your Faith

An ongoing  
call from  
Heaven

Renata Milán Morales

Page 30

The Irish Catholic, March 13, 2025



## Be quick to listen

If I had a euro for every time I was asked to keep my homily short, I mightn't quite have enough for a long weekend in a spa resort, but I'd probably manage a very decent main course in the restaurant. For many Catholics, brevity is, if not the soul of wit, then certainly the soul of compassion: Be kind to us, Father; keep it brief.

There is no such injunction in the Gospel, and certainly not in Mark's Gospel, where we read that Jesus, in his compassion for the crowd, set about teaching them at some length (Mark 6:34). On that occasion, far from being a harsh imposition, a long homily was a manifestation of our Lord's compassion.

### Teach

Our Church loves to teach. She is not just Mother (*mater*) but Mother and Teacher (*mater et magistra*). We can reverse the order and say that our Church teaches to love: her teaching is a manifestation of God's loving guidance of his people. Culturally, we have been conditioned to regard the claims of a teaching Church as condescending; or worse, to see any kind of dogmatic teaching as an exercise of power and control. But if we're to take Jesus



The truths of our faith  
make responsible  
living possible says, Fr  
Chris Hayden

at his word – at his many words! – then we should acknowledge that culturally, we've been sold a pup. Teaching is not a form of bullying – it is a blessing.

**“What surprised her instead was the general sense that there were no handrails, no clear or definitive guidelines for any area of Christian living”**

It's strange, then, to meet Catholics who seem to have little or no sense that to be a Catholic is to adhere to certain teachings, to hold certain convictions. A friend

told me some time ago that she had attended a meeting of Catholics in which everything – everything about Church, about liturgy, about living – appeared to be up for grabs. She pointed out to me that she had not picked up any overt sense of rebellion against teachings, or any rejection of commandments. Culturally, that kind of rebellion would hardly be surprising; but what surprised her instead was the general sense that there were no handrails, no clear or definitive guidelines for any area of Christian living. She was astonished that a group of Catholics could honestly believe that they needed to, or could, make their way along without any reference to what they had received.

Not even a rejection of truth;

just a complete lack of awareness that to be a Catholic is to hold to certain truths! If that's the case, and if the condition is widespread, then we are faced with a fundamental task: to teach that to be a Catholic is to be taught, and that furthermore, being taught is not an infringement on some basic right or dignity, but a great blessing.

**“Far from tying us down, these headings, and the wonderful detail in which they are elaborated by the Catechism, give us wings”**

We should have the good sense to leave aside any clichés about being spoon-fed or infantilised. The truths of our faith do not absolve us of responsibility: on the contrary, they make responsible living possible. Even after we've learned to drive, we have to keep our eye on the road and our hands on the wheel. It was our Lord himself who said, “The truth will make you

free” (John 8:32), so let's not imagine that truth is what we need to be freed from, or that truth-claims are covert attempts to keep us in chains.

### Truth

If we want a quick synthesis and summary of the truths of our faith, we need look no further than the titles of the four main parts of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: what we believe; how we celebrate what we believe; how we live what we believe; how what we believe leads us to pray. Far from tying us down, these headings, and the wonderful detail in which they are elaborated by the Catechism, give us wings. They map out the Christian life and set us on the joyful, challenging way of discipleship.

We do not have to start from scratch or scratch our heads as we set ourselves to reinvent the wheel. Flip charts and discussion have their place, but we start from what we have been given. So let us be taught – happily taught. And may all our discussion and sharing, all our concern for contemporary context and for relevance, begin with the utter relevance of the treasure that is our faith.

# Are you an intentional disciple yet?



Jason Conroy

Sherry Weddell was stumped. She had given dozens of parish seminars before, helping parish leaders discover their God-given charism, and interviewing them one-to-one to discern how the Spirit was moving in each of their lives. But with this particular woman, the interview was getting nowhere: though she was a parish leader, there seemed to be no leads, no hints about God's movement in her life! Eventually, Sherry thought of a more fundamental question: "Could you describe your lived relationship with God to this point in your life?"— to which the parish leader answered, after a moment's thought: "I don't have a lived relationship with God."

The greatness of the book she went on to write, *Forming Intentional Disciples*, is that it both accurately diagnoses the problem and correctly prescribes the solution: most Catholics, let alone non-Catholics, are not yet disciples of Christ; the solution is to make - or 'form' - more Catholics to be intentional disciples.

So what is an 'intentional disciple'? Well: can you be an accidental disciple of Christ? Of course not! Being a disciple involves a deliberate, personal life choice, once and for all and every day. But what does this concretely look like?

Weddell quotes one Cardinal Lustiger: "We're really at the dawn of Christianity." If we want to see what disciples of Christ look like, we need look no further than St Paul and the first Christians, as found in Paul's letters and Acts - and our situation is in fact not too different to theirs!

## Heart

The heart of true discipleship is total Christocentricity— being totally centred on Christ— and this is the first thing we urgently need to return to today. Sometimes there's a reluctance to mention Christ very much and doing so can even be viewed

as 'too Protestant.' Sherry Weddell writes: "Whenever we treat Jesus as a 'topic' within the faith instead as the whole spiritual good of the Church, or as a 'belief' among other beliefs instead of as Lord, Head, Bridegroom, Saviour, and Elder Brother, we profoundly distort the faith and communicate an impersonal or institutional understanding of what it means to be Catholic." Put it to the 'Paul test': when Paul speaks, absolutely everything is related to Christ and centred on Him, and he exhorts the first Christians to do everything 'in Christ' and 'for Christ.'

**“Disposition is of essential importance if we are to be fruitful disciples! This calls for us to take on 'the great journey'”**

This is more than a merely mental decision: we have to 'drop our nets', like Peter and Andrew, to follow Christ! Throughout the book, Sherry Weddell uses this term 'dropping your nets' as the sign that someone has made the concrete life decision to follow Christ. This can take any number of forms - in one case she recalls a woman who quit her job at Planned Parenthood once she started to have a relationship with Jesus.

A disciple must receive the sacraments 'intentionally' too. To think that their effectiveness is solely based on their "mere external performance, apart from the interior dispositions that they demand, is to fall into superstition (CCC 2111)." Disposition is of essential importance if we are to be fruitful disciples! This calls for us to take on 'the great journey,' a 'personal quest' into the grace of the sacraments, which Weddell compares to the long journey of Sam and Frodo in *Lord of the Rings* - no mere afternoon hike!

And like Frodo and Sam, none of us are in this alone: We need to practice 'intentional community' too. The author recounts a "support group for lay Catholics" she set up with some friends in Seattle. Their vision: a community that deliberately



The Calling of Sts Peter and Andrew, Caravaggio

**“Teach and admonish one another in all wisdom', 'stir up one another to love and good works', 'confess your sins to one another and pray for one another'”**

helps lay Catholics to be committed disciples of Jesus. Their manifesto: it should be "NORMAL for lay Catholics to have a growing relationship with God; to be excited Christian activists; to be knowledgeable about their faith and the Scriptures; to know they have a vocation in life given to them by God; and to have the fellowship of other committed lay Catholics as they attempt to follow Jesus." This group exploded in popularity, going from a small group of friends to a multi-parish, multi-generational community, including many new converts.

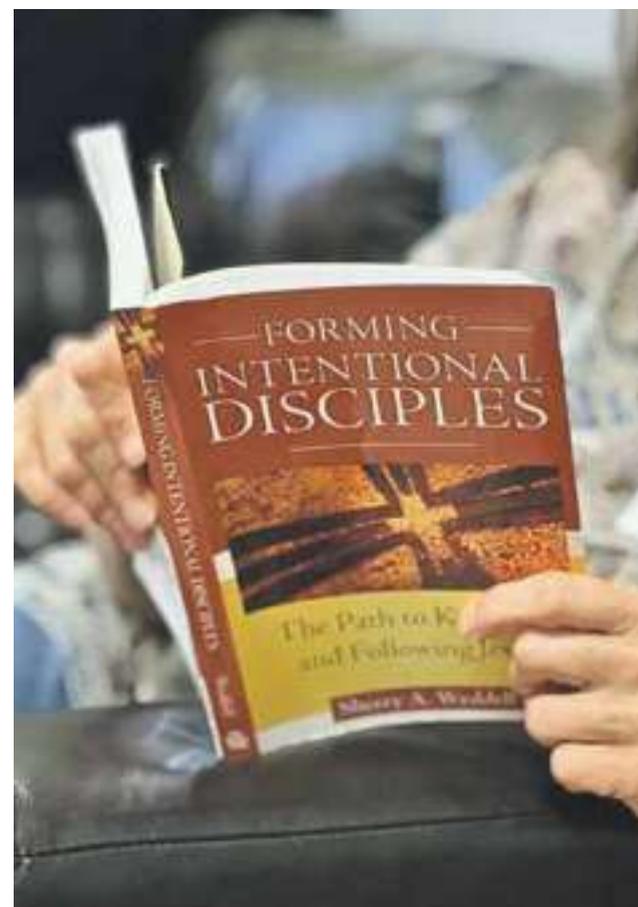
## Support

I've found that tea and small talk after Mass are common, but that it is relatively rare for Catholics to come together specifically to support, encourage, and advise each other in the life of discipleship; one good example, though, is Exodus 90, with its daily check-in with a buddy or 'anchor' and weekly fraternity meetings. Compare, again, the first Christians, and all the ways St Paul calls on them to support each other in the struggle of faith: 'teach and admonish one another in all wisdom'; stir

up one another to love and good works', 'confess your sins to one another and pray for one another', 'bear one another's burdens,' 'As each has received a gift, employ it for one another.'

**“This book should be a number one priority for anyone interested in the New Evangelisation of postmodern Ireland”**

Every disciple, like Peter and Andrew, is called to be a 'fisher of men,' and about half of the book is dedicated to helping you and I to do just this: the 'five stages of conversion' - from initial trust, to curiosity, to openness, to spiritual seeking, to intentional discipleship - are extremely helpful for understanding where a given person might be in their spiritual journey, and what approaches might be best at each stage. But two things are most important: that we get used to 'dropping the name' of Jesus, and to proclaiming the 'Kerygma',



Cover of Forming intentional disciples, Sherry Weddell

or the 'great story' of Jesus life, death and resurrection— once again, these were also the very heart and soul of St Paul's apostolic preaching to the pagans.

This book should be a number one priority for anyone interested in the New Evangelisation of postmodern Ireland - we need to start forming intentional disciples, starting with ourselves,

and then with the people already in the pews. Once even 10% or 20% of people in a Catholic community are disciples, truly remarkable things start to happen, just as they did in the ancient world 2000 years ago.

**i** Jason Conroy is a philosophy student from Co. Kildare, currently studying at KU Leuven, Belgium.

# An ongoing call from Heaven

## National Eucharistic Procession



Renata Milán Morales

Catholicism in Ireland has always been about more than just traditions and celebrations. It has been a pursuit of something higher. Ireland was never a land of passive spectators waiting for life to happen. Instead, it was a place where individuals intentionally sought to live their faith with profound commitment and courage.

Lately, I've been hearing a growing sense of discouragement in the community. "Ireland needs more contemporary saints," people say. But where are the modern-day heroes of faith? Edel Quinn, Frank Duff, Sr Clare Crocket amongst many others. What happened to the missionaries who risked everything to preach the Gospel, even at the cost of their own lives? Have we forgotten about the Penal Laws? And where are the bold Catholics who spent 800 years praying the Rosary, celebrating Mass in secret, knowing that at any moment, the authorities might catch them? It leaves us asking, how can Ireland reignite that same spirit of devotion and fearlessness today?

On the eve of St Patrick's Day, Ireland, the land of saints and scholars, will light up once more. Athlone, "the heart of Ireland," will be the centre of a Eucharistic Procession - a public witness to the vitality of the Irish Catholic heart. At 3pm, on the hour of mercy, the faithful will gather at St Mary's Church to walk the streets in a procession. This event is "not merely a procession". It is a resurrection - a revival of Ireland's sacred mission to be a witness of faith in a world that seems to have forgotten about God.

### Declaration

The significance of this procession goes beyond mere tradition; it is a public declaration of a nation's faith, a statement to a world that may "mock" or "doubt" the old faith, that Ireland is still alive in Christ, as Karen, one of the key organisers told *The Irish Catholic*. "The Catholic faith is the heartbeat of Ireland, and though the world may say it is dead, this procession shows that we are very much alive. It is a homecoming, a return to our roots. A return to Jesus, the Blessed Mother, and the peace only they can offer."

The procession will not stand alone, for it will be preceded by a 33-hour Eucharistic Adoration at Clonmacnoise, one of Ireland's most sacred sites, from March 14-16. There, at the ancient monastic centre founded by St Ciarán, the faithful will prepare their hearts to be part of the great wave of faith that will stream through the streets of Athlone on the eve of St Patrick's Day. Clonmacnoise, the cradle of Irish evangelisation, has long been a place

where the light of the Gospel was sent to illuminate the corners of Europe and beyond.

Barry Mallett, member of the organising team, told this paper about the powerful prophecy of St Patrick to frame this moment of renewal. "Just as St Patrick prophesied 1400 years ago, a fire will spread across Ireland and beyond," he said. "The light that was lit in Derry [during the recent Eucharist Procession], the fire of faith that burns brightly, will now spread to Athlone, and from there it will set the world alight." This prophecy of St Patrick, the missionary who drove out the serpents of paganism, is being fulfilled, according to Mr Mallett. Ireland must rise once again to meet this challenge in love and prayer, "bringing Christ back into the streets," and the hearts.

"It's very significant that this is happening. It happened in Derry before and now it's happening in Athlone. This is the Jubilee Year. Also, Archbishop Eamon Martin has decided to reconsecrate Ireland on June 22 to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Ireland was first consecrated to the Sacred Heart in 1873. It was the first country in the world to consecrate itself to the Sacred Heart," explained Mr Mallett. "We would be blind not to see that this is an ongoing call from Heaven."

**“We are the land of saints and scholars,” he said, “and it is time to pass on the faith, hope, and love on to the next generation, to be a light to all nations”**

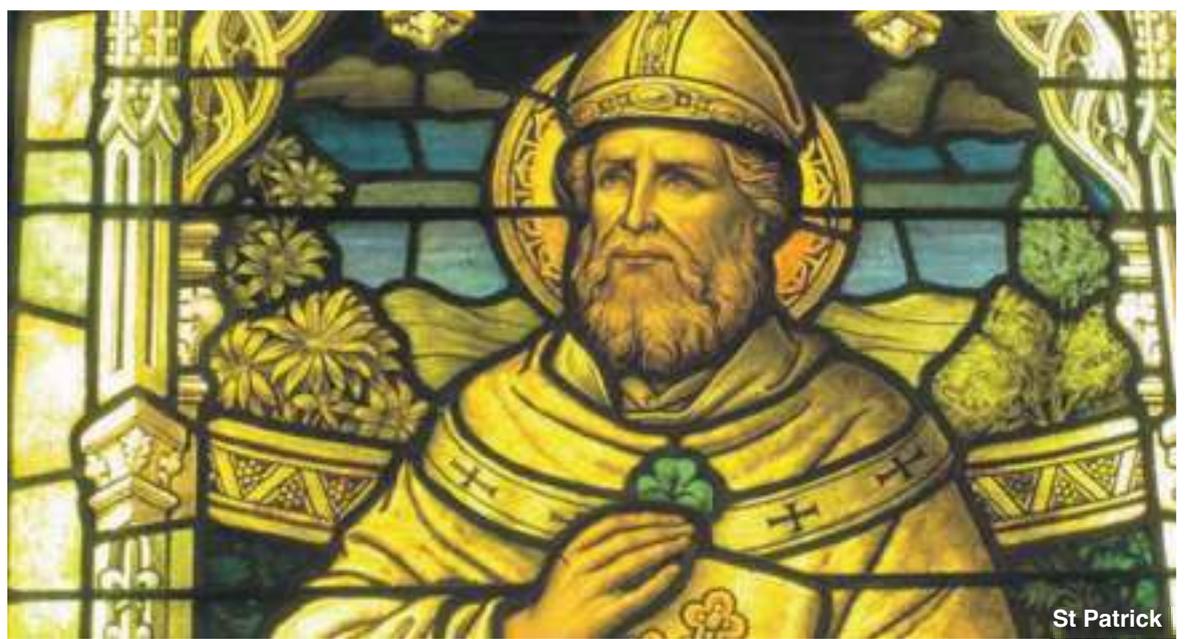
"One of the statues blessed by the Pope will be present on the day. What we see here is continual graces being poured on Ireland for saying yes to Christ their king. This year, 2025, is also the 100th anniversary of the Feast of Christ the King. It is as if Heaven is given support all over the country for this Eucharistic revival to bring Ireland back to the faith."

In the Eucharistic Procession, Ireland will answer the call to stand up, to rise in love, and to reclaim its role as the guardian of the faith. St Patrick, in his great exorcism of Ireland, cast out the dark forces of paganism. Now, as Mr Mallett puts it, Ireland must once again rise in love and prayer to cast out the darkness that has crept in. "We are the land of saints and scholars," he said, "and it is time to pass on the faith, hope, and love on to the next generation, to be a light to all nations."

This is a moment in the great story of Ireland - a story of divine providence and sacred mission. The people of Ireland will walk through the streets of Athlone on St Patrick's Eve. They will not only honour the memory of the saint, but they will honour the living Christ, who continues to call Ireland to be His light in the world. The fires of faith are not out, "they are burning stronger than ever."



A picture of recent Derry Eucharistic Procession.



St Patrick



Sacred Heart

# St Patrick: Do you know the myth or the man?

DD Emmons

Given the popularity of St Patrick's Day, many celebrators know little about St Patrick the man. They might be surprised to learn that he never ate corned beef and cabbage, never drove snakes out of Ireland, and had no leprechaun friends. The majority of St Patrick's Day customs, myths, and fables have been perpetuated and instituted over a period of 16 centuries. Stripping away the secular activities, we discover a holy person who spent over 30 years proclaiming the Gospel to the people of Ireland. Prayerfully recalling and recognising his life as God's chosen missionary is how to uncover the true spirit of St Patrick.

Patrick was raised a Christian but gave little attention to his religion. At age 16, he was kidnapped and carried off to Ireland, where he was sold as a slave. For the next six years, he tended the owner's flocks. This was a lonely job, spent in solitude in all sorts of weather. It was during this time that he experienced spiritual renewal. According to his words, he began praying constantly, and his indifference toward God turned to love.

## Captivity

At 22, Patrick had a dream telling him to escape captivity and return to his homeland. Believing this was a heavenly message, he spent 20 days walking 200 miles to the sea and found transportation to Gaul (France). God, in his surprising ways, was calling this youth to holiness and sainthood to become the apostle to Ireland.

Patrick returned to his family, claiming that during a dream he heard the voice of the Irish, "We beg you, holy youth, to come and walk again amongst us." Patrick discerned that he was destined



St Patrick Catholic Church, Junction City, Ohio.

to return to Ireland and bring the Gospel to a people unaware of Christ. It would take 20 years before he could fulfil this dream.

**“Patrick’s goal was to minister to the Christians in Ireland and evangelise to a people dismissed as heathens”**

Patrick sought ordination as a priest, but facts about these years differ. The saint tells us that on his way to becoming a bishop, he was rejected by other bishops based on an incident from his youth. He overcame this setback but faced more questioning about his desire to return to Ireland. Many

thought he was crazy to return to a place where he had been a slave, a land considered the edge of the known world.

As anxious as he was to return to Ireland, Patrick wanted no shortcuts in his rise to the episcopate. In 432, St Germanus of Auxerre, a bishop, oversaw Patrick's elevation to bishop and sent him to Ireland. Patrick's goal was to minister to the Christians in Ireland and evangelise to a people dismissed as heathens.

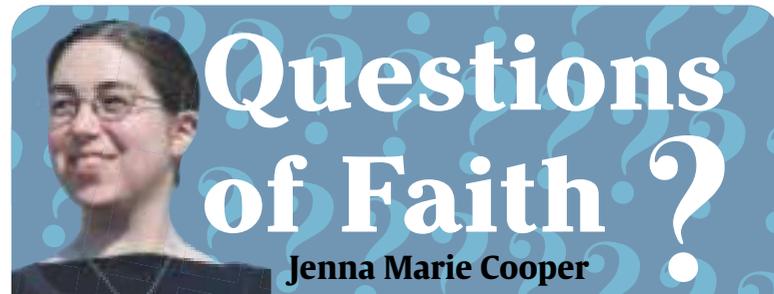
## Culture

Patrick's strategy was to introduce Christianity in a way that made it take root without changing the people's culture. The soil was fertile, but the task was not without difficulty. Fifth-century Ireland had thousands of tribal communities, and few had heard of Christ. Patrick and his group would seek the tribal leaders, and sometimes bribe them, to gain permission to preach. Patrick knew the language from his time as a slave and had some cultural knowledge.

Patrick often faced danger, as tribes captured him several times. But, thanks to the Holy Spirit, they were never harmed. He did not attack the culture but confronted the Druid priests, who promoted reincarnation and human sacrifices. Divine intervention was on Patrick's side during these confrontations, and their magic was refuted by the power of the Gospel.

Legend has it that Patrick used the shamrock, a sacred plant to the Druids, to explain the Trinity. Historians estimate that during his mission, Patrick baptised thousands, ordained 300 bishops, and erected hundreds of churches. St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, Nigeria, and many dioceses and churches worldwide.

*DD Emmons writes from Pennsylvania.*



## What are the different kinds of sin?

**Q: At a recent Mass, the priest talked about “mortal sin,” about which I’d previously heard, but then he mentioned “venial sins” and “temporal sins,” and even “sins of omission.” I’m not familiar with these, especially the last one. How can a person commit a sin without doing anything?**

**A:** Every sin represents a turning away from God, which is never a good thing. But as we know from life experience and common sense, not all sins are equally terrible, and the dynamic of how we come to fall into sin can vary depending on the circumstances.

Mortal and venial sin are two categories along the same scale of how serious a sin is. The more serious kind of sin is mortal sin which, as the name implies, essentially kills our relationship with God. Or, as the Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it: “Mortal sin destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him” (CCC, No. 1855).

We as Catholics believe that those who die in a state of unrepented mortal sin are destined for hell. Although it is also important to keep in mind that we can never know fully as an outside observer what happens within another's soul, so we can always hope that even the worst of sinners may have sought God's mercy in their final moments.

For a sin to be considered a mortal sin in a given instance, three conditions must be met. First, the sin must be ‘grave matter’, meaning that it is seriously wrong in an objective sense. (As an illustration, stealing someone's entire life savings is grave matter; stealing a paper clip is not.) The person committing the sin must also know and understand that the action is seriously wrong. Finally, in order for a sin to be mortal, a person must commit an act they know to be seriously wrong entirely of their own free will (See CCC, No. 1857).

A venial sin is a less serious sin that “does not break the cov-

enant with God” and which does “not deprive the sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness” (CCC, No. 1863).

Minor faults and sins that do not involve grave matter are for the most part always considered venial sins. And some sins that might ordinarily be considered mortal sins might actually be venial in some concrete circumstances, if the one sinning either was not aware of the gravity of the sinful action or was committing the sin because they felt some sort of pressure to do so.

Venial sins do not imperil our souls in the same way that a mortal sin would, but it's still important to strive to avoid committing even venial sins. Among other reasons, “deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin” (CCC, No. 1863).

The term “sin of omission” does not describe the seriousness of a sin, but rather how the sin came to be committed. The opposite of a sin of omission is a sin of “commission,” meaning a sin that we deliberately went out of our way to commit. In contrast, we commit sins of omission when we neglect to do some good that we ought to have done.

Granted, none of us ever do as much good as we theoretically might, but a sin of omission generally involves a real failure to fulfil some clear-cut responsibility or duty. For example, actively forging documents for financial gain would be a sin of commission, whereas failing to report known fraud could be a sin of omission.

“Temporal sin” is not a term I have come across before, but my thought is that this was likely a reference to what we call “temporal punishment due to sin,” which is one way of describing the purification that happens in purgatory.

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

## Meditations on the interior life

### Spending free time with God

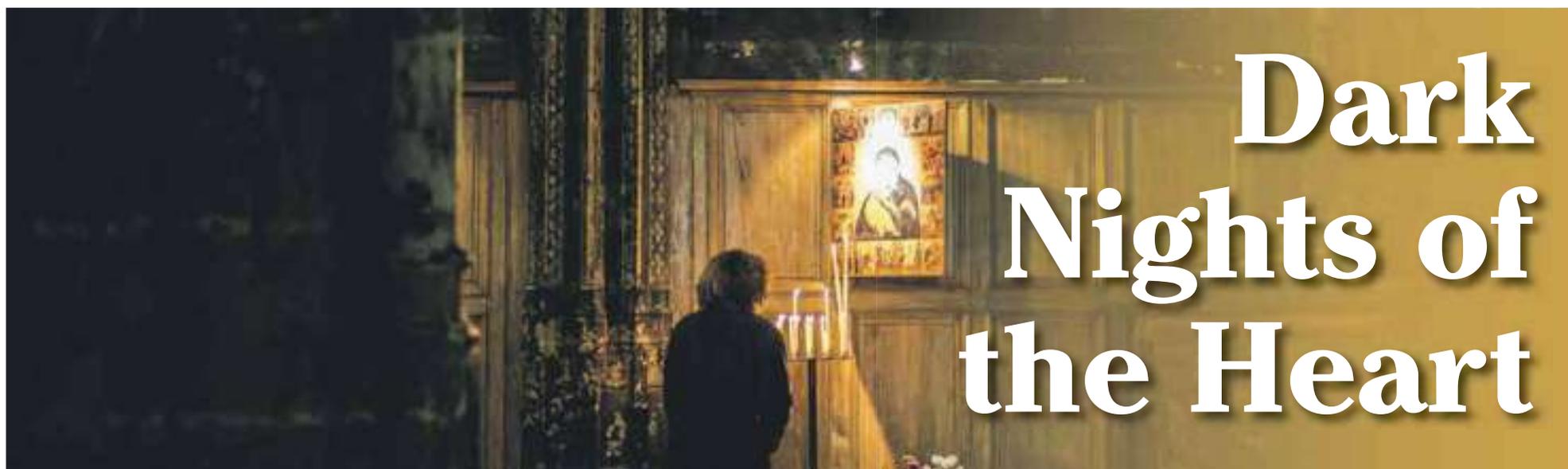
Settle to pray. Free time. Thank You for receiving me always with such courtesy and grace. Lord, I lift up my thoughts to You. You are above and beyond us and when You came into this world nobody recognised You. People were surprised. It was a joy. God comes among us. Even the angel choirs sang of it “Glory to God in the highest.” They saw what a great thing was happening.

My prayer this morning is very simple. I love You. “It is enough to love,” said St Bernadette. This is at the heart of prayer. The love You have for us. You love to be with us, among us. ‘I love you’. It is what You say to us and what we reply to You. We love You in Church, in our walks, in family, in quiet hours and as we drive to work. We love You in all and for all. This is it, Lord, the centre of all things, what keeps us going, why You allow the planet to continue.

I try to raise my thoughts to You, my affections belong to You. Imagine! You became a little child among us in Nazareth. A five-year-old, a smiling bright light. It is

enough to simply love You, for all and in all and above all. A person said to me “I’m slipping back in my spiritual life.” We all do. We go forward, we progress, we love You, and then we slip on ice and fall, and You always help us to our feet again. You reach out a heavenly hand to us - ‘Up and try again.’ It is like learning to cycle a bike as children. We wobble and fall, and yet You are patient. Blessed Virgin you inspire us to pray. Like the best of mothers, you help us to our feet, and we pray, we resume our prayer life.

Lord my day is so much improved by contact with You. I am so much more peaceful, more able to avoid the troubles and badness. You send angels to help and guide us and faith-friends, good people. This is why I am drawn to pray. Because it is all about love for You and Your love for us. It is an exercise. As St Ignatius of Loyola said, “it is a spiritual exercise”, and we must get fit. We must practice. It is the gymnasium of the soul: speech with God who loves and forgives, guides and inspires.



# Dark Nights of the Heart



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

**T**here are times when our world unravels. Who hasn't had the feeling? "I'm falling apart! This is beyond me! My heart is broken! I feel betrayed by everything! Nothing makes sense anymore! Life is upside down!"

Jesus had a cosmic image for this. In the Gospels, he talks about how the world as we experience it will someday end: "The sun will be darkened, the moon will not give forth its light, stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven will be shaken." When Jesus says this, he is not talking as much about cosmic cataclysms as of cataclysms of the heart. Sometimes our inner world is shaken, turned upside down; it gets dark in the middle of the day, there's an earthquake in the heart; we experience the end of the world as we've known it.

However, in this upheaval, Jesus assures us that one thing remains sure: God's promise of fidelity. That doesn't get turned upside down and in

our disillusionment we are given a chance to see what really is of substance, permanent, and worthy of our lives. Thus, ideally at least, when our trusted world is turned upside down, we are given the chance to grow, to become less selfish, and to see reality more clearly.

## Express

Christian mystics call this "a dark night of the soul" and they express it as if God were actively turning our world upside down and deliberately causing all the heartache to purge and cleanse us.

The great Spanish mystic John of the Cross puts it this way: God gives us seasons of fervor and then takes them away. In our seasons of fervor, God gives us consolation, pleasure, and security inside our relationships, our prayer, and our work (sometimes with considerable passion and intensity). This is a gift from God and is meant to be enjoyed. But John tells us, at a certain point, God takes away

the pleasure and consolation and we experience a certain dark night in that where we once felt fire, passion, consolation, and security, we will now feel dryness, boredom, disillusion, and insecurity. For John of the Cross, all honeymoons eventually end.

Why? Why would God do this? Why can't a honeymoon last forever?

**“When we first begin to pray seriously, we are often more in love with the experience of praying and what it's doing for us than we are in love with God”**

Because eventually, though not initially, it blocks us from seeing straight. Initially all those wonderful feelings we feel when we first fall in

love, when we first begin to pray deeply, and when we first begin to find our legs in the world. These are part of God's plan and God's way of drawing us forward. The passion and consolation we feel help lead us out of ourselves, beyond fear and selfishness. But, eventually, the good feelings themselves become a problem because we can get hung up on them rather than on what's behind them.

## Honeymoons

Honeymoons are wonderful; but, on a honeymoon, too often we are more in love with being in love and all the wonderful energy this creates than we are in love with the person behind all those feelings. The same is true for faith and prayer. When we first begin to pray seriously, we are often more in love with the experience of praying and what it's doing for us than we are in love with God. On any honeymoon, no matter how

intense and pure the feelings seem, those feelings are still partly about ourselves rather than purely about the person we think we love. Sadly, that is why many a warm, passionate honeymoon eventually turns into a cold, passionless relationship.

**“In falling, we get closer to bedrock, to God, to reality, to truth, to love, to each other”**

Until we are purified, and we are purified precisely through dark nights of disillusionment, we are too much still seeking ourselves in love and in everything else. Thérèse of Lisieux used to warn: "Be careful not to seek yourself in love, you'll end up with a broken heart that way!" We'd have fewer heartaches if we understood that. Also, before we are purified by disillusionment, most

of the tears we shed, no matter how real the pain or loss, often say more about us than they say about the person or situation we are supposedly mourning.

In all this, there's both bad news and good news: The bad news is that most everything we sense as precious will someday be taken from us. Everything gets crucified, including every feeling of warmth and security we have. But the good news is that it will all be given back again, more deeply, more purely, and even more passionately than before.

## Free-fall

What dark nights of the soul, cataclysms of the heart, do is to take away everything that feels like solid earth so that we end up in a free-fall, unable to grab on to anything that once supported us. But, in falling, we get closer to bedrock, to God, to reality, to truth, to love, to each other, beyond illusions, beyond selfishness, and beyond self-interested love that can masquerade as altruism.

Clarity in eyesight comes after disillusionment, purity of heart comes after heart-break, and real love comes after the honeymoon has passed.

**“Everything gets crucified, including every feeling of warmth and security we have. But the good news is that it will all be given back again, more deeply, more purely, and even more passionately than before”**

## Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milán Morales

# The mysteries of Christ's life

**A**ccording to circumstances catechesis will make use of all the richness of the mysteries of Jesus. Here it is enough merely to indicate some elements common to all the mysteries of Christ's life, in order then to sketch the principal mysteries of Jesus' hidden and public life.

Many things about Jesus of interest to human curiosity do not figure in the Gospels. Almost nothing is said about his hidden life at Nazareth, and even a great part of his public life is not recounted.

Christ's whole life is a mystery of redemption. Redemption comes to us above all through the blood of his cross, but this mystery is at work throughout Christ's entire life. And a mystery of recapitulation. All Jesus did,

said and suffered had for its aim restoring fallen man to his original vocation.

## Preparing the way

In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is "the perfect man", who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate. Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. We must continue to accomplish in ourselves the stages of Jesus' life and his mysteries and often to beg him to perfect and realise them in us and in his whole Church.

The coming of God's Son to Earth is an event of such immensity that God willed to prepare for it over centuries. He announces him through the mouths of the prophets who succeeded one another in Israel.

St John the Baptist was sent to prepare his way. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the bridegroom", whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world"

## Infancy and hidden life

Jesus was born in a humble stable, into a poor family. To become a child in relation to God is the condition for entering the kingdom. For this, we must humble ourselves and become little.

The Epiphany is the manifestation of Jesus as Messiah of Israel, Son of God and Saviour of the world. The presentation of Jesus in the temple shows him to be the firstborn Son who belongs to the Lord.

During the greater part of his life Jesus shared the condition of most human beings: a daily life spent without evident greatness, a life of manual labour. His religious life was that of a Jew obedient to the law of God, a life in the community.

The home of Nazareth is the school where we begin to understand the life of Jesus - the school of the Gospel. First, then, a lesson of silence. A lesson on family life. A lesson of work. The finding of Jesus in the temple is the only event that breaks the silence of the Gospels about the hidden years of Jesus. Here Jesus lets us catch a glimpse of the mystery of his total consecration to a mission that flows from his divine sonship.

**i** From paragraphs 512 - 534

# Look beyond the world you know

Genesis 15:5-12, 17-18  
Psalm 27:1, 7-8, 8-9, 13-14  
Philippians 3:17 - 4:1 or  
Philippians 3:20 - 4:1  
Luke 9:28b-36

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



This Sunday's readings seem to be all about wonder - in Genesis, we hear about a sky filled with countless stars, and then in Luke, we learn of Christ's radiant transfiguration on a mountaintop. There is a sense of amazement.

But for me, it says something vital about Lent. And it all boils down to two little words. The first is one we hear when God speaks to Abram - his very first word to him, in fact: "Look." Such a simple word, packed with so much power.

God wants to show Abram his legacy, his future, what he has planned for him. With that dramatic word, and the opportunity to pause and consider all the stars in the sky and the limitless possibilities that lie before him, Abram assents to God's will. The rest is, quite literally, history.

### Transfiguration

The idea of looking and watching, seeing the incredible made credible, reappears in the Gospel, when we hear Luke's

account of the Transfiguration - another glimpse of what will be, and one that inspires fear in the apostles who were there. The Gospel episode concludes the way the reading from Genesis began - with a reference to the sense of sight.

"They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen."

**“Look at what will be. Listen to the one God sent - the one who has been transfigured, changed, and who will change the world”**

But there's something else that strikes me. If seeing is vitally important this Sunday, so is another sense: hearing.

Earlier in the Gospel, God has something else to tell the apostles - another command, like the one he gave Abram. This is the other significant word to remember this Sunday: "Listen."



Fresco in The Sistine Chapel, The Vocation of the Apostles, Domenico Ghirlandaio.

Look. Listen.

Look at what will be. Listen to the one God sent - the one who has been transfigured, changed, and who will change the world.

### Lent

Look. And listen. You want to know what Lent entails? This is where it begins. These are the watchwords of this season we have begun - words to guide our days and change our hearts

and inspire us as we continue the long and challenging walk to Calvary.

**“Look beyond the world you know, what is familiar and comfortable and look to the world beyond, and the God who sent his Son to heal and save”**

Look. Look for opportunities to sacrifice, to give, to sow compassion or inspire hope. Look around you for those in need: the hungry, the poor, the outcast, the scorned. Seek opportunities to give alms. Look for things to give up. Then look into your heart and give.

Look beyond the world you know, what is familiar and comfortable and look to the world beyond, and the God who sent his Son to

heal and save.

And then, listen. Listen again to the challenging words of Jesus we heard so recently in The Sermon on the Plain, calling on the disciples to sacrifice for others. Listen to Christ's teachings these days as we move closer to Jerusalem, to Calvary, to Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

### Hearts

Listen to the stirrings in our own hearts. Be attentive to God's presence in our lives, our jobs, our families. How does he want us to grow and change this season? What is he asking of us this Lent?

How can we be more than what we are - and make those ashes we received mean something? Listen for God's quiet voice to guide the way. He told Peter and John to listen to his Son. He showed Abram the stars and promised him an inheritance beyond imagining.

Look. Listen. There will be much to see and hear in the weeks ahead. Our eyes will turn toward the Stations of the Cross hanging in church and the empty holy water fonts by the door. We will hear again the mournful refrain of the *Stabat Mater* and its words of sorrow. "At the cross, her station keeping, stood the mournful mother weeping..." Those are among many outward signs leading us to inward contemplation and, we hope, conversion.

Resolve this week to take these scripture readings to heart. We all need to use this season to look. To listen. To be aware of wonder, possibility, change.

Only then can we act and make the disciplines of Lent really matter.

**i** Deacon Greg Kandra is an award-winning author and journalist, and creator of the blog *The Deacon's Bench*.

**“Our eyes will turn toward the Stations of the Cross hanging in church and the empty holy water fonts by the door. We will hear again the mournful refrain of the *Stabat Mater* and its words of sorrow”**

## Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milán Morales



St Cyril of Jerusalem

## St Cyril of Jerusalem: True charity

St Cyril of Jerusalem, born around 315, was a key figure in the early Church, renowned for his defence of Christian orthodoxy amidst the tumult of the Arian heresy. A committed bishop, he lived during a period of the Church's life marked by theological turmoil and imperial politics. His contributions to the Church are significant, particularly through his writings and his commitment to preserving the faith amidst adversity.

Cyril's early life remains largely obscure, though it is believed he was raised in Jerusalem in a Christian household. His education, particularly in Scripture, was complete, preparing him for a future role in the Church.

After his ordination as a priest, Cyril was entrusted with the vital task of catechising the catechumens, those preparing for baptism, and instructing the newly baptised. His Catecheses, a series of instructional writings, remain a critical source for understanding the rituals and theology of the fourth-century Church.

The Arian heresy, which denied the divinity of Christ, was the defining theological crisis of Cyril's life. Cyril was thrust into the middle of this controversy when he became bishop of Jerusalem. His episcopate was characterised by a series of exiles and conflicts, especially with Acacius, the Arian bishop of Caesarea, who initially supported Cyril's appoint-

ment. However, territorial disputes soon emerged, as Cyril asserted the independence of Jerusalem, a historic apostolic see. His refusal to submit to Acacius's authority led to his condemnation and banishment.

During a famine in Jerusalem, Cyril, to alleviate the suffering of the poor, sold some of the Church's treasures. This act of charity was misunderstood, and Cyril faced accusations of corruption and misconduct. The accusations were largely political, as rivals sought to undermine his position. The controversy over Cyril's actions led to his exile, and he spent time in Tarsus before being recalled by the emperor Julian in the mid-4th century, who sought to exacerbate the tensions

within the Church for political reasons. Cyril's return to Jerusalem was short-lived, as after Julian's death, the situation reversed, and he was again exiled.

Despite these tribulations, his defence of orthodoxy was eventually vindicated at the Council of Constantinople in 381, where the Nicene Creed was reaffirmed and Arianism was condemned. Cyril was praised for his role in this victory, and his long-standing commitment to the Church's teachings was recognised.

In his later years, Cyril experienced a brief period of peace, although Jerusalem remained a place of division and strife. He passed away in 386, at around seventy years old.

# Are we simply moviegoers in our own lives?



Pedro Esteva

While many book reviews tend to focus on new releases it is of course important as well to call attention to works that, though they are long standing, still have much to offer. These foundational works of fiction, whether Catholic or not, can enrich the lives of readers of all ages and from all ages. There is a reason they have stood the test of time while their contemporaries have faded into obscurity. It is always intriguing to consider which modern books will stand the test of time and what lessons they'll impart to future generations.

That said, this is one of those cases where I am unsure whether to this book to a wide audience, though I believe that certain readers will find it deeply rewarding. *The Moviegoer* by Walker Percy was first recommended to me by a friend whose recommendations I take with the utmost seriousness. So, I quickly whisked the book from the shelves of my local used book shop. When I finished reading it for the first time, I wasn't sure what to think. I asked my friend for his take on the book only to learn that he had a similar experience and had only recommended it to me to hear my thoughts. And our discussion of *The Moviegoer*, came to a standstill.

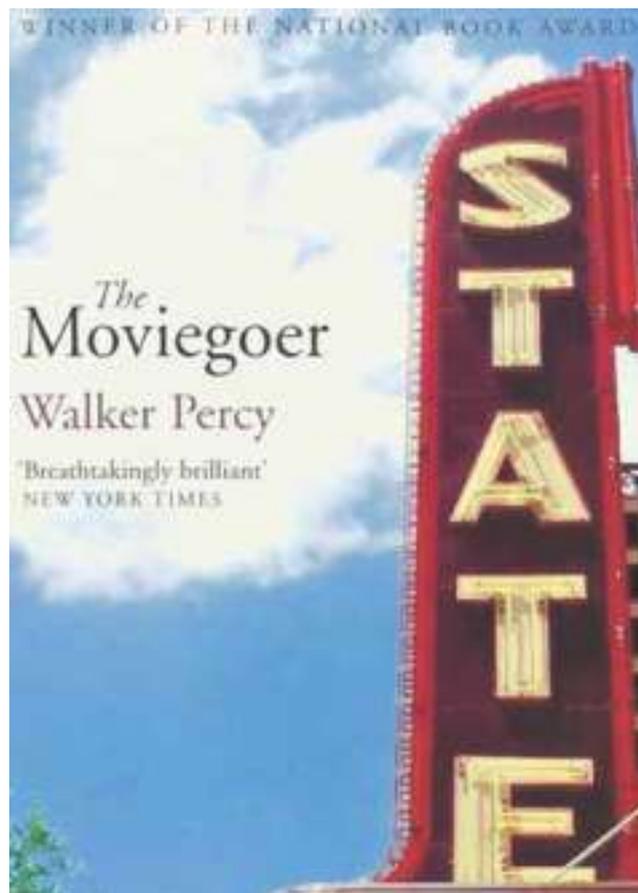
However, over the years

this book has haunted me, probably because I had not understood it. Some novels also have a way of calling you back, again and again. Their landscapes and story beats remain the same, but as you grow, you become aware of different facets. Something catches your attention and what was old has been made new. With Lent approaching, I felt it was time once more to embark on this journey.

**“I am a model tenant and a model citizen and take pleasure in doing all that is expected of me”**

*The Moviegoer* chronicles the existential wanderings of one Jack 'Binx' Bolling in the days leading up to Mardi Gras and Ash Wednesday. Binx is a New Orleans stockbroker who takes finds pleasure in the small comforts of modern life – his club cards, his casual flings with secretaries, his ability to make money, and, most of all, his trips to the movies. Early on he says, “I am a model tenant and a model citizen and take pleasure in doing all that is expected of me.” Yet beneath this carefully maintained ordinariness, he is haunted by a deep restlessness. Struggling with the lingering trauma of the Korean War and the weight of his family's legacy, Binx drifts through life, unable to form lasting relationships.

All of this culminates in what Binx calls “the search.” He describes it – “the search is what anyone would undertake if he were not sunk in the everydayness of his own life ... To become aware of the possi-



bility of the search is to be onto something. Not to be onto something is to be in despair.” While not explicitly religious, his search aligns with the words of St Augustine: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”

## Distractions

Throughout the novel, Binx drifts through the spiritual malaise of postwar America, a world numbed by consumerism and distraction, where despair is quietly kept at bay with entertainment. If anything, the spiritual landscape has only worsened in the decades since the novel's publication – our distractions are more immediate, more accessible, and more relentless. Close at hand, sitting

in our pockets. The everyday malaise Binx describes remains unchanged: “The world is lost to you, the world and the people in it, and there remains only you and the world and you are no more able to be in the world than Banquo's ghost.”

**“At its core, the novel is a pilgrim's tale, akin to *The Divine Comedy*, though without its cosmic scale”**

Beyond this, *The Moviegoer* traces the journey of a man moving, albeit reluctantly, toward the high call of love, responsibility, and self-sacrifice. His complicated relationship with Kate, a woman trapped in her own cycles of existential crisis, forces him to abandon his detachment, his moviegoing, and to truly engage with another human being. In trying to help her, Binx is drawn out

## Take up your cross

Scott P Richert

For some years now, it has been fashionable for Catholics to declare that we're not giving up anything for Lent but instead are doing something positive. This false dichotomy makes sense within the modern, post-Christian worldview, which sometimes seems to view self-denial as the only modern equivalent to sin; but the words of Christ himself make it clear that the truth is more complex: “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 16:24-25).

We admire sacrifice in the pursuit of worldly goals: furthering one's career; rigorous training for athletic events; complex diets pursued for the sake of physical health. But self-denial for the sake of eternal life seems somehow... selfish. The only aspect of Christianity that the modern world seems willing to accept is service to others – so long as we don't mention that we're serving Christ in them.

Yet that, of course, is what we are doing. And a fundamental difference – perhaps the fundamental difference – between the Christian worldview and the literalist, materialist mindset that dominates even the thoughts of most Christians today is that Christians view everything in this world, including our fellow human beings, as symbols of something beyond this life.

The Christian creed was described as the “symbol of faith”: Words spoken

in this world reminded us of realities in the next. Christ told us that when we serve our fellow man, we serve Christ himself, and St Paul expounded at length on the Church as a symbol of Christ and marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and his Church.

The Eucharist is explicitly a symbol, the Host broken in two to remind us of the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ, whose Body it is. We receive into ourselves not only his Body and Blood but his Soul and Divinity. And through communion, we enter not only into the life of Christ in this world and the next, but also into his death – or rather, we enter into his life by entering into his death. The symbol of the cross, stamped on every host, points beyond this life which is passing to that life which is eternal. Only through that cross, only by uniting ourselves to Christ's death by dying to self, can we enter into the fullness of life in this world and the next.

Here in this life, we know only half of the story: We grasp only our half of the symbol. We can take it literally, as something irreparably broken, and mourn our loss and refuse to move forward. Or we can take it for what it truly is: A sign of something beyond ourselves, beyond this world, one half of all that we were meant to be. When we view the world that way, we come to understand what it means to lose our life in order to save it and why denying ourselves and taking up our cross must be the starting point for any good we wish to do.

Scott P Richert is publisher for OSV.

of himself, into the messy, painful entanglements of real life, but also into the possibility of genuine love and an unfiltered experience of the everyday, free from malaise.

## Search

At its core, the novel is a pilgrim's tale, akin to *The Divine Comedy*, though without its cosmic scale. Like Dante, Binx begins in a kind of existential limbo, lost in the confusion of modern life, and must journey through his own form of purgatory, confronting despair and detachment before moving toward a form of redemption.

As we enter our own

period of Lenten journeying, it is important for Catholics to examine our own distractions and comforts – our own “moviegoing” – and ask whether we are truly searching for God or merely passing the time. It is a season in which we follow Christ into the desert, dying to self to truly live. Binx Bolling's search is not the saint's journey, but it is a profoundly human one, marked by missteps yet always open to the possibility of grace. For Catholic readers, especially during Lent, *The Moviegoer* is a mirror and a challenge: Are we truly searching for God, or are we merely moviegoers in our own lives?

**“In trying to help her, Binx is drawn out of himself, into the messy, painful entanglements of real life, but also into the possibility of genuine love and an unfiltered experience of the everyday, free from malaise”**

# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Prayers and music at the beginning of Lent

Last week saw the beginning of Lent, and the onset of the season usually sparks some interesting religious content in the media.

On **Songs of Praise** (BBC One, Sunday) for the first Sunday in Lent Sean Fletcher presented a special edition on the Lord's Prayer, from an Anglican theological college – Ripon College, Cuddesdon. This prayer of Jesus, prayed by millions of Christians worldwide, was described as 'impactful', 'radical', 'challenging' and 'quite profound'. The aptly named Canon Dr Paula Gooder, a New Testament theologian, teased out various aspects of the prayer – describing it as the 'framework for prayer' that Jesus gave us. She went through it line by line – I liked her take on 'daily bread' – 'what we need to flourish'. The line about forgiveness she described as 'the scariest line in all of the teaching of Jesus'. When she found someone about to pray that she felt like saying to them: 'Are you sure you want to pray that?' She linked the line about temptation with the temptations of Jesus in the desert – the reading from last Sunday's Gospel. She explained how the more typically Anglican ending 'For thine is the kingdom...' was a 4th Century addition.



Canon Dr Paula Gooder

Students at the college were asked about their favourite lines from the Our Father, and this included touching contributions from a former soldier, a woman who had undergone cancer treatment, and a woman that had been a young carer for her ill mother. These people were well grounded. Sean Fletcher also interviewed champion boxer Mark Prince who had to learn a lot about forgiving trespasses when her son Kiyon Prince was stabbed to death outside his school when trying to protect friends. He now

does life and sports coaching for young people in a boxing club. As he preached the theology, his humanity suddenly stopped him in his tracks and reduced him to tears – Fletcher himself was also reduced to tears – it was a most unexpected and touching moment.

I thought all the songs in the show would be different musical versions of the Lord's Prayer, but I thought it was a lost opportunity when that didn't happen. However, there were some noteworthy versions – e.g. a beautiful version in Syriac, a language close to what

Jesus would have spoken, from the choir of a Syrian Orthodox Church – the Church of St Lazarus in Bournville. Lucy Grimble sang a soulful modern version, folk-rock style, from one of the Spring Harvest Festivals. Of the other songs, I was impressed by 'Turn Your Eyes' from the Guildhall in Derry and a version of 'Nearer My God to Thee' from the well-known boys' choir Libera.

Continuing on the prayer theme there was a cheerful item about the Poor Clares community in Ennis on **Our Divine Sparks** (RTÉ Radio 1, Friday). Presenter Dearbhail McDonald said they were the longest surviving religious community in Ireland and said she was lucky to have been educated by them. Being an enclosed order, she said they had left the outside world behind, but they were certainly very conscious of it, and engaged with it through prayer, intercession and listening to the people who came knocking on their door.

Reporter Siofra Mulqueen spoke with Sr Bernadine and Sr Gabrielle about life in the enclosed and they made it really attractive! Both were in the order for around 60 years, but they sounded so young and enthusiastic. They outlined their life of prayer, silence, meditation, chores and rec-

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### PATRICK'S PEAK: AN IRISH PILGRIMAGE

EWTN Sunday March 16, 4pm, also Thursday March 20, 9am

Take a prayerful pilgrimage along Ireland's scenic west coast as Bob Dolan follows St Patrick's path up the famous Croagh Patrick to ask God's blessing for his work establishing the Irish Catholic Church.

#### THE PRIESTS: FAITH AND FAME

BBC One NI Sunday March 16, 7pm

Frs Martin and Eugene O'Hagan and Fr David Delargy and the record executives who signed them reveal the real story of how The Priests were discovered and catapulted to fame.

#### PATRICK - A SLAVE TO IRELAND

RTE One St Patrick's Day 7pm, BBC One NI 10.40pm, BBC Two NI Thursday 20, 7pm

The story of St Patrick, his extraordinary mission from Roman Britain to Ireland and how he spread the Christian faith, 1,500 years ago. New RTÉ documentary directed by Ruán Magan. (BBC Title: St Patrick - Born in Britain Made in Ireland)

reation. Both had enjoyed the outside world but were obviously drawn to a different life. One said she found 'the ground in this place was very solid'. Interestingly they found more people coming to their doors for help in the light of the recent wars.

In that context **Sunday Morning Live** (BBC One, Sunday) asked; 'Is peace at any price better than no peace?' With key negotiations due this week it was a timely discussion. All contributors wanted peace, for the killing to stop, but differed some-

what on what shape that peace might take. There was a consciousness of the dangers of 'appeasement', a fear of 'capitulation' and 'aggression rewarded', a desire for a 'just peace', a 'durable peace' and 'reparatory justice'. As often there was a dichotomy between 'principle and practice', and a suggestion towards the end from one contributor that in the short term it would be desirable to have 'an enforced ceasefire with security guarantees'.

Such is the vocabulary of peace-making.

# Music

Pat O'Kelly



## First Wagner mature opera lands in Dublin



The Flying Dutchman

Irish National Opera (INO) returns to An Bord Gais Energy Theatre for four performances of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* on March 23, 25, 27 and 29. As it has been a while since any of the composer's operas have been seen here these performances by INO are welcome.

The *Flying Dutchman* is the earliest of what one might call Wagner's mature operas and it was first produced at the Hoftheater in Dresden on January 2 1843. Wagner conducted the premiere and the piece was relatively well received. He was delighted with the soprano Wilhelmina Schröder-Devrient whose singing he called 'magnificent' but was

less enamoured with the baritone Michael Wächter in the title role.

Wagner was somewhat harsh in his comments when referring to Wächter's 'distressing corpulence, his broad fat face, the extraordinary movements of his arms and legs, which he managed to make look like mere stumps, that drove my passionate Senta to despair'. Neither was Madame Schröder-Devrient (Senta) all that pleased with Herr Wächter. The *Flying Dutchman* had only four performances in Dresden and was not revived there until 1865.

However, it was taken up by several other German theatres and was soon pro-

duced in a number of opera houses across Europe. The *Flying Dutchman* arrived in London in 1870 when it was the first of Wagner's stage works to be produced in Britain. It was sung in Italian, as was the case with its American premiere in Philadelphia in 1876.

Wagner was keen to have the opera performed without intervals but Dresden was adamantly against the idea and *The Flying Dutchman* had to wait until 1901 to be given as the composer intended in a production by his widow Cosima in Bayreuth. However, in that form it runs for a continuous two and a half hours and most houses are happy to leave it

in three acts of manageable length with intermissions.

The INO cast is being led by Hawaiian-born baritone Jordan Shanahan (must be Irish blood somewhere along the line) who has been carving a niche for himself with his charismatic interpretations of dramatic roles. He made his professional debut at the Natchez Opera Festival in the USA in 2002.

His repertoire is wide-ranging moving with ease from the bel canto through the romantic to the contemporary. Wagner roles list high among his achievements. Jordan Shanahan now lives in Switzerland.

Northern Ireland soprano

Giselle Allen, who has garnered a reputation for her dramatic presence and who has established a versatile career with leading opera houses and orchestras, returns to INO to undertake the role of Senta.

Her career highlights to date include the title role in *Elektra* for INO, Marie in *Wozzeck* for Canadian Opera, Miss Jessel in *The Turn of the Screw* and Ellen Orford in *Peter Grimes* in a number of European productions.

Gisela Allen works regularly with several conducting luminaries not least Sir Simon Rattle, Sir Mark Elder, Marin Alsop and Gianandrea Noseda.

# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Letter from America St Patrick and the Irish in Savannah, Georgia

Felix M Larkin

**O**n the last Sunday in February, I attended Mass at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Savannah, Georgia. I was visiting that city to attend the 2025 national meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies. The cathedral is sumptuously decorated, and inevitably that distracted me from my prayers.

Among the many beautiful things in the cathedral that I noticed was a stained glass window depicting St Patrick preaching to King Laoghaire. There is also a large statue of Ireland's national saint in the porch of the cathedral.

I should not have been surprised by these discoveries. Savannah is a very Irish-American city, though we in Ireland are less aware of its Irish connections than we are of the Irish influence in New York, Boston, Chicago and the other 'Yankee' cities of the North. We are perhaps less willing to recognise the Irish Diaspora of the 'Deep South' – the old Confederacy, with its shameful history of slavery.

Yet Savannah boasts the second-largest St Patrick's Day celebration in North America – second only to New York – with a parade that winds through most of the city's many downtown squares.

They don't dye the Savannah River green, but the city does dye the water in its iconic Forsyth Park fountain green. The fountain is the best known landmark of the city. Another park in the city is named for Robert Emmet and has a memorial to the Irish in the form of a stone Celtic cross.

### Colony

The Irish began arriving in Savannah on some of the very first ships bringing settlers to the new colony of Georgia in 1734. There was a significant



A window dedicated to the memory of St Patrick in the old Deep South.

influx of Irish before the Great Famine to work on building canals and railroads across Georgia in the 1830s and 1840s.

Even greater numbers of Irish came in the wake of the Famine. Research conducted by Georgia Southern University indicates that by 1860 as many as one in three white households in Savannah comprised Irish immigrants. The first official celebration of St Patrick's Day in Savannah was in 1824.

**“Moss hangs in profusion from the branches of the trees, creating an almost spectral ambiance in the squares”**

Savannah is a very pretty city, with many beautifully restored eighteenth-century mansions. The streets are laid out in a classic grid pattern and

interspersed with a myriad of small squares with mature trees and monuments or water features.

The most common tree in Savannah is the southern live oak – an evergreen native to the south-eastern United States – and it provides the perfect habitat for Spanish moss to thrive. Moss hangs in profusion from the branches of the trees, creating an almost spectral ambiance in the squares.

### Ghost story

Savannah is, of course, the setting for a real-life ghost story. John Berendt's *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, published to great acclaim in 1994, is a rich, quirky portrait of the city. Its focus turns eventually to the shooting dead of Danny Hansford in Savannah in 1981 and the saga of Jim Williams' arrest and four trials for his murder, ending in his eventual acquittal.

Williams was one of the most prominent residents of Savannah. The shooting hap-



A perhaps premature monument to American freedom in Savannah park

pened in the mansion that was his home. The house had been owned previously by the Mercer family – the family of the famed American songwriter, Johnny Mercer. The annual St Patrick's Day parade in Savannah features briefly in the book, in chapter 19.

Given its Irish heritage, Savannah was a most appropriate location for the annual meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies. It is the premier gathering of Irish Studies scholars in North America, multi-disciplinary but with an emphasis on literature and history. A scattering of Irish-based scholars also attend each year. Apart from the opportunity it gives scholars to present their work to their peers and get some informed feedback, it is a wonderful networking opportunity for scholars at all stages in their careers.

This year it also gave me an opportunity to test first-hand how Americans are reacting to the already-controversial second Trump presidency. Obviously, those attending an academic conference are not a representative sample of the US population. Nevertheless, the mood among those I met was interesting. I detected a quiet, subterranean unease about Trump.



Fountain in Forsyth Parks in the city of Savannah.

Nobody was being very vocal about their concerns, but nobody was denying genuine concern.

In one of the beautiful squares in Savannah, I found an ornamental seat just recently – indeed, prematurely – erected by the Society of the Sons of the

American Revolution “celebrating 250 years of American freedom, 1776–2026”.

It seems to me that celebration is problematic in present circumstances. Will “American freedom” survive under Trump for one more year? Sadly, I think the jury is out on that.

**“In one of the beautiful squares in Savannah, I found an ornamental seat just recently – indeed, prematurely – erected by the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution ‘celebrating 250 years of American freedom, 1776–2026’”**

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.

# Irish saints and the making of Irish culture



Ireland's rock of ages: the traditional grave of St Patrick in Downpatrick, Co. Down.

**A Dictionary of Irish Saints, Second Edition,** by Pádraig Ó Riain (Four Courts Press, €65.00 / £55.00)

Peter Costello

This is a new edition of an important, indeed for some purposes, essential book, which was warmly welcomed by *The Irish Catholic* when it was first published back in 2011. At that time I wrote that this was a "simply splendid book" which "could not be recommended highly enough," as it provided "an almost complete Irish hagiography".

This second edition is not a mere matter of a few cosmetic alterations, as is so often the case with new editions. In fact it is the result of a resolute course of research that began as soon as the first edition appeared, the author making special preparations to note the results of new material and ideas, as well as such corrections and additions as were suggested to him.

Before noting what has been done to make the book even more valuable, I would like to emphasise a matter of importance which should not be overlooked by the general reader.

## Culture

The lives of the Irish saints that began to be written in the centuries after the general adoption of Christianity in Ireland in the fifth century mark an important stage in the development of our island culture. They mark, indeed, the true beginning of the Irish literary tradition as we know it.

Ireland before Christianity was an oral culture, it had no writings, everything that ought to be remembered was committed to memory. This oral culture continued of course through the following centuries. But once the Irish began to create books something new began, a literary tradition that continued to this very day. What needed to be remembered was, hopefully, committed to writing.

**“Even the young and brightest star whose genius is being praised in other papers this week is conscious of those 1500 years of tradition in some little way”**

It is hardly surprising this being so that materials from these centuries was made use of by many modern Irish writers. I have in mind *The Bright Temptation* by Austin Clarke (1932), Flann O'Brien's *Swim-Two Birds* (1939), *The Unfortunate Furse* (1946) and its sequel by Mervyn Wall, and perhaps by a liberal extension, *The Holy Sinner* (1951) by Thomas Mann.

The interest in Early Christian Ireland has declined in recent decades, as Irish writing in English at least has become ever more a part of the Anglo-American literary sphere. But even the young and brightest star whose genius is being praised in

other papers this week is conscious of those 1500 years of tradition in some little way. For once the Irish started writing books they have never ceased!

The original edition of Professor Ó Riain's book ran to some 660 pages. The second to 683 - a mere 23 pages it might seem. Yet this has meant small changes throughout the whole text, largely it seems in refinements of interpretation.

Living as I do in Donnybrook I turned naturally to see what was now to be said about the saints of that parish. Ó Riain in this case has found little enough, beyond the association in Norman times of St Beagnad of Kilbegnet with the place as a patron.

## Tradition

Local tradition, however, claimed that the place is Domhnach Broc, the church of Broc, a holy lady whose well used to be pointed out in the grounds of a large house at the bottom of Eglinton Road. During recent developments this was rubbed out, which led to protests, after which the developer "restored" a well to please the locals. This well, a dry one, is not on the correct site at all.

All of this just goes to show that shroud of misty piety that surrounds so many local "saints". With these, scholarship has difficulties. The materials to unravel the matter simply do not exist. But Dublin is a special case being too well settled by Vikings,

Normans and English to have any real traditions such as these pages well document from elsewhere.

**“This book is already established as an essential resource for local historians”**

The twenty six pages of sources gives the reader a vivid impression of just how large the records are. He alludes to earlier compilers, such as Colgan and others. Of these industrious Canon of Hanlon of Sandymount was the most industrious, for he was also interested in folklore, and topography. He engaged artists and engravers to embellish his pages with vignettes of many places associated with local saints which remained of the highest value.

(One still has to wonder, though, what actually became of those manuscript pages of the November and December volumes of his series which he never got to compete, let alone publish. They disappeared into oblivion on his death and seem never to have been rediscovered.)

This book is already established as an essential resource for local historians. Their continuing research may, by some stroke of luck, akin perhaps to the recovery of the Derrynaflan Chalice, make further discoveries of sources as yet unknown. There is never an end to research once begun.

## Living - and learning - from the real world



A seeker of the truth finds what he needs in the mess of life.

**A Holy Mess: Making the Most of Our Misfortunes,** by Donagh O'Shea (Dominican Publications, €14.99 / £12.50)

Peter Costello

I was only a few pages into this excellent book when I came upon a passage discussing the 1951 catechism, so well known to an older generation. From time to time efforts are made by well meaning but (so O'Shea thinks) misguided efforts to get it back into circulation for a younger generation.

He has good reason for this view, which he outlines in an early section of his book called 'God is Watching You'. Recently he looked into that catechism. He found it very "rules oriented".

There was, for instance, no mention in the catechism of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12), a central presentation of what Jesus taught. He went further and read through the old text and found to his astonishment that the word "love" appears nowhere in it. "Nowhere did it say God loves us, much less that God is love."

With a void where the heart should be, how could it be a framework of the faith. The result was that a generation of Irish children "bracketed God out of their real lives".

In this book he seeks to redirect people into more fruitful ways of life and love. The material is laid out over some ten chapters making use of queries addressed to the author, from real people we are to assume. They present him with a series of problems or cruxes which will be for the most part familiar one way or another to all of us.

But the answers will be quite unfamiliar I suspect, for O'Shea ranges freely and insightfully over centuries of what might be called spiritual writings, but which are in fact manuals for life. We are encouraged to see in our misfortunes, whatever they are, a new way opening up: *doras feasa fiafrai*, as used

to be said in Gaelic, perhaps paraphrased by Joyce that an error in life can be "a portal of discovery".

This is exactly right. The rest of the book sets out to explore another path, or rather paths, for the book is filled with a plentitude of voices from all ages from Evagarius Ponticus and Cassian to the Zen poet Buson (d. 1784), one of whose haikus is quoted: butterfly asleep, folded on the temple bell - the bronze gong booms.

But to return to his central image of mess. We all live in a mess, especially I am afraid some classes of literary people (like the man in the image here) are surrounded by "good reads". It is all a mess, yet these things by their very presence present to the writer a multitude of different views on which the imagination, and the spirit can thrive.

O'Shea he quotes a remark by Johann Tauler, a friend of Meister Eckhart: "When we have gone into our when we have searched for god in the depths of our souls, God comes and searches for us and ransacks our house... and when I say that God seeks us in our house and ransacks it I mean that in this house, in the depths of our souls, we are utterly deprived of all the ideas and conceptions of god that we ever had before."

We are to understand the word mess in the title in a very literal sense. The man in the image is up to his oxters in the mess, and yet and yet... He has found in one book just what he has been seeking and becomes absorbed in it. He has found what he needs in the mess.

This book is quite simply, a book which everyone should read and gain from, for there is something interesting, illuminating, perhaps even life changing on every page of Donagh O'Shea's *A Holy Mess*.

But when you do, think about that butterfly aroused from its peaceful rest unexpectedly by a call to the faithful.

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## The Irish Catholic

### PREPAID CLASSIFIED AD COUPON

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 Phone: 01 687 4095

Number of insertions: \_\_\_\_\_ weeks

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For over 130 years, *The Irish Catholic* has been a voice of hope and inspiration for Catholics in Ireland.



For more information about leaving a legacy to *The Irish Catholic*, phone 01 687 4028 or email [info@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:info@irishcatholic.ie)

# The Irish Catholic

## Crossword

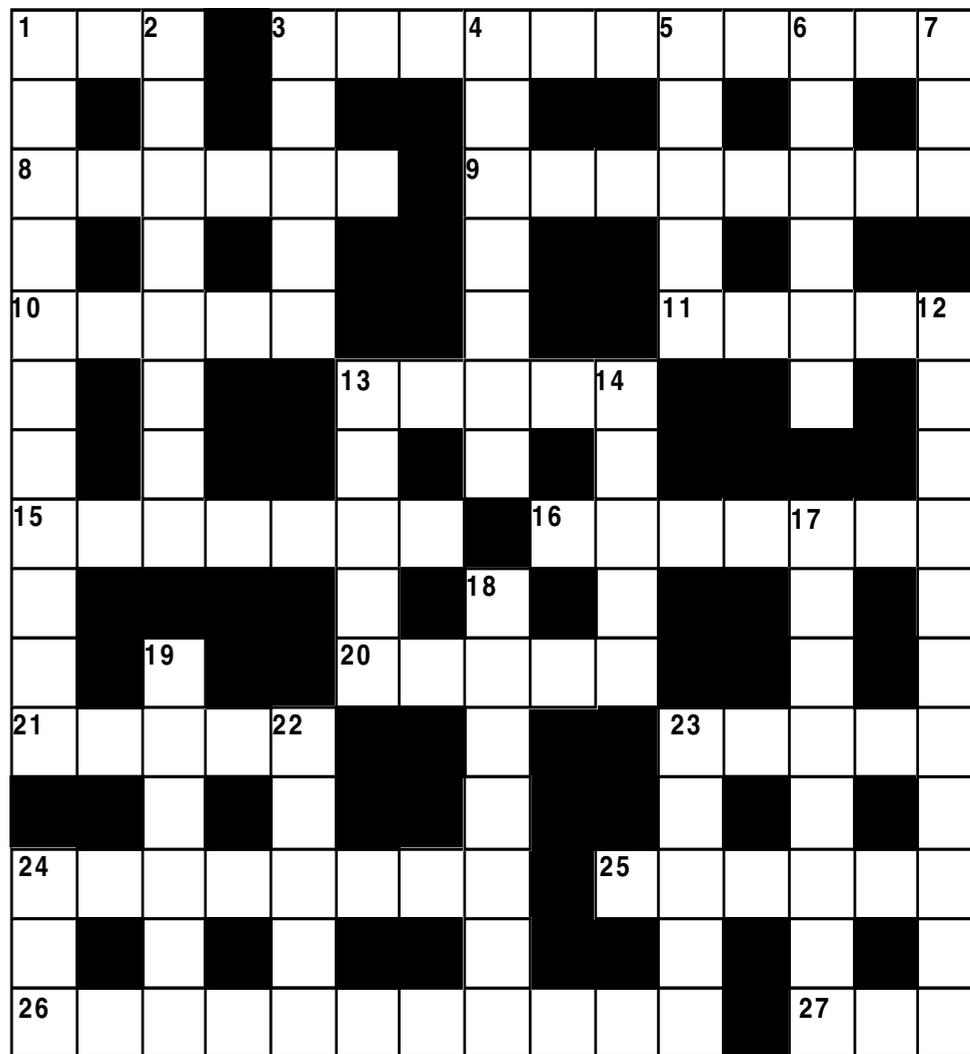
Gordius 706

### Across

- 1 Professional charge (3)
- 3 Defuse and sort out a dispute (5,3,3)
- 8 Staggered (6)
- 9 Unguent (8)
- 10 The 'ticker' (5)
- 11 The Greek underworld; Hell (5)
- 13 Ski-slope (5)
- 15 Renovate, give back (7)
- 16 Of fewer years (7)
- 20 Hasten (5)
- 21 Type of woven fabric (5)
- 23 Pitching golf club (5)
- 24 Good-looking (8)
- 25 Container of berries for sale (6)
- 26 Yielded (11)
- 27 Feel unwell (3)

### Down

- 1 Source of water to combat conflagrations (4,7)
- 2 Green gemstones (8)
- 3 Play unfairly, hood-wink (5)
- 4 Do away with (7)
- 5 Thumb a lift (5)
- 6 List of topics for discussion (6)
- 7 Decompose (3)
- 12 Relating to a significant religious occasion (11)



- 13 Veranda (5)
- 14 Black wood (5)
- 17 Shrub with large white or yellow flowers (7)
- 18 Go ahead of another (8)
- 19 Victor, champion (6)
- 22 Fine cotton thread (5)
- 23 Serious injury (5)
- 24 Possesses (3)

## SOLUTIONS, MARCH 6

### GORDIUS No. 705

#### Across

- 1 Stained glass window 7 Act 9 Cute 11 Thou 14 Geese 15 Pulse 16 Aged 18 Apple 21 Elite 22 Razor 23 Skein 24 Body 25 Debit 26 Tally 29 Aida 33 Knives 34 Atom 36 Dye 37 Dessert spoon

#### Down

- 1 Sou 2 Amen 3 Newt 4 Dance 5 Looks 6 Sash 8 Thunderstorm 9 Clapperboard 12 Allied 13 Ceres 14 Grace 17 Gazebo 19 Penny 20 Erode 27 Aunts 28 Liver 30 Deed 31 Isis 32 NATO 35 Own

## Sudoku Corner 574

### Easy

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

### Hard

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

### Last week's Easy 573

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

### Last week's Hard 573

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

Notebook

Fr Bernard Cotter



# Readers give their advice for Good Masses

At the end of last year, I wrote a piece here on the Mass, entitled, provocatively, 'How NOT to say Mass'. I invited readers to respond. It turned out that many of you had your own ideas on what priests should not do.

It makes sense that readers would have comments to make. You are Ireland's faithful Mass attenders. Many of you felt priests should more often canvass your views.

A number of readers commented on the haste with which Masses are celebrated. Barra from Blackrock noted that in his church the priest makes the sign of the Cross before the congregation kneels after the opening hymn. Malachy from Antrim observes priests who hold up the host saying "Behold the Lamb of God" – and have consumed the host before people have a chance to make the reply. At times he feels that priests come across as if Mass was just another chore: "A little less haste would give us time to digest the meaning of the Gloria, Creed and Sanctus. The Our Father often gets the 'Ascot derby treatment'. Just give us time to say the words in a more prayerful way."

Barra had other interesting comments: After Communion, prayers should be directed at Jesus, he suggested, adding "Mary won't mind, I'm sure". He would also like to see a moment of reflection when the tabernacle door has been closed.



John from Leitrim feels the Liturgy of the Word has expanded and that of the Eucharist has contracted, and suggests there be no prayers of the faithful if there is no one to read them. Generally he would prefer less commentary, more silence and fewer words.

### Liturgy

Murt from Clare feels that at 86 he may be getting a little cranky. But what really annoys him is how the readers say (shout) "Response" after each verse of the psalm. He finds it

irritating (as do I: all readers have to do is pause and look up, and people respond).

**“For me and everyone in my family, the first readings mean absolutely nothing: drop them!”**

Patricia from Co. Clare would love if priests would give space for the Sign of Peace. She comments: "This always brings smiles to people's faces and helps foster a sense of community."

Aidan from Galway feels more use should be made of multimedia presentations on key messages, a story-telling approach. He acknowledges that religious knowledge

among lay people is skimpy, at best. He adds a radical message too: "For me and everyone in my family, the first readings mean absolutely nothing: drop them!"

### Quietness

A fellow County Cork parishioner commends a little quietness during Mass: "Silence is the most underused facility by our priests. This needs no research, just pauses at the right time." He adds: "We don't want what was on the TV news last night; we come to Mass to get away from all that."

He has a word for funeral Mass celebrants too: "Don't canonise the deceased, it can be embarrassing for all concerned. Sometimes we wonder did we come to the wrong funeral."

We have all been there.

### Brave and honest Bishop Willie

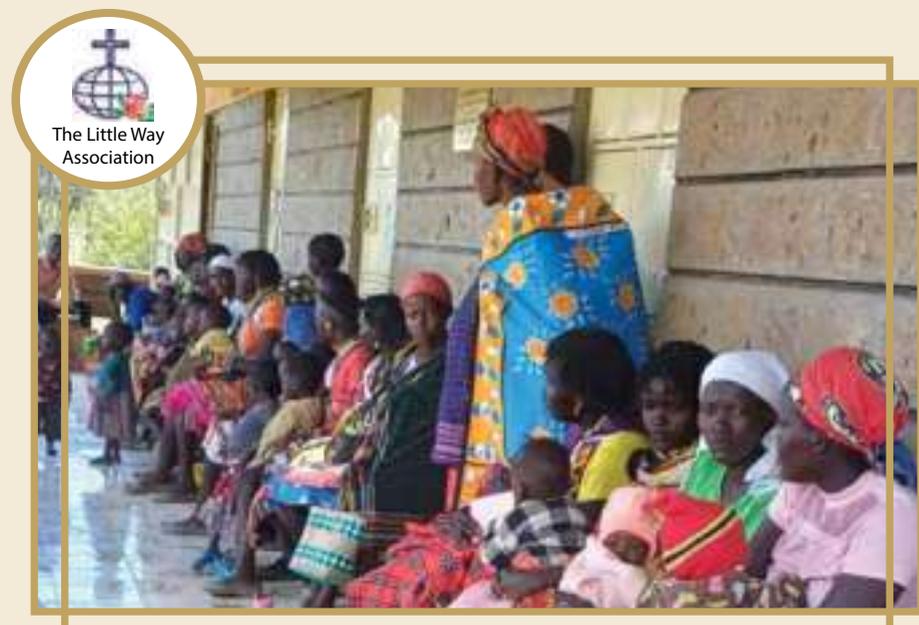
In February, Ireland mourned the loss of the Bishop Willie Walsh, who died suddenly in Ennis at the age of 90. This native of Killaloe Diocese later became bishop of the same Diocese, before such appointments became uncommon. His being a local did not prevent him from being brave and honest, a real prophet when episcopal prophets were rare. His motto summed him up in many eyes: 'Cineáltas Chríost' (the gentleness of Christ). One of his priests remarked: "It was a privilege to have known him."

May he rest in peace (and as our Jewish brethren add) "and rise in glory".

### Never short of a good meal...

I wrote about non-local bishops being appointed to dioceses last month; it brought a correspondence from people unhappy with such impositions. One wrote that his bishop seemed to have no interest in getting to know the people of his new diocese, not even its volunteers. He sought advice.

I recommended honesty. The typical Irish definition of a bishop was one who would never be short of a good meal – and would never hear the truth again. I suggested it might be time to drop the second half of that maxim: the flock have to bear witness to the truth too.



## Sister Hellen appeals for urgent Little Way help for the hungry and sick in East Pokot, Kenya

We have received an urgent request for help from Sr Hellen Chepkirui, Servants of the Sacred Heart in Tangelbei, Kenya, whom we have helped in the past to provide vital aid for school children and groups of people living in poverty and disease. Sister writes to The Little Way Association: "Without your kindness, we would never have been able to save lives and protect families. The East Pokot region is still facing a severe crisis. Terrible drought combined with extreme poverty make it harder for families to afford food and healthcare. Our dispensary is the only source of affordable healthcare services for the local people. Among the most affected groups we target are the children, HIV-positive mothers, TB, diabetes and cancer patients, and those with chronic illnesses. We also target the neglected vulnerable elderly and those who live with various forms of disabilities.

### THE SITUATION IS DIRE AND WE HAVE RUN OUT OF FUNDS

"I have been praying to God to take care of this situation because we have run out of funds. We urgently need medicines in order to help many suffering from water-borne illnesses and also TB and malaria.

### PLEASE WILL YOU HELP SR HELLEN?

"Our founder Father Yermo left us with the motto: God Will Provide. We believe that He will inspire you and your kind benefactors to enable us to help the increased numbers of children, women and men relying on us for relief food and healthcare."

**If you can, please send a donation to The Little Way Association, in order that we can continue to help Sr Hellen and the many other Sisters in Kenya who turn to us for help.**



### LENT WITH ST THERESE

In 1893, St Therese of Lisieux wrote to her sister Celine:

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

**The three pillars of Lent are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. The Catechism says: "Giving alms to the poor is a witness to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God."**

**In Lent, we can serve Christ and help the destitute with our almsgiving**

The Little Way Association uses the world's network of missionaries to help those in direst need. Priests, Sisters and Brothers work in some of the world's poorest areas and in political trouble-spots. Our policy is never to deduct anything from donations earmarked for the relief of poverty or for missionary work.

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