

# The Irish Catholic

## POPE FRANCIS, THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND WHAT LIES AHEAD

Justin Robinson OSB  
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Thursday, May 8, 2025

€3.00 (Stg £2.70)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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# Pray for him and for the Church – come Holy Spirit

## Editorial

The death of Pope Francis in the Octave of Easter while the Church was celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, touched many people – even people who find themselves far from the Church.

Francis' final poignant social media post, just hours before breathing his last, that "we are made for life, not death" will pique those who want to ask the deeper questions about who we are, why we are here and where we are going.

Today's post-Christian secular western world is powered by capitalism on steroids. We are told that our goal in life is to consume, spend and enjoy ourselves rather than thinking about anything more deeply or taking life too seriously.

Yet even a glance at the world we have created in the west tells a sad tale of loneliness, depression, decreased mental wellness and more

and more people who say they don't feel like they quite fit in.

In many poorer parts of the world, Church leaders look at the prosperity of the west and long to see their own people lifted out of poverty. But they also see that the culture of unreflecting that often accompanies economic growth takes a heavy toll on people.

Just eight times in the last 100 years members of the Sacred College of Cardinals have gathered to elect a Successor to St Peter, the man who will become Supreme Pastor of the Universal Church and the Servant of the Servants of God.

The room in which the new Pope vests to give his traditional blessing is known as the room of tears as many new Popes weep at the enormity of their task. And yet they know, even when it can seem that the Lord is asleep, God does not abandon his people.

The papacy stands as

a sign of continuity in a world that is ever-changing. And the papacy must also adapt itself to that changing world. Just over a hundred years when the 53 cardinal electors met in the Sistine Chapel in 1922 to elect Pope Pius XI, there were around 283 million Catholics in the world. Today, there are more than 1.4 billion – and the Pope must be able to speak to all of them.

The Church is not built on the rock of Peter's faith, but on Peter himself despite his faults and failings.

If one raises one's eyes as one leaves St Peter's Basilica in Rome by the central doors, one is struck by an image from the Gospel of Peter walking on water. Even through the basilica is dedicated to honouring St Peter and stands as a reminder of the power of his successors, there is also this reminder that Peter is dependent on Christ and that the promise of *non praevalerunt* is not the same as an assurance

that all will be well at all times for the Church.

The mosaic was initially commissioned when the Popes had fled Rome for Avignon, due to their inability to control the city. Our faith always needs to be marked with a realistic humility, along with the serene reassurance that if we genuinely place ourselves in Christ's hands (rather than relying on our own notions and self-confidence), then all will be well.

And, in contrast to the other 11 disciples, at least Peter has the confidence to step out onto the lake, even though he was running the risk of being in over his head, the others prefer to remain in the boat.

The next Pope must be a man of unshakable faith who will not be content to remain in the boat but will take Christ at his word and step into the unknown.

As *The Irish Catholic* went to print this week, the mem-

bers of the College of Cardinals were preparing to enter the Sistine Chapel and swear before Almighty God in the sight of that majestic-yet-sobering fresco of *The Last Judgement* that they would choose the man the Church needs. By the time you read this editorial, we may indeed have a new Pope.

Whoever he is, the challenges remain the same: he must be a deeply spiritual man as comfortable in this world as he is in pointing to the world that is to come. The Church is not an ethical framework, it is not an NGO, it is not a self-help committee, it has a divine mission from God himself to make the Gospel known and invite the women and men of every generation into relationship with God.

You can't please everyone as Pope. St John Paul II didn't, Benedict XVI certainly didn't, and Pope Francis didn't either. The new Pope must be a man who can speak to a world marked by war, fam-

ine, injustice, alienation and isolation about the Carpenter of Nazareth whose life, death and resurrection has transformed human history in every generation and can so do again. It's not so much a case of liberal or conservative, progressive or orthodox – but of being a credible witness to God in the modern world.

In 1979, the great St John Paul II became the first Successor of St Peter to set foot on Irish soil. His clear Slavic voice as he stood at the ancient monastic site of Clonmacnois resonates today as it did then: "Never forget the wonderful boast and commitment made by St Columban to Pope Boniface IV in Rome: 'We Irish are disciples of Saints Peter and Paul; we hold unbroken that Catholic Faith which we first received from you'".

As we greet the new Pope, let us pray for him and for the Church – Come Holy Spirit.

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# Assisted suicide is a 'race to the bottom' – Maria Steen

Chai Brady

Modern culture is being increasingly consumed by what St John Paul II called a "culture of death", according to Maria Steen, barrister and columnist with *The Irish Catholic*.

Speaking in Dublin on Saturday about *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical on the Gospel of Life, at an event hosted by the Knights of St Columbanus – Ms Steen criticised the spread of euthanasia and assisted suicide in Western societies.

Citing the encyclical's theological and philosophical foundation, Ms Steen said the Church remains a defender of life from conception to natural death and "speaks truth to power" and that the former pope highlighted "how the threats to the elderly and

the sick are aggravated by a cultural climate which fails to see any value or meaning in suffering".

Ms Steen said that Pope John Paul II anticipated many of the societal shifts now facing Ireland and beyond. "He identified how practices like euthanasia would cease to be seen as evils to be tolerated and instead would be demanded as rights and even celebrated," she said, adding that this is rooted in moral relativism and an abandonment of the transcendent view of human dignity.

"This is exactly what we have seen happening in our own country over the past 10 years. And once it starts, the pace gets even faster. It becomes a race to the bottom, a race to depravity... When a sense of God is lost so also a sense of man

is lost. Without the Creator, the creature becomes unintelligible. Man simply becomes just another organism on the face of the Earth. He loses his transcendent character. No longer sees his life as something sacred that has been entrusted to his responsibility.

"Life just becomes a thing which man claims as his own property to do with as he will. When reference to God is removed, everything he has created becomes profoundly distorted without him. This eclipse of God and man leads to practical materialism, individualism, utilitarianism, and hedonism. And in this atmosphere, it becomes simply impossible to make any sense of suffering, despite the fact that none of us escapes it," she said.



Barrister and columnist with *The Irish Catholic* Maria Steen answers questions following her talk in Dublin on Saturday about *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical on the Gospel of Life. Photo: Chai Brady

## Dublin parish to honour Daniel O'Connell at 250th anniversary Mass

Staff reporter

St Andrew's Parish, Westland Row, will mark the 250th anniversary of Daniel O'Connell's birth with a special Anniversary Mass this Sunday, May 11, at 10am. The Mass will be celebrated by Bishop Paul Dempsey, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin.

Known as 'The Liberator', O'Connell was a driving force behind Catholic Emancipation and one of the most influential Irish political figures of the 19th century. A parishioner of St Andrew's, O'Connell played a decisive role in the construction of the neo-classical church that still stands today.

"O'Connell's vision and devotion left a lasting spiritual and civic legacy," a parish spokesperson said.

The politician's fingerprints remain visible in the parish, from the church he helped build to the painting he donated—The Martyrdom of St Thomas à Becket—which still hangs inside. His personal devotion to Becket, a symbol of Church-State integrity, underpinned his political ideals.

For St Andrew's, the annual Mass is a chance to recall a man who, in life and death, helped shape modern Irish Catholic identity.

## Irish parish priest delivers cheque to the Holy Land

Renata Steffens

The Parish Priest of Kingscourt, Co. Cavan delivered a cheque of almost €28,000 to Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem at a recent trip to the Holy Land. Also, on April 30, Fr Gerard McCormack said Mass in the empty tomb within The Church of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem.

The money, which sums

€27,730 was accepted by Bishop William Shomali, auxiliary bishop to Cardinal Pizzaballa and will be split in between four projects the Cardinal supports.

Fr McCormack told *The Irish Catholic*, in meeting Bishop Shomali, "he acknowledged the great generosity of the Kingscourt Parish faith community and mentioned how it is a true model of synodality. Bishop Shomali was joined by Sr Sineád Martin, a native

of Cavan town, who heads the English-speaking section of the Patriarchate at the meeting."

The Bishop also noted Fr McCormack "along with Sr Consilio and Fr Dwayne had led over 23 consecutive pilgrimages to the Holy Land in recent years and hoped it may be possible to welcome pilgrims again from Ireland in solidarity with the Christian people of the Holy Land and walk, once again, in the footsteps of the Lord."

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

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

Printed by Webprint, Dublin.

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# Derry's Christian unity will endure despite political uncertainty – outgoing bishop

Chai Brady

The Bishop of Derry has expressed strong confidence that the spirit of ecumenical cooperation in Derry will continue long after his tenure, even as political debates surrounding a potential border poll and a united Ireland grow louder.

Having submitted his resignation in April upon turning 75, as required under Church law, Bishop McKeown remains in post while the global Church awaits the election of a new Pope following the death of Pope Francis. He said he is "very happy" to await that decision, and to see the strong inter-church relationships in Derry continue.

"Inter-church relations were very good long before Donal McKeown arrived, and I think they will be very good long after Donal McKeown leaves – it doesn't just depend on individuals," he said. "Personal

relationships are good here. Structurally, they're very good as well... there are structural as well as personal relationships in the city which have gone on for decades."

The bishop noted that Derry's Catholic community received "lovely correspondence" from other church leaders including Presbyterian, Methodist, and the Church of Ireland following the death of Pope Francis – a testament, he said, to the depth of local ecumenical goodwill.

While acknowledging that political tensions – including issues like Irish language signage and the prospect of constitutional change – remain present, Bishop McKeown warned against sectarianism being used as a political tool.

"One of the key elements about sectarianism is that it

flourishes when it suits someone to promote fear of diversity... you always look and see who's benefiting," he said.

He insisted that the Churches' role is to be "prophetic" in their unity and have a visible presence.

"Our job is to be visible, together, for as many things as we possibly can be. People are very gracious here. They recognise that there are different traditions, different histories – we share a lot in common," he said. "If we work together, we can actually build a great city here."

In the face of political division, Bishop McKeown believes the Churches must remain "critical friends" to the political establishment – united in their witness to "shared history and shared hopes for the future."

"I have every confidence it will continue," he said.

## WINNERS ANNOUNCED FOR THE EASTER BUMPER CROSSWORD

*The Irish Catholic* is pleased to announce the winners of our Easter Bumper Crossword competition, sponsored by Marian Pilgrimages. We received many submissions, but there could only be three winners.

**FIRST PRIZE:** A trip to Lourdes sponsored by Marian Pilgrimages – Joseph Fitzsimons from Navan, Co. Meath.

**SECOND PRIZE:** €100 – John Donovan from Dungarvan, Co. Waterford.

**THIRD PRIZE:** A digital subscription to *The Irish Catholic* – Anne Hearne from Mooncoin, Co. Kilkenny.

**Congratulations to all the winners, and thank you to everyone who participated!**



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# Papal Nuncio visits Lough Derg on the retreat season opening



Pilgrims entering the boat on the way to Station Island. Insert: Archbishop Montemayor is presented with a Lough Derg Penal Cross by Maureen Boyle as a gift to mark his visit to Lough Derg.

Renata Steffens

The Papal Nuncio to Ireland, Archbishop Luis Mariano Montemayor took part in a one-day retreat in preparation for Confirmations in Lough Derg on May 4. This was the official opening for the One-Day Retreat season in the pilgrim site for the Jubilee Year. Archbishop Montemayor was accompanied by the Deputy Head of Mission Msgr Patrick Zay Han and welcomed by Bishop of Clogher Larry Duffy and Prior Msgr La Flynn.

The Papal Nuncio was the main celebrant at Mass on the day, and "in a light-hearted moment before the final blessing of the Mass, his Excellency referred to how, as in Ireland, in his homeland (like the late Pope Francis, Nuncio Montemayor is Argentinian) there are warm traditions of devotion and pilgrimage," said Fr Flynn.

"However, one notable difference he has noticed is that Catholics in Ireland are not so enthusiastic about singing in church, so he said he would leave the Lough Derg pilgrims with that challenge, and they answered almost immediately with a rousing response on the recessional hymn *How Great Thou Art*," the Prior said.

"On the homeward boat journey, the Nuncio commented on the deep atmosphere of prayerfulness that he had sensed, and he wished Lough Derg well for its ministry of welcoming pilgrims of Hope in this Jubilee Year, along with Knock Shrine and Croagh Patrick its designated partners as national pilgrim destinations for Jubilee 2025."

Fr Flynn said the visitors "left with a Jubilee Pilgrim Passport bearing a Lough Derg stamp, and Msgr Patrick declared his intent on returning to undertake the traditional Three-Day Pilgrimage sometime over the coming months."

# Novena booklet art competition takes place in Down and Connor

Renata Steffens

Down and Connor Diocese is organising a competition to select the cover art for this year's Sacred Heart Novena booklet. All students from the diocese schools are able to participate and the prizes are £250 to the winner student, £250 to their school and their design printed on the booklet's cover. This is the second year of the novena and the first of the competition.

Fr Eddie McGee, Communications Officer for the diocese said, "Building upon the very high level of engagement with the novena across the diocese last year, Bishop Alan has announced a similar Novena to the Sacred Heart of Jesus this June 2025."

The competition seeks "to encourage schools to be part of this diocesan Novena. The competition is open to all schools. Schools are an integral part of the diocesan family, and this competition encourages all students to learn about the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to take part in this diocesan prayer initiative," he said.

A flyer about this Art Competition has been circulated to all schools across the diocese encouraging students to participate. This year's nine-day novena will take place from June 18 to 25, leading to the Feast of the Sacred Heart on June 27.

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# Thousands gather for 2025 March for Life

**Renata Milán Morales**

Thousands descended on Dublin for the 2025 March for Life held on May 5. The march started at 2pm from the Newman University Church and the speeches took place in Molesworth St, close to the Dáil. Despite the “skyrocketing” number of abortions happening, the March for Life witnessed crowds committed and caring for the cause.

Guest speakers included Senator Sarah O'Reilly of Aontú and Ruth O'Sullivan

from Cork, whose video about her abortion has 170,000 views.

Recently elected Senator Sarah O'Reilly stated that, “We must move beyond the present situation where those in power and sadly, many in the media, are acting like they're living in an alternative society, pretending that there's no downside to the new abortion law. Pretending that the abortion numbers are not skyrocketing.”

The organisers of the march explained that the focus of this year's march is

“Ireland's spiralling abortion numbers and the alarming new data on abortion trends based on information contained in replies to parliamentary questions.”

Senator Sarah O'Reilly highlighted the constant investment from the government to facilitate abortions, “I experienced profound sadness that my local constituency has begun gone to carry out abortions. It's the last of Ireland's 19 maternity hospitals to start doing so, and it broke my heart. In addition to the terrible loss of life

from the abortions that will take place, there are not sufficient freedom of conscience protections in place for doctors and other health care workers. You don't want to facilitate abortions.”

During her speech, Eilís Mulroy, Pro-Life Campaign CEO stated that “any society that seeks to call itself civilised must pursue policies that are built on true compassion and concern, not ideology, not politics, not cold indifference.”

See pages 20-21.

## Priest shocked by petrol bombs and graffiti at parochial house

**Pedro Esteve**

“This has been quite an ordeal and in the 50th year of my priesthood, it's the last thing you expect to happen,” said Fr Stephen Duffy PP of Ravensdale, Co. Louth, speaking to *The Irish Catholic* after his parochial house was targeted in back-to-back incidents over the weekend.

Petrol bombs were thrown at the house, damaging the exterior but fortunately not reaching the interior. The fire was quickly extinguished, and no one was injured. This incident followed

a previous one the night before, when ‘satanic’ graffiti was spray-painted on the front of the house.

In an interview with *The Argus*, Fr Duffy described being at home during both incidents, saying, “It's not a nice experience, something I would not wish on anyone.”

Gardai and Louth County Fire and Rescue responded swiftly, and a man in his 30s was arrested and charged in connection with the incidents, as well as a number of car damages in the Ravensdale area. The suspect is due to appear

in Drogheda District Court.

Despite the shock, Fr Duffy made it clear that the attacks were not a reflection of the parish or the community. “The parishioners have been wonderful. This was such a shock, especially given the lovely people I deal with every day,” he said.

Although the incidents disrupted Fr Duffy's pastoral duties, including a baptism and Mass, he remained focused on larger social issues. “A lot worse things happen, such as drug problems and reckless driving,” he remarked.

## Cork awakes hope in Connect 6 event

**Staff reporter**

An event aimed at those between the ages of 18 to 35 will be held in Cork on May 10. It will be the sixth time that this conference, which has seen hundreds from all over the country attending, will be held.

Speaking with Bishop Fintan Gavin of Cork and Ross he explained that, “The origi-

nal idea was to try and bring young people of faith together with their various charisms be them from parishes from different youth groups that were taking place in Cork.”

Connect is responding to the needs of the youth. “We ask the young people what they wanted. The organising group did a brainstorm about what the main topic will be. They came up with hope and

they talked about how challenging can be for a young person today to have hope: the levels of anxiety, the worries about kind of isolation and identity,” explained the bishop.

The event will welcome

Sr Mary Grace as the guest speaker. “Faith is something that helps you on your journey. It's a support. And when you see that articulated by young people for young people it all makes sense,” concluded Bishop Fintan Gavin.

## Trócaire's CEO Caoimhe de Barra set to step down

**Renata Steffens**

Trócaire's CEO Caoimhe de Barra is set to step down after nearly seven years in the position. She was appointed CEO in September 2018, 21 years after joining the organisation as a Campaigns Officer.

Speaking about her position to *The Irish Catholic* last December, Ms de Barra said the role taught her “courage”, which is important “when you're responsible” for the

decision taking in an organisation as big as Trócaire. During the past six years, the CEO learned how to take decisions “in order to protect people at their most vulnerable”.

The work Trócaire does “is about that human connection that [makes] people feel seen and heard as humans in their darkest times. That support is incredibly important”.

More information on Ms de Barra leaving her position and who will take the role to follow.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### 100th anniversary of St Thérèse's canonisation: novena and conference

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the canonisation of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. To commemorate this milestone, Human Life International (HLI) Ireland is hosting events in May.

From May 8th to 16th, a nightly novena will be prayed at 8 pm on YouTube and Facebook, with talks on St Thérèse's devotion to the Holy Face. The novena will include prayers from her Sanctuary in Lisieux, France.

On May 17th, HLI Ireland will hold a conference at the Talbot Hotel Stillorgan Road in Dublin, from 1:30 pm to 6 pm, featuring guest speaker Mary Jane Zuzolo, great-great-grandniece of Carmelite mystic Sr Marie of St Peter. The conference will be live-streamed, followed by a musical celebration and raffle.

Caoimhe Doyle of HLI Ireland noted, “St Thérèse is a saint for modern times, offering hope to those struggling with doubt and despair.”

For more details, email [sttherese100@gmail.com](mailto:sttherese100@gmail.com).

#### New children's grief space opens in Clane

Clane Parish celebrated the opening of a ‘Children's Grief Space’ on April 30

with blessing from Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty. The bishop also blessed the church bell, he said the church “never had a bell, so the blessing of the belfry was in many ways a conclusion of the building.”

Bishop Nulty said “the Children's Grief Space is a support service for school aged children and young people affected by loss through death. It provides a safe, supportive service for the young people and their families who are grieving. The service is provided by trained volunteers. The space is an initiative of Clane and Rathcoffey Parish.”

The bishop said, “it's critical that we create spaces like this in parishes to allow children to properly grieve”, and that “the service is advertised through the parish newsletter.”

The Children's Grief Space was established in October 2024, inspired by Limerick's Children's Grief Space whose founder Sr. Helen Culhane.

In his homily on the day, Bishop Nulty said that “healing takes time, it's not a single moment magic... The important thing is we journey with people, where they are at. We meet children where they are at.”

#### ‘Adopt a Cardinal’ while they select the new pope

Catholics from around the world are invited to pray for the College of Cardinals during the conclave which started yesterday, May 7. Over 400,000 faithful have joined in prayer through the website ‘Adopt a Cardinal’ ([praycardinal.com](http://praycardinal.com)).

By clicking a button, you will be randomly assigned a cardinal to pray for. “You'll receive information about your Cardinal and guidance on how to pray for them during this important time,” the websites read.

“The Cardinals need our prayers as they discern who will lead the Church. Your prayers provide spiritual support during this important process. By ‘adopting’ a specific Cardinal, you create a personal connection to the conclave and to the universal Church during this historic time,” it reads.

The website invites Catholics worldwide to join “in prayer, creating a beautiful tapestry of faith spanning across continents and cultures.”

### I place all my trust in thee...



Crowds gather at the Church of the Holy Child in Dublin to venerate the relics of St Margaret Mary Alacoque and St Claude la Colombière, on the first Friday of the Novena to the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. Mass was celebrated by Bishop Paul Dempsey.



# Did we odd bods know we were 'neurodiverse'?

I hadn't heard the word 'neurodiverse' until about a year ago, when a teacher friend mentioned the condition was increasing among school pupils. Since then, I've been aware of this widening diagnosis in children and adults. As I understand it, 'neurodiverse' basically means human brains function in different ways; but some people who are neurodiverse may have autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

It's now suggested that up to 20% of the population could be 'neurodiverse', and affected by one of these conditions.

Behaviour which might once have been seen as eccentric, a bit strange or awkward, is now more likely to have a clinical label attached to it. Indeed, I remember back



**Mary Kenny**

in the days of my youth, someone might be called 'odd', or described with the generally tolerant Irish phrase 'he's himself'.

Less tolerantly, perhaps, it might have been said of someone 'there's a want there', or that a person wasn't 'the full shilling'. Although much depended on context and even tone of voice.

But now, says Francesca Happé, professor of psychology at King's College, London, someone behaving in an unusual way is more likely to get a diagnosis which will often involve 'neurodiversity'. Diagnosis enhances tolerance and reduces stigma. It can help schools and other institutions to support young

people with a neurodiverse problem.

Definitions of conditions like autism have broadened in recent times – as well as greatly increasing in number. Once it was seen as quite a severe mental problem, notably in children. Now more older people have been found to be on the autistic spectrum – having successfully 'masked' their social difficulties or communication problems all their lives.

Yet Francesca Happé is not entirely sure that having a 'label' is always a good thing. Many conditions are on a spectrum, and don't necessarily need to be medicalised. Once people have a 'label' on their condition, they may view it as self-limiting – seeing themselves as psychologically disabled and unequal to life's everyday challenges.

These are questions I have frequently wrestled with, on a personal level. I have been sometimes obsessed with the idea that I had undiagnosed ADHD as a youngster. All the symptoms were present – compulsive fidgeting, ceaseless distraction, rash and reckless behaviour, inability to concentrate or follow instructions. Like those undiagnosed older autistic folk, I gradually learned to mask, and even control, these ADHD symptoms; and age abates all impulses. But would I have benefited from a neurodiverse diagnosis early in life? Would many others of an older generation?

The answer is – we cannot know.

It is surely a welcome development that individuals with a severe neurodiverse condition, as autism can be, are now properly diagnosed. Yet, for those of us who might just be 'on the spectrum' of a syndrome like ADHD, were we better off having to accept, like St Paul, the 'thorn in the flesh'? We learned to live with our eccentric brains, and maybe even to take comfort from Leonard Cohen's insight: "There's a crack in everything/That's how the light gets in."



Prof. Francesca Happé

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David Quinn, CEO, The Iona Institute

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When Anthony Albanese won the recent Australian election for his Labor Party, he declared effusively that Australia was "the greatest country in the world".

Oz is a jolly nice country, for those who like sport and sunshine and aren't scared of venomous snakes and the Sydney funnel-web spider (apparently the most dangerous in existence).

Objectively I'm not sure Down Under would be voted the greatest country in the world – but Mr Albanese is right to claim it as such, nevertheless. Every prime minister (and head of state) should consider their country the world's finest. It's called patriotism.

It's cheering to see that leaders on the liberal and left of politics, like Anthony Albanese, and Mark Carney in Canada, are now rediscovering patriotism. It's a natural reflex, and too often those who have voiced this sentiment have been disparaged as "far right". They're not, now!

Historian Padraic X. Scanlan has written a devastating new book on the Famine, entitled *Rot*. It highlights not only the catastrophic conditions which made the horrors of the 1840s almost inevitable, but the strong anti-Catholic bias with which British administrations then viewed the Irish people. This prejudice hindered, or even blindfolded, efforts to rescue the situation before the worst occurred.

So, it's interesting to observe now the last barriers against Catho-

lics being removed from the UK constitution: in April, Keir Starmer's government lifted the ban on Catholics being appointed as Lord High Commissioner of the Church of Scotland (Lady Elish Angiolini will take the post this month as the first Catholic to do so). It's suggested the next move could be annulling the Hanoverian ban on Catholics becoming monarch.

Catholic bishops have been repeatedly invited to take a seat in the House of Lords, but the Vatican has always ruled it out.



# From Rome to Ireland: A musical mission in St Patrick's country



Martina Purdy

**S**inger-songwriter Simona Congi adores music, but it was not until she met a Catholic record producer that she changed her playlist. She realised she had been listening to many popular songs with dark, or demonic themes. "All my Taylor Swift songs had the word 'devil' in there somewhere," she told *The Irish Catholic*. "I ended up deleting them all."

It also spurred Simona and her best friend Sr Marielle Rosales to form a new musical duo, entitled 'Beside Us' and to write and record a new Christian song, 'Show Me Your Love' - which is available on Spotify, Apple Music, among others. Beside Us, along with the new tune on the record label, La Gloria, was launched at St Colmcille's Church in Belfast on May 2, hosted by parish priest, Fr Conor McGrath.

"The song is a modern prayer," said Sr Marielle, "in a world that often numbs emotions and dims faith. It is an awakening, a fire burning within, which calls us to real life."

While some popular music is marked by dark and despairing themes, 'Show Me Your Love' - with its 'rap vibe' rooted in the power of the Holy Spirit - is aimed at young people who feel "very far from God". "The track blends powerful imagery, like that of a drifting boat," said Simona. "It's not just a song - it's a journey from uncertainty to hope."

Indeed, their own journeys are remarkably hopeful.

## Reflection

As teenagers growing up in Rome, Marielle and Simona had dreams of becoming pop singers but never anticipated their path would lead them on a Christian mission to Ireland. "We would have sung worldly songs," said Sr Marielle. "I am so glad that this is happening totally for Jesus."

Sr Marielle is a consecrated Sister in Koinonia John the Baptist, an international Catholic movement with well-established roots in The Braid, near Ballymena, Co. Antrim.

Simona, who is an external lay member of Koinonia,

helps to lead the music ministry. She lives close to the little community of consecrated men and women who share a life of faith and friendship in the shadow of Slemish Mountain, where tradition holds, St Patrick tended sheep.

**“Simona said that the new song reflects her own spiritual journey from darkness into the light of faith”**

Simona, who sings and plays keyboard, and guitarist Sr Marielle, who also sings, have inherited St Patrick's desire to spread the faith.

Marielle said she hoped that people would experience Jesus through the song. "Even for one person to make a connection would be a success. The feedback is very positive and we are very excited."

Simona said that the new song reflects her own spiritual journey from darkness into the light of faith.

"When I write a song," said Simona. "It is always drawn from my personal experience with God. 'Show Me Your Love' shows that I was lost and I was not in the right place."

"It's a chant - show me your love. I want more, I want to see more. I've experienced a bit of you - now I want to see it all."

Simona and Marielle bonded at secondary school in Rome. In common with the teenage Patrick, Simona rediscovered her faith as a teenager - having been raised in an Italian family that was rooted in Koinonia.

In fact it was Simona who led Marielle, who was raised in a devout Catholic family from the Philippines, into Koinonia, a community founded in 1979 by an Argentinian priest.

But that came only after Simona rekindled her faith after failing her exams at a school more suited to math and science than her artistic gifts. "Before I failed my year," said Simona. "I got a moment where I was agnos-

**“At age 18, she decided to join as an external lay member and was delighted to be given a sunflower at the ceremony. ‘I was going around Rome with this sunflower and I was so happy because I had received a flower from Jesus’”**



[L/R] Sr Marielle Rosales and Simona Congi

tic. I thought it felt very cool. I knew there was something but I didn't care about it and I failed and the world kind of collapsed."

## Exploration

Failure not only led her to a deeper faith, it also brought her to a new school where she met Marielle.

Simona said she found solace in the prayerful support of Koinonia. "I experienced the Lord again and I saw that life was beautiful. I didn't want to be depressed anymore and then I found this group of friends in school. And I started to invite everybody to Koinonia"

Marielle went to a Koinonia music event which featured a Christian rapper. "It was awkward at first," she admitted, adding she was however impressed with the community from day one.

"There were 300 of them and they were just leaving their stuff, their bags, and growing up in Rome, that was a shock! I thought, 'These people trust each other - wow, they know each other and they are friends.'"

**“She felt the Lord calling her. ‘I knew the words were for me. And I said ‘yes’ to the Lord immediately’”**

At age 18, she decided to join as an external lay member and was delighted to be given a sunflower at the ceremony. "I was going around Rome with this sunflower and I was so happy because I had



[L/R] Simona Congi and Sr Marielle Rosales

received a flower from Jesus."

Then, on the Feast of St Colmcille, June 9, 2017, Marielle felt the Lord speaking to her heart. "That day I just felt I needed to pray and I didn't have my book marked so I just opened the bible and read the Psalm... 'How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord God Almighty... Halfway through I started crying. It was a moment of grace.'"

She felt the Lord calling her. "I knew the words were for me. And I said 'yes' to the Lord immediately."

## Sisterhood

At first, neither Simona nor the Rosales family were prepared for her call - though Simona, through prayer, came to see that her friend was deeply content.

Marielle was a gifted student, particularly in science, with a place at university. "It took my parents a bit of time to understand. Now they are coming to my final vows on August 17."

The path to Ireland began as a gap year visit for the young girls, as part of a Koinonia course. It was extended through the efforts of Sr Christine Sawey, who leads the community at The

Braid. She needed a music ministry, especially at mass, and encouraged their talent. When Sr Marielle entered the community at the Braid, Simona soon felt she was also meant to be in Ireland.

**“We are sisters in our souls and that in a spiritual way we were born sisters”**

Simona - who cares for her mother and works with people who have autism - feels called to marriage and motherhood. And she is delighted that she is united with her friend in the new music project. "We have always felt," said Simona, "that we are sisters in our souls and that in a spiritual way we were born sisters."

It took them about three weeks to choose the name of their singing duo, Beside Us. "We didn't want anything too complicated and we wanted it to mean something," said Sr Marielle. "We are doing this for Jesus who is beside us."



MAY 29  
—  
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# ‘The risk of forgiveness paid off’

## Army chaplain Fr Paul Murphy forgives radicalised attacker



Fr Paul Murphy is pictured in the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes in France during the annual military pilgrimage to the French shrine. In an undated photograph. In the courtroom just before Holy Week, the Irish Defence Force chaplain forgave the radicalised teenager who tried to kill him in a 2024 knife attack. Photo: OSV News/Irish Defence Forces



Chai Brady

In a testament to Faith, Fr Paul Murphy, a chaplain with the Irish Defence Forces, has publicly forgiven the teenage boy who attempted to take his life in a knife attack at Renmore Barracks, Galway, on August 15, 2024.

Fr Murphy shared his reflections on the ordeal during an interview on RTÉ Radio 1's *Sunday with Miriam*, aired on May 4. Despite being stabbed multiple times by a 16-year-old boy (now aged 17) radicalised by Islamic extremist content online, the 52-year-old priest said he holds no hatred — only compassion.

"I remember all the details of it. While I didn't remember his face, I do remember the determination on his face and the real intent to put an end to my life," he said.

Grateful that no one else was harmed, Fr Murphy said: "The general consensus was

that I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Now I would dispute that, and I would say that that wasn't the case at all."

"That boy had come to kill a soldier, that's a matter of record... And I thank God every day that it was me that he got to, rather than one of the others."

**“My rosary beads were beside me in the car, I had an image of my guardian angel on my visor. I was going nowhere that night”**

He attributes his survival to divine providence. Returning from a swim that evening, he paused briefly before entering the barracks. "If it [the car window] had opened the full way, I would be dead," he said. "Our Lady of the Rosary is the patroness of the Defence Forces. My rosary beads were beside me in the car, I had an image of my guardian angel on my visor. I was going nowhere that night."

Fr Murphy also reflected on the significance of the date, saying: "The attack happened on the date of the Assumption of

the Virgin Mary. Our Lady got into heaven. They weren't ready for me that night."

The teenager, who pleaded guilty in February, was sentenced in April to ten years' detention with two years suspended. In court, Fr Murphy offered him an embrace and a message of mercy.

"I went over and whispered a few things into his ear and embraced him in the hope that the offer of forgiveness would change something," he said. "You can fight hate with hate and then we become entrenched in our hatred, and we continue to hate one another, and I think there's enough of that going on in the world. I just believe that if I can fight hatred with love, well then there's an opportunity for something different to happen."

That risk of forgiveness, he said, "paid off".

### Risk

"There's always a risk in forgiveness, but forgiveness has to be accepted as well... To me, the fact that he was able to say 'I'm sorry. I'm really sorry,' meant that that risk of forgiveness paid off."

Fr Murphy is realistic about the consequences of the crime, saying that while he can "personally forgive and I can have my heart pure of that, it

doesn't take away from the fact that there has to be a payment for this. There was an offence against the State, the offence against the Defence Forces, an offence against every soldier who walks through the gate of the barracks".

**“If he can do this for himself, it means that he can make a good positive contribution to society for the rest of his life, rather than just being full of hate”**

Still, he hopes for healing and rehabilitation. "To me I wasn't out to say 'oh he has to be in prison for 20, 30, 40 years'. That doesn't matter to me. Once I know that that boy is a better person coming out than going in, well then I'm happy with that," he said.

Fr Murphy said that he hopes the teenager will benefit from de-radicalisation and make a positive contribution to society: "If he can do this for himself, it means that he can make a good positive contribution to society for the



rest of his life, rather than just being full of hate."

The chaplain views the scars on his arms not as reminders of pain, but of purpose, saying: "I have scars on my arms, which I am proud and honoured to have. They will be with me all of the days of my life. I am very happy to have that as I think that's a sign of love for the Defence Forces."

"I'm just surprised that a bit of mercy and compassion is so extraordinary, that it makes headlines. Maybe if we

were a bit more forgiving in the world, a bit less harsh on others, we might just have a better world," Fr Murphy said.

As he prepares for his sixth overseas deployment to Lebanon in June, Fr Murphy says he's doing well. "I'm happy to be part of that," he said, continuing his mission not only as a chaplain but as a living witness to the Christian message at the heart of his vocation — that love is stronger than hate, and mercy more powerful than revenge.



# 40 years of All Ireland Rosary Rally



We want to create a space where people can connect, not just through prayer but through sharing meals, stories, and experiences

**Renata Milán Morales** hears

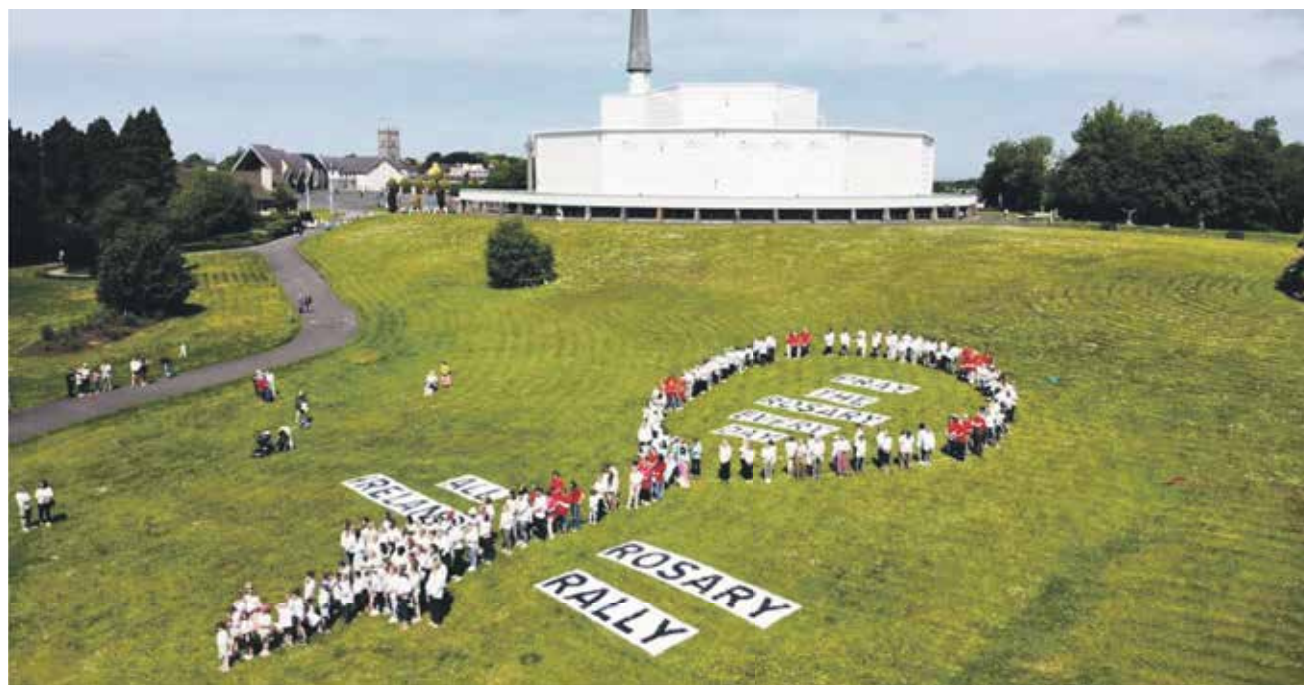
**T**his year marks the 40th anniversary of the All Ireland Rosary Rally, a milestone for an event that has become a highlight of the Irish Catholic year. Held each year at Knock Shrine, the rally continues to gather thousands of pilgrims from across Ireland for a day of prayer, reflection, and spiritual renewal. The event is set to take place on the eve of Pentecost and promises to be a memorable occasion for all those who attend.

The rally's roots go back to the work of Fr Patrick Peyton, the Irish priest whose global efforts to promote the rosary led to some of the largest prayer gatherings in history. Fr Peyton, known for his slogan "The family that prays together stays together," was an advocate for the rosary as a means of uniting families in prayer. His rallies, which drew millions of people from all corners of the world, helped spread devotion to the rosary and emphasised its power to bring families closer to God.

The All Ireland Rosary Rally was inspired by Fr Peyton's mission, and in many ways, it continues that legacy. Fr Marius O'Reilly, a key figure involved in the rally, told The Irish Catholic about the significance of the event. "The rosary is not just a prayer for the past. It's a prayer for today," he says. "It brings us back to what is most important in life: our relationship with God, our families, and each other."

## Together

"The rally is an opportunity for people to come together, to step away from the busyness of everyday life, and to focus on the essentials of faith." It's a day when the Irish faithful gather not only to pray but to remind each other of the importance of prayer in the family home. Over the years, the rally has grown in num-



bers, with last year's event seeing over 10,000 attendees from all around the country. This year, even more are expected to attend, with more than 60 buses travelling to Knock for the occasion.

In keeping with Fr Peyton's vision, the rally is designed to be a day of celebration and community, with a focus on bringing the rosary back into the home. The event's programme includes a range of activities, such as Marian conferences, workshops on making rosaries and scapulars, and an opportunity to meet with over 20 different apostolates from across the country. These initiatives will provide attendees with the tools and resources to continue their spiritual journey long after the rally has ended.

**“One of the highlights of the day will be the living rosary, where attendees will gather to form a giant rosary with their bodies”**

Fr O'Reilly told this paper about the importance of this. "The rally isn't just a one-day event. We want people to leave with something more," he said. "Whether it's a deeper understanding of the rosary, a new connection with a fellow Catholic, or the inspiration to pray more regularly as a family, the goal is to give people something tangible to take home."

One of the highlights of the day will be the living rosary, where attendees will gather to form a giant rosary with their bodies. Participants will wear red T-shirts to represent the *Our Fathers*, while others will represent the *Hail Marys*. A drone will capture the event from above, providing a visual

of thousands of people united in prayer. This tradition, introduced last year, was met with great enthusiasm and is set to continue this year.

The event will also feature keynote speakers, including Msgr Steve Rossetti, a well-known author and speaker. Archbishop Francis Duffy will also address attendees.

Introduced this year is the youth conference, aimed at those aged 18 to 35. In response to the growing need to engage younger generations in the life of the Church, the conference will provide a space for young people to come together and reflect on their faith. Fr O'Reilly hopes this will encourage young adults to rediscover the power of the rosary and prayer in their lives.

"We're seeing more and more young families coming to Knock each year, and that's something that gives us great hope," Fr O'Reilly said. "We want to reach out to young people, to show them that the rosary is not something from the past, but a prayer that can still have a real impact on their lives today."

## Significant

The Holy Mass, which will be celebrated at 3pm by Bishop Donal McKeown, is another significant moment in the day's proceedings. With Dana, Ireland's Eurovision winner, providing sacred music, the Mass will also feature the anointing of the sick, a moment of prayer for those suffering physically or spiritually. For many, this sacrament is an opportunity for healing and grace, adding a deeply personal and emotional element to the event.

Another exciting addition to this year's rally is the picnic on the grounds of Knock Shrine, designed to foster a sense of community and fellowship among attendees. This informal gathering, which encourages people to bring their own

food and share with others, will provide an opportunity to meet new people, share stories, and deepen friendships.

Fr O'Reilly views this as a vital part of the rally's mission. "We want to create a space where people can connect, not just through prayer but through sharing meals, stories, and experiences," he explained. "Faith is not just about individ-

ual prayer but about coming together as a community. It's about strengthening the bonds that unite us."

## Programme

The youth conference, along with the living rosary, and the Holy Mass, are all part of an expanded programme designed to engage the entire family. Fr O'Reilly sees

these elements as essential in ensuring that the All Ireland Rosary Rally remains a relevant and inclusive event for generations to come.

**“This event has become a beautiful expression of faith, a reminder of the importance of prayer in the family”**

What began as a small gathering 40 years ago has blossomed into an event that not only celebrates the rosary but also fosters a deep sense of community among Catholics in Ireland.

For Fr O'Reilly, the 40th anniversary of the All Ireland Rosary Rally is a moment to reflect on all that has been accomplished and to look ahead to the future. "This event has become a beautiful expression of faith, a reminder of the importance of prayer in the family, and an opportunity for Catholics to unite in a shared vision of faith," he concluded.

**i** For more information about the rally, including bus details and the full programme, visit [allirelandrosaryrally.com](http://allirelandrosaryrally.com).

## 40TH ALL IRELAND Rosary Rally

Sat June 7, 2025  
Knock Shrine

**9.30 - 11:30am: Marian Conference** | St John's Centre

Speakers: Archbishop Francis Duffy, Fr John Harris OP, and Christine O'Hara

**10am - 12pm: Rosary & Scapular Making Workshops** | Marquee

**11.30am: Meet 20 Apostolates from around Ireland** | St John's Centre

**12pm: Filming of Human Living Rosary** | Grass area behind the Basilica

**1pm: Keynote Speaker** - Msgr Steve Rossetti | Basilica | Including Healing Prayers

**2pm: Stations of the Cross** - Fr Rory Brady | Outside

**2.30pm: Rosary Procession** | Outside

Led by the Home of the Mother Sisters and the Children's Rosary

**3pm: Holy Mass**

Main Celebrant & Homilist: Bishop Donal McKeown, singing by Dana

**4.30pm - 6pm: Picnic** | Grass area behind the Basilica  
Opportunity to share and meet others

**6pm - 8pm: Youth Conference (18 to 35 years)**

St John's Centre

Fr Luke DeMasi, Danielle Stephens, and Msgr Steve Rossetti

**8pm - 11pm: Pentecost Vigil & Healing Service** | Basilica

Leaders: Fr Joseph Mary Deane CFR and Msgr Steve Rossetti

Confessions available throughout. All ages welcome.

**SUNDAY 10am: Croagh Patrick** | Climb for Ireland

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# The conclave: where it all began

Paolo Affatato

**W**alking through Viterbo, a charming town 40 km north of Rome, one has the feeling of taking a fantastic journey through time. In the historical centre, embraced by imposing and intact walls erected after the year 1000, the buildings, churches and palaces, all built with the local volcanic stone, the dark grey 'peperino' marble, give the idea of being still in the Middle Ages. And they allow you to immerse yourself in times, places, circumstances of other times. In the square in front of the Church of San Lorenzo, this feeling is very strong, due to the presence of the church of the same name dedicated to the martyr saint but, above all, thanks to the splendid palace next to the church. This is the 'Palace of the Popes', which was built by enlarging the palace that was the seat of the city's Episcopal Curia when Pope Alexander IV (who ascended to the papal throne in 1254), due to the hostility of the Roman people and nobles, moved the seat of the papal Curia to Viterbo in 1257. That temporary move was a historic step because it gave rise to the majestic ritual that today takes place in the Sistine Chapel and draws the eyes of the whole world to the Vatican: the conclave.

The first conclave in the history of the Church took place right here, in the refined palace with its windows, adorned by the '*Loggia delle benedizioni*', a portico with elegant and harmonious architecture, from which the visitor can look out onto the square - one can imagine when it was packed with people, waiting for the Pope's blessing - and, on the other side, can enjoy a panoramic view of the city. From there one enters the 'Hall of the Conclave', today a city museum that is the pride of Viterbo and the most important historical monument of the city.

## History

In the royal hall that made Christian history, the Council of Cardinals met as early as the end of November 1268. After the death of Pope Clement IV, the election of a new pontiff was to take place. At the beginning of 1270, after more than a year of *sede vacante*, the Father General of the Order of Friars Minor, Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, was also in Viterbo. The Franciscan friar took note of the bitter divisions - the work of the devil, 'the one who divides,' from the Greek word *dia-ballo* - that were running through the gathering of those who were called to give the Church the new Successor of Peter. The proce-

dures followed so far, however, was not fruitful: there were occasional meetings in the cathedral, then in the evening the cardinal electors were free to retire to their rooms or go about their business.

The pressure was strong, but the cardinals resisted: in January 1270, the cardinals launched an excommunication against Corrado da Alviano, the *podestà* (chief magistrate) of Viterbo, who had dared to threaten them into reaching an agreement. In this scenario, Friar Bonaventure was inspired by the Holy Spirit: the cardinals were to be locked up 'cum clave' and the close confrontation was to lead to a positive outcome. On June 1, 1270, the gates of the city were closed and the cardinals were led from their private homes into the 'great hall of the bishop's palace' and locked up there until the election was over. With a singular practice: from the roof you could sometimes communicate with the inside, in fact, the people of Viterbo uncovered the hall to induce more pressure on the cardinals.

**“The parchment is the oldest written record of the enclosure imposed on the College of Cardinals during that long period of the sede vacante. The cardinals were enclosed for over a thousand days with rationed provisions until the election of the new pontiff”**

The historical evidence of that particular juncture is on display in the hall today: it is a parchment, dated June 8, 1270, a document of exceptional historical value, which bears the signatures of all the cardinals present. The parchment - transferred to the palace in 2022 from the municipal library that stored it - still bears the original wax seals of the cardinal electors and bears witness to the dramatic situation. '*Ex palatio discooperto*' i.e. "from the uncovered palace", the cardinals demand the immediate release of Cardinal Henry of Ostia from the place where they are imprisoned. Thus reads the ancient Latin text written on the document: 'We, by divine commiseration, Cardinal Bishops, Presbyters and Deacons of the Sacrosanct Roman Church, having compassion with fraternal affection for the infirmity of our venerable brother Enrico, Bishop of Ostia and Velletri, commend to you Alberto di Montebuono,

Podestà of the Municipality of Viterbo, and Raniero Gatti, Captain of the people of Viterbo, to grant, out of that debt of loyalty that binds you to us and to the Roman Church, immediate freedom of exit to the same bishop from this palace in which we are confined and not to keep him longer against his will, since he for the sole reason of the current vacancy of the Holy See has renounced, before us electors of the Roman Pontiff, his right and vote'.

The parchment is the oldest written record of the enclosure imposed on the College of Cardinals during that long period of the *sede vacante*. The cardinals were enclosed for over a thousand days with rationed provisions until the election of the new pontiff. The voting process continued until September 1271 when, in a compromise election, the Archdeacon of Liège, Tedaldo Visconti, who was in the Holy Land at the time of the election, was elected to the papal throne. He ascended the throne with the name of Gregory X at the beginning of 1272 and, precisely on the basis of the Viterbo experience, during the Second Council of Lyons in 1274, he promulgated the Apostolic Constitution '*Ubi periculum*' ratifying, from that moment on, the institution of the conclave as the elective method for Roman pontiffs.

## Sacred

Walking through those sacred rooms, which forever marked papal history, the scent of

those events is still pungent and present. The eyes see documents, objects, talar robes and painted icons; the roof has been restored and naturally closed with solid wooden beams, but the visitor is enraptured by the story: the walls and exhibits speak and carry a load of history that also has consequences for today, for the election of the next pope. The new technologies available for museum visits, moreover, do nothing but unite past and present, the new and the ancient, allowing young people to graft events from over 750 years ago onto their digital devices.

Martin IV (the French cardinal Simon de Brion) was the last pope of the Viterbo period. Elected after a six-month conclave - also long and very troubled, even marked by the arrest of two cardinals - he was crowned and began his ministry in the city of Orvieto, due to the hostility of the Romans towards a French pope. The new pontiff realised the intolerable interference of the city's powerful in the conclave that had elected him - a fact that the Church still stigmatises today, in the dynamics of the present - and so he left Viterbo in 1281, immediately after his election. The papal see never returned to the city. But he left today's pilgrims an extraordinary testimony of events that have forever marked the history of the universal Church.









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# 'There is no contusion, only confusion' said a pope who fell off his horse



Paolo Affatato

**T**here is the Pope who, as soon as he is elected, falls off his horse. And the one who leaves the cardinals in suspense for three days before saying the fateful 'I accept'. There are the bets, which were already going crazy in the 16th century. And there is the tale of the stratagem with which the cardinals' assistants tried to get their bosses elected. The red booklet discovered by chance a few months ago in one of the dusty basements of a Vatican palace is a mine of information on the Conclave. Entitled *Historical Documentation*, it was written by the scholar Emanuele La Broca and published by the Vatican Press Office in 1963, on the occasion of the *Sede vacante* after the death of John XXIII. That 60-year-old text recounts episodes, curiosities, anecdotes, chronicles of the reign of 261 popes - of course the last 5, from Paul VI to Pope Francis, are missing. And it is a valuable historical document because it is a typewritten publication (computer graphics did not exist), certainly in a very limited edition. It popped up while the premises of the building were being cleared of old objects and books, and soon became a treasure: a useful tool to give historical depth to the time of *Sede vacante* and Conclave, a rite that is repeated today but was first conceived in the second half of the 13th century.

## Bread and water

The text immediately highlights the apostolic constitution *Ubi periculum* issued by Pope Gregory X in 1274, the one establishing the Conclave as the body and process to elect the pontiff. The fifth law of the 15 that make up the text of the bull reads: on the third day of the assembly, food shall be sober and frugal, one dish for lunch and one for dinner. After five more days, the cardinals will have only bread and water. One can understand how the Pope wanted to induce his brethren in Conclave to come to an agreement promptly. We were coming from elections in which the *Sede vacante* had lasted for months or even years. The stratagem of enclosing the cardinals in a room 'cum clave' proved effective and was a turning point: Gregory X definitively confirmed it as the law of the Holy See, which has endured



Vintage photograph of Sistine Chapel, Vatican Rome, 19th Century. Photo: iStock

**“The duration of the Conclave has been variable and can be said to be unpredictable. Among the longest - notes the red booklet - two years and 9 months that of Gregory X in 1271, while among the shortest was that of Innocent V, a single day between 21-21 January 1276”**

for centuries and has survived to this day.

## Over thirty dispositions

Over the centuries, there have been more than thirty papal dispositions on the Conclave, starting from 1200 up to the last one, the *Universi dominici gregis* of John Paul of 1996. There are many original, curious or simply useful regulations to be found in those documents. For example, Clement XI in his Bull *Apostolatus officium* provided that there should be 35 'scopatori' (attendants), two doctors, and a surgeon who, for a modest fee, could render assistance to the confined cardinals.

## The many cities

Likewise, there were many cities and places where the Conclave was held: in fact, if the Pope was outside Rome at the time of his death, the cardinals had to meet there. And they had to do so without seeking prior agreements, which were absolutely forbidden. And so - before agreeing in 1492 to hold the assembly in the Sistine Chapel, later designated as the fixed venue in 1878 - many pontiffs blessed the crowds in places far from the capital: Terracina, a seaside resort in lower

Lazio, Viterbo, Velletri, Perugia, Pisa, Naples, Venezia. Also in France in the well-known city of Avignon in 1300, the election of six popes was held. In Rome, voting often took place in the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, but four conclaves in 1800 were held at the Quirinale, the palace on the Roman hill of the same name that today houses the President of the Italian Republic, a building confiscated from the Vatican after the newly founded republic wrested the city of Rome from papal rule.

**“When one refuses the papacy out of humility, one ceases to be humble, because one does not obey the voice of God”**

A peculiar 'travelling Conclave' began in Rome in Santa Maria Maggiore, moved to the monastery of Santa Sabina on the Aventine Hill, then to the convent of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and finally - given a danger of epidemic - to Rieti and then to Anagni. After 27 months of *Sede vacante*, and a lot of hard work, the cardinals

returned to Rome and in 1294 a pope was elected who 'made the great refusal' because, just over three months after his election, Celestine V decided to abandon the papal throne.

In the Conclave of 1700, Cardinal Giovanni Francesco Albani also thought very well of it: having obtained the majority of votes, he kept the electors in suspense for three days and it was the Cardinal Abbot of Tencin who overcame his reluctance: the latter reminded him that when one refuses the papacy out of humility, one ceases to be humble, because one does not obey the voice of God. So Albani surrendered and took the name Clement XI.

## The duration

The duration of the Conclave has been variable and can be said to be unpredictable. Among the longest - notes the red booklet - two years and 9 months that of Gregory X in 1271, while among the shortest was that of Innocent V, a single day between 21-21 January 1276, like the 20-hour Conclave that elected Pope Eugenio Pacelli as Pius XII between 1 and 2 March 1939. The record for the shortest Conclave in history is held by Paul II: just a few hours,



elected on the first ballot, on 30 August 1464. The Conclave remains an extraordinary experience, witness Cardinal Roger of Mayendorf, elected Pope Clement II in 1046 after taking part in 12 Conclaves in 50 years of cardinalate.

## An Italian affair

For a long time the Conclave remained an affair reserved for Italians (after all, the Pope is Bishop of Rome), but the time came when a foreign cardinal had to be received. This was done with a special ceremony and a majestic rite. Among foreign cardinals, the stratagem attempted in the 16th century by Spanish Cardinal Bartholomew de la Cueva remained historic: his assistant spoke individually to 32 cardinals (out of 44 electors) begging them to give his boss a symbolic vote, and many agreed, before discovering that if they did so, De la Cueva would be elected pope. And it almost happened.

## The rooms

Since in the Apostolic Palace the cardinals' rooms were assigned by lot, as soon as they received their accommodation for the Conclave, the cardinals had it decorated according to their needs, sometimes luxuriously. But at some historical junctures, the rooms were much more sober. In 1477 the Conclave was held at the convent of Santa Maria sopra Minerva and the monks' cells, available to the electors, had only a bed, a small table, a kneeler and a chair. Even in 1800, when the Conclave was held in Venice in the Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, the Cardinals stayed in the cramped monk's quarters.

## The ride

In ancient times, the Pope was consecrated but also enthroned and crowned: throne and crown were symbols of temporal power. On the same day of the election, he had to ride through the streets of Rome to take

possession of the Lateran Cathedral. The ride through the centre of the Urbe was a parade, rich, sumptuous and colourful. Every palace, noble or popular, every church, every monument was adorned. It was a great feast for the Roman people. From 1500 onwards, the alternative of using a litter was given. In 1769 Pope Clement XIV fell off the steed because of the crowd. He promptly said with a play on words: 'There is no contusion, only confusion'. From then on he used to recall St Paul's fall from his horse as the impetus for his personal journey of conversion.

## Betting on the Pope

Nobles, bourgeois, commoners all were gripped by the fever of betting on who the Conclave would elect. So much so that Pope Pius IV in the bull 'In Eligendis' of 1562 openly forbade them. And Gregory XIV in the 'Cogit Nos' of 1591 clearly reiterated that the people were called to pray, not to bet. He therefore decreed that the papal guards should confiscate the stakes from betting and donate them to charitable works. Moreover, since exorbitant sums were also bet, the betting collectors already tried every means to prevent the name chosen as papal candidate from actually ascending to the papal throne. The bets risked influencing the Conclave.

## The election

The various papal dispositions over the centuries indicated that the election could take place in three ways: *per inspirationem*, i.e. by the unanimous proclamation of all the cardinals saying 'eligo' in a loud voice. A second way was *per compromissum*: the cardinals, in particular circumstances, could delegate - all in agreement - the task of choosing to a small group of even just three cardinals. A third way, the vote by *scrutinium*, the ordinary one, which is in force today, is regulated in its various stages: each cardinal receives a card on which is written in Latin: '*Eligo in Summun Pontificem ominus meum Cardinalem...*'.

## The names

The 266 successive popes chose a total of 83 names. It was Sergius IV in the year 1009 - reports our precious red booklet - the first to change his name as soon as he was elected. The most chosen was John with 23 popes. Pius had 12, Clement 14, Urban 8, Paul 6 and, before Paul VI, the last was in 1621. We shall see what the next pope chooses.



# The family St Thérèse of Lisieux chose to arrive in Ireland



There is a growing need for the childlike simplicity of St Thérèse's 'little way,' as Mr Sweeney's daughters, Marcie and Therese noticed after starting their journey as the custodians of the relics, writes **Renata Milán Morales**

**I**n the heart of Kildare, a family that mirrors the Martin family has dedicated its life to bringing the devotion to St Thérèse to Ireland. The Sweeney family began this journey when the five daughters were young. They hold first-class relics of Sts Zélie and Louis Martin and St Thérèse the Little Flower.

"We are the custodians of three very special First Class Relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux and of both her parents St Louis & St Zélie Martin. Our late father, Pat Sweeney was the national St Thérèse Relics Manager in Ireland," explained Marcie Duggan, his daughter and current custodian of the relic. "He travelled all over Ireland with these relics helping to spread the message of St Thérèse's 'little way'. He was also one of the organisers of the historical 2001 visit of the Relics of St Thérèse from Lisieux in France and drove the Relics all over Ireland. He did this again in 2009 and 2018."

## Devotion

Mrs Duggan told *The Irish Catholic* that the devotion was first inspired by her mother. "It came from my mother first. We feel like we grew up with her [St Thérèse]. She was like the 6th sister." Yet, their mission only materialised after their father's retirement when his friendship with the former prior of the Carmelite Church in Kildare, Fr Joseph Ryan, started to build up. "He [Pat Sweeney] was a Sergeant Major and the first to brought St Thérèse's relics to Ireland. When he retired, he went up to the to the Carmelite Church [Kildare] to see how could fill his time. Fr Joseph Ryan was talking about his love of St Thérèse and since our mother was a devotee to St



Custodians of the first-class relics and Pat Sweeney's daughters, Marcie and Thérèse.



Relic of Liturgical vestments designed by Celine Martin, St Thérèse's sister

Thérèse, they went to Lisieux when Theresa [Pat Sweeney's daughter] was studying French. When my dad went to Lisieux he was overwhelmed."

"He devoted his life to St Thérèse and her family, the Martin family. We have continued to carry out some of our father's work in bringing the Reliquary around Ireland. We hope that the Relics can bring people hope, strength and comfort in their daily lives and in times of need," said Mrs Duggan.

**“All these children were venerating the relics. And they said, ‘what will we say?’ I said put your hand in the relics and say ‘hello, St Thérèse’”**

The modern age has brought many changes, and many people are struggling with the changes brought by industrial and technological developments. There is a growing need for the childlike simplicity of St Thérèse's 'little way,' as Mr Sweeney's daughters, Marcie and Thérèse noticed after start-

ing their journey as the custodians of the relics. "I suppose it's the comfort that people want. And I think the children are concerned as well... We were very surprised, but we joked with when we brought the booklets to the children with the school experience, you know, it was great to see them... They definitely got engaged. I think the religion is there. They were putting the relics to their heads, telling us, 'what should we do?' All these children were venerating the relics. And they said, 'what will we say?' I said put your hand in the relics and say 'hello, St Thérèse'."

Thérèse and Marcie visit schools to tell the children about St Thérèse's little way. A booklet where the children can find information about the saint was made by Suzzane O'Brien in collaboration with the Sweeney family. On it, the children can write their own prayer to the little flower. The booklet is written in the style of a letter, for the children to feel closer to the saint. "I think what appealed to the children as well is that she wasn't great in school. She struggled with English and maths, and she wasn't great at sports. She just loved storytelling. So, she used to sit in in the playground and



First-class relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux and Sts Zélie and Louis Martin

tell the stories. She had a great love for God and she would say, 'look, you talk to God, tell him how your day is going, if it's not going great, tell him it's not going great'. She also lost her mother at a very early age. She understood grief and loss. I suppose a lot of children can relate to her."

## Simplicity

"A lot of people ask about St Thérèse. 'What did she do?' And I would just say that she was very simple... People can identify with the simplicity and the childlike way, and just the faith

that she had. I suppose that people identify with her. The humanity and her and her faith. So, I think that's what people are looking for. They sort of identify with that simplicity," explained Thérèse Sweeney. "The other side is that, when priests are given the sermons. When they have the relics there, they do talk about little way, those small acts of kindness, those small gestures. When you compared to St Teresa of Avila, who is also a doctor [of the Church] and an intellectual, you can see it's not at the same," she continued. Telling this paper about their

mission, Mrs Marcie Duggan explained that, "We generally take the requests when somebody gets in touch and says, 'can you bring the relics to us?' and is it and yes, but you need to get your parish priest to contact us first and we'll make the arrangements through them. The relics are available. We usually bring the relics to schools, nursing homes and hospitals." She also explained that a big event is happening the day of the Centenary of St Thérèse's canonisation, "May 17 is the big day. It's the centenary of her canonisation day. We are putting the exhibition together. We will have an opening ceremony at 2:30pm and we have a talk given by Fr Michael McGoldrick. We will also do a special blessing."

**i** The first-class relics of St Thérèse of Lisieux and her parents are available on request. You can contact the Sweeney Family via email [stThereseRelicsSweeneyfamily@gmail.com](mailto:stThereseRelicsSweeneyfamily@gmail.com) or through phone 0858887549. Any support to the mission, a smile, a note or a coin, would be appreciated.

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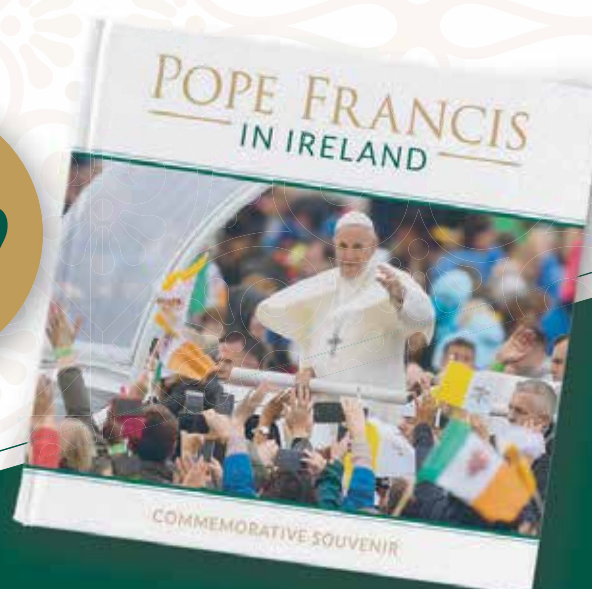
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# Remember Pope Paul VI and the popes since



David Quinn

**T**he first pope I ever saw in the flesh was Paul VI, indeed he is the first pope I can remember. My parents had somehow won a package holiday and that included a day in Rome. It was 1975 and a Jubilee Year. I can't remember exactly what time of year it was, probably spring or autumn because it was pleasantly warm and sunny.

We arrived in Rome on a tour bus and filed into St Peter's Square. I recall my parents pointing out Austin Gaffney, who was a well known and popular singer at the time. I hadn't heard of him. I was too young, but I remember being impressed someone famous was on the same bus as us.

I think we probably ended up standing somewhere in the middle of St Peter's Square. There didn't seem to be too many children and I was surrounded by adults. I was at this stage too big to expect either of my parents to pick me up, not that I'd wanted them to, and so I had to crane my neck or try to find gaps between the adults to see anything.

## Blessed

I was able to see the balcony of St Peter's and in due course, Pope Paul appeared on it and blessed the crowd below and said some prayers. He was so far away, it was impossible to see his face properly, but I suppose it is similar when people see the British royal family on the balcony of Buckingham Palace.

The pilgrims below began to sing some hymns and I can clearly remember Austin Gaffney in full voice. Strangely enough, that is actually my main impression of the day because I could see so little

with all the adults around me.

Four years later, Pope John Paul II famously travelled to Ireland, so he is the second pope I ever saw. Paul VI had died the previous year and John Paul I died after only a month as pope.

Of course, half the country saw John Paul II that September. I was in secondary school at the time and we all had to assemble at the school early in the morning when it was still fairly dark and then head to a train station and disembark as close to Phoenix Park as possible. Then there was the longish trek to the site of the papal mass itself.

I don't think we appreciated the fact that we were standing in the middle of one of the biggest crowds ever assembled, over million-strong. There was great excitement when the helicopter carrying the pope appeared overhead and everyone waved up at it.

**“About four of us went into town because we knew that the pope was due to go down O'Connell Street at some stage in his ‘popemobile’”**

Once he landed and went to the raised platform where he would celebrate the Mass, he was even further away than Paul VI in St Peter's Square four years before.

So to make up for this, once the Mass was over, about four of us went into town because we knew that the pope was due to go down O'Connell Street at some stage in his ‘popemobile’. We got there as quick as we could and were on time to get right to the front of the crowds lining the street (we were close to where the Spire is now) and got a very good look at him. We were delighted with ourselves.

I saw Pope John Paul maybe two times after that when I was in Rome covering some event or other for



Pope Paul VI on a postage stamp in the Ajman “world peace” series. Photo: iStock

my job and always at one of the Wednesday General Audiences.

I never actually met him.

But I did meet Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in December 1995, ten years before he became Pope Benedict XVI. I had been granted an interview with him and what I most remember was his gentle, unassuming and courteous manner, totally at variance with the fearsome and very image the media had given him.

Then, in 2005, I was sent out to Rome by the *Irish Independent* to cover the death and funeral of Pope John Paul, followed by the Conclave and the inauguration Mass for Pope Benedict.

## Memorable

I was there 20 days in all that April, and they were by far and away the most memorable days of my journalistic career. What I recall above all were the vast crowds that descended on Rome to file

past the body of St John Paul and pay their respects. They were actually far bigger than the ones that filed past Pope Francis last month, I think that is perhaps because so many Poles arrived, because they were different times, because security at St Peter's is now tighter than it was and maybe because he was the first pope who really travelled widely, and this had an effect. Pope John Paul had a deep effect on the public imagination.

I was in St Peter's Square when Pope Benedict appeared for the first time before the world on the balcony and heard the famous words ‘*Habemus papam*’ to loud cheers and applause from the enormous crowd below.

**“Pope Francis was a popular pope overall, including with people who were not Catholics at all, or had given up the faith”**

Unfortunately, I was not in Rome for the election of Pope Francis but I did see him a year later when he appeared briefly at a conference on the family being held in the Vatican.



The statue of memorial of Pope Paul VI from Brescia (Giovanni Battista Montini) in Duomo Nuovo by Lello Scorzelli (1984). Photo: iStock

He addressed the audience of several hundred who had arrived from all over the world and then went about the rest of his business of the day.

Of course, he came to Ireland in 1988 under very difficult circumstances. Irish public opinion towards the Church had soured over the child sex abuse scandals. Most people could not look at popes the same way, even though Pope Francis was a popular pope overall, including with people who were not Catholics at all, or had given up the faith.

In addition, the 8th amendment had only been repealed a few months before by a margin of two-to-one.

## Premature

Perhaps the visit was premature. At this stage it had been nearly forty years since the visit of John Paul II and I remember thinking, despite that, it was too soon in light of the scandals, the mood was too bad. Like a lot of

people, I thought he should have gone to Northern Ireland where the reception from Catholics would have been much more enthusiastic than in the South. Of course, he had come for the World Meeting of Families which was in Dublin and he was only here for 36 hours. Coming here under the circumstances was a brave thing for him to do.

I'm lucky enough to be in Rome again this week for the Conclave. If it is a quick one, like the last few, I hope to be in St Peter's Square for when a new pope is introduced to the world and we hear those words ‘*Habemus papam*’ once more. Then memories of this new pontiff will begin to record themselves on our minds, as they inevitably will, because the office of pope remains, even now, in 2025, one of the most important in the world even politically speaking, and from a religious point of view of course, the most important one of all.

**“I don't think we appreciated the fact that we were standing in the middle of one of the biggest crowds ever assembled, over million-strong. There was great excitement when the helicopter carrying the pope appeared overhead and everyone waved up at it”**



# Hallucinations and Luddites

## The ethics of artificial intelligence



Breda O'Brien

**W**hen friends were transcribing a mound of material recently, I shocked myself by asking, 'Why aren't you using AI?'

I have significant moral objections to the use of AI. The foremost one is that it is based on systemic theft of intellectual property. Large language models were trained on vast quantities of information and images stolen from their owners.

For example, Getty Images is a large commercial enterprise where the work of some 50,000 photographers can be searched and for a fee, licensed for use. Getty is currently suing a British firm, Stability AI. Getty claims Stability AI scraped millions of their images from the internet in breach of copyright law in order to train Stability Diffusion, an AI that produces images from text prompts. Getty is also claiming that Stability Diffusion's output contains significant amounts of copyright data. The case is ongoing and is

far from the only case being taken.

For example, Meta, Facebook's parent company, is being sued because it used a notorious website called Llama 3, which pirates books and documents to train its Generative AI.

**“Fair use was intended to cover situations like teachers photocopying a chapter of a book, not for wholesale appropriation of original material”**

Emails have been obtained which show that Meta had internal discussions about the ethics of using the pirated material but decided that they would use a 'fair use' argument if it was challenged. Their argument is that the material is transformed, not used in its current form.

Fair use was intended to cover situations like teach-

ers photocopying a chapter of a book, not for wholesale appropriation of original material. In January 2025, Meta was ranked seventh of the top ten companies worldwide in terms of market capitalisation. It was then worth an eye-watering \$1.655 trillion. It could well afford to pay for the material, but decided not to.

### Clash

There is a kind of arms race going on among the big tech companies to develop the fastest and most dominant generative AI models. This is my second worry. Greed is driving the development of AI, not any concern for the long-term welfare of humanity.

I suspect every time we use AI for some minor task like writing an email, we are training machines to replace our jobs.

Generative AI also hallucinates, or in plainer terms, makes stuff up. This is because GenAI does not resemble human intelligence. Instead, it uses advanced pattern recogni-

tion. It is predicting what words belong together and as a result, it will sometimes generate plausible-sounding but inaccurate information.

**“They just wanted fair working conditions, minimum pricing, continued high standards in production and rights to pensions”**

The classic example is citing a source by recognised authors, but the cited document does not exist. It is plausible that the authors would have written something that was published in a particular journal - but it never happened.

Anyone querying the way AI is being pushed on us by major corporations is accused of being a Luddite.

In reality, the Luddites were skilled artisans who sold their labour at fair

prices for generations, only to see themselves replaced by low-paid, low-skilled workers operating machinery in appalling conditions.

The Luddites were not anti-technology. They just wanted fair working conditions, minimum pricing, continued high standards in production and rights to pensions. Some did commit acts of violence, including some assassinations, which were unjustifiable and clearly wrong. The majority focused on smashing machines because they had no other way of focusing attention on their plight.

The wealthy factory owners were able to persuade the government to send in troops to attack the Luddites. Trials were held with indecent speed. Not just leaders were hanged. In one case, a 16 year old boy was hanged just for acting as a lookout.

The Luddites were happy to use machinery. They just wanted better working conditions and decent recompense, instead of the low wages and shoddy outputs the owners favoured.

The Luddites were reacting against greed that also despoiled the environment. They may have something to teach us.

### Risk

Pope Francis has written on several occasions about AI, including for World Com-

munications Day 2024. While acknowledging the exciting possibilities, he said: 'Their great possibilities for good are accompanied by the risk of turning everything into abstract calculations that reduce individuals to data, thinking to a mechanical process, experience to isolated cases, goodness to profit, and, above all, a denial of the uniqueness of each individual and his or her story.'

**“The key question is whether it will be used to enhance our humanity or to enrich the few”**

As it turns out, my friends were already using AI for the transcription but were carefully checking the output for hallucinations and errors. It is impossible to deny the usefulness of this technology. But useful does not mean ethical.

The key question is whether it will be used to enhance our humanity or to enrich the few. Given the obscene wealth of people like Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, and Elon Musk, who was until recently enthusiastically engaged in cutting aid to the world's poorest people, confidence cannot be high that good choices will be made.

**“Generative AI also hallucinates, or in plainer terms, makes stuff up. This is because GenAI does not resemble human intelligence. Instead, it uses advanced pattern recognition. It is predicting what words belong together and as a result, it will sometimes generate plausible-sounding but inaccurate information”**



# Out&About

## A special visit to St Saviour's



**DUBLIN:** Recently, the Choir of Chavagnes International College, a French boys' school, under their Headmaster Ferdi McDermott (of Irish-Scottish background) visited St Saviour's, Dominick Street.



**WATERFORD:** Deacon Brendan Gallagher and Deacon Stuart McGovern. Deacon Gallagher served the altar at Deacon McGovern's Ordination to the Diaconate by Bishop of Waterford and Lismore Alphonsus Cullinan on April 27.



**LIMERICK:** The Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem attended the Requiem Mass for Pope Francis in St John's Cathedral on April 23. Pictured are Chevaliers Gearóid Williams (Kilrush), David Williams (Ennis), Brian Mc Carthy (Cork), Peter Moylan (Ennis), Donnacha Fahy (Burren) and Dame Maureen Jones (Newmarket on Fergus).

### IN SHORT

#### 'Pope Francis was like a grandfather to me'

A lay woman from the Diocese of Clogher, accompanied by her husband and son, was one of the thousands attending Pope Francis' funeral in Rome. Catherine McLoughlin said that once the funeral began, she could hear from outside of St Peter's Square "love pouring out for this man who has meant so much to so many."

"The emotions are overwhelming," she said. "I watched with quiet tears the Cardinals in their guard of honour as Pope Francis left the Basilica of St Peter for the final time. It feels we are intruding in intimate moments of death whilst at the same time being so welcome."

"To me he is like a grandfather who has accompanied and nurtured my faith. The grief I feel is tangible and being in Rome is a gift that I'll be forever thankful for," Mrs McLoughlin

said she "feels like Pope Francis has accompanied me in some pivotal moments of my life."

She discovered her feelings for her now husband during the Youth Day in Krakow, Poland; as a newly married couple they received a blessing in Rome; and "were invited to a special audience with Pope Francis in Dublin for the World Meeting of Families."

"Pope Francis, our dear Francesco, may the choirs of angels guide you home," Mrs McLoughlin concluded.

#### Columban missionaries deliver awards to Co. Antrim students

Two Columban missionaries visited St Louis' Grammar School in Ballymena, Co. Antrim to present prizes to three winners in this year's Columban Schools Media competition. Fr Kevin McHugh and Fr Pat Colgan visited the

school on Good Friday, April 18 to deliver the awards.

The three winners were Odhran McGowan, Maria Rosa Black and Eabha Delargy. Ms Delargy said she likes 'faith based' competitions and that it was one of the reasons she chose RE as an A-level subject.

Two out of the three winners will go to the 'sister' school in Ghana for two weeks, where they will assist with building classrooms and assessing needs for similar trips in the future.

St Louis' Grammar School has had winners in the competition for three years in a row, "and full credit goes to teacher, Ms Shauna Pickering, Head of RE at St Louis," Fr Colgan said in a statement for the Columban's web-site.

"The school also had a weekly Lenten Mass which was packed. These signs – including the outreach to Ghana – show a faith-based school at its best. We wish them, and all the schools who sent in entries to our competition, every

success in their plans," Fr Colgan said.

#### Volunteers clean North Main Street in Cork

Over 40 volunteers gather for a 'cleaning and greening' day in Cork city centre on April 29. The initiative was organised by the Cork Business Association (CBA) and is supported by Cork City Council.

The group focused on deep cleaning the North Main Street, power washing, removing algae, planting and painting. Dave O'Brien, CBA president told *CorkBeo* the "North Main Street is the first street chosen as part of this process, and we're hoping to get to all the major streets in Cork city over a period of time".

Mr O'Brien told *Echo Live* the initiative was about the business community "taking real ownership and pride in our city and making it as attractive as possible to shoppers, visitors, and residents".



Edited by Renata Steffens  
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



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



**KERRY:** Attending the Feast of Divine Mercy at St John's Church, Tralee, The McDonagh family from Annagh, Tralee. (L/R) John Paul, Anthony and Mikey McDonagh, (back row L/R) Leanne, Michelle, Bernadette and Anthony and Mary McDonagh. Photo: John Cleary.



**CAVAN:** Rev. Martin O'Kelly and Fr Gerry MacCormack of Kingscourt Parish who led the annual Good Friday Walk of Witness in the town. This year, with the Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian faith communities.



**KERRY:** Audrey Christie, Camp, and her brother Jason Kelliher, Tralee, attending the Divine Mercy devotions at St John's Church, Tralee on Mercy Sunday. Photo: John Cleary.



**KILKENNY:** Attending Mass for Pope Francis led by Bishop Niall Coll in St Mary's Cathedral were (Church of Ireland) Rt. Rev. John Neill, Archbishop Emeritus of Dublin, Rt. Rev. Adrian Wilkinson, Bishop Cashel, Ossory and Ferns, Vicar Billy Burke, (Methodist) Rev. Katherine Kehoe, Kilkenny Mayor Andrew McGuinness and Cathaoirleach Michael McCarthy and Laois Cathaoirleach Padraig Fleming.



**DONEGAL:** Fr Pat Ward PP Kincasslagh Parish with Kate and Francie McGovern, who celebrated their wedding anniversary last week. The couple got married in the chapel in Kincasslagh 60 years ago.



**CAVAN:** Bishop of Kilmore Martin Hayes led Pope Francis' Requiem Mass in the Cathedral of Sts Patrick and Felim. Pictured are Cllr Trevor Smith, Bishop Martin Hayes, Cathaoirleach of Cavan County Council Cllr TP O'Reilly and Cllr John Paul Feeley. Photo: Adrian Donohoe.

## CAVAN

Parents and Grandparents of students are invited to a fundraising coffee morning in aid of Breast Cancer Ireland takes place on May 13 at 9.30am at Coláiste Dun an Rí in Kingscourt. Come for tea, coffee and bakes.

## CORK

Repair Café at Kanturk Library takes place on May 10 from 11m to 1.30pm. Anyone with broken household items that need repair or want advise is welcome at the Repair Café.

## DERRY

Ballinascreen Community Forum is organising a free day trip to Derry on May 14, from 9.15am to 6.30pm. In the morning visiting the Tower Museum and in the afternoon attending the Mayor's Social Tea Dance in Guildhall. All are welcome. For more details and to book contact Rosemary on 07748645 007 or info@cfballinascreen.org

## DONEGAL

SafeTALK, a training offering guidance and building confidence in how best respond when coming across someone who might be vulnerable to consider suicide will take place on May 15 from 9.30am to 1pm in The Resource Hall, Pettigo. For more information email CDLMSTraining@pieta.ie.

## DUBLIN

Altar servers and animators gathering led by Missionaries of Apostolic Grace takes place on May 17 from 11.30am to 5pm at Church of the Guardian Angel, Blackrock, A94 WF89. This gathering will be a meaningful occasion for the young boys and girls who actively serve at the altar across 14 Mass centres of Syro Malabar Catholic Church in the region.

## LOUTH

All welcome for the 'Taizé Gathering' with prayer around the cross in candlelight and music of Tainzé on May 9 from 8pm to 9pm at 'Bethany', 34 Point Road, Dundalk, A91 WOC9. Followed by tea/coffee. For more information contact 042 933 1602.

## MAYO

The next Latin Mass will take place on Sunday, May 11, at 6pm in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock Shrine.

## ROSCOMMON

Workshop on deliverance and healing led by Bro. Thomas Paul Kodiyan, Germany takes place in Our Lady Star of the Sea Prayer Centre, Athlone from May 16-18 from 10am to 7pm. For more info and registration contact Nancy on 086 405 4489. Donations appreciated.

## SLIGO

Everyone is welcome to the official reopening of the newly upgraded Cloonacool Community Centre car park on May 10 at 8.30pm. The car park opening will be followed by a book launch and refreshments in the Community Centre.

## TIPPERARY

Diocese of Waterford and Lismore's Family Fun Day for the Jubilee Year takes place on May 18 at Holy Family Mission, Glencomeragh House, Kilsheelan from 2pm to 5pm. Mass will be celebrated at 1pm and registration begins at 2pm. Activities for all ages and food truck with reduced rate for families. Donation only but pre-registration is essential due to limited capacity. Register on waterfordlismore.ie/jubilee2025.

## WATERFORD

At the Holy Family Church, the weekly Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Mondays after 11am Mass until 4pm. An invitation to attend and spend some quiet time with the Lord.

## WEXFORD

Fundraiser night at Codd's Pub Kilrush for Relay for Life Wexford takes place on May 16 at 9pm. The music will be with Luke Whitty and there will be candle bags available, Shannon-bridge pottery with Wexford Relay for Life logo for sale. All welcome.

## WICKLOW

The Rosary will be said each evening (weather permitting) at the Grotto in Rathnew for the month of May at 7.30pm. All are welcome.



# Pope Francis, the Islamic



Justin Robinson OSB

**W**hilst the legacy of Pope Francis may take years to be fully understood, interreligious dialogue clearly emerged as one of the quiet yet defining themes of his papacy—particularly in his engagement with the Islamic world. Key appointments to the College of Cardinals, landmark visits, high-profile meetings and the publication of historic documents together point to Francis' desire for interreligious encounter, dialogue, and fraternity. As the Church now looks to the future, many wonder whether Francis' successor will continue along his path and in what direction Catholic-Muslim dialogue might go from here.

Much has been made of the striking diversity among the electors who will participate in the upcoming conclave—a reflection of Pope Francis' effort to shape a more inclusive and universal Church, attentive to voices from its geographic and ecclesial peripheries. During his pontificate, Francis appointed cardinals from a number of Muslim-majority countries, in places as diverse as Brunei and Bangladesh, Morocco and Malaysia, Palestine and Pakistan. Many of these countries received a red hat for the first time, with these appointments turning the Church's gaze toward minority Christian communities living in distant and often overlooked corners of the world. At the same time, voices shaped by life in Muslim contexts were brought into the heart of the Church, allowing Rome to listen more closely to Islamic perspectives and giving new energy to the Church's engagement with the Islamic world.

On the morning of the late pontiff's passing, I was attending an audience in the grand diwan of one such cardinal elector in a Middle Eastern capital. Guests were sipping bitter qahwa and sharing ma'amoul, the buttery, date-filled cookies traditionally eaten during religious festivals across the Arab world. We exchanged the seasonal greeting *kull saheh wa intum salmeen* –



Pope Francis greets a young Rohingya refugee from Myanmar during a December 1 interreligious and ecumenical meeting for peace in the garden of the archbishop's residence in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photo: CNS/L'Osservatore Romano via Reuters.

a wish that “every year you be safe” – when a message from the Vatican lit up the cardinal's phone: the Holy Father had died. The mood shifted at once. Our festive greetings gave way to hushed murmurs of *Allah yirhamo* – “God have mercy on him” – and a solemn sadness filled the room. As we mourned his passing, many of us were already wondering what would come next for the Church, particularly in the Middle East given the strides made in papal outreach to the Arab and Islamic worlds that we inhabit.

**“Their sentiments were sincere and striking”**

A measure of Pope Francis' impact in these worlds came not only through official statements, but through

**“The Pope moved as diplomat, pilgrim, and herald of the Gospel, his gentleness and simplicity softening hearts and sowing seeds of fraternity that continue to grow”**

something far more personal: the spontaneous messages I received that same day from Arab Muslim friends, near and far. A friend in Morocco wrote that “he was a beloved man, and his words were peace and goodness for all people.” A sheikh in Palestine described him as a friend of his people. My regular taxi driver in Jordan sent his condolences and recalled the Pope's visit to his country with warmth, while an Iraqi friend praised Francis' outreach to the Shia community. Their sentiments were sincere and striking. These messages spoke volumes about the bridges Francis had built through gestures of respect, dialogue with Muslim leaders, and his emphasis on human dignity and fraternity. The mourning of a Catholic Pope by Muslim friends was not merely an expression of goodwill; it was a testament to the resonance his

**“These messages spoke volumes about the bridges Francis had built through gestures of respect, dialogue with Muslim leaders, and his emphasis on human dignity and fraternity. The mourning of a Catholic Pope by Muslim friends was not merely an expression of goodwill; it was a testament to the resonance his message found far beyond the walls of the Vatican”**

message found far beyond the walls of the Vatican.

## Diplomacy

It was precisely Francis' outreach beyond the Vatican – and his particular focus on building bridges over its walls – that brought him into closer contact with the Islamic world, elevated his profile and that of the Catholic Church, and opened new possibilities for encounter, relationship, and dialogue. Over the course of his twelve-year pontificate, Francis travelled to more than a dozen majority-Muslim countries. Among his many engagements were a meeting with interfaith leaders in Albania; prayer with Islamic clerics in Istanbul; participation in an interreligious meeting in Indonesia; a speech at a dialogue summit in Bahrain; and attendance at a congress of religions in Kazakhstan. In each place, the Pope moved as diplomat, pilgrim,

and herald of the Gospel, his gentleness and simplicity softening hearts and sowing seeds of fraternity that continue to grow.

**“His bond with Rabbi Abraham Skorka wove together personal trust, theological dialogue, and shared efforts”**

Perhaps one of Francis' greatest and most enduring gifts was his capacity to form deep personal relationships, especially across religious lines. Long before his election as pope in 2013, Cardinal Bergoglio's decades-long friendship with a Buenos Aires rabbi stood as an example of his ability to seek common ground between followers of different faiths. His bond

with Rabbi Abraham Skorka wove together personal trust, theological dialogue, and shared efforts toward social justice—embodying the kind of interfaith fraternity that Francis would later champion on the global stage.

## Relations

Around the time of Pope Francis' hospitalisation in early February, an Egyptian priest told me how deeply moved he had been to learn that Sheikh Ahmad al-Tayyeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar in Cairo, had offered prayers for “my dear brother, Pope Francis” in the mosque that Friday. That gesture of fraternal care spoke volumes about the personal bond that had formed between the Pope and the Grand Imam, as well as the progress made in rebuilding ties between the Catholic Church and al-Azhar, the revered seat of learning and jurisprudence



# world and what lies ahead

in the Sunni Islamic world.

Relations had been strained between the Vatican and al-Azhar since Pope Benedict XVI's lecture at the University of Regensburg in 2006, in which he quoted a 14th-century Byzantine emperor who made critical comments about Islam and Muhammad. Although Benedict clarified the quote did not reflect his own personal opinions, anger flared across the Muslim world and al-Azhar eventually froze its official dialogue with the Vatican in 2011, claiming the Pope had "repeatedly addressed Islam negatively."

**“Fitzgerald’s quiet diplomacy is seen by many as having laid the groundwork for the reconciliation, renewed dialogue and warming of relations”**

In the midst of these tensions, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald – papal nuncio to Egypt between 2006 and 2012 – is often credited with keeping lines of communication open and limiting the damage during this fraught period in relations. Born in England to Irish parents, Fitzgerald became a missionary with the White Fathers and a fluent speaker of Arabic, scholar of Islamic Studies, and long-time head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue before his entry into the Holy See’s diplomatic service. Widely regarded as one of the Church’s foremost

experts on Islam and inter-religious dialogue, Fitzgerald’s quiet diplomacy is seen by many as having laid the groundwork for the reconciliation, renewed dialogue and warming of relations that took place during Francis’ papacy. In 2019, the Pope elevated him to the College of Cardinals—a move many saw as a long-overdue public recognition of his decades-long contribution to Christian-Muslim understanding.

## Commitment

Pope Francis and Sheikh Ahmad met on several occasions, deepening their personal friendship and helping to restore relations between the Vatican and al-Azhar. At the heart of their bond was a shared commitment to combating religious violence, fostering peace, and promoting fraternal relations between followers of different faiths. Their friendship proved groundbreaking, as was the Pope’s historic meeting with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in 2021. In the Iraqi city of Najaf, the two leaders discussed the importance of coexistence, mutual respect, and the protection of religious minorities. This meeting marked an important step forward in Catholic-Shia relations, with al-Sistani recently describing it as “a moment of great significance.” The positive impact of this encounter continues to reverberate, influencing Catholic-Shia dialogues and interactions today.

Yet these friendships and



Pope Francis meets Westmoreland Palon, Malaysia’s new ambassador to the Holy See, at the Vatican June 10, 2019. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media handout via Reuters.

encounters were not merely symbolic, for they yielded tangible results such as the historic signing of the Document on Human Fraternity which Francis and al-Tayyeb co-signed in Abu Dhabi in 2019. The joint statement called for a culture of dialogue, mutual cooperation and reciprocal understanding, underpinned by human values that unite all people and which forbid violence

**“Widely regarded as one of the Church’s foremost experts on Islam and interreligious dialogue, Fitzgerald’s quiet diplomacy is seen by many as having laid the groundwork for the reconciliation, renewed dialogue and warming of relations that took place during Francis’ papacy”**

in the name of religion. Pope Francis’ later encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* – itself an appeal for human fraternity and a rejection of conflict – said the

document was “no mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogue and common commitment.”

**“Whoever his successor may be, there is hope that they will build on the firm foundations he laid”**

Although it will take time to fully assess Pope Francis’ lasting contribution to interreligious dialogue, the key pillars of his approach ought now to be recognisable. Whilst it is always possible his successor will set out on a different path, it is widely believed the composition of the College of Cardinals makes it unlikely the next pontiff will differ greatly in outlook to the late Pope.

The new Pope’s interreligious in-tray will, among other things, include continuing the friendships

and goodwill established by Francis; confronting religious violence and fundamentalism wherever found; promoting common interfaith action on issues of justice, peace, and care for creation; and confidently sharing the Christian faith with an openness to listening and learning from encounters with followers of other religions.

Some apprehension lingers in interfaith circles, aware that it was Pope Francis’ unique personal blend of humility, courage, and relational warmth that allowed interreligious dialogue to flourish in our time. Yet whoever his successor may be, there is hope that they will build on the firm foundations he laid—ensuring that the Church’s commitment to encounter, dialogue, and fraternity not only endures, but deepens and expands.

**① Justin Robinson OSB is a monk of Glenstal Abbey in County Limerick currently residing in Cairo.**



Trappist Fr Jean-Pierre Schumacher, the last survivor of the 1996 massacre in Tibhirine, Algeria, died November 21, 2021, at the age of 97. In this photo, Pope Francis kisses Fr Schumacher’s hand during a meeting at the cathedral in Rabat, Morocco, March 31, 2019. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.



# Ireland stands for human dignity in 2025 March for Life



It gives my heart great joy to see so many people here today... Today we stand together, united by a cause rooted in the deepest convictions of the human heart, **Renata Milán Morales** hears.

Since the 2018 referendum over 50,000 abortions have been carried in Ireland. In the most recent programme for government we find the objective of ensuring “that all maternity hospitals provide equitable access to termination of pregnancy services.” The value of life is being measured on circumstances. “Terminating” a life is now seemingly a right. The debate about abortion is about more than abortion itself. The event began with a clear statement: “You have 50,000 reasons to be here,” said by Wendy Grace, MC at the March for Life held in Dublin on May 5.

## Hope

However, despite these facts there is still hope. The March for Life began with a family gathering where children had their faces painted, among other activities. This was followed by a Mass at Newman University Church. Minutes before the march began, people from all backgrounds started to mingle. All came for the same reason: to protect the right to life. From Newman University Church to the Dáil, the streets began to fill with thousands of people. Banners showed the presence of people from Donegal, Galway, Belfast and other areas of the country. Children, teenagers and young adults were also present holding signs with messages such as ‘love life’, ‘protect them both’ and ‘pro-life, pro-woman, pro-baby’.

This year, the Pro-Life Campaign aim was to focus on “Ireland’s spiralling abortion numbers, the alarm-



Crowd on Molesworth St at the annual March For Life. Photo: John McElroy.



Pro life advocates pictured with signs. Photo: David Conroy.



A group is pictured at the stage. Photo: David Conroy.

ing new data on abortion trends based on information contained in replies to parliamentary questions, and our call for the Government to take immediate steps to ensure women prior to an abortion are not kept in the dark about the range of practical supports available.”

**“I thought I was doing what was best for our little baby girl at the time”**

Recently elected Senator Sarah O’Reilly was present as one of the guest speakers. During her address to those present she expressed that, “it gives my heart great joy to see so many people here today... Today we stand together, united by a cause that transcends politics. A cause rooted in the deepest

convictions of the human heart. The belief that every life matters and that women deserve better than abortion.”

Ruth O’Sullivan from Cork, whose video ‘The other side of abortion’ has accumulated 170,000 views, was also invited to speak at the march. “On the one hand I take full responsibility for my actions, our actions myself and my husband, and I’ve asked my husband on occasion a lot if he recalled anyone mentioning to us at the time that there were maybe other paths that we could have taken. And he said the same thing. There was no one that was brave enough to... I thought I was doing what was best for our little baby girl at the time. Whether it’s an unplanned pregnancy or a case like mine where we received a diagnosis. Abortion goes ahead. It’s irreversible. I find it astounding that the government presents the ‘courage approach’,

which only pushes abortion as a model of best practise. What’s happening is having a truly devastating impact on the lives of many women, not to mention what it’s doing to the lives of our unborn babies... What about the wider societal impact? The Doctor who terminated the life of my baby came back a little later to pay his respects, and I remember clearly him saying ‘I’m very, very sorry for your loss’. Which is still bizarre when you think about it. The very person who ends the life of your baby says, ‘sorry for your loss’. It’s not natural.”

## Voice

Wendy Grace, who is about to welcome her fourth child, also pointed out the fear she felt going to the 20 weeks scan, “People are being put under pressure now to have an abortion if something is wrong at a scan.” This statement shows the approach

that is being taken in maternity hospitals.

Eilis Mulroy, CEO of the Pro-Life Campaign also spoke to those present, “This is our cause, and we will not stop until we see change. I say listen to our reasonable demands to those who think we are going to fall silent, think again of every woman who has been failed by the system. We see you, we hear you. We will continue to fight for you. Stay strong. Stay determined. Let’s continue to March together for women, for children, for life. Thank you again for being here.”

As the guest speakers addressed the thousands of people in attendance, the sound of the crowd’s engagement and response to the pro-life advocates’ words showed their commitment and care.

The March for Life gave a voice to women who, like Ruth O’Sullivan, are still battling the trauma of abor-

tion. It also discussed how this issue could be tackled on a government level. Most importantly, it reinforced and encouraged those who attended to fight for this cause.

**“I have every confidence and belief that the pro-life work that you’ve done has saved many lives”**

Wendy Grace concluded the event on a hopeful note, “I have every confidence and belief that the pro-life work that you’ve done has saved many lives. And even if it just saved one life and helped one mother. Wouldn’t it all be worthy? The time and the efforts that you put in is supporting women and their babies is saving lives. Thank you for that.”





Big crowds were seen during the march. Photo: David Conroy.



Agnieszka Kosciwicz getting ready to march to Molesworth St on Monday at the annual March For Life. Photo: John McElroy.



A group is pictured holding their signs. Photo: David Conroy.



Katie Edel Ward, Alanna Ward and Elizabeta Boricio at the annual March For Life. Photo: John McElroy.



Crowd in Molesworth St on Monday at the annual March For Life. Photo: John McElroy.



Senator Sarah O'Reilly pictured addressing those present. Photo: David Conroy.



# The Irish Sister who helped control the HIV epidemic in Brazil



Renata Steffens

**“H**IV remains a major global public health issue, having claimed an estimated 42.3 million lives to date,” reads the World Health Organization’s website.

In Brazil, the illness, at the time known as ‘gay plague’, was first diagnosed in men in 1982, and in women the next year. By 1993, the number of infected was over 16,500 people. An Irish Sister in mission in Brazil, saw first-hand what AIDS was doing to people and “decided to do something about it”. Sr Margaret Hosty joined Divina de Fatima Nogueira Dias and established the AAVE Group in 1995.

The charity group supports those living with the virus, provide medication, courses, home/hospital visits, counselling, among other services. Some of the organisations the AAVE Group works in conjunction with are the Archdiocese of Goiânia, Misericórdia and Trócaire.

Sr Hosty is celebrating 40 years in Brazil in 2025 and received a Human Rights Award in 2023 for her work with those vulnerable people. *The Irish Catholic* talked with the Sister about her mission and work in Brazil, read the interview below.

**Q: Could you talk a little about your first years of Vocation?**

**A:** I entered the Sisters of St Louis in 1967. I didn’t have much contact with religious orders before I entered but one or two came to our school to talk about religious life. I don’t remember a thing they said. They were obviously doing Vocation promotion but it didn’t mean anything to me. I first met the Sisters of St Louis in 1964, in Balla, Co. Mayo, and I was impressed by them. They seemed so ordinary and down to earth, human.... and that attracted me. When I was in primary school our teacher prayed that Catholic missionaries would go to South America because the people there were being converted to evangelical religions! That sounded terrible to me (then!) as a child. I knew I wanted to go to Latin America as a missionary. As a Sister of St Louis, I got the opportunity.



Archbishop João Justino visits AAVE



“The day I left Ireland,” 1967

**Q: You moved to Brazil in 1985, as a native of Co. Roscommon, how was it to adapt to such a different environment? Not only weatherwise, but culturally, the language, the food...**

**A:** Yes, I entered the Sisters of St Louis in California in 1967. At that time, we didn’t have a mission in Brazil so I thought if I go to North America I might get to South America sooner, easier! It was a big challenge for me to adapt to life in [the] US - weather, culture, food, education system and of course religious life. I attended university and trained as a teacher in Los Angeles, enjoyed teaching and made many friends. Our Sisters opened the first mission in Brazil in 1976 in the state of Tocantins in the centre-north of the country. I was finishing

my degree at that time and not ready for a move. When in 1985 the opportunity came, I headed for Brazil. A big move indeed with many differences in comparison to [the] US.

**“Every culture has its challenges and it’s blessings... each one is holy ground”**

The only thing that was about the same was the weather in Southern California and the weather in central Brazil! The Brazilian people are very welcoming and accepting. The language was a big challenge for the first two years but even when I made so many mistakes in speaking Portuguese, the people

always made a great effort to understand me! After 40 years I still make mistakes in speaking Portuguese but the people don’t mind! Every culture has its challenges and it’s blessings... each one is holy ground. I love living and working in Brazil and have many good friends here.

**Q: Please, tell me about these past 40 years, the projects you were involved in, and your achievements as a missionary.**

**A:** The language was a big challenge at the beginning.



Sr Hosty arriving in Brazil



Coordinating Liturgy in Goiânia

I taught English in a public school for a few years and found this extremely difficult.

**“They were often exploited and treated unjustly so by forming a syndicate they were more assured of their rights”**

Teaching in Catholic schools in LA where par-

ents paid fees was very different from teaching in a public school in Goiânia, in Brazil. At one stage I thought of returning to LA where I felt I knew how to teach! Around this same time, I began to get involved with the washerwomen who were forming a syndicate. These were the times when families here didn’t have washing machines, when women washed and ironed other people’s clothes for a pittance. They were often exploited and treated unjustly so by forming

**“We, [the] Sisters, did the Sunday Liturgy, marriages and baptisms. At the same time, we worked hard to train local leaders to take on these leadership positions”**





Delivering food to a poor family



Sr Hosty receiving the Human Right Award



"The day I entered the Convent in Los Angeles"

## “No matter where I am I will always be motivated and influenced by Jesus’ words: ‘I have come that they may have life, life in abundance’”

a syndicate they were more assured of their rights. At the same time, I began to help in the local parish where there wasn't a resident priest. We, [the] Sisters, did the Sunday Liturgy, marriages and baptisms. At the same time, we worked hard to train local leaders to take on these leadership positions.

**Q: You are a co-founder of the AAVE Group. Please tell me about it, what it is, how it works, and its importance to the Brazilian community.**

**A:** Through my work in the parish, I first came in contact with HIV/AIDS. A seminarian friend and fellow worker who contracted HIV at some stage, became seriously ill as he developed AIDS. That was in 1993 before life-saving medication for HIV/AIDS became available. I knew almost nothing about AIDS at the time, and from seeing the discrimination my friend suffered, I realised that so many others were also ill-informed, leading to fear and stigma for those with HIV/AIDS. After his death, I felt I needed to do something about this, and that was how I got into working with and for people living with HIV and AIDS and founded the AAVE Group.

The AAVE Group, [www.grupoaaave.org](http://www.grupoaaave.org) (which in English stands for: AIDS, Support, Life, Hope) works with people with HIV/AIDS and their families, providing psy-

chological support and counselling, home and hospital visits, advice on their rights and legal entitlements, and training for income generating skills to help people who have lost their incomes due to HIV/AIDS to become more financially self-sufficient and provide for themselves and their families.

AAVE provides education regarding HIV/AIDS and its prevention in the community as we go to schools, church groups, factories, and door-to-door in poor and marginalised neighbourhoods to give correct information and to encourage early testing.

A third aspect of our work is Advocacy to protect and defend human rights. At times this means questioning and contesting public policies or challenging hospital administration. As human rights are often infringed or even denied, we affirm the right to health care, medication, among other human rights.

**Q: In the past 40 years the numbers of infected dropped considerably and people dying from HIV related illness is rare nowadays. Is AAVE's work still relevant/important today?**

**A:** There aren't the same numbers dying as a consequence of AIDS nowadays as there were in the 80s and 90s. Science and medicine have made

great advances in health care to treat HIV. However, there still isn't a vaccine available and there isn't a cure. Nowadays, people are living with HIV, although in the past six months five seropositive people whom we have supported and accompanied for many years have died.

**“Those who live with HIV/AIDS are listed among the ‘nobodies’ of our society if they are poor, homosexual, black or belong to a minority group”**

The federal government provides medication, but often at state and city government levels there are gaps/lags regarding treatment for opportunist infections. Every week AAVE has several requests from service users to buy medication or pay for exams which are urgent. We do what we can as we depend totally on donations for this aspect of our work. (Just last week we had to buy morphine for a poor black HIV positive woman who is dying).

What hasn't improved is the stigma, condemnation, moral judgement and discrimination. These attitudes kill. Antônio Guterres, sec-



Visiting a service user in her home

retary general of the World Health Organization says that, if we are to end AIDS, no-one can be left behind. However, what we see in practice is that the poor are often left behind. Those who live with HIV/AIDS are listed among the ‘nobodies’ of our society if they are poor, homosexual, black or belong to a minority group.

**Q: In 2023 you received a Human Rights Award, please, tell me about it.**

**A:** Yes, I received a Human Rights Award from the Legislative Assembly of the State of Goiás for my work to protect the human rights of people living with HIV/AIDS. Besides being pleased with the recognition I received, I was happy that our work at AAVE merited this award and that it got State recognition too. Previously in 2006 I received the Pedro Ludovico State Award also for my work in the defence of human rights of people of people living with HIV/AIDS.

**Q: What's for the future? Do you have new projects you are working on?**

**A:** From the very beginning of my work with people living with HIV/AIDS and down through the years, I have been very conscious of people who are LGBTQIA+. I have listened to their pain, and I have ‘seen their wounds’ as it were. I have wanted to do something. The good news is that together with like-minded religious both men and women, laywomen and an Anglican minister we established a Christian Diversity Group and held our first meeting last month with people who are LGBTQIA+. We hope and pray that our work will bear fruit and give life and hope to many and that the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21, “That all may be one” will be furthered.

**Q: Do you plan on moving back to Ireland at some point, or will you stay in Brazil?**

**A:** Did my sister-in-law suggest this question? I've

worked here for 40 years... 30 of them specifically with people who are poor and living with HIV; we've gotten a Christian Diversity group off the ground, and I'll be 75 this year. One positive outcome from Covid is that we learned to work from a distance, so I am planning on continuing these works from a distance... living in Ireland as of 2026. No matter where I am I will always be motivated and influenced by Jesus' words: “I have come that they may have life, life in abundance”, (Jn 10:10) and “That all may be one”, (Jn 17:21), which is also the motto of the St Louis Sisters.

I am very grateful to my family, to the Sisters of St Louis, to the many donors and to friends and colleagues for their constant care and support during all these years. Above all, I am grateful to God who has led me and is always with me. Thank you to *The Irish Catholic* for this opportunity to tell my story.



# THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

## Italian synodal assembly was a positive show of unity - Theologian

### Despite negative media coverage, the synod showed vitality and positivity in the Church



Luca Attanasio

The second synodal assembly of the Italian Bishops' Conference (CEI) held in Rome between March 31 and April 3 ended with a real shock. The document proposed at the end of the proceedings, which was supposed to indicate the future of the Italian Church, was overwhelmingly rejected by the assembly members. Basically, the 1008 participants, including 7 cardinals, 168 bishops, 252 priests, 34 religious, 17 deacons, 530 lay people (277 women and 253 men) showed marked opposition to the docu-

ment, which they considered 'sad', 'bureaucratic' and 'without vision for the future'.

**“Thanks to the way the news was reported by the media, also due to its clamour, the event was experienced by all members as a positive sign, of great vitality”**

The intensive work put in over the past three years, according to the assembly members, was not received. In the end, due to too many amendments, a resounding decision was taken: no vote, everything postponed to October. And even the general assembly of bishops will have to be moved to November, a measure with very few precedents: it has only happened twice before in the last twenty years, and always for reasons of force majeure (the death of John Paul II in 2005 and the pandemic in 2020).

Contrary to what one might believe, however, also thanks to the way the news was reported by the media, also due to its clamour, the event was experienced by all members as a positive sign, of great vitality. An occasion that, contrary to appearances, united, compacted the assembly rather than dividing it, and can be

experienced as a path of unity for the entire Italian Church. To understand from the inside how it went, *The Irish Catholic* turned to Stella Morra, a theologian and member of the national committee of the synodal path, who has been present since the beginning.

**Dr Morra you have followed the work from the beginning, for three years, can you tell us how it went?**

“Beyond the most controversial topics, the document put to the vote did not respond at all to the needs but above all to the experience of the path travelled. This is the main problem.

The assembly had become somewhat accustomed after three years of work, to a synodal method that, albeit with difficulty, sought and found convergence. The document that was presented to us on Monday, March 31 was definitely not up to that method. The evening of the 31st was very agitated, but of a positive kind of agitation. In other words, it was clear to practically the whole assembly that the text was no good, but thanks to the freedom we had from Tuesday morning, in the 28 working groups we felt a great deal of responsibility for the criticisms made and the proposals to be made, and on Wednesday the Council of the CEI wisely accepted the idea of postponing. We found ourselves in the end much less divided because even the most polemical felt fully recognised in this movement. It was unacceptable to have a document whose title was ‘That joy may be full’, so sad”.

**“There has been debate, there have been misunderstandings, but the desire to proceed united and with an air of renewal has always been clear. We lived a collegial reality, in a period in which we felt the novelty of the Synod on Synodality, and in that document we found none of this”**



**One of the main problems, therefore, was the tone of the document, sad, in a certain sense renouncing....**

“Exactly, it did not reflect at all the three years of work that have been anything but sad and passive. There has been debate, there have been misunderstandings, but the desire to proceed united and with an air of renewal has always been clear. We lived a collegial reality, in a period in which we felt the novelty of the Synod on Synodality, and in that document we found none of this. The sense of responsibility emerged well

during the final assemblies. In the 28 groups we felt a great responsibility for the criticisms we had made and, therefore, for the proposals we had to make. And in fact we have produced an enormous amount of material, never so vast and so of quality. At that point, faced with so much quantity and quality, the only solution was to postpone, it was impossible to do everything overnight. And the Italian Bishops' Conference wisely did not oppose it.”

**Has there been more debate on the questions of the female diaconate,**

**pastoral care of people with different sexual orientations or for the divorced? Were these the most delicate issues that led the assembly to ask for the document to be redone?**

“It is obvious that all these were very sensitive topics but I would like to reiterate that there has been no real polarisation on specific issues. The real issue was that the document was not up to the ecclesial sensitivity that has been created with much effort and vision in these three years. The text looked like a bureaucratic document, with no vision for the future. Contrary to what one might think, therefore, that moment, instead of representing the lowest point, was perhaps one of the highest, a real passage in which all lay people, bishops, consecrated people, priests and cardinals felt the responsibility to take the floor and say ‘no’. As the Scriptures say, ‘That joy may be full’ ... there is a need for communication of joy and breath”.

**Doctor, in your opinion, why did the CEI produce such a disappointing text?**

“Behind it is the limitation of the Italian Church, which has been used for too long to being covered by the dominant Catholic culture. It is finding itself uncovered and afraid of losing an identity. Somehow, the assembly responded: ‘Rest assured, we are here, trust us for a path towards and positive. Let me add, in conclusion, that it is even more necessary not to give in to fear and to have confidence after the death of Pope Francis: the Churches, including the Italian one, are on the move and the Lord will continue to take care of them”.







# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Canada's election sees life issues sidelined

● Canada's recent election saw the Liberal Party, led by Mark Carney, reclaim power after a tight race against Conservative Party challenger Pierre Poilievre. Carney, a practicing Catholic, has publicly dissented from the Church's teachings on abortion, stating that his faith would not interfere with a woman's right to choose. Both Carney and Poilievre, while voicing support for abortion rights, largely ignored life issues during the campaign.

Bishop William McGrattan, president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, expressed concern over the disconnect between politicians who claim to be guided by their faith and their positions on life issues. The bishops' conference also highlighted the need to protect the right to life, from conception to natural death, and criticised the expansion of Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) and limited access to palliative care.

Matthew Wojciechowski of Campaign Life Coalition urged Catholics to focus on individual Parliament members who hold pro-life views, as leaders from both major parties avoided championing the right to life.

### Kashmir Catholics pray for peace between India and Pakistan

● Bishop Ivan Pereira of the Jammu-Srinagar diocese in Kashmir shared that the Catholic faithful in the region are praying fervently for peace amidst growing tensions. The small Catholic community, which numbers about 9,000 in a state of 13 million, has been marching and praying, holding lit torches as symbols of reconciliation. The violence escalated on April 22, when a Pakistani extremist attack killed 26 Indian tourists, heightening the political crisis between India and Pakistan, who have clashed over Kashmir since 1947.

Bishop Pereira

condemned the attack as a cowardly assault on innocent lives, stressing that justice must be pursued. He also expressed concern over ongoing ceasefire violations and the destruction of militant homes by Indian police. Despite the fear, the bishop stressed the importance of the Catholic community's mission to foster peace and brotherhood. Catholic schools in Kashmir, mostly attended by Muslim students, continue to promote unity. Bishop Pereira concluded that their community draws strength from the universal Church's prayers during this time of crisis.

### Archdiocese of Tijuana collecting guns and ammo

● Catholic Church leaders in Baja California have launched a program called "Sí al desarme, sí a la paz" (Yes to disarming, yes to peace) to combat crime. Churches are acting as collection points for guns and ammunition, offering compensation depending on the type of weapon.

The initiative, which began last week outside Tijuana's old cathedral, was announced in collaboration with Baja California Governor Marina del Pilar Ávila Olmeda. Archbishop Francisco Moreno Barrón and other dignitaries attended the ceremony. The Mexican Army will destroy the collected weapons. Similar programs have seen success in other parts of Mexico, helping reduce violence.

### New state law in Washington will attack confessional seal

● State legislators in Washington have passed, and Governor Bob Ferguson has signed into law, a bill that requires priests to report information about child abuse, even if it is given in a sacramental confession.

The bill—which takes effect in July if it survives legal challenges—requires clergy to report suspected abuse to law enforcement, in a direct challenge to the integrity of the confessional seal.

Archbishop Paul Etienne of Seattle quickly responded with an unambiguous public statement:

Catholic clergy may not violate the seal of confession – or they will be excommunicated from the Church. All Catholics must know and be assured that their confessions remain sacred, secure, confidential and protected by the law of the Church.

The archbishop remarked that the legislation "is specifically targeting religious conduct by inserting the government into the Catholic tradition". Stating that the new law is a violation of religious freedom.

Governor Ferguson—a Catholic himself—swept aside such concerns, saying: "Protecting our kids, first, is the most important thing."

## Ukraine's religious leaders urge US faithful to 'be on the side of truth' amid war

Ukrainian religious leaders met with Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, on May 1, urging the US Church to "be on the side of the truth" regarding Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine.

The Ukrainian Council of the Churches of Religious Organisations (UCCRO), established in 1996 and the largest such group in Ukraine, represents a range of religious communities and engages in initiatives like spiritual revival, inter-faith dialogue, and charitable work. During their meeting, UCCRO members expressed gratitude for the American people's support but voiced concerns about shifts in US positions on Russia's aggression.

Bishop Vitaliy Kryvytskyi of Kyiv-Zhytomyr thanked the US Church for its solidarity, stating, "We never cease to pray for you." Bishop Igor Bandura, a UCCRO delegate, emphasised prayer as Ukraine's "most powerful weapon" and requested continued intercession.

However, Bishop Kryvytskyi urged US Catholics not to allow "false narratives" to prevail. He stressed that Russia's invasion, beginning in 2014 and escalating in February 2022, should be recognised as "war," not a "conflict." He criticised the shifting political rhetoric, particularly under the Trump administration,



Firefighters work at the site of a Russian drone strike in Kyiv, Ukraine, May 4, 2025. Photo: OSV News /Olga Yakimovich, Reuters.

which has at times seemed to side with Russia or remain ambiguous.

Recently, the US signed a minerals deal with Ukraine but did not offer clear security guarantees, differing from the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Despite this, the US authorised the transfer of a Patriot missile battery to Ukraine, considered an important step for Ukraine's security.

The UCCRO delegation also raised concerns about Russia's forced deportation of Ukrainian children for

"re-education" and adoption by Russian families. The Ukrainian government estimates 19,546 children have been taken, while Russia claims over 700,000 children in its custody.

These transfers, which violate international law, have led to arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court against Russian officials, including President Vladimir Putin.

Additionally, UCCRO members highlighted Russia's attacks on churches, with over 600 religious

buildings damaged, and religious persecution in occupied territories. The Russian government has banned the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Knights of Columbus, and Caritas in some regions, while Ukrainian Catholic priests have been captured and tortured.

Archbishop Broglio encouraged UCCRO members to continue speaking the truth, respecting human rights, and treating all people, including Russian prisoners of war, with dignity.

## Kidnappings of Catholic priests surge in Nigeria amid rising violence

In Nigeria, violence against Catholic clergy has surged in recent years, with nearly 150 priests kidnapped over the past decade, according to recent reports. This troubling trend shows no signs of abating, with 12 priests abducted in just the first quarter of 2025—an all-time high. The majority of these kidnappings are driven by ransom demands, but some may have religious or political motives, especially in regions with high insurgent

activity, like Kaduna.

Priests are often targeted for their visibility and perceived access to funds, and while many are released after ransom is paid, 11 have been killed, with several still missing. The kidnapping of Fr Ibrahim Amos in April 2025 highlights the ongoing dangers clergy face, although he was released unharmed.

This violence is part of a larger pattern of Christian persecution in Nigeria,

with reports showing more than 52,000 Christian deaths since 2009. The Nigerian Catholic Bishops' Conference continues to call for stronger action from the government to address security concerns and end the attacks. Despite these threats, clergy remain steadfast in their mission to serve the faithful, drawing attention to the resilience and courage of Nigerian Catholics amidst growing adversity.

## Chinese diocese 'elects' new bishop despite sede vacante

Despite the death of Pope Francis, the Chinese government has proceeded with episcopal appointments, highlighting tensions in the Vatican-China relationship. In Shanghai, priests, nuns, and laypeople ratified the election of Fr Wu Jianlin as auxiliary bishop, while in Xinxiang, Fr Li Janlin

was 'elected' as bishop. Both elections occurred without Vatican approval, consistent with China's push for autonomy in Church governance.

The Vatican-China deal, signed in 2018, allowed Chinese authorities a role in selecting bishops, though this has led to disagree-

ments over appointments. In Xinxiang, Fr Li's election conflicts with Bishop Zhang Weizhu, an underground bishop appointed by the Vatican. This dual reality, where state-appointed and Vatican-appointed bishops coexist, complicates the situation.

With the papacy vacant,

the Chinese government's actions serve as a test for the upcoming pope. Cardinal Pietro Parolin has defended the deal, acknowledging its slow progress and difficulties. The challenge remains for the new pontiff to navigate China's influence over the Church's governance in the region.





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## Sistine Chapel gets ready for conclave



In preparation for the conclave to elect a new pope, workers build platforms over a protective covering on the marble floor of the Sistine Chapel. The cardinals who enter the conclave May 7 will sit at tables facing the centre with the tables in the back row raised slightly. Photo: CNS /Vatican Media.

## Francis' final gift to Gaza: Popemobile will be transformed into mobile clinic for children

Pope Francis, deeply concerned about the situation in Gaza, bequeathed his popemobile to Caritas Jerusalem in his final months, with the directive to convert it into a mobile health station for Gaza's children. The new health station is expected to be operational by mid-May, according to Peter Brune, secretary general of Caritas Sweden, who, alongside Anton Asfar from Caritas Jerusalem, conceived the idea in February. The popemobile had been stored in Bethlehem since Pope Francis' 2014 pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The project was approved

by the Pope after Swedish Cardinal Anders Arborelius approached him with the proposal.

Brune emphasised the urgent need for help in Gaza, especially with the full blockage of aid since March 2. "This is not the way we should treat our children," he said, highlighting the severe impact of blocked access to food, water, and healthcare, which makes children particularly vulnerable to infections and preventable conditions.

The mobile clinic will provide life-saving interventions in Gaza, where the healthcare system has nearly collapsed.

It will be staffed by medical professionals and equipped with diagnostic tools, including rapid tests, suture kits, syringes, oxygen supplies, vaccines, and a refrigerator for storing medications. The clinic will be ready for deployment once a humanitarian corridor to Gaza reopens.

Asfar remarked that the vehicle represents Pope Francis' love and care for the vulnerable during the crisis. Since the war began, the Pope has maintained contact with Catholic Holy Family Parish in Gaza, offering support and expressing his solidarity with the com-

munity sheltering there.

The mobile health station, called the 'Vehicle of Hope,' symbolises that the children of Gaza are not forgotten. Brune explained that it would convey a message of hope, with children being treated in the popemobile as "miracles." The Pope's gesture serves to draw attention to the plight of Gaza's children.

Meanwhile, Israeli media reported that the Israeli cabinet approved plans to "conquer Gaza" and control territory, as well as a distribution plan for humanitarian aid, which Israel says would prevent Hamas from controlling it.

## Martin Scorsese producing film featuring Pope Francis' last in-depth on-camera interview

Filmmaker Martin Scorsese is producing a documentary about Pope Francis and his educational initiative, Scholas Occurrentes. The film, titled *Aldeas, a New Story*, will feature what is reportedly the pope's final in-depth on-camera interview, focusing on his vision for a 'culture of encounter' through education.

Scholas Occurrentes, founded by Pope Francis in 2013, aims to foster cross-cultural dialogue and inclusion, especially through film production. The documen-

tary will showcase short films created by participants of the Aldeas Initiative in Italy, Gambia, and Indonesia, emphasizing community building and personal identity.

Scorsese, who partnered with Aldeas Scholas Film and his own Sikelia Productions, described the project as a testament to the transformative power of creativity. "Now, more than ever, we need to talk to each other and listen to one another," he said, highlighting cin-

ema as an ideal medium for cross-cultural understanding.

Pope Francis, who passed away shortly before the documentary's announcement, had spoken fondly of Aldeas, calling it a "poetic and constructive project" that addresses human life, sociability, and conflict. Scorsese, reflecting on the pope's legacy, praised his wisdom, commitment to goodness, and lifelong learning. The film's release date has yet to be announced.

## Archbishop Caccia to UN: Dialogue, disarmament 'best way' to honor Pope Francis

● The Holy See's diplomat to the United Nations, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, reiterated a call to end nuclear proliferation during a UN General Assembly meeting, honouring the late Pope Francis. Archbishop Caccia stressed, the best way to honour Pope Francis was to "rediscover the spirit" of multilateralism and work together for peace.

Archbishop Caccia also emphasised the need for nuclear disarmament, urging nations to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. With conflicts around the world exacerbating global tensions and suffering, he argued that military spending should be redirected for peacebuilding, hunger elimination, and development, particularly in vulnerable nations. The archbishop reaffirmed that a world free of nuclear weapons is not only possible but necessary.

## Final preparations, discussions underway before conclave begins

● All 133 cardinals who plan to enter the conclave to elect a new pope had arrived in Rome, the Vatican press office said. However, only 132 of them participated in the morning general congregation, a meeting that gives all the cardinals -- those under the age of 80 and eligible to enter a conclave as well as those over 80 -- a chance to discuss priorities,

challenges facing the church and the qualities needed in the next pope.

Topics included - canon law; the importance of Catholic charities "in advocating for the poor"; and the need for a pope who "should be a person present and close, a door of access to communion, to unity in a world where the world order is in crisis, a pastor, a shepherd close to the people."

## Papal Foundation to give \$14 million for people in need in over 60 countries

● The Papal Foundation, a US-based charitable organisation, has announced \$14 million in grants and humanitarian aid to support 116 projects across 60 countries. This includes \$10 million for relief projects and \$4 million for urgent humanitarian assistance. The foundation's initiatives cover areas like clean water access, school construction, healthcare facilities, and care for elderly priests.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Chairman of the Board, joined over 80 members of the Foundation on a Jubilee pilgrimage in Rome, reflecting on their responsibility to serve the poor with faith and compassion.

In addition to grants, the Foundation allocates \$800,000 annually in scholarships to over 100 priests, seminarians, and religious sisters through the St John Paul II Scholarship Program. These scholarships support education in Rome, helping students develop the skills to serve communities. The Foundation's work is a tangible sign of the Church's love in action.

## Vatican tailor prepares cassocks for new pope ahead of conclave

● As the Vatican prepares for the upcoming conclave, anticipation is not only building about the next pope but also about who will dress him. Raniero Mancinelli, a tailor near the Vatican, has handcrafted cassocks for three popes, including John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis.

While Mancinelli hasn't yet dressed a pope for his first appearance on the balcony, he is preparing three cassocks—small, medium, and large—in anticipation. Mancinelli, who has been in business since 1962, has earned positive reviews from previous popes, but he won't know if his garments will be chosen until the new pope appears on the balcony.

Though Gammarelli's tailor shop has traditionally provided the papal cassocks, Mancinelli continues to prepare his own as a gesture of service to the church. His meticulously crafted garments will be offered as a gift, reflecting his dedication to his work and to the church. Mancinelli's shop remains a rare place where the traditions of ecclesiastical tailoring live on.



# The quiet faith of Seán Marty Lockhart



Éanna Mackey

**T**here are few Gaels who don't know the name Seán Marty Lockhart. An All-Star winner, an Ulster champion, and a man who wore the Ireland jersey with pride more times than anyone else. Lockhart has spent much of his life in the spotlight. But behind the accolades and county colours is someone whose impact runs deeper than any silverware.

Now a teacher and coach at St Patrick's College, Maghera—a school of over 1,300 pupils where he's taught for 25 years—Lockhart's influence is felt as much in the corridors and classrooms as it once was on the pitch.

"If you asked my wife, she'd say the proudest moment of my life was our wedding day," he jokes. "But I've been very blessed. I had a fortunate playing career and now a rewarding coaching one. But really, it's about passing something on."

It's that idea—of handing things down—that crops up often when he speaks. Whether it's football, family, or faith, Lockhart's life is rooted in a quiet kind of stewardship.

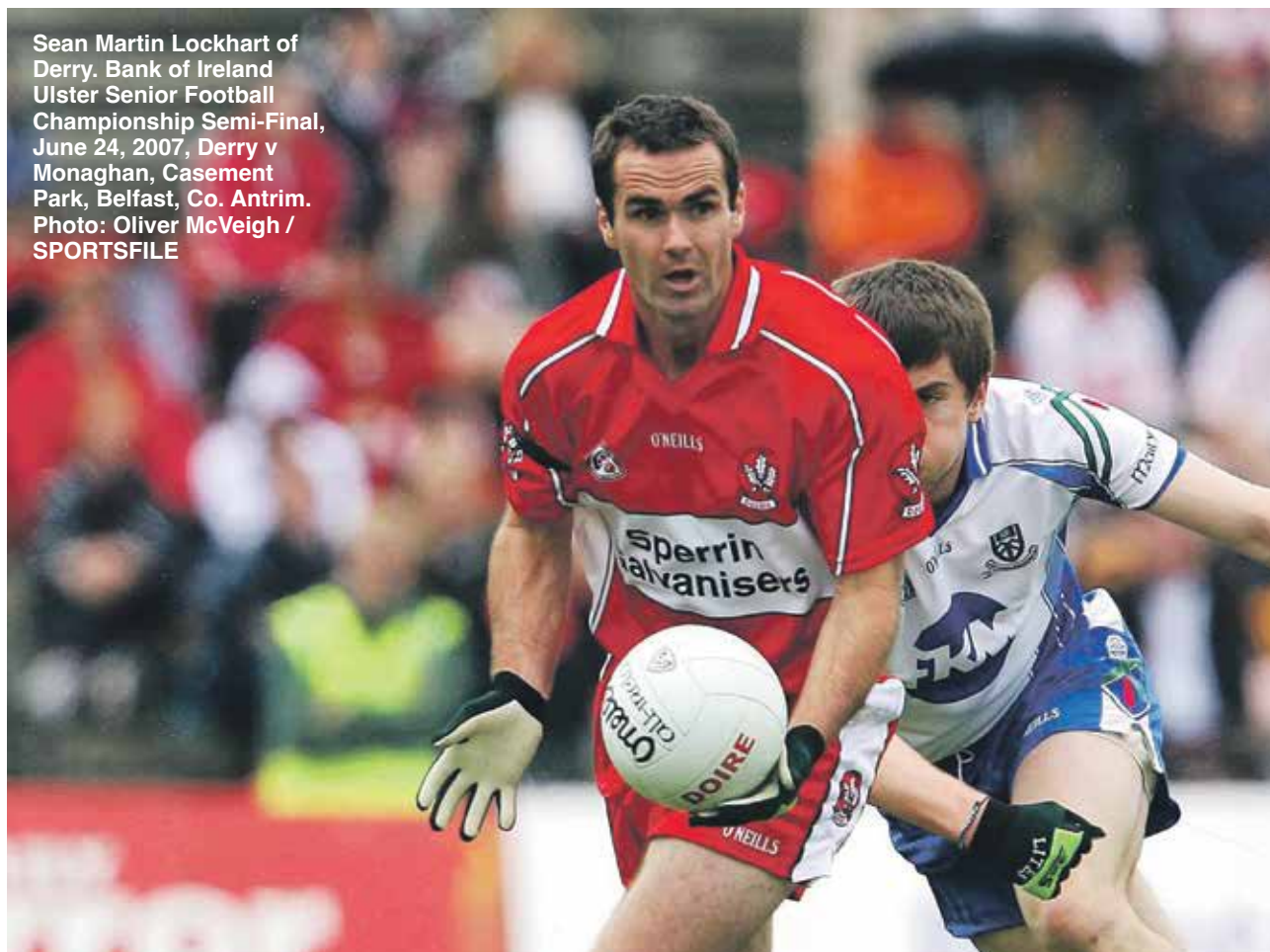
"I'm certainly not a goody two shoes," he says with a wry smile. "I'm no angel. I'd be a rascal at times." But beneath the humour lies a strong moral compass—one that was instilled early on and has never quite left him.

## Family

"As a family, we'd be private. We have a strong faith, and we go to Mass, but we don't

**"Some lads have a surprisingly stronger faith than you'd realise. It's a constant fight to try and get young people involved, but it's about linking them to people they look up to— a teacher or coach, a high-status GAA player, or whoever. Seeing that example really matters"**

Sean Martin Lockhart of Derry. Bank of Ireland Ulster Senior Football Championship Semi-Final, June 24, 2007, Derry v Monaghan, Casement Park, Belfast, Co. Antrim. Photo: Oliver McVeigh / SPORTSFILE



push it down anyone's throat. We've three children, and we try to provide a good example for them. Rearing children is preparing them for life when you're not there. One day we'll be gone, and we just hope they make the right moral decisions."

**"Pray for other people who need the prayers more, and God will look after you"**

Lockhart's upbringing in rural Derry was steeped in that quiet faith. He still remembers going to a local grotto with his mother, praying there before Mass, and visiting graves of loved ones—a tradition he's kept alive.

"She used to say to me, 'Pray for other people who need the prayers more, and God will look after you.'"

That simple wisdom stuck, and it began to manifest itself in ways that went beyond Sunday mornings. A quiet, private and deeply personal routine became part of his matchday preparation.

## Career

"During my club and county career, on the day before a match, I'd go to my local club pitch to train, then I'd head over to the chapel, say some prayers, visit the graves—my grandparents—and then go to the grotto. You'd just feel spiritually ready. Content with yourself. I continued that all throughout my football career."

"In my kitbag I always

had the St Martin relic or a bottle of holy water. You'd be blessing yourself for your mother when you were young," he laughs, "but it's only when you get older that you realise, 'Do you know what? This does you no harm.'"

And now, in small but meaningful ways, he's passing it on.

"To me it's like handing the torch down from my parents' generation to my children."

At St Patrick's, too, faith is part of the rhythm of school life—but always with a light touch.

"There's a strong faith within the school," Lockhart says.

**"Before the All-Ireland school's semi-final this year, I gave out the jerseys and threw a bit of holy water over them"**

It can be seen woven through the school community in gentle ways. Colleagues giving the Hogan

Team Managers medals and holy water before games. Pre-game team Mass in the school oratory. A principal, grieving the sudden loss of her sister, coming in to say a quiet prayer with the All-Ireland-winning Gaelic footballers before a match. Holy Spirit pins for the players, still worn on blazers months later.

"Before the All-Ireland school's semi-final this year, I gave out the jerseys and threw a bit of holy water over them," he says. "One of the senior lads asked for some and then passed it around."

## Faith

"For them to see you using holy water—it definitely helps. Some lads have a surprisingly stronger faith than you'd realise. It's a constant fight to try and get young people involved, but it's about linking them to people they look up to— a teacher or coach, a high-status GAA player, or whoever. Seeing that example really matters."

Faith, for Lockhart, isn't about grandeur—it's about small acts, done with intention. It all comes down to a

template laid down for others to follow.

**"It's not just about sport—it's a bit of faith too," he said. 'It all comes down to an example being set; if parents are providing a good, solid foundation, I think most children will follow it'"**

"Our parish Banagher runs a camp every summer called 'Hope Camp'; the concept started in the Limavady parish. Children come down and use the facilities; there's sport, there's Mass, and there are prayers, games and fun activities. The bishop even comes out."

"It's not just about sport—it's a bit of faith too," he said. "It all comes down to an example being set; if parents are providing a good, solid foundation, I think most children will follow it."

Despite that, there is always an uphill challenge to get more people involved in faith, but the community of Banagher remains steadfast in its traditions.

"There are definitely fewer people going to Mass than there used to be," he says, "but there's still a very strong faith within the community. During the Troubles, that faith was one of the things that kept people going up here; perhaps it meant more as they had to fight for it."

Despite that, when Lockhart speaks to his own children, there's one piece of advice he makes sure to pass on.

"One thing we've tried to teach our children is that people pray for things in life—but they rarely go back and say thank you. You must be grateful in life for what you have."

But through it all, he's never claimed to have it all figured out. He's not aiming for perfection—just a life lived with purpose and a hope that a few good values get passed along the way.

"I'm not Angel Gabriel by any means," he says. "But it's those wee things. They stay with you."



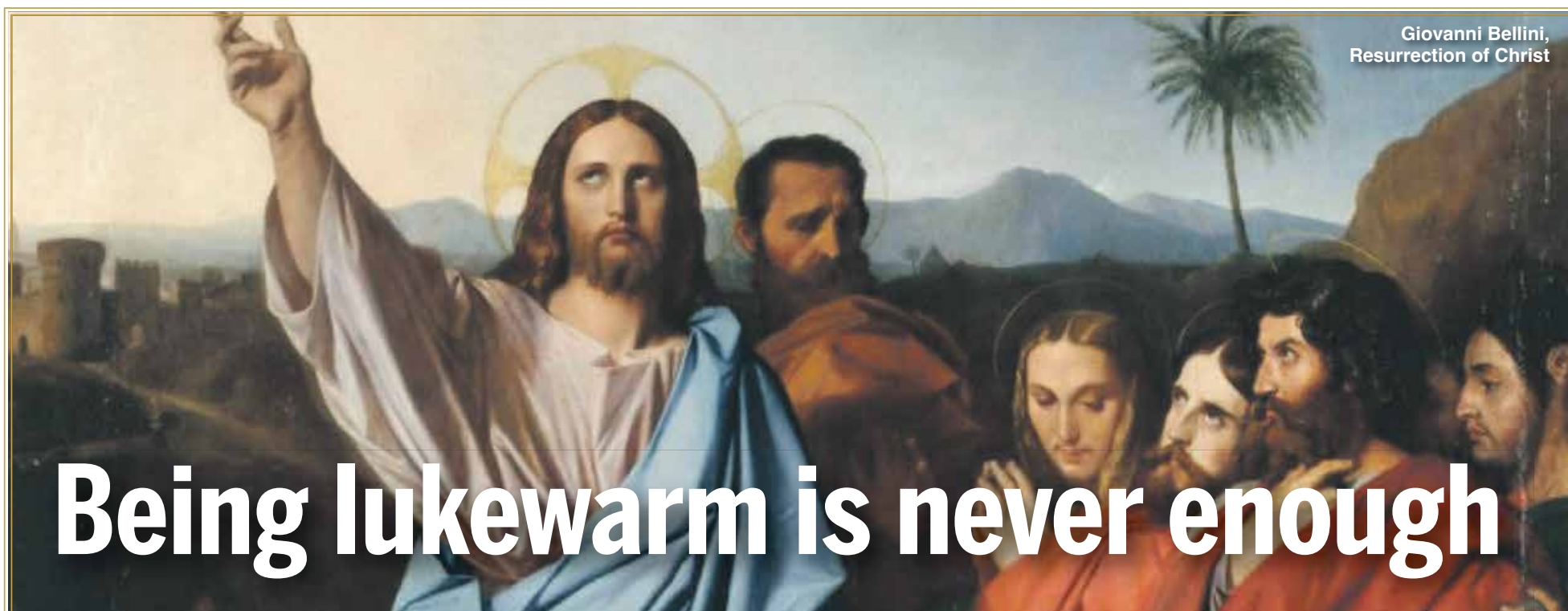
# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, May 8, 2025

**Faith and rollercoasters in the face of the conclave**

Jason Conroy

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Giovanni Bellini, Resurrection of Christ

## Being lukewarm is never enough

**W**e often find ourselves working with all sorts of people in the workplace. Some are friendly, others not so much, and others yet – well, let's just say they don't care about anything or anyone. One such colleague of mine is like a guardian: looking out for me, spoiling me with treats and sharing bits of wisdom and life experience. There's a quiet strength in the way this person carries themselves, like someone who's weathered more storms than they let on. Just having this person around makes the day feel a little lighter – like knowing someone's always in your corner.

This guardian often uses the familiar expression, “if you snooze, you lose.” It's a rather poetic way of saying that hesitation or delay can cause you to miss out on something good. Recently, it got me thinking in the context of my faith and Christian background. As practicing Catholics, we are called to many things – sharing the Good News with the world around us, or taking up our daily crosses and following Jesus, to name but a few. But before I go any further, let me backtrack a little in this little essay.

### Commitment

I've been thinking a lot lately about how hard commitment can be, especially in the world we live in now. Everything moves so fast, and we are constantly told to keep our options opened, to not settle, to always be ready for the next best thing. I have felt that pull myself – whether it was hesitating to say yes to a meaningful thing or holding back because I was afraid of the cost and making a fool of



**Catholicism does not call us to be passive. It calls us to act, to respond, to wake up, writes Peter Kasko**

myself. And this caused me to question my dedication. Unfortunately, this mindset doesn't just stay in the small stuff. It creeps into bigger things like relationships, career or personal projects. And it most certainly creeps into how I live my faith.

The truth is, that mindset tends to become a recurring theme: a tendency to waver, to remain in a state of indecision, rather than fully committing myself. Some of us, if not most, certainly experienced a similar moment, where this lack of commitment leaves us feeling adrift, unable to anchor ourselves firmly to one path. We tell ourselves our intentions are good, yet when the moment arrives to take decisive action, we falter. I falter. The disciples faltered. Peter, most famously, denied Jesus three times – just moments after boldly declaring he would never leave His side, even offering his life. And this internal conflict, this fear of the definitive, keeps me – keeps us – suspended in a lukewarm existence.

Some time ago, I joined a small study group on the Catechism of the Catholic Church. At first, I thought it would be a nice way to brush up on what I already knew, maybe deepen my understanding a bit. But as we

began reading and discussing together, something unexpected happened – I realised just how high the bar is set for us as Catholics. Page after page, teaching after teaching, I was struck by the depth, the challenge, and the beauty of the life we are called to live. I did not see it, I was blind. I had been living with a vague sense of faith, but I was oblivious to the bigger picture – the call to holiness, to virtue, to mission. It was humbling, almost jarring. But it was also awakening.

It brought to mind the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” (Mat 7, 13-14)

### Discipleship

This passage is a clear call for intentional discipleship. It is a call to choose virtue, self-sacrifice and obedience to God in a world that often promotes the direct opposite. At first, it feels like an invitation, not a warning. It is a reminder that Christian life is not meant to blend in with the world, but stand apart, often uncomfortably so. And maybe I had been

drifting too long on the broad road, assuming I was fine, lulled by the comforting idea that simply being a “good person” was enough – while quietly missing the narrow, costly beauty of the path Christ calls us to.

**“God speaks in real time. He moves in the here and now. And if I am always waiting for the perfect moment, I might sleep through the one He is offering me”**

That realisation stirred something in me. I looked back at moments in my life – nudges I ignored or invitations from God I treated as optional or postponed indefinitely. Not because I didn't care, but because I kept telling myself there would be time. Later. When I'm more prepared. Suddenly, “if you snooze, you lose” hit me on a much deeper level. It wasn't just about procrastinating on everyday tasks. It was about spiritual slumber, missing the grace of the present moment. The truth is, God speaks in real time. He moves in the here and now. And if I am always waiting for the perfect moment, I might sleep through the one He is offering me.

You see, Catholicism does not call us to be passive – it calls us to act, to respond, to wake up. The Catechism reminds us that faith is both a gift and response. (CCC 166) It is not enough to admire the truth from a distance, we are invited to

step into it, even when it is uncomfortable or inconvenient. Especially then.

This all was highlighted to me this past Sunday, the Divine Mercy Sunday. At Mass we heard the Gospel according to John, where the risen Jesus appears to his disciples, breathes the Holy Spirit upon them, and says: “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” It's such a simple, powerful moment – He doesn't just comfort them, He commissions them. And he does the same with us. We are not meant to stay behind locked doors of fear or doubt. We are sent. We are empowered. We are called.

### Catechism

I could not help but think of my catechism study group. Week by week, our conversations and shared reflections have quietly shaped us, challenged us and helped us our faith with new eyes. Helped me to see my faith with new eyes. I am grateful for that small circle of people who kept and keep showing up, wrestling with big truths, and supporting one another as we all try – imperfectly – to walk the narrow path together as sisters and brothers in Christ. And to this I invite all of you – to walk together the narrow path as we seek to follow Christ more closely each day.

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



# A terrible beauty is born – The resurrection of Peter



Fr Barry White

At the end of *The Georgics*, Virgil retells the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice—a story of love, loss, and irreversible failure. After Eurydice dies from a snakebite on her wedding day, Orpheus charms the rulers of the underworld with music to win her back. They agree—on one condition: he must not look back as they ascend. But as they near the surface, Orpheus, in a moment of recklessness, glances behind him. Eurydice, almost restored, vanishes like smoke. The agony of love is sealed by a single fatal mistake.

Like Orpheus, Peter too makes a promise he cannot keep. Yet unlike a Greek tragedy, his story does not end in final loss, but in restoration. Peter's journey is not one of perfection, but of transformation—where shame becomes strength, and failure gives way to friendship renewed. His 'resurrection' is not only an event at Easter morning, but a personal encounter with mercy that unfolds slowly, painfully and beautifully.

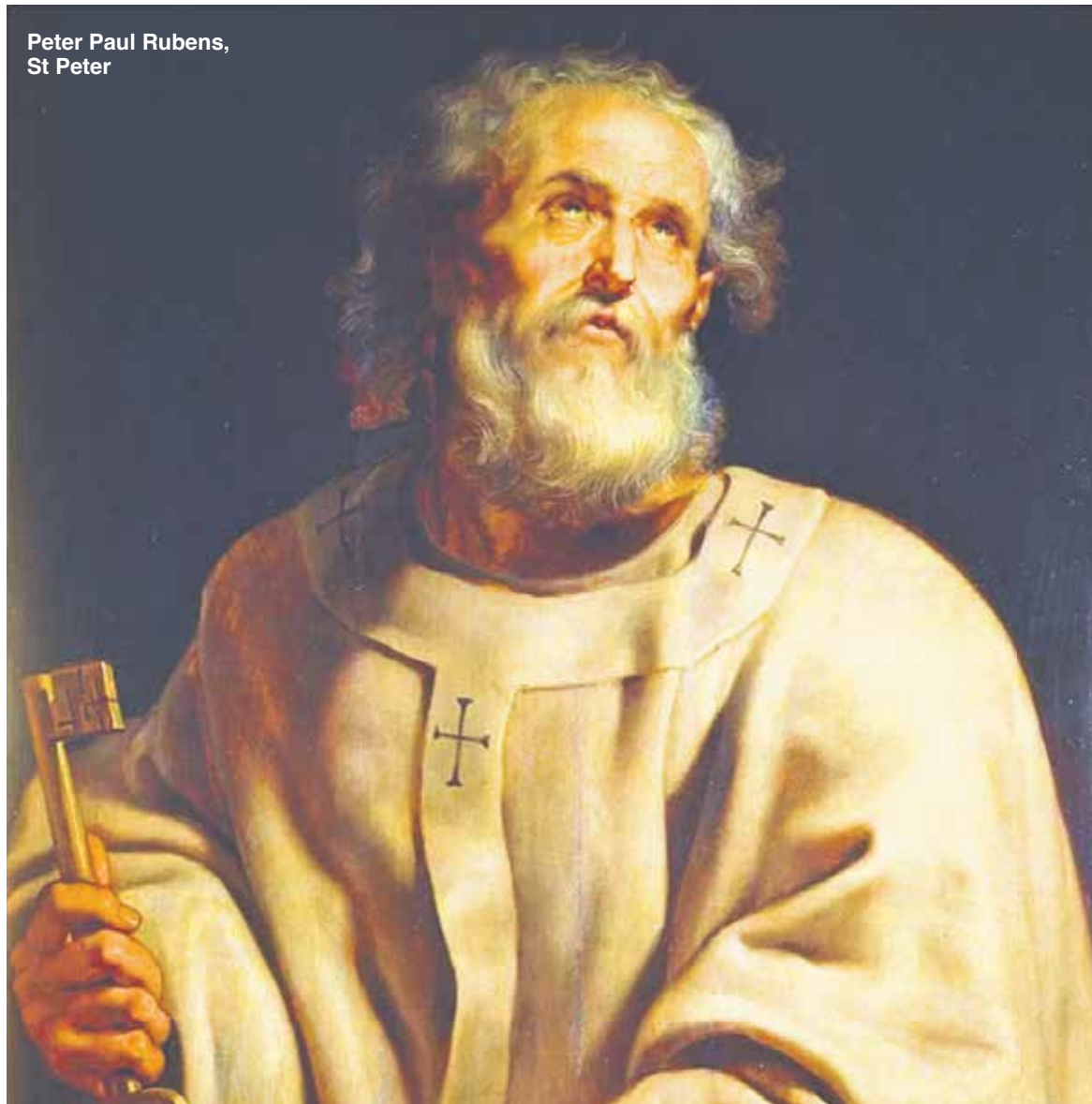
Discipleship, too, is not immune to moments of impulsive decisions, of glancing backward, of walking with more zeal than wisdom. The path of the disciple is not a straight line but a pilgrimage that ebbs and flows. Sometimes we stride ahead with courage; other times we stumble in fear, hesitate in doubt, or return to old habits when the way ahead feels unclear.

## Flaw

Peter's impulsive loyalty reveals a familiar flaw—his pride, his hubris, his Achilles' heel. At the Last Supper, he boldly declares, "I will lay down my life for you" (John 13:37). His words are heartfelt but overconfident. Jesus warns him: "Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times" (John 13:38). Later, in the courtyard of the High Priest, warming himself by a charcoal fire, Peter does exactly that. He denies knowing Jesus, not once but three times (John 18:12–27). Then the cock crows. The night of friendship ends not with loyalty, but with betrayal.

In that moment, Peter stands with Orpheus—both made promises they could not keep, both experi-

Peter Paul Rubens, St Peter



enced tragic failures. Eurydice slips back into shadow; Jesus is led away to be crucified. Peter's final words about his friend are not of love, but denial. For the rest of the Passion, Peter is silent, absent. Overcome with shame, he, like Orpheus, is left alone on the shore of sorrow. There is the 'night of denial' for every disciple—the moment we realise we are not as strong as we thought, when our promises collapse under pressure.

**His slowness speaks not only of guilt, but of a heart still longing for restoration. Discipleship is not linear**

But the Gospel is not a Greek tragedy.

On Easter morning, Mary Magdalene rushes to tell Peter and the other disciple that the tomb is empty (John

20:1–9). The two disciples run to the tomb, but Peter's footsteps are heavy with guilt. The beloved disciple outruns him and, seeing the evidence, believes at once. Peter, though the first to enter, hesitates to believe. His slowness speaks not only of guilt, but of a heart still longing for restoration. Discipleship is not linear. It is a pilgrimage through shadow and light, where faith often emerges slowly—through wounded love and faltering hope. As Pope Francis said on 26 March 2016, "This marked the beginning of Peter's resurrection, the resurrection of his heart".

## Fishing

Even after the Risen Lord appears, Peter returns to fishing (John 21:2–14), perhaps out of confusion or discouragement. Others follow him—even those not fishermen by trade. It is a deeply human response—returning to the familiar when the future feels uncertain. That night they catch nothing. At dawn, a

figure on the shore tells them to cast the net to starboard. They obey—and catch 153 fish, symbolising all the known species of fish at the time. This becomes a sign of the Church—a net cast wide to gather all.

**Discipleship becomes possible not by our own effort, but through the power of the Risen Lord, encountered in simple acts and sacred signs**

When Peter hears, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7), he ties his outer garment around him and jumps into the sea. Who dresses before swimming? Like Adam and Eve covering themselves after the Fall, the gesture reveals a mix of shame and longing. On the shore, Jesus has prepared a charcoal fire—the only other one in John's Gospel was in the courtyard of Peter's denial. But this fire is not for betrayal, but for breakfast. The setting shifts from cold denial to warm reunion. "Come and have breakfast," Jesus says—an invitation to mercy and healing.

The net, once too heavy for the group, is now drawn ashore by

Peter alone—a sign not of solitary strength, but of grace rediscovered (John 21:11). Discipleship becomes possible not by our own effort, but through the power of the Risen Lord, encountered in simple acts and sacred signs.

## Conversation

Then comes a conversation that is both tender and invasive. Jesus engages Peter in a threefold question (John 21:15–17): "Do you love me...?" The use of the Greek terms *agape* (unconditional love) and *philia* (friendship) carries significant nuance. Jesus first asks, "Do you love me (*agape*)?" Peter replies, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you (*philia*).". A second time—same question, same answer. On the third occasion, Jesus meets Peter not with idealism but with honesty: "Do you love me (*philia*)?" Peter is hurt, but affirms, "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you (*philia*)". Three denials are met with three invitations: "Feed my lambs." "Look after my sheep." "Feed my sheep."

Jesus stoops from *agape* to *philia*, accepting Peter's fragile gift of friendship in his weakness, yet gently encouraging him through the dialogue to rise again toward the fullness of *agape*, a love that is sacrificial and whole. Here is the practical heart of discipleship: not spiritual perfection, but persevering love—love that remains through denial, confusion, and regret.

Jesus then says to Peter, "...you will stretch out your hands and somebody else will...take you where you would rather not go" (John 21:18). This hints at Peter's martyrdom—his hands stretched out in crucifixion. The bold promise he once made—"I will lay down my life for you"—will at last be fulfilled.

Then, there is a final, tender invitation: "Follow me" (John 21:19). After all that has happened—denial, shame, silence, return, reunion—still the call remains. Follow me.

This is the rhythm of discipleship: bold confessions of faith followed by failure; the night of the cross followed by the dawn of resurrection; the return to old routines giving way to new beginnings. We discover we have no strength on our own, but through Christ, who meets us again and again—not with condemnation, but with intimacy and mercy.

In Easter 1916, W.B. Yeats wrote: "All changed, changed utterly: A terrible beauty is born." Peter's life embodies this. The beauty of resurrection is terrible because it comes through death—death to pride, to self-reliance, to illusions of strength. Yet in that dying, something new is born. Not perfection, but love. Not failure, but friendship renewed.

Jesus is our true Orpheus—not one who loses the beloved in a moment of human frailty, but one who enters the shadowed realm of death and leads us out. He does not falter on the threshold. He does not look back. He walks forward, into the light—and takes us with him.

**This is the rhythm of discipleship: bold confessions of faith followed by failure; the night of the cross followed by the dawn of resurrection; the return to old routines giving way to new beginnings**



# Faith and rollercoasters in the face of the conclave



Jason Conroy

A few months ago, a friend and I here in Leuven went on one of those carnival rides that look, frankly, insane. It was basically a huge pendulum. If you think of it like a clock-face, it swung as high as one o'clock on the one side, and eleven o'clock on the other. All the while, the seats at the end of the pendulum were spinning also - with us attached. Death seemed imminent. At the top of the swing's arc, we were practically upside down, and the next moment we were plummeting back towards earth, with a sensation as though your heart, stomach and other organs were trying their very best to stay inside your ribcage. Nature has not prepared the human body for this kind of thing.

Across from us was a girl, who looked about 14, sitting nonchalantly in her seat, totally relaxed, arms swinging, just letting herself be carried along by the motion of the ride. Her lot seemed quite enviable compared to mine. So, putting my trust in whatever Belgian safety inspector had cleared this machine for public use, I also let go, made my peace with God, and, basically, went limp. Then it changed.

**“The way to live out Easter is to take to heart the fact that the all-powerful love of Christ has triumphed and overthrown death, the devil, and the whole world, for YOU”**

## The Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility

It's the month of Mary and it's the month of the conclave - these can teach us a lesson too. Evan S. Koop's article in the latest volume of *Nova et Vetera*, which I quote from below, showcases the fascinating theory that sees a link between the Immaculate Conception and Papal Infallibility. According to Matthias Scheeben, who first proposed it, these are the “two most precious and immovable foundation stones of the supernatural kingdom of Christ and... the most beautiful trophies of his victory over hell.” They demonstrate two characteristics of the supernatural order of grace in relation to the

Terrifying; exhilarating; a bit like flying; the sky beneath, the city hanging upside down, rooftops gilded by the setting sun, the great clock tower looming up and falling precipitously away - it was unforgettable. When you let go, you enjoy the ride.

This should be our attitude to life too. This is what our Lord meant when He said: “Unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

**“I feel like I've been thinking so much lately about the Pope's death, that I've almost entirely forgotten about Christ's coming to life”**

Last Saturday, for the Jubilee Year, being Pilgrims of Hope and all that, my local parish in Leuven participated in a 27km pilgrimage to a Marian shrine in Basse-Wavre. Many fields and forests we passed through, and as the boots got muddied and the legs began to ache, the main thought was: keep going, get to the destination. We pilgrims here on Earth, we also should stay focussed on the goal: Christ, and the destination: Heaven.

I feel like I've been thinking so much lately about the Pope's death, that I've almost entirely forgotten about Christ's coming to life. With most of the usual

Easter considerations somewhat submerged in commentary on the conclave, we need to keep our eyes fixed on the more important matter: whoever is elected Pope, Christ is risen. It's the most important celebration of the Church year; and yet ironically we often focus more on Lent than on Easter, even though the former is entirely a preparation for the latter.

I suppose we don't quite know how we're supposed to celebrate Easter; at least with Lent, you know you got to fast. Here's one way to live it out. In Lent, we did what we could to get right by our own efforts, and found that it's impossible without grace; now that the grace of the Resurrection has arrived, it's time to let go, and accept it for what it is: all-powerful, and unmerited.

### Hearts

Christ said to us, “Do not let your hearts be troubled”, but this is a struggle for us: we tend to fret about what will happen next, who the Pope will be, what will happen to our loved ones, and all the rest. These things are important, but remember this, that if you zoom out far enough, you'll see that the whole universe is in one person's hands: Christ's.

You might be familiar with the famous series of comedic stories by PG Wodehouse, Jeeves and Wooster. Bertie Wooster is a rich, carefree young fellow, with a hyper-competent butler called Jeeves. No matter what trouble Bertie gets into, in the end Jeeves “shimmers onto the scene” and solves everything. The effect is that Bertie can wake up every



Black smoke during the conclave of 1878, Dante Paolucci

morning with all the joys of Spring and welcome in the new day, a happy chappy. Well, how much more is this the case with us, who have our guardian angels always at our side, and a Father in Heaven who has all the hairs on our head counted?

**“I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope”**

I invite you to look back over your life. How often have you worried and stressed about some upcoming thing, only for it to pass by without a hitch, and often indeed carrying an unexpected blessing? How many prayers have been answered unnoticed? How many heartaches have been mysteriously comforted by the providential course of your life? Will you spend your whole life fearing disaster around the next corner, when the thousand-and-one previous corners turned out to be perfectly harmless? What will it take for you to get the mes-

sage: good is planned for you, not ill? “I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” That doesn't mean nothing bad will happen; but remember that even the Crucifixion led in the end to the Resurrection. “All things work together unto good for those who love God.”

### Triumphed

So, the way to live out Easter is to take to heart the fact that the all-powerful love of Christ has triumphed and overthrown death, the devil, and the whole world, for YOU. He is the Lord of History, and everything that happens, happens on His watch.

So what to do, then, when it's all been done for you? Here's what: let go. It's not all on you. You know you're loved, that you're being looked after, and that your life is going somewhere and not nowhere: all you have to do is keep your eyes on the goal - Christ - and stay faithful. Since you don't need to look out for yourself all the time, you're free to come out of yourself, and live for another. Instead of tensely holding on, you can close your eyes, let go, and say “not my will, but yours, be done.” Then everything changes.



# Young people's call for renewal



Catholic schools face a critical juncture. The opportunity for renewal is vast, the path forward is clear, writes **Bláthnaid Gunawardana**

Catholic schools have long been a crucial pillar in the Irish education system. They are highly admired and supported for their high levels of academic excellence, positive community engagement and strong moral framework. They aspire to have faith and learning go hand in hand. Shaping students into not only motivated, inspired, high achievers but also compassionate, faithful young individuals. However, despite their continued success in academic and extra-curricular fields, there is a growing concern that schools may be losing sight of their original mission: forming young disciples of Christ.

While it is crucial that young people receive a well-rounded, high-quality education. It is just as important to instil a deep, living faith in students, one that goes beyond an annual Mass or a prayer over the intercom. As a student attending an Irish Catholic school, I, along with many others, believe that many schools fail to achieve this objective, leaving them at risk of becoming 'Catholic' by name rather than by practice.

## Opportunities

In today's world where academics are becoming increasingly competitive, with students reaching for high points and big opportunities. This drive for success, while important, can sometimes overshadow the school's spiritual mission. Catholic schools face the challenge of balancing the pressures of performing well in exams and extra-curricular activities while also upholding the strong, moral foundation upon which they were built.

In many cases, religion classes are not given the same weight or attention as other compulsory subjects. Schools may rely on the assumption that the student's moral and spiritual views will be reinforced at home, but this assumption is not always correct. With busy home schedules and varying levels of parental involvement, this approach may not provide the consistent reinforcement of Catholic



**“The gap where Irish Catholic schools are and where they should be isn't a failing, but an opportunity to renew, refocus and rekindling the fire of Christ in young people”**

principles that young people need.

Teachers play an irreplaceable role in forming the spiritual lives of youth. However, many educators in Catholic schools feel inadequately prepared to fulfil this role effectively. Some teachers, particularly those who don't teach religion, may not have a deep understanding of the faith, while others may struggle or fail to model these values themselves. In an environment like this, it is easy for students to view the Catholic faith as something simply reserved for Mass in the holidays and lighting a candle before your exams, rather than something that is relevant and worth following in their daily lives

**“Witnessing a teacher's kindness, humility and integrity will leave a lasting impression on young minds and can even serve as a form of evangelisation”**

If Catholic school's aim to thrive spiritually as well as academically, it is essential that teacher formation be prioritised. I believe that providing teachers with opportunities for spiritual growth, theological education and practical faith integration could be the key to reigniting the Catholic ethos within schools. Teachers who live out their Catholic values, both inside and outside of the classroom, become authentic, sincere witnesses to the Gospel. Witnessing a teacher's kindness, humility and integrity will leave a lasting impression on young minds and can even serve as a form of evangelisation.

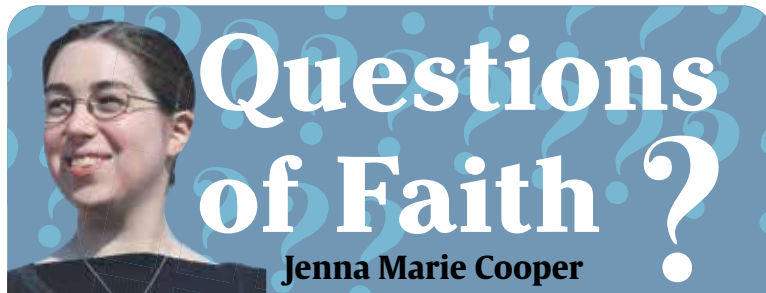
Despite these challenges, the gap

where Irish Catholic schools are and where they should be isn't a failing, but an opportunity to renew, refocus and rekindling the fire of Christ in young people.

While the task of instilling Catholic ethos may sound daunting, it is not impossible. These schools must strive to cultivate an environment where faith isn't diminished down to a subject, but a living, breathing daily experience. By promoting youth groups, family masses, adoration and retreats, schools can give students the opportunity to encounter Jesus Christ personally and meaningfully. Schools should encourage open discussion on faith, ethics and morality, creating a space for students to wrestle with their beliefs and make their faith an integral part of their identities.

## Juncture

Catholic schools face a critical juncture. The opportunity for renewal is vast, the path forward is clear. The mission of Catholic schools is not only to prepare students for college or careers. It is also to help them become disciples of Christ, capable of navigating the world's challenges with wisdom, compassion and integrity. As St John Paul II once said; “In order that the Catholic school and the Catholic teachers may truly make their irreplaceable contribution to the Church and to the world, the goal of Catholic education itself must be crystal clear. Beloved sons and daughters of the Catholic Church, brothers and sisters in the faith: Catholic education is above all a question of communicating Christ, of helping to form Christ in the lives of others.” The future of Catholic schools holds incredible promise. If they commit to the purpose of nurturing both mind and soul, they will continue to shine as a beacon of light in the lives of countless young people.



## Questions of Faith?

Jenna Marie Cooper

**How do God's will and the Holy Spirit play a role in a conclave?**

**Q: How do God's will and the Holy Spirit play a role in a conclave?**

A: I think ultimately, events in the life of the Church like conclaves bring us to the mysterious place where God's providential ordering of history intersects with human free will.

On one level, there is nothing miraculous about a conclave. That is, the assembled cardinals are human men who use their human powers of reason and prudential judgment to vote on a decision. In real life I think it's fair to assume that most cardinals today are essentially good men who will undertake this responsibility with the care it deserves, but in theory there is nothing to stop the cardinals from making a careless or deliberately bad choice of a new pope.

And indeed, although in the past century we as a Church have been 'spoiled' with a number of saintly popes, the Church's 2000-year history has unfortunately seen some popes who were cowardly, faltering or even notoriously immoral.

But at the same time, we also believe that God loves and continues to guide his Church. Jesus himself said that he would “be with [us] always, until the end of the age,” (Mt 28:20) and that “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name - he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you” (Jn 14:26).

We also believe that God's guidance of the Church is manifested in the concept of papal infallibility, meaning that in certain very specific circumstances, when a pope is teaching on faith and morals specifically in his role as pope, God will protect him from error (see the Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 892).

While papal infallibility as applied to the teaching of Catholic doctrine is different from the process of electing a pope in the first place, it still serves to underscore how God “will not leave us orphans” (Jn 14:18).

There is also some scriptural suggestion that God would have a hand in choosing bishops at least. In the book of Acts, after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, the remain-

ing 11 apostles gathered to choose a successor and replacement to Judas Iscariot, who had taken his own life after betraying Jesus. After determining two suitable candidates, the final decision was made by casting lots, with the idea that God would take advantage of that occasion of randomness and chance to put forth his own preferred candidate (Acts 1:15-26).

Even today, in our liturgy we can sometimes glean hints of the idea that God himself chooses bishops. For example, in the Good Friday passion liturgy, during the general intercessions we pray for the current Holy Father with the words: “Let us pray also for our most Holy Father Pope [Name], that our God and Lord, who chose him for the Order of Bishops...”

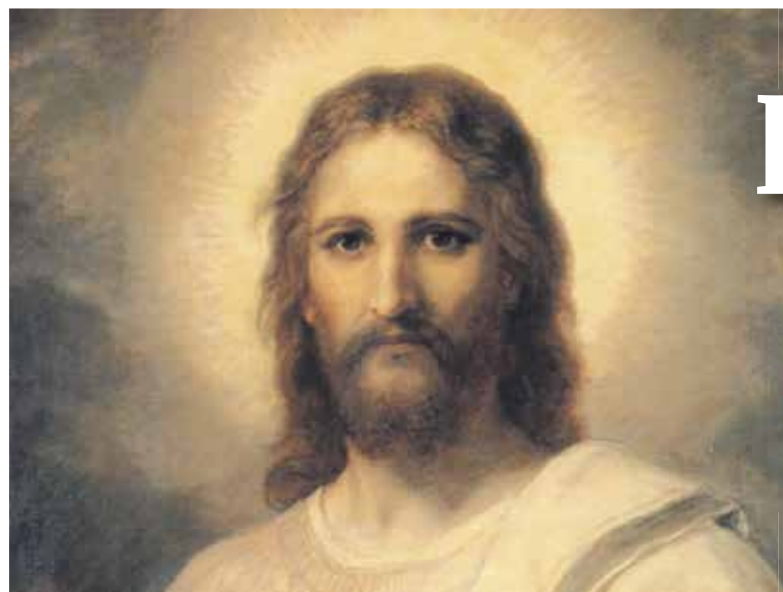
Yet, this sense that God calls and chooses bishops still co-exists today with a rather prosaic administrative process for determining candidates for the episcopate, involving such mundane things as recommendations and ‘short lists’ of names. So here, too, it seems that the Church expects God to make his will known, but usually through very ordinary means rather than by extraordinary divine intervention.

This dynamic interplay between God's will in all its perfection and our fallible human capacities for discernment is one reason for the many special customs surrounding a conclave. For example, the cardinals pray explicitly to the Holy Spirit before their voting and deliberation.

The solitude and isolation of the conclave is meant to foster almost a retreat-like atmosphere, which should make it easier for cardinals to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. And in St John Paul II's document *Universi Dominici Gregis*, which spells out the official rules for a conclave, it is noted that: “the election will continue to take place in the Sistine Chapel, where everything is conducive to an awareness of the presence of God, in whose sight each person will one day be judged.”

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# Paradox, seeming inconsistency, and tension



**Fr Rolheiser**

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**T**he thought of some of the greatest and most influential people in history seems at times riddled with inconsistencies. Jesus, Augustine, Socrates, Aristotle, among others, appear at times to be contradicting themselves. It's not always easy to see how everything squares with everything else in their teachings.

That's why the great religions and philosophies of the world are so prone to multiple interpretations. For example, given the depth and scope of Jesus' teaching, Christianity in particular is open to different kinds of understanding. It's no accident that there are hundreds of denominations within Christianity and every variety of spirituality and worship inside these. Jesus' teaching is so rich that it would seem none of us can carry it like master. Rather we each pick our parts selectively, struggle to hold them in some consistency, and end

up much narrower than the master.

## Consistency

Consistency, someone once quipped, is the product of a small mind, just as inconsistency is the mark of a great one. There's a truth in that, though it must be carefully understood. For instance, sometimes we achieve a certain consistency, a view of things that seemingly has no internal contradictions, though at a high price, namely, we end up narrow, non-inclusive, one-sided, impoverished, and reductionistic. Whatever else might be said about them, racism, bigotry, fundamentalism, and unhealthy nationalism are consistent. However, their consistency is predicated on a synthesis that is so narrowly drawn that it ignores and denigrates important areas of life.

Conversely, sometimes what looks like inconsistency is really a person holding together a number of important truths

in a higher synthesis. The person may look inconsistent, but what she is really doing is holding a number of truths in creative tension that are seemingly in opposition to each other but are not. The person who tries this juggling act will often find herself in great tension, but (metaphorically) she will also find that she has no blocked arteries and very resilient lungs, that blood flows freely to every part of her person and she is able draw life-giving oxygen from whatever kind of air within which she finds herself.

**“His teachings are more both/and than either/or. We struggle with that. It's easier to carry a select few truths than try to carry them all”**

Jesus was like that. He held important truths together in creative tension and as a consequence was misunderstood by just about everyone and scandalised people on both sides of the religious and ideological spectrum. His teachings are more both/and

**“Jesus was like that. He held important truths together in creative tension and as a consequence was misunderstood by just about everyone and scandalised people on both sides of the religious and ideological spectrum”**

than either/or. We struggle with that. It's easier to carry a select few truths than try to carry them all.

## Contradictory

What are some of the seeming contradictory truths that Jesus held together and carried in a creative tension? Here are ten of them, chosen because a healthy spirituality must always carry both sides of these.

1) A strong sense of individuality, a focus on private integrity and private prayer, but coupled with an equally strong commitment to community, family, civic and ecclesial involvement, and social justice.

2) A healthy capacity to drink in life and enjoy it without guilt, even as one befriends an equally healthy capacity for asceticism and renunciation.

3) A self-confidence and healthy self-assertion in using the particular gifts that God has given us but held always in

tension with a healthy humility and a habitual self-effacement.

4) An eye for the prophetic, a sympathy for what lies outside the centre, for what is marginalised, a challenging voice for the excluded, even as one recognizes the importance of the institutional, defends against anarchy, and helps nurture what's sacred within family, Church, and tradition.

5) A perpetual openness to what's new, what's strange, what causes discomfort, to what's liberal, even as one works to ground oneself in what conserves, in the familiar, in routine, in what gives rhythm and makes for stability.

6) An eye for the sacred, for God, for the eternal horizon, but always coupled with an unabashed love for this world, for its joys, for its achievements, its present moment.

7) A passion for sexuality and a defense of its goodness and earthiness, coupled with an equal defense of chastity and reverence.

8) An eye for world community, for stretching the boundaries we were born into, for an ever more inclusive embrace of the foreigner and the stranger, even as one remains deeply loyal to family, personal roots, and hospitality at home.

9) A hope and an idealism that defies the facts, that relies on God's promises rather than on the evening news, that will not let the truth of the resurrection be silenced by the accidents of history, but is still held together with a realism that is pragmatic, programmatic, and is committed to doing its share of the work.

10) A focus on the next life, on life after death, on the fact that this is not our final home, even as we focus on the reality and goodness of life here on earth.

Jesus held all of these together in one synthesis and he paid the price - misunderstanding. Are we willing to pay that price to give fuller expression to Christ?

# Walking the Emmaus road as a family

**Laura Kelly Fanucci**

**R**ight now is a difficult time for nearly every family I know. Parents are stressed. Teens are depressed. Kids are anxious. Studies on mental health back this up with statistics, but start a conversation with friends, family, neighbours or parishioners and you'll soon hear stories of struggle and suffering.

During tumultuous times in our homes, what does it mean to celebrate Easter? Can we really rejoice in a moment like this?

Tucked within the Gospel of Luke is a story that shows us exactly how to live out the Easter season - not as a one-day celebration, but 50 full days of feasting.

What's more, the walk to Emmaus gives us a road map to guide our journey together as families into the hope of Easter.

First, we need to leave home. The disciples' courage to step beyond their comfort zone - especially when their own safety was threatened - let them meet the risen Christ. Later, after they recognise the stranger who walked with them, the same impulse spurs them onward: "They set out at once and returned to Jerusalem," to share with others what had been revealed to them (Lk 24:33). How is God calling us to step out in faith this Easter? To be not afraid, even in troubling times, to share with others the good news we have found?

Second, we must welcome the stranger. The disciples did not

dismiss the traveller who joined them on the road. They engaged him in conversation, even when he corrected them in stark terms: "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!" (Lk 24:25). If the disciples had turned a cold shoulder instead, they might have missed everything God had waiting for them. How can we open our hearts and homes this Easter to those we do not know? Can we remember that Christ is the face of every stranger, or will fear or judgment keep us locked away?

Third, we must keep talking together. The disciples are willing to converse, question and debate the difficult news and most pressing questions of their times, "the things that have taken place there in these days" (Lk 24:18). They

even share what weighs heaviest on their hearts. When Jesus asks what they are discussing, "they stopped, looking downcast" (Lk 24:17). Can we keep talking through differences and disagreements, bringing our full selves to each other in good faith?

Fourth, we need to break bread together. In meals around our family table and at the altar of the Eucharist, we must keep breaking bread to encounter Christ present among us. How can we pray for the wisdom to see Christ among us and the courage to respond to his call?

The road to Emmaus reminds us that Christ goes with us everywhere, walking and talking among us: in our conversations and debates, in ordinary meals and sacred liturgies, in journeys near

and far. Our hearts burn within us, too, whenever we realise he has been right next to us all along.

When the disciples approached the village, Jesus "gave the impression that he was going on farther" - but they pressed him to stay with them (Lk 24:28). This small detail holds the key. No matter what is happening in our families or the wider world, inviting Jesus to stay close is the way to discover what God has waiting for us.

"Stay with us." Their plea is our prayer, too. We need the hope of the risen Christ, perhaps now more than ever.

**① Laura Kelly Fanucci is an author, speaker and founder of Mothering Spirit, an online gathering place on parenting and spirituality.**



# Paying close attention to the voice of God

Acts 13:14, 43-52  
Ps 100:1-2, 3, 5  
Rv 7:9, 14b-17  
Jn 10:27-30

## The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



**A**re we listening? This week's Gospel from John offers this simple, matter-of-fact statement from Jesus: "My sheep hear my voice."

That idea of hearing also crops up in the first reading, from Acts, which reminds us how the people of Antioch responded to Paul and Barnabas: "On the following sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord."

In a time when so much of our communication is visual - on screens so small you can hold them in your hand, or so large they take up a wall in a living room - the scripture on this Sunday brings us back to something so basic, so fundamental, we almost take it for granted.

We realise once more that ours is a faith that was initially spread by the spoken word - and by one simple

sense: hearing.

Maybe we need to ask ourselves, all these centuries later: are we listening?

**“The famous psalm makes it so clear: he is our shepherd; we shall not want”**

On this 4th Sunday of Easter, known as Good Shepherd Sunday, the Gospel traditionally focuses on Christ's role as a shepherd, guiding us lovingly where we need to go. It is a metaphor rich with meaning - underscoring both our own humility and dependence on the Lord, and his gentle attention to our needs. The famous psalm makes it so clear: he is our shepherd; we shall not want. This is also a Sunday

when we are encouraged to think more deeply and pray more intently for vocations - fervently asking the Lord to raise up more shepherds to guide the flock. But this Sunday, maybe we need to think not only about the message in the scriptures, but how that message is conveyed - and whether it is received.

### Voice

In a 2020 address, Pope Francis spoke about the voice of the Good Shepherd. He noted how it differs from other sounds in the world. "The voice of God corrects us with great patience," he said, "but always encourages us, consoles us: it always nourishes hope. God's voice is a voice that has a horizon."

In our noisy and distracted age, it can be easy to miss the shepherd's voice, to tune it out, to stop listening. Instead of a horizon, we can run into brick walls and dead ends. But the readings this week make plain: someone is calling out to us. We need to pay attention.

The voice of the Good Shepherd is one that affirms,

uplifts, inspires and, as the holy father underscored, "nourishes hope."

**“While we're aglow with the joyful spirit of Resurrection and new life, shouldn't we listen more closely to try and hear the Good Shepherd?”**

During this Holy Year when we are journeying as Pilgrims of Hope, this is something we all need to hold onto - and listen for. Our culture is suffused with angry voices that mock, condemn, and accuse; they are quick to sow disharmony or doubt. Spend any time scrolling through social media or surfing the channels of cable television and you won't have a hard time finding those voices.

But in these early weeks of the Easter season, while we're aglow with the joyful spirit of Resurrection and new life, shouldn't we listen more closely to try and hear the Good Shepherd?

We need our ears and our hearts to be open to his guidance, his reassurance, his call - which, not insignificantly, brings us back to the idea of vocation.

In addition to listening for



The good shepherd, Bernhard Plockhorst

**“The voice of the Good Shepherd is one that affirms, uplifts, inspires and, as the holy father underscored, ‘nourishes hope’”**

the shepherd's voice, we also need to discern just where that voice is calling us. How can we best follow where he is leading us? Where can we best serve him? Are we being asked to love God and love our neighbour in a singular way?

Each of us is called to serve. Everyone has a voca-

tion of some kind. What is ours? The Lord our shepherd is speaking to us, directing us where we need to go. Are we listening?

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

## Carlos Acutis and the matter of timing

Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

**E**ighty thousand adolescents thought they were traveling to Rome for the much-anticipated canonisation of Carlo Acutis. Instead, many were in the Eternal City for the Holy Father's funeral.

A pope's death isn't like a presidential election or even the death of a king. Popes don't have heirs. So, when the chair of St Peter is empty, everything comes to a standstill. No bishops can be named - or retired. No treaties can be signed. And no new saints can be canonised. There is, of course, a way to work around that; but not on a week's notice. And so, Carlo Acutis, the "first millennial saint," will remain blessed for a while longer.

I imagine the kids are disap-

pointed. I would be. But the hiccup in scheduling gives us all a little extra time to learn more about Carlo - and why the Catholic Church has deemed him worthy of canonisation. I'd recommend the new documentary film, Carlo Acutis: Roadmap to Reality.

A degree of skepticism about his cause has been brewing, not only among some of the faithful but in the secular world. As a recent article in (of all publications) The Economist observes, "Even people with a special devotion to him find it hard to say exactly what Carlo did. Nothing in his sparse life story explains that this ordinary-seeming teenage boy is about to become the first great saint of the 21st century."

I won't argue with anyone who considers Carlo's résumé unimpressive. He died of leukemia, after all, at 15. But I will challenge the notion

that authentic sanctity produces a biography that reads like a fantasy or adventure novel.

Living in relationship with God makes us more fully who we were created to be. And God creates a whole lot of ordinary people with thin résumés. Holiness is a universal call. 'Ordinary' is precisely what holiness is supposed to be.

The canonisation process is long and arduous. It took 500 years for Joan of Arc. Building a cause requires time, money and expertise. Carlo's skeptics note that his parents, and his mother in particular, did everything they could to push their son's process along.

The timing is another source of controversy. God makes saints, and the Church merely recognises them. When someone is raised to the altar, it often seems that God is trying to reach the people of a par-

ticular time.

A Church encrusted with wealth and corrupted by worldly power needed the poverty of men like Francis and Dominic. A society in which marriage and family life are derided and attacked needs the devotion of Louis and Zélie Martin and the courage of the Ulma family.

So, what of Carlo Acutis? In our utilitarian culture, achievements are everything. Perhaps we need a saint who wasn't extraordinary at all; one who searched for purpose the way so many of us do but found it in Christ Jesus.

We have never been lonelier. Perhaps we need someone who enthusiastically engaged digital technology but had the wisdom to limit himself to an hour of video games a week; someone who prioritised sharing his life with others and spending time with Jesus in

Eucharistic adoration.

Living in a world mediated by filters and images, screens and social media has made us more virtual and less real. Maybe we need a normal teenage boy to remind us that we are not mere spectators, but children of God redeemed and reborn in Christ.

Jesus does not call digital disciples or ask us to live lives of virtual virtue. Instead, he perpetuates his real and personal presence to us in the Eucharist. What Carlo Acutis shows us is that the Gospel is not disconnected from reality, and a completely ordinary life in our world can be holy.

**i** Jaymie Stuart Wolfe is a Catholic convert, freelance writer and editor, musician, speaker, wife and mom of eight grown children, loving life in New Orleans.



# The Catholic crisis in Ireland

## Catholic education, Apologetics and COVID-19



Emily Nelson

**T**his article explores what influences people to develop a faith and conversely why do they lose their faith. Research evidence points to perhaps surprising data on the role of schools and, also on the influence of home. Insight into apologetics helps us consider how we discuss and defend our faith with others. We also see what early research tells us about the impact of Covid on faith.

Why do you have a faith? The answer is, most likely, your parents according to American sociologist Christian Smith. That is not to undersell the impact of many other variables in our lives: friends, books and other good resources, cultural influences and importantly, personal experiences of God. Smith found that in comparison to many other influences, parents usually have the greatest impact. They often set the bar for religiosity which their children usually come somewhere equal or underneath. Parenting style was shown to possess the strongest influence on transmission of religion. Parents talking with their children about religion was the largest contributing factor, followed by the level of parental religious faith and then frequent parent religious service attendance, though all produced significant impact on the religiosity of their offspring. While these forms of parental behaviour do not guarantee that their children will follow in the faith, it is a significant factor for those who do. Through this knowledge, we understand the importance of support-



Worshippers wearing protective masks. Photo: CNS/Antonio Denti, Reuters.

ing parents in their role in religious transmission.

**“Results here indicated that generally, Catholic primary schools were felt to increase faith, and secondary schools decrease or have a neutral impact”**

Another important consideration is the role of Catholic education. This remains prominent in Ireland. In my master's research 96% went to a Catholic primary school and 95% a Catholic secondary school. Results here indicated that generally, Catholic primary schools were felt to increase faith, and secondary schools decrease or have a neutral impact. Participants felt that they learnt more about what the Church teaches than the reason behind Church teachings. This is worthwhile considering in line with modern teaching methods. These results point to continued consideration of the role and

impact of Catholic education and the importance of other sources of catechesis for example through parents, the Church itself and programmes.

### Questioned

Have you ever been questioned on why you have a faith? The branch of theology and philosophy which explores this is known as apologetics. This term comes from a Greek word and means to defend a particular view. In this context it refers to the practice of providing reasons, usually rational arguments, to defend the faith. Philosopher and theologian Professor William Lane Craig suggests that apologetics can be employed to increase the faith of Christians, bring about conversions and alter culture so that Christianity may be considered an intellectually viable option. As shared in a previous article in this series, irrational beliefs were ranked 5th on the scale of 11 potential factors in rejection of Catholicism. Scientific knowledge and secularist/atheist intellectual influence were ranked 9th and 10th but were still

weighted to influence. Below comments taken from my master's research, both from 22 year olds, reflect both the need for apologetics and an encounter with God's love.

“I am Catholic culturally but I just feel disappointed in life, like I pray when I hear of someone sick but I just feel that God or whatever God really exists is not listening to me. There has been a lot of tragedy around my community lately and my prayers to make sure that death didn't happen weren't answered and now I feel there isn't really much point because God isn't listening to me and allows tragedy to happen. It has greatly affected me like I just feel like that whatever hope I had is now gone” Female, 22

**“Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you”**

“I likely will return to the church when I read some good apologetic books on the papacy in relation to Eastern orthodoxy. Protestantism isn't even a contender at this point. I'm 100% convinced intellectually that either Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy is the true church. It's just working through the papacy issues to come to a resolution.” Male, 22.

Apologetics clearly has

an important role to play to overcome intellectual difficulties in openness to the faith, and for some, apologetics alone will bring them to Christ. But for many others it is a combination of this knowledge and understanding of God, alongside an experience of His love and relationship with Him that will open their hearts. We can address this by learning about our own faith to share with others, in line with St Peter's call for us to be “Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you” 1st Peter 3:15 (NRSV). We can respond by using good resources such as Catholic Answers or Word on Fire amongst others (including of course, *The Irish Catholic*) and inviting those we know to opportunities to experience God in retreats, Mass, confession, adoration or other events.

### COVID-19

What effect did COVID-19 have on our practice of faith? In ‘*Catholicism in the Time of Coronavirus*’ Bulivant has suggested that Covid was likely to decrease affiliation due to breaking habits of Mass attendance and the effect of the virus on the elderly population that embody a disproportionate percentage of practicing Catholics. Regarding Ireland, the Iona institute uncovered that 36% of those attending prior to the outbreak returned in September 2020. Out of those who hadn't 45% said this was due to the fears of the virus and 22% reduced capacity. The remaining 33% were happy to watch online, lost the habit, or unsure as to why. When asked if they would return, only 4% said no and 19% were unsure. In my master's work, which was completed in 2022, some participants shared the impact of Covid on their disaffiliation. Although only a small minority agreed that Covid did impact their affiliation in some way, it's still significant that 15 people in a sample of 104 recognised the impact. A combination of new availability of online services, for some increased free time because of change in their job circumstances and recurring news on death and illness may have prompted certain individuals to explore Catholicism or religion in general more. Covid was mentioned by participants in my research

and was on numerous occasions described as a contributing factor that acted as the nail in the coffin to their final decision to leave, though for many it did not impact at all.

“Due to Covid and not attending mass regularly it has caused distance. But I already had issues with the church and the rules that they have, and I don't fully understand where they come from so they just annoy me and feel unnecessary” Female, 23

“Broke the habit during Covid but am attending more often now.” Female, 65

If you know someone who hasn't attended Mass since COVID-19, maybe now is a chance to invite them back or explore with them their reasoning why.

**“Apologetics or reasoning for the faith was considered to have a minor but significant impact in this study, though it is recognised elsewhere as being an important factor”**

These results demonstrate that a range of issues were felt to contribute to participants distancing themselves from the Church. Factors with greater reported impact on disaffiliation include negative experiences (either directly themselves or vicariously), dissent from Church teaching and for some general busy-ness resulting in difficulties attending Mass. Covid for most was not a factor but did finalise the disaffiliation of a number. Many felt their Catholic secondary education did not increase the faith, while the opposite was felt at primary school. Apologetics or reasoning for the faith was considered to have a minor but significant impact in this study, though it is recognised elsewhere as being an important factor. Thereby, we can see which issues effect greater numbers while also recognising the importance of individual narrative. We can prepare on this basis and use our learnings to impact those we come across and care about.

What will the future bring? We will explore more in the final edition of this series.

**“If you know someone who hasn't attended Mass since COVID-19, maybe now is a chance to invite them back or explore with them their reasoning why”**



## TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



# Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it

**W**hen I heard that RTE Investigates was doing yet another abuse-themed exposé related to the Church, I thought, 'Here we go again'.

Broadcast of **Christian Brothers: The Assets, the Abusers** (RTÉ One, Thursday) was delayed after the death of Pope Francis. Perhaps they thought it would be tone-deaf to show it so soon after, or perhaps they thought it wouldn't be respectful. I wasn't particularly hopeful that it would be a fair programme. Last year RTÉ produced one of the most biased programmes ever on the abortion situation in Ireland. It was dripping with pro-abortion talking points and with barely veiled hostility to the pro-life perspective.

First it has to be said that the stories of abuse in Christian Brother schools were just awful. Blessed Emund Rice must have been turning in his grave, again. I could well understand one victim's feeling of 'terrible anger' at the abuse he suffered. Another victim described 'brutalising' experiences. Survivors felt let down by Church and State. As so often is the case the reports of abuse were not handled properly, neither swiftly, effectively nor justly. The patterns of abuse and mishandling are



Michael Kelly in an interview on a rooftop close to St Peter's in Rome.

typical of so many institutions but are particularly offensive and disappointing when they happen in Church-run institutions – you'd expect much better. And these stories were no media concoction – there were guilty pleas, confessions and convictions.

This programme focused on Christian Brothers' assets, especially in relation to property, how it is managed, sometimes disposed of and where the money raised goes. Questions were raised about the legal strategies, which seemed designed to frustrate the efforts of survivors to achieve redress. It was quite damning, but given my lack of confidence in the RTÉ Investigates approach I just wondered if there was another perspective we were missing, if we weren't getting a spin to show things in the worst possible light. I'd like

to have seen some interviews with Christian Brother leaders, or even from some ex-brothers who might have made useful contributions. I don't know if they were afforded any such opportunities. Quoting official statements from the order is just not good enough and comes across as cold and corporate. Further, because some convicted abusers had been at the highest level of governance, some survivors felt that this coloured the order's defensive and legalistic responses.

As usual the programme took broad swipes and applied a moth-eaten strategy – juxtaposing sinister music with religious iconography. It felt smug, simplistic and lazy. At one stage the narrator said of the Christian Brothers: 'some were gifted educators who inspired thousands of boys'. This was certainly my experi-

ence as a past pupil. I doubt I'd be writing this column today if it hadn't been for that inspiration.

The question of child abuse arose again on **Sunday** (BBC Radio 4), which had some topical coverage of the Conclave, even including an interview with the Pope's tailor! In a worldwide vox pop on the qualities needed in the new Pope Irish journalist Breda O'Brien said he'd need to be aware of the 'profound impact' of abuse and effect real accountability from the top down. A Divine Word missionary priest from Manila described the Conclave as a 'movement of the Holy Spirit' and said the new Pope would have to be 'a father, a mother, and an administrator'. A Nigerian priest said the new Pope would have to address matters of concern to both liberals and conservatives and

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### FAITH AND LIFE

**EWTV Sunday May 11, 9am**

Marion Carroll suffered from MS for 17 years, and was bedridden and incontinent. But on September 3, 1989, she was healed at Knock, Ireland's shrine. In this interview, she recalls what happened on that special day. Part 1 of 2.

#### ASSISTED DYING: THE FINAL CHOICE

**BBC Two Monday May 12, 11pm**

A look at the patients in Canada and California legally choosing assisted dying, including both those undergoing the procedure and those who feel it puts the most vulnerable at risk.

#### EWTV LIVE

**EWTV Tuesday May 13, 6am**

Sr Brieghe McKenna, OSC, talks about her ministry to priests and religious and also shares her view on the state of the priesthood and religious life over the last fifty years.

issues relevant to believers. An Argentinian politician was optimistic about getting a 'very good Pope for humanity'. Vatican commentator Edward Pentin thought the Conclave would have elements of a referendum on Pope Francis. Reporter Colleen Dulle agreed but thought that was the case for all Conclaves. Dr Miles Pattenden gave some useful historical background on the history of Conclaves, while Sister Nathalie Becquart, undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops since 2021, reckoned there would be no going back on the increasing number of women in leader-

ship roles in the Church – better decisions were made, she said, when men and women were together in governance.

Last Monday, on **Morning Ireland** (RTE Radio 1), Michael Kelly, of Aid to the Church in Need and former IC Editor brought us bang up to date from Rome – the official period of mourning was just ended and now there were important pre-Conclave meetings of the cardinals, out of which would hopefully emerge a profile of the desirable qualities of a new Pontif. Fingers crossed!

## Film

Aubrey Malone



# Caged victim of primeval initiation rites

**N**icolas Cage has been flying under the radar for so many years now we could be forgiven for forgetting just how great an actor he is. With two Oscar nominations in his quiver (one converted) and a plethora of other awards, his career should be the envy of many more hyped talents.

Fighting off charges of nepotism at the beginning of it, he changed his name from Coppola (Francis Ford Coppola is his uncle) to Cage to deflect attention from it. Since then, he's brought huge energy to a raft of roles characterised by their chameleon nature.

I expected both mystery and terror from his latest outing, *The Surfer* (15)



The Surfer

seeing as it's directed by Lorcan Finnegan. In Finnegan's *Vivarium* we were presented with a couple trapped in a miasma of identikit houses in a Kafkaesque suburb with, as Jean-Paul Sartre might have put it, "No exit."

Here the trap is a sun-kissed Australian beach where the unnamed Cage, a monied businessman, had an idyllic youth before his father died He

seeks to recapture that lost paradise by trying to buy back his childhood home from its new owners.

His dream is scuppered by a series of bizarre incidents featuring an abusive cadre of beach-hut ne-er-dowells drinking and drug-taking on the beach. They summarily divest him of the blandishments of 'yuppieism'. Dehydration gives him a meltdown.

In his descent to the level of 'unaccommodated man', to quote Shakespeare from *King Lear*, we see a Biblical metaphor for expiation. It's compromised by the Satanic figure of Scally (Julian McMahon). Scally rules his flock like a demented despot.

A homeless old man (Nic Cassin) has a grudge against him. He offers

Cage some solace, but also the threat of retribution against Scally.

The Surfer recalls David Fincher's *The Game* and Danny Boyle's *The Beach*, in its elaborate structure and diverging parameters. Finnegan plays with the antinomies of poverty and wealth, memory and desire, technology and primitivism in Cage's quasi-cathartic rite of passage into a world that at times appears illusory.

The film goes from the sublime to the ridiculous with its baptismal motif, and the portrayal of surfing as a quasi-spiritual activity. Cage also looks too grounded to repeatedly part with his expensive possessions for messes of pottage – or, if I may use a terrible pun, pots of message.

Finnegan has some interesting things to say to us about the pains and duties of paternity over three generations, though the constraints of a 100-minute film means this ambition, like his other ones, verge on the aspirational.

Even if we accept Cage's masochism, and his capitulation to Scally's demonic mantra "You've got to destroy to create," Finnegan's reach often exceeds his grasp in a challenging film which seeks to emulate the horror and sophistication of the works of M Night Shyamalan, whose career he seems to be trying to emulate for some time now.

Does he succeed in this instance? Answers on a postcard please.





# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## A poet's journey to the sources of his vision

**Journey Upstream,**  
by Noel Monahan  
(Salmon Poetry, €12.00 /  
£6.99)

**Seamas Cashman**

**J**ourney Upstream, Noel Monahan's ninth collection, appeared a few weeks ago. The cover image by Patrick Lynch belies the mischievousness in the energetic joy and humour the poet brings through his wonderful poem making.

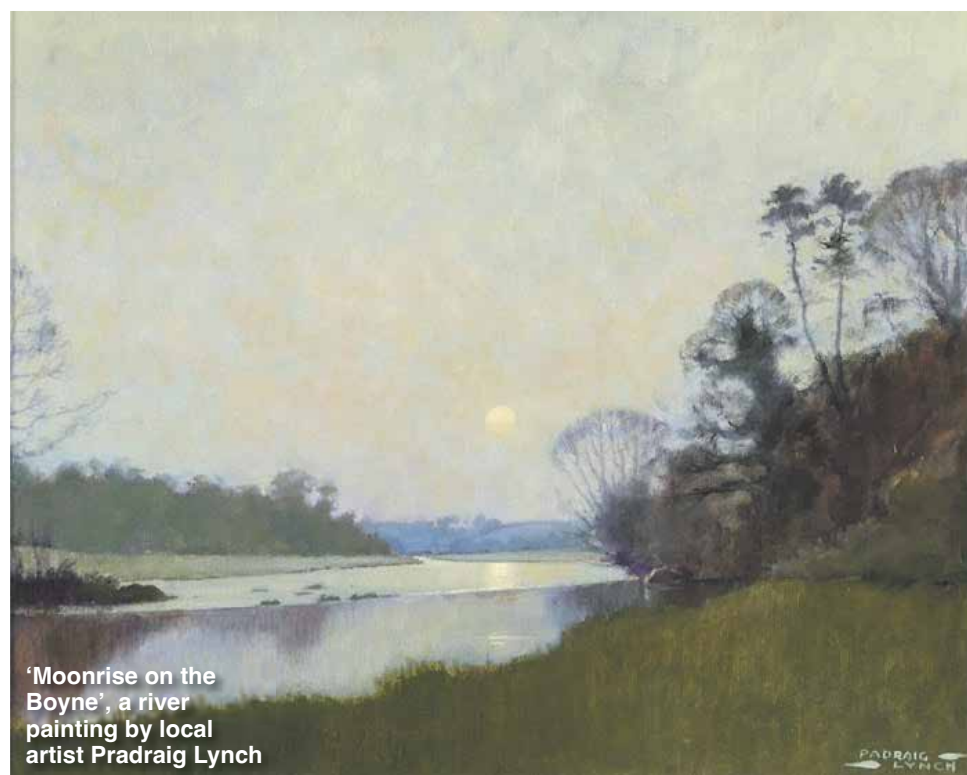
Noel Monahan, from Grannard, Longford, lives in Cavan. He has published nine poetry collections, and also translation selections in French and in Italian. His poetry has been on Leaving Certificate courses. He has also adapted his work for stage and film. His publications and plays have received many awards. The subject of his previous collection *Chalk Dust* (Salmon 2018) was a Boys Catholic Boarding School in the 1960s.

When asked to write a review of this latest volume I agreed readily and was intrigued in particular by a fifty page 'prose-cum-poetry' suite of texts in a section entitled 'Maynooth Calling', a reflection of his years spent there as a clerical student.

I had pre-dated him at Maynooth in the early 1960s, still a strong McQuaid era for Catholic Ireland where women were still locked out of almost everything; and gates locked us in at Maynooth! Permission to go outside the college grounds was restrictive; young boys served in the student dining room, not young women, though occasionally a nun monitored us! Change had indeed taken place.

### Reflections

The 23 short 'poem and prose' items that make up this section of the book are witty, and apt reflections of the



'Moonrise on the Boyne', a river painting by local artist Padraig Lynch

clerical students' way of life. The end of the 60s and the 1970s brought changes: he could bring a group of young females, including his sister, to visit him, even to his rooms!

**“Monahan portrays this social structure with wit and integrity, and indeed without mercy for us readers”**

At his first job teaching after his Maynooth sojourn, he was undoubtedly mortified when the Reverend Mother of St Clare's Girls' School invited him to lead a sixth-year class in singing the rousing hymn, 'Hail Queen of Heaven'. And the girls would undoubtedly

have blushed their way through had he ventured there with his revised texts for the hymn in this poem:

Milky white-faced girls,  
all lips: / Kissing the ocean  
star, / Kissing the wanderer,  
Kissing life's surge, /  
Kissing the gentle chaste  
and spotless Maid.

Of course, he admits that Maynooth did have its own character and ways; but he tired of them: the Ghost Room, Rhetoric House, Logic house, The Gunn Chapel, When the Girls Arrive (they get bored and slip off to the bus back to Dublin! — Life is tough!), Groupings of Students, Birettas On, Stand Like Statues, Facing Heaven; The Kildare Chubs (first years); Nuns; A Flame (A 'Gig' in today's language)—with its endless 'Kum Ba Yah My Lord.' And more! Monahan portrays this social structure

with wit and integrity, and indeed without mercy for us readers, or himself who has by then taken up singing plus guitar with Leonard Cohen's best. And no mercy for Maynooth either!

But back to the start of the book where from the beginning there is a wonderful variety of family poems: 'Sol and Luna' for Anne (beautiful tribute poem) and as I read on, poems and poem lines frequently lift themselves off the page to speak to the heart and the mind, to the ground and the air and to all the trees, rivers and lakes. In the opening two poems, it is the river Erne that speaks.

### Cherishes

This is a poet who knows and cherishes his world; and includes the title poem 'for Jessie, his publisher, and her dogs' He returns to Covid days and pours out superb short poems for and about children. His powerful 'Advice to a Young Poet' is for would-be poets. Indeed, I suggest, for all poets too. The opening lines begin via metaphor, with memorable images that echo Co. Monaghan's great Mr Kavanagh:

Break the lock on the field gate



Poet Noel Monahan in reflective mood on a river bank

Avoid the muck-worms at the gap

Abandon old visions you have of yourself

In the opening two poems we hear the voice of the Erne; there are poems to his grandchildren, a response to a John Lynch painting of a robin; a beautiful tribute to Maire Clarke; a gentle 'When You are Alone in a House'.

**“Is it perhaps we the people who are really doing the changing, distancing ourselves from 'bony heads of hills, empty eye sockets, I see man's shadow climb down from the cross'”**

He has a separate section of poems in both English and Irish versions, including one on ploughing, and others on mythologies, history (1798), and a gem titled *Smaointe Fánacha* / "Stray Thoughts From Glangevlin".

Religious considerations seep through many of his poems but: 'We no longer confess. / We bear our guilt, carry it everywhere'. Themes are family, flowing water, places and mythologies, and the lie of the Land.

There are too the darker sides of loneliness, the indifference of nature and frequently of ourselves, and our connections with the land that is changing, or is it perhaps we the people who are really doing the chang-

ing, distancing ourselves from 'bony heads of hills, empty eye sockets, 'I see man's shadow climb down from the cross / Lights out in heaven, no heat in hell'.

But also, happily if only we look, there are reasons to live for: we have our myths and we have 'Mullinalaghta'.

Place names to die for: /Hills of standing stones, Larkfield,

Pathway through the oaklands, /Grey ridge among the bushes, red hillock

Lake of the calf, a horse meadow to run wild in / Dinnseanchas of stones on the move /... .. /

Mullinalaghta, a homeland to live for.

### Magnificent

That magnificent poem is of 15 lines (only 8 are here) and announces with confidence that the place we live is in itself reason to want to live on with trust and faith in ourselves and in the place of our birth.

In a section called Longing for the Stars, are some thirty other about Cavan, its people and localities, including a poem of great importance called 'The Theatre of Covid-19' (pp 41-42) which is a telling what covid was and how we really were during that world pandemic of 2019.

And I have mentioned less than half the poems here! All lyrics that tune in to similar depths of beauty, philosophy and musicality.

In this book, Noel Monahan is writing at his very best, confirming that he is a contemporary Irish poet of significant stature and achievement.

**“As I read on, poems and poem lines frequently lift themselves off the page to speak to the heart and the mind, to the ground and the air and to all the trees, rivers and lakes”**



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.

# On another man's wounds

**One Man's Ireland: Memories of Dan Mulvihill, Maverick Republican,**  
by Owen O'Shea  
(Merrion Press, €16.99 / £14.99)

**J. Anthony Gaughan**

**D**an Mulvihill was born at Brackhill, Castlemaine, Co Kerry, in 1897. He was educated at the local National School. To prepare for an Entrance Examination at the Marconi College in London, he attended the Western College of Telegraphy in Kilrush in Co Clare in 1915. Subsequently he trained as a Radio Officer in the Marconi College. In his Memoir he recalled how he enjoyed his time in London.

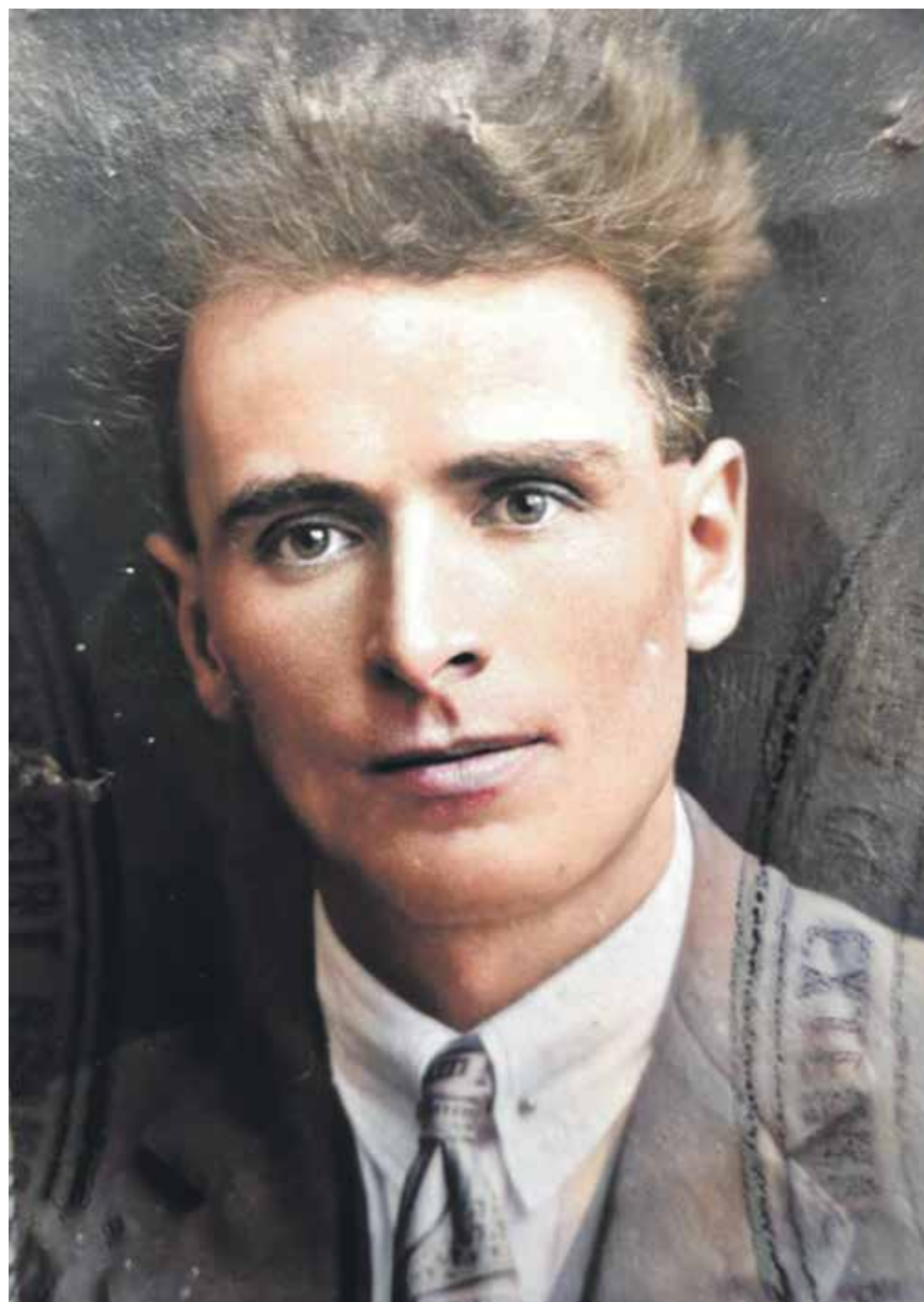
Following his graduation he was appointed as one of the two Radio Officers on the SS Aidan, a passenger ship which plied around Central and South America. It departed from Liverpool on August 11, 1916. During the following two years he had the opportunity to visit the important cities and ports of the Americas.

**“Dan and Shanahan, as the ringleaders of the protests, were expelled and most of the students departed from the College with them”**

Back home at the end of 1918, he won a scholarship to the Agricultural College at Clonakilty in West Cork early in 1919. Soldiers were billeted in the Workhouse not far from the College. Dan and Tom Shanahan organised a weekly protest at its military occupation.

In March, fighting broke out between the protesting students and some of the soldiers. Dan and Shanahan, as the ringleaders of the protests, were expelled and most of the students departed from the College with them. On arriving home Dan and Shanahan joined the struggle against the Crown forces.

Dan provides an account of



Dan Mulvihill, from a passport photograph of 1925. Photo: UCD Archives

the struggle in Kerry, particularly in his own area of mid-Kerry. The deadliest incident in which he was involved was an ambush at Ballymacandry, near Milltown, in which five members of a police patrol were killed.

## Charged

Early in 1921 IRA GHQ charged Paddy Cahill, OC, Kerry Brigade No 1, and its flying column, of expending their energies on 'eating, sleeping and general amusements'. In April Liam Lynch, OC, 1st Southern Division, and then recognised as one

of the outstanding leaders of the IRA, conducted a review of the Kerry Brigades and at a meeting of their representatives in Camp in the Dingle Peninsula announced that Cahill was suspended.

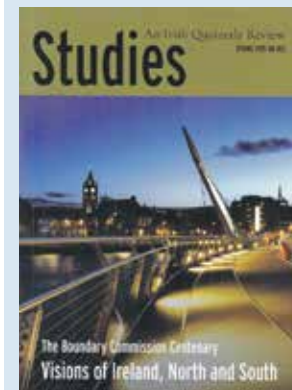
**“Dan was in Dublin when the Civil War began and he smuggled de Valera out of the city to safety”**

However, the subsequent attempt by GHQ to have Andy

Cooney replace him failed as Cahill's colleagues refused to switch their allegiance. While in Kerry, Lynch located himself in Dan's home at Brackhill and, as he departed, he requested Dan to join his Division staff. Following the Anglo-Irish Truce, Lynch appointed Dan to be Liaison Officer for Kerry. His role was to deal with claims of breaches of the Truce.

Dan was in Dublin when the Civil War began and he smuggled de Valera out of the city to safety. He returned to active service with his colleagues in mid-Kerry but dur-

## Mindful considerations of all things Irish, from changing faith to hope in the future



**Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review,**  
Spring 2025.  
(€10.00 / £8.95).  
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**Peter Costello**

**T**his is a special issue of the long established Jesuit edited quarterly that has long played a part in forming opinion across Ireland on all kinds of issues, religious, social and political, and artistic. It was originally modelled on the example of the French Jesuit journal *Études*, founded 1856, which focused on religion, philosophy, history and literature, but has long since taken its own way in the very different circumstances

of Ireland.

This current issue (the 453rd since 1912), deals with the centenary of the Ulster Boundary Commission. The thirteen contributors drawn from a variety of positions, deal not so much with the intricacies of that historical question, so much as with how it went to shaping the Ireland we know today, especially in the light of the Good Friday Agreement.

Here in Ireland we have come to take that landmark for granted. But when one bears in mind that it was guaranteed by the good will of the United States of America, there are now those who fear that the current administration, not notable for goodwill in many directions, may affect the very immediate future. But these essays here are full of both informed comments and revealing insights.

It is important to the life of a community that such a journal should flourish. To read *Studies* occasionally is a good thing, to support it in its essential work with a subscription would be even more important, especially as it will in future issues be dealing with the consequences for the Church and faith under a new Pontiff in Rome.

ing most of the Civil War he was at the side of Liam Lynch, leader of the Anti-Treatyites.

In his Memoir he describes the appalling tit-for-tat killing in Kerry as the fighting petered out. At the end of the Civil War, he and thousands of others were rounded-up by the Irish Free State army and interned in 'Tintown Camp' on the Curragh, Co Kildare. He was not at liberty again until the general release in 1924.

Dan assisted his former comrade, Florrie O'Donoghue, the organiser of the Supplementary Intelligence Service in 1939. This organisation monitored civilians suspected of being inclined to support and facilitate either a British or German invasion.

## Supported

Like most other Kerry Republicans, Dan supported the Fianna Fáil party but switched his allegiance in 1948 and supported the Inter-Party government, of which Clann na Poblachta, lead by Sean MacBride, was a part.

Two years later he was appointed to the Advisory Committee in the Department of Defence. It adjudicated upon the applications by former members of the

IRA, Cumann na mBan, and the National Army, for pensions. Even when he left this post he continued to assist veterans of the War of Independence to access pensions to which they were entitled.

**“Dismayed and disillusioned by the political leaders of the 1970s and 1980s, he died in 1984”**

A 'diehard' Republican to the end, he attempted unsuccessfully to rally the 'Old IRA' to support the Provisional IRA campaign in Northern Ireland. Dismayed and disillusioned by the political leaders of the 1970s and 1980s, he died in 1984.

On a few occasions I met the gregarious Dan Mulvihill with whom I shared a Mulvihill ancestry. He occasionally visited Listowel to link-up with Captain Tom Shanahan, his life-long friend from their time together as boarders in the Agricultural College in Clonakilty. Their friendship had not been affected by their having taken different sides in the Civil War.



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## Crossword

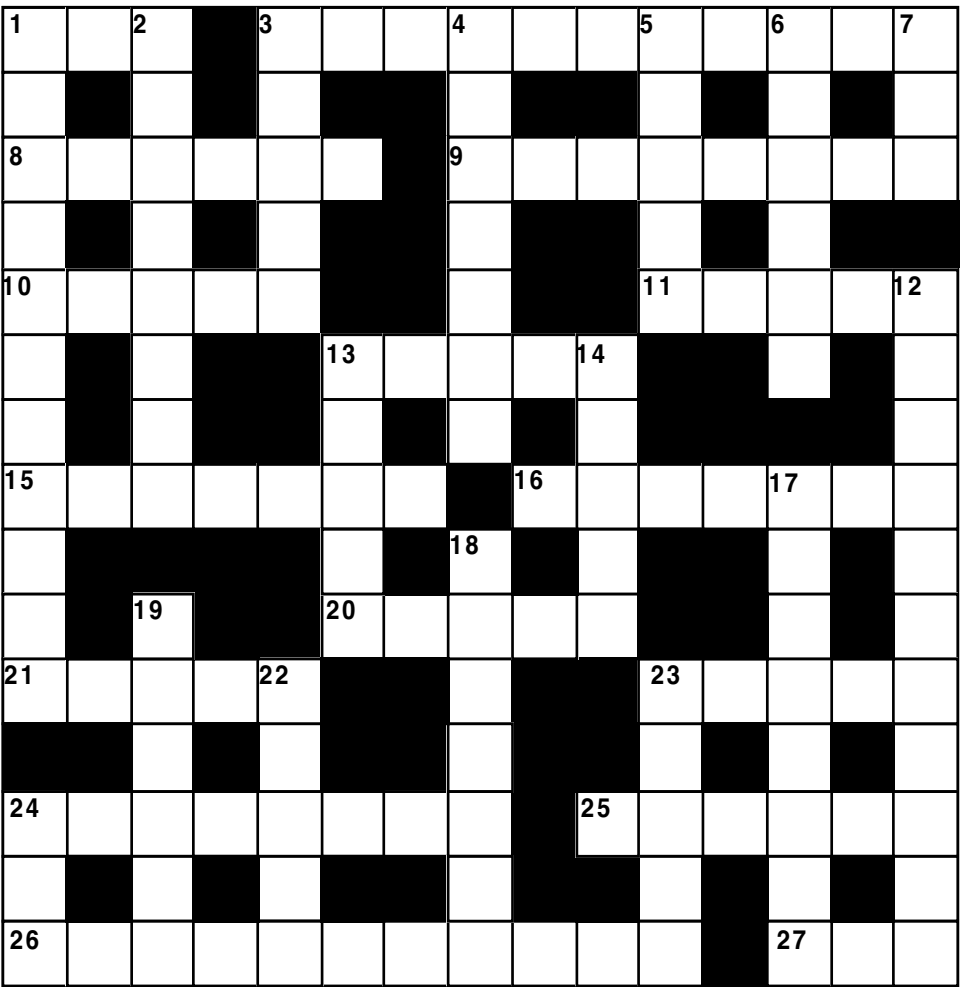
Gordius 714

### Across

- 1 Taxi (3)  
3 Mapmaking (11)  
8 Ejected forcibly (6)  
9 Powered cutting implement (5-3)  
10 Aristocratic (5)  
11 Threaded fastening piece (5)  
13 Room just below the roof (5)  
15 Kangaroo-like animal (7)  
16 Top prize in a raffle, etc (7)  
20 Americans (5)  
21 Give out, berate (5)  
23 Circus comedian (5)  
24 Students (8)  
25 Large area of trees (6)  
26 Carried from one place to another (11)  
27 Drink made of wine and cassis (3)

### Down

- 1 Regalia (5,6)  
2 America's national sport (8)  
3 French pancake (5)  
4 They entitle you to seats at a performance, etc (7)  
5 Sudden attacks (5)  
6 Pie-crust or tasty delicacy (6)  
7 Tree whose wood was used to make longbows



- (3)  
12 & 13 Famous religious building in London (11,5)  
14 Pandemonium (5)  
17 Style of garment
- (4,4)  
18 Cutting tooth (7)  
19 Leader of the Israelites in the Battle of Jericho (6)  
22 Playthings that look
- like babies (5)  
23 Harmonious combination of simultaneously played notes (5)  
24 Took a seat (3)

## SOLUTIONS, MAY 1

### GORDIUS No. 713

#### Across

- 1 Cot 3 Fair hearing 8 Tugged 9 Cold snap 10 Catch 11 Rotor 13 Fiery 15 Turmoil 16 Parsnip 20 Smart 21 Spoil 23 Siren 24. Cucumber 25 Mingle 26. Patron saint 27 Nut

#### Down

- 1 Catechetics 2 Together 3 Flesh 4 Racquet 5 Alder 6 Ignite 7 Gap 12 Resplendent 13 Flies 14 Yeast 17 Nitrogen 18 Malaria 19 Tomcat 22 Limbo 23 Shirt 24 Cup

## Sudoku Corner 582

### Easy

					1	4		3
			5				1	
9		6			8			5
2				5		1		
		5	1	9	3	6		
		8		4				9
6			9			2		1
	2				4			
4		7	3					

### Hard

	7				2			6
6			4	8	1		7	
	8				9			
9				7			2	
8		2				5		7
	1			3				4
			9				8	
	4		8	2	6			5
2			5				1	

### Last week's Easy 581

3	7	2	5	6	1	9	4	8
5	6	9	2	8	4	1	7	3
1	8	4	7	9	3	5	2	6
6	5	8	4	1	2	3	9	7
9	4	7	6	3	5	2	8	1
2	3	1	8	7	9	6	5	4
4	9	3	1	2	8	7	6	5
7	1	5	9	4	6	8	3	2
8	2	6	3	5	7	4	1	9

### Last week's Hard 581

2	6	5	3	7	1	8	9	4
4	1	9	6	8	5	3	7	2
3	8	7	9	4	2	1	6	5
5	7	1	8	2	4	6	3	9
8	4	6	5	9	3	7	2	1
9	2	3	7	1	6	4	5	8
6	9	2	4	3	8	5	1	7
7	3	8	1	5	9	2	4	6
1	5	4	2	6	7	9	8	3



## Notebook

Fr John Harris OP



# My election at baptism

I am writing this article while in Rome on Dominican business. By the time you read it, not only will I be back in Ireland, but there may very well be a new pope. As you can imagine there is only one topic of conversation in the city, be it in a shop, taxi, restaurant, on a bus or waiting in line to go through one of the Holy Doors. Once people see the religious habit or a roman collar there is only one question, "Who will be the next pope?"

And of course any Italian one speaks with can give you a list of candidates and who they want to be pope. The atmosphere is something between the Rose of Tralee or the Grand National.

## Celebrating

During week while I was in Rome, we were also celebrating the feast of St Catherine of Siena, a Dominican saint who was much preoccupied with the role of the papacy in the Church and the need in her day for unity and peace in the Church. Sitting by her tomb I was reminded of the divine role of the papacy. As we have been reminded, the cardinals are not electing a successor to Francis or Benedict



but to Peter. Christ left us the papacy as a sign of his love for the world and as a means of communion. He knew that the devil sows the seeds of discord and disunity. Jesus left his Church a rock of unity and communion. He knew as none of us know, that in the midst of a sinful and broken world there needed to be a community of unity and peace. The pope is after all the "pontifex" the bridge builder. Jesus was fully aware of what he was doing. But as so often happens Jesus

is the one forgotten in a world dominated by the categories used by the media and political discourse. When Jesus assigned Simon with the name Peter and the role of leadership it was a divine mandate, not a political one. The papacy is a sign of God in the world uniting and bringing together, not dividing and separating.

## Reflection

This brings me to a more personal reflection on membership of the

Church in Ireland. You and I have been loved into the Church at baptism by an act of God's providence. Being baptised is God's way of inviting you closer to himself, an opportunity for you to grow in a deeper communion with him in his community of the Blessed Trinity. In public discourse and maybe even in private conversations we can lose the divine origin and constitution of the Church and our calling into it. The Holy Church is not a political party or a golf club, it is God's call made personally to you in the communion of his children to enter into the love of the Father for the Son in the Holy Spirit.

I think we are embarrassed to speak in such terms in the modern age. To speak of the divine origin of the Church or of the supernatural life of grace which unites us in the Blessed Trinity is to many an alien language, if not pure nonsense and idiotic. But it is the truth which I think the election of a new pope should give us all the opportunity to reflect upon. Let us ponder not so much upon the election of the new pope as on our own personal election into the internal life of the loving and eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## Pilgrim or tourist

During the Jubilee Year of 2000, one of our Dominican friars while visiting Rome was recalling his first visit to Rome for the Holy Year of 1950. When asked what was the greatest difference he noticed in the two events he said; "in 1950 people came as pilgrims now they come with their cameras as tourists".

I was reminded of this observation as I sat in prayer at the tomb of Pope Francis. As far as I could see for the time I was there most of those passing the Pope's grave were more intent on taking photos or selfies than praying for him. Maybe I should have been more focused on my prayers than looking disapprovingly at my fellow tourists.



## This Eastertide, please help the people of Myanmar

The two earthquakes, whose epicentres were located near the cities of Mandalay and Sagaing, have caused great devastation. At present, the death toll is believed to be around 5,350, with 7,860 injured and hundreds more reported missing. Fr Henry is in charge of the Archdiocese of Mandalay's emergency response team. He writes to the Little Way, "The situation is terrible. At present, the most important needs are humanitarian assistance such as food, medicine, temporary shelter, and hygiene kits. Many people will need help for a long time, before they can start to rebuild their homes and lives."

**The Little Way Association will forward, without deduction, every euro you send to Priests and Sisters known to us in Myanmar to provide basic humanitarian aid and to help families rebuild their lives. Please give what you can, and pray for Myanmar, going through a harsh period of war and natural disaster. The needs are immense. To donate online go to [littlewayassociation.com](http://littlewayassociation.com)**



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- St Therese

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