

The Irish Catholic

**A WEARY
'WEIRDING' WORLD
NEEDS ADVENT
MORE THAN EVER**

Breda O'Brien
Page 6

**A FAITH
WORTH
LIVING FOR**

Martina Purdy
Page 11

**SYNODAL
CHURCH WILL
BE MORE
INCLUSIVE**

Bishop Michael Router
Page 23

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Ask politicians where they stand on assisted suicide, Bishop Crean urges

Garry O'Sullivan

Bishop William Crean, Bishop of Cloyne has issued an appeal to Catholic voters that when being canvassed over these days to ask prospective TDs to indicate clearly where they stand on assisted suicide/assisted death.

"Our population is aging. The cost of nursing care is increasingly difficult for families. Enormous pressure will be brought to bear on frail elderly and others diagnosed with terminal illness to succumb to a potentially new culture of death" the bishop said.

He added: "How we care for the weakest and most vulnerable goes to the core of our moral fibre and integrity as a society.

"Compassion must always be our first response in the face of pain. Our palliative care culture and organisation across the country are an extraordinary witness to compassionate care for all approaching life's end."

Young Catholics - A generation seeking something deeper



Faustina Obodo, Oonagh Nwankwo and Eva Conroy are pictured during the CONNECT 5 event last Sunday November 17, organised by the Diocese of Cork and Ross where more than 160 young Catholics from all over the island gathered. Photo: John McElroy. See page 30

Bishop Doran outlines issues for Catholic voters

The Right to Life

The right to life is a fundamental human right and when life is taken away, all other rights are taken along with it. In 2018, the Oireachtas legalised abortion, with the assurance that it would be rare and safe. Over a five-year period, more than 30,000 babies have been aborted, the vast majority of them under 12 weeks and with no suggestion of any medical reason. Who even asks the mothers what is going on for them, emotionally, physically or economically?

Euthanasia

The Dáil recently voted to receive the report of the Oireachtas committee on assisted dying. This vote had no immediate effect, but it does give us some idea of the number of politicians in the last Dáil who would be prepared to consider legalising Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide. If this had been about passing legislation, there were enough 'yes' votes nationally to legalise assisted suicide and euthanasia, with all the same promises about it being safe and rare.

The availability of assisted suicide would further weaken respect for life in our society and put pressure on elderly and the sick people who are already vulnerable. It would also seriously undermine doctors and nurses whose professional commitment is to support life. Election candidates should be questioned on their past voting history on this matter and on their intentions for the future.

looking to buy the same number of houses.

Government can no longer leave the provision of housing to developers who are in the market for profit. Public policy needs to focus on the building of far more houses which will be owned and managed by local authorities at rents which are realistic. It needs to be made clear to candidates that the time for promises is over. Families need homes, not hotels and office blocks.

Childcare

There seems to be no shortage of policies about the funding of childcare, which like so many things, is becoming more highly regulated and more expensive.

All the focus is on providing subsidies for parents whose children attend child-care facilities. Why would we not also consider subsidising parents of young children, at least those under school-going age, who would prefer to stay at home and look after their own children? Surely that would be a positive way for government to recognise the essential contribution that parents make in caring for their own children (cf. Art. 42 of the Irish Constitution). In the final analysis, the primary consideration should be given to what is good for children rather than to what might be good for the economy.

Rural Development and Policing

When it comes to petty crime and anti-social behaviour in our towns and villages, the visibility of An Garda Síochána is an important preventive measure. When phone calls are made, the response often seems to be that there is no car available.

I imagine this must be a source of frustration and concern for the Gardaí themselves. Most of them live in our communities and, if they are not properly resourced, they themselves are also being placed at risk. In a healthy economy such as ours, one must question how public spending is prioritised.

Migrants and Refugees

Placing large numbers of refugees and asylum seekers, many of whom are traumatised by their experience of war, into remote places where there is no prospect of either work or integration, is of no real benefit to them. It clearly causes concern in communities where limited services are put under pressure.

There is no justification for violence or racism against refugees and asylum seekers. Candidates for election need to be reminded of the many promises that have been made about the re-development of publicly owned buildings to provide accommodation which is fit for human habitation, in places where there is public transport and the possibility for people to access work and education.

Housing

Housing is another fundamental human right and there has been a serious housing crisis in Ireland for many years. It was not caused by refugees or asylum seekers and any attempt to blame them for the situation is unfair. In a market which is dominated by the private sector, subsidies and grants only serve to increase prices, because the same number of people are

Healthcare chaplain: Add assisted suicide and euthanasia to election agenda

Brandon Scott

A healthcare chaplain has said that the “concern, worry, and anxiety” around the issue of assisted suicide and euthanasia after the Dáil’s recent vote to acknowledge a



Dr Margaret Naughton

report that calls on the Government to legalise assisted dying in certain restricted circumstances, demands inclusion as an item on the election agenda.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Dr Margaret Naughton said that Irish politicians’ shift in attitude to assisted suicide and euthanasia has become “very concerning” for those who deal with end-of-life care on a regular basis and ambiguities are only heightening fears about the ultimate goal of the overwhelming majority of TDs in the Dáil.

“It’s very concerning to put it mildly because in a healthcare setting we value human life and we do all

that we can to attend to the dignity and the respect of each of the people that we encounter so anything that would threaten or run counter to that is obviously very problematic and concerning,” she said.

“I think there’s a lot of ambiguity out there and there’s a lot of concern amongst people. There’s a lot of language being used around this and a lot of concern about where this is ultimately going to lead us.”

Dr Naughton said that the practicalities around the provision and regulation of assisted suicide and euthanasia, of which there are many, are causing concern about “what the future trajectory of

this is” and one of the ways clarity can be provided is if the topic becomes a central item on the election agenda.

“People have very strong opinions on both sides of the argument, there’s definitely some concern about what the future trajectory of this is ... Where is it going to lead us in terms of day-to-

day reality of being cared for in a hospital or a healthcare facility or also the reality of what’s going to happen a loved one if they find themselves in a compromised situation or facing a terminal diagnosis?” she said.

“So there’s a lot of concern, worry, and anxiety out there so people need direc-

tion, they need insight, they need clarity. It needs to be part of the election agenda. It needs to be discussed more and it needs to be supported more. It also needs to be explored in a very real way with people and recognised authentically that people have concerns around this.”

‘Communication critical to prevent addictions’, says Church expert

Renata Milán Morales

The Irish Bishops’ Drugs Initiative continues their work to prevent drug use on a national level with ongoing changes to address their message to today’s youth. “We’re updating the pledge for sixth-class students, making it more relevant while educating them about the risks of alcohol and drug use,” explained to *The Irish Catholic* the IBDI National Coordinator, Mr Darren Butler. “One of the initiative’s key programs involves engaging parents and schools... It’s critical to communicate why we want young people to avoid substances, especially given how alcohol affects the developing brain.” Meanwhile, Bishop Paul Dempsey noted during his homily on the occasion of Matt Talbot’s Centenary that “Ireland is one of the wealthi-

est nations in the world, yet addiction is a huge issue.”

The IBDI, since 1997 continues with the ‘Confirmation pledge’, which is now called ‘commitment’. This is a commitment that the teenagers make to abstain from any type of drugs. “Even 10 years ago, it was a different world to what it is today when it comes to all the different types of challenges young people have with the different types of drugs,” noted Mr Butler.

Mr Butler talked the importance of open communication, especially for teenagers. “Young people need to know they can reach out for help without fear, whether it’s their parents or guardians,” he said. “Creating that safety net can prevent dangerous situations from escalating.”

See pages 14-15

Ballymena six awarded



Six young parishioners from Ballymena Kirkinriola Parish received JP2 Awards and Papal Cross from Fr Michael McGinnity. The group has served the parish over the past year with the support of Catherine Diamond, co-ordinator who lead the programme.

Film about nuns in Ireland wins documentary award

Renata Steffens

Produced by Scratch Films, *The Last Nuns in Ireland* has won a Radharc Trust Award in the cat-

egory Broadcast Documentary. In this film directed by Judy Kelly, writer and broadcaster Dearbhail McDonald explores the role of religious sisters in Ireland as the average age of nuns is over 80.

The film is the second of two films about the Catholic clergy in Ireland. It was broadcast on RTÉ One on January 16, with its first part broadcast on January 15, focusing on the priests in Ireland.

The film explores the question ‘what if these are the last nuns in Ireland and will we miss them?’

The 50-minutes long film examines the role of nuns and how they shaped Irish lives,

including their own “for better or for worse”.

It is believed that the film production company is currently working on a ‘Last Missionaries’ film.

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Labour must clarify what it wants to replace religious instruction with

Brandon Scott

The Labour Party's proposal to move religious instruction outside of daily teaching hours in schools in the party's recent election manifesto has prompted a senior figure in Catholic education to question what sort of alternative to religious instruction they would introduce and this is something that they haven't addressed yet according to the CEO of the Catholic Education Partnership.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, CEO of the CEP Alan Hynes, said: "I think people would have to ask themselves, if Labour are talking about removing religious instruction during teaching hours, which is one part of the Catholic ethos of the school, what do they want to replace it with?" he said. "That's the question Labour need to answer."

"It's likely that they will go with something like an ethics course of some form or another because when last in government and holding the education portfolio they pushed a separate ethics course that they wished all schools to teach. The thing is, every ethics course comes from

a particular world view, so what world view do Labour wish to impart?"

"Labour are now purporting that the pupils attending Catholic schools will, in fact, receive another world view. So there's kind of a slight-of-hand for parents – you might send your child to a Catholic school but we're going to teach them something else ... Something else that Labour has not defined. So what ethical view do they hold that the public holds in so little regard?"

Proposals like these are the result of a frustration with parents' continued satisfaction with Catholic schools according to Mr Hynes, who stressed that parties like Labour, many of whom poll at low percentages in opinion polls, seek to "impose their view on the entirety of the population".

"Labour along with several other parties are very frustrated essentially because parents are not wildly in favour of divestment," he said. "But one thing is that as we've engaged in various different divestment projects around the country, for the most part, local communities have indicated that they wish to stay with Catholic schools."

"The other approach is the Labour approach that imposes a solution from above without any regard to local feeling or the feelings of those attending the school or the community within which

the school is situated. This is a top-down thing, where again, a party that only represents 3 or 4% of the population has a desire to impose their view on the entirety of the population."

Recent reports have indicated that Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil would prefer to enter coalition with the Labour Party if returned to Government after the next general election.

Priests respond to Nicole Kidman's fear of death



Renata Milán Morales

Acclaimed actress Nicole Kidman recently revealed her struggle with the fear of mortality, sharing that it sometimes leads her to wake up crying and gasping in the middle of the night.

Bro. Laurence Kettle OFM, talking to *The Irish Catholic*, acknowledges that fear and anxiety over death are natural, saying, "It's OK to be afraid or a little anxious. While not ideal, these emotions keep us alert and focused, protecting us from indifference, which can be more

dangerous." He encourages perseverance, even in times of struggle, "We should keep trying."

Bro. Kettle continued, "When encouraging someone who is suffering, I sometimes point to the Man on the Cross. That Man supports our suffering... The cross is seen as disturbing, but the divine irony is that it offers hope in suffering... It is a sign of strength".

Fr Chris Hayden, on this issue, adds to Bro. Kettle's comments that "The Church provides a faith that assures us death has been overcome by Christ... Faith gradually helps us see our anxieties in a different light."

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'Vague' housing proposals will not help homeless – campaigners

Chai Brady

Housing and homelessness campaigners have called on politicians for "clear, actionable" plans to deal with the housing crisis as current proposals "remain vague". It has also been urged for a referendum to be held regarding making housing a Constitutional right – something promised by Government parties five years ago.

Speaking at the European Housing First Hub's Annual Conference in Dublin Castle on Tuesday, Mike Allen, Director of Advocacy at Focus Ireland said that while the importance of the 'Housing First' model was acknowledged by political parties, the decline in attention to wider housing issues "is deeply concerning".

In their 2020 manifestos, Fine Gael mentioned homelessness 31 times and Fianna Fáil 33 times. In 2024, these figures dropped to 9 and 4 mentions, respectively.

"While mentions alone are not the measure of commitment, the specific policy proposals seen in 2020 have largely been replaced by generalities in 2024," Mr Allen said.

Founder of the Peter McVerry

Trust, Fr Peter McVerry told *The Irish Catholic* Ireland is in the housing crisis "mess" because of an over reliance on the private sector.

Fr McVerry highlighted that in 1975 the Irish government built 8,500 council houses, in 1985 it was 6,900, and in 2015, 75 council houses were built, "and that was an ideological decision". He advocated for the Government to set up a national housing agency who would provide houses for the population.

Regarding making housing a Constitutional right, Fr McVerry said that that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael "don't want to do that".

"Even though they put it into their election manifestos, into their programme for Government five years ago, that they would hold a referendum on putting the right to housing into the Constitution – we've heard nothing about it since," he said.

"If politicians are coming to your doorstep, that would be one of the questions I would ask them: 'Are you in favour of putting the right to housing in the Constitution?' I would expect a very definite 'yes' from anybody who comes to my door looking

for my vote."

Mr Allen pointed out that last year there was an increase in the number of social homes built compared to many years previous, but "few homeless households were able to access them, and homelessness still increased".

To reverse the trend, he called for targeted use of housing supply, ensuring a portion of new homes is ring-fenced for homeless households, as well as investment in wraparound supports, including mental health services, care work, and community development initiatives.

Homelessness has risen by 45% since the last general election – from 10,146 people in February 2020 to 14,760 in September 2024.



Fr Peter McVerry

Irish college gets a cardinal



The Pontifical Irish College team in Rome welcomed Cardinal Prevost, Prefect to the Dicastery of Bishops, who presented on his role in the Dicastery the process of selecting Bishops and engaged in a Q&A with the laity, priests and seminarians.

Party's proposals to liberalise abortion are 'monstrous' and 'barbaric'

Staff reporter

A TD has described moves by political parties to abolish the mandatory three-day waiting period to access abortion medication and to extend the 12-week limit to allow for abortion on request as "monstrous" and "barbaric" and asked "is 40,000 abortions since 2019 not enough?"

Responding to the Labour Party and People Before Profit's proposals to liberalise the provision of abortion in their recent election manifestos, Independent TD for Laois-Offaly Carol Nolan decried the moves and told *The Irish Catholic* that she "utterly opposes

them".

"Proposals to further liberalise abortion access up to and including abortion on request through all stages of pregnancy are nothing short of monstrous and barbaric," she said. "They reflect a nauseating willingness to obliterate the reality of the unborn child and a desire to subsume her or his existence into an ideology of utter indifference. This is not compassion. This is cruelty writ large."

"Is 40,000 abortions since 2019 not enough? These proposals read to me as a manifesto for future trauma. I utterly oppose them. Women and children deserve better."

Vocations Monstrance makes its way through Ireland

Renata Steffens

A monstrance blessed by Pope John Paul II for the increase of vocations is making its way through Ireland. 'The Vocations Monstrance' will visit twelve dioceses over a two-weeks period, from November 18 to 29.

St Pope John Paul blessed in total six monstrances for vocations prayer in 2004, one for each continent. The monstrance visiting Ireland is the North America one, explained Deacon Eric Cooney, who works for the National Vocations Office and is deacon at Monkstown Parish, the first stop of the monstrance.

Deacon Cooney explained the United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops contacted the Irish office "to see would we like the monstrance to come to Ireland."

"The experience of the American bishops," the deacon said, was that "whenever people pray for vocations, there is a growth and increasing in vocations... They did a survey about twelve years ago, and the survey was of seminarians who had entered the seminary. They discovered that out of the 20% of parishes that prayed for vocations, 80% of the seminarians came from that 20% of parishes."

"It's very clear that whenever vocations are actively prayed for, there is a growth in vocations. Whether with the monstrance or not," Deacon Cooney said.

Book on holy Irish men and women seeks to 'renew' and 'inspire'

Brandon Scott

Ahead of the launch of the book *'The Rock from Which You Were Hewn: The Lives and Legacy of Holy Irish Men and Women'*, co-author Fr John Hogan OCS, said his hope is that the publication "inspires" and "renews" Catholics in the country by exploring the rich legacy of holy Irish men and women over the past 200 years.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, Fr Hogan said that one of the motivations behind writing the book was Pope Benedict XVI's call to Irish Catholics almost 15 years ago.

"We want to respond to Pope Benedict's call to look at the great spiritual tradition that we have as Christians and Catholics in Ireland and to draw on that as we move towards renewal after the scandals," he said.

"But as Pope Benedict said in his letter to the Irish, the Church in Ireland needs to reform but that reform needs to take place drawing upon the great traditions that we have and particularly the legacy of holiness that the people who have gone before us have shown."

Rather than attempt to excavate a

more antiquated time in Irish Catholicism, Fr Hogan decided to go for a more contemporary study of the faith on the island and this means that anyone reading can find a person whose life and circumstances mirror their own.

"Instead of going back into the dim and distant past, we've looked at more contemporary models of holiness that have emerged – particularly in the last 200 years. It looks at the Good News and the positive dimension of the Church and Christianity in Ireland which we need to look at if we're going to go forward and address problems in the past but also flourish in the future."

"The idea behind it is that people will be inspired. We have people from every walk of life in there. Everyone who reads this book will find someone whose life mirrors theirs in some way and can encourage them to live the Christian life."

i Fr John Hogan and Dr Patrick Kenny's *'The Rock from Which You Were Hewn'* will be launched at 6:30 on November 21 at Ely House, Dublin 2. Guest speaker will be Archbishop Eamon Martin.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Priest founder of Clare Youth Service dies in Limerick

A priest who dedicated decades of his life to youth service died on November 17. Fr Seán Sexton, former PP Inagh/Kilnamona died in the University Hospital, Limerick. His work directly affected thousands of young people over 40 years, especially in Co. Clare, being the mind behind Clare Youth Service (CYS).

Through his life, Fr Sexton was the inspiration behind multiple youth services, youth groups, youth cafés and music projects in Co. Clare and abroad.

He was part of the setting up of the European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC) in 1976, a European network of youth work and youth club organisations that practices and promotes non-formal education. ECYC reaches two million people in Europe every year.

Currently, there are 47 projects operating with the values and principles Fr Sexton developed. The priest was involved "in the early days of the National Youth Federation, now Youth Work Ireland," CYS said.

CYS concluded: "Fr Seán was many things to many people – Friend, Trainer, Advisor, Counsellor, Listener, Mentor, Guide, Pastor, while different people feel that their experience of Sean is the full story, he is in fact the sum of all our stories".

2024 Irish Inter-Church meeting takes place in NI

The 2024 Irish Inter-Church Meeting (IICM) took place on November 12 – 13 in the Dromantine Retreat and Conference Centre near Newry. This year, the meeting theme was 'Finding the Face of God in One Another'. Representing the Catholic Church were Bishop Leahy, Bishop McGuckian, Bishop Duffy and Gary Carville.

The gathering focused on reconciliation, emphasising the profound need to recognise humanity in the other "as a way to bridge divides caused by racism, economic inequality, and the lasting impact of Northern Ireland's historical conflicts," a statement said.

"This year's conference sought to address the rising polarisation and hostility driven by recent socio-political shifts, including the effects of Brexit, reflections on the Good Friday Agreement, and the challenges posed by the housing and cost-of-living crises."

Overall, the gathering was marked by "rich content and vibrant conversations around tables... The IICM concluded with a renewed commitment to healing, underlining that true reconciliation goes beyond conflict resolution and builds an inclusive, compassionate society."

A terrible event recalled..

Years ago, I had a certain amount of sympathy for Provisional Sinn Féin/IRA. I even defended some of their tactics on the – now I think stupid and wicked – revolutionary principle that “you can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs”.

I felt the Catholic nationalist people of Northern Ireland had suffered long injustices: maybe they had to fight for change.

Impact

But I remember exactly the moment when the full horror of “the armed struggle”, and its appalling strategy, struck home to me. It was 50 years ago, on November 21, 1974, with the news of the Birmingham bombings.

It was the ordinariness of that evening, with young people gathered together harmlessly for an after-work drink, that was so compelling. When the blasts came, at the Mulberry Bush and the Talk of the Town, 21 people lost their lives, and nearly 200 were injured.



Mary Kenny

“How precious life was, emblemised by that infant in the cradle: and how wrong to destroy it wilfully and heedlessly”

And many of the victims were themselves Irish, since Birmingham has always had a strong Irish community. Two brothers, Desmond and Eugene Reilly, aged 21 and 23, who had met to share a pint together, were instantly killed. Imagine the grief of their mother: losing both her sons. This struck me as wantonly cruel.

Certain events often have an impact on us for a reason: we are open, at a particular moment, to examining our conscience more rigorously. And I think I was awakened to the horror of taking human life because I had just recently given birth to

a baby. How precious life was, emblemised by that infant in the cradle: and how wrong to destroy it wilfully and heedlessly.

“For each of us, there has perhaps been one event that really brought home to us how heinous it is to cause innocent civilians to perish”

Apart from the tragedy of lost lives, there was an awful impact on the

Iwrote recently about attending a traditional Latin Mass in France, and I’m flattered to hear I was quoted from the pulpit in Cork. I have now received a short booklet, sent anonymously to enlighten me further, called *Dispelling Confusion: A respectful Plea for the continuing of Harmonious Unity of Legitimate Diversity in Ritual Practice of the Sacred Liturgy*. (Published by ICHTHUS

– Catholic Apostolates International.)

I dislike Church quarrels and I wouldn’t want to enter into arguments around this issue, or why Benedict XVI (traditionalist) was right and Pope Francis (modernist) is wrong. But there is an interesting chapter on why so many young people seem drawn to the Latin Mass: in a confusing world they seek the awe and spiritual nourishment they may find in the

Usus Antiquior. There can be an experience of “total immersion” in the traditional form.

And the Novus Ordo – the modern form – can contain too much “jumping up and down”, as I’ve heard it described: stand, kneel, stand again, sit, stand. There’s something to be said for restfulness and contemplation.

I’m not a partisan for one side or the other: but open to listening to both.

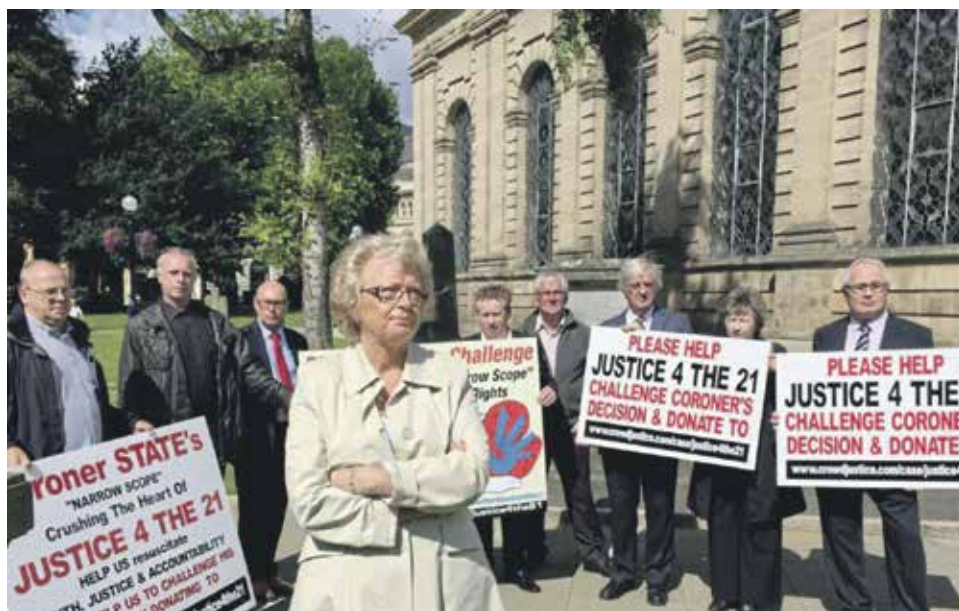
Irish community, and then the injustice of the Birmingham Six who were wrongly imprisoned for the crime. The IRA never admitted responsibility, but IRA operatives have been identified as having carried out the atrocity (Michael Murray, who died in 1999, has been one publicly named).

Over the years, as we know, there have been many atrocities, including

the Dublin and Monaghan bombs, and the terrible events at Omagh. For each of us, there has perhaps been one event that really brought home to us how heinous it is to cause innocent civilians to perish. Many members of the clergy have upheld that message and preached it constantly.

In 2018, I travelled to Birmingham for an Irish Embassy reception

at the Conservative conference there. Julie Hambleton was holding a public vigil for her late sister, Maxine, who had died, aged 18, in the Birmingham bombs. Her organisation ‘Justice4the21’ was still campaigning to find and charge those involved with planting the bombs. I walked over and put a tenner in her collection box.



Julie Hambleton and other Birmingham pub bombings campaigners from the Justice4the21.

Succumbing to modern consumerism

The Isle of Lewis, in the Outer Hebrides, has finally succumbed to modern consumerism, by allowing, for the first time in its history, Sunday trading.

The fiercely strict “Wee Frees” in Lewis have succumbed to the inducements of Tesco supermarkets, which opened their doors in

Stornaway to islanders shopping last Sunday. Two thousand islanders signed a petition to oppose the move, but shoppers duly turned up at noon, just the same. Thus passes a Sabbatarian tradition which, in its more extreme form could be joyless and mean-spirited. Yet applied in moderation, the notion that there should be one day of the week for

spiritual reflection, and not dedicated to trading and consumerism, is quite sane.

I had an aunt who came from a Tipperary Protestant background, and although she became a Catholic, she wouldn’t shop on a Sunday. She could also never quite shake off a feeling of guilt if she indulged in a card-game on the Sabbath.

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Doing Advent right



Breda O'Brien

It's the time of the Feast of Christ the King, which marks my annual one-woman Advent restoration campaign. In CS Lewis' book, *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* the reign of the White Witch in Narnia means that it is always winter and never Christmas.

In our culture, we suffer from a similar problem, except that in our case, it is always Christmas and never Advent. My father, Lord have mercy on him, used to say, "It is now Christmas every day". He talked about getting an orange for Christmas, a rare and exotic fruit for most Irish people in the 1920s. (My father would be 107 if he were alive today.)

He meant that treats that used to be special are now taken for granted. For many of us, with the notable exception of people who are struggling financially, stuffing ourselves silly is a daily option for many of us rather than something that happens once a year. Toys that once would have made children's eyes pop out on stalks are now commonplace. Gifts are exchanged far more frequently.

When we lose Advent as a season, we lose many gifts, not least the gift of patience.

“We have tested and tasted too much, lover./ Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder”

There is a beautiful poem about Advent by the poet Patrick Kavanagh. I must have been about 16, sitting in Mrs Kenneally's wonderful, soul-nourishing Eng-

“Advent is a season where we look forward to light, even though the days grow darker. The commercial Christmas lights go on too early, not to mention the fact that they are environmentally unfriendly. However, Advent candles are a reminder of the comfort of light in darkness”



A family lights an Advent wreath at their home. Photo: OSV News/Tom McCarthy Jr, Catholic Review

lish class, when I turned the pages of Soundings to Patrick Kavanagh's *Advent*. I don't know why that first line spoke to me so immediately and so deeply. "We have tested and tasted too much, lover./ Through a chink too wide there comes in no wonder."

Tested

God knows, I had tested and tasted nothing at that stage. Far from being worn out by experiencing too much, I was positively sheltered. Perhaps I was just at that painful moment when childhood is about to be left behind forever and was already mourning "the luxury of a child's soul" and the capacity to be stirred to wonder by the "newness

that was in every stale thing".

In the poem, Kavanagh speaks about fasting in Advent, the dry, black bread and the sugarless tea. Today our culture pushes instead Advent calendars that promise us treats for every day of Advent. Nor is just a chocolate.

“Individual satisfaction achieved through consumerism is the best our culture has to offer for Advent”

Astrid and Miyu, a UK jewellery brand, offers a

solid gold Advent calendar, a steal at £1,340 sterling, but don't worry, because the brand has embraced sustainability. That may seem like a far-fetched example but a quick Google will bring up stationery, cosmetics, and skincare brands - all flogging Advent calendars ranging in price from €50 to hundreds of euros.

Individual satisfaction achieved through consumerism is the best our culture has to offer for Advent. It is very far from what Pope Benedict wrote about the season:

"The purpose of the Church's year is continually to rehearse her great history of memories, to awaken the heart's memory so that it can discern the star of hope....It is the beautiful task of Advent to awaken in all of us memories of goodness and thus to open doors of hope."

Hope

Our entire world needs hope at the moment, embroiled as it is in wars and rumours of wars, political polarisa-

tion and radicalisation, and what some people are now calling 'global weirding' as extreme events like flooding and storms batter the planet.

All of us could do with rediscovering what Kavanagh eventually discovers in his poem, the joy of what he calls 'ordinary plenty'.

Instead of rushing everywhere frantically, we can count the blessings of having friends and families to care for and become more aware of the bereaved and lonely, for whom Christmas is really difficult.

“As the saying goes, if you are sick of Christmas by December 25 - the first day of Christmas - you are not doing Advent right”

We might take time to phone someone, instead of sending a cursory text. We might make an arrange-

ment to meet. We can pray for healing and wholeness. And if we are one of the people for whom Christmas is difficult, we can pray for the grace to go on and to bring something good out of what has hurt us and left us raw and wounded. We can pray for the courage to hope when hope seems impossible.

Advent is a season where we look forward to light, even though the days grow darker. The commercial Christmas lights go on too early, not to mention the fact that they are environmentally unfriendly. However, Advent candles are a reminder of the comfort of light in darkness.

As the saying goes, if you are sick of Christmas by December 25 - the first day of Christmas - you are not doing Advent right. Having a reflective, preparatory Advent needs a change of mind and heart and a humble submission to God's grace. I pray that all of us will live Advent so that, in Patrick Kavanagh's words, 'Christ comes with a January flower'.

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Hold politicians accountable on domestic violence this election

INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE
**ELIMINATION
 OF VIOLENCE
 AGAINST WOMEN**
 NOVEMBER 25



Sr Fiona Pryle

Coming up to the elections, Ireland has a chance to do something radical! Will violence against women be on all the manifestos of the political parties and will they give a commitment to provide proper refuge spaces in each county? We, the voting public can hold our politicians accountable when they appear on our doorsteps. It is an opportunity to ask them about their policies and if they get into Government, what are their plans regarding ending domestic violence.

Women have heard so many platitudes about zero tolerance and too many times being told 'never again' - what we now need as a country going forward is action.

Future

This year, Simon Harris, speaking in the Dáil in an open debate on gender-based violence, said "It's incumbent on men to take leadership positions and not allow the worst of us to speak for the rest of us on gender-based violence every time we see or hear misogynistic behaviour we need to call it out. Do not stay silent as silence can be perceived as agreement."

Let us hope that the 2024 elections which coincide with 16 days of Action and its theme of unite, calling on Governments to show how

much they care about ending violence to women and girls, will result in the formation of a government which makes this call a priority.

The dream will be to see if the new government will be courageous enough to put measures in place to address what the World Health Organisation (WHO) states that violence against women is at a pandemic state.

“The Campaign calls on citizens and governments to show how much they care about ending violence towards women and girls”

The annual 16-days campaign to challenge violence against women and girls is an international campaign and runs every year from the November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women

December 10, Human Rights Day.

Since initiated in 1991 by the first Women's Global Institute more than 6,000 organisations from approximately 187 countries have participated in the campaign. The colour orange is chosen by the United Nations to symbolise a brighter future, free of violence.

This year's theme is 'Unite! Invest to prevent violence against women and girls'. The Campaign calls on citizens and governments to show how much they care about ending violence towards women and girls.

Numbers

Sadly from the statistics and reports, violence in general is on the increase across the world. Every day 137 women in the world are killed by a partner or by a member of their own family (UN Global Study on Homicide, Gender Related Killing of Women and Girls 2018).

In Ireland, we are witnessing an alarming increase of

violent incidents, leniency in the courts, little accountability or rehabilitation of offenders. In Women's Aid Annual Report for 2023, the agency experienced the highest number (18% increase) of disclosures in their 50-year history. When records first started in 1996 to the present day, 265 women in Ireland have died violently, 9 of them occurred in 2023.

“It is reported that 1 in 4 women suffer some form of abuse in their relationships”

Each woman killed violently is an outrage, resulting in utter heartache and trauma for those left behind. Alongside this statistic, 20 children have died from incidents where women have died violently. In almost all murder/suicide cases, the killer was a current or former partner of the woman.

These statistics only speak

“Women have heard so many platitudes about zero tolerance and too many times being told 'never again' - what we now need as a country going forward is action”

of the extreme physical aspect of domestic violence. It is reported that 1 in 4 women suffer some form of abuse in their relationships. From my experience of working in the sector, women have described the abuse of coercive control as having to walk on eggshells and living a nightmare with their children. With the current housing crisis and high rents, women feel trapped and have no option but to continue living in unhappy and unsafe homes.

Change

Legislation has changed over the years and in January 2019, coercive control was introduced as a criminal offence. This legislation has given more possibilities for women to go through the courts system, to address psychological, emotional, sexual and financial abuse.

However, even with some legal changes, and small increase of services, it has done nothing to change the statistics and we continue to see more and more women and children abused.

While writing this article I heard a news bulletin reporting on an Irish man arrested in Hungary for the murder of an American woman, it stated the man said it was an accident and he didn't mean to do it. Unfortunately, time and time again, a harrowing case emerges in the public consciousness that reshines the light on the underbelly of male violence that lies deep in our society.

What therefore needs to be done to bring about real changes? It is imperative, that addressing gender-based violence, we need money to invest in education at all levels especially schools to explore relationships and what is misogyny, sexism, power, control and consent. I believe this education would go a long way to developing healthy relationships and make society safer for future years.

i Sr Fiona Pryle is a Good Shepherd Sister and social worker currently journeying with women seeking justice in the courts.

“Women have described the abuse of coercive control as having to walk on eggshells and living a nightmare with their children. With the current housing crisis and high rents, women feel trapped and have no option but to continue living in unhappy and unsafe homes”

Applying pro-life votes effectively in General Election



Eilís Mulroy

We're currently in full swing of the general election campaign, with the polling date set for Friday, November 29. In this election, the stakes are very high for the pro-life movement. In May 2023, we saw the passage at the second stage of a very extreme abortion bill, introduced by People Before Profit. This bill would expand the on-demand abortion limit from 12 weeks to 24 weeks, putting Ireland among the most extreme abortion regimes in the world. This extreme bill, which completely undermines all the promises of

the 2018 referendum, must be robustly challenged. The Government needs to understand that the electorate is not supportive of a radical abortion agenda. To ensure these concerns are represented, we need to elect men and women of courage and conviction to speak up on right to life issues in the next Dáil and Seanad.

Understanding

To help ensure that pro-life voters are fully aware of the views and record of the candidates standing in their constituency, the Pro Life Campaign has produced a comprehensive voter guide. Available at www.prolifecampaign.ie

“The reality is that politics is all about making compromises. Not everyone will have a “perfect candidate” in their area, and even where there is a strongly pro-life candidate the reality is that they may not be in contention with taking a seat”

prolifecampaign.ie voters can review the stances and records of all candidates standing in your area. It will direct pro-life voters towards the best candidates and help ensure that in the next Dáil pro-life voices are represented.

The reality is that politics is all about making compromises. Not everyone will have a “perfect candidate” in their area, and even where there is a strongly pro-life candidate the reality is that they may not be in contention with taking a seat. It's really important that pro-life voters use their number 2, 3 and following preferences to ensure their vote doesn't wither away and

instead continues on to the next best candidate. Sometimes our vote, including low transfers, will be instrumental in keeping strong pro-abortion voices out – so it is critically important pro-life voters transfer down the ballot.

“They need to know that if there are movements to liberalise the abortion law that they'll have a fight on their hands”

The proportional representational (PR) system that exists in Ireland allows us to vote for the candidates we most want to see elected (pro-life candidates) and tactically vote against candidates we least want to see elected (pro-abortion candidates). That's the sole reason why the Pro Life Campaign voters' guide provides additional information about candidates other than those

“The general election will likely be our last occasion to vote on critical national issues like abortion for the next five years. We need to make sure every vote counts”

who are listed as pro-life.

In the next Dáil, we're likely to see a vote on euthanasia. We're likely to see the Government respond to the three-year review, which made extreme recommendations to further liberalise the abortion law. Minister Stephen Donnelly even abstained on the People Before Profit bill, which he acknowledged went even further than the three-year review report. In the next Dáil, we need to ensure that the Government feels severe pressure. They need to know that if there are movements to liberalise the abortion law that they'll have a fight on their hands. This requires the pro-life movement being visible outside and inside the Dáil.

On election day, after voting for pro-life candi-

dates, use your preferences wisely to help ensure that the most aggressive pro-abortion campaigners do not get elected. By voting No 1. for the candidate you most want to see elected and then voting down the ballot paper to the candidate you least want to succeed, you ensure the best possible outcome in the election for the pro-life issue.

The abortion rate is spiralling, with an annual increase of approximately two thousand abortions per year. The trends are stark and we need representatives prepared to call this out. The general election will likely be our last occasion to vote on critical national issues like abortion for the next five years. We need to make sure every vote counts.

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I AM AN ELECTION ISSUE

VOTE PRO-LIFE

We need men and women of courage and conviction in the next Dáil to speak up on right to life issues. To find out where General Election candidates in your constituency stand, visit www.prolifecampaign.ie

Your
Vote
Matters

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The first vows profession of a Redemptoristine nun



Renata Steffens

“When she finally arrived in Ireland, she was drawn by the silence, “and I felt that this is my call. This is my life and my location”

With a monastery in the heart of Dublin, the Redemptoristine nuns are a group of women who try to bring God's love to each other in community. “We live and pray in community. Community is a very important feature of our lives,” their website reads.

They live an enclosed life, which means they do not leave the grounds of the monastery, but it is not lonely. The community life is centred on prayer, but they also spend time with each other and work together in the production of altar bread and looking after the monastery.

Last Saturday, November 16, the community celebrated the profession of the first vows of Sr Nilima. She is from Mumbai, India and has been in Dublin for three years preparing for this moment. She told *The Irish Catholic* previous to her first profession she was “excited” and “a little bit nervous”.

“I think that is part of life. I'm coming closer to that big commitment to God... It is a big commitment to me and I'm very happy to say yes to God. In whatever I do, the way I live my life in this religious, contemplative way. I'm very excited and very thankful to God for my location and life.”

Journey

Sr Nilima first came to Ireland in December 2021. She did her postulancy for one year and novitiate for two. But that was not the first time she entered the religious life trying to find the right life path for herself.

When Sr Nilima was decid-

ing what she should do with her life, she was considering studying for a career “like nursing or teaching”, or joining the religious life. “I am afraid of blood and bodies”, the sister explained, so she decided on the second option.

When some religious sisters came to visit her parish, she “was drawn by them, [by] the way they were living their life and preaching...that was the first time I wanted to be a religious, but I was not sure whether it was my call,” or whether she should get a regular job and get married.

One day, telling her aunt about all the doubts she had about her future, the aunt asked if she really wanted to join the religious life, it “suddenly came from my mouth that yes, I would like to join.”

“Sr Nilima then decided that path was the right one for her, however, the challenges to start her religious life were still not over”

The aunt talked to her own sister, who is a religious, and some sisters came from the convent to meet Sr Nilima and her family. “When they explained about their life and everything, I was drawn,” Sr Nilima said.

She joined that convent in India, but they had an active life, much different from what the sister was looking for, as since childhood she was a quiet person. After three years and a half, she told her superiors “That was not my call,

because that was active” and she was looking for silence. “I'm not happy,” she said, “I would like to go back. So she told [me] ‘yeah, no problem if you're not happy. Your happiness is [what] matters. Wherever you go, you must [be] happy.”

Sr Nilima went back home but kept wondering about her future. After around five months, a neighbour mentioned a girl she knew from a different parish in her area, who had moved to Ireland and joined the Redemptoristine Nuns.

“They are contemplative. If you would like to join...” the neighbour said. After considering it, Sr Nilima decided to try, and the neighbour went to the girl's house to ask for her contact number.

“Then I contacted her. She told [me] about the sisters and their charism and their life, how they live. It was something that made me think deeply.”

After talking over the phone, some sisters went to Mumbai to visit and explain about life as a Redemptoristine nun. Sr Nilima then decided that path was the right one for her, however, the challenges to start her religious life were still not over.

She applied for her passport, which was fine. On the other hand, she could not get a visa, as it was mid-pandemic. Sr Nilima waited two years from the moment she decided to join the Redemptoristines until she actually joined them in Ireland.

Destination

“I'm very thankful and grateful to God,” Sr Nilima said, as during those two years of wait she “came to know more about this life. They were talking to me, I was joining sometimes through the webcam in their prayer life.”

When she finally arrived in Ireland, she was drawn by the silence, “and I felt that this is my call. This is my life and my location.”

Sr Nilima is not sure about the future, but after so much wondering and waiting to figure out her path in life, she is certainly happy to finally be able to profess her first vows.



Sr Nilima and her parents, William and Josephine Malya, with Sr Gabrielle, Prioress.



Sr Nilima and Sr Gabrielle, Prioress.



Sr Nilima and Sr Gabrielle with Fr Ryan Molovlasky C.Ss.R., a redemptionist priest.

“One day, telling her aunt about all the doubts she had about her future, the aunt asked if she really wanted to join the religious life, it “suddenly came from my mouth that yes, I would like to join”

A faith worth living for



Martina Purdy

Two bishops stood on Co. Down hillside, facing each other, both draped in blood red, the colour of the martyr.

It was a poignant scene at the weekend, as the Bishop of Down and Connor pondered the stone monument of St Patrick, which was illuminated in red, as the sun went down at Saul, the place where Ireland's patron saint first proclaimed: 'Is tighearna Íosa Críost!'

Those words which we take for granted - "Jesus Christ is Lord!" - can still get you persecuted, jailed, or even killed in many countries around the world.

As Bishop Alan McGuckian pondered St Patrick's monument, which rises 47 feet on Slieve Patrick, he was keenly aware that he was about to address Mass goers in the church below. He also knew that, among them, were the descendants of those who were first to hear and believe those revolutionary words.

"We lit up Patrick's statue in red tonight," Bishop McGuckian told the congregation at the vigil Mass, "and it will remain lit up for the week in solidarity with the Christians persecuted to this day. Some people think there could be 250 Christians suffering violence even unto death every single day. There are 50 countries in the world where Christians are regularly persecuted and dying often."

"So this week you will look up at the mountain and you will see it at night, all in red. Remember to pray for our brothers and sisters all over the world who at this very moment, this very day, are being persecuted for boasting that 'Jesus Christ is Lord!'"

Although the monument, which was built in the 1930s to mark the 1500th anniversary of St Patrick's arrival in 432AD, is lit green annually, this is the first time the status has been lit red for the 'Week of Witness'. This week is organised by the pontifical charity, Aid to a Church in Need (ACN) which supports 6,000 vulnerable communities in 140 countries.

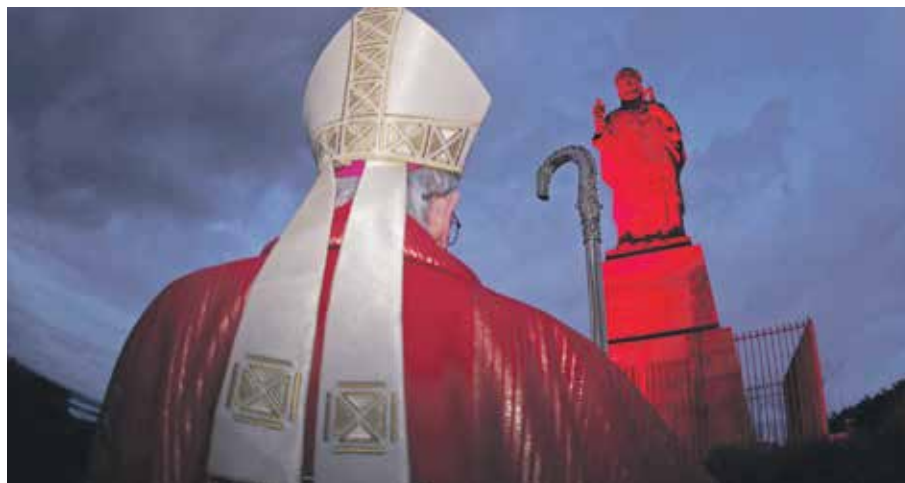
The lighting, like the statue itself, was a labour of love, through the efforts of parishioners, the diocese, the local Knights of St Columbanus (CK12) and the generosity of a Belfast company NIAVAC (Audio Visual Ltd).

Reflection

In a passionate plea, the Bishop of Down and Connor urged those who passed the monument this week to reflect on what it means to follow Christ.

"Every time you look up there, let it not be 'oh woe is us, we are being persecuted'. Look up, stand in solidarity and feel yourself called to be a witness to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord!"

Bishop Alan reminded Mass-goers that martyr simply means 'witness'.



Bishop of Down and Connor Alan McGuckian at Slieve Patrick. Photo: Bill Smyth.

And he told a powerful story of a Polish nun who was visited by the SS in her convent when the Nazis invaded.

The SS man said to the nun: "In ten years, you will be honouring Hitler on those altars where you now honour Jesus Christ."

The nun retorted: "When Hitler dies on a cross for his people and three days later rises from the dead, I will wear a Nazi uniform rather than my habit."

The Bishop recalled the great tradition of Christians saying 'Jesus Christ is Lord.'

"Men, women and children in their droves died because they would not stop saying 'Jesus Christ is Lord' and that is part of our story. The important thing is that not just that we resist but that this boast of ours 'Jesus Christ is Lord' touches our hearts because we know we have a God who is close to us and who loves us."

This tradition in Ireland dates to the fifth century when St Patrick was himself put in chains for the sake of the Gospel - and condemned the 'evil of evil people' who had ambushed a group of newly baptised Christians.

Some who live among us today have first hand stories of violent persecution.

Indeed Bishop McGuckian, as Bishop of Raphoe, spoke of a Nigerian priest who regularly received news from home about clergy, and catechumens being killed.

This week on Red Wednesday, November 20, the Colosseum, where early Christians were fed to the lions, was among landmarks lit red.

“It is good to remember that we worship a God of the living, a God in whom we find safety”

In the modern age, we have television images of slaughtered Christians.

Who could forget, asked Bishop McGuckian, the martyrdom of Coptic Christians, murdered in Libya for their faith in 2017?

"Twenty-one construction workers," said Bishop McGuckian, "Regular guys".

Ragheed Ganni, a Chaldean Catholic priest, served at St Patrick's Sanctuary of Lough Derg and was well-known and respected among clergy in Down and Connor.

Bishop Alan McGuckian

reminded us all of his martyrdom, after he returned home to Iraq. He was killed, along with three deacons, on Trinity Sunday, 2007, because he defied a death threat and witnessed that 'Jesus Christ is Lord' by celebrating Mass.

The Congregation for the Causes of Saints has opened Fr Ragheed's cause for beatification, and declared him a Servant of God.

As Bishop McGuckian spoke of Fr Ragheed, that great tradition of Christians saying 'Jesus Christ is Lord' came alive.

In the month of remembrance, it is good to remember that we worship a God of the living, a God in whom we find safety.

At the foot of Slieve Patrick, where St Patrick began and ended his earthly mission in Ireland, the parishioners were left to ponder what it really means to declare 'Jesus Christ is Lord'.

"Please God," declared Bishop Alan, "None of us will have to die for this but it would be wonderful if we were able to live for it. Because if our faith is worth dying for, it is all the more worth living for."

So, as a dear nun and friend used to say, "Let us live well, so we can die well."



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A dire warning from Canada for us all



David Quinn

In case you hadn't noticed, there are serious moves being made in the House of Commons to allow assisted suicide. Where Britain goes, we usually follow in due course. The bill to permit assisted suicide is not being sponsored by the new Labour Government, but by a member of the Labour party and there will be a free vote on the matter. The private member's bill was published last week and claims it contains all sort of 'safeguards'. I'll say some more about those further on.

Labour now has an enormous majority in the House of Commons. It won two-thirds of the seats earlier this year based on one-third of the popular vote. Labour MPs are more likely to favour assisted suicide (its proponents insist on calling it 'assisted dying') than Conservative MPs, and this means it will take a big effort to defeat it, although a journalist friend of mine who follows British politics much more closely than I do, says there is a decent chance this might happen.

As mentioned, MPs are being allowed a free vote on the issue. Prime Minister, Keir Starmer, is quietly in favour, but interestingly his Health Secretary, Wes Streeting, has expressed strong reservations. Those reservations are based partly on what is taking place in Canada where the so-called 'safeguards' that accompanied the introduction of assisted suicide and euthanasia in that country in 2016 have proven to be almost meaningless. The grounds for allowing assisted suicide keep expanding, and even when there is a clear abuse of the law, nothing seems to happen. No-one is ever punished.

“What is truly outrageous is that the bill would allow a doctor to suggest assisted suicide to a patient. It is hard to imagine anything that strikes more at the heart of the doctor/patient relationship than this”



A doctor visits a patient in the palliative care unit of a hospital. Photo: CNS/Philippe Wojazer, Reuters

It has now been reported that in the province of Ontario alone, “euthanasia regulators” have identified over 400 “issues with compliance” with the country's Medical Aid In Dying (MAID) law.

“How can doctors be trusted to follow the law properly when we don't even know what they are doing?”

If the so-called 'safeguards' introduced with laws such as this are to mean anything, then there must be proper recording by doctors of what they are doing, but a lot of the time this is not happening. Therefore, how can doctors be trusted to follow the law properly when we don't even know what they are doing? This assumes that they are always telling the truth when they do appear to be following the law.

We know how incredibly

widely England's abortion law has been abused. In England and Wales there are now more than 200,000 abortions annually. Any woman who has an abortion is meant to do so because of a danger to her mental or physical health or because the baby has a disability.

Dubious

The vast majority of abortions take place for very dubious 'health' reasons, and although two doctors must approve a termination on this ground, there is not the slightest difficulty in finding such doctors. Sometimes the forms are even pre-signed. Everyone knows that so-called 'health' related abortions are really being carried out on the healthy babies of perfectly healthy women and therefore England's abortion law is being widely abused. But few care. There is a nod and a wink approach to the matter.

Therefore, if the apparent 'safeguards' introduced to ensure abortion are so badly flouted, why should there be

the slightest guarantee that they are properly enforced if and when assisted suicide is introduced?

“Canada only introduced assisted suicide and euthanasia eight years ago and in 2022 alone, over 13,000 people died in this way”

At first, there might be a determination to ensure the safeguards are being followed, just to reassure the public, but it is easy to imagine a more relaxed and careless approach to them as time goes on. This is without considering the fact that when laws of this kind are introduced and are restricted to the terminally ill at first, over time the grounds are widened to include those suffering from serious physical illness and then to the mentally ill.

Some of the witnesses who appeared before the Oireachtas committee on assisted suicide when it was meeting were quite clear that they eventually want the grounds for assisted suicide widened beyond the terminally ill.

Canada only introduced assisted suicide and euthanasia eight years ago and in 2022 alone, over 13,000 people died in this way, accounting for 4.1%

of all deaths. The trajectory is only going upwards. Estimates are that around 15,000 Canadians died by lethal injection last year.

There is now plenty of evidence of health workers suggesting assisted suicide to very sick patients.

In 2022, the New Atlantis magazine provided examples of Canadians who suffer from chronic conditions or disabilities, and have trouble accessing adequate supports or housing, either being presented with the option of assisted suicide by health workers, or else asking for it themselves.

The New Atlantis uncovered online discussions between assisted suicide providers in which they admit that chronically ill or disabled Canadians who are not receiving sufficient supports from the State are starting to turn to assisted suicide as a way out.

Reservations

This is why Wes Streeting, Britain's Health Secretary, has serious reservations about the assisted suicide bill currently before parliament. He believes Britain could easily end up in a Canadian-type situation in which patients at the end of their tether, and being failed by the National Health Service there, could turn to assisted suicide in their desperation. It is not hard to imagine, and it is also not hard to imagine it happening here. Unfortunately,

our Health Minister, Stephen Donnelly, seems to be in favour of assisted suicide.

The safeguards in the bill currently before the House of Commons resemble in some ways the so-called 'safeguards' in England's abortion law. For example, two doctors must sign off on a patient's request to die by lethal injection. But why should this not be abused as has been the case with the abortion law, and what is to stop patients 'shopping' around until they find two doctors who will accede to their wish?

What is truly outrageous is that the bill would allow a doctor to suggest assisted suicide to a patient. It is hard to imagine anything that strikes more at the heart of the doctor/patient relationship than this.

Another safeguard is that even after two doctors sign off on the request, a judge must then approve it. This does look like a genuine safeguard. It would at least keep numbers down, one presumes, by slowing down the whole process, even if particular judges are inclined to sign off on the request after two doctors approve of it.

“Sir James Munby, warned that it was not the ‘proper function’ of a judge to rule whether someone would be eligible for such a death. He described the assisted suicide bill as ‘defective’”

But notably one senior English judge, the former head of the UK High Court's family division, Sir James Munby, warned that it was not the “proper function” of a judge to rule whether someone would be eligible for such a death. He described the assisted suicide bill as “defective”.

It is perhaps this sort of sentiment that might lead to the bill being defeated. A few years ago we did not have the terrible example of what is happening in Canada before us, but now we do and we have no right to pretend something similar could not occur in Britain, or here in Ireland. Let's hope the example of Canada will be heeded.

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The Irish Catholic

‘Never too late’ to fight addiction - Matt Talbot’s centenary launch



John Anderson who received the Honours Award and Robert Bailie who received the first Matt Talbot 10 year service medal with John Murphy, Supreme Knight, Philip Brennan, Deputy Provincial Grand Knight and Michael Delaney, Supreme Registrar. Photos: John McElroy.



Adrian King, Hilary King and Sean Farrell at the ceremony.



Renata Milán Morales

“If the Church was making saints on spiritual miracles, Matt Talbot would have been a saint long ago,” told Bro Michael Murphy, a St Columbanus Knight and key figure in Matt Talbot’s commemoration, to *The Irish Catholic*.

Recently, Matt Talbot’s Centenary Year launch was held at Ely House, Co. Dublin. From November 2024 to June 2025, various initiatives across Ireland will honour Matt Talbot’s legacy of faith, recovery, and perseverance.

“Many only know of Talbot as an older man, but “he had already been sober for 40 years by the age of 68, dedicating his life to prayer and spiritual growth,” explained Bro Michael.

“The centenary of Matt Talbot’s death is a significant milestone,” said Bro Michael. “We formed a committee, and I was asked to chair it, brainstorming ways to celebrate this moment in a meaningful way.”

The first step, according to Bro Michael, was meeting with Archbishop Dermot Farrell to discuss the plans. “At that time, there wasn’t a coordinated approach. There were many people doing great work

in Matt’s name,” he explained, pointing the need to work together with these initiatives. At the same event, two awards were given: the Honours Award and the first Matt Talbot 10 year service medal.

“Most people turn to addiction due to trauma, seeking happiness in the wrong places,” he said. “But Matt’s story shows the power of grace. His peace of mind came from drawing closer to God”

One notable initiative has been the coordination of a national network of Masses focused on addiction recovery. “The Matt Talbot Prayer Society, based at St Eugene’s Cathedral in Derry, already hosts a monthly Mass for those affected by addiction,” Bro Michael said. “We expanded this to multiple churches across the country, holding these Masses simultaneously. We also incorporated relics of Matt Talbot, which we were entrusted with for a year, to visit these Masses as a focal point of prayer and healing.”

In addition to the spiritual focus, a special commemorative Mass will be celebrated by Archbishop Farrell on June next year, marking the official centenary. “This is part of a broader weekend of celebra-

tions,” Bro Michael noted.

Another major project involves a drama-documentary by Joyful Films, a US-based Emmy-winning company specialising in Catholic stories. “They’re producing a film on Matt Talbot’s life, showcasing his transformation from addiction to holiness,” Bro Michael said.

Bro Michael believes Talbot’s journey offers hope to those battling addiction today. “Most people turn to addiction due to trauma, seeking happiness in the wrong places,” he said. “But Matt’s story shows the power of grace. His peace of mind came from drawing closer to God.”

Mr Darren Butler, representing the Irish Bishops’ Drugs Initiative at the event and working together with the Knights of St Columbanus, told this paper how their work complements the centenary activities. “Our initiative began in 1997 when Bishop Éamonn Walsh recognised the growing issues with drugs and alcohol, especially among young people,” Mr Butler explained.

Mr Butler noted the importance of preventative measures. We’ve found that parents often don’t fully understand the challenges their children face today,” he said. “The world has changed significantly, even in the last decade, with the proliferation of new drugs and pressures on young people.”

Speaking at the event, Bishop Paul Dempsey, in his homily at the event, reflected on Talbot’s enduring rel-



John Anderson who received the Honours Award and Robert Bailie who received the first Matt Talbot 10 year service medal at the ceremony.

evance.

“Matt’s story offers hope,” he said. “It shows us that while the path to recovery isn’t easy, it’s always possible... It is never too late to change.”

He recounted a crucial moment in Talbot’s life. “At his lowest point, abandoned even by those he thought would help him, Matt made the radical decision to turn his life around. Initially, he made a three-month pledge to abstain from alcohol. Then,

through prayer and frequent visits to churches, he found the strength to keep going.”

The homilist also drew attention to the broader societal challenges surrounding addiction. “Ireland is one of the wealthiest nations in the world, yet addiction is a huge issue,” he observed. “Matt’s life reminds us of the hope and change that are possible through faith and community support.”

Looking ahead, organisers

hope that the centenary activities will renew interest in Matt Talbot’s story and extend its impact. “The second steps in the 12 steps of AA is always came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity,” said Br Michael. “We have to look outside ourselves. And where is the best place to look? As Pope Benedict wrote, to the ‘guiding stars in our lives’, the people who have lived good lives.”



Bishop Paul Dempsey Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin with John Murphy, Supreme Knight at the ceremony.



Knights of St Columbanus during Mass celebrated by Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin Paul Dempsey.



Bishop Paul Dempsey Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin celebrating Mass for the Order of the Knights of St Columbanus in Dublin.

December 19, 2024

The Irish Catholic

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Out&About

A meaningful sharing



DERRY: Fr Michael McCaul, the new chaplain for St Colm's High School, Draperstown, recently visited the school to speak with Year 12 pupils about the meaning of ordination and the role of a priest in the Catholic Church.



DUBLIN: Celebrants Shaykh Dr Umar Al-Qadri, Archbishop Michael Jackson, Auxiliary Bishop Paul Dempsey, Rev. Damian Murray, Humanist Moya Corcoran, Rev Robert Smyth PP at the Irish Kidney Association Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving for organ donors on October 12. Photo: Conor McCabe.



MONAGHAN: (L/R) Sr Rosa CFR, Bishop Larry Duffy, Youth Ministry Director James McLoughlin, Guest Speaker Mickey Harte, Supreme Knight John Murphy, Youth Ministry Chaplain Fr Leo Creelman and Sr Fidelis CFR during the Clogher Diocese JP2 Award ceremony on November 8. Photo: Rory Geary.



DUBLIN: Most Rev. Paul Dempsey Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin and most Rev. Dr Michael Jackson, Archbishop of Dublin and Bishop of Glendalough in the opening procession at the Irish Kidney Association Service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving for organ donors on October 12. Photo: Conor McCabe.



KILDARE: Dr Máire Colhoun, Carraroe, Co. Galway and Permanent Deacon Denis Kelleher, Co. Kerry. They both received Masters in Theology specialising in Bible and Spirituality on November 9 in St Patrick's Pontifical College, Maynooth.

IN SHORT

Waterford and Lismore youth gather in Mt Melleray

An event organised by Ascend Waterford and Lismore Youth Ministry gathered around 50 people from around the diocese in Mount Melleray on Saturday, November 9.

The group composed of clergy and religious, young adults, prayer groups, movements, Faith Reps and individuals invested in Youth and Young Adult Ministry in some way, gathered to pray and discern intentional youth and young adult ministry in the diocese.

The event, which is expected to be run on an annual basis, was an uplifting day for all the present, with time for networking and prayer for the intentions of attendees and the needs of the diocese.

In the afternoon, the group had a session using the Conversation in the Spirit model encouraged by the Synodal Process with the question: How can we walk intentionally with young people on their journey of faith and provide meaningful opportunities for them to encounter Jesus, and particularly, what is the Spirit prompting us to?

The gathering resulted in encouraging and

hope-filled sharing between the participants, and a nice and fruitful time overall.

Organ donors service broadcast on RTÉ

The Irish Kidney Association service of Remembrance and Thanksgiving for organ donors, which occurred in the Church of the Holy Child, Whitehall, Dublin 9 on October 12 and gathered an estimated 1,600 people was broadcasted by RTÉ at 11 am last Sunday, November 17.

This unique annual service is on its 39th edition and is an important occasion for remembering deceased loved ones who have in their deaths the opportunity to give life to others through organ donations, and for organ recipients and families to give thanks and pay tribute to their donors.

Present were leaders of the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, and the Islamic faith in Ireland, along with Humanist involvement, the Service brings together people of all beliefs, united in their support for organ donation as the ultimate act of humanity.

Edited by Renata Steffens
Renata@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



DUBLIN: Recently, the 4th year students of Rel. Ed. Music of DCU School of Theology, Philosophy and Music performed at the annual DCU Educational Trust Memorial Service at the Interfaith Centre on the Glasnevin Campus.



KILDARE: Dr Máire Colhoun with her sister Aine Donnelly, nephew Dónall Donnelly and niece Eimear Donnelly during her graduation on November 9 in St Patrick's Pontificate College, Maynooth.



MONAGHAN: (L/R) Clogher don Óige volunteers Katie Duffy and Aine Dunne with Sr Solanus CFR and Eleanor Farry during the Clogher Diocese JP2 Award ceremony on November 8. Photo: Rory Geary.



MONAGHAN: Attendees at the Diocese of Clogher JP2 Award Ceremony on November 8 when 90 young people were presented with their JP2 Award for volunteering in their parishes and communities over the last year. Photo: Rory Geary.

ARMAGH

St Malachy's Church choir practises every Thursday from 8pm to 9pm in St Malachy's choir loft and sings at Mass on Sundays at 9.30am. New members are welcome.

CAVAN

Virginia Gospel Choir concert at St Bartholomew's Church, Muntercon-naught takes place on November 29 at 8pm. Proceeds in Aid of Ballydurrow Community Centre. Tickets are €10. To buy tickets contact Carina on 086 179 8419 or Noel on 087 278 5903.

CLARE

West Clare FRC is running a Knitting and Crochet Group at 11.30am every Monday in Kilrush Community Centre. All experience levels are welcome.

CORK

The annual Missionaries of the Sacred Heart 'Light Up a Memory Mass' takes place in the Sacred Heart Church, Western Road at 6.30 pm on November 23. The candlelit remembrance event will be streamed live at mscmissions.ie.

DERRY

Matt Talbot Prayer Society is organising the monthly Mass to venerate Matt Talbot Relics at St Eugene's Cathedral on December 2 at 7.30pm.

DONEGAL

Mass for deceased children and young people takes place in the Sacred Heart Church, Muff on November 22 at 7.30pm. Please, bring a photograph or memory of your loved one.

DOWN

Parish of Kilmore and Killyleagh is hosting a morning of tea/coffee in the parish hall, Killyleagh for the men of the parish on November 23 at 10am. The event seeks to eventually establish a Men's Shed in the area.

DUBLIN

Monthly prayer vigil for life happens in St Agatha's Church, North William Street on November 23 at 11 am. Led by the Helpers of God's Precious Infants, Mass will be celebrated by Fr Brendan Kealy, followed

by Eucharistic holy hour, rosary and benediction. Confessions available.

St Canice's Church Christmas novena commences on December 16 at 10am and concludes at the 10am Mass on Christmas Eve.

GALWAY

Service of adoration, reflection and prayer for vocations with one of the six monstrances blessed by St John Paul in 2004 to be used during Exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament will take place in Galway Cathedral on November 24 from 7pm to 9pm. All welcome.

LIMERICK

Advent silent retreat 'A time of waiting' with Eucharist and reconciliation on November 30 from 10.30am to 5pm in the Limerick Diocesan Centre, St Munchin's, Corbally. Bring your lunch. Tea/coffee/snacks provided. Donations are €20. To book contact Phyllis at 087 963 6893.

MAYO

All Night Vigil in Knock Shrine will commence with confessions from 10pm on December 7. The vigil takes place from Midnight in Knock Basilica. The evening will include reflections and personal testimonies from guest speakers, rosary and holy hour. The vigil will conclude with Mass at 4am on December 8.

The next Latin Mass will take place in the Blessed Sacrament Chapel Knock, on Sunday, December 8, at 6pm.

TIPPERARY

'The Upper Room Gathering' prayer meeting for young professionals aged 18+ happens every second Monday of every month in Holy Family Mission, Glencomeragh House, Kilsheelan. With a talk at 6.30 pm followed by adoration and Mass at 8 pm followed by tea/coffee. For more info contact 052 6133 181.

TYRONE

St Oliver Plunkett's Church, Clady invites everyone to come and pray the rosary every Tuesday at 7.30pm.

WICKLOW

Kilaveney Parish's Christmas get-together happens on November 24 after Mass in the Community Hall. All welcome for tea/coffee, carol singing bottle and more.

An Irish priest preserving the peace



Brandon Scott

After a number of years of much-savoured, relative peace, I think it can be confidently asserted that the world is at war. Whether it's the war of attrition marinating Ukraine, the devastating war in Gaza or the emergent escalation of tensions in Lebanon, the foundations of the world are currently being scarred by bloodshed and barbarity.

Watching on from the secure terrain of this country can be painful. There's certainly no shortage of updates on the litany of news sources we scan through on a daily basis and this, in effect, does nothing more than hammer home how utterly powerless we are to stop the inhumanity unfolding in real-time.

Many fantasise about securing peace, few have the resources or the capacity to do so. But those who do and compromise their own health and safety in the quest for peace must never be forgotten and their bravery never taken for granted.

Upholding

One of those who has regularly been tasked with the sobering role of upholding peace in peril is Fr Patrick Mernagh, a priest based in Co. Wexford and someone who has served as chaplain to the Irish Defence Forces in Lebanon on 5 occasions. Although Fr Mernagh admits that he is "saddened" by recent developments, he tells *The Irish Catholic* that he only has positive memories of his time in the embattled country, particularly when recalling the warmth and generosity of the natives.

"On the first mission I saw a beautiful country with great resources – the best resources Lebanon has is its people because they're just a wonderful people", he said. "One of the wonderful things about Lebanon was the fact that all religions got on so well. I went five times to work

in Lebanon and it was probably the best example of faith working in action regardless of what faith you are. That's something I think you always have to admire.

"Something that we tend to forget is that there was never any friction between faiths or religions in Lebanon, it always had to do with politics unfortunately. The culture is a family-culture and the people are always interested in celebrating the great things about life and of course remembering their loved ones in death as well."

The bond with the Lebanese people grew with each tour to such an extent that returning to the country felt like a "coming home" of sorts, according to Fr Mernagh, who remarked that locals take it upon themselves to maintain a memorial marking the deaths of the 48 Irish soldiers who have lost their lives whilst on duty in the country.

“We have always been regarded by the people of Lebanon as a friend which is a nice title to have in any country, particularly when you're a stranger”

"I used to love going to visit the country every time because each time we went out we got to know the people a bit better," he said. "It was like coming home at different times because the people were so unique and so special. In that regard my heart is so saddened to see the way things are now panning out at this moment in time in history.

"We have always been regarded by the people of Lebanon as a friend which is a nice title to have in any country, particularly when you're a stranger. In the earlier years on the missions we were always embedded into the local villages, they lived in the local villages with the people and shared the life of the people. In Tebnine they would've helped to create an orphanage for the children at that time after the war, to give them a new sense of purpose and hope.

"We were always involved in different educational projects as well, helping the people with the lads' own money,

it wasn't just the Government money, it was their own money that they saved up. You were never the stranger, you were always part of the community.

"There is a special memorial to the 48 soldiers who have died in the service of peace over the years and the people of Tebnine look after the Irish memorial of remembrance and that's where we bring our dignitaries and generals to mark with a wreath each time they visit because we cannot forget the sacrifices they've made."

Hospitality aside, Fr Mernagh noted that each time he returned to Lebanon over the last number of years he witnessed a country that was unravelling before his eyes, primarily because of the worsening state of the economy, and this was driving people into dire poverty.

"In all of the five tours, each tour I went out I could see that the economic situation was getting worse and then with the collapse of the banking sector in 2019 I could see things were getting dire for the people of Lebanon because the inflation was on the rise and the only thing that was subsidised was the price of bread but everything else just went bonkers," he said.

"I would often be going into a local shop and the shopkeeper would say that he had to check the price of the Lebanese pound to see what it's worth because inflation just went through the roof It was incredible. The ordinary people could not afford to live and you could see it getting worse and worse."

Contemplate

It can be hard to contemplate peace when bombs are reducing cities to fragments of rubble and civilians are forced to literally pick up the pieces of their lives and start all over again but when asked if peace is a realistic goal when destruction and carnage reign supreme, Fr Mernagh, who served in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, cited the peace process on this island as an example of peace

“When a man or woman of Oglagh na hEireann puts on their uniform, they go out to do a duty and that's what makes a soldier different to any other person in society – they're called to be servants of the state and a peacekeeper, which is far harder than being a peace enforcer”



People walk on the rubble at the site of the Israeli airstrike in Beirut, Lebanon. Photo: OSV News/Ali Alloush, Reuters

being forged and maintained in what initially seemed the most impossible of circumstances.

“Somebody needs to sit everybody down and bring them together to say that it's time to work to end this hatred, division and war”

"I worked in Northern Ireland as well from 1992-1994 and that was probably the most troublesome last two years because I worked in Newry at that time and two bombs actually got me out of the bed once – the force and the impact literally got me out of the bed. What you need to realise is that when you think the impossible is not possible, that's when you need to dream again," he said.

"My wish would be through a third body or agency, that's acceptable to all parties, that somebody needs to sit everybody down and bring them together to say that it's time to work to end this hatred, division and war."

It's been an incredibly unstable time for Irish peacekeepers



Fr Patrick Mernagh. Photo: South East Radio.

in Lebanon, with multiple media sources reporting earlier this month that the Israeli Defence Forces called on Irish peacekeepers to evacuate the villages they're defending, a request that Ireland flatly rejected. Although tensions remain high, Fr Mernagh insists that the word 'scared' isn't part of the soldiers' vocabulary and reminds people that their bravery should never be understated.

"A soldier is never going to admit to you that they're scared – that's one thing," he said. "When a man or woman

of Oglagh na hEireann puts on their uniform, they go out to do a duty and that's what makes a soldier different to any other person in society – they're called to be servants of the state and a peacekeeper, which is far harder than being a peace enforcer because there are some more regulations: You cannot fire until you are fired on, you can't return fire until you're fired at. There's much more discipline attached to being a peacekeeper than a peace enforcer. It calls for great restraint.

"We should be very proud of our troops serving overseas because in the middle of a very difficult situation which it is at the moment, they are restrained and are working on a very strict mandate of observing, monitoring, reporting the situation and being the eye of world on a situation that the world cannot see at this moment in time."



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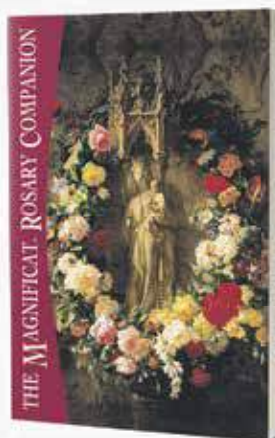
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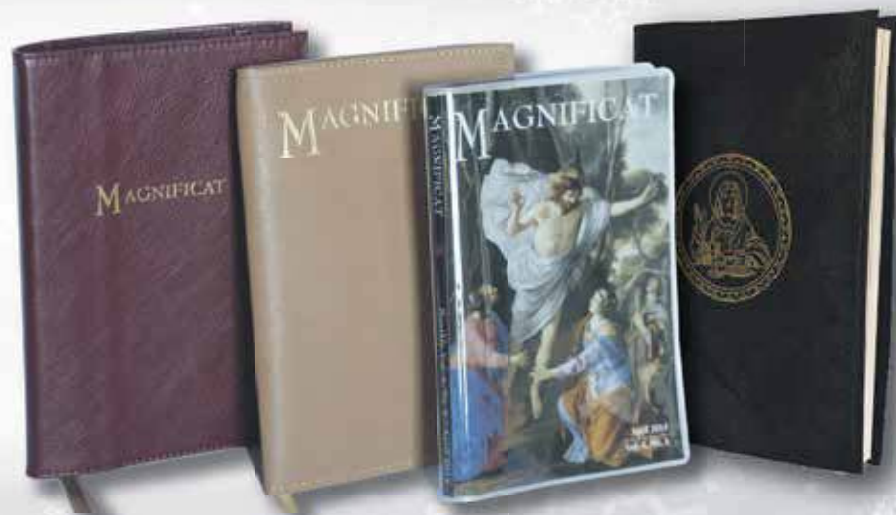
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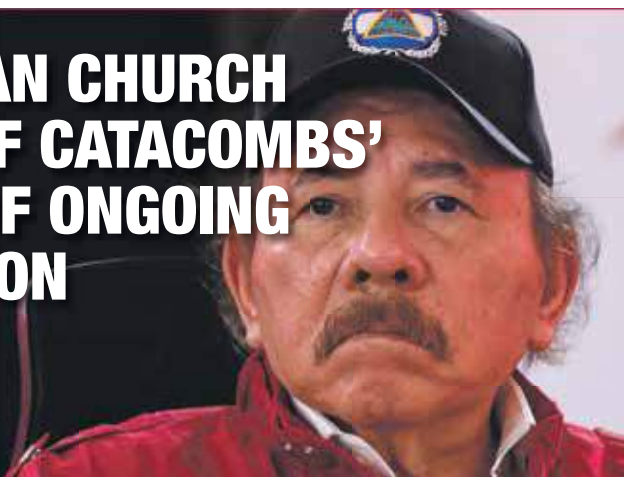
THE SYNODAL TIMES



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

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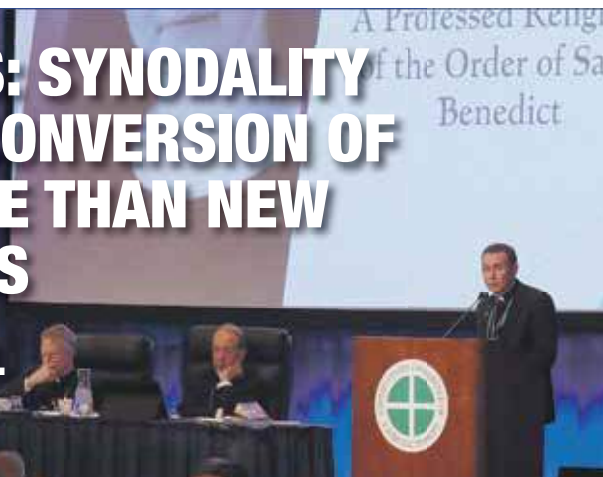
PAGE 24



US BISHOPS: SYNODALITY REQUIRES CONVERSION OF HEART MORE THAN NEW STRUCTURES

JONATHAN LIEDL

PAGE 26



Church will be more inclusive of women, young people, and the marginalised after Synod



**Bishop Michael
Router**

The recent synod entitled *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission*, which came to a conclusion on 27 October, led the Church through three years of reflection and discernment. Its final document outlines a blueprint for action that will help all of us who are baptised to take responsibility for the mission we have received from God. I welcome its proposals, and I know that, despite our resistance to change, the plan it outlines will be fruitful and life-giving for Catholics everywhere.

Report

The report, clearly and unequivocally, acknowledges the scandal of abuse and it emphasises the need for the Church to listen attentively and compassionately to the voices of abuse survivors

to foster healing and reconciliation. It restates the need for accountability and transparency to restore trust and confidence. Without this starting point every effort to renew the Church will be fruitless.

“Our commitment to ongoing faith formation will of course be central to this approach and the synod recognised that this is not just for the lay faithful but for all of us, bishops, priests and people, together”

I particularly welcome the report’s call for greater co-responsibility that includes a commitment to implement decisions collectively in a way that will involve all the baptised. This will build a culture of accountability and ensure the creation of Pastoral Councils in every diocese and parish. These councils will be mandatory and given an important and significant role in building



“Commentary on the synod, unfortunately, has been dismissive and negative, both from inside and outside the Church community, but its fruits, as outlined in its final report, will be abundant and hope filled”

communities of faith that cannot be sidelined or bypassed.

I am filled with hope that women, who are so vital to the mission, will be given a greater say in the decisions that are taken about all issues within the Church and that the formal Ministry of Catechist will give

many women an opportunity to take a leadership role in parishes, in faith formation and in liturgical celebrations.

I also believe that the call contained in the final report to create a more inclusive Church where the young, the marginalised, and those of different faiths,

are valued and listened to as sons and daughters of God, will broaden our scope for outreach and help us to discern a way forward together in faith.

Our commitment to ongoing faith formation will of course be central to this approach and the synod recognised that this is not just

for the lay faithful but for all of us, bishops, priests and people, together. Particular emphasis in the final report is given to the formation of clergy, with a call for guidelines to incorporate synodality and ecumenical awareness in our training. The ongoing formation of bishops and priests will prepare us for roles that promote unity and inclusive decision-making within the Church.

Negativity

Some of the commentary on the synod, unfortunately, has been dismissive and negative, both from inside and outside the Church community, but its fruits, as outlined in its final report, will be abundant and hope filled for those who have eyes to see the wider picture and whose focus is not limited to just a few issues of personal concern. It is our job now to ensure that its recommendations are implemented, so that the Church can increase its positive and transformative presence in a troubled world and continue to convey what it so desperately needs – the hope proclaimed by Jesus Christ.

✚ Bishop Michael Router is Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Armagh.



World Report

IN BRIEF

Italian parish defies blowback to welcome migrants

● One year ago, an Italian pastor made national headlines for welcoming migrants and homeless persons to sleep in his urban parish during cold winter nights, braving the opposition of incensed locals who circulated a petition calling for his removal.

Today, Fr Giovanni Kirschner of the parish of Santa Maria del Sile, located in the city of Treviso, in the northern Italian region of Veneto near the border with Austria, is at it again.

Last week, roughly thirty asylum seekers were expelled from a parking structure in Treviso where they had been sheltering, ostensibly on the grounds that a certificate certifying the fire protection system in the structure was out of date.

Seventeen migrants were relocated to a local barracks of the carabinieri, the Italian military police, but the facility couldn't hold all thirty, so the remaining thirteen found shelter in a large tent erected on parish grounds.

Installation of new bishop in England deferred for a second time

● For the second time in less than a year, the installation of a bishop has been deferred in the Diocese of Plymouth, England.

Bishop-elect Philip Moger from the Archdiocese of Southwark, England, was due to be installed November 9 but suddenly announced a "delay" to his installation just days before it was due to take place.

"In the very last few days, concerns have been raised of a personal nature to which I must attend immediately. This will take a little time," he wrote.

"I have therefore agreed with all directly concerned to delay my installation as the new bishop of Plymouth until these processes have been completed."

Bolivian bishops call for dialogue amid political crisis

● After more than 20 days of protests led by former leader Evo Morales against the administration of President Luis Arce, which included roads blocked and caused billions in economic losses, the Bolivian bishops issued a message in which it called the people to an open dialogue that helps to extinguish violence and build peace.

"If we truly have a sincere

dialogue with God that can take us to national reconciliation, whose objective is respect to human dignity and common good; if we convert the current crisis in opportunities for real structural changes in the country; if we extend our hands towards reconciliation and peace, we shall not hold the guns that cause pain and suffering to the people," the letter read.

Two more Italian priests sanctioned for claiming Francis is 'anti-pope'

● Two clerics in Italy, one formerly a diocesan priest and the other a member of a religious order, have been sanctioned recently for the crime of schism, as both have publicly argued that Pope Francis was never validly elected and thus constitutes an "anti-pope."

The Archdiocese of Sassari on the Italian island of Sardinia announced on November 13 that Fernando Maria Cornet, a native Argentinian who was ordained to the priesthood in 1992 and who served in Sassari since 2011, has been dismissed from the clerical state by order of Pope Francis.

Meanwhile, reports also suggest that Fr Giorgio Maria Faré has been dismissed from the Discalced Carmelites after a deadline imposed by the order's leadership for renouncing his positions passed, and he too may soon be facing a laicization procedure.

Both men have prominently propounded the theory of the Pope's illegitimacy.

Bishops in Gabon call referendum 'a step toward democratic restoration'

● Catholic Bishops in Gabon have called the November 16 constitutional referendum "a step toward democratic restoration".

Voters went to the polls to vote for a new Constitution that would end the military transitional government and return the country to democratic rule.

The referendum, the bishops said, "represents a step toward democratic restoration following the August 30, 2023, liberation coup".

"Dissatisfaction and hesitation are natural in such a project. If everyone were to agree on every article, we would already be in heaven. No constitution is perfect. Not only is it always a product of compromise, but it is also subject to improvement," the bishops said.

Nicaraguan Church 'Church of catacombs' because of ongoing persecution

The dictatorship of President Daniel Ortega and his wife, Vice President Rosario Murillo, is preventing priests from entering hospitals in Nicaragua to administer the sacrament of anointing the sick to those who need it, according to lawyer Martha Patricia Molina, author of the report "Nicaragua: A Persecuted Church?" while reports emerged over last weekend that President Ortega also took the step of expelling Bishop Carlos Enrique Herrera Gutiérrez of Jinotega, president of the country's bishops' conference.

Approximately 10 priests from different dioceses have confirmed the situation in hospitals to Ms Molina, who nevertheless noted — in an interview with the Spanish edition of *EWTV News* — that a few other priests are allowed to enter hospitals, "but these are priests with some sort of ties to the dictatorship; they sometimes have the possibility of entering hospitals, but it's not something widespread", she explained.

The lawyer commented that before this year the Sandinista dictatorship allowed priests to enter health care facilities. Security measures have been tightened without any justification and the persecution becomes more severe when priests try to enter with clerical garb, which is why many choose to try entering wearing secular clothing.

Ms Molina said the problem is even more serious in the country's interior, "where priests are more recognised because the towns are very



Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega attends the Alba summit in Caracas, Venezuela. Photo: OSV News/Leonardo Fernandez Vilorio, Reuters

small, so the authorities, the doctors who are in the hospitals or the people who are manning the gates at the hospital entrance, already know them and are quicker to bar them from entering".

"In other places, for example in the capital, the people who are manning the entrances to the hospitals don't recognise all the clergy of the Archdiocese of Managua, so they have a better chance of getting in, but not dressed as priests; instead they are going in as laymen to provide the anointing of the sick for people who are about

to die," she explained.

Meanwhile, according to the Nicaraguan newspaper *Mosaico CSI*, Bishop Carlos Herrera was exiled to Guatemala last week and is staying at a residence of the Order of Friars Minor to which he belongs for recently criticising a pro-Ortega mayor who interfered with a Mass by blasting loud music in front of the local cathedral.

The Latin American Bishops' Council expressed its closeness following the expulsion of Bishop Herrera in a letter published on its website and addressed to Cardinal

Leopoldo Brenes, Archbishop of Managua and vice president of the Nicaraguan Bishops' Conference.

The Latin American bishops expressed their solidarity with Bishop Herrera and said they pray "that this situation will be resolved soon and that he can return to his homeland".

Félix Maradiaga, former presidential candidate said the Church in Nicaragua is subjected to a persecution that has practically turned it into a "Church of catacombs".

Trump picks several Catholics for cabinet

President-elect Donald Trump has chosen several Catholics to serve in his cabinet and other parts of his administration, including environmental lawyer Robert F Kennedy Jr, three-term Senator Marco Rubio, and Representative Elise Stefanik.

The 45th and soon-to-be

47th president made more than a dozen announcements within 10 days of his electoral victory over Vice President Kamala Harris. Many of his Cabinet nominees and other administration official picks have yet to be announced.

Among the Catholics

Trump has chosen for his Cabinet are Kennedy, who was nominated to be the secretary of Health and Human Services; Rubio as secretary of state; Stefanik as ambassador to the United Nations; and John Ratcliffe, nominated as director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Trump also announced he will appoint Tom Homan as the "Border Czar", a position that does not require Senate confirmation. Homan is a Catholic and was previously the director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement during the president-elect's first administration.

New president of Scottish bishops takes Church's message to 'the streets'

The new president of the bishops of Scotland is taking the Church's message to "the streets" by joining in the evangelistic efforts of a Scottish railway mission.

Bishop John Keenan,

who was announced as the new leader of the Church in Scotland on November 4, recently participated in the mission of Rail Pastors in Inverclyde, Scotland. He told CNA: "It is the Church on

the streets where the Spirit wants us to be and where we feel his unique presence in almost every encounter".

Bishop Keenan defined the Rail Pastors' mission as "creating a little bit of

community and warmth" at train stations where he shared "the joy of the Gospel", using the phrase popularised by Pope Francis in his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.



Edited by Brandon Scott
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Blessing the fruit of the womb



A woman places Pope Francis' hands on her belly seeking a blessing for her unborn child after the Pope's weekly general audience in St Peter's Square at the Vatican November 13, 2024. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media.

UK bishops continue to speak out after release of assisted suicide bill text

The bishops of England and Wales continue to urge Catholics to "raise their voices" in opposition to an assisted suicide bill, the text of which was published earlier last week.

Late on November 11, English Labour Member of Parliament Kim Leadbeater published her Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill before Parliament members vote on it November 29. This means that members have less than three weeks to prepare to vote on a controversial issue.

Archbishop of Southwark John Wilson said: "As followers of the Lord Jesus, we must be bold in our efforts to uphold, respect, and protect

every human life from conception until natural death, because if we don't stand up and value the dignity of human life, who will?"

"The Catholic Church is clear: Every life is valuable — regardless of a person's physical or mental state," he continued.

The archbishop's words come as the contents of Leadbeater's controversial bill showed that terminally ill adults who are expected to die within six months would legally be able to seek help to kill themselves provided they receive the approval of two doctors and a judge.

However, Archbishop Wil-

son is concerned that the new bill will communicate the message that the elderly and vulnerable are "nothing but a burden to society".

"People are being presented as a problem," he said. "As a burden. A statistic. Something we can deal with through ending their life. Where is the dignity in that? Where is the love in that?"

Reacting to those who say "life has no value," he said: "We need to raise our voices to say that is not true. We are stewards, not owners, of the life we have received. Life is not ours to dispose of."

Leadbeater insisted that her bill contains "robust"

safeguards, claiming that coercion would lead to 14 years in jail, but Archbishop-Wilson believes the pressure on sick and vulnerable people to opt for assisted suicide would be "immeasurable."

"The pressure this would put people under who are suffering illnesses or disabilities is immeasurable. It demeans humanity and deprives people of their right to life. This right is given by God and is for God alone to take."

The archbishop challenged UK Catholics to contact their members of Parliament and pray for the defeat of the bill in obedience to their calling as disciples of Christ.

US bishop calls for return to Friday abstinence from meat

A leading US Catholic bishop last week called on his fellow bishops to help revive the tradition of abstinence from meat on Fridays as a way to commemorate the upcoming 10th anniversary of Pope Francis' 2015 environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Archbishop Borys Gudziak,

chairman of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, the committee charged with advancing Catholic social teaching, made his remarks at the conference's annual fall meeting in Baltimore on November 13.

In 1966, the USCCB (then called the National Conference of Catholic Bishops) removed the obligation of the faithful to abstain from meat on Fridays except during Lent.

"We could renew the tradition of Friday abstinence from meat," said Archbishop Gudziak, the metropolitan

archbishop of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Philadelphia. "A return to Friday abstinence would be good for the soul and for the planet, maybe for something else, uniting our devotion to the Lord and reverence for the Lord's creation."

Vatican roundup

Cardinals test out virtual reality headsets

● Catholic cardinals this week donned virtual reality headsets at the premiere of an innovative art exhibit that opened this week for the 2025 Jubilee Year showcasing contemporary art inspired by artificial intelligence.

The exhibit, titled 'Interconnected Hearts: Taiwan Contemporary Art Exhibition 2024', is hosted at the Republic of China's Embassy to the Holy See, just steps away from St Peter's Square. It features art created by three Taiwanese artists using 3D scanning, virtual reality (VR), machine learning, and AI technologies.

Among the first to try out the VR headsets at the exhibit's premiere on November 11 was 84-year-old Cardinal Silvano Maria Tomasi, the Pope's special delegate to the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, the prefect of the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education, described the art exhibition as "intriguing and extremely innovative".

Pope has Sunday lunch with 1,300 guests

● Pope Francis had lunch last Sunday at the Vatican with 1,300 people "who hold a privileged place in God's heart" as part of celebrations to mark the eighth World Day of the Poor.

This year's lunch, organised by the Dicastery for the Service of Charity in collaboration with the Italian Red Cross, was held inside the Paul VI Hall as a sign of the Holy Father's desire to be close with "those who are most in need: the poor, the marginalised, the suffering, and the forgotten".

In anticipation of the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis' message for the eighth World Day of the Poor stressed the importance for the Catholic faithful to be aware of the presence and needs of the "poor whom we encounter daily".

Pope urges 'human-centred' approach to 'climate finance'

● Referencing the concept of "climate finance", Pope Francis said in a message to the UN climate summit last week that ecological debt and foreign debt both impact a nation's future.

The Pope warned that both foreign debt and ecological debt are "mortgaging the future" of nations.

"It is essential to seek a new international financial architecture that is human-centred, bold, creative, and based on the principles of equity, justice, and solidarity," the Pope said.

Vatican, Catholic leaders from Europe discuss sexual abuse in the Church

● Catholic leaders from across Europe were in Rome last week to discuss how the Church can best protect children from sexual abuse and how to help those who have already been hurt by it.

The Vatican's Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM) hosted a conference on safeguarding in the Catholic Church in Europe from November 13–15.

The gathering, that took place in the centre of Rome at the headquarters of the PCPM, included participants — bishops, priests, religious, and laymen and laywomen — from 25 countries in Europe.

Part of Vatican library and archive moved to Rome seminary

● Pope Francis has called for the expansion of the Vatican library and archives to a building outside Vatican City to make more "available this precious patrimony."

In a letter dated October 29, the Pope declared that part of the archives and library be moved to a building on extraterritorial Vatican property at the Archbasilica of St John Lateran.

The building where the documents and books will be housed in the future is also used for Rome's major seminary.



Letter from the US

US bishops: Synodality requires conversion of heart more than new structures



Jonathan Liedl

Promoting synodality in the United States depends more on a conversion of heart than on the creation of new structures, the US bishops emphasised at their fall assembly in Baltimore.

"It's about cultural change, not necessarily structural change or not necessarily canonical changes, but first and foremost a change in how we can relate one to another and the Body of Christ," said Archbishop William Lori of Baltimore at a November 13 press conference at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) meeting.

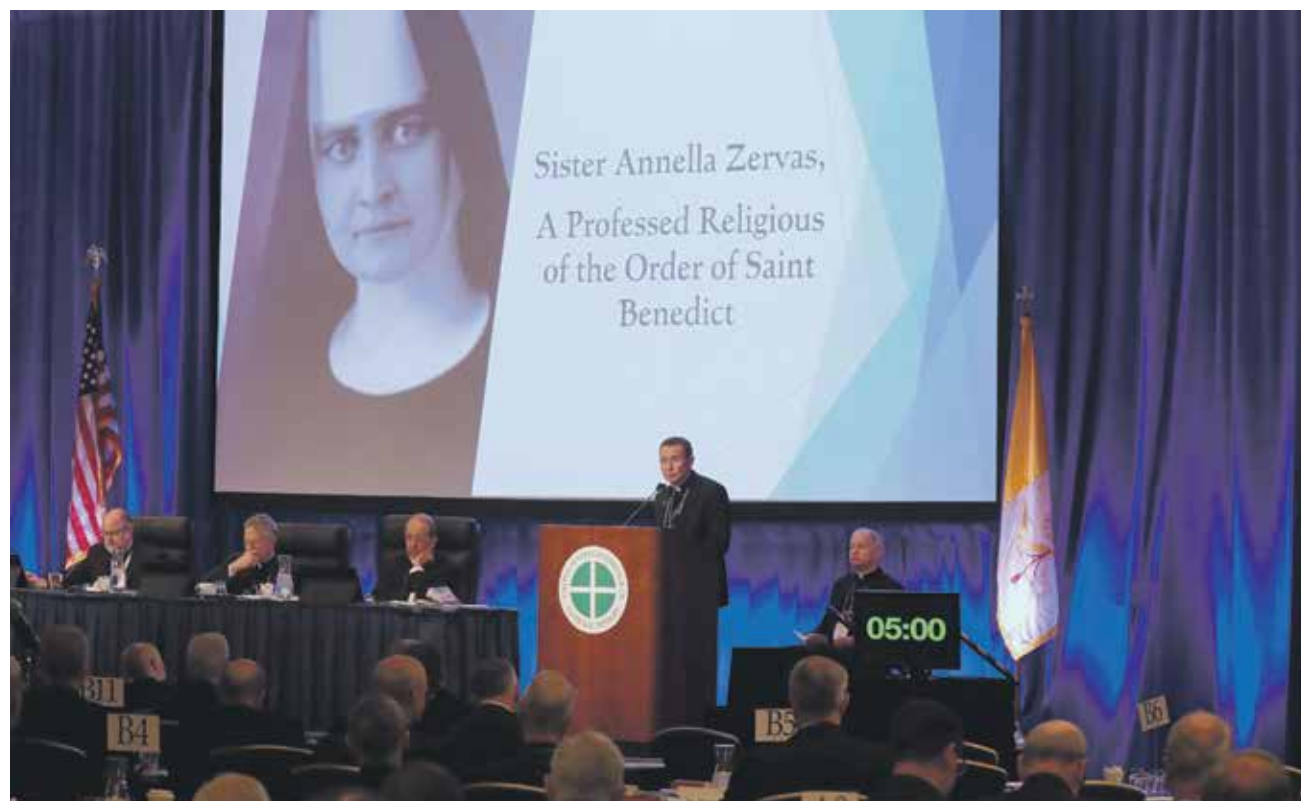
The USCCB's vice president, Archbishop Lori was one of five bishops who had been tapped by the conference to take part in last month's Synod on Synodality session in Rome, which brought to a close a four-year process initiated by Pope Francis aimed at discerning how to make the Church more inclusive and participatory.

Structure

Throughout the November 11-14 assembly in Baltimore, several bishops who had participated in the synod shared with the assembly and the press that the Church in the United States is already uniquely blessed with the kinds of practices and consultative bodies called for by the synod's final document, such as finance and pastoral councils.

For instance, USCCB president Archbishop Timothy Broglio spoke of the "country's rich history of promoting co-responsibility" in his opening remarks on November 12, before noting in his presidential address that some synod participants "were surprised" at how prevalent synodal structures already are in the United States.

"Many of the synodal exercises that are common in our country wait to be introduced elsewhere," he said, before listing six different consultative structures that are widespread in the US, including a National Advisory Board and presbyteral councils.



Bishop Andrew H. Cozzens of Crookston, Minnesota, speaks about the cause of beatification and canonisation of Sister Annella Zervas, a professed religious of the Order of St Benedict, during a November 12, 2024, session of the fall general assembly of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in Baltimore. Photo: OSV News/Bob Roller.

However, Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville, Texas, warned that without a deeper conversion to authentic listening and encounter, already existing consultative structures will not live up to their potential.

“Although the US is blessed by a number of consultative structures, it could learn from other parts of the universal Church where a ‘village’ mentality is still prevalent”

"Without that humility, the structure won't really help," said Bishop Flores, the USCCB's doctrine committee head and point man on the Synod on Synodality.

Bishop Flores stressed that listening goes beyond treating someone like a mere "source of information," but is a spiritual discipline that one can't "get from an online course".

The Brownsville bishop said that although the US is blessed by a number of consultative structures, it could learn from other parts of the universal Church where

a "village" mentality is still prevalent. He also stressed the importance of listening to the poor and communities that have withstood the "onslaught of modern technology" for insights into how to truly listen to others.

Bishop Flores said that the Pope's publication of *Dilexit Nos*, an encyclical on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the midst of the Synod on Synodality session, provided a key lens for how to understand synodality, an interpretation that was also advanced by papal nuncio Cardinal Christophe Pierre in his November 12 address to the US bishops.

Promotion

Both Archbishop Lori and Bishop Flores emphasised the importance of promoting a synodal culture at the local level.

Archbishop Lori spoke of inviting his pastoral council and other diocesan bodies to prayerfully read the Synod on Synodality's final document and discern "what it means for us and how we're going to try to live that out as we go forward". He also spoke of the importance of pastors recognising the gifts of others, inviting them to participate.

"Pastors who do this and have done this their whole life as priests, chances are those are the places where the churches are full on Sunday," he said, underscoring

that listening doesn't mean that "faith and morals are up for grabs."

Bishop Flores emphasised the importance of pastors being "accessible" to their people, which he said was a reflection of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, who became physically present among his people. He also said Christ was never afraid to listen to someone else in the course of his outreach, and all Catholics should follow his lead.

“Another theme that emerged multiple times at the USCCB assembly was the idea that agenda-driven approaches were present at and detracted from the Synod on Synodality”

"Quit judging the person before you actually try to understand the way they speak," he said.

Although local Churches have been encouraged to begin implementing synodality, Bishop Flores noted in his November 12 presentation to

the assembly that some decisions at the universal level, including those involving the synodal reform of canon law, will be made by Pope Francis himself.

"And I don't think the Holy Father is at all shy about taking decisions when he's ready," said Bishop Flores.

Bishop Flores also emphasised the need for ongoing work on the theological underpinnings of synodality, including the nature of the episcopal conferences and an understanding of how the "sense of the faithful" can and cannot be gauged through consultative bodies.

He also spoke of the need to strengthen ecclesial bonds at the national and continental level, but also stressed that the work of an episcopal conference "cannot and should not supplant the local decisions of the local diocesan churches."

Another theme that emerged multiple times at the USCCB assembly was the idea that agenda-driven approaches were present at and detracted from the Synod on Synodality. Archbishop Lori, for instance, said in his report to the assembly that there was "a bit of campaigning in the room" at the synod, a view that Archbishop Broglio endorsed.

"It is not easy to listen and set aside the campaign positions that sometimes coloured the approaches of certain par-

ticipants," said Archbishop Broglio in his presidential address. "There is still an occasional sentiment that if I do not get what I want, the Church is not being synodal."

The bishops did not explicitly name any issues that were being lobbied for at the Synod on Synodality, but activists promoting causes like the ordination of women and softening the Church's moral prohibition of same-sex relations were present both inside and outside of the synodal hall.

"We have to grow in our understanding and in our ability to listen to the Holy Spirit," added Archbishop Broglio.

Implementation

One development that emerged at the USCCB assembly was clear support for the creation of a dedicated task force to explore how to implement synodality within the episcopal conference.

The proposal initially was made from the floor on November 12 by Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego, who was one of five US prelates tapped by Pope Francis to participate in the recent synod. A voice vote of the gathered bishops, with not a single dissenting voice, confirmed that the USCCB's priorities and plans committee should move forward with preparing the task force on synodality.

Prior to the assembly in Baltimore, Cardinal McElroy and Cardinal Blase Cupich of the Archdiocese of Chicago, another papal nominee to the synod, had publicly called for synodality to be addressed by the USCCB in the form of a dedicated committee, a more substantial body than a task force.

The USCCB has already taken steps to make its assemblies more synodal, including round-table seating arrangements, time for small-group discussions, and the executive sessions, which allow for more free flowing discussion without the presence of media.

Whatever comes next, Archbishop Lori said that his experience of the Synod on Synodality final session's long and sometimes grueling monthlong schedule was a good chance to cultivate the virtues needed for a synodal reform to bear fruit.

"It is a long-haul proposition," he said. "Building a synodal Church is going to require a lot of patience, a lot of perseverance, and a certain spiritual discipline."

Letters

Letter of the week

Bring permanent residents back to cities

Dear Editor, In recent years one can observe the poor maintenance of both civic and privately owned historical buildings in the centre of Irish cities and large towns. "Not enough chimney pots" a politician told me.

What he was saying is that there are little or no Dáil votes to be had in city centre

areas anymore. Permanent residents have moved out to the suburbs. They only come into the centre for a parade or a charity event.

Social and private housing which was within walkable distance of schools and shops have been sold off and turned into short term lucrative rental accommodation

with no policing of Rent Pressure Zones. Only the most enthusiastic desperate politician will spend time seeking out the rare permanent resident to get a 2nd or 3rd preference.

The demise of our cities is lack of permanent residents, online shopping and "No one living over the shop" and high

rates for small businesses.

There will be no revitalisation of Irish cities unless measures are taken to bring permanent residents back into the centre of our towns and cities with all public facilities within walking distance.

*Yours etc.,
Nuala Nolan,
Bowling Green, Co. Galway*

We get the Government we vote for

Dear Editor, We go to the polls on November 29 to vote for a most important outcome for our country.

Ireland has changed from a caring Christian Society to a self-centred indifferent one. Law and order is breaking down, and we have murders, assaults, robberies on a daily basis. Many citizens, especially women and elderly live in fear.

Housing and immigration is a disaster. In Limerick people are afraid of getting ill and going to UHL. We know of the dreadful incidents and many others have had bad experiences there. Graduate doctors and nurses are emigrating in thousands. They can't afford to buy houses or support themselves, so we have a shortage of qualified people in Irish hospitals.

Recent Governments and many politicians have become more European than Irish. The Catholic Church has failed also. When did we last hear the rules of the Church?

The Ten Commandments are never mentioned. The 5th states clearly "Thou Shalt Not Kill." We would have had a different outcome in the in the Abortion Referendum if

people had been reminded of this, and 10,033 Irish citizens would not have died in the past 12 months.

When we go to vote, we must not leave our conscience at home, but take it and our brains with us to the polling booth.

Our country is at the crossroads, so please vote for the individual that will support your beliefs and principles and not for those who are giving false promises.

We get the Government we vote for.

*Yours etc.,
Nuala Doran
Raheen, Co. Limerick*



facebook community

Each week we publish a selection of comments from *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

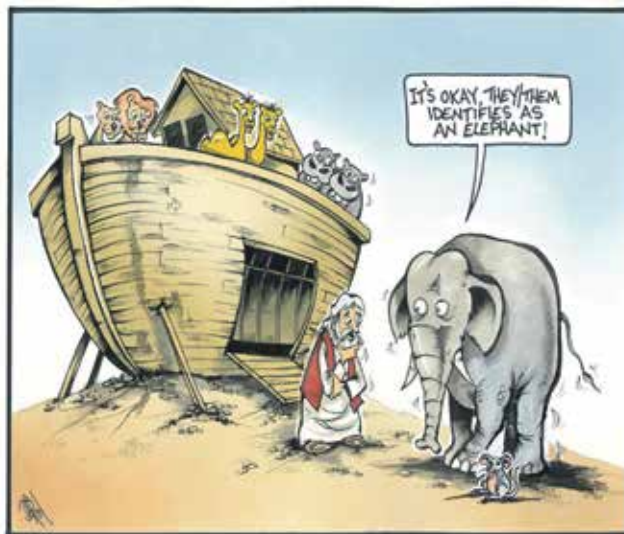
Increase in enquiries to diocesan priesthood gives 'hope' for future

The biggest problem facing the church is the failure to defend the teachings on marriage, abortion, euthanasia, the sacrament of confession, then there are the cliques that seem to be running churches and calling for married priests, and women priests, many people going to church today see nothing wrong with fornication, abortion, euthanasia, condoms, IVF. The church won't grow until it teaches the truths of the faith and instructs the ignorant - **PJ Malone**

'Our priests are constantly burying young people who die for want of a reason for living' - Bishop of Derry

Such a sad reflection on life in 21st Century Ireland. - **Eamonn Mcgrady**

What do you think? Join in the conversation on *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page



A rejection of anything associated with faith

Dear Editor, Fr Swan's recent correct assumption that a spiritual vacuum is encroaching upon Christian identity [*The Irish Catholic* - October 31, 2024] can be experienced with a gradual move away from traditional saints' names to ones that are Irish but identifiable with trends associated with popular media, such as *Game of Thrones* or a blatant Wicca/New Age practice, such as Aradia or Iris.

The move away from clearly identifiable

saints of popular or universal devotion points to a quiet rejection of anything associated with faith to its complete opposite. A recent columnist in the Northern Irish daily, *The Irish News*, stated that when confronted with these dark evenings, it was only by embracing the "Celtic/Pagan" wheel of the year that understanding the darkness can be adopted and understood!

As with the Korean War, the faith

is now finding itself in its own Pusan pocket; we need the calibre of a General MacArthur and launch a daring spiritual version of the Inchon landings and take the fight back, not to come to a stalemate but to a realised victory through the example set by the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

*Yours etc.,
Fr John McCallion CC
Coalisland, Co. Tyrone*

Letters to the Editor

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

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

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

Priests are heroic community leaders

One of the challenges facing the Church in Ireland today is the tension between the fact that necessary Church reform requires patient discernment, but also the fact that this reform is urgently needed.

Within a decade the Dublin Archdiocese – the country's largest with over a million registered Catholics – will have only a couple of dozen priests to serve the current 198 parishes.

It is a familiar pattern across the country, and no group of stakeholders (to use a corporate term) has given more time to patient reflection on the issue than our hard-working priests.

Yet, a frustration that one will often hear from priests is the concern that the 'process' becomes the destination and endless meetings, consultations and sharing takes centre-stage and all the energy needed for radical reform, withers away.

Often dioceses have adopted ambitious rationalisation plans, there has been much buy-in and people have accepted the inevitability of change, even daring to believe that in the change God can reveal new ways to journey forward together as a community of faith.

But then a bishop retires and a new man arrives. He too feels the piercing need for discernment to precede reform, and the process begins again.

It is frustrating for priests and hides from the lay faithful the urgency of the change that is needed. Courageous conversations have begun in some communities, but the danger is that Church reform proceeds at the pace of the slowest member. And with some people inevitably wanting to drag their heels, this means that reform will always be a destination far in the future.

Looking to the future requires faith. It also requires a deep appreciation for both salvation history, and ecclesiastical history. Whether in the history of the Israelites or across the broad canvas of 2,000 years of Church history it has sometimes been in times of exile or when all has seemed lost, that a new ability to find intimacy with God emerges.

Think of the post-Good Friday band of the Lord's followers. Just a week earlier, they had arrived triumphantly. Now their tiny community was frightened, scattered and without leadership.

Yet, at the Supper of Emmaus "they recognised him in the breaking of bread" and realised that the Lord's eternal presence was the gift that would sustain and nourish until the end of time.

There is a danger in Church reform and rationalisation that we consider the work to be little more than the sort of re-organisation that one sees in the corporate world, as if bishops are little more than area managers for a regional bank that has been bought by a larger competitor.

The propagation of the faith and evangelisation are God's work first, but they require human co-operation. Christianity is not magic, that is perhaps why so many people walk away disappointed with what they expect God to be rather than take on the patient journey of discerning what God is saying to the Church in Ireland as she moves through the first century of the third millennium.

Survival is not a Christian value. Jesus did not say, I came that you might survive – no, the Lord came that "we might have life and have it to the full". Only when we move beyond a survival strategy – that prioritises the Church rather than Christ – can we see the new ways that God is preparing for a new springtime in Irish Catholicism.

It is with a certain amount of incredulity that many will hear talk of a new springtime, but that is to fall for the vice of despair and disillusionment.

Our priests now are fewer and older. But they are also heroic community leaders who have the resources – and faith – to lead their people to a new way of being the Church together. This will require painful decisions. Things that we once thought brought us life, will disappear – and the challenge will be to find new life in the new ways.

But only a brief look back on Church history will reveal to us the truth that God is always with his Church.

Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, November 21, 2024

My kingdom is not of this world

Deacon Greg Kandra

Page 33



NET Ireland



Proud to proclaim my Faith

As someone who grew up attending Catholic schools, participating in youth groups, and attending various Catholic events, you might think I had a deep connection to my faith from an early age. But it wasn't until I was 19 that I discovered the difference between knowing about God and experiencing His love.

From the ages of 14 to 19, I lived far from God, choosing to follow my own path without regard for consequences. At 19, a Catholic friend invited me to sing at a three-day Diocesan Youth Conference. Initially, I declined, but her persistence won me over. I agreed - not out of faith, but for the spotlight. I had no intention of encountering Jesus or helping anyone grow in their faith.

During the conference, a young Catholic speaker named Andrew Laubacher shared his testimony. His story of transformation, overcoming addiction and turning back to God, struck a chord with me. If someone



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like him could turn his life around, maybe there was hope for me too.

Adoration

On the second day, there was Adoration and Confession at the Church of the Sacred Heart. I wasn't interested, so I sat at the back, observing. Gradually, I noticed young people leaving Confession with visible joy. Their transformation stirred something in me. After 45 minutes, I got up and went to Confession for the first time in four years.

In the confessional, I poured out the sins of my past. How could God

still love me after everything? When the priest laid his hands on my forehead and said, "My child, I absolve you of all your sins. Go and sin no more," I broke down in tears. In that moment, I experienced God's love so tangibly that I knew my life had to change.

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Afterward, I returned to the pew and made an honest prayer to the Lord - the first in years. I asked Him to guide me and help me live a life worthy of His love.

As the conference wrapped up on

the third day, I reflected on Andrew Laubacher's story. He had transformed his life and was now traveling the world, inspiring others to turn to Christ. That resonated deeply with me. I realised I wanted to do the same - to help young people see that Jesus is real and that faith is not just something for the older generations.

Returning home, I began researching ways to get involved in ministry. That's when I discovered

NET Ministries, an organisation dedicated to evangelising young people. It felt like exactly what I was looking for. I went on to serve with NET Ministries Canada for a year, followed by two years with NET Ministries Ireland.

Transformative

Those three years were transformative. They deepened my faith and gave me the opportunity to share Christ with countless young people. However, by the end of my third year, I felt the Lord calling me to take the next step. I applied to study psychology in Dublin and was thrilled to be accepted.

Since 2019, when I first joined NET Ministries, God has consistently opened doors for me. While working with NET Ireland, I had the opportunity to work with Radio Maria Ireland, Ireland's Catholic radio station. That experience, in turn, paved the way for my studies in Dublin. Now, as a psychology student, I continue to stay proactive in my faith. Since moving to Dublin, I have started a women's faith

study group at my home, meeting bi-weekly to explore scripture and build community.

Over the years, I've often heard people say that faith is dying and that the Church is in decline. But I strongly disagree. While it's true that fewer people may be filling the pews, I see a new fire in the Church - especially among young people. There's a hunger for authenticity, a genuine longing for connection with God, and a willingness to live out faith in bold ways.

Looking back to when I was a teenager, I never would have said I was proud to be Catholic. But today, I stand here as a young psychology student, active in various Catholic groups across the country, and I'm proud to proclaim my faith.

Of course, there are always challenges. Not everyone will be receptive to discussions about faith, and we live in a society that can sometimes be indifferent or even hostile toward religion. But in my experience, most people are open and respectful when approached with genuine love and humility.

My journey has shown me that it's possible to be young, Catholic, and passionate about faith. God's love is transformative, and He continues to guide me, one step at a time. I hope my story inspires others to believe that faith is not something of the past - it's alive and vibrant, and it has the power to change lives, just as it changed mine.

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Go and make disciples of all nations



Peter Kasko

I was recently approached by a friend who asked me what is like to be a member of core/leadership team and the challenges that come with it. From the moment, it was like a flood of ideas coming to my mind and the flow was so quick that I just couldn't keep track of all. Fast forward to this moment, sitting in front of the screen, I'm just drawing blank. The joke's on me. Sure, I imagined that it would be extremely easy to put together a few lines. As sensei Yoda would have said it: Mistaken very, I was.

Experience

I joined 'Living Water', an adult charismatic prayer group, in early 2018 as they held 'The Life in the Spirit Seminar'. First, I was an observer, later a member, and finally this year I accepted the invitation to be part of the leadership team. I did not accept the invitation on the spot, but took a few days to reflect, discern (as we Catholics like to say) and eventually said yes. The idea of being part of a group of like-minded individuals with the same values is appealing, to say the least. Leading/leadership does not come easy; challenges occur and here are a few to start the conversation:

In a nutshell, charismatic is about the Holy Spirit and a personal encounter. If I want to lead by example, I need to have a genuine personal con-



Living Water retreat 2024

“Some prefer to sit in silent adoration, others maybe vocal and musical, some again are more academic – ultimately, we are all one body in Christ, and each brings his or her set of skills to the betterment of the group”

nection with the Holy Spirit. That is, I need my Faith to be honest, I need to be opened to the promptings and willing to discern the same – all with an open heart. And I want the same experience for others. Genuine spiritual growth is a combination of emotional experiences properly discerned by a deep grounded Faith.

Discerning and enabling

the Holy Spirit to lead my life is a start. Next step is aligning the thoughts and ideas with other members of the leadership team. We are, naturally, from different backgrounds, each with a personal relationship with our heavenly Father and a unique set of gifts. Based on this, we all have specific expectations and preferences on how to structure the prayer evening.

Of utmost importance is the ability to come together, in unity and prayer, and to listen to one another. Some prefer to sit in silent adoration, others maybe vocal and musical, some again are more academic – ultimately, we are all one body in Christ, and each brings his or her set of skills to the betterment of the group.

Sounds lovely, right? There are moments, though, when personalities take over the better of us and even conflicts may arise. To name one, pride may get in the way, and I may think my ideas are better than others. Even in a closed small leadership group we need to be able to handle disagreements in the spirit of love

and humility. I cannot stress the importance of coming together in prayer. Encouragement of mutual respect and open communication is essential for preserving harmony. This also applies for leading the group and guiding its members.

“God always shows up! When we make the effort to also show up, the graces provided are abundant”

Another challenge can be expressed by the following: less is sometimes more. This

challenge is a personal one (but I firmly believe others struggle with this too!). I have what you might call a natural gift to talk. To talk a lot, and to talk about anything. However, it is not always the right and good thing to do. When I started “talking” in front of a group on a regular basis I realised that I very easily swerved off script, ventured into the ‘depths of improvisation’ and lost track of the main point. I have learnt that a well-timed pause can highlight the main point if used at the right time.

Finally, I would highlight the challenge with commitment. Let's be honest, we do not ‘feel’ it all the time, whether with prayer, attending Mass, or simply being nice to your colleagues at work (you know which one I'm talking about). Same with the prayer group. The reasons may vary depending on our environment, or it could be simply going through a period of spiritual dryness. The good news is, God always shows up! When we make the effort to also show up, the graces provided are abundant. As Paul said in the letter to the Hebrews, “it is a journey requiring patience and perseverance.”

In summary, being one of the leaders of a prayer group does require a conscious combination of spiritual depth, theological insight and emotional and spiritual intelligence. Finding the right balance is a must yet extremely hard to achieve, however, all work can be done, and it is profoundly fulfilling.

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.

‘Lumen Gentium’ and the universal call to holiness

David Werning

The dogmatic constitution from Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, promulgated 60 years ago, sets forth the nature and mission of the Church. It begins by naming Jesus as the “Light of the Nations” *Lumen Gentium* and head of the Church, which is his body and includes all the faithful. Jesus established the Church and ever sustains it as a sign and instrument of his grace, which is offered to all people.

It focuses on the different roles and charisms and roles in the Church – laity, clergy

and religious – and how the members travel together on their pilgrim way, witnessing to Christ on Earth by lives of holiness.

Lumen Gentium ends by pointing the faithful to Mary as “a wholly unique member of the Church” and “the model of virtues.”

The fathers at Vatican II, wanted to fill in the blanks from Vatican I (19th Century) caused by war and politics, with *Lumen Gentium*.

Pope St John XXIII convened Vatican II in 1962 and died in 1963, a year before *Lumen Gentium* was issued. His successor, Pope St Paul VI, adopted his predecessor's directive that the teachings

of Vatican II should favour a pastoral approach, being open to the goodness of the world and sharing the good news of Jesus with all.

All the elements in the final version of *Lumen Gentium* serve to illuminate the essence of the Church as a pilgrim people journeying through history under the headship of Christ toward full communion with him in Heaven.

Society

Through the holiness and witness of its members, the Church not only receives Christ's grace but dispenses it. *Lumen Gentium* says that each “disciple of Christ has

the obligation of spreading the faith.”

Regarding the visible society on Earth, the Church consists of the laity, clergy and religious. Since they are all one in Christ, they share “a true equality” and participate in Christ's mission according to their role. Each baptised person is a priest, prophet and king.

Members of the clergy are called to the ministerial priesthood. They have the responsibility of presiding at the liturgy, preaching the Gospel and governing the Church. Members of the laity enjoy what is called the common or baptismal priesthood, however, the laity have

the special vocation of being a leaven within society, seeking God's will in temporal affairs and being a witness to Jesus. Religious are members who have received the special gift of conforming themselves to the evangelical counsels of Christ: chastity, poverty and obedience. When each member seeks to fulfil his or her role, relying on God's grace, the goal of Heaven becomes that clearer for them and for those to whom they witness.

Lumen Gentium is quite clear “that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love.” All are

called to universal holiness, which is not a passive reception of God's grace. Rather, it is an active response to it. It is the normal way of life for anyone who seeks to follow Christ, and it entails cultivating the relationship with God through daily prayer, acts of charity and participating in the life of the Church.

The call to holiness is shared by every disciple: to place one's faith and trust in God, to receive Christ's gifts that he offers through the Church by the power of the Holy Spirit, to persevere in love and to fulfil God's will.

David Werning writes from Virginia.

CONNECT call youth to 'Think of what is above'



CONNECT 5 attendees



Bishop Fintan Gavin greeting young people after Mass



James and Anna O'Shaughnessy from Glanmire Parish.



L-R Fr Columba Jordan CFR, Sarah Ryan-Purcell, Miriam Dunne, Bishop Fintan Gavin, Rory Phayer, Brendan Keenan, PJ Cronin, Eva Conroy and Katie Ascough



Q&A with Bishop Fintan, Katie Ascough and Fr Columba

Renata Milán Morales

“How do we live in a way that shows the Christian values and virtues without seeming exclusive or condescending?” “What scripture passages can offer hope?” “How can we deal with desolation?” These were just some of the questions asked by young adults at the fifth ‘CONNECT’ gathering in Cork, themed ‘In a Troubled World, Dare to Hope’. This initiative, proposed by Bishop Fintan Gavin of Cork and Ross, aims to offer young Catholics with a space to meet and participate with their faith in a sociable and meaningful atmosphere.

Initially designed to bring

together youth groups within Cork, ‘CONNECT’ has quickly expanded. Young Catholics travelled not only from Cork but also from Sligo, Dublin, and even Derry to attend the event. While 160 participants had registered in advance, more arrived on the day, eager to take part in the gathering held at University College Cork.

The guest speakers on the day were Fr Columba Jordan CFR, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, and Katie Ascough, founder of ‘Called to More’. Their talks focused on messages rooted in faith.

Fr Columba encouraged the audience to reflect on the Gospel passage, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be” (Matthew 6:21). “What I love – that’s where my heart is,” Fr Columba said. “What-

ever I love, I will gather, and my heart will follow.” He also shared a story from his childhood. “When I was a child, I’d walk around clutching money tightly because my heart was wrapped around it. What’s your heart wrapped around today?”

Noting the noise and negativity that can overwhelm us in the modern world, Fr Columba observed that we have the gift and the misfortune in our days to know everything that is happening in the world at all times. He pointed out that we are more connected than ever, but we need to be connected to God first.

“When I get overwhelmed by bad news, I’ve learned to pause,” he continued. “I stop, turn to the Lord, and remember [that] my treasure is in Him. That changes everything.”

He offered a reminder for anyone struggling to find hope, “Declare the truth, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has filled me with His love, and I am free.’ God’s promises are the foundation of hope.”

Fr Columba also challenged common misconceptions about hope. “Hope isn’t 50/50 or just wishful thinking,” as a passenger during a flight once told him, “It’s the desire for all good things that God wants to give us, coupled with the confidence that He will.”

Katie Ascough emphasised the importance of peace and integrity in the Christian life. “We cannot be effective in anything if we’re frantic,” she said. “It’s really important to find peace in your heart, and it’s very simple... talk to God, pray, and trust Him. He holds the whole

world in His hands and has bigger plans than we can see.”

Katie highlighted the influence of social media on our lives. “Social media can be such a problem. If you need to get off it, do it. But at the very least, unfollow accounts that don’t build you up and replace them with those that do. What you see makes such a difference,” she advised.

In a world where values can seem outdated or unpopular, Katie reminded attendees of the power of living a life rooted in virtue. “Living out Christian virtues with integrity inspires others by the way you live. The opposite, falling into hypocrisy, not only separates you from God but can also scandalise people and make it harder to lead them towards God.”

She challenged the audience

to take steps toward personal growth. “Identify what you need to work on, whether it’s chastity, sobriety, or another virtue, and go for it. You’ll be the happiest, freest version of yourself, and your life will be a powerful witness to others.”

Speaking to attendees, it became clear that there was a deeper yearning among the youth for something significant. “This generation has questions that need to be answered,” one participant remarked. Another noted, “It’s not enough just to entertain us. We’re asking for something more.” The gathering showed a generation seeking something deeper than surface-level answers, wanting to engage with the big questions about faith and life.

Meditations on the interior life

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“The religion of Christ is love,” said St Teresa of Calcutta.

Lord, we forget sometimes that love of You is the essence of our religion. It is the first and greatest of all commands... ‘To love the Lord our God with all our heart and soul mind and strength.’ This is why we are created, why You give us the gift of life and today. As St Therese said “Lord, to love You I only have today.” The present moment.

We forget sometimes that the love which inspired You to give us the gift of the Eucharist, that every Mass said on the planet, is Your love, becoming present, Your way of remaining with us. There is no greater love. Baptism is the same, it was and is Your love for us, Your wish to write our names in Heaven, to instil in us the Holy Spirit, to guide our lives and keep us out of trouble. Equally Confirmation, it is the Holy Spirit poured out further, to fill our hearts, to become the Sweet Interior Guest, to steer us rightly through difficult paths and choices, to give us



St Francis of Assisi

right reason, common sense, and lots more. The same applies to weddings in Church, to anointing, to Confession and holy orders, all are gifts of love of God, means by which God pours into the world His own love.

At crucial times, dying, deciding, beginning married life, beginning ministry, when seeking healing for

sin and guilt, our prayers should be inspired by a Spirit of love for God and others. Every dawn, every sunrise, every gift of a new day, is also Your gift and for a reason. There is something for each of us to do. A little mission, a service, a work, which only we can do. No one need be unemployed for You are the Grandest Employer and You give everyone a purpose, a gift. To St Joseph it was carpentry and care of the Lord, to Our Lady it was a seemingly ordinary life in Nazareth, cooking, caring as other mothers. To St Peter it was fishing until called further.

St Francis of Assisi said when dying “I have done what was mine to do, may Christ show you what you must do.” This is the great question. Lord, what do you want me to do? What is my life’s work, my calling, my unique vocation? To be married? To be single? You know best. Here I am Lord, I come to do Your will.

For love of You today I will spend time thinking about this and asking You. Please, show me. Make clear my path, tell me what to do, where to go, what is my purpose.

Master of all the saints



Jaymie Stuart Wolfe

“Who do you say that I am?” It’s the question Jesus posed to the men closest to him, the one Peter answered with an unequivocal confession of faith in him as the Messiah and Son of God. The entirety of our Catholic faith rests on Peter’s response and, for 2,000 years, the Church has proclaimed the divinity of Jesus Christ and his eternal kingdom.

“Who do you say that I am?” is directed to every Christian soul. It is the one question on life’s final exam each one of us will be required to answer.

The quality of our discipleship is largely a consequence of the response we give - not only in our words, but by how we live. That’s because Jesus is every Catholic’s most significant other. Our relationship to him is the single most important relationship we have because it defines and shapes all the rest of our relationships.

Life is a pilgrimage toward holiness, and saints are made, not born. As we grow in our faith, who Jesus

becomes increasingly central to who we are. That transformation is invariably reflected in how we live. And as our answer to Christ’s question develops and deepens, a pattern of growth in the Christian spiritual life emerges and the path from muse and motivator to mentor and master becomes clear.

For nearly all of us, Jesus begins as a source of inspiration for our creativity and our choices. We find power for our life’s work in the Gospel accounts of his life, death and resurrection. We are drawn by Christ’s goodness, intrigued by his truth, and elevated by the beauty of his grace. But we remain committed to our own self-will.

Those who move forward in faith adopt Jesus as a source of motivation. As a motivator, Christ brings out the best in us. He affirms all that is godly and good in us. He becomes a driving force behind our deeds and provides initiative, guidance and direction to our lives. He gives us the motivation we need to embrace change and growth. But we maintain authority over our lives according to our own priorities and preferences.

Serious disciples make Jesus their mentor to growth in the spiritual life. This is what has the power to move us from consumer Catholicism to intentional missionary discipleship. But it does not put an end to self-will.

Our evangelisation efforts are focused on making more of these kinds of disciples. And there is little doubt that increasing the very small percentage of Catholics actively

engaged in a mentoring relationship with Jesus Christ would transform both the Church and the world. But while that may be enough for us, it is not enough for God. God’s plan for us is nothing short of sanctity. He wants to make every one of us - without exception - a saint.

So, what’s the difference between a serious disciple and a saint? The Grand Canyon between seeing Jesus as a mentor and serving him as a master. Saints surrender everything to Jesus. They let go of all other attachments because they know they cannot serve both God and something else. They do not seek to serve God in the way they desire to serve him, but in the way he wants to be served. They accept everything from his hand as gift and commit to making a total and sincere gift of themselves to him and to all they encounter.

Saints are satisfied only by God himself; nothing less than God or other than him will do. And for those who are holy, God alone is enough. Nothing else is wanted, needed, or required.

The heart that is inspired can become obedient. The soul that is trained by Christ can surrender itself entirely into God’s hands. Jesus Christ calls everyone to holiness, and he opens up the pathway to sanctity when he asks us, “Who do you say that I am?”

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Questions of Faith

Jenna Marie Cooper

What’s the scriptural basis for praying for the dead and venerating relics?

Q: What scriptural basis is there for praying for the dead, for their repose, or for praying to the dead, for their intercessions? And in a related way, what scriptural basis is there for the Catholic practice of ‘relics’, such as saving a person’s bone fragments? My Protestant friends say these practices are not in the Bible and in fact border on the occult.

A: The Catholic customs of praying for the souls of the dead, praying to the saints who have gone before us in earthly life, and of venerating relics are based primarily in the Church’s long-standing tradition and theology rather than explicit scriptural ‘prooftexts’. However, the Bible does indeed allude to these practices.

In terms of praying for the repose of the souls of the dead (praying for the souls in purgatory), the clearest supporting Scripture passages is found in the Old Testament book of 2 Maccabees.

For background, the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees tell the story of the Jewish people’s fight to maintain their culture and faith in the face of Greek occupying armies, and of their liberation by the Maccabees and their leader, Judas. In chapter 12 of 2 Maccabees, we read that many Jewish warriors died in battle, and it was later discovered that the fallen had been wearing pagan amulets in clear violation of the First Commandment.

Judas the Maccabee: “then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice... He did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin” (2 Mc 12:43-46).

But incidentally, the books of Maccabees are not always familiar to Protestant Christians, since these were among the Old Testament books that Martin Luther chose not to include in his edition of the Bible.

In terms of praying “to” the dead, I think it would be more accurate to say that Catholics ask the saints for their intercession. Although the saints are members of the faithful who are “dead” insofar as they have already suffered bodily death, we believe that in a more ultimate sense they are alive with God. And it would logically follow that we can ask the saints, our heavenly friends, for their prayers just as we could ask our friends here on Earth to pray for us. Scripturally, James 5:16 tells us that: “The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful”; and Revelation 5:8 specifically describes the prayers of the saints as: “gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the holy ones.”

With respect to relics - which you correctly note are often a piece of a saint’s body such as bone fragments or pieces of hair - our main scriptural point of reference is Revelation 6:9, in which St John recounts his vision where he “saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the witness they bore to the word of God.”

Though this was in reference to a heavenly altar for the worship of God, very early Christians echoed this passage in a very tangible, concrete sense when they would celebrate Mass over the burial places of the martyrs.

Eventually this custom evolved from celebrating Mass in catacombs and cemeteries into the practice of placing a relic, such as a small piece of a saint’s body, into altars within Church buildings. And in modern times, our current Code of Canon Law tells us: “The ancient tradition of placing relics of Martyrs or of other Saints within a fixed altar is to be retained” (Canon 1237). So, while relics of saints are now often venerated on their own, this ‘original’ and scriptural use for relics has endured until today.

✠ Jenna Marie Cooper, who holds a licentiate in canon law, is a consecrated virgin and a canonist whose column appears weekly at OSV News. Send your questions to CatholicQA@osv.com.

Lighter thoughts on a heavy subject



Fr Rolheiser

www.ronrolheiser.com

Some years ago, a friend was facing the birth of her first child. While happy that she was soon to be a mother, she confessed openly her fears about the actual birth-process, the pain, the dangers, the unknown. But she consoled herself with the thought that hundreds of millions of women have experienced giving birth and managed it. Surely, she felt she could manage it too.

I sometimes take those words and apply them to the prospect of dying. Death is the most daunting, unsettling, and heaviest topic there is, our occasional false bravado notwithstanding. When we say that we are not afraid of dying, mostly we're whistling in the dark and, even there, the tune comes out easier when our own death remains still an abstract idea, something in the indefinite future. Full disclosure, my own thoughts about dying no doubt

fit that description, whistling in the dark. But why not? Surely whistling in the dark is better than torturing ourselves with unnecessary fear.

Courage

And so, I employ my friend's methodology for steeling her courage in the face of having to give birth and face that unknown. Simply put, millions and millions of people have managed the process of dying, so I should be able to manage it too! Moreover, unlike giving birth to a child, which affects less than half the human race, in the case of dying, everyone, including myself, is going to have to manage it. A hundred years from now, everyone reading these words will have had to manage his or her death.

So, here's a way to look at our own death: Billions and billions of people have managed this, men, women, chil-

dren, even babies. Some were old, some were young; some were prepared, some were not; some welcomed it, some met it with bitter resistance; some died from natural causes, some died through violence; some died surrounded by love, some died alone without any human love surrounding them; some died peacefully, some died crying out in fear; some died at a ripe old age, some died in the prime of their youth; some suffered for years from a seemingly meaningless dementia with those around them wondering why God and nature seemed cruel in keeping them alive; others in robust physical health with seemingly everything to live for, took their own lives; some died full of faith and hope, and some died feeling

only darkness and despair; some died breathing out gratitude, and some died breathing out resentment; some died in the embrace of religion and their churches, some died completely outside of that embrace; and some died like Mother Teresa, while others died like Hitler. But every one of them somehow managed it, the great unknown, the greatest of all unknowns. It seems it can be managed.

Experience

Moreover, nobody has come back from the other world with horror stories about dying which suggests that all our horror movies about being tormented after death and ghosts and haunted houses are pure fiction, through and through.

Most people, I suspect,

have the same experience that I have when I think about the dead, particularly about persons I have known who have died. The initial grief and sadness of their loss eventually wears off and is replaced by an inchoate sense that it's alright, that they are alright, and that death has in some strange way washed things clean. In the end, we have a pretty good feeling about our dead loved ones and about the dead in general, even if their departure from this earth was far from ideal, as for instance if they died angry, or through immaturity, or because they committed a crime, or by suicide. Somehow it eventually all washes clean and what remains is the inchoate sense, a solid intuition, that wherever they are now, they are in

better and safer hands than our own.

When I was a young seminarian we once had to translate Cicero's treatise on aging and dying from Latin into English. I was nineteen years old at the time, but was very taken by Cicero's thoughts on why we shouldn't fear death. He was a renowned stoic; but, in the end, his lack of fear of dying was a little like my friend's approach to giving birth, that is, given how universal it is, we should be able to manage it!

Faith

I've long since lost my undergraduate notes on Cicero, so I looked up the treatise on the Internet recently. Here's a nugget from that treatise: "Death should be held of no account! For clearly the impact of death is negligible if it annihilates the soul, or even desirable, if it conducts the soul to some place where it is to live forever. What, then, shall I fear, if after death I am destined to be either not unhappy or happy?"

Our faith tells us that, given the love and benevolence of the God we believe in, only the second option, happiness, awaits us. And we already intuit that.

“Death should be held of no account! For clearly the impact of death is negligible if it annihilates the soul, or even desirable, if it conducts the soul to some place where it is to live forever. What, then, shall I fear, if after death I am destined to be either not unhappy or happy?”

Catechism of the Catholic Church



By Renata Milan Morales

The divine revelation of God

By natural reason we can know God with certainty, based on his works. But there is another order of knowledge, which we cannot possibly arrive at by our own powers: the order of divine Revelation.

His plan of loving goodness

He reveals His mystery, His plan of loving goodness, formed from all eternity in Christ, for our benefit. God has fully revealed this plan by sending us his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It pleased God to reveal himself so we can respond Him, know Him, love Him and become sharers in the divine nature and wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation.

God communicates Himself to us gradually. He prepares us to welcome by stages the supernatural Revelation that is to culminate in the person and

mission of the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, who dwelt in us to accustom us to perceive God and to accustom God to dwell in us.

The stages of Revelation

He invited us to intimate communion with Himself and clothed us with grace and justice. This revelation was not broken off by our first parents' sin. The covenant with Noah after the flood shows the principle of the divine economy toward us "in our lands... in our nations".

The division in nations is intended to limit the pride of fallen humanity (Babel). Because of sin, polytheism and idolatry of rulers threaten this economy with the perversion of paganism. Scripture expresses the heights of sanctity that can be reached by those who live according to the covenant of Noah.

With this purpose, God calls Abram from his country, and makes him 'Abraham', "the father of a multitude

of nations." The people descended from him would be the trustee of the promise made to the patriarchs, the chosen people, called to prepare for when God would gather all his children into the unity of the Church.

After the patriarchs, God formed Israel as His people by freeing them from slavery in Egypt. He established with them the covenant of Mount Sinai and, through Moses, gave them his law. Israel is the priestly people of God and "the first to hear the word of God." Through the prophets, God forms his people in the hope of salvation, in the expectation of a new and everlasting Covenant intended for all, to be written on their hearts.

Mediator and fullness of Revelation

Christ, the Son of God made man, is the Father's Word. In Him He has said everything. There will be no other word than this one. Any

person questioning God or desiring some vision or revelation would be guilty of foolish behaviour and of offending Him, by not fixing his eyes entirely upon Christ.

"The Christian economy, therefore, since it is the new and definitive Covenant, will never pass away; and no new public revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There have been "private" revelations, some of which have been recognised by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it. God desires all men to proclaim Christ to all nations through generations.

Next week we will explore paragraphs 75 to 100, 'The heritage of faith.'

My kingdom is not of this world

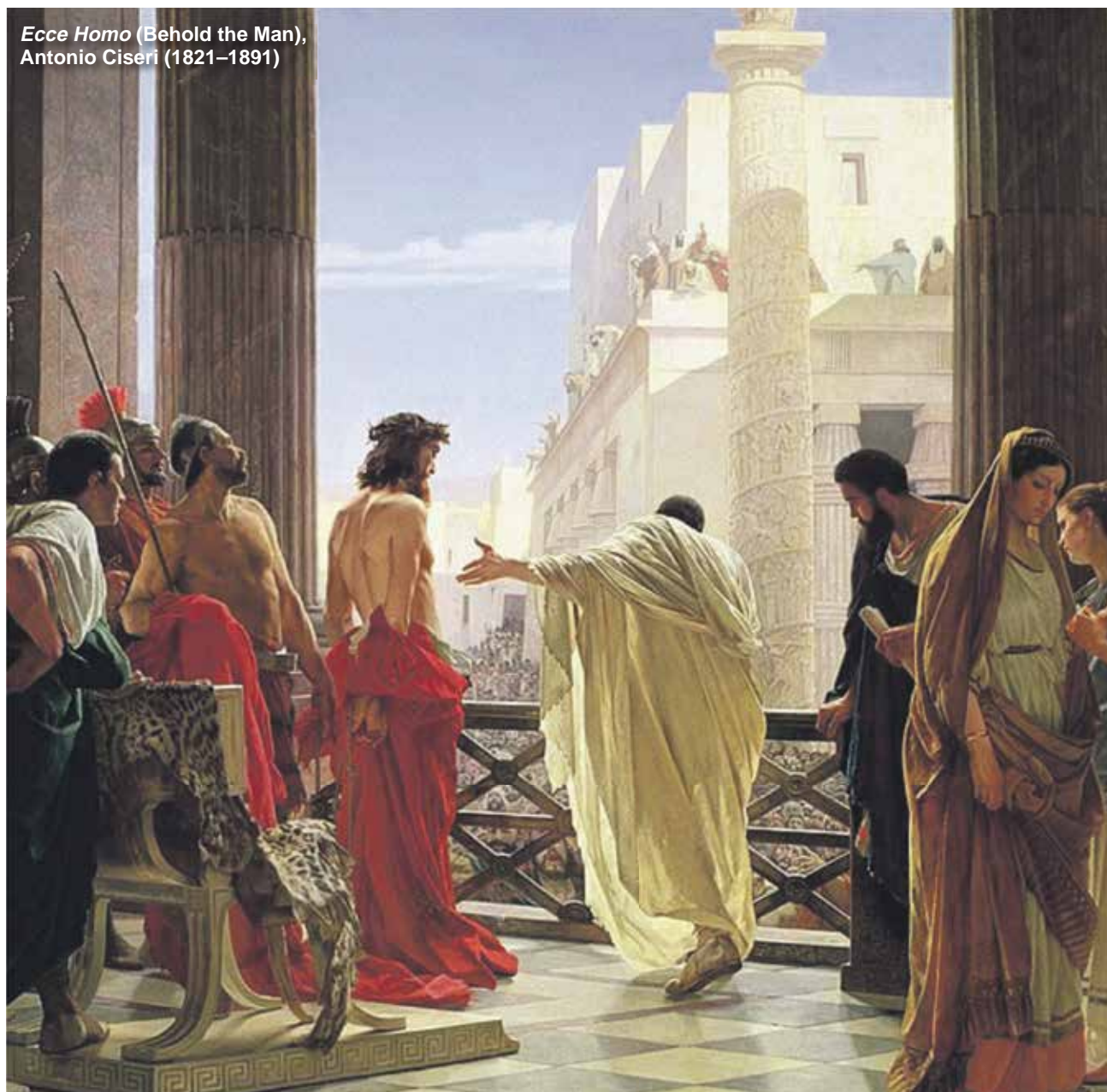
Dn 7:13-14
Ps 93:1, 1-2, 5
Rv 1:5-8
Jn 18:33b-37

The Sunday Gospel

Deacon Greg Kandra



Ecce Homo (Behold the Man),
Antonio Ciseri (1821-1891)



One thing is clear from this Sunday's gospel: Pontius Pilate is a man looking for answers. All of what he has to say in this passage from John is offered in the form of a question.

"Are you the King of the Jews?... I'm not a Jew, am I? ... What have you done? ... Then you are a king?" Pilate here is more prosecutor and inquisitor than governor, trying to gather evidence to decide what to do with the shackled man standing before him. But as we hear this interrogation, we can't forget that this scene is unfolding in the final hours of Christ's earthly life, and that the end is near.

It carries multiple meanings for us on this last great solemnity of the liturgical year. Teetering at the threshold of Advent, we might use this Sunday as an opportunity to ask a few questions ourselves. As we will do in a few weeks on New Year's Eve, we should take stock.

Where has the last year taken us? What have we learned? How have we changed? And reflecting on the scene in this passage, we might also take time to reflect anew on Christ's Passion - and how this King gave all so that we could share in his Kingdom. Ultimately, this Solemnity of Christ the King is an occasion to assess what really matters - and why.

Powerful

The first reading, from the Book of Daniel, makes clear just how powerful and how eternal the ruler of the universe is: "His dominion is an

everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away; his kingship shall not be destroyed."

That's followed by this powerful affirmation from Revelation: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

“Our King is Christ. It's just that simple. How easily we forget”

Maybe - in a year that has been fraught with political upheaval and conflict, when the daily headlines have been filled with stump speeches, debates, accusations, name-calling and often-inscrutable polling data - maybe, just maybe, this Sunday can serve as a reminder that our world is ruled by something (and someone) more important than the name we check off at the ballot box.

Our King is Christ. It's just that simple. How easily we forget.

And how easily we let other kings, other distractions, rule over us - monarchs who demand our time and rule our days. They may be trivial - how many hours do we give to things that are petty, wasteful, hurtful or indulgent? - or they may be lethal, sins that can consume us with all kinds of cravings or addictions that can bludgeon us until we are broken.

This Sunday might move us to question what other

sovereign rulers are sapping our loyalty, fealty or attention - and which ones may redirect our hearts. Like Pilate, we should seek answers. Do we give enough honour and fidelity to the only King who matters?

Preaching on this feast several years ago, Pope Francis

put it this way: "Jesus wants to make it understood that above and beyond political power there is another even greater one, which is not obtained by human means. He has come to Earth to exercise this power, which is love."

The words of a familiar hymn come back to us: "The

King of Love, my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never. I nothing lack if I am his, and he is mine forever."

As this liturgical year comes to a close and we turn toward Advent and preparing the way for the Lord at Christmas, this is a moment to search, reflect and, like Pilate,

to question. It is also a blessed opportunity to recommit our hearts to the King of Hearts, the one we know is the King of Love.

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

Saint — of the — week

By Renata Milan Morales



St Columbanus

St Columbanus: A man of courage

St Columbanus, also known as St Columban, was a prominent figure in early Irish monasticism who later became a missionary to continental Europe during the early Middle Ages. Born in 543 in Leinster, Ireland, Columbanus was well-educated from an early age. Being a handsome man, he was troubled by intense temptations and, seeking spiritual guidance, turned to a local religious woman who lived as a hermit. Inspired by her example, he chose to embrace the monastic life, despite his mother's strong opposition.

Columbanus first studied under Abbot Sinell of Cluaninis, and later joined the monastery led by Abbot Comgall, later canonised as St Comgall. It was here, under Comgall's direction, that Columbanus formally embraced monasticism. The Bangor

community's austere discipline and intellectual rigour drew a growing number of monks, and Columbanus was deeply influenced by this environment.

After years of secluded prayer and contemplation, Columbanus felt a calling to missionary work abroad. Around 583, he set out for Gaul with twelve fellow monks. Reaching France in 585, he found the Church there weakened by barbarian invasions and internal corruption. Welcomed by King Gontram of Burgundy, Columbanus and his companions established a monastery in a deserted Roman fortress in the mountains. Although remote, the monastery became a popular pilgrimage site and attracted so many vocations that two additional monasteries had to be established.

These monastic communities

remained under Columbanus's authority and adhered to the distinctly Irish monastic traditions in which he had been formed. As they grew, Columbanus himself increasingly sought solitude, spending extended periods in a hermitage and communicating with his monks through an intermediary.

However, Columbanus's adherence to Irish practices occasionally put him at odds with local bishops, particularly over the calculation of the date of Easter. His fearless stance against immorality also led him to rebuke the local king for his licentious lifestyle, insisting that he marry. This threatened the power of the queen mother, who had him deported to Ireland. However, his ship was driven back to shore by a storm, allowing him to continue his work on the continent, ultimately making his way to Italy.

In Italy, Columbanus was welcomed by the ruling Lombards but found the Church divided by heresies. He wrote against Arianism - a belief that denied the divinity of Christ - and urged Pope Boniface IV to help restore the Church's unity. Although he disagreed with the Pope on certain theological points, Columbanus expressed his loyalty to the papacy, affirming his commitment to the Chair of Peter.

In 614, the Lombard king granted Columbanus land in the town of Bobbio, where he founded his final monastery. Columbanus died there the following year, in 615. The abbey at Bobbio would endure as a centre of theological orthodoxy and cultural preservation for centuries, bearing witness to the lasting impact of St Columbanus and the Irish monastic tradition he established.

Apple intelligence and the new era of machines



Rohith Kinattukara

You are excited. Finally you are at the Apple store to get the latest MacBook, one might say, everyone's dream computer. You get back home and unbox your brand-new machine in all its glory and start typing away, sending emails, watching Netflix and maybe even doing some creative writing. Little do you know, Apple has a new AI system integrated inside the computer called 'Apple Intelligence'. Yes, they claimed that name as well, a very Apple move.

What is Apple Intelligence? It's the new AI model that is found in the latest iOS and MacOS updates, however, only the iPhone 15 pro and above, iPads with the A17 pro chip and above, and the MacBook's which have the Apple silicon chip (M-series) are eligible to use the latest AI model. The AI model uses something called 'private cloud compute' which also means, AI that doesn't need any cloud or internet access to generate different AI tools within the system. This means a very robust and privacy driven AI system that won't take your data

Confusing

This all seems very confusing. Let's take an example of a scenario where you will be using these tools Apple has provided. You are writing an email to a company for a horrible service they provided. Naturally, we would be so angry that our emotions would end up being literal words that come on writing. Maybe you finished writing the email, and you realise it's too harsh and you don't know how to make it polite and want to share the same frustration. That's where Apple intelligence comes into play. By just simply clicking the writing tools option, it gives you a set of tools that include proof reading, summarise, and rewrite with different tone of writing.

Here is the problem though, this is a scary start when it comes to technological advancement. AI like the one apple has introduced, could possibly alter human minds to think for themselves. Everyone would start to just right

click and make AI generate a Shakespeare styled email or text and it would come to a point where one might not understand the truth or reality. Pope Francis recently came out to say, "protect human dignity in this new era of machines." God has created us humans to have a mind of our own, to create great things with the mind He has provided while creating the universe. As Catholics, we shouldn't forget the purpose of why God has put us on this planet he created for us, and we should build innovations that will benefit us rather than destroy us.

However, AI taking over tasks would be far stretched in today's world. Yes, AI can do many things like doing analytics search, creating spreadsheets, helping programmers to solve problems within minutes and so on. In these scenarios, AI is a friend and not the enemy. It saves a lot of time and money for companies to get solutions done quickly.

“There would be times that you suddenly have a question before sleeping for example, and AI tools like ‘Catholic AI’ will definitely help”

The 'Catholic AI' App, which can be found on the AppStore (Apple) and the google play-store (Android) is a revolutionary AI tool that helps Catholics to understand the Bible better by asking question on that particular verse and additionally ask any questions regarding faith with their AI chat bot while also creating bible images to help picturise the scenario for easier understanding. Apps like this can help children who are curious about faith, learn more about Catholicism, and parents can integrate it to teach them on how to grow as a good catholic. There would be times that you suddenly have a question before sleeping for example, and AI tools like 'Catholic AI' will definitely help.

Another sector that needs to start accepting AI assistance is education. AI could alter brain thinking and promote laziness, but if educational institutes could start monitoring, training and educating students on AI tools, it will make students understand what is right and what is wrong and allow them to use it as tools rather than



Pope Francis watches a video at the Vatican with a delegation of representatives from the Fabbrica di San Pietro, Microsoft and other organisations involved in creating a "digital twin" of St Peter's Basilica using AI software. Photo: CNS/Vatican Media

some gateway escape. When AI like the Apple Intelligence is inside the system, there isn't an escaping anymore for educational institutions, like how they were reluctant to introduce the internet back in the early days of the internet boom.

Beyond

AI has come far and beyond than what people expected it to be. The prediction is said to be almost 10 years in advanced, which is a great feat when it comes to innovation and progress. Companies like Apple, who were pure heart hardware-based companies, are now turning their heads to AI and software, which comes to show, software innovations are the next big thing. Churches can use software to help promote Catholic churches to use Artificial Intelligence and virtual reality to showcase different historical visuals of the Church and events in the Bible or have virtual assistance (like chatbots) around the Church to help answer different questions for example.

A slight recommendation, a great start to have a better understanding on how to make maximum use of AI tools would be starting a course on prompt engineering. It teaches you how to write prompts, which would help the AI models to understand and learn along the way what exactly is required by you.

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

Can humanity survive the digital age?

Kimberley Heatherington

The answer - according to an Institute for Human Ecology panel convened at The Catholic University of America in Washington - is basically this: It depends.

There are "two big questions that hang over human life in digital reality right now," announced Ross Douthat, a media fellow with the institute and *New York Times* opinion columnist: "Is social media dehumanising us? Robbing us of creativity?" And, "is Artificial Intelligence replacing us?"

It's a paradox of both connection and disconnection. With increased smartphone use - an estimated 69% of the global population - come questions of authentic versus artificial community.

"It's actually become the vehicle through which we seek community," said Luke Burgis of Catholic University's Busch School of Business.

While smartphones and social media are, Burgis said, enhancing our social sense and awareness, the communicative pace can be dizzying and dislocating. "It's accelerated this kind of social sensory awareness that we have - but probably so fast that we have no idea what's happening."

The ascendancy of AI, Burgis said, issues a challenge to human creativity.

"I do think there's something to be said about doubling down on our human creative and artistic spirit - which I believe the AI can never replicate," declared Burgis. "So, sort of getting back to the kind of spiritual theology of creation, I think, is something that we'll

probably hear a lot more about in the next few years."

Schulman noted that public reaction to AI-generated art is indeed frequently negative. "There's already this kind of instinctive sense of dehumanisation and flattening," he observed.

Nonetheless, AI endlessly fascinates - but for a very basic reason, said Jonathan Askonas, an assistant professor of politics at Catholic University. "It's the thing that's most fascinating about any new technology - which is, what does it mean to be human? How does this reshape what it means to be human?"

While that remains an open question, "I think what it demands of us is a higher standard of creativity; of specialisation; of learning; of thought," Askonas suggested.

In June, at a Vatican-organised international convention on "Generative AI and Technocratic Paradigm," Pope Francis asked of AI, "Does it serve to satisfy the needs of humanity, to improve the well-being and integral development of people?" Or does it instead, the pontiff cautioned, "serve to enrich and increase the already high power of the few technological giants despite the dangers to humanity?"

OSV News asked Douthat what philosophical and spiritual conundrum is posed by the notion that AI could eventually acquire humanity -- that it could, in some way, become "human."

"You already have people who clearly think that their chatbots are functionally human, and that population is going to increase," replied Douthat. "And I think that's sort of the debate that Catholicism has to be prepared for."

✎ Kimberley Heatherington writes for OSV News from Virginia.

TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



What are we trying to achieve?

When you see tragedies reported in the media, you feel sympathy, but it can be impersonal, unless it hits close to home.

As I was watching the **Nine News** (RTE One, Tuesday) I was sad to hear of a man drowned in Galway. But then towards the end it was announced the deceased was singer-songwriter Johnny Duham. I was shocked because I knew him. We had corresponded about music, philosophical and religious matters. So many of Johnny's songs were spiritual in nature, in fact he was something of a mystic in his own way. He was prolific on Facebook during and since lockdown with his 'Songs from my Cell' series.

The news broke during **The John Creedon Show** (RTE Radio 1, Tuesday) and the host, always a supporter of Irish recordings, gave fulsome tribute and played several of his songs, his own versions, from his own albums. He described Johnny as "a champion for other songwriters as well". A segment on **Morning Ireland** (RTE Radio 1, Wednesday) was hit and miss and a bit lacklustre, but I did enjoy the heartfelt tribute later on **The Louise Duffy Show** (RTE Radio 1). It's a great



Johnny Duham

music show, with a tasteful and eclectic selection, and Johnny's music was a perfect fit for it. She spoke of "immense sadness" in the music business and an "outpouring of love" for him. She said he was "incredibly kind" to her when she started her show. She quoted producer and composer Bill Whelan who described Johnny as "a thoughtful, disciplined and spiritual songwriter." She played Christy Moore's version of **The Voyage**, his best-known song, a touching tribute to family life. One of the things I most admired

him for was his brave and public stand in defence of the 8th Amendment and of unborn children. This stand was not very common or popular in music circles.

Another person making an unusual stand is UK Health Secretary Wes Streeting who has come out against the latest effort at an assisted suicide bill due before the UK Parliament. In a clip on **Times Radio Breakfast** (Saturday), he spoke of concerns about "resource implications" and compulsion issues for doctors who have ethical or moral objec-

tions. The issue was then discussed by Rachael Maskell, Labour MP, of the group 'Dying Well' who are against the measure and Charle Falconer, Labour Peer, who is in favour. It was a rational and well-balanced discussion with no bias shown by presenter Chloe Tilly.

There was evidence of the opposite on many channels with the continuing demonisation of Donald Trump. Admittedly he does give them plenty of sticks to beat him with, the latest being his picks for various Government departments. If anything, they amplify my dread (and curiosity!) in relation to the incoming presidency. The worst example I heard was the host's comments on **The Pat Kenny Show** (Newstalk, Thursday). He described Trump's choices as a "basket of deplorables" (a Hilary Clinton original). Whether this is apt or not, we should expect more impartiality from the presenter of a current affairs show.

Speaking of dread, it's the actions of current President Biden that has me even more worried. I saw on **Sky News** on Sunday 17 that he was allowing Ukraine to use US missiles to attack targets inside Ukraine. Putin is not amused. So, is this a reckless provocation or a tactical

PICK OF THE WEEK

THE DIVINE SPARK

RTE Radio 1 Friday November 22, 10:05pm

New religious affairs series with Dearbhail McDonald - postponed last week due to a match.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

RTE One Sunday November 24, 10:30pm

Travellers' Rights advocate, Catherine Joyce Collins, tells Joe Duffy about a life in which she has fought tirelessly for justice.

UPFRONT WITH KATIE HANNON - IMMIGRATION

RTE One Monday November 25, 9:35pm

Journalist Katie Hannon hosts a live audience-centred current affairs programme where the public come face to face with those whose decisions impact directly on all our lives.

show of strength? On **Times Radio Breakfast** last Monday morning, former Putin advisor Sergi Markov spoke of "a pathway to nuclear war". Journalist Jenny Kleeman thought it looked more serious than it was. Biden, she reckoned, was concerned with his legacy after the disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. This was a warning to Russia, and she thought Russia was playing 'the long game', relying more on time to achieve its goals.

The issue of 'non-crime hate incidents' (NCHI) figured large on that show, following UK police visits to journalists' homes investigating tweets, and even

more bizarrely investigating children calling each other names in the schoolyard! Presenter Stig Abel put it pithily - "Being wrong and stupid is not a crime" - and wondered if people weren't too readily involving the police. Jenny Kleeman thought that it was up to teachers to solve schoolyard offences, and if there wasn't a crime then police should not be involved. Some, she said, were making personal injury from offence, and police should just not take such cases on board.

'Adults in the room' came to mind.

Music

Pat O'Kelly



Frank Maher Classical Music Awards

I'm always glad to give some recognition to our young musicians whether or not they are planning to make the art the basis of their careers. With the spotlight shining on them at this time of the year, Barbara Elliott of Touchstone Communications tells me that the 2024 Top Security/Frank Maher Classical Music Award - valued at €5,000 and Ireland's largest classical music competition for secondary schools - has been presented to pianist Ai Lin Sun (17) who studies at Dublin's Institute of Education.

Earlier this month she was one of the six finalists at the Royal College of Physicians where her programme comprised two of Rakhmaninov's



Frank Maher Classical Music Awards

Etude Tableaux and Beethoven's Op 57 *Appassionata* Sonata.

The awards were cre-

ated in 2001 by Top Security chairman Emmet O'Rafferty to honour the memory of his late music teacher Fr Frank Maher at Castleknock College. Commenting on the result Emmet O'Rafferty congratulated Ai Lin Sun and the other finalists for their excellent performances and reminded those present that Fr Maher's passion for classical music inspired many students and that it was a privilege to support talented young musicians as they embark on their professional journeys.

The award, established in 2001 by Emmet O'Rafferty, chairman of the firm 'Top Security', honours Vincentian Fr Frank Maher (1929-1998), who taught music and other

subjects at Castleknock College, Emmet O'Rafferty's alma mater. Fr Maher was also music director of the college liturgy who demanded a high standard from the boys and usually attained it.

The awards' aim, by the way, is to 'showcase outstanding young musical talent in Irish schools and is open to sixth year post-primary students of strings, woodwind, brass and piano. The €5,000 top prize must be used to attend a place of recognised tuition, a course of study in Ireland or abroad or on a purchase necessary for the development of their talent'. Ai Lin Sun plans using her prize money to take part in international music competitions.

The judging panel comprised Dr Gerard Gillen, emeritus professor of music at Maynooth University, internationally famed Dublin-born classical pianist Veronica McSwiney and Wolfgang Klos, professor of viola at the University of Music and the Performing Arts in Vienna.

Commenting on Ai Lin Sun's performances, Dr Gillen said 'she made a compelling impression with her combination of outstanding technical skill and expansive range of emotional expression that made for performances that were rich in colour, excitement, and imaginative insight. She is clearly a performer whose future will be followed with the keenest

interest'.

The other finalists, who each received a bursary of €500, were violinists Maedhbh Ní Chathasaigh (18), Ballincollig, Co Cork and Chloe O'Connor (18), Donnybrook, Dublin; cellist Oscar Casey (18), Douglas, Cork and pianists Aidan Keane (17), Trim, Co Meath and Amhlaoibh Ó Siocháin Ó Beoláin (18), Glanmire, Co Cork. Last year's winner, Joe O'Grady, is now studying music as part of his bachelor's degree at Harvard University in Massachusetts.

Some of the previous winners went on to other prestigious schools in New York, Vienna, Berlin, Hamburg and London.



BookReviews

Peter Costello



St Kilda: Scotland's lost island community

The Gravity of Feathers: Fame, Fortune and the Story of St Kilda,
by Andrew Fleming
(Birlinn, £25.00 / €30.00)

Peter Costello

The life and culture of our own off-shore islands here in Ireland has long played an important part in creating our ideas about what Irish culture as whole is. The books of the islands themselves all have given insights into lives lived in conditions very different from those of most of us.

So much so that this book about the legendary island of St Kilda some forty miles from the nearest other land, some 14 hours it seems by air even today.

But who was St Kilda, readers may ask, noting the title of this book. The truth is that there never was a St Kilda; she was a "saint" unknown to the medieval Church. The title comes from a language confusion.

The Scottish off-shore island, out in the wild seas of the North Atlantic from the nearest other part of Scotland, whose history this book explores did not take its name from her; she was invented to explain the island's name.

This strange sequence, however, is quite in keeping with the long and convoluted history of perhaps Scotland's most famous off-shore island, a place that has fascinated southerners since the middle ages.

Macleod

In the very first chapter the author reveals his discovery of evidence of Neolithic, even a Mesolithic occupation. He sees the islands as remote, as so many do. But he does not discuss the fact that the island stood in the stream of the sea-borne culture of the western European sea coast from very earlier times, along which nearly every major cultural change was carried down to the advent of the Iron Age.

But what we really know for certain about the

“On St Kilda there was a hard creed for a hard life, which had at times led to protest and even revolt by the congregation, not surprisingly”

island begins with Martin Martin's 1698 account of them, *A Voyage to St Kilda*. This was widely read as it seemed to reveal an ideal early community. It inspired Dr Johnson and Boswell to undertake their "Highland Jaunt" in 1773, as well as many others including the present reviewer. Like them I only got as far Iona, but by the 1970s St Kilda was beyond easy reach.

“The MacLeod of the day wanted to dispose of the islands he offered them at any price to potential buyers; the idea of giving it over to those who lived there never entered his mind”

The island was the property of the MacLeods -- to which family Martin was tutor. But they or rather their agent or rent collector - called a "tacks man" in Scotland - soaked the island of its produce for centuries.

This is truly the part of the story that will arouse anger in some readers. When at a later date the MacLeod of the day wanted to dispose of the islands he offered them at any price to potential buyers; the idea of giving it over to those who lived there never entered his mind.

For the landed gentry all land is wealth - even a speck in the distant ocean like St Kilda. In Scotland the "Land War" of the 1880s took a less aggressive form, not being backed by a political party. The Liberals held the Highlands, the emerging socialists industrial Clyde side. The islanders were

little thought of by either: they had votes alright, but nowhere to cast them.

Vocation

The religious life of the off-shore islanders in the two countries was very different. There were churches on our Aran, a Catholic chapel and Church of Ireland church. But on the Blaskets, as on so many other islands, to attend a service the islanders had to row ashore, weather permitting.

On St Kilda there was a Presbyterian minister; but the teaching of Calvin and Knox seem somehow to be ill-adapted to the hard life of the people. The minister and his wife seem to have provided little real spiritual comfort to the people, at least in the sense that their Catholicism seems to have done for our islanders. On St Kilda there was a hard creed for a hard life, which had at times led to protest and even revolt by the congregation, not surprisingly.

The creation of a summer steam ship link brought tourists, and also the possibility of a trade in the islanders' woven tweeds. These were sold in classy urban shops as a significant mark up; not much of the money they raised made its way back to St Kilda. The islands were often seen as "lazy" in the same way that Africans and Mexicans are by some Americans; yet the women were never far from their spinning wheels, the men toiled all night often at their looms. Indeed at times one feels one is reading about some exploited colony in Africa or Asia.

The most striking and intimate chapter is one based on the records kept in the first decades of the last century by the nurses posted to the island by the government. Here the information gets close to how life was really lived there.

One striking aspect of this history is that neither before or after the evacuation of St Kilda was any attempt made to get any one of the islanders to relate their own life stories, as was made on the Blaskets. Hence



The abandoned island today.



The sturdy island men in the summer of 1886.

“One striking aspect of this history is that neither before or after the evacuation of St Kilda was any attempt made to get any one of the islanders to relate their own life stories”

though the author's research has been wide ranging over many aspects of island life, when it comes to the mind and feelings of the natives none of them speak for themselves.

No-one gave them the inspiring exemplar of Maxim Gorki's *My Childhood*, that had such a profound effect on the Blasket writers; no Scottish Mrs

Kennedy came to ask questions of the island women about their experiences, and see to their recording. So over the inner life of St Kilda a great silence prevails.

This is a book which many people in Ireland will read with great interest, remarking as they do how different the course of modern history has been in the two

countries. From that point of view this is a book not to be missed. One wonders if the model of Irish independence (however flawed it may seem to some) will remain to have some effect on the future of Scotland in the post-Brexit decade to come.

The enigmatic title may well puzzle readers as well; but its origin is only explained some forty pages in that the author "couldn't resist" adopting it from a semi-facetious book of 1815. In general authors should resist such urges. For clarity of purpose, indeed mere truth, St Kilda is better served by a straightforward title for a place with "a history like no other".

“The islands were often seen as “lazy” in the same way that Africans and Mexicans are by some Americans; yet the women were never far from their spinning wheels, the men toiled all night often at their looms”

Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

The emerging musical glory of Medieval Europe

“With Angels and Archangels”: Sharing the Worship of Heaven. Bible, Poetry Liturgy and Devotion in the Middle Ages, by John Blakesley (Gracewing, £15.99 / €19.25)

Peter Costello

For mainstream theologians this sort of liturgical poetry is a rather narrow interest. It addresses not central issues in relation to the understanding and presentation of the Eucharist, but simply deals with matters of changing presentational style. It often arises too from a confusion of aesthetic feelings with a mystical experience, some think.

Nevertheless the use of hymns and other musical forms is now for many an essential even integral feature of Christian worship. This, the author, admits is often taken for granted.

Hymns

The use of hymns is a development usually credited to St Ambrose of Milan (c. 339-397), to whom tradition credits the composition of the *Te Deum*. For half a millennium hymns in the style of St Ambrose were (the author remarks) “the only legitimate form of liturgical poetry. These non-scriptural developments were



Hildegard of Bingen composing music.

“Rising from the humble folk to the Almighty Creator enthroned in power like an emperor of creations”

seen by many as a way of reinforcing the truths of the Gospel especially in a society which was still largely illiterate.

It these developments that are discussed in the ten compact chapters of this book. He isolated a set of significant figures Notker, the so-called “Stammer of St Gall”, the styles of Paris and

Winchester, and the contribution of Hildegard of Bingen and Elizabeth of Schönau.

In his final chapters he draws together the themes of the disparate approaches into an essay on sharing in the worship of heaven, with the Angels and Archangels. The highly literate person involved in contrast with the mass of the Christian popu-

Following Jesus: “The Way, the Truth and the Life”

Praying with the Bible: An Ignatian Guide, by Nikolas Sintobin (Messenger Publications, €14.95 / £12.95)

Peter Costello

This book, written in a very accessible style, provides lessons in reading the scriptures from an Ignatian point of view and should find a wide readership.

At the very start of the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius announces that the first step has to be “composition, seeing the place”. I have always thought this simple guiding phrase, “*Viendo el lugar*”, seeing the place, is paradoxically the very heart of the exercises, the imaginative realisation of the gospel scene as an initial step to insight. It lays the emphasis on the “sight” of insight.

Guidance

Nikolas Sintobin, is a Flemish Jesuit, who has published three other books with Messenger Publications, drawing on his long experience as a teacher and councillor.

He opens with some fifty tips for praying with the Bible in a general way, expelling the essential structure of why, where and how to pray. For those seeking to follow “the way” Sintobin is a patient, revealing and kindly guide.

He follows this with an exemplar: a section on guided prayer drawn from *Matthew* 14: 22-33. All of this fills some 50 pages or so, a good half of the book.

“The reader has a balanced approach of preparation and then performance”

The section prepares and primes the readers to literally follow Jesus through a series of texts that illustrate the individual relations, with God, his sense of “evil and sin” in both the world and one’s self. He then turns, however, to following the life of Jesus, through his public career, the days of the Pas-



Jesus with his followers, from a painting by J. J. Tissot.

sion, and the fulfilment of the Resurrection.

This takes some 60 pages, forming the second half of the book. So the reader has a balanced approach of preparation and then performance.

So, how does this book suggest the individual about the enterprise of using passages from the Bible as a frame? He does not propose reading the Bible from the beginning, a task that these days would daunt many. Instead he offers a series of some fifty passages largely from the gospels, but also from the prophets and the psalms, sources which for centuries have informed the ideas of all Christians.

lation. One might almost see a relationship with the facades of the Gothic cathedrals of Europe on which are carved in stone the various ranks and orders of the Christians universe, rising from the humble folk to the Almighty Creator enthroned in power like an emperor of creations.

The author emphasises the sense of communion which the middle ages created, and which by implication many think of as lost in the Church today. But for many this musical tradition epitomises what the Church really is, as least for them, whatever theologians more closely based on the actual

terms of the gospels might wish to bring to people’s minds and hearts today.

Yet this would be, as theologians suggest, to refocus the centre away from the Eucharist, where it might more properly be placed, where in the view of most Christians’ communion essentially takes place.

The fabric of the creative imagination

Peter Costello

Currently visitors can enjoy two exhibitions related by the materials used at the Coach House Gallery, adjacent to the always interesting Chester Beatty Library and Gallery, in the extensive grounds of Dublin Castle.

These are entitled respectively *Roots: A dialogue in textile and poetry* and *Beyond Chaos: Textile Journey Collective*.

The first show mounted by “*Contemporary Textile Art*” is by *element 15 collective* draws its inspiration directly from the always moving and startlingly evocative poems of Jane Clarke, including her most recent collection *A Change of Air* (Bloodaxe Books, £10.99 / €13.25), which critic Jane Taylor remarked “deals with contemporary and historic

rural life in Ireland, in particular its crafts and traditions.”

And it is this aspect which the artists responded to in a series of very individual yet evocative images of a now vanished Ireland. Their work informs reactions to poems, but these are themselves very effective and affecting.

“Those woven items we take for granted in everyday life will provide their emerging artist with creative ideas”

The second exhibition, curated by Sara Ross, also deploys the nature and texture of fabrics too by the Textile Collective, a union of all-island art practitioners

with various access needs at all stages of their careers. Inevitably this show is more disparate, but it is its so very varied nature that makes for visitor interest, though it lacks the unity provided to *Roots* by Jane Clarke’s poetry.

Families with budding artists will find that the use of those woven items we take for granted in everyday life will provide their emerging artist with creative ideas too, to work with what is to hand to create something new and complex out of what is essentially simple and to hand (an echo here perhaps of the ancient myth of humanity’s own creation from clay).

Both exhibitions run until January 19, 2025 at The Kane Room, The Coach House Gallery, Dublin Castle, Dame Street, Dublin 2; 10.00 am to 4 pm; admission is free.



One of the art creations in the *Roots* exhibition.

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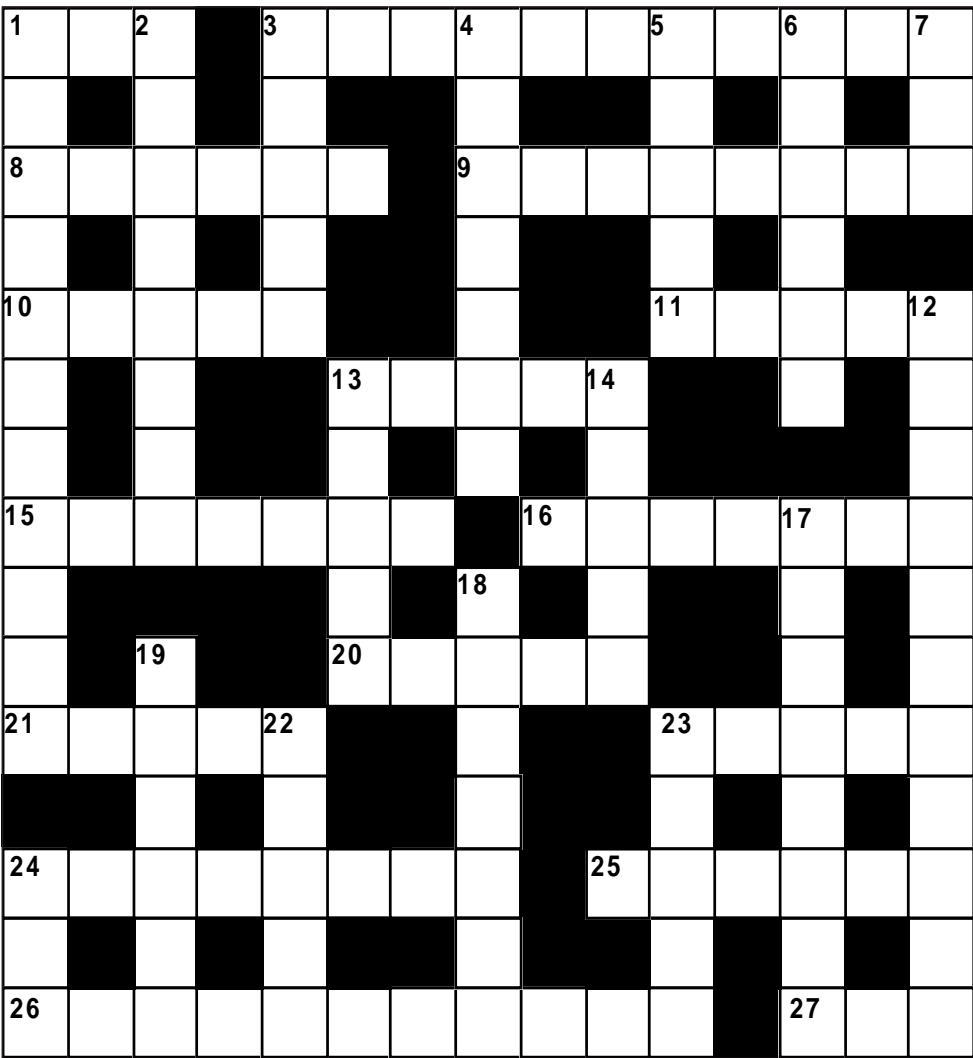
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Crossword

Gordius 690

- Across**
- 1 Evergreen tree (3)
 - 3 Type of underwear (5,6)
 - 8 Haphazard (6)
 - 9 Huge (8)
 - 10 City in Northern France (5)
 - 11 Feats, actions (5)
 - 13 Oriental sleeping mat (5)
 - 15 Cushion to kneel on in church (7)
 - 16 Type of tool (7)
 - 20 Late (5)
 - 21 The underground parts of a plant (5)
 - 23 Hawaiian greeting (5)
 - 24 Mediterranean island (8)
 - 25 Peaceful (6)
 - 26 When a film is billed thus, every actor in the movie is famous and respected (3-4,4)
 - 27 Mesh (3)

- Down**
- 1 Use it to get the flames going (11)
 - 2 Pretty curls (8)
 - 3 Alcohol (5)
 - 4 Raise (7)
 - 5 Historic ruler of Judaea (5)
 - 6 Took part in civil disturbance (6)
 - 7 Distress signal (1.1.1.)



- 12 Spy (6,5)
- 13 One part of the surface of a gemstone (5)
- 14 Diaper (5)
- 17 Historic French emperor (8)
- 18 Old-fashioned, no longer in ordinary language (7)
- 19 Paddock (6)
- 22 Fast (5)

SOLUTIONS, NOVEMBER 14

GORDIUS No. 689

Across

1 Boarding pass 7 Her 9 Weak 10 Locust 11 Spud 14 Dozen 15 Loire 16 Plum 18 Cloak 21 Tribe 22 Adult 23 Reset 24 Eden 25 Anger 26 Abyss 29 Iowa 33 Palace 34 List 36 Pad 37 Intermediary

Down

1 Bee 2 Asks 3 Dill 4 Nacho 5 Paste 6 Shop 8 Redemptorist 9 Will o' the wisp 12 Finite 13 Peter 14 Ducks 17 Lounge 19 Oaths 20 Kayak 27 Blaze 28 Swarm 30 Wadi 31 Lead 32 Ulna 35 Spy

Sudoku Corner

560

Easy

			1	4		5	8	
		4		7	9		3	
1								
	4				8			
9		6	2		1	8		3
			7				1	
								6
	5		8	1		7		
	6	2		9	3			

Hard

5		1			6	3		4
	2	3	7		9			
		7						
	5		6	8				
6	3						5	1
				4	3		9	
						9		
			3		7	6	4	
3		6	4			2		7

Last week's Easy 559

9	5	8	7	6	1	2	3	4
4	7	3	9	5	2	6	8	1
1	2	6	8	3	4	5	7	9
5	3	4	1	7	6	8	9	2
7	9	1	2	8	3	4	5	6
6	8	2	5	4	9	7	1	3
8	1	9	6	2	5	3	4	7
3	6	7	4	9	8	1	2	5
2	4	5	3	1	7	9	6	8

Last week's Hard 559

8	2	9	5	7	6	3	1	4
6	1	4	9	2	3	8	7	5
3	5	7	1	8	4	9	2	6
5	9	2	6	3	1	7	4	8
4	8	1	2	5	7	6	3	9
7	3	6	4	9	8	2	5	1
2	4	3	8	1	9	5	6	7
1	7	8	3	6	5	4	9	2
9	6	5	7	4	2	1	8	3

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Notebook

Fr Martin Delaney



The contribution of women to the Church

I can recall, when living in the United States almost twenty years ago, listening to an interview on National Public Radio with Mary Robinson. The American interviewer enthusiastically introduced Mrs Robinson as the first ever woman to be President of Ireland. During the interview Mrs Robinson was asked if she could see the day when a woman would be elected President of The United States. Our former president gave an interesting answer when she said that she was hopeful but that the first female president of the USA would probably have to come from the right, the conservative wing of American politics.

I thought of those words of Mrs Robinson again last week when, for the second time in eight years the people in America rejected a woman candidate for president in favour of a man who, to quote one of our former Taoisigh, is somewhat of "flawed pedigree". I know there were many reasons why Kamala Harris was not elected but you cannot get away from the basic fact that there is a significant number of people in the USA who even in 2024 cannot countenance the idea of a woman holding the highest office in the land.

Just a few weeks before the US election The Synod on Synodality called by Pope Francis ended in Rome



Mrs Robinson

after two years of deliberation. The idea of the synod was to chart a new way forward for our Church at every level. One of the hopes of many people leading up to that gathering was that there would be a new recognition of the role of women in the Church particularly in leadership and perhaps even ordination, at least as deacons. Despite some generous language in the final document, it is very clear that there is huge opposition to even look at women having anything like an equal role in Church leadership and ministry. However, as every reader of this paper knows, this Church of ours cannot survive without the incredible contribution of women at every level.

When it comes to discrimination against women and girls we tend to

From For Grief by John O'Donohue

When you lose someone you love,
Your life becomes strange,
The ground beneath you gets fragile,
Your thoughts make your eyes unsure;
And some dead echo drags your voice down
Where words have no confidence.
Your heart has grown heavy with loss;
And though this loss has wounded others too,
No one knows what has been taken from you
When the silence of absence deepens.

Flickers of guilt kindle regret
For all that was left unsaid or

undone.

There are days when you wake up happy;
Again inside the fullness of life,
Until the moment breaks
And you are thrown back
Onto the black tide of loss.

Gradually, you will learn acquaintance
With the invisible form of your departed;
And, when the work of grief is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time.

What a life is worth!

A life insurance salesman visited a woman who had recently been widowed. For 35 years her late husband had contributed to a substantial life insurance policy. So, the salesman said to her, "Your husband often told me how determined he was that you would be well provided for after he was gone. And so here I am," he continued, "to present you as the sole beneficiary, with this cheque for €500,000" The widow tearfully accepted the cheque. She wiped her eyes and said, "but nothing can replace that wonderful husband of mine who left me this €500,000. And I can tell you this for certain: I'd give at least half of it now to have him back"



think of countries like Afghanistan where the Taliban don't want females to be educated. We think of some of the Arab cultures that confine women to a second-class role in society. Our Church and almost all western countries, particularly the United States are very vocal in their criticism of such discrimination but, is there a whiff of hypocrisy and double standards here? My sad conclusion is that these past

few weeks have not been the best of times for women in terms of equal access to participation and leadership in both the Catholic Church and in what is the most powerful country in the world. It is hard to avoid the reality that in so many parts of the world and in various institutions, many groups of people and women, are still discriminated against in very powerful ways.



A bishop in Mozambique badly needs funds to construct a parish church

Bishop Diamantino Antunes IMC of Tete in Mozambique has written to The Little Way Association to tell us of the situation in the new parish of St Martin de Porres in Mpadue. A parish church will be an immense blessing to this parish where Catholics now pray in the open air, and Bishop Diamantino earnestly hopes The Little Way can help him.

"Located in central Mozambique the population of the diocese is estimated to be 3 million, of whom 700,000 are Catholics," the bishop writes. "Evangelization began here with the arrival of Jesuit Fathers in the sixteenth century. The future parish church of St Martin is located in the surroundings of the city of Tete. The people here suffer from poor housing and much poverty, both material and spiritual. Our Catholics have to pray under trees in the parish grounds and there are many sects here which prey on the faithful, making them false promises of healing and prosperity.

"The new church will improve pastoral care and provide a proper setting for the celebration of the Eucharist, catechesis and formation meetings. The new church, when finished, will make it possible to carry out more effective religious and social work among the children, young people and the poorest, in particular.

"May Saint Therese, whose great desire was always to be childlike in her approach to God, inspire your supporters in that spirit to give generously to our appeal. I assure you that all donations will be much appreciated and will help us greatly with this project."

Please can you help?

Every euro you send will be gratefully received, and will be sent without deduction to Bishop Diamantino in Mozambique, to build the parish church of St Martin de Porres.



"A word or a smile is often enough to put fresh life in a despondent soul." - St Therese

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