

The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 91. DECEMBER 2023

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See inside...



Advent Talks & Carols - Limavady.



Bambinelli Blessing - Lavey.



Camogs' 80th Anniversary - Greenlough.



Wishing all a blessed celebration of the birth of Our Saviour, Jesus

Sisters, Paige and Esme Kelly, Desertmartin Parish, excited for Christmas on a visit to St Patrick's Church Crib, Keenaught, on Bambinelli Sunday.



St Aengus' NS Nativity Stars - Bridgend.



St Joseph's Church Golden Jubilee - Ballyscullion.



St Patrick's Church 50th - Desertmartin.



St Patrick's PS 50th - Castlederg

People in focus



Dana.



Lawrence Moore RIP, Waterside.



Natasha O'Connor, Waterside.



Pat Breslin, Strabane.



Shauna Clifford, Ballymagroarty.

Also featuring: St Aengus' NS stars shine at Burt Carol Service; St Eugene's PS new play area blessed; Loreto Omagh girls fundraising for Lusaka project; Syro Malabar community news; New Cloughcor Grotto marks 200th anniversary; Dungiven commissions new Eucharistic Ministers; City parishes blessed through Divine Child Novena; Children's Catechism Club; Young Writers share thoughts; Cathedral Carols enjoyed by all; Christmas Afternoon Tea treat in Cathedral Hall; Banagher SVP festive gathering; Legion of Mary inspiring retreat; Long Tower Men's time of prayer; Diocesan Safeguarding Mass; Derry Re-union for Holy Land Pilgrims; Fatima pilgrimage reflection; Rosary feature; Vocations news; Eucharistic feature; Diary Dates; Quiz... and much more...

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Lord, help us to build a society that is pleasing to You

by Shauna Clifford

THIS December, the Holy Father, Pope Francis has invited us to join with him in his prayer intention of praying for people with disabilities. He has specifically asked that we pray that "People living with disabilities may be at the centre of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusive programs which value their active participation"

I have a disability and have been a wheelchair user all my life. In February, of this year, I became a Consecrated Virgin Bride of Christ within the Derry Diocese.

There are many people in society living with disabilities, both adults and children. Those disabilities may be physical,

sensory, learning related, hidden, or a disability relating to mental health. Some people could be living with multiple disabilities.

Whether you are a person living with or without a disability, we were all created and given life by God. We are unique individuals and we can all do something unique for God.

Mother Teresa once said, "What I can do for God, you can't do, and what you can do for God, I can't do."

Pope Francis, through his prayer intention, in a sense is also asking us to value and respect each other. It is important to remember that behind every disability there is a person, and to be mindful of this when planning and providing services

for people with disabilities.

People's perceptions and attitudes towards people with disabilities have been changing over the years. Understanding and knowledge about different disabilities is continuing to develop over time, but there is still a long way to go, with much room for improvement.

It is an ongoing process and we all have a responsibility to help change perceptions and attitudes in a positive way in our society, including me. I know what it is like living as a wheelchair user, but there are many people with different types of disabilities and I am not an expert on disability. I am not an expert on anything in life. God is the expert, not me.

Different disabilities bring their

own challenges, as with anything in life, however, God told us that He would not leave us and that He would be with us until the end of time. He also told us to take up our cross and follow Him.

Pope Francis has asked us to pray for people with disabilities, in particular, the removal of physical and attitudinal barriers that hinder our full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

"The joy that you have freely received from God, please, freely give away: So many people are waiting for it! So many are waiting for it from you!" (Pope Francis)

Lord Jesus, Help us to see each

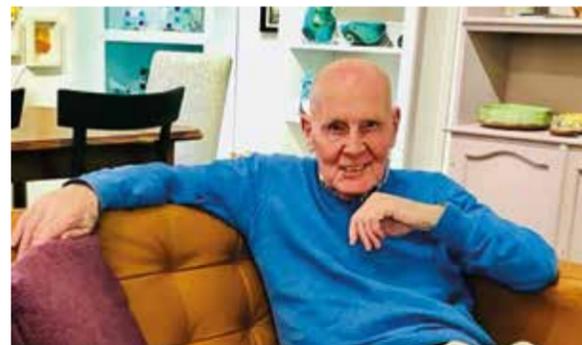


Shauna Clifford, Holy Family Parish, Ballymagroarty, Derry

other as You see us, we are all created in Your image and our hearts are connected to You. We ask that You lead and guide us, helping to create and build a society that is pleasing to You. Amen

A man of strong faith, committed to family, friends and parish...

Fondly remembering the late Lawrence Moore



WORK on this December edition was carried out amidst the sad news of the passing of Waterside parishioner, Lawrence Moore, who had a great interest in the mission of "The Net" and was a much appreciated source of advice and encouragement in the period of preparation for its Easter 2015 launch publication, and beyond.

A trusted friend and mentor, Lawrence's vast knowledge and sense of humour made him an entertaining conversationalist and writer, with a unique style in painting a picture with words. Generous in his willingness to help, he happily took on producing 'Quiz Time' each month for "The Net" until his health started to deteriorate, and he then passed it to his son, Lorny, to take on in a seamless hand-over, knowing that he would be equally committed.

Born on Christmas Day, 1937, Lawrence Noel was blessed with a warm, joyous smile that sparked a twinkle in his eyes and triggered smiles in return.

The second eldest in the family of 10 born to Alex and Martha, Lawrence began his working life as a 14-year-old, to help out with the running of the family home.

As was the way, he had several jobs throughout his working life, including BSR, DuPont, Courtaulds, Hutchinson, and the Belfast Telegraph, where he worked for 33 years until retirement.

Lawrence enjoyed playing sport in his spare time, and while he played football as a school boy, cricket became his passion as a teenager when he joined Waterside Cricket Club, so much so that he ended up playing for 30 years, making many life-time

friends.

Having met the love of his life, Bridget, in 1957, the couple got married in January 1959 and welcomed their first-born, Mary, at the end of that year. Some six years later, they suffered the sadness of their infant son, Daniel, passing away in 1966.

The family spent time in several houses before settling in Violet Street, Waterside, almost 50 years ago. Sadly, life changed greatly for the family when Bridget died in 1988 following a long battle with illness, aged only 48.

In later years, Lawrence took the opportunity to travel, holidaying with friends across Europe, and making several visits to family in the US and Canada.

Speaking at the Requiem Mass in St Columba's Church, Chapel Road, on Sunday, November 26, Fr Michael Canny, VG PP, noted that Lawrence had been heavily involved in the life of the local community: "He was a long-time member of the Legion of Mary, and served for many years on the Waterside Parish Council.

"Lawrence was very involved in our Parish Visitation Group, visiting the old and housebound, living out the Gospel of today; I was sick and you visited me."

He added: "Lawrence's health

took a downturn over the past five years, but he was to acknowledge many times during those years that he was blessed to have many good people around him.

"He was a man of faith, firmly believing in Jesus, and that faith was nourished by his attendance at Mass and time spent in prayer. I am confident that when he met Jesus in death a few days ago, he met Him not as a stranger but as a friend."

Passing peacefully in Dale View Nursing Home, where he had resided for the last 10 months of his life, the 85-year-old will be sadly missed, especially by his devoted family, who were always there for him and particularly rallied round during the past five years in helping to care for him.

Very much their hero, his sons and daughters recall their father as being very kind and a hard worker, with a simple but deep faith that he held onto and took comfort and strength from, right up to the end of his life.

"He was a very good, solid father," remarked Lorny, adding: "His commitment was to his family. Whatever he had, we had. He never kept anything for himself.

"And, he had strong morals, which I respected him for. I just thought that whatever he did was

the right thing to do. He would have had to go to Confession if he felt that he had spoken out of turn. He had a lovely faith, right up to the end, and he stuck by it rigidly. His belief in God made him the person that he was. He was very committed and a top confidante."

"As well as being involved in the parish, he would have worked with the SDLP when there was a chance of peace, and he was very committed to the Legion of Mary."

The large attendance at Lawrence's funeral reflected the high esteem in which he was held, and the choir that he had loved to sing with paid their own tribute to him with their beautiful singing at his Requiem Mass.

He is survived by his daughters and sons, Mary, Lawrence, Joan, Bridgeen, Paul, Daniel, Geraldine, Declan and Sara, his many grandchildren and great-children, his long-term companion Mary, and siblings, Mavis, Alex, Brendan, Frances, Dolores, Margaret and Anna. He was predeceased by his brothers, Eamonn and Jim.

Lawrence was laid to rest in St Mary's Cemetery, Ardmore. May he rest in peace.

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

Contacting us:

If you have a story that you would like to share or an event you would like covered by The Net, just drop an email to editorthenet15@gmail.com or ring/text 07809292852

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

Supporting us:

The mission of 'The NET' is to share the fruits of the faith in homes, parishes and schools across the Diocese of Derry, and be a source of hope and encouragement in living our Catholic faith each day.

'The NET' is a Lay Apostolate that has the blessing of our Bishop, Most Rev Donal McKeown.

With no fixed charge to read this publication, donations would be most welcome to help cover costs. Annual accounts will be available to view on request.

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The ministry of

The NET

was dedicated to Our Lady, through the intercession of St Maximilian Kolbe, in a ceremony celebrated by Bishop Donal McKeown on August 14, 2019.

Climbing frames...balancing games...a stepping stone or two...

All kinds of wonderful fun for St Eugene's primary children



THE children attending St Eugene's PS in the Cathedral Parish, in Derry, got an early Christmas gift when their colourful new playgrounds were blessed by Bishop Donal, before being officially opened by former pupil and singing star, Dana.

Congratulating all involved in the provision of the new play facilities, the Bishop remarked: "It is great to see a school which is determined to make the best possible provision for all of its students.

"St Eugene's PS has worked within the limitation of its site to provide a bright and stimulating environment for the children. It all reflects the Catholic ethos, which believes in a God who believes in people."

He added: "The number of newcomer children in St Eugene's also reflects the conviction in Catholic education that is open and a place where diversity of cultures and religion can flourish together."

Having attended St Eugene's in her primary school years, before going on to be the first Irish winner of the Eurovision Song Contest, in 1970, with 'All Kinds of Everything', aged 18, Dana (Rosemary Brown) was delighted to return to cut the ribbon for the official opening of wonderful, eco-friendly play facilities, assisted by her primary school friend, Maura Carlin.

The opening ceremony was also attended by the Mayor, Patricia Logue, Board of Governors members, parents and principals

from neighbouring schools.

Dana's delight was shared by the principal, Ms Carol Duffy, who expressed deep gratitude to the anonymous benefactor, a former pupil of the school, who had approached her a few years ago with the offer to install new play facilities for the children.

She commented: "The new playground will be beneficial to children of all ages at the school, and we were keen to choose equipment that was eco-friendly and long lasting to provide enjoyment for

pupils for many years to come.

"It was a pleasure to see the smiles on the children's faces as they returned in September and saw the new playground for the first time. And we now have it officially opened, and by a former St Eugene's pupil too."

Following the opening ceremony, the visitors enjoyed refreshments in the assembly hall while being entertained by the school choir singing a few well-chosen songs, including 'All Kinds of Everything' especially for Dana.



Travelling to Zambia in 2024 to assist in a Spirit of Paul McGirr project...

Loreto girls fundraising for Lusaka Tyrone School

LORETO Grammar School, in Omagh, continues to offer its students opportunities to use their time and skills to help others less fortunate, with a group preparing to go to Zambia in 2024 to work on the Spirit of Paul McGirr Foundation's school project in Lusaka.

Speaking to 'The Net', Ms Lisa Ryan, the school's acting vice-principal for Pastoral Care & Welfare, who will be assisting and travelling with the group of 12 Loreto girls to Lusaka next October, noted that it was the second time for the project to run in the school.

She explained that the girls, who will be in Y13 when they travel, were currently fundraising for the development of a Home Economics classroom and food store, which will include the provision of ovens, cooking utensils, sinks, cupboards, hot water, toilets, etc, at the secondary Tyrone School, Zambia, built by the Spirit of Paul McGirr Foundation.

She continued: "It is hoped that this unit will be used to prepare a daily meal for up to 800 pupils who attend the school in Lusaka."

"We have pledged to kick-start Phase 1 with £13,000-£15,000", said Ms Ryan, adding: "It is going

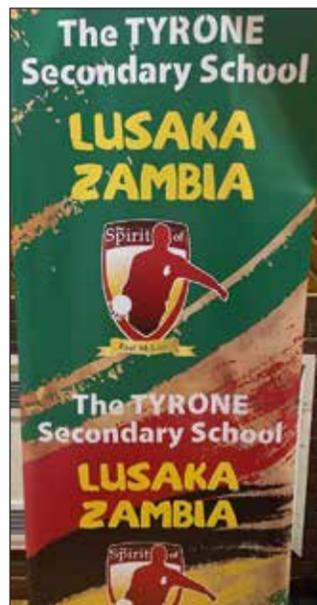
very well at the minute. We have a number of different fundraising events in the girls' local parishes. The first one we had outside of school was a Loreto-to-Lusaka Quiz Night in Aghyaran, which was a fabulous night. One of the students held it in conjunction with her family. There were a lot of sponsors who sponsored each round of the Quiz.

"We also had a 5K Family Fun Run on December 16 in Loughmacrory, and on December 15 we drew our raffle for a hamper of BPerfect cosmetic products worth over £120 in Bradley's Pharmacy, that was donated. In the New Year, on March 1, we will have a Gala Evening in The Silver Birch Hotel, Omagh."

Ms Ryan went on to say: "When the girls are out in Lusaka, they will be very much working WSon the ground with the pupils at Tyrone School, using their skills and talents across various areas.

The Spirit of Paul McGirr Foundation was established in 2007, ten years after the fatal injury of 18-year-old Paul McGirr, Dromore, during a GAA match in Omagh, to remember his spirited approach to life.

The charity works with the Chanda community in Lusaka to design, fund and construct buildings which create safe spaces that enable community members to realise their full potential. It carries out its works in collaboration with the SMA Order in the parish there, which is a large, unplanned settlement characterised by high levels of deprivation and poverty.



Highlighting value of faith schools at Golden Jubilee Mass, Bishop Donal commended...

Believing in faith, life and learning at St Patrick's Castlederg



THE 50th anniversary of St Patrick's Primary School as a centre of education in Castlederg was a wonderful occasion for celebrating and reminiscing on Friday, December 1, with past and present pupils and staff members, parents and parishioners amongst those who gathered to mark the occasion.

The principal of the Castlefin Road school and nursery unit, Mr Brian McGurk hailed the Golden Jubilee a great night of celebration, expressing his deep appreciation to Bishop Donal for celebrating the Mass in St Patrick's Church and to Fr Paul Fraser, PP, and the Parish Committee for their contributions.

During his homily, Bishop Donal told the pupils that while there have been many changes in the last half a century, such as mobile phones, computers and Google Classroom, the school's motto - Faith, Life, Learning - was as important in their grandparents' school years as it is today.

"Those who built this new school," he noted, "knew that

a school was not merely a place where children were sent to be educated and get all the information they needed. If we work on the basis that children sleep for eight hours a day, they spend about 18% of their waking hours in school each year. But children are sponges who are learning all the time. They learn many important things in the classroom - but they learn so much more at home, with friends, on the sports field, in the community and on-line.

"That is why it seems to me a silly idea that we expect schools to teach all sorts of things about so many issues - and then blame the teachers when things go wrong. You celebrate your history as a school which seeks to work with the community and to build on what the family and the community hands on."

He added: "Some people may ask why faith comes before life and learning. But faith is not just a little bit of religious knowledge that you have to learn off in your RE class and that is separate from life or learning. Faith is a way of

looking at life, a lens through which you view and make sense of what is going on in the world around you and the various subjects that you study.

"Some people believe that there is nothing except what we can see and touch. Life is mainly about making the most of what we have and then we die. But faith says that life has a meaning - even when we make mistakes, even when it seems unfair, even when some people appear to get life easier than others.

"In a world of celebrities and fame for a few, faith says that nobody's life is unimportant, that no good act is a waste of time, that looking after number one brings more loneliness than joy. Faith says that life to the full comes from being part of a community, for sharing your talents with others and by believing that none of us is as smart as all of us."

Stating that some people in society want to remove any reference to faith from schools, Bishop Donal remarked: "They say that faith makes people narrow minded and does not help them to learn to be good people. But I take seriously the words of Jesus, who said that He had come so that we might have life and have it to the full.

"The message that Jesus brought about life and learning about the world was simple - and amazing. He said that we are all made in the image and likeness of God, whether we are famous and talented or not; even when we make mistakes, forgiveness is always available because Jesus died on the Cross to take away

the sins of the world; our bodies are not toys to be played with but temples of the Holy Spirit, and that our bodies will be raised up on the Last Day.

"And that is the good news about our dignity and our destiny that some politicians want to have banned from school. They seem to be suggesting that your parish community should not be able to send children to a school environment which reinforces a way of looking at life and love."

Highlighting that the amazing thing about faith schools elsewhere around the world is that they are very popular, partly because of the quality of the education that they offer, Bishop Donal added: "Maybe it is because, where faith says that people are of eternal value and that no child is a mistake, we know that we can expect great things for and from everybody. Don't be embarrassed about offering your way of looking at faith, life and learning."

Welcoming the occasion as "a chance for young and old to celebrate who you are, that you have been on this site for 50 years and how you have great plans for the future", he concluded: "Communities need good schools - and schools need supportive communities. You have both here. Cherish them together and the next generation will be proud of you for believing in faith, life and learning."

After Mass, everyone was invited across the road to St Patrick's Hall for some refreshments, including a slice of the scrumptious anniversary cake.



Celebrating annual Diocesan Safeguarding Mass, Bishop Donal led... Prayer for respectful and life-giving relationships to be hallmark of Church



THE annual Diocesan Mass for Safeguarding Personnel was celebrated in St Eugene's Cathedral on the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Celebrating the Mass, Bishop Donal reflected on how the world, at the present time, can seem like "a very dangerous place", with wars, disasters, accidents, domestic and street violence, reports of sexual assault a workplaces, from operating theatres to film studios.

He went on to say that the Church's safeguarding policies were "not merely bureaucracy to prevent abuse", but to "create healthy environments where young and old, male and female feel respected and cherished".

"Our Lady of Sorrows was a victim," he noted, who knew about abuses of power, and he highlighted how she had been

told that her heart too would be pierced, had given birth in a stable in Bethlehem, had been a refugee from persecution by Herod, and had stood at the foot of the Cross as her Son was put to death unjustly.

"So, we come together to remember those in our Diocese who have suffered any sort of abuse in church contexts," said Bishop Donal, acknowledging that the effects of abuse "can do enormous emotional and spiritual damage".

He added: "We remember those who work tirelessly in parishes to protect children and vulnerable adults, and everyone.

"We pray that we will be able to promote life-giving, loving communities of faith in a dangerous world, and model human nature at its best."

Saying that Church renewal



Mrs Briege O'Neill, Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, and, seated, Mrs Marie Gormley, Designated Liaison Person.

was "not merely structural but cultural," Bishop Donal concluded with a prayer for "grace in our communities as they face an uncertain future, so

that healthy, respectful and live-giving relationships will be our hallmark."

Refreshments were served afterwards in the Cathedral Hall.



'Syro Malabar Community News by John Augustine Joseph

Sunday School students encouraged in faith studies

THE Sunday School of the Syro Malabar community in Derry was inaugurated by Fr Joshy Parokkaran, for the year 2023–2024, in a small ceremony after Holy Qurbana on the First Sunday of September.

The headmaster, Mr Joseph Augustine welcomed the new and continuing students, and encouraged them to persevere in their studies of the faith this year.

The Parish Trustee, Mr Jolly Vandanath, wished God's blessings to the students. Afterwards, a small prayer service was led by the Sunday School teachers.

After this, the youth of the parish who had participated in the Football tournament in Belfast, run by the SMYM (Syro Malabar Youth Movement), were congratulated on the victory in the tournament.



Fr Joshy Parokkaran, chaplain to the Syro Malabar community

Cherupushpa Mission League inauguration

THE Cherupushpa Mission League (CML) was inaugurated in our community in October by Fr Michael Canny, PP Waterside. The CML is a lay initiative of the Syro Malabar church which was established in 1947, after Indian Independence, to promote Indian vocations and missionaries.

Cherupushpa means 'the little flower' and refers to St Therese of Lisieux, who is the chief patron saint of the CML.

Fr Joshy delivered the presidential speech for the inauguration, and the director of the CML in our community, Mr Anil Thomas, facilitated the function. The

animators (volunteers) of the CML organised the event.

An array of competitions (Bible Fest) took place in the Sunday School, ranging from Singing and Elocution competitions to a Bible Quiz. The students and the parents took part in the day of events. The event was organised by the Sunday School teachers.

October was also the Month of the Rosary and so the Syro Malabar community celebrated the end of the month with a small Marian Prayer service, which was led by the Mathruvedi (Mother's Forum) of the community.



City parishes again blessed through Divine Child Novena



Walkers preparing to leave Termonbacca with Divine Child figure as Novena got underway

THE annual Novena to the Divine Child Jesus was led again by the Discalced Carmelites from the Iona Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, with the Divine Child figure carried around the City churches during this very special week of prayer.

In Carmel, the Carmelites have observed what they affectionately call "the child Jesus days of recollection" since the time of St Teresa of Avila, and Derry has been blessed to have this tradition observed by its resident Carmelites.

From December 8, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, until December 16, the Child Jesus figure journeyed through the City, resting overnight in various parish churches.

It left Termonbacca for St

Mary's Creggan on the first night, then moved to Holy Family, Ballymagroarty, St Patrick's Pennyburn, St Joseph's Galliagh, St Brigid's Carnhill, Our Lady of Lourdes, Steelstown, Immaculate Conception Waterside, St Mary's Long Tower and back to Termonbacca.

Each night, Mass was celebrated and the Novena prayers said, with many joining in this beautiful preparation for Christmas.



St Mary's Creggan



Holy Family Ballymagroarty



St Patrick's Pennyburn



St Brigid's Carnhill.



Our Lady of Lourdes Steelstown.



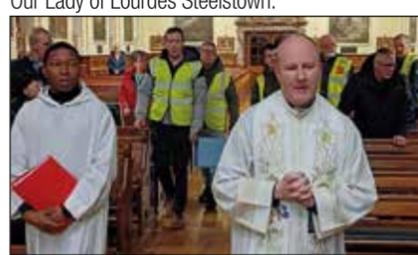
Our Lady of Lourdes Steelstown.



St Joseph's Galliagh.



Immaculate Conception Waterside.



St Columba's Long Tower

Derry reunion for Holy Land pilgrims

SOME eight months after walking together in the footsteps of Jesus during a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in February with Bishop Donal, pilgrims from various parts of the Diocese and further afield gathered to share memories and catch up with each other.

Greatly saddened by the suffering, death and destruction now happening in this sacred place, a prayer was offered for peace there, especially for the sake of the little children.



Lavey blessing on Bambinelli Sunday



St Aengus' NS stars shine at Burt Carol Service



This month, John shares how the Syro Malabar community has been preparing for Jesus – the Light of the World, while Luke reflects on Fire in Christianity, and Sean writes about how 2024 is a new opportunity to find meaning in the talents God has given to us.

Currently studying in Rome, Hollie writes about her wonderful experience there so far, relating it to Advent, and Niamh shares her thoughts on the many opportunities for young people to engage in acts of service in their communities.

Reflecting on the challenges facing the Church in these times, James highlights that instead of leaving the Church because of the scandals etc, Catholics should get more immersed in their role as baptised members and help lead.

Erin tackles the controversy currently surrounding her favourite singer, Taylor Swift's world tour, highlighting lines from some of Taylor's songs that have helped her to connect with God.

In her first article for 'The Net', Cadhla shares the story of the Padre Pio Prayer Group in her home parish of Ballinascreen and the recent blessing of a St Pio relic for the Shrine in Holy Rosary Church, while fellow parishioner, Bronagh reflects on COP28 and the words of Pope Francis.



Hollie Frystal, Co Tyrone Deanery. Bronagh Doherty, Co Derry Deanery. Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery. John Agustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery. James Tourish, Derry City Deanery. Erin Whoriskey, Derry City Deanery.



Shea Doherty, Derry City Deanery. Evan Curran, Derry City Deanery. Seán McLaughlin, Co Tyrone Deanery. Niamh Sharkey, Derry City Deanery. Cadhla Shivers, Co Derry Deanery. Luke Doherty, Inishowen Deanery.

Pope Francis and COP28...The Cry of the Earth by Bronagh

COP28 is a conference held annually to unite countries, leaders, governments and people on the issue of climate change. Climate Change is one of the most imminent crises the planet faces. Climate change is happening much faster than environmentalists had previously predicted and now we are warned that 250,000 additional yearly deaths may occur by 2030, due to incidences like malaria and coastal flooding, which are direct consequences of climate change (WHO, Oct 2023).

This is a huge problem that requires help from all corners of the Earth, and COP28 aims to do that by bringing together world leaders, environmental change activists, religious leaders, people in business and young people.

Delegates from 199 parties attended the UN Framework Conference held in Dubai, which started on November 30 and lasted until December 12. As the name suggests, this was the 28th meeting of these united parties on combatting climate change. However, this year there was a Faith Pavilion, the first of its kind, where representatives from various faiths were present.

In 2015, the Pope made his own programme, Laudato Sí, focusing on environmental protection during his papacy

(Church Times, Dec2023). This letter is about caring for our common home. Laudato Sí has seven common goals, the first one being, 'The Cry of the Earth'. This refers directly to climate change. Our Earth is crying out for change as its temperatures rise, ice caps melt, diseases increase, and inhabitants struggle.

The Pope was, unfortunately, not able to attend this year's COP meeting, although he wrote a speech and Cardinal Secretary of State, Pietro Parolin delivered it to delegates at the UN Climate Change summit. It emphasized that "The future of us all depends on the present that we now choose".

In this speech, he also circled back to his Laudato Sí goals, and said that, "May we be attentive to the cry of the earth, may we hear the plea of the poor, may we be sensitive to the hopes of the young and the dreams of the children! We have grave responsibility to ensure that they are not denied their future." (Vatican News, Dec2023)

Global warming has become a scary new normal for people in many parts of the world; wildfires, floods and hurricanes, hotter temperatures, and air pollution are beginning to harm us all. These have major consequences on children, and the future of



our world, causing breathing difficulties, malnutrition, and infectious disease.

Save the Children predicts that by 2050, a further 24 million children will be malnourished as a result of the climate crisis and, by 2040, one in four children will have extreme water shortages. Water and food are essential for life; climate change is a life-threatening crisis. Save the Children is working tirelessly and are a global leader in helping children and communities around the world adapt to the impacts of the climate crisis.

Pope Francis concluded his speech with the outlook that 2024 would be a breakthrough, a breakthrough in climate change, global peace, and global faith by urging leaders to "leave behind our divisions and unite our forces! And with God's help, let us emerge from the dark

night of war and environmental devastation to turn our common future into the dawn of a new and radiant day."

The aim of the Paris Agreement, a legally binding treaty on Climate change, is to "limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels", and this is the common aim of everyone on the planet to help reduce Global warming and its devastating effects.

Everyone can help, we don't have to leave it up to the leaders attending COP28, everyone can do their part by reducing energy consumption in their houses, eating less meat and dairy, and respecting and protecting green spaces. Reducing climate change is a global effort in which everyone must take part. As writer, Parisa Fits-Henley said, "But what can I do? I am just one person", said 7 billion people".

Preparing for Jesus – 'Light of the World' by John

THE Syro-Malabar liturgical year begins with the season of Annunciation, known as 'Subara' in the Syriac tradition. This season lasts typically from the end of November. It is rooted in the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin Mary, and places a profound emphasis on the mystery of the Incarnation and the "transformative power of God's plan for humanity".

Inextricably linked to the East Syriac tradition, this season is marked by prayer, reflection, and penance, which emphasises themes of humility, obedience, and expectant waiting. The Syriac term 'Subara' signifies a period of sanctification and purification similar to Lent in preparation for the celebration of the Nativity of Jesus Christ. Embracing Mary's "Fiat", the season invites the faithful to engage in self-examination and to anticipate with joy the birth of the Saviour.

This season is characterised by unique liturgical customs and traditions that deepen the spiritual experience for believers. Special hymns, prayers, and scripture readings are incorporated into the worship services, underscoring the

theological significance of the Annunciation. In addition to the spiritual practices, cultural traditions and communal gatherings further enrich the season. Pilgrimages and acts of charity contribute to the sense of unity and shared anticipation among the faithful.

The season then ends with the feast of Christmas. Christmas in the Syro-Malabar Church is a joyous and spiritually rich celebration that combines deep religious traditions with cultural festivities. The festivities typically commence on the eve of Christmas with the Midnight Qurbana. This solemn liturgical service is marked by the chanting of hymns and scripture readings that focuses on the significance of the birth of Jesus Christ.

A unique tradition in the Syro-Malabar Church is the ceremonial lighting of the Christmas fire, known as 'Puthuvely.' Before the Midnight Qurbana, a fire is kindled outside the church, symbolising the light of Christ coming into the world. The faithful gather around the fire, and a priest blesses it, signifying the sanctification of the new light brought by Jesus. The fire

is then used to light the lamps and candles inside the church, symbolising the spreading of Christ's light to dispel darkness. It thus reminds us that Jesus is the Light of the World. Following the liturgical celebrations, families and communities tend to have communal meals and to engage in cultural activities.

The season of Annunciation ultimately prepares us for the Nativity of Our Lord, whether it be through the liturgical prayers or the fasting or through charitable activities.



From home to Rome! by Hollie

CIAO, from the Eternal City! Well, it has been a while since I have written for 'The NET'. After my last article had featured World Youth Day back in August, so much has happened! I have been an undergraduate Theology & History student at St Patrick's College Maynooth since 2021, and this year I moved to Rome, on a scholarship, to study at St Thomas Aquinas Pontifical University (the Angelicum) until June. It has been one heck of an experience so far, and I would like to share some of the journey with you, particularly keeping the season of Advent in mind.

The word 'Advent' means 'coming' or 'arrival' and is a season of preparation. Now, I cannot claim that my arrival in Rome was in anyway as dramatic or eventful as Christ's in Bethlehem, but I can relate to the journey, that required a lot of preparation, more so interiorly as well as exteriorly.

At the time of writing, we had celebrated the second (purple) candle, representing peace, also known as the Bethlehem candle. So, let's take that image!

Firstly, the second candle reminds us of when Mary and Joseph left Nazareth for Bethlehem, after listening to God's Will and responding

wholeheartedly by placing their trust in Him. Isaiah prophesied, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2 NRSV). The candle recalls how the destruction and despair in the Old Testament was about to change, upon the arrival of Emmanuel – "God with us".

Pope Francis says that "we are invited to set out on a spiritual journey" (Admirabile Signum, n. 1). Today, as a pilgrim people, we too ought to discern what God is asking of us individually, and more importantly as a community.

Secondly, to ensure a safe deliverance and proclamation of Christ's birth, there happened to be active participation from all, eg, Mary and Joseph, the Magi, the Shepherds - all of whom were invited and guided by God, the protagonist, if that was in the form of a dream, a messenger or a star! Nevertheless, the preparation and the journey depended solely on a community that listened and responded together.

When I moved to Rome, the first thing I noticed was the diversity and co-responsibility of the faithful, eg, women and men, young and old, lay religious and priest. It was refreshing! This model that is rooted in the Gospel

can provide us with guidance on how to discern the integration of baptismal values of every person into the life and mission of the Church today.

Lastly, when embarking upon any journey, it is okay to be apprehensive. Mary and Joseph, the Magi, and the Shepherds also expressed their wonder, not knowing what was ahead, but still placed their trust completely in God...and in the end a Saviour was born.

In my experience, after a year-long preparation and discernment, being excited and nervous, I arrived in Rome, and I am here almost four months already. It has been an amazing experience so far!



Ballinascreen Padre Pio Prayer Group *by Cadhla*



IN late 2004/early 2005, Fr Colum Clerkin, who was the then Parish Priest of Ballinascreen, had discussions with Tom and Peggy Maguire about the possibility of forming a Padre Pio Prayer Group in the Parish. Following consultations with the Padre Pio Prayer Group Centre in San Giovanni Rotondo, an application for the Group was signed by the then Bishop of Derry, Bishop Seamus Hegarty and approval was granted by the International Association of Padre Pio Prayer Groups in San Giovanni Rotondo, who issued a Certificate of Aggregation in January 2006 to Ballinascreen Padre Pio Prayer Group, which links the Group with the Holy See and the Pope, and is a very high honour for the Prayer Group.

The first monthly Mass was celebrated in the Parish in October 2005, with approximately 50 signatures collected. These became the founding members and formed the beginning of the Prayer Group. James Duffy, the late Susan Potter, and Shannon Kelly kindly volunteered their help along with Tom and Peggy, and they all worked tirelessly in the early years to get the Prayer Group established.

The Ballinascreen Padre Pio Prayer Group meets in the Holy Rosary Church in Draperstown on the first Monday of every month. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament commences from 12 noon, with Recitation of the

Rosary at 7.10 pm, followed by Novena Prayers to St Pio, and then Mass then begins at 7.30 pm, and everyone is very welcome to attend.

During the Mass, the laity participates in the Readings, Prayers of the Faithful, Hymns/Music and the Offertory Procession, when the petition box is carried to the altar. In more recent years, students from St Colm's High School, Draperstown, willingly participate at the Mass as part of their Pope John Paul II Award. Books and devotional items to St Pio are available for sale, after the Mass, with proceeds sent to the Shrine of St Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo.

Over the years, parishioners and Padre Pio devotees have been very generous with donations to the Group, which has meant that a total of over £11,000 has been sent to Padre Pio Charitable Causes in San Giovanni Rotondo and elsewhere.

In early 2009, the Ballinascreen Padre Pio Lay Committee was organised to develop the Prayer Group activities and the promotion of St Pio. The decision was made to bring a specially commissioned, life-size statue of St Pio to Ballinascreen Parish. So, following various consultations and many months of planning, the statue was made in Italy and shipped to Ballinascreen in August 2009.

St Pio's Statue was placed

outside the Holy Rosary Church in Draperstown. Generous Donations from Ballinascreen parishioners, businesses and other individuals provided the funds for the manufacturing and delivery of the statue. Fr Clerkin blessed it at the Padre Pio Mass in September 2009. Many people stop at the statue daily to offer up their private intentions and thanksgivings to St Pio.

Pilgrimage

Since the formation of the Ballinascreen Padre Pio Prayer Group, many Group excursions have taken place. The annual national pilgrimage in honour of St Pio (for the Irish Padre Pio devotees) is held at Knock on the third Sunday of September, which is close to St Pio's Feast Day on September 23. The Pilgrimage first began in September 1979, in the same month of the Papal Visit to Knock by St John Paul II.

In 2009, the Ballinascreen Padre Pio Lay Committee organised their first trip to Knock, with 27 people attending that year and it has been an annual excursion ever since! Every year, a full coach load of pilgrims attend, along with other Ballinascreen parishioners who travel by car. They recite Rosaries, attend the Blessing of the Sick and participate in the Mass. Following Benediction, the Ballinascreen Padre Pio Prayer Group Banner is carried in the Rosary Procession.

Over the years, a strong

devotion to Padre Pio has developed within the community of Ballinascreen and many parishioners have also travelled to San Giovanni Rotondo. On their most recent trip to Italy, in October 2023, they had the honour of attending a Group Mass and reciting the Rosary in the old Church where Padre Pio celebrated Mass. They also visited the new crypt, where they placed petitions at the body of St Pio, viewed St Pio's Cell and prayed in front of the Crucifix where St Pio received the stigmata. Pilgrims also participated in the Way of The Cross before attending the Sacrament of Reconciliation. They visited the Shrine of St Michael the Archangel, where Padre Pio sometimes sent penitents as part of their penance.

During the trip, representatives from the Group also graciously received a Relic of St Pio, which was blessed and placed in Holy Rosary Church, Draperstown, by Fr Peter Madden PP, on December 4, 2023. The relic is on permanent display in the Church for public veneration.

To ensure that the information I was gathering for this article was accurate and reliable, I met with a representative of the Ballinascreen Padre Pio Lay Committee, who kindly took the time to answer my questions about the Prayer Group. The Ballinascreen Padre Pio Prayer Group would like to pay tribute to and record their thanks to all the priests who have served



the Group since its formation in 2005, including the parish priests - Fr Colum Clerkin, Fr Séamus Kelly and Fr Peter Madden, alongside the curates - the late Fr John Downey, Fr Dermot McGirr and other visiting priests.

Padre Pio is quoted as saying "Pray, Hope and Don't Worry..."

Worry is useless, God is merciful and will Hear your Prayer".

About the Prayer Groups, Padre Pio said: "In the Groups, when my children unite together in prayer, Jesus will be in the midst of them. There will also be the mother of Jesus, and I will also be present in spirit and united in Prayer."

Lots of ways for young people to engage in acts of service *by Niamh*

AS disciples of Christ, we are expected to carry out acts of service embodying the principles of love, compassion, and selflessness taught by Jesus. Rooted in the belief that faith should manifest itself through actions, the Catholic Church encourages its members to engage in various acts of service to make a positive impact on the lives of others and promote the values of the Gospel.

As young people, there are many different ways we can become involved in serving in our community. For example, in the Derry Diocese we have numerous charities that we can volunteer our time to or donate to. One great example is St Vincent de Paul, a charity that helps feed families in need all across Ireland. We can volunteer in their charity shops, donate money, or we can make a Christmas hamper to donate to a family in need.

At the core of our faith is the principle of love, which comes from the

commandment given by Jesus: "Love your neighbour as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). This commandment is not just a call to feel affection, but an instruction to express love through actions, and this is not just to those close to us but everyone all around the world. To love our neighbour in charity is to love God within them. Acts of service, therefore, have become a way for Catholics to live out their faith by putting love into practice.

Numerous Catholic organisations, both at local and international levels, are dedicated to serving the less fortunate. These organisations provide opportunities for Catholics to engage in volunteer work, ranging from medical missions to disaster relief efforts. Through these acts of service, Catholics not only extend a helping hand to those in need but also embody the teachings of Jesus, who Himself exemplified a life of

selfless service. Jesus served every person regardless of creed, background, faith, social status or age. He put faith into action by showing all those around Him how our Heavenly Father is compassionate and forgiving. This can be seen in the miracle stories where Jesus serves everyone, even the outcasts.

The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats serves as a powerful reminder for Christians to actively engage in acts of kindness, mercy, and compassion. It encourages believers to look beyond themselves and their immediate concerns, recognizing God's presence in those who require assistance. The parable's central message revolves around the importance of physical acts of compassion and kindness in the lives of believers. Jesus emphasises that our faith should be reflected not only in our beliefs and rituals but also in expressions of love

and mercy towards others. The Catholic Church recognises the corporal and spiritual works of mercy as fundamental expressions of Christian charity. Corporal works include feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick, while spiritual works involve instructing the ignorant and comforting the sorrowful. Acts of service directly align with these works of mercy and are considered a duty of Catholics.

As a young person involved in my parish, I too can perform acts of service. I read at Mass in the month of January. I'm also a volunteer for faith friends. This involves me leading a Year 4 class once a week in preparation for their Holy Communion, by helping them come to know Jesus in a more meaningful way.

Acts of service as a young person may also include helping at local GAA clubs or volunteering for a summer camp, like Hope Camp. However, I have found the

best place to participate in acts of service has been in my own home. Coming from a large family there are no shortage of jobs to be done: helping my mum prepare food; helping my siblings with their homework; visiting my grandparents and helping them with housework. The list is endless.

As I write this, the words of Mother Teresa come to mind: "If you want to change the world go home and love your family".



Speak Now by Erin



AS I am growing in my faith, I am learning that God is always speaking to us. It isn't only when we are in prayer or at Mass but every moment of our lives. We can hear the voice of God through the everyday things. He will often use the things we enjoy or care about to speak to us.

Recently, my favourite singer, Taylor Swift has been voted person of the year and is

performing a world tour. As part of her tour, she mimics someone casting a spell and this has led to a lot of debate around whether, as Catholics, we should listen to her. While I don't believe she is a good role model in everything she does, I feel her music can help me reflect on my faith and God.

Here are some examples of lyrics that help me connect with God:

"You're the only one of you, baby that's the fun of you." (ME!) - God has created us all uniquely and it's good to be reminded of that. We are all children of God, and we may share some similarities but there never has been, or never will be, another you. As St John Henry Newman writes: "God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next."

"Desperate People Find Faith, so now I pray to Jesus too." (Soon You'll Get Better) -

Taylor wrote this song about her mother's cancer diagnosis. This lyric is a reminder that God permits suffering because it can strengthen our faith. For some people, it takes desperate and emotional situations for them to turn to God, but it is always for the better. In Romans 5: 3-4 it states: "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character, and character, hope."

"All the Jokers Dressing Up

as Kings." (Call it What You Want) - This lyric, featured in one of Taylor's love songs, particularly makes me reflect on Jesus' temptation from Satan in the desert. Satan pretended to be a King, offering Jesus all the kingdoms to worship him. However, Jesus knows He should stay loyal to the Lord alone and quickly replies: "You shall worship the Lord your God and only Him shall you serve" (Matthew 8-10). This Bible passage is relevant to us as we can take inspiration on how to reject our own temptations and stay loyal to God.

"And prayed to God you'd be coming home alright, and you would've been fine." (Timeless) - This is another simple lyric in a love song, where Taylor brings her petition to God in prayer while her loved one is off at war. I believe this lyric emphasises that prayer is the most powerful tool to help our loved ones and keep them safe. Praying for the safety and protection of others shows God that we trust in Him and gives us comfort. God also wants to hear from us through prayer.

"What died didn't stay dead,

you're alive, so alive." (Marjorie) - In this song, Taylor sings about her grandmother who passed away. This part of the chorus makes me think of eternal life in Heaven. Although some of our loved ones may no longer be with us, we should continue to pray that they are with God in the afterlife. As Catholics, we believe that we will continue to live spiritually for all eternity.

"Talk to yourself, talk to the tears, talk to the man who put you here." (Come in with the Rain) - This is another connection to prayer. The man who put you here being God, we should all include prayer in our daily lives. Anything can be included in your prayer as it is a conversation with God. God wants us to connect with Him and keep Him in the forefront of our minds through everything we do. We can share every aspect of our lives with God our Father.

"In your life, you'll do things greater than dating the boy on the football team." (Fifteen) - Taylor shares how there is always more important things to come in life, and we shouldn't give so much emphasis to superficial

things. In our spiritual life, we could instead spend our time focusing on building a true relationship with God. Believing in God's plan and knowing He is all loving will help us get through tough times in our life. "For I Know the Plans I Have for You, Declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 29:11)

"Something wrapped all of my past mistakes in barbed wire, chains around my demons." (Invisible String) - I connected this lyric with Revelations 20: 1-2, where it says: "Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." This is basically God using His angel to wrap 'chains around our demons.'

This is just a few short examples of how music lyrics or things that are not necessarily religious can help us connect with God. Taylor has an album titled 'Speak Now' and, just like Eli told Samuel, we should pray the prayer: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." (1 Samuel 3:10).

In times of crisis and trouble lead don't leave by James



THROUGHOUT the centuries, our Church has had its struggles and issues that have made it the subject of constant criticism and controversy. From war and violence, to more recent scandals surrounding the Church, people over time have lost faith, some feel that their trust and commitment have been betrayed and thus, packed up and simply never returned.

This is a sensitive topic, one that must be treated in a solemn and grave manner, where rationale and understanding must take precedence over everything else. However, thankfully, it is one that has been dealt with, as well as its on-going legacy still being examined, with additional measures and safeguarding procedures being put in place to ensure that the evils of the

past may be relegated to history forever.

We cannot afford to shy away from what has happened, that would only exacerbate the issue, nor should we try to make excuses or use petty explanations of no substance. Honest discussion and civil discourse should take place, as it has been, and no matter how difficult these things become, we must remember that they are for the betterment of our Church that we love.

In times of crisis and trouble, we must lead, not leave. According to the Republic of Ireland's census, in 2011 84.2% of the population identified as Catholic, with the most recent 2022 census showing that now 69% identify as Catholic. Statistics regarding weekly Mass attendance provide a similar trend, with the North

also experiencing a drop in weekly Mass attendance. Now these are things you probably already know, it's not really a surprise to anyone who regularly attends Mass or follows trends regarding the Church, and the reasons given can vary from the increasing secularisation of society to immigration to the scandals from within the Church.

This leads me onto the essence of this argument, what can 'we', the laity of the Church do, to prevent this further decline? All trends and statistics show that Catholic faith in Ireland is in decline, and that people are indeed leaving, many stating that the scandals of the past are to blame for their departure. However, I plead to make this argument, instead of abandoning this Church, the one Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church founded by Christ Himself, let us lead this Church and guide it through the struggles that it may face. Some may view that as the job of the Pope, and the worldwide clergy, but we all have a duty to do, however small or large it may be.

If we want to change the way people view the Church, we must change the way people view us. In this increasingly secular world, we must proclaim to all that we are Catholics, and more importantly, that our actions and words must represent this fact. We must continue, now more than ever, to live out the teachings of Christ and the guidance given to us by the

Church, recognising that we are physical representatives of the Church. It is vital that we take responsibility for all we do and say and that, together, we let others know that the true values of Catholicism are about love of thy neighbour and service to others. Of course, we know that the failures and wrongs of the past happened not because of Catholic teaching, but due to the utter contradiction to it, and so this creates the emphasis now, for us, to demonstrate through our daily lives what living a truly Catholic life offers the world and those around us. Obviously, we won't be perfect, and thank God for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, but we must always strive to do our very best. People do not become saints after they die, they become saints for what they have done while alive. Similar to how Priests act 'in persona Christi', we must too, as laypeople, act and live like Christ to the best of our ability so that we represent ourselves and the Church in the greatest way possible.

The Church has made tremendous strides forward in regard to safeguarding and child protection, and these things must be given the recognition and credit they deserve, but for us, as non-ordained members of the Church, we must take responsibility in our daily lives for how we represent the Church. What the Church needs more than anything else from its laity is leadership, not desertion.

Fire in Christianity by Luke



I recently had the privilege of lighting the first candle of the Advent wreath at a Sunday Mass. Afterwards, I began to think about the prevalence of fire in Christianity. It's not just seen in the numerous candles in most churches. One of the most obvious associations with fire in Christianity is the Holy Spirit, which is often depicted as floating tongues of flame without a visible fuel source and frequently, but not exclusively, without smoke.

This image has two main sources in the Bible. The first is Matthew 3:11, which reads "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." Luke 3:16 has a similar quote: "John answered them all, 'I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.'"

Later, the Holy Spirit is directly stated to look like flames, in Acts 2:1-4, as follows "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them."

These two passages soundly show the connection between the Holy Spirit quite well, though the Holy Spirit is far from the only reason fire is associated so closely with our religion.

The second place fire is seen in the Bible that occurred to me was the powerful image of the burning bush that appeared to Moses in Exodus 3:1-3, which reads: "Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. 3 So Moses thought, 'I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.'"

This also has something in common with the floating fires of the Holy Spirit, the fact being that neither fire consumes fuel, even when fuel is available to it. This is something which

2024 is a new opportunity to find meaning in the talents God gave us

by Seán



THROUGHOUT the season of Advent and the coming of Christmas and the New Year, it is our duty to evaluate the year and how we used it. Did we put this time to good use? Or did we squander it with things that do not build our character? This season brings the renewal of the calendar, but also an imitation of how Jesus renewed the age. The coming of Jesus over 2000 years ago was such a major event in human history that it is how, in Christianity, we measure the years. The birth of Jesus caused a split in the human comprehension of our time here on God's creation, a renewal of the age Before Christ.

For me, 2023 was a massive year

in the development of my life. Events that I foresaw for years to come finally came to be as the 12 months of this year filtered by. It is a year that I will not forget. How could I possibly forget studying for months for my GCSE examinations? How could I forget the moment that I pulled the results out of the envelope? I scanned the page wildly, finding what I'd worried over for months to be pleasantly rewarded for my efforts. In September, I began my A-levels, the long anticipated advanced level of education that I'd wondered about since my first year at school. My summer was spent productively. I spent a week in the ancient city of Rome, becoming entranced by

its complexity and rich history, it being the ultimate centre of our Catholic faith in all the world. To me, I spent 2023 very productively. I don't believe that it could've gone any better in terms of my development in faith and character; two things that are essential to each other, they are compatible and go hand in hand.

When God sent His essence to earth in the form of man, He came with the mission to renew our view of faith in Him and gain a deeper understanding of His love for us. Life became a test for humans. This test was to prove our worth for a heavenly eternity. Before Christ was a time when winning the approval of God was the following of the ancient covenant that God made with Moses and the Israelites on Mount Sinai. Jesus renewed this covenant. He did not come to remove it, but to finally 'fulfil it', that being his duty as the Messiah.

The Year of the Lord, 'Anno Domini' in Medieval Latin, was an age that brought hope to the potentiality of a heavenly survival for humanity. The love

and mercy of God was reinforced by the teaching of Jesus. Leading a life being as loving and merciful as God gives us this worthiness. Anno Domini gave humans the opportunity of a fresh, new beginning, no longer held accountable for the mistakes in Genesis. But to prove our worthiness, we must use our talents.

Parable

In my opinion, the symbolic Parable of the Talents detailed in the Gospel of Matthew is one of the most informing lessons in the Bible. Matthew 25:14 says: "For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted them to his property." In this parable, the man going on the journey represents God. We humans represent the servants. The man in the parable entrusts his servants with talents, the first servant five, the second two, and the third one, "each according to his ability." This is to say that God has given us talents and it is our duty to use them to achieve success in life. In the parable, the first two servants through

trade and investments double the amount of talents that they have. The man praised the servants because they used the talents that they were provided with and were able to offer back twice as much to the person who gave them the talents. The third servant buried his talent in the ground, believing that his master did not deserve his effort. This servant was lectured for his disobedience and lack of effort. The servant said to his master in Matthew 25:24, "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed, so I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours."

The master in the parable told this servant, in Matthew 25:28-29, to, "take the talent from him and give it to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away." In other words, the man who had the most talents and put in the most effort and work to develop his talents received more credit from

his master. But the servant who did not put in any effort and did not develop his talents was given no credit, because he did not try to earn any. A worker does not get paid if they do not work.

In real life, what this parable symbolises is how human development works. The human that uses his or her talents the best and develops them to their limits will receive the most credit from God, because they have shown God that they can work hard and have earned their worthiness.

As the age of Anno Domini commenced, Christianity bloomed and Christians were given a new method of living, a new way to fulfil the ability that God has given us, like the servants that were given ability by their master in the parable. 2023 was an opportunity to develop ourselves, but so is 2024. 2024 is a coming opportunity, and we should view it as a new opportunity to find meaning in the talents that God did give us, instead of obsessing over the talents He did not.

continued from page 14

may seem rather alien to us, as the consuming nature of fire is something that is often seen as intrinsic to the element. A parallel can be drawn between the fire and us, as followers and believers of God. While fire is not alive, it does share traits with living beings, namely the requirement for food. While the fire is being used by God, however, He sustains it, in a similar way to how He sustained the Israelites with manna during their 40-year exile, as seen in Nehemiah 9. The way fire defies mortal understanding by surviving on its own may also symbolise how God is beyond human comprehension. This apparently undying fire is part of why some churches keep a light constantly fuelled and burning, frequently near the Tabernacle, in a similar manner to the Ner Tamid in synagogues. Leviticus 6:13 refers to this practice, saying: "The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out."

Memorable

While these are what I believe to be the two most memorable appearances of fire in the Bible, they are far from the only two. 364 Bible passages contain the word 'fire', 32 contain 'flame', and 617 contain the word 'burn' or a variation of it. Interestingly, approximately 85% of the mentions of fire come from the Old Testament. The first instance of fire comes from Genesis 11:3, though this passage is interesting as some translations

do not actually use the word 'fire' specifically. However, the word 'igni' is used in the Latin Vulgate copy, which is derived from 'ignis', meaning fire, so I will treat this as the first instance.

Most instances do not centre on the ephemeral element, such as the example above. This is because fire is such an integral part of life, particularly back in biblical times.

In the Old Testament, God also frequently appears in the form of fire, such as when He guides the Israelites out of Egypt in the form of a pillar of fire. Exodus 13:21 states: "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night."

This also reveals another aspect of fire that could link it to God: light. Light is frequently used to symbolise holiness and goodness, which could extend to fire as one of the primary sources of light during biblical times. Here, God guides the Israelites to safety in much the same way that He will guide us if we put our faith in Him. God also appears as fire later in Exodus 19:18, when He gives out the Ten Commandments: "Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently."

Another aspect of fire is its potential for destruction. While fire is a source of warmth, light

and life, it can cause disastrous damage if left unchecked. This is also in a way fitting. While God's anger is slow to rouse, His wrath is always described as terrifying, such as in Numbers 11:1: "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when He heard them His anger was aroused. Then fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp." Or in Deuteronomy 32:22: "For a fire will be kindled by my wrath, one that burns down to the realm of the dead and its harvests and set afire the foundations of the mountains..."

Fire is also fascinating in the way it is not used solely as a symbol for God. Many of the mentions of fire in the Book of Revelations are in conjunction with the beast. Revelations is also the book in the New Testament which features fire the most.

There is certainly a lot more depth to fire as a religious symbol, as evidenced by the several hundred other passages which I did not touch on. In conclusion, fire is a vital image tied both to God's life-giving nature and his wrath.

I will end with a quote that I particularly like, Hebrews 12:28-29, which reads: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our 'God is a consuming fire'."

St Columba's Greenlough camogs celebrate 80th anniversary

ST Columba's Camogie Club, Greenlough are celebrating 80 years since its formation.

A special Mass was organised by a sub-committee to begin the celebrations, which included a candlelit procession involving

the U6, U8, U10, U12, U14, U16, U18 and Senior camogs, along with their coaches.

The Readings, Offertory Procession and music ministry were all carried out by members of the Club.

A heartfelt thanks is extended to Fr Eamon Graham for joining members on the night and making it such a memorable occasion.



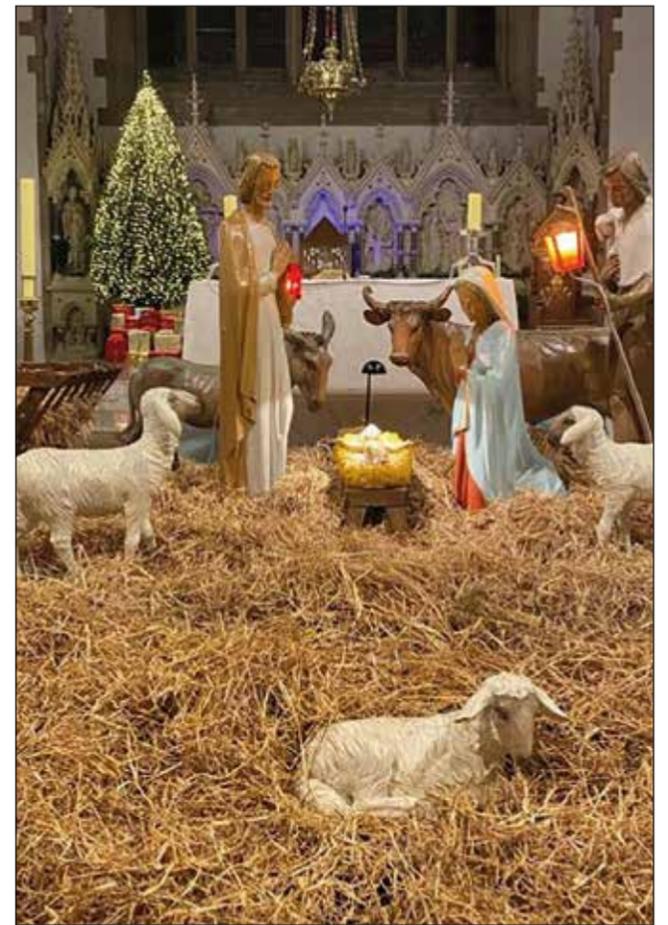
Santa Sunday goes down a treat at St Eugene's



Christmas spirit high at Afternoon Tea with Anne Marie & Friends

THE Cathedral Hall in St Eugene's Parish was the cosy setting for a beautiful Christmas Afternoon Tea with the musically talented Anne Marie Hickey & Friends.

Warmly decorated for the occasion, many enjoyed the delicious tea and entertainment provided by Anne Marie, Brenda O'Somachain, Roisin Rice, Mary Murphy, Lauren Doherty and St Mary's College Irish dancers.



Cathedral Carols enjoyed by all ages



Baby Ellowyn was the youngest caroler at this year's St Eugene's Christmas Carol Service.

Limavady parishioners enjoy Advent talks and Carol Service Walk

LIMAVADY parishioners had a welcome opportunity to catch up with Fr Peter O’Kane, who had ministered amongst them in the past, when he was invited by Mgr Bryan McCanny, PP, to give a series of talks in preparation for Christmas in St Mary’s Church.

And Fr Peter, who has recently been appointed as Diocesan Trainer in Evangelisation & Adult Faith Formation, enjoyed his return visit to the Roe Valley parish for the three Sunday evening ceremonies.

Beginning with the praying of

the Rosary, the congregation listened to the reading of the Sunday Gospel and Fr Peter’s talk, before a Eucharistic Healing Service and Benediction to close.

Afterwards, all were invited across the grounds to the fabulous Bethany Centre for some refreshments.

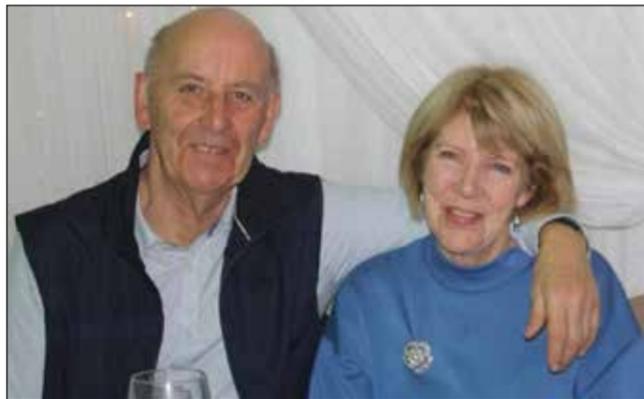
St Mary’s Church was also the starting point for Limavady’s traditional Ecumenical Walking Carol Service this year, which took the 300 carolers around the various churches in the town.



Great turnout for Limavady Ecumenical Carol Service Walk



Banagher folk feeling festive at SVP party



Adomnán – 1400th Anniversary in 2024 by Dr Seán Beattie, Culdaff



ADOMNÁN was a distant relative of Colmcille and became Abbot of Iona in 679. His birth date is usually given as 624, according

to the ‘Annals of Ulster’ and the ‘Chronicum Scotorum’. His importance may be gauged from the fact that there are no less than 14 references to him in the various Annals. He is better known as St Eunan. He is the patron saint of the Diocese of Raphoe in both the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland. Historically, he is considered as important as Colmcille but he is less well known and details about his life are scant.

The precise year of his birth has been disputed by historians but the overall body of evidence points to 624, thus making 2024 the 1400th anniversary of his

birth. This date is supported by Donegal Historical Society. Equally, there are disagreements about where he was born. William Reeves argued that it was in Tír Áeda, now anglicized as Tírugh, a barony outside Donegal Town. He had some connection with Drumholm as a young man, on the shores of Donegal Bay. Brian Lacey has argued that his birth place was somewhere near Raphoe, in the territory of his mother’s people.

Lex Innocentium

Among his many achievements is his book, ‘Vita Columbae’, on his predecessor, Colmcille. In the

treatise, he depicted Colmcille as a saint. He wrote ‘De Locis Sanctis’, which has been described as the oldest surviving ‘guidebook’ to the Holy Land. He also wrote ‘Lex Innocentium’, the oldest law that we know for the protection of innocents and non-participants (mainly women and children) in time of war. Current debates regarding the conduct of the wars in Israel and Ukraine have given rise to discussions on the protection of the vulnerable in warfare, and such concepts can be traced back to the saint’s time.

A Friend of Kings

In his life, Adomnán had many

roles and could be described as the first multitasker in the Christian world, more of a Renaissance man, in the modern sense. He had roles as monk, abbot, historian, hagiographer, theologian, lawmaker, diplomat, sailor, builder, a relative and friend of the Kings of Ireland and Britain. Among the latter, he listed Flann Fina, King Aldfrith of Northumbria, whom he quoted widely and whose reputation in Ireland was so strong that he was regarded as a saint.

Whatever about the exact date of his birth or his homeplace, he was one of the most important persons to come from the County

of Donegal – to be clear, this geographic area was defined after his time - who lived throughout most of the seventh century. It is now time to commence preparations to commemorate him with pride and dignity. Columban celebrations were dampened by the pandemic, but perhaps his successor may obtain the full dignity he deserves. On an ecumenical level, there are great opportunities to take further steps in that direction.

The date of Adomnán’s death is given in the ‘Annals of Inisfallen’ as 704.

Celebrating 50 years of worship in St Patrick's Church, Keenaught, in the Parish of Desertmartin, Bishop Donal told those gathered...

Be grateful for the past...Be hope-filled about the future



STANDING as majestic as Slieve Gallion in the distance, St Patrick's Church in the townland of Keenaught, in Desertmartin, was looking its best on the morning of the First Sunday in Advent, with the grounds decorated with yellow and white bunting for the celebration of 50 years of worship there.

Bishop Donal was the main celebrant for the Mass of Thanksgiving, and he was joined on the altar by Fr Peter Madden, PP Ballinascreen & Desertmartin, and Fr Dermot McGirr, CC, and four native priests, Fr Kevin McElhennon, Fr Brian Donnelly, Fr Sean McGuigan, Archdiocese of Armagh, and Fr Christopher McElwee, Rosminian Order.

Sharing a special nugget of information regarding the occasion when the Church was blessed and consecrated by the parish priest at the time, Fr Henry O'Neill, on Sunday, December 2, 1973, Bishop Donal told those gathered that the water carrier that day had been a young altar boy called Kevin McElhennon, who was later ordained there.

The ceremony began with a beautiful blessing of the Advent Wreath and the lighting of its first candle, and later included the anointing and dressing of the altar.

During the homily, the Bishop remarked that people had been "worshipping God at the foot of Slieve Gallion for longer than we know", saying: "Even before the spiritual descendants of St Patrick arrived in this beautiful place, people were struggling to create meaning and hope in the midst of all the challenges of life."

"The various buildings that we know of at this end of the parish were all built in hope by people who wanted a place where God could be worshipped and where His people could gather to deal with life and death, birth and love, sin and persecution."

He added: "Despite their poverty as the Penal Laws were being repealed, your ancestors did the best they could and sought to reflect their hope in building and then extending the old St Patrick's. They did that in hope in 1835, 1853 and 1929."

"The 1835 church was built in a hollow, but not so this present church, it was built on a hill. Its construction in 1973 responded to need for a larger building for a growing community of worshippers. And on this first Sunday in Advent 2023, we are again invited to be people of hope for a new reality and a new situation. And there is much need for hope."

Speaking of Advent's invite to prepare to welcome the Prince of Peace, who told His followers that He would leave them a peace that the world could not give, Bishop Donal told those gathered that Advent "invites us to be people who, even in a violent world, are not afraid to dream of peace and to do little things to build peace."

"Our current culture," he said, "tends to say that life is so sad that we should forget about hope and just party here and now, trying to ignore the realities that we face. Jesus says I can change, we can change; our world does not have to be ruled by anger, violence and

revenge.

"Wherever people worship on Sundays, our gathering around the Word of God and Holy Communion is a call for us to be a community that is brave enough to offer hope for our young people, even when everything seems dark, and we are frightened into hiding in our lonely little bubbles. Love and forgiveness are possible, reconciliation can take place. But Jesus doesn't just tell us to hope. He tells us to do our little bit to make it happen."

He went on to say: "Our hope is not merely born from the idea that peace is possible - in the world and in our hearts. We can work for peace in the mixed-up world in which we find ourselves because Jesus tells us that no life is wasted, that nothing done in love is a waste of time."

"St Paul writes that God has called you and already joined you to the life of Jesus - and that you will share in the fullness of His life after death. Thus, even if our lives are scarred by violence or addiction, or ended prematurely by disease or accident, they have an eternal worth. Those who are joined to Christ in this life will share with Him eternal life. Because Jesus died young from a brutal and unjust death, He has given meaning to all those who die. Again, that is why we are people of hope and why our hope-filled celebration of Advent is healthy and not merely an empty time."

Suffering

Aware that St Patrick's Church had been built with the shape of Slieve Gallion in mind, Bishop Donal remarked: "What we do here is never an escape from the world. Jesus knew the reality of poverty and human suffering in His own life. In the face of the often painful issues that scar our lives, Jesus gathers us at the foot of the cross to remind us that life

is not easy for so many. There is always a time for celebration and the marketplace wants us to be constantly buying. But there is a time to acknowledge that life is not just full of smiles and beautiful teeth and glossy hair.

"Gathering for Mass each weekend calls us to engage with the messiness of life with Jesus who hangs on the Cross with all of us, offering hope and mercy. And we gather here to be fed on the Body of Christ. Jesus offers a vision of human life which says that our bodies are sacred and will be raised up on the last day."

"That contrasts," he noted, "with the depressing modern message that our bodies are just toys to be played with and nothing is good or bad, right or wrong. Indeed, some of our leaders would insist that schools should not be allowed to speak of any vision of human sexuality other than their message, that there is nothing true or beautiful in relationships, nothing that should be called wrong."

Stating that Jesus still invites people "to gather for Mass each weekend to hear a message that the strong would rather not have talked about", Bishop Donal went on to say: "And he wants us to come together because we need support from each other if we are to face the chill winds of an intolerant worldview that wants to make space for everything except faith in Jesus. Gather here each week to let Jesus mould you into a people of wisdom and grace."

As they remembered those who erected the church dedicated to St Patrick, the Bishop remarked: "They could not have imagined how the world would change over the half century since 1973. We have no idea what the future holds for us. But we believe that Jesus is a God for all seasons, that His grace and mercy are badly needed in a hurting world, where



hope and good news are in short supply.

“Look after the building. But keep building up the people who gather here at the easternmost end of the Sperrins. St Patrick was not put off by the size of the task that faced him. Do not be afraid to be messengers of good news in this time and this place, even when we know it is not easy in a harsh, uncertain world.

“Take St Paul’s words as addressed to you - the witness to Christ has indeed been strong among you so that you will not be without any of the gifts of the Spirit while you are waiting for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

“Be grateful for the past. Be hope-filled about the future, for we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Don’t be afraid to say that you believe this so that people can remember you with gratitude in another 50 years’ time.”

At the end of the ceremony, which was beautifully enhanced by the music ministry, Bishop Donal thanked all involved, and paid tribute to the ministry of Fr Peter and Fr Dermot in the Parish, with the congregation responding with a loud applause.

Thanking Bishop Donal, Fr Peter said that the ceremony had brought him back to the first time he had been in St Patrick’s Church, for Fr Brian Donnelly’s ordination. Both had been in the seminary together, and Fr Peter was ordained two weeks later.

“I sang the Litany of the Saints that day,” he recalled, saying: “And, so it was lovely to do so today as well.”

He added: “I had no idea that day, 40 years ago, that this church was only 10 years old. The building might be 50 years old, but the faith that brings us here is deeper and longer. I thank you all for your faith and service.

“You see Dermot more than you see me, and I want to thank him for the huge amount of work that he has led in this Parish, particularly over the last year and the last few months.”

After another loud applause of appreciation from the congregation, the ceremony came to a close, but the celebrations continued afterwards with refreshments in the St Martin’s GAC clubhouse, where all enjoyed a delicious slice of anniversary cake.

(Photographs by Julie Kelly)



Legion of Mary members enjoy inspiring retreat

by Tom McDermott

EARLIER this year, the Legion of Mary had a visit from Deus et Patria to the Derry Diocese. Young people from Belfast and Dublin visited three Churches over a weekend. They spoke in Ballymagroarty, Carnhill and Creggan Churches.

They also spent some time on the streets and visiting houses in the Creggan area, promoting the Legion of Mary and encouraging young people especially to consider not only joining the Legion of Mary, but getting involved with their parish community in whatever way suits them.

This created a lot of interest and the Legion of Mary has had enquiries about their work from a number of people since then. We are always open for new members, both auxiliary and full members. If people feel they are not suited to be fully active members they can become auxiliary members. This involves saying the daily prayers including the Rosary. This work is very important for the Legion of Mary, because without these prayers we can do nothing.

Since then we have had our annual bus run to Knock, which saw two buses go from the city. Although it was a very wet day, that did not dampen the spirits of members and friends, who had a great time there.

On Sunday, October 15, we had our annual one day Retreat in Termonbacca, with around 40 in attendance. Members came from

Derry City, Waterside, Carnhill, Galliagh, Currynierin, Strabane, Omagh, Castlederg, Moville, Clonmany, Muff, Limavady and Buncrana.

Our agenda for the day included praying the Rosary and Legion prayers, talks on ‘From Mary to Jesus’ and ‘Legion of Mary in Nigeria’, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Confessions, Mass and closing prayers

The first talk was given by Aoife O’Neill, who stood in for Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, who could not attend. Aoife did a great job and highlighted the importance of Mary’s role in bringing us to her Son. Mary always points us to her Son. Jesus came to us through Mary and we can come closer to Him through His Mother.

Aoife pointed out 10 principles that would help us in our journey to get closer to Jesus: Humility; Lively Faith; Blind Obedience; Continual Prayers; Universal Mortification; Divine Purity; Ardent Charity; Heroic Patience; Angelic Sweetness; and Divine Wisdom. Although there is a lot there, maybe just concentrating on one or two would help us on our journey to get closer to Jesus.

The second talk was given by Fr Cajetan Apeh ocd, who told us that Nigeria has a population of around 210 million people, the most populous in Africa. He explained that Nigeria was the first African country to have the Legion of Mary active in the church, and that members were



co-workers with priests and could reach people that priests could not reach. He said what stood out for him was the Legion’s devotion and dedication that has stood the test of time over other groups. Fr Cajetan told us that members go into villages and preach and help out with older people in washing etc. They work with non-Christians too and have converted many.

Irish missionary priests have worked in Africa in the past and still do, but we have five Nigerian priests presently working in Ireland. For Fr Cajetan, the Legion of Mary has played a part in his vocation and continues to

influence many, including young men in joining the priesthood.

Overall, the day was a great success for the Legion of Mary and, after a tough time through Covid when some Praesidia closed, we are now hopeful of getting some of those Praesidia up and running again.

If anyone is interested in joining the Legion of Mary, either as a full member or an auxiliary member, please call one of the following numbers and we will be delighted to put you in touch with the right people to guide you: Tom (07521500665); Gerry (07904341198); and Theresa (07555629473).



Parish WhatsApp group chat on fire as Ballyscullion community combined talents to organise...

Wonderful Golden Jubilee celebration for St Joseph's Church on the shores of Lough Beg

THE 50th anniversary of the opening of St Joseph's Church, Ballyscullion, within the Parish of Bellaghy, was marked on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, with the celebration of Mass by Bishop Donal.

Paying tribute to the faith of the community in deciding 50 years ago to replace their old chapel with "a new one that would be worthy of God and of this people on the shores of Lough Beg", the Bishop found it fitting that the Golden Jubilee was celebrated on the day the Church celebrated "the extraordinary work of God in a very ordinary young woman in Palestine 2,000 years ago".

"Mary's Son is Emmanuel, God with us," he stated, adding: "In this church, as in every church, we celebrate God's presence among us in Word and sacrament. God stands with us in a great cathedral and in a small rural church. God stood with your ancestors when there were no churches because of poverty or persecution. In today's feast, Mary says, God is with you and wants you to be holy."

Commenting on the dedication of the Church to St Joseph, "the quiet man of faith who says

nothing in the bible", Bishop Donal went on to remark: "Faith calls us apart from the noise of issues that the strong want us to think about - buying, partying, spending, so-called reality TV - and asks us to deal with often painful issues that scar our lives - love and loss, hopes and disappointments, sin and forgiveness."

He added: "Here, in this holy place, you say God is with us in farming and in fishing, in birth and in death, in joy and in tragedy. In a sad world, we have good news to celebrate here."

"This church is the place in this community where people deal with the real questions of life. Cherish it and what you want for here for another 50 years. We lose too many people because they were not helped to process the pain of being human; hard work, but the only thing that will heal the human heart and help it to hope, and to be free!"

Welcoming Bishop Donal "home", the Parish Priest, Fr Pat O'Hagan thanked the Co Antrim native for taking time out of his extremely busy schedule as Bishop of Derry and Apostolic Administrator of



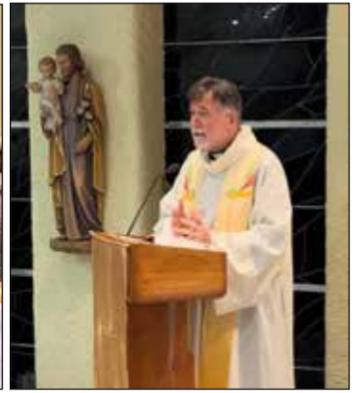
Down & Connor, to be with the community of Ballyscullion on the Golden Jubilee of St Joseph's, which was opened on December 8, 1973.

Delightedly reporting that the Parish WhatsApp group chat had been "on fire" once the community knew that the Golden Jubilee Mass was going to take place, with offers of help regarding physical, liturgical, musical, financial and culinary aspects of such a celebration, Fr Pat thanked everyone who had helped in any way "to make

the Mass a fitting celebration of a very significant occasion", including the readers, singers and musicians, those who offered the intercessions and brought up the offertory gifts."

"This Golden Jubilee," he remarked, "brought the whole community together in a way that should make them rightly proud."

And, he was very happy to also thank all those who had prepared the food to be enjoyed afterwards in Moneyglass Hall.





Termonbacca Ladies Prayer Group yet another bud of faith bursting forth in Derry



Natasha O'Connor, one of the founders of the Termonbacca Ladies Prayer Group.

aged 30 to 60 somethings, who have been journeying together, but a source of mini-miracles in their lives.

The seed for the prayer group was sown during a conversation between 45-year-old Natasha O'Connor and her sister, Nicola.

Originally from Killea, Co Donegal, but now living in the Waterside with her husband, Kevin and two children aged nine and 11 years old, Natasha told 'The Net' that, having attended Youth 2000 prayer gatherings in her late 20s, she was aware of "the benefit of having a prayer group and being amongst people of similar faith".

Recalling the conversation with her sister, she said: "Nicola and I were chatting about the challenges today and that there was a feeling of isolation in the world. We talked about what way we wanted our children to grow up, and about not having anywhere where we could talk about our Catholic belief and grow in our faith. There was no one really we could talk to in our workplaces.

"As a result of our conversation, Nicola called Aoife O'Neill at Termonbacca about somewhere

to hold a Ladies Prayer Group and she gave us a night that we could come to the Oratory in the Retreat Centre."

"Initially, we just advertised it on Facebook," added Natasha, "We started out with about five or six of us gathering on the first night, including my two sisters, my friend, Jennifer Coyle, and myself, and we are now the core group that takes the lead on the prayer nights, when we would have about 18-20 ladies.

"We pray the Rosary, Lectio Divina with the Gospel reading, sing hymns, and have some quiet time in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and reflection. Afterwards we have a cup of tea, which is a great opportunity to chat with other women of the faith to encourage and sustain us."

Heartened by how the group has transformed since it was first set up, she said: "Initially, we had about five minutes of quiet time in Adoration and that has now grown to 20 minutes.

"There have been mini-miracles amongst the group too, with some finding their lifestyle has changed dramatically since coming to the Prayer Group. I would say that

every one of us has a testimony at this stage around our own growth in the faith."

In the last few weeks, there has been an added element of Bible Study offered by the core group's spiritual director, Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, after 15 minutes of chatting over a cuppa at the end of the time of prayer. Gathered around in the Coffee Bar of the Retreat Centre, they listen intently to Fr Stephen opening up the treasures of the faith in the Scriptures, starting with Mark's Gospel, and asking any questions they may have as they go along.

Mentioning that another fruit of the Prayer Group was a recent Ladies Retreat Weekend, which attracted about 30 retreatants, Natasha reflected: "We are really blessed in this group. God has been so good to us."

The prayer group meets in the Oratory at Termonbacca on Tuesday nights from 7.15-8.15 pm, and new members are more than welcome. The Bible Study begins at 8.30 pm, after the tea-break, and is not just for those attending the Prayer Group but other ladies as well.



Dana and Mickey Harte moved by sound of large gathering of men praying and singing as... Flame of faith fanned during Long Tower Men's prayer in Eucharistic Adoration



DERRY'S Dana enjoyed a visit to her home-town when she was invited to sing her recently released St Patrick's Song, 'Light the Fire' during an afternoon of Men's Prayer in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, on the eve of the Solemnity of Christ The King. Dana was joined on the altar by Tyrone man, Mickey Harte, the current manager of the Derry GAA senior football team, who led the gathering of men of all ages in praying the Rosary.

The day of prayer included a period of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, short talk on praying with the heart by French theologian, Jean Khoury, founder of The School of Mary, and on-going Confessions, with many men who had not been to Confession in years taking the opportunity to confess. There was also an opportunity to gather afterwards for talks in the Discalced Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca.

Moved to see so many men, young and old, gathered together in prayer and to hear them join her in singing 'Light the Fire' in such a historic place of prayer and worship as St Columba's Long Tower, with its sacred connections to another of Ireland's Patron Saints, Dana thanked them for responding to Heaven's call to be there and encouraged them in their prayer.

Highlighting the words of her song, 'light the fire in my heart once again', Dana remarked that it would good to pray those words "because when there's light in our

own hearts then we spread it and share it".

"Our world needs that fire – that fire of faith, hope and love," she said, adding, "You have come from all different parts of Ireland to this historic place where St Colmcille lit the fire of faith in this wonderful city. What God has planned for each one of you to do will amaze you, and it will be a saving grace for our country."

Dana then invited Mickey Harte to speak the words of St Patrick that form the lead in to her song, 'Light the Fire', which she had composed in honour of Ireland's globally-known Patron Saint.

Struck by the large gathering of men before him, Mickey took time to share his own thoughts regarding the Rosary.

"I've never had the privilege of speaking before so many men who were prepared to say the Rosary, and who hold the Rosary dear to themselves and their families," he said, before sharing memories of the praying of the Rosary in his childhood home.

"My father, God rest him, said the Rosary every night in our house," he recalled, adding: "I'm the youngest of 10 children and my first memory is of sitting at the chair that my father was kneeling at, tucked in underneath his arms, and hearing him calling out the Rosary. That was done every night and gave a real sense of security and comfort. I must have been only about three years of age, and I suppose that was when the seed was sown in my heart for the praying of the Rosary."

He continued: "When my father was calling the Rosary, we always said it. Then, when we grew up and had our own families we maybe weren't just as diligent about that, and that is the way life goes sometimes.

"However, I think it is very important to make this distinction that even though we weren't as diligent about saying the Rosary every day, the most important thing for me was that the seed was sown for the Rosary prayer which kept the faith going in Ireland in the Penal times, when people weren't able to get to Mass.

"Now, I would not let a day go past without saying the Rosary. So, there may have been a lapse, but what my father gave us was the sowing of the seed, and all it needed was a little bit of nourishing."

Share

In a special word of encouragement to parents and grandparents amongst those gathered, Mickey said: "I think it is important to make sure and share the Rosary with your children and grandchildren. Even if they don't continue with it when they are going through different stages of life, there will be something there within them and, in time, the Rosary will come back to them as a very special prayer.

"So, I would encourage you, when driving along in the car with your children and grandchildren to say the Rosary. If you are driving them to school, maybe get them to say the 'Our Father' or a decade of the Rosary. It just instils in them that the Rosary is important to men and women, and that prayer is important."

He added: "In this modern age, people think that the Rosary is a very long prayer. Maybe it is for those who haven't found the value of prayer in their lives, but I think we need to put a bit of context on that. This long prayer takes 15 minutes maximum...how much time do we spend looking at television, laptops, iPads, 'phones, and everything else?"

"So, it's not really a long prayer. This is a very short window in

your day when you can give time to God and Mary, through the Holy Rosary. In praying the 'Hail Mary', we are asking Mary to 'pray for us now and at the hour of our death', and we are saying that 53 times when we are praying the Rosary. We are simply calling Mary into our lives, so that She may bring our requests to Jesus like nobody else can."

"It is worth thinking about the influence we can have on others," Mickey continued, "the good that comes from praying the Rosary is not just something we have found for ourselves, we need to share it with as many people as possible.

"That is why it is so good to see the Men's Rosary started in Ireland and how it has spread so far, and how we were brought together here for this special gathering with people who know the value of the Rosary. It is a resource for us in the way forward to bringing the faith back to Ireland, not only just the way it used to be, but even better, with people really understanding the value and presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, and of bringing Mary into our prayers as well.

"I think we are in a very blessed time. Sometimes people think that the darkest hour comes before the dawn, well I think the darkest hour is on its way to lift and the dawn is coming; the dawn of what we can become as real faithful Catholics in this country.

"We shouldn't be despairing, we should be people of hope, and there is no greater source of hope than the Eucharist, Adoration and the Rosary. Don't keep this precious prize to yourself, share it with as many people as possible, and be a person of joy because you have the presence of Jesus and Mary with you."

Mickey also highlighted the importance of having a Holy Water font in the home, saying: "In the 50s and 60s, there were always Holy Water fonts in our homes...and there was always Holy Water in them. I think that is something we need to return to as well; to recognise the value of Holy Water in our lives, and to bless ourselves before leaving the house."



Dana and Mickey Harte leading in song and prayer at the Men's time of prayer in St Columba's Church, Long Tower.



Men's First Saturday Rosary in Clonmany, Co Donegal.



Men's First Saturday Rosary in Derry.



Men's December First Saturday Rosary in Derry.



Men's December First Saturday Rosary in Carndonagh



Men's Rosary in Malin, Co Donegal.

Dana's reflection on writing Rosary theme song for Fr Patrick Peyton and...some 33 years later... her new St Patrick song 'Light the Fire'...

Call to keep flame of faith burning brightly in our hearts



Dana singing 'Light the Fire' at the St Eugene's Parish Mass to mark the 150th anniversary of the Cathedral back in May.

SINCE launching her new song, 'Light The Fire - St Patrick's Song', earlier this year for St Patrick's Day, Dana has returned to her home-city of Derry to sing it at occasions such as the St Eugene's Parish Mass in May to celebrate the Cathedral's 150th anniversary and the Men's time of prayer last month in the Long Tower.

The song refers to the Paschal fire lit by St Patrick on the ancient Hill of Slane in 433 AD, and how it is still calling for the flame of faith to be kept burning brightly in hearts. In an interview with Radio Maria Ireland back in March to talk about how 'Light The Fire' had come about, Dana described it as "the most unusual thing" she had ever been involved in.

She talked about how the seed had been sown for the song during a conversation about 10-12 years ago with her late brother-in-law, Fr Kevin Scallan, who founded the 'Intercession for Priests' in 1976, and with whom Dana recorded a number of Rosaries, including the Blue Rosary, the Healing Rosary, and the Intercession for Priests Rosary.

"Fr Kevin said to me, you know we need a new hymn to St Patrick because he is not for a past generation, his message and mission is for today and for the whole world," recalled Dana, adding: "He stressed that it is such an alive and important message and asked me to pray about writing a new hymn to St Patrick.

"So, I started reading 'The Confession of St Patrick', but there was a lot going on in our lives at that time, it was a very difficult time, and I only managed to get a few pages read. However, when

we prayed our Rosary, with little aspirations at the end, it came very strongly to us that we should say, 'St Patrick, St Brigid, St Columba, and all the Saints of Ireland, pray for us'.

"We were saying this every day but got neither a note nor a word, however, I never feel pressured about anything like this. If you get inspiration for it, it's meant to be, and if you don't, it's not. About four or five years later, we were driving to Dublin for an event in the RDS. It was an Easter Sunday and we were praying the Rosary in the car as we drove along. We hadn't been talking about St Patrick or thinking about a song, but while we were praying the third decade of the Glorious Mysteries - the Descent of the Holy Spirit - 90 per cent of it just instantaneously came!"

She continued: "You really need to have confirmation about whatever it is you are praying about. Well we got two very strong confirmations in the one day, so Damian and I knew that it was really important."

However, Dana had felt that the song wasn't complete: "I didn't know what it was, but I knew there was something missing. Damian kept saying to me, 'You have to record this', and I'd say, 'Yes, I know that, I know that'...but we never did.

"Then at the end of January this year, the bit that was missing just came to me; I finally knew what it was. After all those years, I literally sat down with a very friend, a great traditional guitarist, at the end of January and on February 1 we 'routined' it, that is, laid it down as we felt it should

be. Sometime after that, Damian asked if I had realised that I had 'routined' it on St Brigid's Day... and I hadn't thought about that. It was completed after a few days in the studio, over a period of a week-and-a-half."

In awe at how fast things suddenly started happening, Dana was delighted at the launch of 'Light The Fire' in the St Patrick Centre at Downpatrick on March 13, highlighting that it was the only centre in the world that is entirely on the life and message of St Patrick, and located beside the Church of Ireland graveyard where he and St Brigid and St Columba are buried, with the first Christian Church he founded in Ireland only a couple of miles away.

She went on to recall how a conversation with Fr Richard Gibbons, the Parish Priest and Rector of Knock Shrine, asking him if he was coming to the launch at the St Patrick Centre, had led to him asking her to launch it also at the St Patrick's Day Mass in the Basilica at Knock, in Co Mayo, the same county where St Patrick had spent 40 days fasting on Croagh Patrick, now a popular place of pilgrimage.

"I am just in total awe at all of this," said Dana, "I know it is meant to be. On hearing it, people feel that it is like an anthem for today, and when Martina Purdy interviewed me about it and I told her that most of it had been written on an Easter Sunday on the way to Dublin, she remarked, 'Of course, it was the Easter fire that Patrick lit'.

"St Patrick lit that fire under pain of death, in a time of very dark days. It was a fire of love that came through the darkness of that time, converting the people of Ireland, and through the wonderful missionaries that we have had down the centuries, that light was spread through the entire world.

"So, this song, 'Light the Fire', is saying 'Light the flame in my heart once again...and the fire will burn in the darkness', because the embers are still there from that fire on the ancient Hill of Slane and the darkness will be filled with light. It is a calling for today and for the intercession of St Patrick.

"I am just so moved when I talk about it. This song is for today and for each one of us. It is really a song of great, great hope."

Slane

Reminded of another interesting connection with the Hill of Slane and her singing ministry, Dana went on to recall an encounter with Venerable Patrick Peyton, the Co Mayo born Rosary priest.

"All our young life," she said, "our mother always repeated Fr Peyton's motto - 'The family that

prays together, stays together' - and so, we prayed the Rosary as a family. At that time most families did that; you knelt in the kitchen and prayed the Rosary. Of course, we were always getting into trouble because we were always pushing each other, trying to make each other laugh. That memory of praying the Rosary stays with you, and the blessing of that stays with you.

"Later in life, in 1990, I was invited to sing at a Rosary Rally in Florida with Fr Peyton. I had assumed that this incredible man, who had gone around the world with the living Rosary, where actors would act out the different decades of the Rosary, and who my mother had first seen after World War II at a Rosary Rally in Wembley Stadium, was in Heaven. I never dreamt that he would be still alive.

"At the time of the invite, I had so many Rosary beads I could have opened my own shop but, honestly, I had great difficulty in praying the Rosary. So, I felt that I could not go because it would be hypocritical, and I said 'No'. Then my mother heard about the invite and I ended up going."

Recalling the occasion she then first met Fr Peyton in Florida, at a private meal, Dana said: "Waiting for him to come into the room, I felt almost scared to meet him. When he walked in you could see that, while he was gaunt and slightly stooped, he was a tall and powerful presence. I actually felt that I was in the presence of a saintly man.

"We all sat down to dinner and I was seated right opposite him. I was nearly afraid to look in his eyes because I thought he was going to know when he looked at me that I didn't say the Rosary regularly! He was softly spoken and started to talk about his life and childhood. He was captivating; we were literally hanging on his every word.

"He talked about how they used to kneel in the kitchen to pray the Rosary, and I thought, 'Oh, that's what we did'. He described how he used to rest his elbows on the arms of a wooden chair and lean forward, and we were thinking that this man was born a saint! Then, he told us that one night his older brother slapped him across the head in the middle of the Rosary. We were all astounded, but then he said that he had deserved it because he had been reading a comic! Well, that brought great relief. We laughed so much, and I thought to myself, 'Oh, thank you Jesus', because this man had had difficulty with the Rosary too."

She continued: "We chatted on and then he said that he had been looking for a theme song for his ministry for 40 years. He looked



Dana and her husband, Damian, with the music ministry at the Men's time of prayer in St Columba's, Long Tower.

up into my eyes and asked if I could write it. Well, it was like an electric shock and I said, 'Oh no!' I thought that I couldn't possibly write it when I didn't even pray the Rosary. I was totally shocked.

"However, after dinner was finished and before I left the room, I was hearing music and words. I thought, 'No! There is no way that I could be thinking anything about a theme song.' I couldn't sleep that night because it was going around and around in my head, and I couldn't make any sense of it. It wasn't like a normal song...it had different sections that were related but slightly different.

"The next morning I felt dreadful. We were walking to the stage area in the stadium for a sound check before the Rosary Rally, and I said to Damian, 'I don't know what this is in my head. It's haunting me. It just keeps repeating.' And he told me, 'Don't be afraid of repetition, the Rosary is repetition...and it just fell into place, I could almost see it in front of me.

"It was sung prayers before and after the decades of the Rosary. I knew that the priest was to simply explain the decade with a meditation on it. I knew exactly what it was and I just felt that I heard, 'This will be used to teach the Rosary to those that don't know it and to refresh the Rosary for those who do pray it'. Just as clear as daylight and that night we made a rough tape and gave it to Fr Peyton. He flew off the next morning and called when he got to New York to say that it was what he had been looking for 40 years."

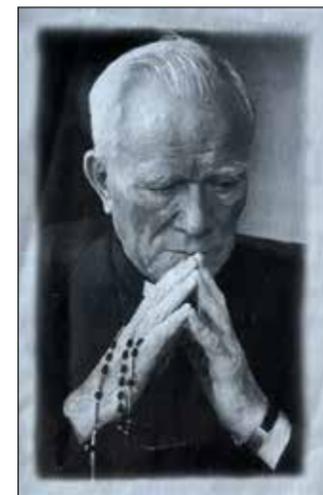
About two weeks later they found themselves in a studio in Slane, with Fr Peyton telling them that recording could not begin before they went to the top of the Hill of Slane where St Patrick had lit the fire.

"He said, 'We are going there

now,'" recalled Dana, "so, we all went up to the top of the Hill of Slane with a big bottle of Holy Water and Fr Peyton blessed us and blessed Slane, and threw the Holy Water as far as he could. He asked for the intercession of St Patrick and blessed Ireland, and we then went down and began recording the Rosary. He also threw almost half a bottle of Holy Water over the desk of the engineer, who nearly fell to the ground in horror, but afterwards he said that the equipment had never worked as well.

"We recorded the whole Rosary with Fr Peyton, but it was very near the end of his life. It was 1991. With his blessing, Fr Kevin Scallan did his part, using his own meditations and prayers. Fr Peyton died, but that Rosary has gone to every corner of the world, and there has been conversions and healing through the power of that prayer."

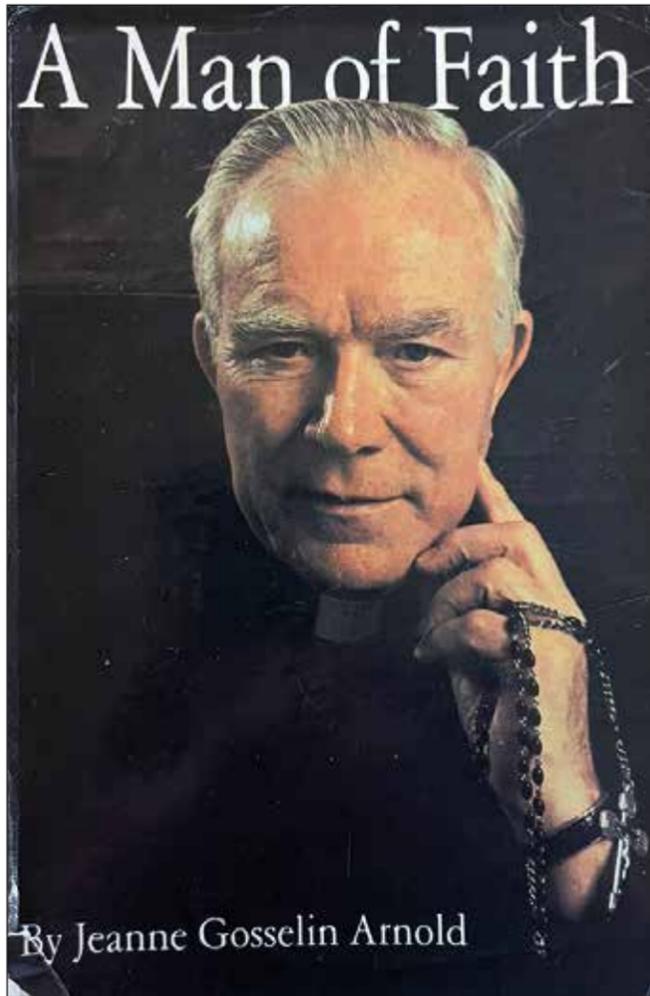
Saying that she now loves praying the Rosary every day, Dana remarked: "God is very good. He gives you what you need and then, when He thinks you have got a grasp of it, He wants you to share it."



The Rosary Priest, Venerable Patrick Peyton.

Aware of the “difference it made to kneel together in front of the hearth and tie the family together with God and Our Lady and the saints”, Rosary priest, Venerable Patrick Peyton CSC believed that...

The Rosary meets the needs of the modern family today – to get together to pray



The Rosary priest, Venerable Patrick Peyton CSC, Attymas, Co Mayo.

“GOD is now with His people. He has come among us. He is visible in the Infant Jesus – helpless and totally surrendered to the care, love and protection of His Mother, the young girl Mary. God made no mistake in His choice of her for so unbelievable a responsibility. His Heaven is now her arms that enfold Him, her heart that loves Him, her eyes that watch for His every need. The shepherds and the Wise men – the poor and rich – both find their God when they find Mary. Like the shepherds and Wise Men, all of us will find Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word of God, when and where they find Mary.”

THIS meditation on ‘The Nativity’ for the ‘Joyful Mysteries’ by the Irish-born Rosary priest, Venerable Patrick Peyton, CSC, is recorded in the book on his life, ‘A Man of Faith’, written by Jeanne Gosselin Arnold, which is well worth a read to experience the great impact one man’s deep love for Our Lady and the Rosary had on nations of people around the world, and to be drawn into a deeper appreciation of this powerful prayer.

Speaking to the thousands who gathered for the Rosary Rallies he led in dioceses across the globe, as part of the Family Rosary Crusade he founded in 1947, Fr Peyton’s main message was to assure them: “Our Blessed Mother Mary is alive. She is here. She will help you if you ask her. She cannot deny you. She will come and pray with you to her Son Jesus, who is with

God His Father in Heaven. He cannot deny His Blessed Mother anything she asks...I know. I lived it.”

He also shared with them his memories of growing up praying the Rosary every night before bedtime in the family home, in the Co Mayo townland of Carracastle, near Ballina. Born on January 9, 1909, in a time when Ireland was still feeling the effects of the Great Famine, he was the sixth of nine children in the family of John and Mary Gillard Peyton, who taught him and his siblings that in praying the Rosary they were inviting Our Lady to join them in prayer in their home, and thanking God, through Her, for their blessings, as well as asking for His guidance.

He often recalled how the sight of his father getting down on

his knees to lead the family in praying the Rosary every evening, no matter how hard or long the day’s work had been, had been a formative experience that had stayed with him throughout his life.

“It was the entire family praising God, asking Him through His Mother to protect it, to guide it to the destiny He had intended for it,” he remarked, adding: “That nightly scene constitutes my earliest memory and the most abiding. From it, I derive the entire pattern and purpose of my existence.”

“There were times when we had little or nothing to eat,” he said, “but there were never times when we did not have our strong spirit of faith to face all the difficulties and hardships of life...A great spirit of charity and unity dwelt in that home; brothers and sisters never lost an opportunity to come to the aid of their parents or each other.”

As a youngster, he discovered how much praying the Rosary meant to him when during a week spent with a neighbouring farmer and his family, to help gather potatoes, that family did not pray it: “Nobody had ever explained to them what a difference it made to kneel together in front of the hearth and tie the family together with God and Our Lady and the saints.”

So affected by this, the young Patrick found the courage to share his thoughts with the farmer as he paid him his wages for the week, and he later found out that the family had then started praying the Rosary.

Fond of spending his spare time in the parish church in childhood, and imagining himself celebrating Mass while an altar boy, Patrick’s family had felt that he had a calling to priesthood. When, as a 19-year-old, he and his older brother, Tom, went to join their three sisters in America, this call grew stronger, for both of them as it turned out, and they joined the Holy Cross Order.

Tuberculosis

After 10 years of study with the Holy Cross Fathers, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which led to a lengthy time in hospital. When he did not respond to treatment, he grew doubtful about being able to continue his studies for the priesthood. His doctors finally told him that he could either go through a series of operations to enable his lung to rest, though he would be left deformed, or...he could pray.

Discussing the situation with his

superior, he was asked if his faith was a sham or a reality, and was reminded that God will never say ‘no’ to Our Lady. With a renewed sense of the reality and nearness of Mary, he realised how his daily praying of the Rosary would now stand him in good stead: “Those 53 ‘Hail Marys’ I said every night of my life were like an insurance a man pays on a house. Now the house was burning down and he would claim his insurance...That night, I put my life in prayer. I put my life in the hands of God and Our Blessed Mother.”

As his prayer grew stronger, so did Pat and he returned to his studies at Holy Cross College exactly a year after being taken to hospital by ambulance, though he was still under medical care and did most of his studying in bed.

He and his brother, Tom, were eventually ordained priests on the same day, June 15, 1941, and Fr Pat dedicated his life as a priest to Our Lady that day: “She helped me out of her own love in answer to my prayers, and I wanted to thank her by dedicating my life, my every action, every merit of my priesthood to her.”

Pondering how to fulfil this pledge to Mary, he kept it in prayer and during a day of retreat, towards the end of January 1942, in the midst of World War II, he realised that his lifework was to get every family in America, and the whole world, to pray the Rosary daily: “It would repay my debt to Our Blessed Mother and bring peace to the world by bringing peace to the family on its knees before God every single day.”

He resolved to spend himself until death “to bring the family Rosary back to home life, not for the month of May or October or Lent, but for always.”

So began his life’s mission, which saw many ups and downs and received great support from his superiors and many others along the way, including four popes – Pius XII, John XXIII, Paul VI, and John Paul II.

In a private audience with Pope John XXIII, in February 1959, Fr Pat was told by the Holy Father: “I ask you especially to teach the children – teach the children everywhere the Mysteries of the Rosary – for in this way you will be teaching the life of Christ to the men and women of tomorrow.”

In a letter to Fr Pat later, on May 1, imparting an apostolic blessing, Pope John XXIII wrote: “Individuals, whatever their spiritual status may be, will undoubtedly find in the fervent recitation of the holy Rosary, an



This painting of ‘The Madonna and Child’, by Spanish painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, was a favourite of Fr Peyton’s and served as the main image of the Virgin Mary for the entirety of his Family Rosary Crusade efforts.

Prayer for the Beatification of Venerable Patrick Peyton

Dear Jesus, Father Peyton devoted his priestly life to strengthening the families of the world by calling them to pray together every day, especially the Rosary. His message is as important for us now as it was during his life on earth. We beg you, therefore to hasten the day of his beatification so that your faithful people everywhere will remember his message that the family that prays together stays together, will imitate him in his devotion to your Mother and ours, and will be inspired by his holy life to draw ever closer to you with childlike confidence and love. Amen.

Prayer for a favour through the Intercession of Venerable Patrick Peyton

God, Our Father, your wisdom is displayed in all creation and the power of your grace is revealed in the lives of holy people, who inspire us to trust you more fully and to serve others more generously. In a unique way, you blessed the life and work of your servant Father Patrick Peyton, CSC, and made him a fervent apostle of Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary and Mother of us all. Through his intercession, we ask for this favour..... Please grant it, if it is for your honour and glory, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

invitation to regulate their lives in conformity with Christian principles. They will, in truth, find the Rosary a spring of most abundant graces to help them in fulfilling faithfully their duties in life.

“Souls lacking in faith and wavering for want of courage are in need of maternal help to overcome discouragement in their sad plight. This maternal help they can receive through devotion to the Blessed Virgin who has given a Redeeming God to the world...”

As well as becoming a household name in America, with his hit radio shows and films that attracted millions and starred Hollywood stars like Bing Crosby, Grace Kelly and James Dean, Fr Pat’s Rosary mission, which included establishing Family Rosary and Family Theatre Productions, went from continent to continent, reaching over 40 countries, including his Irish homeland, with his renowned mantra, “the family that prays together stays together”, converting millions to

family prayer.

Preaching on the salvation of families through prayer, he would say: “In a home where the Rosary is prayed devoutly each day, families are reminded constantly of what Jesus and Mary suffered for their sakes. Their gratitude is renewed daily. They give thanks in the daily actions of their own lives. In such a home, there cannot be an unfaithful husband or wife, or a parent or child without love and kindness.”

Lights

Highlighting that the Rosary can bring families through all dangers and evils, he told listeners: “All family prayer, no matter what is prayed, all group prayer is wonderful. But it is the Rosary prayed by families that will keep the lights of faith flowing in the days of darkness of faith, as it has done in the past.

“We must hold fast to the treasure of the Rosary, the gift of Our Blessed Mother, the role of Our Blessed Mother that was the

Beautiful new Grotto celebrates St Mary's Cloughcor 200th

A beautiful grotto has been built in the grounds of St Mary's Church, Cloughcor, in the Leckpatrick Parish, to mark the 200th anniversary of the opening of the Church.

Delighted to have Our Lady honoured as part of the anniversary celebrations, parish priest, Fr Gerry Sweeney commended the work of parishioner, Kevin McGrory, who built it.

He added: "There is no grotto in the Parish, so this is a first and it has all been paid for by donations from parishioners.

Marking the bi-centenary of the Church, the hope is that it will be a place for people to come and pray at any time."

Fr Gerry blessed the new grotto, with parishioners gathered around, after the Saturday Vigil Mass.



Fr Gerry Sweeney, PP Leckpatrick, with Grotto builder and parishioner, Kevin McGrory.



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last gift that Jesus gave us before He died. We must never forget the Rosary and its meaning, the very embodiment of our Christianity."

Speaking about his mission at a celebration organised by friends to mark the 20th anniversary year of the Family Rosary Crusade, Fr Pat told those gathered: "Total surrender to Mary is the secret of my happiness, my sureness, my security. It will be yours if you ask her.

"That is the grace that God has given me all these years - to have no other thought, no other purpose, but just to tell the world that Mary is a woman who could not say 'no' to God the Father when He gave her the first role as the Mother of God, and who cannot say 'no' to Jesus Christ who gave her the second role as the Blessed Mother of all humanity.

"That is the mission that God gave me - to have the privilege of helping His Blessed Mother in fulfilling her second role by going among all people and bringing families to her to lead souls back to God."

Reflecting during a 1980 interview on the origins of the Rosary, Fr Pat said: "It was a real blessing to me to discover through my own study and research how the Rosary has its roots way back in the Old Testament and evolved through the Word of God in the New Testament, and through the guidance of the Church and the acclamation of the faithful. It shows how one light leads to another if only we are open to accept it.

"Like all the works and events in the Church, the Rosary has the power and touch of the Holy Spirit upon it...It's the product of many ages and various cultures responding to the needs and desires of the people to offer God praise and adoration, to enter into the contemplation of His eternal plan - and to appreciate how He worked out salvation through Jesus and Mary...It meets the needs of the modern family today - to get together to pray."

On the Golden Jubilee of Family Rosary, Pope John Paul II wrote in a letter, on February 11, 1992,

giving thanks to God "for the many gifts bestowed on the Church" through Fr Pat's "tireless and persevering efforts". In it, he prayed "that all Christian families may discover the treasure of the Family Rosary in order that their family life be strengthened and blessed."

Experiencing declining health in the later years of his life, due to on-going heart problems, it is known that Fr Pat continued to pray the 15 decades of the Rosary, and when he was dying on the morning of June 3, 1992, his last words were: "Mary, my queen, my mother." He also had great love for the Mass and made a holy hour every day.

The process for Fr Pat's canonisation began five years after his death and, in 2001, he was named 'Servant of God', with Pope Francis bestowing on him the title of Venerable on December 18, 2017.

In honour of the great faith and ministry of this humble, Irish-born priest, who often proclaimed that "a world at prayer is a world at peace", maybe readers of 'The Net' will consider taking the following pledge and prayer, taken by millions throughout the world during the Family Rosary Crusades, as a gift to your family and our world for Christmas and beyond...

"My pledge and prayer - Mary, I ask your intercession with your Divine Son for myself, my family, my country, my world. I shall do this through the Rosary that I will pray daily with all or some of my family or alone if necessary, because I so firmly believe in the words of your Son: 'Again I tell you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by my Father in Heaven. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.' (Mt 18:19-20)"

('A Man of Faith' by Jeanne Gosselin Arnold - ISBN 0-9608836-0-6

'The Rosary Priest - A Biography of Patrick Peyton CSC by Fr Tom Mulligan - ISBN 978 1 84730 861 0)



Celebrating the second anniversary of the Children's First Saturday Rosary in St Patrick's Church, Claudy.



Some of the children who attend the monthly Children's Rosary in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, Derry.

The Holy Rosary...the prayer we all love

by Annie Mullan

AS we pray the Rosary, we meditate on the life of Mary and Her precious Son, Jesus, our Saviour, beginning at the Annunciation when Archangel Gabriel came to tell Mary that She would have a Son and would name Him Jesus, and that He would be great and be called the Son of the Most High, to the Coronation, the day She was crowned Queen of Heaven.

We meditate on Jesus from the moment Mary conceived Him in Her virginal womb through the power of the Holy Spirit, until the Ascension, when He gloriously ascended into Heaven, and now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

The prayer of the Rosary is powerful. If only we knew how close Jesus and Mary are to us when we pray from our hearts and especially little children, whose hearts are so pure. Our Lady of Fatima chose children to pray the Rosary, assuring them that Her Immaculate Heart would be their refuge and the way that would lead them to God. She asked the children to pray the Rosary every day in order to obtain peace for the world and the end of the war.

So, let us teach our little children the holy Rosary today. Let us rest in the Persons of Jesus and Mary;

Jesus being the healer and Mary the nurse of our broken humanity. Jesus, whom we meet in the Joyful, Sorrowful, Glorious and Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary, is the author of love.

In faith, as we make our way around the beads, we journey with Jesus in union with Mary, meditating on the birth, life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and King.

Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary, with St Joseph, St Dominic and all the Angels and Saints in Heaven, we entrust ourselves, our families, our children, and the whole world, to your Motherly care.

The Children's Rosary is prayed in St Patrick's Church, Claudy, at 2 pm on the First Saturday of every month, and in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, Derry, on the second Saturday of each month at 2 pm. All families are welcome.

The 2024 All Ireland Rosary Rally will take place at Knock Shrine on Saturday, June 1. Attendance at this is growing each year, with this year's gathering being one of the largest attendances during the 2023 pilgrimage season at the International Eucharistic & Marian Shrine.

Pilgrimage to Fatima – Reflection & Perspective

by John-Martin O’Kane

Earlier this year, I had a strong calling to pilgrimage, and given my Marian devotion, it was only apt that I took the opportunity to go to Fatima. I just knew the basic facts around the apparitions at Fatima, so this was bound to be a pilgrimage of discovery, encounter, formation, and renewal. I joined a group of 58 pilgrims from Derry, Donegal and Strabane parishes, and we were in the company of our spiritual directors: Fr. Sean O’Donnell and Fr. Malachy Gallagher. I was also reacquainted with a few lads from my Cursillo weekend last April, so it was nice to have familiar faces on the trip too.

Wednesday 4th – Thursday 5th October – Arrival

We set out on the Wednesday evening (4th October), travelling to Dublin on a trusty Reddins coach, in order to catch the early morning flight to Portugal. This was in many ways a vigil of sorts, as we travelled throughout the night hours. The flight touched down at around 8.30am in Lisbon on Thursday after a rather smooth, uneventful flight. At Lisbon airport, we were met by one of our two allocated guides, Elsa Silvia. Elsa’s life-long passion for Fatima and the message of Our Blessed Mother would become evident throughout our pilgrimage as she recounted the story of the three shepherd children, the happenings around the apparitions and their significance.

From Lisbon, we commuted the last leg of our journey by coach to Fatima. The view from the coach window revealed a sundrenched beautiful, yet simple landscape, interspersed by towns and villages with vast arrays of white buildings and red roofs. I immediately connected with the place and knew the adventure and experience would be both special and fruitful. After midday, we arrived in the beautiful Hotel Cinquentenario, which would be our home for the next seven days.

At around 5pm, Holy Mass was celebrated in the Chapel of the Angel of Peace. The liturgy set the scene for our pilgrimage and enlightened us to the prayer of Jesus for his disciples after the Last Supper, who would continue His mission after He had left this world (John 17:11-19). This was a prayer imploring the Father’s special protection and blessing on his disciples against the backdrop of opposition and persecution that they would inevitably face in their future mission. We are all missionaries by virtue of our Baptism. We have a purpose and a role to play in God’s plan, as we are his instruments in this time.

Friday 6th October – The Three Shepherd Children

After a hearty breakfast in the hotel, we set off for the Fatima Parish Church and it was

appropriate that we should do so, as this Church was central to the faith formation of the shepherd children and was the Church of their Baptism. This was a splendid building adorned with wonderful church art and statues including the statue of Our Lady of Fatima as She appeared to the children in Cova da Iria. The church also contained the original tabernacle in the sanctuary, in front of which young Francisco spent many hours in prayer and adoration. I began to connect with the Fatima story.

Holy Mass was celebrated here with the Liturgy of the Word taken from the Mass of the Baptism of Our Lord, with an account from Luke’s Gospel (Luke 3:15-16, 21-22) indicating the true humility of Christ in that he led by example in being baptised by John in the River Jordan, just as we are baptised, even though he had no need given His sinlessness and His Divine nature. Jesus wished to be truly united with His Church and so it was important for Him to be Baptised by John in this way.

During this Mass, we were afforded the opportunity to renew our Baptismal Promises and reflect on the purpose of the Sacrament of Baptism, in not only cleansing us from original sin, but in enrolling each of us as children of God; something that can never be undone or erased.

Following Mass on Friday morning, we delved deeper into the Fatima story. We visited the village of Aljustrel, where Jacinta, Francisco and Lucia grew up. We were blessed to have the opportunity to view the living quarters of Jacinta and Francisco Marto’s house and the place where the children were born, and more intimately appreciate their humble beginnings. We also saw the bedroom where Francisco’s life ended prematurely in 1919, and the sick bed of Jacinta before she was moved to Lisbon, where she died in early 1920 due to Spanish flu. The deaths of the two youngest seers were foretold by Our Lady in the second apparition in June 1917.

We were unable to gain access into Lucia’s house, as it was undergoing remedial work at the time of our pilgrimage, however we proceeded a short distance on foot to the site of the well at the rear of Lucia’s house, where the second apparition of the Angel occurred in the summer of 1916. This was a truly remarkable moment on our journey, as a fellow pilgrim, Niamh Kehoe, played a rendition of Ag Críost an Siol (Christ’s is the seed) on flute adjacent to a statue of Francisco sited at the well. This was special given that Francisco also played flute and is often depicted with the instrument. We were blessed to have Niamh’s musical talent

accompany us throughout the pilgrimage. Her music ministry was critical to the enhancement of our liturgies each day.

The second angelic apparition (Angel of Portugal) revealed to the children the urgent need for prayer and sacrifice ‘in reparation for the sins by which The Lord is very much offended’ – something that is by no means less applicable in these times!

On the Friday afternoon, after a group photograph was taken, Elsa gave us a guided tour of the Sanctuary Square including a visit to the new Basilica (The Basilica of the Most Holy Trinity), which can hold approximately 8000 people. The tour was rounded off with time spent in the Main Basilica (The Basilica of Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima) and a viewing of the final resting place of the children. Free time later in the sweltering afternoon sun (around 33 degrees Celsius) gave me a chance to explore the Sanctuary further, and to marvel at the architecture and specifically the Stations of the Cross within the stone arches to either side of the main Basilica.

Saturday 7th October – Venerable Lucia & St. Anthony of Portugal

On Saturday morning, the group had the opportunity to embark upon the first of our day trips, with the destination being Coimbra. We were joined by a small group from Shrewsbury, England, led by Father Peter Dutton, who was also the main celebrant at the morning Mass in the Carmelite Convent of Sister Lucia. This was the beautiful Mass of Our Lady of the Rosary with the Gospel reading taken from Luke 1:26-38, which recites the story of the Annunciation of the Angel Gabriel to a young Mary, and more importantly reveals Her courage through Her fiat and acceptance of the will of God. “I am the handmaid of the Lord, let what you have said be done to me”. I wonder can we say ‘Yes’ to God in humility and fully consent to his will in our lives.

The Chapel in the convent contained one of two statues commissioned by Sister Lucia depicting Our Lady when she showed her Immaculate Heart, dressed in white with a crown of thorns encircling Her Immaculate Heart. These were sculpted by José Ferreira Thedim under the careful instruction of Lucia, who didn’t approve of the positioning of Our Lady’s hands in the first attempt at the statue.

Following on from morning Mass, Elsa led us to the museum within the convent, which is dedicated to the life of Sister Lucia. The reality of Lucia’s life, following the deaths of her cousins, was brought to being when we got the chance to see

various artifacts and personal possessions from Lucia’s adult life as a Carmelite Sister, including a replica cell containing items such as her bed and a small desk with a typewriter that she used, and indeed even the door from her original room was transplanted here. Also noteworthy were the large suitcases containing correspondence to her from all over the world, including Ireland! The museum held some of Lucia’s apparel from her last days, when she was confined to bed, and there was also a fax on display that was sent to Sister Lucia from Pope John Paul II on the day of her death, February 13, 2005.

Whilst in Coimbra, Elsa took us to two significant sites pertaining to Saint Anthony of Padua, (or Saint Anthony of Portugal as Elsa reminded us of the saint’s Portuguese origin, born in Lisbon in 1190). Saint Anthony was an intellectual and excelled in his studies at a young age to the admiration of his superiors. Our first stop was at the Monastery of Saint Anthony of the Olives. It was here that Saint Anthony lived as a Franciscan. Having previously acquainted himself with and witnessed the fervent lives of the Franciscans, he too aspired to lead a life of courageous evangelisation with great humility and zeal.

Saint Anthony, known previously as Fernando, witnessed the lives of five Friars who travelled to Morocco with the intention of spreading the Gospel of Christ and the conversion of souls. These friars were however martyred, and this lit the burning desire in Fernando to follow in their footsteps and so he decided to leave the Augustinian Order and become a Franciscan.

As it would transpire, God had other plans and his life subsequently changed course by means of illness and he ended up in Italy and later in France where his mission continued. He died in Padua, Italy, in 1231. On our visit to the Monastery of Saint Anthony of the Olives, our group had the opportunity to individually venerate and receive a special blessing with a relic of Saint Anthony containing a small fragment of bone from his earthly remains.

Our second stop after lunch was at the Church of the Holy Cross (Monastery of Santa Cruz) in downtown Coimbra, where the young Fernando was ordained an Augustinian in 1220 before his transition to the Franciscan Order. It is this very transition that led Saint Anthony to be tagged as the saint who was always in search of something, and so today he is invoked by the faithful who require help in finding lost objects. At the Church of the Holy Cross, we had time to explore the sacristy, choir stalls, the adjoining



Basilica of Our Lady of Fatima



Rosary & Candlelight Procession in the sanctuary square



Derry Pilgrims at Holy Mass in the Carmelite Convent of Sister Lucia, Coimbra



Elsa Silvia giving us a guided tour of the sanctuary square and telling the story of Fatima



Fr. Seán, Fr. Peter & Fr. Malachy celebrating Holy Mass in the Carmelite Convent of Sister Lucia, Coimbra

cloister and sanctuary, as well as view the many pieces of sacred art and relics held in this holy place. We also visited the tombs of the first two kings of Portugal who were laid to rest here.

Sunday 8th October – The Sabbath at Fatima

Another spectacular day dawned with blue skies all round,

and we left our hotel to attend the Sunday morning ceremonies in the Sanctuary Square, with 10am Rosary recited from the Capelinha (Chapel of the Apparitions), and then procession of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima to the altar in front of the main Basilica for the 11am International Mass. The Gospel from the 27th Sunday in

Ordinary time (Year A) was read in various languages and was taken from Matthew 21: 33-43. The key message of this parable by Jesus was to tell the Jewish leadership of their erroneous ways with respect to the past poor treatment of the prophets and the foretelling of His own passion and death at their hands, but moreover to warn of the wrath of the Lord against those 'wretched tenants of the vineyard', and their exclusion from eternal salvation and the Kingdom of God should they refuse to mend their ways.

During the International Mass, I was selected by a sanctuary steward to join a team of assistants to the Eucharistic Ministers. We were each paired up with a Eucharistic Minister and had to accompany them holding an umbrella as they passed among the hundreds of attenders in the sanctuary square to distribute the most Sacred Corpus Christi. The umbrella was a visual indicator to the people of the various locations throughout the square where they could receive Holy Communion and was also useful in shading the Eucharistic Minister from the midday sunshine. This was a timely reminder to me and indeed something worthy of note for all Mass goers of our duty, as the lay faithful, to readily participate in and assist with the Holy Mass at any opportunity as it presents itself.

At the end of the Mass, the Adeus or Farewell Procession, saw us bid farewell to the statue of Our Lady of Fatima by waving our white handkerchiefs as the statue passed through the square and returned to the Capelinha. After lunch, we embarked on another short excursion on foot to the nearby Monastery of Pius XII – the Irish Dominican Convent. What better way to spend a Sunday afternoon in prayer and adoration in front of the exposed Blessed Sacrament. We were led in prayer by Fr. Sean during this time and after holy hour and Benediction, we had the opportunity to meet the sisters residing there, including Sister Michael, who was the aunt of one of our pilgrims, Brian McGowan. We give thanks for their heartfelt welcome and hospitality during our visit.

The Rosary and candlelight procession at the Capelinha each evening was a special feature of our pilgrimage; however the Sunday evening was extra special in that six from our group (including myself) were selected to carry the statue of Our Lady of Fatima during the candlelight procession – three men from Derry and three from Donegal. The sanctuary stewards were military in their organization and arrangement of the selected groups. There were three groups of six carrying on this particular evening, a mix of both ladies and gentlemen. Each group had to carry a portion of the journey around the sanctuary square – my group started off from the Capelinha, and transition between the groups carrying was

done seamlessly on the move! My group had the double privilege of a second carry of the statue on the return leg back into the Capelinha. It will be a moment in time that won't be forgotten – Our Lady had chosen us to serve in that moment, and how honoured we were to oblige for Our Blessed Mother!

Monday 9th October – Santarém – Church of the Eucharistic Miracle (Most Holy Miracle)

On Monday, we were treated to something a little different, but nonetheless it could be classed as another highlight of the pilgrimage. We set out on a half-day trip to Santarém, where we had the opportunity to celebrate the Mass of Corpus Christi in the Church of the Eucharistic Miracle.

This widely recognised Eucharistic miracle came about as a result of a request by a sorceress or witch to obtain a consecrated host. A lady, experiencing a troublesome marriage, had sought the help of the witch and was promised a remedy if a consecrated host was brought to her. After hesitation, the lady relented and committed the sacrilegious act and received Holy Communion at Mass in the Church of St. Stephen, but later removed the Sacred Host from her mouth and enclosed it in her veil, with the intention of bringing it to the witch as instructed.

Before this could happen, and on her way back from the church, the host began to bleed. The lady, stricken with panic and fear, rushed home and concealed the bleeding Eucharist in a chest. Later in the night, she and her husband awoke to a sound and light emanating from the chest and when they investigated further, they witnessed angels in adoration before the Miraculous Host, which was levitating above the opened chest.

The following day, they informed the parish priest and much commotion ensued with the locals coming to witness the miraculous occurrence for themselves. The Miraculous Host was eventually brought back to the Church of St. Stephen for preservation and encased in wax. On exposition some years later, it was discovered to have broken out of the wax and was miraculously enclosed in a crystal pyx. The Miraculous Host was subsequently placed in a monstrance, where it can be adored on the high altar of the Church to the present day.

This Eucharistic Miracle, like so many others, reveals to us in a very tangible way, and reinforces to us, the real presence of God in all the tabernacles of the world. The Lord is acutely aware of our human limitations, of our need for evidence and our reliance on our senses, such as our sight, hearing, etc., to perceive the reality of what is before us in the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith. It is the real presence of Christ; body, blood,

soul and divinity in that tiny but Sacred Host – that which was instituted at the Last Supper by Jesus. The Gospel of the Corpus Christi Mass, taken from John 6:51-58, highlights the truth of the real presence and the Eucharistic Miracles themselves, in that Christ asserted, "I am the living bread which has come down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

On Monday afternoon, the group covered approximately four kilometres on foot, from the hotel to the Caminho dos Pastorinhos (Way of the Little Shepherds) and back again, in the company of our guide, Carina Vieira. This route was traversed many times by the shepherd children on their way from the Cova da Iria to Aljustrel, and for us, the arduous journey in the searing heat was in some small way akin to Christ's journey to Calvary. With this in mind, we silently contemplated the true love of God for us in the passion and death of His Son on the cross, by stopping and reflecting on the fifteen Hungarian Stations of the Cross from the perspective of Our Blessed Mother. Our Lady humbly accepted what was happening before her eyes during the passion and death of her Son, even though it went against every fabric of her being and caused her immense sorrow, but she knew that she had to conform to the will of God and deny her own maternal will.

Various pilgrims from our group took their turn at carrying the wooden cross or reading the reflections on the way. It was a beautiful time of solidarity, as well as a time to renew our appreciation of Christ's sacrifice. On the way, we visited the Monument of Our Lady at Valinhos – this was the site of the apparition on the 19th of August, 1917. Unlike the other apparitions, this one did not occur on the 13th of the month due to the detainment and chastisement of the shepherd children by the Administrator of Vila Nova de Ourém. Following their release, Our Lady appeared to the children at this location and again spoke of the impending miracle in October and requested the construction of a Chapel in the Cova da Iria, as well as reiterating the message of prayer and sacrifice.

As well as Valinhos, our Way of the Cross led us to the Loca do Cabeco, where the Angel of Peace appeared twice to the shepherd children, in the spring and autumn of 1916, as a precursor to the apparitions of Our Lady the following year. The Angel taught the children prayers, and in the autumn apparition, he offered the Body and Blood of Christ to the children, with Lucia consuming the Sacred Host and Jacinta and Francisco drinking from the Holy Chalice.

The Way of the Cross concluded with a visit to the Chapel of St. Stephen of Hungary. This Chapel had a beautiful stone-hewn depiction of Calvary, and

this, together with the individual stations along the Caminho dos Pastorinhos, were the result of the collaboration of Catholic Hungarian pilgrims throughout the world.

Tuesday 10th October – Nazaré & Mass in the Capelinha

Once again, we set off in the early morning for a half-day trip – this time to Nazaré, a seaside resort nearby Fatima. We couldn't travel all the way to Portugal and not have a stroll along one of the many beautiful beaches it has to offer. With deep sands and blue waters, it would be rude not to at least dip our toes at the water's edge – and so we did, but beforehand, we visited the Shrine of Our Lady of Nazaré. This Shrine is located in Sitio, which is a small village on top of a cliff overlooking a beautiful beach of Nazaré below. A miraculous intervention by Our Lady in the 12th century saved a Portuguese knight during an early morning hunt, whose horse, in pursuit of a deer, was diverted in its course on a foggy morning and thus saved from a hilltop fall that would have resulted in serious injury or even death of the knight. A grotto nearby holding a statue of Our Lady of Nazareth, was the site for the construction of new chapel after this miraculous occurrence. During our visit the statue was removed for restoration, but a replica stood in its place depicting Our Blessed Mother breastfeeding the child Jesus.

On return to the Sanctuary in Fatima, Mass was held in the Capelinha, with Fr. Sean being the main celebrant. The Gospel of the day was taken from Luke 10:38-42 and reflected on the sisters of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. Both ladies had their strengths, and we can see that whilst Martha was active and chose to serve by cooking and providing for the guests in their house, it is Mary who is lauded for choosing the better part in that she opted to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to and contemplate on His Word. Jesus encourages Martha to worry less about the worldly distractions but instead to focus attention on and give time to God. This message is contemporary in that in our modern world there are far too many distractions to speak of that we can freely give our time to instead of keeping our focus on Christ. Let us surrender time daily for Our God – the fruits of which will eventually be evident in abundance.

Following the beautiful Mass, it was time for us to light our group candle at the candelabrum, and in doing so, we brought all our prayers and petitions forth and surrendered them to Our Lady of Fatima, who would intercede to the Lord on our behalf. To Jesus through Mary! A magnificent spray of flowers was also placed in the Capelinha by Fr. Malachy.

Wednesday 11th – Thursday 12th October – Departure

On Wednesday morning, Holy Mass was celebrated in the Chapel of Death of Christ underneath the

Basilica of the Holy Trinity. This was an intimate gathering, with only our pilgrim group present at the Mass. The liturgy was taken from the Mass of Saints Francisco and Jacinta Marto – the brother and sister duo, whose statues resided in the chapel sanctuary. Reflecting on the Gospel of the Mass, taken from Matthew 18:1-5, 10, 12-14, we can decipher a message of humility, in that Jesus identifies the little children as those greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. The innocence of the children highlighted in this Gospel perhaps reveals to us the reason why Our Lady appeared to three shepherd children, rather than others of more superior standing. Children are more likely to be obedient to the message and fulfil the requests laid before them, and this proved to be true of the children of Fatima. They were trustworthy and held fast to the truth despite the chastisement of the adults around them. Indeed, Lucia devoted her long life to the message of Fatima and could be described as the great secretary and apostle of Our Lady of Fatima in relaying the message of prayer, sacrifice and penance to the world until her death in 2005.

Following Mass, we were treated to tea, coffee and ice cream at a nearby café. During this time, our group presented Fr. Sean and Fr. Malachy with a token of our deep appreciation for their friendship and spiritual guidance before and during our pilgrimage. The remainder of our day was free for us to rest, shop, explore or perhaps revisit some of the earlier sites in and around Fatima itself.

On the Thursday morning of our departure from Fatima, we attended one final Mass in the Capelinha, celebrated by Fr. Daniel McFaul, who was accompanying another group from Derry and we were delighted to overlap with them and hear the familiar accents of fellow Derry pilgrims. We left the hotel at around 11.15am and arrived back on Irish soil at around 8.30pm following some delays. The coach trip northwards from Dublin brought us to Strabane and Derry in the wee hours of Friday morning.

It would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to applaud one special lady, who was instrumental in organising our wonderful pilgrimage and seeing us safely to Fatima and back home again – Patricia Moore (and her

husband Willard), we offer you our deepest gratitude.

For me the pilgrimage will never be forgotten. I forged new and lasting friendships, and connected with like-minded, faith friends. Amongst our time of prayer and reflection, there was also banter and craic in abundance too. We supported each other, and I can witness to the fact that I could see the work of Christ through the words and deeds of others on our trip. We encountered Christ in each other and moreover returned to Derry educated, invigorated, renewed, and permanently reformed for the better. Fatima is a special place and I've no doubt of my return, by the grace of God, in time to come.



Derry Pilgrims carry the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima during candlelight procession



Assisting the Eucharistic Ministers during the International Mass



Our Lady cradles the earthly remains of Jesus – Sacristy of Monastery of Santa Cruz



Derry Pilgrims carry the Statue of Our Lady of Fatima during candlelight procession

Speaking on Vocations at the Long Tower Novena in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Diocesan Vocations' Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan remarked...

The last priests in Ireland? I don't think so!

EARLIER this year, the Association of Catholic Priests organised a Conference entitled: 'The last Priests in Ireland.' I must say, the title exercised my patience greatly. I discussed it with some classmates, and I wrote to the ACP (but got no response) to say that, in my opinion, the current cohort of priests serving the people of Ireland are far from being the last of our breed.

Yes, the numbers are down on what they had been. In the years that I've been a priest there has been a sharp decline. When I was a seminarian in Maynooth there were, on average, about 320 men there studying for the 'home mission', whilst now there are 30 at most. When I was ordained there were about 140 priests serving the parishes of this Diocese. Now there are around 70, and the projection is that there will be a much smaller number, fewer than one for each parish, by the year 2035, which is only really 11 years away.

I was asked a while back how I feel about the future of vocations,

and my reply was that I'm very hopeful. The person who asked me that was taken aback somewhat by my response. St Peter tells us in his first letter (Chapter 3, verse 15) that we should "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope."

The birth of Jesus is our hope, just as waiting for the birth of the Messiah was, and still is for some, a time of hope. For those of us who believe that the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus Christ, the whole mystery of His life, death and resurrection is our hope.

It's just over two years since Bishop McKeown asked me to be Director of Vocations for the Diocese of Derry. If one thing has characterized my tenure of that position it is prayer. I am constantly encouraging and promoting fervent prayer for vocations. I send out a prayer to each of the parishes of the Diocese each week, something based on the Sunday readings, and I invite the priests to publish it in their bulletins or to use it as an

intercession.

Beginning on St Patrick's Day 2022, we had a Diocesan Year of Prayer for Vocations, and shortly after it came to an end the National Vocations Council launched a Year of Prayer for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood. In that venture, Derry led the way, just as Derry seems to be leading the way in terms of the number of those currently discerning a priestly vocation, to the extent that we're very much the envy of the whole country. People often ask me directly, "What are you doing in Derry?" My answer, quite simply, is that the people of the Diocese are praying.

There were 37 participants at a recent 'Come and See' weekend in Maynooth, from all over the country, and eight of them (over 20%) were from our Diocese. Right now, we have 15 men in the Diocese discerning with the help of a priest-mentor; we have three men in seminary formation, and one more joining them in January, God willing. But...they are not yet priests! They all need our prayers.

One of the reasons given for the large numbers in Derry as opposed to the rest of the country is that "things are different in the North." That may be true in some ways, but if God is calling men in this Diocese, God is surely calling men from all over Ireland. I abhor that defeatist kind of attitude. That kind of thing gets us nowhere.

A parishioner invited me a few months ago to take part in a venture of his which entails asking 19 people to say a decade of the Rosary each day for vocations to the diocesan priesthood. Each person, including the group 'leader', chooses one of the 20 decades of the Rosary, with the result that the group members, between them, say a full Rosary each day. Mine is the fifth decade of the Mysteries of Light, in honour of The Institution of the Eucharist, and as I prepare to say it I remind myself that I'm offering it for my own diocese. It's not a selfish thing to do that. "Charity begins at home," or so we're told. If people in every diocese in the country were to take part, then



Fr Pat O'Hagan, Diocesan Vocations Director at the Long Tower Novena with Fr Gerard Mongan Adm, right, and Fr Stephen Ward CC

each diocese would soon see a revival in the number of men coming forward to offer their services to their local Church.

Even if you're not part of such a group, say your own decade each day, and encourage anyone you feel might be a good candidate for

priesthood to consider it as a way of life. Above all, pray! Prayer is powerful. I know that, and I'm sure many of us know that from our own experience.

Please pray, and pray fervently, for vocations to the priesthood for this Diocese of Derry.

The faith is not just holding but being re-ignited in our Emerald Isle by Pat Breslin



Pat Breslin, who is discerning call to priesthood.

AS the Diocese continues to pray for vocations, as part of the Irish Year of Prayer for Vocations, it is very heartening that out of the 36 men who attended a 'Come and See' Vocations Weekend in

Maynooth in mid-November, eight were from the Derry Diocese.

One of those eight was Strabane-Camus parishioner Pat Breslin, who has since shared his thoughts of the experience with 'The Net', describing the weekend as very well presented and informative.

"It was a great opportunity to meet with seminarians who are all in different stages on their journey to priesthood," said Pat, "Some in their first year and some in their final year."

He added: "It was also encouraging to meet all the other lads who are actively considering their future as a priest, and a good opportunity to learn what life is like for a seminarian in Maynooth.

"I had met some of the lads from my diocese before this weekend, but some I met for the first time. As for the seminarians, I had only ever met two of them before the weekend but I had an overwhelming sense of community with everyone I met and talked to and, more importantly, I had a feeling that this is where I'm meant to be."

"If we believed everything we see and hear in our ever increasing faithless media, we would think the Church is finished in our country," remarked Pat, "as all we ever hear about is the shortage of priests, but this weekend gave me hope, with the great seminarians who are to be ordained in the coming years and all the lads who attended the 'Come and See'

weekend.

"There were 36 in total on the Weekend, of all ages and from all corners of our Emerald Isle, and that shows me that the faith is not just holding but it's being re-ignited."

He continued: "Catholic Ireland has seen many dark times throughout the centuries and I believe we are now coming out of one of the darkest of those times. May God bless the good faithful priests and parishioners who held the Church through the darkest hour, and bless all those now answering the call.

"A final thought for those still worried about the numbers, it took only one man to bring the faith to Ireland in the first place."

Continue to pray that the Lord will send many into the harvest of the Diocese by Fr Pat O'Hagan, Diocesan Vocations Director

AS we approach the end of 2023, the year which saw the ordinations of three new priests for the Diocese of Derry, we pray God's blessing on Frs Michael McCaul, Shaun Doherty, and Stephen Ward, and their ministry in their respective parishes of St Eugene's Cathedral, Drumragh (Omagh), and the Long Tower, Derry.

We pray too for our three current

seminarians, Stephen Baxter and David Stott at the Pontifical Beda College in Rome, and Lexie Morrison at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. And we pray God's blessing on Oran Gartland, a parishioner of Holy Family, Ballymagroarty, as he prepares to begin his propaedeutic year of studies at the Scots' College in Salamanca, Spain.

At least a further dozen from the Diocese are currently discerning their vocation under the guidance and accompaniment of a priest-mentor.

During this Year of Prayer for Vocations to the Diocesan Priesthood, we are all encouraged to pray that the Lord will send many into the harvest of this Diocese. The theme of the Year of

Prayer is: 'Take the Risk for Christ.'

May many more find the courage to take that much needed leap of faith, as the people of the Diocese continue to pray fervently for an increase in vocations to the priesthood here, in the North West. Please consider doing this in the New Year, praying at least a decade of the Rosary each day for this much needed intention.



Dromantine gathering a grace-filled time for Bishop Donal and Diocesan priests

AT the end of November, in the lead-up to the First Sunday in Advent, Bishop Donal and over 50 Diocesan clergy spent time together in prayer, reflection and discussion on their priestly ministry during this era in the Church.

Commenting on the gathering in the SMA Dromantine Retreat Centre, Bishop Donal described the reflection period on the Council of Priests' chosen theme, 'Priesthood and ministry in our Diocese in a time of change', as "a grace-filled 48 hours".

He added: "Fr Hugh Lagan SMA and Professor Seamus O'Connell, Pontifical University, Maynooth, invited us to engage with scripturally based reflections on the woman who anointed Jesus in Bethany (Mk 14:3-19), using the

words of Jesus, 'She did what she could'.

"The process revealed a great commitment to priestly ministry as well as an impressive level of fraternity between priests of all ages. Thanks be to God, we left on the Friday afternoon with a spring in our steps and a new sense of God's grace at work in our midst in this time of change.

"The challenge is now to take this rich sense of vocation and engage with parishioners around the Diocese, so that we can together be re-energised for the mission of proclaiming the mercy of God revealed in Jesus."

Bishop Donal also thanked the priests "for their huge honesty and generosity in the face of many challenges."

The Eucharist is the Source & Summit of Synodality and New Evangelization

by Rev Dr Joseph Karukayil Varghese

IN the complex landscape of the 21st century, where the world grapples with physical and cultural conflicts, the call for introspection within religious institutions becomes imperative. Churches, as pillars of faith, are faced with the challenge of revitalizing their ancient doctrines for a modern audience. Enter Pope Francis and his vision of the New Evangelization - a divine path toward spreading the eternal message of Jesus Christ. At the heart of this spiritual revolution lies synodality, a journey of unity, participation, and openness guided by the Holy Spirit. As we embark on this transformative expedition, the significance of liturgy emerges as the key to unlocking the potential of the New Evangelization.

The New Evangelization: Synodality and Liturgy in Harmony

In the intricate journey of the New Evangelization, the fusion of synodality and liturgy emerges as the guiding force for a renewed Church. As we delve deeper into this transformative expedition, it becomes imperative to integrate the profound insights presented in the recently published report from the October 2023 Synod. This synthesis is crucial in comprehending the richness of Christian initiation, harmonizing communal worship, and fostering a vibrant faith community.

Navigating the Contemporary World

As we step into the second quarter of the 21st century AD, a world embroiled in physical and cultural conflicts and confusion about our destiny unfolds. Even within the realm of faith and practice, churches are struggling to provide their adherents with new ways of engaging with the

ancient wisdom of the scriptures and the enduring story of salvation. If ever there was a time for the churches to take stock and engage in discernment of their role in contemporary culture, it is now. Pope Francis believes that the Holy Spirit is guiding the Church towards a New Evangelization, aligned with its salvific, historical, and cultural purpose of spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Synodality:

A Path of Communion and Collaboration

Synodality is described as a path on which the People of God walk together, listening to the Holy Spirit and the Word of God. It leads to deeper communion, increased participation, and greater openness in fulfilling Jesus' salvific mission. A study on 'Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church' highlights the ancient roots of the term 'synod' and its similarity to the Latin word 'Concilium', meaning 'Council'. Pope Francis envisions a "missionary option", a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. A synodal Church pursues a common mission through the participation of all its members.

Sensus Fidei: A Guiding Light

Pope Francis believes that synodality is the way to truly belong to the Church, aligned with God's will. It involves a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The importance of listening, dialogue, prayer, discernment, and making decisions together for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel cannot be overstated. Sensus Fidei, translating literally from Latin as 'sense of the faith',

is a vital resource for the new evangelization, enabling people to understand what aligns with or contradicts the teachings of the Gospel.

Establishing the Synodal Process: Journeying Together Towards a Synodal Church:

Pope Francis has entrusted the responsibilities of the synodal process to every member of the Church. This journey encompasses four essential components:

*Walking Together for a Synodal Church: Emphasizing the importance of respecting the present world, Pope Francis calls for the Church to develop strong connections and cooperation in all areas of its mission. This extends to the entire People of God, with the belief that all baptized individuals should feel fully engaged in the ecclesiastical and social transformation.

*Journeying Together to Live in Communion: With a sense of faith (Sensus Fidei), every faithful person is called to share responsibility in manifesting the blessings of the Holy Spirit within the faith community. This participation involves various experiences of faith, including popular piety, pastoral, cultural, social, and personal competence.

*Journeying Together to Achieve Participation: In a synodal Church, the entire community is invited to pray, listen, analyse, dialogue, and discern with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Any decisions reached will closely align with God's will, and efforts should be made to include all those who feel excluded.

*Moving Together to Be 'Open to Mission': The Church exists to evangelize, meaning its mission is to save souls. The Synodal Process paves the way for this missionary dimension to which we are called,

enhancing and demonstrating our witness to the Gospel.

Eucharist as the source submit of the New Evangelization

Liturgy stands at the core of the New Evangelization, offering a transformative experience through sacramental celebrations. The recently published report from the October '23 Synod reaffirms the centrality of liturgy, recognizing it as the vital force propelling the Church forward. It underscores the sacramental journey as a reflection of the early Church's catechumenal path, embracing baptism as the seal of equal membership and confirming the Sensus Fidei as a guidepost for discernment.

In our quest for a renewed Church, the synergy between synodality and liturgy emerges as a beacon of hope. The journey together, with its four essential components, exemplifies a commitment to inclusivity, communion, active participation, and an openness to mission. Liturgy, as the soul-stirring celebration of sacraments, not only binds us in communion with God but propels us into the world as evangelists. As we adapt to the evolving landscape of worship, the report's emphasis on widening community prayer beyond Mass resonates deeply. Alternative forms of liturgical prayer and the richness of popular piety, particularly Marian devotion, emerge as essential elements in fostering a vibrant faith community.

In conclusion, the New Evangelization beckons us to navigate change while anchored in the timeless values of the Church. The parish becomes not only a participant in liturgy but a beacon of hope, radiating the transformative power of faith to society at large.

New Eucharistic Ministers commissioned for Dungiven Parish



Encounter The Lord in silent contemplative prayer

by Aoife O'Neill

"Your Face O Lord do I seek, do not hide your face from me"

WHAT keeps us from getting to know God better? What gets in the way of us basking in the reality of God's love for us?

Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre, Derry, invites you to join us for a weekend free of the distraction of daily life by way of the Silent Directed Retreat from January 26-28.

Directed by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, retreatants will be introduced to and led through teaching on methods of prayer, particularly meditation and contemplation. Talks will focus on the mysteries of

the Lord's life and how they relate to your prayer.

If you would like to spend some time away from the distraction of everyday life, in beautiful, scenic surroundings and learn more about growing in your spiritual life through silence, then this retreat is for you.

The weekend is done on a residential basis, is open to men and women, and costs £90, which includes all meals.

For further information/booking please contact Aoife on 02871262512 or termonbaccaderry@gmail.com.



Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during December for:

Persons with disabilities: We pray that people living with

disabilities may be at the centre of attention in society, and that institutions may offer inclusive programmes which value their active participation.

Prayer for Priests

Heavenly Father, I ask you to bless our bishops and priests and to confirm them in their vocation of service.

As they stand before us as ministers of Your Sacraments, may they be channels of the love and compassion of the Good Shepherd, who came not be served but to serve.

Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the courage to proclaim your Word of

justice, love and truth. Bless, in a special way, Your servant Father, Send your Spirit upon him So that he may always walk in the path of faith, hope and love, in the footsteps of Christ, the eternal priest, who offered Himself on the cross for the life of the world. Amen.

Remember in prayer during December:

- Fr John McDevitt (Dec 1st)
- Fr Micheal McGavigan (2nd)
- Fr Kevin McElhennon (3rd)
- Fr Daniel McFaul (4th)
- Fr Dermot McGirr (5th)
- Dr James McGrory (6th)
- Fr Brian McGoldrick (7th)
- Fr Neil McGoldrick (8th)
- Fr George McLaughlin (9th)
- Fr James McGonagle (10th)

- Fr Edward McGuinness (11th)
- Bishop Donal McKeown (12th)
- Fr Con McLaughlin (13th)
- Fr Peter McLaughlin (14th)
- Fr Anthony Mailey (15th)
- Fr Peter Madden (16th)
- Fr Gerard Mongan (17th)
- Fr Colm O'Doherty (18th)
- All Priests (19th)
- Fr Patrick O'Hagan (20th)
- Fr Seamus O'Connell (21st)
- Fr Kevin Mulhern (22nd)
- Fr Kieran O'Doherty (23rd)
- Fr Francis O'Hagan (24th)
- Fr David O'Kane (25th)
- Fr Peter O'Kane (26th)
- Fr Arthur O'Reilly (27th)
- Fr Michael Porter (28th)
- Fr Sean O'Donnell (29th)
- Fr Gerard Sweeney (30th)
- Fr Joseph Varghese and Fr John Walsh (31st)

Termonbacca Silent Retreat

Friday 26th – Sunday 28th January 2024

"Your Face O Lord do I Seek, Do not Hide Your Face from Me"

A Silent Retreat devoted to learning Methods of Contemplative Prayer and to Experiencing the beauty of the Lord Jesus in Silence.

Guided by Fr Stephen Quinn o.c.d.

“All the beauty I see He has given to me and His giving is gentle as silence”

by Fr John McLaughlin ssc



Ana Hein

“LATE have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.” (St Augustine of Hippo, Confession)

That piece I read when still a teenager and an avid reader, like my sister, and from amongst whose books from Annie P Smithson I pilfered it! Many years later, I came to know and read the author in his own testimony. The search (passion) continues to lead me onwards!

A few years ago, but well into this century, a marvellous elderly lady, Anita Hein, got through to me with one simple sentence: “But Juan, you are my best friend!” I had just been trying to tell her that I would be resigning and leaving Chile, and my words had been cautiously chosen. She was, indeed, first amongst a list of friends, men and women, whom I had come to value for the grace and gift that friendship is. To cross the divide of age, country and culture, creature comforts, sexuality etc, is no small jewel in the life of anyone.

‘Amigo, Juan Vicente’, was the preface of another lady; ‘Juanito’ was the preferred greeting of Sra Malvinas, deep in the countryside outside Talca, as she offered me a far too substantial breakfast (or indeed early dinner, ‘cazuela’ etc, just as the sons just in from the ‘chacra’ shared). I wanted only a cup of tea and a bit of toast!

Part of the pastoral planning during my time in Chile was, indeed, to form ‘Comunidades’ of Friendship, as they emerged

from the CFIVE programme for the First Communion of their children and maybe of some of themselves. To try to preserve the newly-found unity and shared Catholic understanding of the group, the objective was to continue off their own steam as a Christian community. One of those groups did, indeed, honour me by taking my name as its title, and their friendships swelled outwards towards members of the chapels and wider parish groupings. Another one of those ‘comunidades’ in which my friends, Monica and Saul participate, has more than 30 years of almost continuous weekly meetings of prayer and mutual support. Admittedly, many others have fallen apart due to family circumstances and a more secular ambient that is emerging.

There were often beautiful celebrations of events related to Retreats and Wedding anniversaries. Some of these involved the welcoming back from a group on Retreat and the testimonies or the afternoon tea (onces) gatherings, where people came to their feet and told of the joy and the healings associated with their decisions. On one period of three months, I had a few Golden Weddings and the spontaneous sharing and prayers all had individual and warm family thanksgivings bursting forth, as I contemplated the wonderful graces of their occasions. The words ‘Fidelidad’ and ‘Compromiso’ echoed forth from all these celebrations in different and edifying forms.

There were a couple of such celebrations where, as a winding-down from a Workshop, I was able to introduce a relaxed ‘Celtic Circle Dance’, which I had learned in Dalgan during the ‘Faith and Mission’ course and had become enamoured of their joyful movements. So, making a shot at suitable music and remembered steps, there was a surprising and zestful show of unity and group cohesion that brought the participants back in to the world of committed action.

The same exuberance often accompanied celebrations of

September 18, the National Feast, when the local dance group got on the floor for the ‘Cueca’ and a lively termination to the liturgy on that occasion. And there were other occasions where a fund-raising family Bingo, or a simple cooked fish or chicken dish, with a glass of wine (vino navegado), in one of the chapels, could lead to a couple of hours on the floor, with the same ‘Cueca’ or ‘Cumbia’, and where everyone wanted to step out and relax with family and community friends.

One of the events that I enjoyed immensely was the participation in the Senior Citizens Folklore section of the Summer School of the Workers Institute, in the Diocese of Santiago, usually held then at the height of the summer, and which brought rapid perspiration on all of us who stepped in to learn the songs and native dances from the North to the South of that long extended countryside. So that we were well prepared when it came to the next community or chapel fiestas! It reminded me of a short Summer School in Gaoth Dobhair some years ago, with Noel O Gallchoir, and the Ceili had the same energy and adrenaline flow! There was an added grace and liturgical beauty in the parish of San Columbano, where the Religious Dance group, ‘Bailes de San Andres’, appeared on many solemn occasions and served as a living and evangelising base for its own dedicated members. Its dedication to Our Lady was palpable and brought from its members a zeal to honour her in all their appearances, as well as journeys to Iquique for the Feast of ‘The Virgin of Mount Carmel’ (July 16) in La Tirana, and at the national Sanctuary of Maipu in Santiago.

Rugged beauty

There was often, too, a rugged beauty in the wayside Stations of the Cross celebrated, with posters and gestures around the Event of the Station; the Women at Jerusalem putting the question to the participants as what the women weep for today, brought spontaneous and unrehearsed expressions of their lived reality, and the people who did the Cyrenes of today evoked a host of names of groups and movements active in the Cause of Christ. Columban Fr Alo Connaughton had left some of us indebted for his ingenuity in drawing up the dynamics and possible dialogue that served as a base for those beautiful moments of a lived-group and personal faith. Again, in a moment of personal and singular beauty, and during the Covid, with Churches closed and when some of us operated on Facebook videos, using images of Cross, Light, Water, and Word through the Triduum, I sat amazed. Jaime and Helga (now

deceased) sat down and washed the feet of each other, in a simple enactment of that Holy Thursday. With some awed-emotion, I wondered was there any family in Ireland who would have sat down to do the same. “O Beauty ever ancient and ever new...”

The question of humour is often very personal. For me, it so often served to bring out the very intimate and genuine values of community and personal lives. So, for example, were the cartoons of Cezar Barroso illustrating the Gospel of the day for the Latin American. Such also were the ‘modismos’ and the preserved sayings of the ‘pueblo’, as they often wryly observed their failures and incomprehensions. Un Pajarito...Un Pintar Monos, Vaso de leche, Humos en la Cabeza. Un Gran Huevon...Pan pan, y vino vino...Si el rio suena... No tan adentro...etc. Having just attended, in Moville the drama ‘Kings of the Holborn High Road’, with a great flourishing of dramatic words, I found myself evoking the same marvellous verbiage in popular and non-curriculum Spanish! Being enticed by the parish secretaries in Valparaiso to attend the local performance of the great Chilean comic, Coco Legrand, I got a dig in the ribs from both sides, when Coco did a cameo of the priest officiating at a wedding. It was a good take-off and I could not hide under the seat as the audience roared with laughter!

The poetry of the place always evokes some of the hidden beauty of the scenes. Like the occasion when we were celebrating the birthday of Fr Michael Hoban, it occurred to me to get a copy of Seamus Heaney’s ‘Digging’ and read it out as a valedictory to the ‘festejado’. Violeta Parra has a poem, ‘Gracias a La Vida’, which I once used in place of the Exultet with a youth group at the Easter Vigil on Holy Week (one gentleman did demur as my choice!) Then there was the glory of the poetry of Gabriela Mistral, Nobel Prize winner in her time. Visiting with Dublin friend, Fr Dermot Clarke, at Vicuna and the museum in her birth place, we came away with some copies in English which interested Dermot. Her great poem for me is ‘El Placer de Servir’, and others are prose-poetry as on the ‘Hands of St Francis’, ‘The Death of a Mother’, and her own grief at that moment. Dermot in English, and I in Spanish, subsequently took out the latter poem to help comfort a bereaved family on the loss of their mother.

The great writers like Neruda also provided me with moments to savour and deepen my awareness of life and those around me. At one period of enthusiasm, infatuation maybe, I carried around Cogs on long bus journeys and learned off

some of his 20 sonnets, Poemas de Amor, “en este parado en que nos encontramos, o pequeno infinito, pudimos no encontrarnos en el tiempo”: on that plain in which we found ourselves, a little piece of infinity, we might never have come together in real time.

The great novelists of the time in Latin America, for me, were people like Jorge Amado of Brazil, whose place of birth and museum in Bahia Salvador, I had occasion to visit with two Columban friends, Frs Aidan Larkin and Michael Mc Glade. Once again, we were dancing on the streets there during ‘Carneval’, as there was no one just walking! And Gabriel Garcia Marquez, with Isabel Allende, were others who left me with a stack of images and some very quotable sayings, such as Marquez, ‘Chronicle of a well-announced death’, and Allende’s ‘fantasy or fable images’, which are not so different from what passes for News in the world in which I am now living!

Cartoons have also been a passion for me in the pursuit of some of the aspects of Beauty. Daryll Cagle is my current favourite on-line, and in Chile, Lucas had classic illustrations in the Sunday ‘Mercurio’ and in his booklets on his beloved Valparaiso and Vina del Mar, where I served for over 10 years.



Virgen de Guadalupe.

Respond

Cardinal Danneels of Belgium, in a challenging article some years ago, declared that the modern mind was more likely to respond to the message of Christianity through Beauty, as Truth and Love had become tarnished from misuse. So that I did become aware of the subject once again, though from an early age in Dublin, I would visit with awe and admiration the Municipal Gallery in Parnell Square and read books on Art and the great Architects of the ages. I had reason to treasure our own Corr and McCormack churches and was blessed, as a student, to be invited to be present at the Blessing of Murlog Church. So, the appetite has always been there!

One of the great, perhaps the greatest, sources of beauty has

been in Church terms, Our Blessed Lady, La Virgen in Chilean terms. Even from the early recitals of the Litanies, now almost unknown to a new generation, the praise and devotion to Mary has lifted us up to the divine in our environments. Amongst many Marian events in my life abroad was the Feast of The Immaculate Conception in Valparaiso, at the National Marian Shrine of Lo Vasquez. There, for three days in December, was a huge presence of pilgrims, beyond the 500,000, who made their way there walking, on horseback in traditional spurs and cape, on festooned bicycles from many miles around and from the capital Santiago. The outdoor basilica extension held around 3,000, and Confessions went on day and night for the two-and-a-half day period. So it was somewhat daunting for me to celebrate an early morning Mass there on one occasion. The Confessions, where the penitents were from amongst the Poor generally, were held outside and in an open semi-circle, from where the visiting confessors were plainly visible and under inspection, and it could be hot during the summer days and very cold at night. The once-a-year confession for many brought forth moving narratives and remembrances of those absent from the previous year, and were in a conversation-style, where religious sisters and laity helped motivate and prepare the penitents. One small moment remains in my mind, where a young boy, accompanying one of the many stalls and sellers, came forward to me, because he said he just wanted to come in and talk, even though he had no notion when or if he would be able to make his First Communion. Our Lady, ‘Madre de los Pobres’, was very much in evidence on those occasions.

Padre Carlos Muller was a French diocesan priest who had been in a German prison camp during the War. As my parish priest, I came to know a sainted man, eccentric and often irascible, who was an expert on Latin American Church history, on which he wrote, and on Church music as well as multiple other talents, like driving without having to look at the road in front of him. This did cause some to change cars on their way home from some of his outings. On the occasion of a National Vigil for Peace and Reconciliation, he produced material from many sources, including the Cathist Orthodox prayer, with which I will close these reflections on Beauty in life and liturgy.

The Akathist Hymn, which in its present form was added to by many Ecclesiastical Hymnographers, existed for most part even before it was

The Divine Mercy Image explained... The Gaze of Jesus

by Sr Benedetta Hutnikiewicz ZSJM

WELCOME back to our reflections on the Divine Mercy Image. This time, we are going to look deep into the Lord's eyes! As I was preparing to write this article, I looked up the 'Concordance' to St. Faustina's Diary and I was struck by how many times she mentions the way our Lord looked at her, gazed upon her. What was His gaze like? So, let us uncover what lies hidden here; let's dive deeper.

The fundamental quote and thought to take away from this reflection is this: "Once, Jesus said to me, My gaze from this image is like My gaze from the cross." (Diary, 326) Now, what does that mean?

Let's look at the moment when Jesus was crucified. Who did He see gazing from the Cross? He saw Mary Magdalene and the other women who faithfully accompanied Him to the very end. He saw Our Lady and the Beloved Disciple standing at the foot of the Cross.

"When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home." (John 19:26-27)

In the last moments of His earthly life, struggling to catch a breath or utter a sentence, Jesus is looking with loving compassion at His Mother and at John. This is not merely a moment of care of a son for His Mother and disciple (though it is too!), but also the expression of His love and care for each of His disciples: us. He entrusts the whole Church, in the person of John, to Our Lady. He gives Her as a Mother to every one of us. He knows we need

Her motherly protection and affection, Her understanding and compassion. So He shares that precious treasure, His own Mother, with us. That's one thing that His gaze says to us: I see you, my child! I see that you need a mother to take care of you, so I'm giving you a Mother like no other.

Beyond those loving and faithful faces, who did He see from the Cross? He saw the two thieves crucified at His side. Both were guilty, but each had a different attitude. One was mocking and jeering at Jesus: "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" (Luke 23:39). The other, repentant and aware of his sinfulness, cried out: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom".

Think about it...didn't Jesus want to save them both? Of course He did! That's why He was enduring the tortures of crucifixion, to save sinners like me, like you, like those two criminals. What a suffering to His heart that in that moment one of them rejected the gift of salvation. Can you imagine with what love and pain Jesus looked at Him? And then with what love and tender joy must He have looked at the penitent one? This is how He looks at us too, with tenderness, love, with sadness if we reject His Mercy, with infinite joy when we reach out to embrace it.

Beyond those, who did Jesus see? He saw the Roman soldiers who crucified Him. He saw the crowds that were laughing at Him and ridiculing Him, while He was offering up His life for them. Luke records that the Lord said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34). These are astounding words! He wants the Father's Mercy to reach those who are nailing Him to the Cross

and also those who scorn His sacrifice. Think of the moments when you choose sin, especially when you choose it wilfully. In those moments, Jesus is pleading with the Father for you: "Father forgive him/her, for they are not aware of what they are doing". What a tender, loving gaze of Jesus in such a moment!

As you might have noticed, I am focusing on some of the seven last words of Christ here, but with special emphasis on those that reveal how He was looking at us. The others are either directed to the Father, like, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" or "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" or have a more general meaning, like, "It is accomplished" (very rich in meaning, but less related to our topic here).

There's one more left among those that have a special significance to understanding the gaze in the Image: "I thirst". "I thirst" was not a cry of physical thirst only. Jesus said to St Faustina: "I thirst. I thirst for the salvation of souls. Help Me, My daughter, to save souls. Join your sufferings to My Passion and offer them to the heavenly Father for sinners" (Diary, 1032).

The words "I thirst" were also the calling of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. Having heard them, she understood her vocation within a vocation: the call to serve Jesus in the poorest of the poor. So, when Jesus was gazing down from the Cross, His gaze expressed a thirst - for your salvation and for the salvation of every single human being that ever lived, is living or will live on this earth. His gaze is saying: by My sacrifice I wish to save everyone. Every soul is precious to Me. You are precious

to Me!

Beloved

Finally, I think I need to say that the Lord looks at us with pleasure and joy. After all, we are His beloved children, the ones He has died and risen for. He is the one who created us and knows us intimately. We are constantly in His heart and under His loving gaze. When critical gazes, hate or spite befall us, His gaze is always there to return to it and find in it the truth of being Beloved.

Sr Faustina expresses a beautiful intimacy she shared with Christ: "I want to hide myself so that no creature might know my heart. Jesus, You alone know my heart and possess it whole and entire. No one knows our secret. We understand each other mutually with one look. From the moment we came to know each other I have been happy. Your greatness is my fullness" (Diary, 201). You can have the same intimacy with Him, if you only want to come closer.

The gaze of Jesus is also capable of penetrating into the very depths of our hearts. But not in a scary way! I like to think that He sees the hidden tears, pain, efforts (even if unsuccessful!), and the joys and jokes that only we share. Yes, He sees the sins too! This is how Faustina experienced it: "After Holy Communion, I saw the Lord Jesus just as I had seen Him during one adoration. The Lord's gaze pierced my soul through and through, and not even the least speck of dust escaped His notice" (Diary, 324).

However, if He reveals these 'specks' to us, it's only in gentleness and mercy, to draw us closer to Himself. Oh, how much He desires to be closer to us!

"O merciful God, You do not despise us, but lavish Your graces on us continuously. You make us fit to enter Your kingdom, and in Your goodness You grant that human beings may fill the places vacated by the ungrateful angels. O God of great mercy, who turned Your sacred gaze away from the rebellious angels and turned it upon contrite man, praise and glory be to Your unfathomable mercy, O God who do not despise the lowly hear" (Diary, 1339).

If we turn to Him in contrition and sorrow, He will look at us with great compassion and Mercy.

Those of you who have been following this series of articles on the Divine Mercy Image will remember how I spoke about the Image as a way to healing our image of God the Father. The Father looks at us through the eyes of Jesus, or, as St Faustina says, through His wounds.

"Towards the end of the litany I saw a great radiance and, in the midst of it, God the Father. Between this radiance and the earth I saw Jesus, nailed to the Cross in such a way that when God wanted to look at the earth, He had to look through the wounds of Jesus. And I understood that it was for the sake of Jesus that God blesses the earth" (Diary, 60).

With what loving tenderness and care must the Father be looking at each of us through those eyes, through those wounds! If any of us find ourselves fearing God the Father or unsure of His fatherly affection for us, we are invited to look into the eyes of Jesus. There we will find the answer to the questions that nag us.

St Faustina would also pray that the Father's gaze would rest on her, through the wounds of Jesus: "Prayer during the Mass on the



day of the perpetual vows. Today I place my heart on the paten where Your Heart has been placed, O Jesus, and today I offer myself together with You to God, Your Father and mine, as a sacrifice of love and praise. Father of Mercy, look upon the sacrifice of my heart, but through the wound in the Heart of Jesus" (Diary, 239).

So, I invite you to look into Jesus' eyes today, whether before the Image or in your imagination. Spend some time contemplating what His gaze is saying to you personally. I can promise you, you won't regret those moments spent with Him. Who knows, maybe they will change your life forever?

(Sr Benedetta is of the Sisters of Mercy, based in Letterkenny)

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formally accepted by the Church in 626 AD. The Kontakion 'To the Invincible Champion...we ascribe the victory' was added then, and came to be recognized as the Akathist Hymn, because of the following described miracle attributed to the intercession of the Theotokos...

While the Emperor of Byzantium Heracleios was on an expedition to fight the aggression of the Persians on their own grounds, there appeared outside the walls of Constantinople barbaric hordes, mostly Avars. The siege lasted a few months, and it was apparent that the outnumbered troops of the Queen City were reaching desperation. However, as history records, the faith of the people worked the impossible. The Venerable Patriarch Sergius, with the Clergy and the Official of Byzantium Vonos, endlessly marched along the great walls of Constantinople with an Icon of the Theotokos in hand, and bolstered the faith

of the defenders of freedom. The miracle came soon after. Unexpectedly, as the chronicler narrates, a great storm with huge tidal waves destroyed most of the fleet of the enemy, and full retreat ensued.

The faithful of Constantinople spontaneously filled the Church of the Theotokos at Vlachernae on the Golden Horn and, with the Patriarch Sergius officiating, they prayed all night, singing praises to the Virgin Mary without sitting. Hence the title of the Hymn 'Akathistos', in Greek meaning 'not seated'.

Integral

The Akathist Hymn is a very important and, indeed, integral part of our religious and ecclesiastical life. When we are present during the First Friday Service, we firmly realize that we commence to ascend the spiritual steps of the lengthy Lenten period, to finally reach the peak with Our Lord's Glorious Resurrection.

The Akathist Hymn was not



On a visit to Clonmacnoise...our roots.

strange to the Latin West, even though apart from the Eastern Church. Pope Benedict XIV granted on May 4, 1746, an indulgence of 50 days to the Latin and Eastern Rite Roman Catholics, for each recitation of the Hymn.

Fr Vincent McNabb, a Roman Catholic priest in London, translated the Hymn into English in 1934. In his forward remarks he stated: "No apology is needed for introducing the Akathistos to

the Christian West. Indeed, the West might well be apologetic about its neglect, or ignorance of such a liturgical and literary masterpiece."

any of our Service Books, we can readily see that our glorious and Ever-Virgin Theotokos is the center of many of our Orthodox Services, in which prayers abound for Her interceding to Her Son, and our God, for our Salvation. The Virgin Mary is the most exalted and most honoured person by God. She is the most revered and most loved by humans. She is a binding force for all Christians. She is the Unique Personality of the world, because of the unique fact of the Lord's Incarnation. She is the daughter of Grace and the Crystal Vessel of the Grace of the Holy Spirit (see Luke 1:26-56).

Faith in the Almighty God is primary and all important to the Holy Orthodox Church. Our dependence on God is always beyond question, and from this faith we should strive not to

stray. Therefore, Services, like the Akathist Hymn, should be a must and attended by all. Moreover, this particular Service links us so beautifully with a great and glorious period of our Christian history; it is also a very live tradition, which has never ceased in the Orthodox Church since its official acceptance in 626 AD.

Living in these trying times, when we are besieged by many forces of evil, it is hoped that the Akathist Hymn as well as our other Services may become the bulwark to withstand, and indeed to overcome these forces. Paraphrased from Fr George Papadeas'.

1st Stanza (of Twenty Four, in Four Part)

The Archangel was sent from Heaven to cry: Rejoice! to the Theotokos. And beholding You, O Lord, taking bodily form, he stood in awe, and with his bodiless voice he cried aloud to her such things as:

Rejoice, you through whom

joy shall shine. Rejoice, you the Redemption of the tears of Eve.

Rejoice, Height hard to climb for human thought. Rejoice, Depth hard to explore even for the eyes of Angels.

Rejoice, for you are the Throne of the King. Rejoice, for you sustained the Sustainer of all.

Rejoice, Star that causes the Sun to appear. Rejoice, Womb of the divine Incarnation.

Rejoice, you through whom creation is renewed. Rejoice, you whom the Creator is born a Babe.

Rejoice, O Bride Ever-Virgin



Parish Post-its

Aghyaran

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Thursdays after 9.15 am Mass, and finishes at 12 noon.

Ardstraw East

(Newtownstewart)

YOUCAT Study: A one-hour interactive YOUCAT programme, for those aged 16+ years, takes place on Thursdays in the Oratory, at 7 Main Street, Newtownstewart, starting at 6.30 pm. For further information contact 028 81661445 or email ardstraweast@derrydiocese.org. This may be of particular interest to those undertaking the Pope John Paul II Award.

Badoney Lower

(Gortin-Rouskey)

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Tuesdays in St Patrick's Church, Gortin, following 12.30 pm Mass, with Benediction at 5 pm.

Ballinascreen

Live Crib: The Live Crib will take place on Saturday, December 30, marking the 800th anniversary of the first Crib created by St Francis. More details to follow.

St Pio Mass: Mass in honour of St Pio of Pietrelcina is celebrated on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm, in Holy Rosary Church. The Novena prayers and Rosary are recited at 7.10 pm.

Ballymagroarty

Anniversary Mass: The 40th anniversary Mass for Holy Family Church will be celebrated by Bishop Donal on Sunday, December 31, at 12.30 pm

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, every Sunday, from 1.30 - 6 pm. Padre Pio Prayer: The Holy Family Padre Pio Prayer Group meets on the first Tuesday each month at Holy Family Chapel, Ballymagroarty, Derry. It starts with the Rosary at 6.45 pm, followed by Mass at 7.15pm, and Novena to St Pio directly afterwards. There will be a first class relic available for veneration.

Banagher

Adoration & Chaplet: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Divine Mercy Chaplet take place in St Mary's Church, Altinure, on Thursdays 10.30 am - 11.30 am, and in the Grotto Chapel, Fincairn, on Fridays,

10-11 am.

Bellaghy

Community Café: The Open Door Community Café is open on the last Sunday of each month, from 11.30 am until 1 pm.

Buncrana

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament now takes place in St Mary's Oratory every Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, beginning at 6 am and closing at 10 pm, and on Sundays 2-10 pm.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed each weekday at 9.30 am in St Mary's Oratory, prior to 10 am Mass.

Guided Holy Hour: A Guided Holy Hour of Adoration in Honour of the Holy Face of Jesus takes place on Sundays, 6-7 pm in St Mary's Oratory. All welcome. Rosary for Priests: Three Rosaries are prayed each Tuesday, between 1-2 pm, in the Oratory for vocations to the priesthood and religious life.

AA: Alcoholics Anonymous Amazing Grace Group, Buncrana, has five meetings per week: Sundays - 8 pm, Tuesdays - 8.30 pm, Thursdays - 11.30 am, Fridays 8.30 pm, and Saturdays at 11.30 am. If you think you may have a problem with alcohol, please come along. Venue for all meetings is St Teresa's Room.

Al-Anon: The Al-Anon Group, for anyone whose life is or has been affected by someone else's drinking, meets in St Teresa's Room on Thursdays at 6:45 pm.

Burt, Inch & Fahan

Adoration: Adoration in St Mura's Parish Church, Fahan, takes place each Friday after 10 am Mass.

Cappagh

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher every Monday-Sunday after 10 am Mass, and in Corpus Christi, Mountfield every Thursday evening at 8 pm.

Carndonagh

Ecumenical Carol Service: The annual Ecumenical Carol Service will be held in the Church of the Sacred Heart, Carndonagh on Friday, December 22, at 8 pm.

Castleberg & Ardstraw West

Adoration: Adoration takes place following 10 am Mass in St Patrick's Church on Fridays, until 12 noon.

Claudy

College Anniversary: St Patrick's & St Brigid's College will be celebrating its 60th anniversary with Mass in St Patrick's Church at 7 pm on Thursday, May 2, 2024, followed by further celebrations in the College, until 9.30 pm.

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place from after the 10 am Mass until 8 pm on Tuesdays in St Patrick's Church, Claudy, and on Wednesdays in St Joseph's Church, Craigbane.

Living Word: There is a 'Living Word' gathering in the Upper Room in St Patrick's Church on Thursdays, 7-8.30 pm, for a time of reading and reflection on the Mass readings for the following Sunday. All welcome.

Children's Rosary: Children's Rosary continues in St Patrick's Church, Claudy on the first Saturday of each month, at 2 pm. All are welcome.

Coleraine

SJYP Meet: St Joseph's Young Priests' Society meets on the last Monday of each month at St John's Church Sacristy, after the 10 am morning Mass, and is open to everyone. New members are welcome at any of the meetings, which support praying for and assisting to support the vocation to priesthood and the religious life.

Exposition: St John's Church Monday Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Wednesdays in St John's Church, from 2-4 pm with Rosary at 3:45 pm.

Creggan

Vocations Prayer: There will be Vocations Holy Hour in St Mary's Church, Creggan, on the second Friday of each month, running from 8-9 pm.

Polish Mass: Mass for the Polish community will be celebrated at 9.30 am every second and fourth Sunday of the month in the Divine Mercy Chapel, at St Mary's Church.

Dunamanagh

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Patrick's Church after 10 am Mass on Saturdays, until 12 noon, and on Mondays from 7-8 pm.

Drumragh (Omagh)

Prayer Group: The Charismatic Prayer Group meetings take place in The Pastoral Centre on Thursday evenings, with Rosary at 7.40 pm and prayer meeting at 8 pm. All welcome to come and pray.

Legion of Mary: The Legion

of Mary Men's meetings take place on the first, second and last Monday, and third Tuesday of each month at 7.30 pm, in St Vincent's Hall (beneath Sacred Heart Church Sacristy). Contact: Sean on 07730671370.

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in Sacred Heart Church on Wednesdays following morning Mass until 5.30 pm. Rosary of Reparation: On the first Saturday of each month, a Rosary of Reparation will be prayed at 1pm on Main Street, Omagh. All welcome to join.

Dungiven

Healing Mass: A St Pio Healing Mass takes place on the first Tuesday of each month at 7 pm in St Patrick's Church.

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed at 9.35 am in St Patrick's Church from Monday-Friday.

Lectio Divina: The Lectio Divina Group meet on Wednesdays, from 7.30 - 9.00 pm, in the Parish House. Prayer Group: The St Canice's Prayer Group meets each Thursday in the Conference Room at 7 pm, and invites anyone who wishes to deepen their faith through shared Scripture, Prayer and Praise.

Errigal

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Mondays after the morning Mass in St Mary's Church, Ballerin, until 2.30 pm. Rosary & Chaplet: The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet are prayed in St Joseph's Church, Glenullin, every Wednesday evening at 6.30 pm.

Social Gathering: Tea and scones are available in Glenullin Social Club after the Wednesday morning Mass, offering an opportunity to have 'a cuppa and a natter' after the prayers are said! Everyone welcome.

Fahan

Adoration: Adoration takes place in St Mura's Parish Church each Friday after the 10 am Mass.

Faughanvale

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed every Friday at 7 pm in Star of the Sea Church.

Greencastle

Divine Mercy: The Divine Mercy Chaplet is prayed on the First Tuesday of every month at 12.15 pm before Mass in St Patrick's Church, Greencastle.

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in St Patrick's Church after 12.30 pm Mass on Tuesdays until 5 pm.

Iskaheen, Drung & Muff

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Tuesdays after 10 am Mass in St Patrick's Church, Iskaheen.

Divine Mercy: Divine Mercy Devotions take place on Wednesdays after 10 am Mass in Sacred Heart Church, Muff.

St Peregrine: The St Peregrine Novena Prayer and veneration of relic takes place in St Columba's Church, Drung, after the 10.15 am Mass on the first Sunday of each month.

Leckpatrick

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays after 10 am Mass until 5.30 pm.

Limavady

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration will take place in St Mary's Church on Thursday, December 14.

Children's Liturgy: Children's Liturgy for children in P1-P3 takes place every Sunday at the 12 noon Mass in Christ the King Church.

Maghera

Pray & Play: The Maghera Parish Pray and Play for Parents, Grandparents & Tots (three years old and younger) meets every Friday,

in the Fairhill Youth Centre, after the 10 am Mass. It runs from 10.30 am until 12 noon.

Melmount

Exposition: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the church on Mondays after 10 am Mass until 6 pm.

Graves' Blessing: The annual Blessing of Graves will take place on Sunday, May 19, 2024 at 4 pm.

Moville

Prayer: The Rosary and Divine Mercy Chaplet will be recited in St Pius X Church, Moville, at 7.30 pm every day, from Sunday - Friday.

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Mondays, from 2-9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6-9 pm, in St Pius X Church.

Sion Mills

Blessing of Graves: The annual Blessing of Graves will take place on Sunday, June 2, 2024, at 3 pm.

Legion of Mary: The Legion of Mary meets in the Green Room, behind the church, each Monday evening at 7.30 pm. This is open not only to members of the Legion but to anyone interested in joining. Anyone can come along to the start of the meeting for the Rosary.

Steelstown & Culmore

Lectio Divina: Lectio

Divina is a way of praying the Scriptures together and takes place every Wednesday after 10 am Mass, in the Parish Conference Room. All welcome.

Adoration: Spend some quiet time before the Lord Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament each Friday after 10 am Mass to 6.50 pm.

Stations of the Cross: Come along to reflect on the Way of the Cross on Fridays at 7.30 pm.

Strabane (Camus)

Graves' Blessing 2024: The annual ceremony of the blessing of graves for the parish will be held on Sunday, May 26, 2024, at 3 pm.

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place all day in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis of Peace), which is situated at the back of the Church.

Prayer Group: The Contemplative Prayer Group meets on Mondays at 8 pm in the Prayer Room in the Parochial House. All welcome. Entry by Parish Priest's front door.

SJYP Society: The St John Vianney branch of the St Joseph's Young Priests' Society (the three combined Strabane parishes) meets on the first Tuesday of the month, excluding January, July and August, with Rosary in the church after 10 am Mass and continues

Continued on p29

in St Patrick's Hall. More people are encouraged to join in this prayer for new students to join the priesthood. The Society assists Irish and overseas student. Please contact Margaret Harte on 028 71 883159.

Padre Pio Mass: The Padre Pio Mass takes place in the Church on the first Wednesday of the month at 7 pm, with Rosary beforehand at 6.40 pm.

Grotto Rosary: The Rosary is recited at the Grotto on the last Sunday of each month. Everyone welcome.

Templemore – Long Tower

Aras Cholmcille: Tea/Coffee will be served in the café in Aras Cholmcille after 10 am Mass on the first and last Sundays of each month (subject to change). Everyone welcome.

Padre Pio Mass: A Padre Pio Mass for

healing in mind and body takes place on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm, in Long Tower Church. It is hoped at the end of each Mass to give a Blessing using a First Class Relic of Padre Pio. The Mass will be streamed via the parish website: www.longtowerchurch.org then click on the link for the webcam or alternatively by logging on to www.churchmedia.tv.

Templemore – St Eugene's

Eucharistic Adoration: Every Sunday, there is Eucharistic Adoration from 3-6 pm and every Tuesday from 10.30 am until 7.20 pm.

Matt Talbot Mass: The Matt Talbot, Freedom from addiction Mass takes place on the first Monday of each month at 7.30 pm in St Eugene's Cathedral.

Exploring Poetry:

Exploring Poetry with Mary Murphy continues on Fridays at 11 am in the Cathedral Hall. You are most welcome to join via the online platforms or in person.

Cathedral Voices: Cathedral Voices is a singing group for people living with dementia and older members of the community. The singing club takes place every Thursday from 1.30-3 pm, and is a great chance to socialise, listen to music, have a cup of tea and a chat and a bit of craic. If you are interested in attending, please contact the parish office on 028 71262894.

Three Patrons

God Club: God Club is an opportunity for 16-30 year olds to learn together about their faith. It takes place in St Pio House, in the grounds of St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, on Sundays from 7.30-9 pm

on Sundays. **Family/Youth Mass:** A Family/Youth Mass is celebrated every Sunday at 6.30 pm in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh. Everyone is welcome.

Be Still: Be Still is a Men's Prayer and Friendship Group that meets every Thursday night from 8-9.15 pm in Our Lady's Chapel, within St Joseph's Church building, Galliagh. Its mission as a group is to provide a safe place where men can pray and share in a confidential and supportive setting. All men are welcome.

Holy Hour: A Holy Hour for the Unborn & Expectant Mothers takes place on Thursdays at 7 pm in Our Lady's Chapel, St Joseph's Church, Galliagh. All welcome.

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in Our Lady's Chapel, St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, on Mondays

after 11 am Mass, concluding with a Youth 2000 Holy Hour from 7-8 pm. It also takes place seven days a week in the Adoration Room in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, from 8 am until 6 pm, and in St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn, on Wednesdays from 10.45 am - 6.45 pm.

First Saturday: On the First Saturday of each month, after 11 am Mass in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, there is Adoration and Rosary, ending with Divine Mercy and Benediction at 3 pm.

Living Disciples: Living Disciples meet on Tuesdays at 7.30 pm in St Pio House, St Joseph's

Church grounds, for Praise & Worship, friendship and a cup of tea. All welcome.

Holy Face Devotions: Devotions to the Holy Face of Jesus takes place every Tuesday after 11 am Mass in Our Lady's Chapel, St Joseph's Church, Galliagh. All welcome

St Pio Mass: A monthly Mass in honour of St Pio takes place on the first Monday at 7 pm in St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn.

Healing Night: A Healing Night with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal takes place monthly on the first Friday, at 7 pm in St Joseph's Church,

Galliagh. Everyone welcome.

Holy Souls Prayer: Praying for the Holy Souls, Our Lady of Montligeon Prayer Group meets on Wednesdays after 9.15 am Mass in the room adjacent to St Brigid's Parochial House, Carnhill, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

Urney & Castlefinn

First Saturdays: The First Saturday Devotion and Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will take place in St Columba's Church, Doneyloop, from 12 noon until 1 pm on the

First Saturday of each month.

Adoration: Weekly Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Anthony's Chapel every Tuesday, from 12 noon until 8 pm.

Cenacle: The Cenacle for Priests takes place every Tuesday in St Anthony's Chapel immediately after the 7 pm Mass.

Waterside & Strathfoyle

Lectio Divina: Reflect on the Scriptures with Lectio Divina in St Columba's Church, Chapel Road, on Thursday nights, starting at 8.15 pm.

...Other Diary Dates

Praise & Worship: A night of Praise & Worship will take place in St Pio House, Galliagh, on Friday, December 29, starting at 7.15 pm.

Silent Retreat: What keeps us from getting to know God better? What gets in the way of us basking in the reality of God's love for us? Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre, Derry, is hosting a weekend free of the distraction of daily life by way of the Silent Directed Retreat from January 26-28. Directed by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, retreatants will be introduced to and led through teaching on methods of prayer, particularly meditation and contemplation. Talks will focus on the mysteries of the Lord's life and how they relate to your prayer. The weekend is done on a residential basis, is open to men and women, and costs £90, which includes all meals. For further information/booking please contact Aoife on 02871262512 or termonbaccaderry@gmail.com.

Irish Pilgrimage Trust: The Irish Pilgrimage Trust Group 190 of Irish Pilgrimage Trust are looking for Male carers,

around age of 18 up to 45, to travel to Lourdes at Easter from March 31 until April 6, 2024. All Carers are to pay their own fare, which is as follows: €495 for 3rd Level Students; €750 for any other persons. If anyone is interested in volunteering, or if you know of a child or young person who would like to go on the pilgrimage, please contact Margaret Rose Gormley on 07922237986.

Servant Sisters: The Sisters of the Home of the Mother are hosting weekly formation meetings on Tuesdays, at 7.30 pm, in the Parochial House at Cross, Killygordon, (F93PN0X), and the weekly Holy Hours on Thursdays at 7 pm.

Holy Souls Prayer: Under The Gaze of Our Lady of Montligeon, the Holy Souls of Purgatory Prayer Meeting takes place on Wednesdays after 9.15 am Mass in the room adjacent to St Brigid's Parochial House, Carnhill, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. It also takes place on the third Monday of each month in Termonbacca, with prayers especially for deceased priests and religious. All welcome.

Sr Clare Mass: Mass in honour of Sr Clare Crockett is celebrated on the second Sunday of each month, at 7 pm, in Termonbacca.

Polish Mass: Mass for the Polish community will be celebrated at 9.30 am every second and fourth Sunday of the month in the Divine Mercy Chapel, at St Mary's Church, Creggan, in Derry City.

Stations of Cross: On the First Friday of each month, after 10 am Mass in St Eugene's, there is a silent procession from the Cathedral to St Columba's Church, Long Tower, meditating on the Stations of the Cross.

Coastal Rosary: Rosary on the Coast for world peace and the protection of unborn babies takes place at Lisfannon Beach, Buncrana, on the first Sunday of every month at 3 pm, and at Benone Strand on the third Sunday of every month, at 3 pm.

Men's Rosary: The Men's Rosary takes place on the first Saturday of every month in Market Street, Omagh (opposite Primark) at 1 pm. All Welcome!

Sr Clare Mass: Mass in honour of Sr Clare Crockett is celebrated on the second Sunday of each month, at 7 pm, in Termonbacca.

All welcome. The Mass is streamed live via Termonbacca YouTube channel.

Reading with the Carmelites: The Carmelite Fathers at Termonbacca hold a monthly session of 'Reading with the Carmelite Saints', to explore learning friendship with Christ through the example of the Carmelite Saints. It takes place on the third Thursday of the month at 7.30 pm.

Healing Night: The monthly Healing Night with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, in Derry, takes place on the First Friday of each month, at 7 pm.

Sr Clare Rosary: The Sr Clare Rosary continues every Monday night, at 8.30 pm, in St Joseph's Room, at the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca.

Matt Talbot Society: The Matt Talbot Society Mass, praying for those suffering from addiction, is offered for those enrolled on the first Monday of every month in St Eugene's Cathedral, at 7.30 pm.

"Come and see!"
ANSWER THE CALL!
DERRYVOCATIONS.ORG
If this is of interest to you, please contact the Diocesan Vocations Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan on (+44) 07703444280 or (028) 7933 6452

Men's Rosary
2024 Saturday's @ 1pm
Owen 44 7525 166090
Sat Jan 6 Dungiven:
The Grove, Main St
Opposite the old Castle
Sat Feb 3 Derry
Guildhall Square besides O'Neill Sports Shop
Sat Mar 2 Banbridge
Newry St 100 metres past the Downshire Arms Hotel and War Memorial on the central isle
Sun ~ St Patrick's Day
Mass Rock
Slemish Mountain
Rosary @ 2 pm Mass at 3 (concelebrated)
CatholicismRocks.com

Cursillo
Ladies Weekend
22nd– 25th February 2024
Mens Weekend
29th February– 3rd March 2024

Diocesan Diary

Youth Festival: Derry Diocesan Youth is leading a pilgrimage to Medjugorje Youth Festival from July 30 to August 8, for those aged 16+. Those interested in coming on this pilgrimage are asked to message the Derry Youth social media pages or email their name to lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org.

JPII Awards: The annual Pope John Paul II Award

Ceremony will take place on Wednesday, February 7, at 2 pm in St Eugene's Cathedral. This Ceremony is for all those who have completed the Award.

ACCORD: Accord Derry Marriage Preparation Courses (Pre Marriage

Courses) will take place on January 19/20; February 23/24; March 22/23, 2024. Venue: Everglades Hotel, Prehen Road, Derry. Please note that these courses are not virtual and are in person. Bookings are now being taken on www.accordni.com.

Eternal Echoes... Timeless Truth for today's hearts by Regina Deighan

Enriching your Advent season

IT is hard to believe how long Christmas decorations and treats have been sitting on store shelves. Yet, here we are, mere days away from "[...]the most wonderful time of the year." Amidst the busyness of what society calls the 'Christmas Season', we as Catholics must take time to slow down and recognize that the days leading up to Christmas are a time of preparation. In fact, according to our liturgical calendar, Christmas is only beginning for us when it is ending for everyone else.

But, in order to make the most of the Christmas season, we have to prepare ourselves for it. Just as you might make preparations for a grand dinner for Christmas Day, or purchase gifts to give, so too preparations have to be made for our hearts and souls if we are to enter into this season of our Lord's birth and truly relish in and grow spiritually from it. The Church gives us these days of preparation in the holy season of Advent

The word Advent derives from the Latin verb meaning "to come." It is during this solemn season that we prepare for Christ to come into our lives in three different ways: in

history (celebrating His birth when He came into the world); in mystery (celebrating His coming into our hearts in the Most Holy Eucharist and in every moment we allow Him); and majesty (celebrating our "blessed hope" of His glorious Second Coming at the end of time).

Our Advent days of preparation should not merely be focused on worldly things like parties, presents, and Christmas music; all the more, we should be focused on prayer, self-reflection, joyful penitence, and conforming our lives ever more closely to the coming Christ. This Advent preparation is most definitely challenging amidst a secular culture constantly telling us that buying, eating, and parties are the heart of this season.

Here below are a few suggestions of ways you can enrich your spiritual life during this holy season of Advent in order to make the most of this time of preparation, making a manger in your heart for Jesus to find a loving home.

Music, Art, and Literature

Listen to true Advent music (not Christmas), such as the album 'Advent at Ephesus' recorded by the

Benedictine Sisters of Mary, Queen of Apostles.

Choose a piece of art that depicts the Nativity scene or the journey to Bethlehem. Sit and pray with it like a visual 'lectio divina', putting yourself into the story and using it as a springboard for prayer. Eg: 'Adoration of the Magi' by Gentile da Fabriano, 'The Nativity' by El Greco, 'The Mystical Nativity' by Sandro Boticelli or 'Adoration of the Shepherds' by Rembrandt

Read 'A Christmas Carol' by Charles Dickens! It's very short and has countless adaptations to watch after reading. The story is one of conversion, examining what chains bind us in life, entrapping our freedom to truly love Christ and serve Him joyously in others. It is a story of newness-of-life and change-of-heart, providing us with a healthy perspective on examining our own selfishness and sinfulness, and evaluating what truly matters in this life.

Prayer and Sacramental Life

Jesus' advent is always present to us in the Most Holy Eucharist. Spend time with Him in adoration, inviting Him into your heart; share

with Him what you need to clear out of your life in order to make room for Him this Christmas.

Examine your conscience and go to Confession so that you can receive the Eucharist with a pure and spotless soul, especially on Christmas.

Sit with a physical nativity scene (perhaps one in the church or in your home) to consider, in prayer, the miracle of what God has done for us through Jesus' incarnation and nativity.

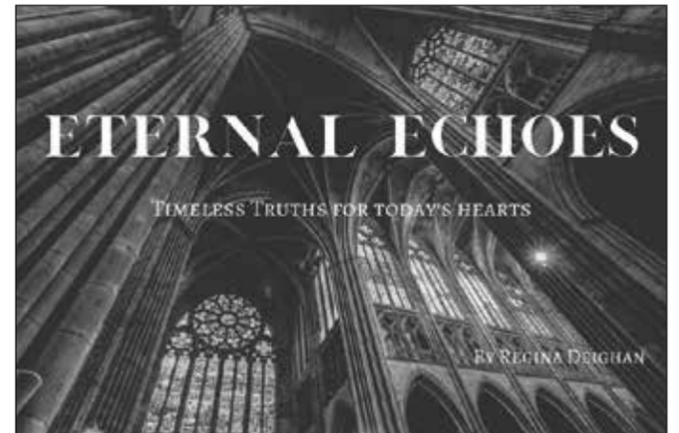
Out and About

Find a charity or organization where you can offer your time or services, especially to those in most need. Donate items or money to a charity. Find a place collecting gifts for underprivileged children and donate a gift to them.

Take a trip to local churches in the area to see their nativity scenes and Advent wreaths.

In the Home

Create a Jesse Tree to reflect on our Salvation History through Scripture stories and symbols. You can find more information on how to do that here: <https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/advent/the-jesse-tree/>



www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/advent/the-jesse-tree/

Use an Advent calendar with purpose. There are all kinds of fun Advent calendars and countdowns, but take the opportunity to connect yours with a daily reflection, prayer, or spiritual work in which the whole family can participate.

Set up a "progressive Nativity." This is a Nativity scene where the figures are added slowly over the weeks of Advent. For example, you could begin with Mary, then add Joseph, then shepherds, and crowning the scene with Jesus on

Christmas Eve or Christmas Day.

As secular society begins to remove their decorations and stop playing their festive music, Catholics are only just beginning. What a joy to be able to relish in the beauty of the birth of our Saviour for a time even after culture tells us that the Christmas season is over!

Perhaps, by honoring Advent in some of the ways listed above, we might be able to say this year, with good old Ebenezer Scrooge himself, that, "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."

Waiting for God Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR



Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR

NOW that December has arrived, preparations for Christmas really get into full swing! Although the first time I heard Christmas publicly mentioned this year was way back in July!

The shops are all decorated for this event with Santa and glitter and reindeers, etc. The air is full of joyful music and singing. There is an atmosphere of expectation all around us, although so much of this is about what you will give to others and what you will get from them. The shopping craze begins.

A problem

Many people have a problem with Christmas – it is too religious! They would love to get rid of the name and just have a happy holiday. They want to get rid of cribs in public places, even though the name forces cribs into those public places.

We have the commercial interests to thank for still having Christmas as the title for this time. They know, if it were taken

away, there would not be the same frantic shopping. Can you imagine people getting excited about "I'm dreaming of a white holiday"?

Christmas Day, December 25, is the day towards which the commercial world has a great countdown. The closer we get to that date, the more urgency there is in getting all that is necessary to make it a happy day. The next day, St Stephen's Day, the focus will immediately turn to sales and bargains. And once again the rush will begin.

Our problem

As followers of Christ, we too have a problem – in fact we have a double problem! The first part of this is that we can get caught up in the commercial Christmas to such an extent that when Christmas Day arrives, we too are ready to move on to the next thing. We have had enough of it! Of course, let us enjoy all the hype and the joy of the season around us. But do it together as a couple, as a family, and as a community.

For us, as Christians, the Christmas season runs from Christmas Day until the feast of the Baptism of Christ, which this year takes place on Sunday, January 7. During this time, we reflect on and pray about some of the beautiful aspects of our faith in Christ born in Bethlehem.

The second part of our problem though is more important. We are so used to the story of Christmas that we can take it for granted and become almost bored by it. We can go through all the motions

of preparing for Christmas, especially if there are children in the home. But it does not necessarily touch us in our minds and hearts.

What can we do?

In the Calendar Year, Christmas comes at the end of the year. And then a New Year begins on January 1, with all the resolutions that are made for a better life.

In the Christian Year, Christmas comes towards the beginning of a New Year. The Christian New Year begins on the First Sunday of Advent, which this year falls on December 3. We then spend four weeks preparing for Christmas in ways that will help us to celebrate the great mystery of Christ's birth with joy and gladness.

The theme of Advent

The theme for Advent this year is clearly set out in the Gospel passage of the first Sunday: 'Stay awake'. What a wonderful motto that is for all of us for these weeks.

Obviously it does not mean 'don't sleep!' That would be completely unhealthy and most undesirable. What it does mean is be alert over these weeks to all the goodness and wonder that is in you and all around you, and then you will know something of the wonderful mystery of the child in the manger of Bethlehem.

Be alert

'Waiting for God' is the title that I took for this article. The truth is that God is constantly being made present for us every day. Our problem is that we are not alert

enough to see God's presence and God's power and love.

Sunday Mass

One of the main ways we can see God's presence with us and for us is in the celebration of the Eucharist. As Catholics, we have always had a great emphasis on going to Mass every Sunday. Unfortunately, we have seen this as an obligation and, as such, very often as a burden.

Sunday Mass is rather a responsibility given to all of us for making God's presence felt in our world through Christ in the Eucharist and in Christ's Body, the Church. Week by week, we build up a picture of this presence through the Scriptures and through the real Presence of Christ, in the Eucharist, and in us as a community. We cannot do that if we are not present at Mass. And even if we are present, we cannot do it unless we take our responsibility to be actively involved in listening and in the prayer.

The first challenge

The first challenge for all of us at the beginning of this new year of faith is to be present at Mass each Sunday during Advent and beyond, and take a full part in it as a family where possible.

At the end of every Mass, those present are sent out to bring the Good News of Christ to the world they live in. They do this, not by preaching, but by the peace and joy that comes from the closeness of Christ to us in the Eucharist. If you are not present you cannot be sent. And all of us are the poorer for that.

The second challenge

The second challenge of this New Year in following Christ is in terms of our relationships with one another, especially in marriage and family life, but also in the faith community in which we nourish our faith. Generally this is the parish community but not always that. The family is acknowledged as the Church of the home or, as it is called, the Domestic Church. This is based on the relationships of husband and wife in marriage, and on the relationships of parents and children in the family.

Christmas is usually celebrated in a special way in families: the Christmas tree goes up in the home; the decorations are taken down from the attic and put up around the house; the lights are checked out, and where necessary, are renewed. Even the outside of the house is lit up for all to see.

Relationships

All of that is lovely to see and good to enjoy. But the real renewal has to be in how the people within the home are committed to being the best they possibly can be for each other and, consequently for the glory of God.

It is through these relationships that God's presence and love are seen and experienced in our homes. This month, at the beginning of this new year of faith, is the time to recommit to one another so that joy can be the main quality of life in marriage and family life, and that peace can be the main gift that is radiated out to the world around us.

An end – or a beginning

As I indicated earlier on, what

is going to make the biggest difference to Christmas this year, as indeed every year, is how we approach it. We can do this either as the end of a year when we see Christmas ending on Christmas Day; or as the beginning of a year in which we see Christmas as the star that will show us the way into a new year of faith, of hope, and of love.

If we follow our Christian calendar, we will find that the Christmas season brings us right up to January 7, when we celebrate the Baptism of Christ. This feast is about why Christ was born in the stable of Bethlehem.

It was so that He could open up a totally new way of human life that is based on love – the love of God for us and our love of God as our Father – and also our Mother – as the one who is totally invested in us and in every human person, and indeed in all of creation. The only way of human life that will ever be successful is life that is lived in love for God and for one another.

This love begins with those closest to us in marriage and in family life. But it is a love that opens each one out to the ends of the earth as we become more and more God's people.

Happy New Year

I wish you and all your loved ones a Happy New Year, beginning on Sunday, December 3, and going on to the end of November/beginning of December next year. And in that context I wish you a very happy Christmas that will be with you every day of 2024. You will be in my prayers. Please keep me in yours.

Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

HELLO children. C3 welcomes you to the month of December. This is a very exciting time of year as we prepare during Advent for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, which is celebrated on December 8.



Immaculate Conception

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception we celebrate and honour the holiness and innocence of Mary. Our Catholic faith teaches us that God kept Mary free from original sin. She was conceived immaculately, which means that from the moment of her conception she was free from original sin and in a state of grace, pure enough to be the Mother of Jesus (CCC 490-493).

She was a fitting tabernacle to hold within Her the body the flesh and blood of Jesus our Saviour. When we receive Holy Communion, we also hold within us the Body and Blood of Jesus, so we should try not to sin and to be pure and holy like Mary.

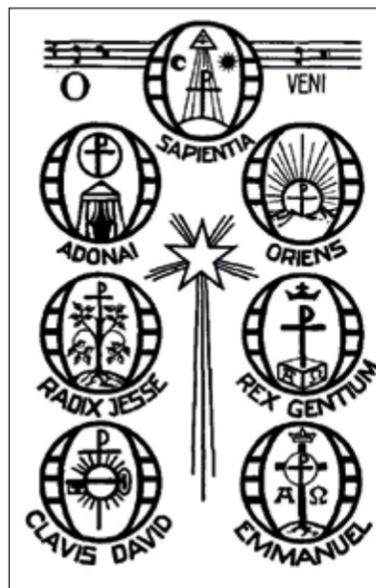
The Advent Wreath

The use of the Advent wreath with the five candles has been a tradition for hundreds of years. The wreath is a symbol of the four weeks in which we prepare for the birth of Jesus, with a candle being lit each week, three purple candles and one rose candle. The green branches remind us of the new life we have in Jesus, the circle signifies the eternity of God's love for us, with no beginning or end, and the candles represent hope and light which Jesus brings into a dark world. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Day, as a symbol of Christ, born as the Light of the world.



Saints of the Month

- St Ambrose – December 7
- St Lucy – December 13
- St Stephen – December 26
- St John – December 27



Traditions - O Antiphons

During the season of Advent and Christmas there are many traditions which we carry out in our homes; lighting the Advent wreath, putting up the Christmas Tree and decorating our home with holly or tinsel. The most important tradition is giving our family crib a special place in our home so that we can welcome the baby Jesus on Christmas Day.

Since Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas Day, it is also important to pray, read the Word of God from our bibles and praise God by singing. Our faith has a beautiful tradition which begins on December 17 every year, and ends on December 24, this tradition is known as the O Antiphons. This special time in Advent is known as the 'second part of Advent' or the 'Golden nights'.

Every night, eight days before Christmas, we ask Christ to come and we call Him by a different name. Each of these names begin with 'O' for example, 'O Come O Come Emmanuel'. They are called O Antiphons, which means they are prayers which are sung or chanted. They are seven jewels of liturgical song which sum up all our Advent longing for our Saviour. The O Antiphons tell us the different names which speak of Christ (listed below) and also highlight the prophesy of the prophet Isaiah who foretold the coming of the Messiah.

If you take the first letter of each name and write them backwards, you get "ERO CRAS." This means



- 'Tomorrow, I will Come' in Latin.
 Dec 17: O Sapientia (Wisdom)
 Dec 18: O Adonai (Lord and Ruler)
 Dec 19: O Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse)
 Dec 20: O Clavis David (Key of David)
 Dec 21: O Oriens (Dawn of the East)
 Dec 22: O Rex Gentium (King of the Gentiles)
 Dec 23: O Emmanuel (God With Us)



Christmas Day

Christmas Day is celebrated every year on December 25. The word 'Christmas' comes from the combination of Christ and Mass; it is the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ (CCC 525). This was the day Jesus was brought into our world to reveal God to us. Christmas is a very special feast and it is one of only three feast days on which the Catholic Church celebrates birthdays. The other two are the births of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. All three of these birthdays have one thing in common – John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus were all born without Original Sin.

Christmas is a special time when we gather together to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. We exchange gifts in our homes and give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of his Son to us.



The Feast of the Holy Family

The Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated on the first Sunday of Christmas. This feast day is dedicated to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. We ponder their life together in Nazareth and pray for our own families.

The Gospels do not tell us anything about Jesus' life when He was growing up in Nazareth. The last story St Luke tells us is the finding of Jesus in the Temple (Lk.2:41-52) and so we have the hidden years of Jesus' life (CCC514). We know that during this time, Jesus' relationship with Mary and Joseph helped Him as he grew to maturity, increased in wisdom, and found favour with God.

The Holy Family provides us with a perfect model of how to live: they loved God and one another. Families are like 'schools of love', for within our families we learn how to receive and share love (CCC 2207). God's love is transmitted to us through the love of our families, through the ordinariness of family life, God is present. The family has been described as the 'domestic church' (CCC 2204), a place of ecclesial community and a communion of persons, an image of the Truine God.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places

of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph graciously hear our prayer. Amen

The 12 Days of Christmas

The 'Twelve Days of Christmas' is a Christmas carol which everyone is quite familiar listening to during the Christmas season. This song appears to have a repeating, catchy melody, which announces a list of strange gifts. However, this song carries with it a more profound and serious message. It was written during the period of 1558- 1829, when Catholics were forbidden to practice their faith. It was composed as one of the 'Catechism songs' which helped young Catholics to memorise the teachings of their faith.

The gifts in the song are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The 'true love' in the song refers to God Himself, and the 'me' who receives the gifts presents every baptised person.

The One Partridge in the pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of God who comes to us on the first day of Christmas. Here, Jesus is symbolically represented as a mother partridge, a bird which will pretend to be injured in order to draw predators to herself away from her young. Jesus did this for us by offering Himself on the Cross; the pear tree is the Cross itself.



Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. From what Christmas carol do the lyrics, 'Mild He lays His glory by, Born that man no more may die', come?
2. In which country is it traditional for 13 'Yule Lads' to descend from the mountains one-by -one each night from December 12, bringing sweets and small gifts for children?
3. On which horse racing course does the King George VI chase take place each year on Boxing Day?
4. Who played 'Bad Santa' in the movie of the same name?
5. What current head of state was born on Christmas Day 1971?
6. With what seasonal pantomime would you associate the character 'Jill Crumble'?
7. What 2008 Christmas No 1 single features in the movie 'Shrek'?
8. What star sign would you be if you were born on Christmas Day?
9. In what US sport do the national champions traditionally have a game on December 25?
10. In what 2011 animated Christmas film does Santa's clumsy son try to deliver one missing gift to a young girl before the big day?
11. What is the chemical symbol for snow?
12. How many reindeer pull Santa's sleigh?
13. Melchior, Balthasar and which other 'Wise Man' feature in the Nativity story?
14. In what European country are the first two working days of the New Year both celebrated as public holidays?
15. What is the highest grossing Christmas movie of all time?
16. In what country is Eggnog said to have originated?
17. What country will Australia's cricket team host in this year's Boxing Day Test?
18. The song 'Mary's Boy Child' has been Christmas Number 1 on two separate occasions, with two different artists. Harry Belafonte was first, but what group did it in 1978?
19. What two Saints celebrate their Feast Day on 24 December 24?
20. What actor voices seven different characters in the 2014 film 'The Polar Express'?

Quiz Answers: 1, Hark the Herald Angels sing. 2, Iceland. 3, Kempton Park. 4, Billy Bob Thornton. 5, Justin Trudeau. 6, Jack and the Beanstalk. 7, Hallelujah. 8, Capricorn. 9, Basketball. 10, Arthur Christmas. 11, H2O. 12, Nine. 13, Caspar. 14, Scotland. 15, The Grinch. 16, England. 17, Pakistan. 18, Boney M. 19, Adam and Eve. 20, Tom Hanks.

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

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Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,