

The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 92. JANUARY 2024

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See inside...



Nativity Musical - Moville.



Nativity Drama - Urney & Castlefin



Live Crib - Ballinascreen



“Be communities of service as Jesus suggests...and everybody is a winner!” – Bishop Donal (see p4-5)

Catholic Schools' Week artwork reflecting theme of Communities of Service and Jesus' Washing of the Feet, exhibited during the launch Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral.



Bouquet of thanks for St Aengus' sacristan - Burt



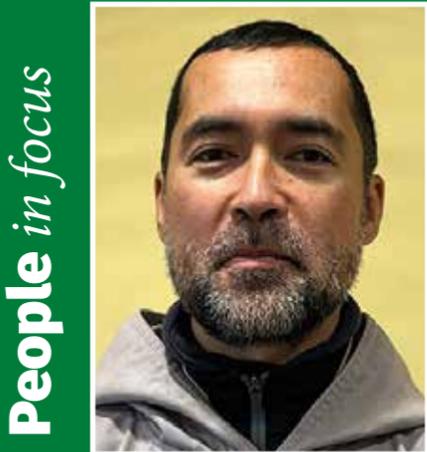
Holy Family Church 40th - Ballymagroarty



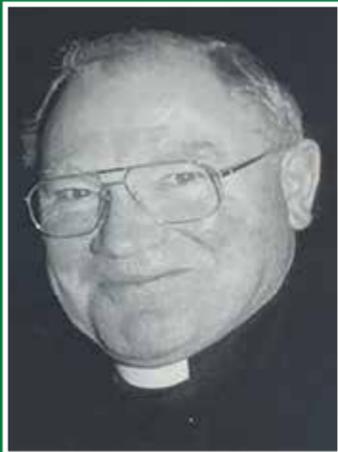
Holy Family PS Derrymino - Ballymagroarty



Killyclogher 200th Anniversary Carol Service - Omagh



Fr Antonio Maria Diez de Medina cfr - Galliagh



Fr Seamus O'Connell RIP



Kathleen McMullan - Craigavole, Kilrea



Margaret Mary Knight RIP



Mrs Caroline McLoughlin - St Columb's College, Derry

Also featuring: Diocesan RE Conference; Young Writers share thoughts; Children's Catechism Club; Syro Malabar Parish Day; Long Tower Eucharistic Study; Living Word reflection in Claudy; Badoney Lower Carol Service; Newtown Stewart Legion of Mary sing-song; Steelstown PPC time of prayer; Urney & Castlefin native turns 108; Walk for Glenock raises over £3,000; St Columbanus Knights support Foodbank; Irish Section; Vocations news; Diocesan Adoration Apostolate continues Eucharistic mission; Christian Unity Week; Termonbacca News; Features; Diary Dates, Quiz and much more...

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Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope's prayer intention for January... "For the gift of diversity in the Church: Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to recognise the gift of different charisms within the Christian community, and to discover the richness of different traditions and rituals in the Catholic Church."

A call to celebrate the richness of being Catholic

ONE of the great graces of the Catholic tradition has been the conviction that unity does not require uniformity. As early as 110 AD the term Catholic, which means 'universal', was used by St Ignatius of Antioch. The Nicene Creed is normally used at Mass on Sundays, and in nearly all Christian traditions, including the traditions that arose out of the Reformation. It goes back to 381AD, and it refers to the Church as 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic'.

However, we also have a clear biblical tradition about how we are all living cells in the Body of Christ and how each of us is gifted by the Holy Spirit, 'working in all sorts of different ways in different people.' (cf 1 Corinthians 13:6).

Jesus had praised apparently unimportant people like children, the generous widow who put in a few small coins to the Temple Treasury, and the faith of the pagan Roman centurion. We insult the Holy Spirit when we limit the work

of God's grace to official office holders in the Church.

And Catholicism has also been diverse in another way. Right from the beginning, Christ's early church worshipped in various languages, and different liturgical traditions developed across Europe and the Middle East.

The Latin Rite of the Liturgy has been dominant. But there are still 23 'Eastern Catholic Churches'. The Maronite Church and the Syro-Malabar Church, to which many of our Indian Catholics belong, have always had their own structures and Canon Law. The Syro-Malabar church has a very long tradition of synodality from which others can learn.

Most of the other 21 Catholic Churches are based on groups who initially belonged to the Orthodox tradition, who broke from Rome in 1054, but who then returned to communion with the Papacy.

Thus, for example, there is the 'Greek Orthodox Church' which

is not affiliated to Rome, and the 'Greek Catholic Church' which has retained the Orthodox liturgical tradition, and the practice of married clergy! Similarly, Pope Benedict XVI allowed Anglican clergy and parishes to join the Ordinariate and retain their Anglican traditions but within the Catholic Church. They, too, have married men as priests.

January is the month which celebrates the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity – January 18-25. This year, Pope Francis asks the whole church to pray for:

*A renewed sense of 'missionary synodality' where parish renewal is based, not merely on restructuring Mass times but on re-involving the laity to discern the way forwards and actively to evangelise our society; and

*A greater awareness of the liturgical, legal and canonical diversity which is a characteristic of the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic' Church.

Even within the Latin Rite church, we have great diversity of spiritual traditions, based on great religious reformers such as Saints Benedict, Francis, Dominic and Ignatius.

The closing document of the Synod of Bishops assembly in October 2023 – 'A Synodal Church in Mission' (cf www.synod.va/en) - had a particular message for all of us to recognise the distinctive charism of religious congregations and to allow them to be a prophetic and sometimes uncomfortable source of renewal (Cf Section 10). That is exactly the role that they played in the time of their founders.

Furthermore, the Synod's document points out how we, in Europe, are enriched by the arrival of Catholics from other continents. They often have different styles of worship and of pious practices.

Pope Francis wants us to celebrate the diversity with which the Church has been blessed, and 'to discover the richness of



Bishop Donal

different ritual traditions in the heart of the Catholic Church.' It is a call to celebrate the richness of being Catholic – not to fear it. This is particularly important in an age of fragmentation.

As Vatican II's Lumen Gentium wrote in its opening paragraph, 'the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race.'

We need abundant prayer if we are to see the world through divine eyes and not just with limited human vision.

Tribute to the late Fr Seamus O'Connell

WITH the words of 'Auld Lang Syne' still fresh in the mind after welcoming another New Year, while reflecting on former days and friends, the news of the passing of Fr Seamus O'Connell stirred up a mixture of happy memories and sadness at the loss of another great source of encouragement in the early days of 'The Net'.

Retiring as parish priest of Maghera in 2010, after 50 years of priesthood, Fr Seamus moved to the village of Park to become the priest in residence at Altinure, where he happily shared his vast knowledge and years of experience with those who gathered for the celebration of Mass in St Mary's Church, and his great love for Our Lady by setting up a Cenacle of the Marian Movement of Priests at St Joseph's, Banagher, for weekly prayer for Mary's beloved priestsons.

And when he was approached

for his opinion on draft copies of 'The Net', as a publication to promote faith activities in parishes and schools around the Diocese that was evolving from a time of prayer and discernment, he didn't hesitate in offering not only encouragement and advice, but much-needed prayer support.

He had a great desire to help people and did help many. This was the experience of Fr Patrick Lagan, who was ordained in St Patrick's Church, Glen, having received his reference for Maynooth from Fr Seamus, who was parish priest of Maghera when he served as an altar boy there. It was, therefore, particularly poignant for Fr Patrick to serve on the altar as MC during Fr Seamus' Requiem Mass in St Patrick's, Glen, on Tuesday, January 16, and to be one of the pallbearers.

Speaking to 'The Net', Fr Patrick described Fr Seamus as

"an extraordinary man and a great priest, with so many gifts, the fruits of which will be seen in time to come." A particular memory for Fr Patrick is a comment he had often heard Fr Seamus make during his Sunday homilies: "Thank God for a good rearing".

"Fr Seamus treasured families and served as Episcopal Vicar for the Family under Bishop Seamus Hegarty," added Fr Patrick, "He really supported family life and treasured the role of parents, and there are many families in Maghera that would testify to his kindness and goodness to them, particularly when they lost someone either in tragic circumstances or through sickness."

The high esteem in which the 89-year-old's fellow priests also held him was evident in the gathering of around 40 clergy to concelebrate at his Requiem Mass in the packed Glen

Church, with chief celebrant, Bishop Donal acknowledging that Fr Seamus "had touched the lives of so many".

Ordained to the priesthood on June 19, 1960, Fr Seamus served as curate in St Patrick's, Pennyburn, for the first year, before being appointed as curate to Ballykelly in 1961, and then as Administrator for St Brigid's, Carnhill, from 1974 until 1989. After this, he became the parish priest of Maghera, where he ministered for 21 years before retiring in 2010 to become the priest in residence at St Mary's Altinure, where he spent the last 14 years of his life.

The homily at the Requiem Mass was delivered by Fr Eamon Graham, PP Lavey, who recalled beginning his priestly ministry with Fr Seamus in 1982, in Carnhill, and having the privilege of spending time with him again during his time as parish priest of Banagher.



Fr Seamus O'Connell

He recalled Fr Seamus being regarded by younger priests as "one of the movers and shakers in the Diocese", saying: "He certainly was."

Fr Eamon added: "He always tried to find new ways of spreading the Gospel, right up to his dying days, and was a strong advocate of peace and truth while in the City at the time of the Troubles, and was fearless in preaching the Gospel.

"His house in Carnhill was a

The NET

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 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.

The NET

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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

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Excitement mounting amongst Holy Family P7s undergoing fitness prep for...

Amazing 'Derrymino' around Derry churches

AFTER the very successful inaugural 'Derrymino' around the churches of Derry last year, the Primary 7 pupils of Holy Family PS, in Derry, are now in preparation for the spring Camino-like event founded by their principal, Mr Garry Matthewson as a memorable learning experience about the City's religious history and how natural it is to drop into a church for a visit.

Holy Family principal since 1998, Mr Matthewson told 'The Net' how the 'Derrymino' had evolved from an activity he had done with his P7 class while teaching in St Anne's PS, Rosemount, in 1987.

"I had come to St Anne's to take the P7 class in the third term," he recalled, "so I decided to take them out and around churches from a Geography and History aspect more so than faith.

"Sometime after that, I walked the Camino leg from Ferrol to Santiago de Compostela, as part of a parish group led by Fr Chris Ferguson. Then last year, I was doing recruitment interviews as a CCMS advisor, and during one a candidate talked about an activity they had done in their parish for young SVP members.

"This got me thinking, in terms of my own school and parish, about doing a version of the Camino within Derry. I started considering the practicalities of it, with our school being near the Donegal border and the older churches in the City being around the Long Tower area, etc."

He added: "After looking at the logistics of doing a Camino trail around the churches in Derry, I spoke to the P7 teachers about it and how we needed to prepare. So, we started on physical fitness by walking regularly around the school grounds, which are located beside Holy Family Church.

"We decided that we would need to visit two churches each day we went out, which we did on average once per week. At the Church, the priest or a parishioner familiar with its history gave us a historical presentation about the church and other aspects, like the design and decoration. For example, the removal of altar rails in churches

after Vatican II, except for the Long Tower, and the reason for that."

Garry went on to explain that during their Derrymino they made six visits in total, over a month-and-a-half: Termonbacca and St Mary's in the Creggan; St Eugene's Cathedral and the Blessed Sacrament Chapel in Columba House; St Columba's Long Tower and the beautiful chapel in Lumen Christi College, which is very interesting; St Joseph's, Gallagher, and St Brigid's, Carnhill; St Patrick's Pennyburn and Our Lady of Lourdes, Steelstown; and St Columba's in the Waterside and St Breacan's ruins in St Columba's Park.

He continued: "It turned out to be a walk through the history and growth of the City through visiting the Churches there, as the growth of the City is mirrored by the growth of churches. The children got a lot out of it, and they got fit too! It reinforced that the Church is there for them, that it was a natural thing for them to do, to just drop into a church no matter where they are. The teachers and parents loved it too.

"There was also the whole idea of pilgrimage for the children to experience, and they had a passport to get stamped and take notes on during their trips. They reflected on what they needed to carry and what we would be doing. We looked forward to different aspects of our journey, and if there was something significant en route we stopped and talked about it."

"There were occasions when we came upon something that could be tied in with what the children were doing in school," said Garry. "For example, the P7 children were reading a trilogy of books called 'McCauley's War' written by Charlie Herron, who used to be principal of Foylevue School in Derry, and whose son, Paul had been vice-principal at a time in Holy Family PS. Charlie's books were set in the Malborough area, near St Eugene's Cathedral. So we talked about that history and what the children were reading as part of their literacy work.

"Another example is our walk to St Mary's Church in the Creggan

from Termonbacca, through the cemetery. 'McCauley's War' mentioned Watts Basin, which became the Bull Park and which had a football field where the Jon Clifford's Tristar Football Club played. In honour of all that Jon had done for young people in the area, the people had it renamed the Jon Clifford Park. A lot of our boys play football for Tristar today, so this was a talking point en route for the children."

Columba

Focused on the faith and history of Derry, Mr Matthewson felt that the experience was very worthwhile for various reasons, saying: "The children got to know a lot about their city and its foundation through a man of God, Columba. While at the Long Tower and Lumen Christi College, the pupils got to know about the story of Columba, from Gartan to Derry, to Drumcliffe in Sligo, and then on to Iona."

Amazed about all that had happened during the pilgrimage around the churches, Mr Matthewson shared one particular incident: "In school, we talk about synchronicity a lot, such as something happening that had just been talked about, and some of the things that happened during our Camino walks were just mind-blowing. For example, many years ago when our school choir performed at Sunday Masses, we didn't have an organist in the school, so a German man called Markus Michel played the church organ for us. However, he contracted cancer on his hand, which resulted in the loss of a finger and impacted on his ability to play the organ, so he no longer was organist for us.

"During our visits to the churches, we usually asked if we could sing, and when we asked this in St Columba's Church in the Waterside, the person presenting the talk on the church happened to mention that their organist was called Markus Michel. Our music teacher, Mrs Claire Doherty, then explained to the children about Markus and how much extra effort it would have been for him to learn

to play the organ again.

"On our walk back, we were journeying down the Northland Road and as we literally turned round a corner, who was stepping out of a car but Markus, whom I hadn't seen in six years. We told him what had happened. Considering the chances of this happening, some of the children thought that we had set it up. We had numerous incidents like this happen during our walks. It was a very good experience." Happy to encourage other schools to consider doing something similar, Mr Matthewson was asked to talk about the 'Derrymino' at the Diocesan RE Conference last August, and Mr Gavin Doherty, one of the P7 teachers who completed the 'Derrymino', was asked to talk about it at the Diocesan Primary School RE In-Service Day.

"It is something that could easily be done anywhere and adjusted time wise to whatever suits," he remarked, saying: "We found it really worthwhile and are going to do it again this year. Some of the children that I thought might not be able to do it because of their fitness level, really knuckled down and did it. The most challenging part of our 'Derrymino' was probably the walk to Termonbacca and then onto St Mary's Church in the Creggan.

Garry concluded by stating: "This year, it might take us seven weeks, as I would like to include visits to St Augustine's Church on the Walls and the Church of Ireland's St Columba's Cathedral, so that the children get an ecumenical viewpoint. We will probably start at the end of April, beginning of May.

"It has to fit in with the weather and, thankfully, the weather was kind to us last year. We have started our fitness preparation by doing a couple of small walks around the school and getting used to walking along footpaths in big numbers. We will have 60-65 children taking part and they are looking forward to it.

"Finally, please remember to say a prayer for us if you see us on the streets of Derry in our red hoodies in the spring."

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place constantly visited by clergy, with many a priest in need of a break, or who was sick or anxious, brought in and given food and a place to stay for a while. He taught me that spending time with fellow priests was probably one of the most important things that I could do, as well as taking time to pray. He was a great man of hospitality. Confession was also very important to him, and he devoted much time to this and looked at new ways of encouraging the Sacrament of Reconciliation."

Stating that Fr Seamus "was not perfect and was the first to admit that", Fr Eamon went on to point out that "his great virtue was that he kept trying". He concluded by saying that Fr Seamus would ask them to go from his funeral "with heads held high as Christians, and to go out to the whole world announcing the Good News."

Maghera PP, Fr Paddy Doherty also paid tribute to Fr Seamus, who was the first parish priest he served with after ordination. He thanked God for Fr Seamus' ministry of care and dedication over the years, during which he had organised

many programmes in the Diocese, and had done great work in parishes not only in buildings, but also in community.

Highlighting the importance of the support of family members and parishioners in the life of priests, he noted that Fr Seamus had been very grateful for that.

Remarking that Fr Seamus had already his headstone erected in the graveyard, Fr Paddy added: "We joked with him that the only thing missing was the date, and now we know it"

In his closing comments, Bishop Donal also gave thanks for Fr

Seamus and prayed that "God will continue to bless us with men and women of faith who will walk to and through Calvary because they believe in Resurrection."

Son of the late Patrick and Brigid O'Connell, Fr Seamus was born on December 16, 1935, in Kilrea. He is survived by his brothers, Paddy and Gerard, and pre-deceased by siblings, Sean, Cahir, Anne (McNicholl), Mairead (Mulholland), Phyllis (Convery), Marie (Scullin), and infants Betty, Therese and Martin. May Fr Seamus rest in peace.



Launching Catholic Schools' Week 2024, Bishop Donal said...

Be communities of service as Jesus suggests...and everybody is a winner!



all, it's all about me, isn't it?" Explaining that Catholic Schools' Week was an opportunity each year to consider 'who are we and what are we trying to be', Bishop Donal said: "Our answer for this year is 'Communities of Service'.

"I find this interesting because it does not talk about passing exams or winning prizes. In a world that tells each that I should focus a lot on 'me', it puts community at the heart of who we are. And in an age where 'nobody tells me what to do', it emphasises service. This means that we have a particular way of seeing education. And, unless we offer something different, why on earth would Catholic schools exist?"

Noting that schools are "very highly pressurised places", he remarked: "There is huge expectation on staff to deliver the content of the academic curriculum, and of everything else that is dumped on schools. And schools can often be judged mainly by the exam results, even thinking highly of themselves on the basis of how their pupils compete with other schools.

"But our theme says that our schools are not just factories for handing on information. They are meant to be communities where young people, staff and parents can feel that they belong, and know that they will be able to grow; a place where the different talents of pupils can be valued, and where you know you will get encouragement and support when you need it.

DESPITE the adverse weather conditions, there was a great turnout by schools across the Diocese for the Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral to launch Catholic Schools' Week 2024, with the magnificent choir of St Patrick's College, Maghera, travelling from the other side of the Glenshane Pass to lead the singing.

Highlighting that this year's theme is 'Communities of Service', as the ceremony got underway Bishop Donal stepped forward to receive artistic representations of this from the various primary and second level schools.

Acknowledging the amount of work that had gone into creating the art pieces, the Bishop remarked: "The world is a place with a lot of pain, worry and fears about the future. Jesus asks, how can we be communities of service?"

In his homily, Bishop Donal spoke to the young people about how Jesus had "shocked many of His friends by how He behaved" and had "mixed with the wrong people and died between two thieves".

"And on one occasion," he added, "two of His followers asked whether they could get special places in Heaven. But in reply, Jesus said to His followers that He had come not to be served but to serve and to give His life for many (Mk 10:45).

"To many people in our modern world of stars and celebrities, His teaching still seems strange. After

Reputation
"Sometimes there is the temptation to think that the most important thing is the reputation of the school, and that decisions have to be built around what is seen as best for the institution or even for the staff. A healthy school community looks after all its members, especially the weakest of the pupils. A Catholic school



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is most true to its identity when it promotes community rather than competition, where it promotes the achievements of all and not just the perceived excellence of the few.”

Bishop Donal went on to point out that Catholic schools “are meant to be of service to the wider world and not just to its pupils”, highlighting that Pope Francis had written nearly 20 years ago that our schools should not be built on a consumerist competitive mentality that benefits the few but crushes too many.

Quoting Pope Francis writing that “our objective is not to form islands of peace in a fragmented world – but to educate people with the capacity to transform that society”,

(Education for Choosing Life, 2014, San Francisco, Ignatius Press, p75), the Bishop remarked: “Does the sense of community within the school push gifted and talented people to build a better world for the less able? We are wasting our time, Pope Francis wrote, if we just help the already privileged to look after themselves. Being a community of service means that we model a different way of being human. If we build walls rather than bridges, we reinforce already existing differences. We remain part of the problem of a divided society rather than becoming part of the solution. Jesus wanted to give His life for others, not just live His life for me.”

“The blessings and talents that we have received are for the welfare of all and not merely for ourselves,”

he stated, adding: “The guiding principle of morality is not ‘I’m worth it.’”

He went on to quote Pope Francis proposing “overcoming the destructive ethos of the competition of all against all (and) to carry forward the practice of a solidarity that takes aim at the roots of egotism in an effective way.”

Stressing that in “a very fragmented world with much anger and violence, as communities of service, we are called to be salt to the earth and light to the world”, Bishop Donal noted: “That is exactly what Jesus was saying in today’s Gospel. He was master and God for the apostles, but He washed their feet, like a servant would do.”

Highlighting the five themes for this year’s Catholic Schools’ week, January 21-27, as being: Service in our community of friends; Service in our school community; Service in our family community; Service in our local community; Service in our Faith Community/our parish, Bishop Donal concluded: “The strange thing is that these are not distractions from being a successful school. The more you emphasise communities of service, the happier you will be and you are more likely to get great exam results. Be communities of service as Jesus suggests – and everybody is a winner!”

Organised by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre, the ceremony came to a close with the presentation to each school of a large-sized card with the prayer of St Teresa of Avila, ‘Christ has no body now but yours.’



**Prayer for Catholic Schools
Derry Diocese**

Loving God, we thank you for the gift of faith that we received through the witness of our families, our school, and our parish.

Bless our school community, unite us, and help us always to be the love and compassion of Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus tells us to ask and we will receive, to seek and we will find, to knock and the door will be opened.

Help us always to know our need of You. Open our hearts in prayer so that we can become closer and closer to You.

We make this prayer through Your Son, our Saviour and Brother, Jesus Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

Diocesan RE Conference offered Catholic schools opportunity to reflect on call to...

Go make disciples of all nations

WITH Catholic Schools' Week being celebrated across the Diocese during the first month of the New Year, it is a good time to reflect on the very successful Diocesan Religious Education Conference that was held in the lead up to the new school year, at the end of August 2023.

This was the second such conference to be held in the Diocese under the leadership of Bishop Donal, who is Chair of the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education. (NICCE).

Delighted at the interest of those who attended, Bishop Donal told "The Net": "It was most encouraging to see over 1,000 people in attendance at the two days of the RE Conference.

"Despite the relentless wave of negativity about Catholic education in both parts of the island, there remains a huge commitment to offering our distinctive model of education to a very confused world.

"The keynote speakers and the workshops were intended to inform and inspire, as well as to offer an opportunity for professional conversations between colleagues."

He went on to share the best comments he had heard about the Conference: "When is the next one?"

Held in St Columb's College, Buncrana Road, in Derry, the two-day Conference included a number of workshops. It was organised by the Diocesan Catechetical Centre and had as its theme 'Go Make Disciples of All Nations' (Mt 28:19).

The first day of the Conference focused on post-primary school staff, with primary school staff attending on the second day, and each included the celebration of Mass. In addition, there were talks on both evenings, including one for Boards of Governors and Management, with an opportunity for panel discussion.

The main speakers were David Wells, writer and inspirational speaker who has worked with schools, churches, dioceses and organisations internationally, who spoke about Catholic Schools as Essential Places of Evangelisation, and St Mary's College principal, Brendan McGinn, who spoke about Building Communities of Dialogue and Forgiveness.

Amongst the special guests in attendance were: Dr Alex O Hara, National Director for Catechetics and Executive Secretary to the Council for Catechetics, Irish Episcopal Conference; Alan Hynes CEO, Catholic Education Partnership; Eve Bremner CEO CCMS; Fintan Murphy Chief Executive, Catholic Schools' Trustee Service; and diocesan advisors from other dioceses.

During his talk on Catholic schools as essential places of evangelisation, David Wells shared a problem that he had observed in schools all around the world: "We all have other things to do. We are

busy, busy, busy!"

Highlighting events such as the Diocesan RE Conference as an opportunity "to throw us into a bigger picture than me or mine", he remarked that the whole world had been taught something during the COVID pandemic, with some finding it uncomfortable as it gave them time that they were not used to having because of their jobs.

He went on to comment on the importance of putting Christ at the centre and to teach with love, pointing out that schools were not just for teaching subjects, but were field hospitals like Pope Francis speaks about.

Reminding those gathered that Christ had looked into the hearts of the broken, David remarked: "We have an emergence of a generation that is in communication a lot but are more isolated, and are often anxious socially."

Quoting Pope Francis as saying "ignorance is the birth place of fear" and that "the best chance this planet has of peace is education", he added: "Fear is the birthplace of all things that cause conflict."

David concluded by stressing the important role Catholic schools play in helping young people to be "a bit more confident and courageous by teaching them that there was nothing to be afraid of."

In his talk, Brendan McGinn highlighted that Catholic school communities all shared the values of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, and that the crux of the teaching of Jesus in the Church is "love".

"Love," he stressed, "should be at the centre of the Church and should be at the centre of all we do in our schools. Love in its purest form is forgiveness. In the Bible, where it is mentioned 89 times in the Old Testament and 38 times in the New Testament, it means 'to let go'."

He went on to note: "When forgiveness is absent during times of hurt, it pervades every part of our lives, and can fester and drain you. You take this unresolved angst with you into your home, to work, on nights out, and you do not sleep well. And, it can impact more than just you and I."

Pointing out that forgiving unconditionally was not to expect forgiveness in return, and that unconditional forgiveness saves from carrying the angst, he added: "Imagine a school environment where forgiveness exists in purest form. What would the implications be for our school communities?"

"As a leader," he said, "I have learnt that being compassionate and kind is very important and has a great impact. When a child is forgiven they understand what forgiveness is."

Workshops

As well as having much to take away from the Conference through the talks, those attending found the workshops very worthwhile. Amongst those leading them



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were St Columb's teachers, Tony McGonigle and Mark McConnellogue.

Commenting on his experience of presenting, as a recent postgraduate recipient, to a group of secondary school teachers on the many benefits of studying for the MA in Catholic Leadership through Saint Mary's University, Twickenham, Tony said: "It was great to meet such a diverse and interesting group of teachers who were so receptive to the possibility of furthering their professional development whilst exploring their own Catholic faith."

Mark presented a workshop to both Primary and Post-Primary teachers on Catholic Social Teaching and found that it had been very well received, with all participants fully engaged throughout.

He recalled: "I traced the development of Catholic Social Teaching - from Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* right up until the present day with Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*. The central tenet of Catholic Social Teaching is the pursuit of the Common Good.

"The workshop focused on the Biblical foundations of love of God and neighbour and on developing a fundamental option for the poor. All of this was applied to the school context and we reflected on how we teachers might be Christ for each of our pupils and colleagues, but also

how we should strive to see Christ in every pupil and colleague."

Other workshops included Art & Craft, Celtic Saints, Chaplaincy, Children in Crossfire, Developing School Values, Faith & Sport, Guided Meditation, *Laudato Si*, Liturgy & Collective Worship, Mary's Meals, Music, Social Media & Faith, The Derrymino, The Gift of Catholic Leadership, Trocaire, Ways of Praying, Why Go To Mass? and Youth Commission - engaging young people in their faith.

Bishop Donal shared his thoughts with the attendees in his homilies during the Conference Masses, reflecting on his own years as schoolteacher and principal. He explained that the purpose of the Conference was to help them acknowledge the enormous task and privilege it was to be involved in education, remarking: "After all, teachers don't teach subjects, they teach people."

"In your schools, you face enormous challenges," he said, "because the young people in front of you face enormous challenges. You face funding issues. You have to deal with many people whose lives and relationships are on the edge of fragmentation. You are working with young people who have so many special needs and claims on your time. You are expected to solve so many of the problems that society causes or fails to grapple with - and then you get blamed for not doing everything. And an often-intolerant state demands

that you become a mouthpiece for its ideology. And in that context, you hear Jesus still say, 'Go make disciples of all nations.'"

Urging those gathered to "stand for something", Bishop Donal said: "If we want to be a decent formation community as well as a Catholic school that offers a life-giving way of looking at life, then we need to be aware of what it is we stand for.

"Education limited to curricular content without an ethical framework does no favour to our young people who seek guidance. Information without any sense of inspiration crushes young people who want to dream. It is no wonder then so many people are crushed by the pain of being human and the absence of any worldview that helps them to cope."

He went on to point out that church documents were clear that Catholic schools have a distinct way of looking at the world, stating: "The Catholic school is 'a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of the human person, and of history is developed and conveyed' (Vatican, *The Catholic School*, 1977, para 8)."

Quoting Pope Francis writing nearly 20 years ago, "If in our schools we do not develop a distinct way of being human, a different culture and sort of society, we are wasting our time" (J M Bergoglio, *Education for Choosing Life*, 2014, Ignatius Pres, p75), Bishop

Donal noted that the Catholic school was under huge attack locally and globally for daring to offer a different worldview to that championed by a one-dimensional, 'obey your thirst' set of assumptions about what is good or bad.

"Catholic education dares to say that what suits the strong may actually be very destructive both for children and for the environment in which they will have to grow up. The awkward message of the cross and the resurrection has always met opposition. We should not be surprised that there are those, including many of our political leaders, who want us to be silenced."

He concluded by highlighting that the Catholic school had to be active in building communities of formation where good human relationships were promoted and cherished.

"Life is full of problems," he said, "but the Catholic school can be a place where participation and reconciliation skills are learned, where reconciliation is prioritised over self-righteousness. Pupils learn more from how they are treated than from what they hear in nice words. Reconciliation is not merely a political issue. It has to do with day-to-day issues - and it is taught and caught without being part of the formal curriculum. Schools who are experts on in-house reconciliation will continue to be a blessing on the whole of society."



Taking on principalship of St Columb's College as 2024 gets underway...

Mrs Caroline McLaughlin reflects on new role as Catholic leader in education



Mrs Caroline McLaughlin, new principal of St Columb's College, Derry.

role our school has played in the Catholic Education of many young men from Derry and beyond over many years. I look forward to contributing to this in the years ahead and, in 2029, when we will celebrate our sesquicentennial year, I hope our school will stand proudly as it has done since its foundation as a beacon for educating young Catholic men.

Mindful of my role as a Catholic leader, I will place emphasis on our Core Values which underpin everything that we do. I am determined to 'promote in each pupil, through Catholic education, the fullest Christian human development of which he is capable.' We aim to create a climate in St Columb's based on Christian principles that is suitable for teaching and learning, and which promotes in the pupils a sense of responsibility and self-discipline. We are committed to developing each child's full potential to become a positive contributor to society in their adult life. We strive to achieve

this by working in partnership with the child, their families, and the wider community, to create an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding, truly reflecting our values.

My former parish priest, Fr Porter, used to say, "Generosity in the Catholic tradition is promoting the good in others." At St Columb's, we wish to recognise, promote, and champion the good in all our students and in our school community. We want all our pupils to be the best version of themselves.

Pope Francis asks young people: "Dear young people, do not bury your talents, the gifts God has given you. Do not be afraid to dream of great things." We have many talented young men who attend St Columb's. We want to nurture and advance each individual talent. In our school, we have much to be proud of. We have much to be grateful for. And in this spirit of generosity and positivity, I embark on this journey as Principal.

My priority is and always has

been to ensure the safety and happiness of our boys each day at school. The wellbeing, pastoral and spiritual needs of our pupils is paramount in ensuring that they reach their potential. We want our students to flourish within a nurturing and supportive pastoral care environment. We will foster the holistic development of each individual pupil, to develop young men that listen and are resilient, who can build meaningful, positive relationships and who place great value on kindness and service.

St Columb's College is a caring community, inspired by the Spirit of Christ. Christ's commandment to love God and neighbour inspires a caring ethos, which is expressed in relationships within and beyond the College. We believe education in the College is person-centred, promoting the dignity, self-esteem and full development of each person made in God's image and uniquely loved by God. We believe education in the College is inclusive.

Education in the College is rooted in the Gospel values and promotes Respect for Life, Love, Solidarity, Truth and Justice. We aim to nurture young people who will go on to build a better society and pursue the Common Good.

I firmly believe in the Columban belief, 'Great Oaks from Little Acorns Grow'. As Principal, I look forward to working with all our young people and their families and my staff as Catholic educators, as together we support our pupils at every stage of their educational journey in St Columb's College. Our pupils start with us as 'Little Acorns' in Year 8 and, through the holistic, spiritual, positive and nurturing educational environment, they leave us as Year 14, young men 'Great Oaks' with values that are centred on Jesus Christ, the model teacher, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Our school motto is 'Seek first the Kingdom of God'. The values of God's Kingdom are, therefore, the foundations upon which our

school culture and environment are built - values of truth, justice, love, honesty, patience, understanding, forgiveness, and the dignity of the human person.

The prayer of St Columba

*Be a bright flame before me,
O God a guiding star above me.
Be a smooth path below me,
A kindly shepherd behind me
Today, tonight and for ever.
Alone with none but you, my God
I journey on my way;
What need I fear when you are near,
O Lord of night and day?
More secure am I within your hand
than if a multitude did round me stand.*

Please remember me in your prayers as I take on my new role as Principal in the school, I am so proud to lead.

Ballinascreen Live Crib helped many experience true meaning of Christmas



CHRISTMAS 2023 marked the 800th anniversary of the creation of the first crib by St Francis of Assisi in Greccio, Italy. To mark this special anniversary, Ballinascreen Parish hosted a very successful Live Crib event on Saturday, December 30, at St Eugene's Church, Moneyneena.

All the main characters from the Nativity story were dressed in costume in the crib, which also featured live animals, including a donkey, calf, sheep and goats. After marvelling at the sight and sounds of the live crib, visitors were invited to enter St Eugene's Church, where there was Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and recitation of the Rosary every hour on the hour. Refreshments were also served throughout the day.

This amazing, grace-filled family day commenced with Mass at 10 am, at which Bishop Donal was the main celebrant. Following this Mass, the live crib, featuring real animals and people, was blessed by the Bishop and remained operational right through until 6 pm.

At 6 pm, the Live Crib event concluded with a candlelit Vigil Mass and Benediction. This memorable event offered a wonderful experience of true community spirit and faith. It will, no doubt, live on in the hearts and minds of the many, many visitors of all ages who came along to experience the true meaning of Christmas.

The many visitors to this event made the journey around the church grounds, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, past 14 'stations', each one depicting a key moment from the Nativity story, and their journey finally brought them to the Live Crib.



Parish of Urney & Castlefinn reflection on...

Meaning and importance of Nativity Scene ...*Admirabile Signum*

by Colette Carlin

LAST Christmas, 2022, Fr Oliver Crilly gave me a little book, 'The Meaning and Importance of the Nativity Scene', written by Pope Francis and published in 2022. It is a beautiful reflection from the Holy Father on the Nativity and I was captivated by the story.

Afterwards, I mentioned to Fr Crilly and Fr Hegarty that this book would be a perfect basis for a Live Adult Nativity in St Mary's Church and both responded positively to the idea!

Fr Crilly typed the script and I agreed to recruit volunteers to take part. It was a busy October and November recruiting the volunteers, but all agreed. We had four Narrators who narrated the Script, while parishioners from both sides of our Parish created the Tableau of the Nativity in front of the Altar.

I think baby Tommy stole the show with his beautiful smile, and

he was so good. Several others helped by donating the animals (not live) to create the scene. Fr Hegarty did the introduction and the conclusion.

We were blessed with our musicians and singers, Ursula, Senan, Aaron, Rachel, Marion and Amelia, and the pupils of St Mary's, together with Brid, who led the congregational singing.

It was a truly joyful parish occasion and a great way to begin our last week of Advent 2023, leading into the celebration of Christmas.

Little did we realise when we thought of this idea the significance of the timing of this event, but it was exactly 800 years ago on November 29, 1223, that St Francis created the first live Nativity scene in the little town of Greccio, in Italy. So, it was a very special way to celebrate this anniversary.



Badoney Lower Carol Service beautiful close to Advent

THE Parish of Badoney Lower enjoyed a beautiful Advent and Christmas Carol Service on December 21, in St Mary's Church, Rouskey, Co Tyrone.

The Scripture readings were led by Fr James Devine, while young people were to the fore in leading the singing.



Fr James Devine CC, Newtownstewart, Plumbridge, Greencastle and Gortin



Young musicians delight in Moville Nativity musical

MOVILLE parishioners were treated to a wonderful night of music from the Ceolan School of Music in preparation for Christmas.

The musical extravaganza, led by Clodagh Warnock in St Pius X Church, included scenes of music,

word and song telling the Story of the Nativity.

The hard work and talents of the young musicians was much appreciated by those who came along to experience the musical Nativity.



Killyclogher Carols celebrated 200th Church anniversary

THE Cappagh Parish has been celebrating over 200 years of faithful worship at St Mary's Church, Killyclogher.

On the third Sunday of Advent, the priests and people of the Parish were joined by Bishop Donal for a special 200th anniversary Carol

Service.

With youth encouraged to get involved in parish life, young people were very much to the fore in taking part in the celebration in the lead up to Christmas, auguring well for the future.



Feast of Holy Family beautiful occasion for celebrating 40 years of Holy Family Church



HOLY Family parishioners in Ballymagroarty gathered on the Feast of the Holy Family, at the end of 2023, for a beautiful 40th anniversary celebration of the opening of their Church.

Parish Priest, Fr Joe Gormley and assistant curate, Fr Kevin Mulhern, SMA, were joined by Fr Gerry White, who has generously assisted in the Parish during his retirement, and the congregation in welcoming Bishop Donal to celebrate the Mass of Thanksgiving on Sunday, December 31.

Amongst the congregation in the Church of the Holy Family was Fr Thomas Canning, CC Drumquin, who was appointed to minister in the Parish following his ordination 35 years ago.

Reflecting on the difficulties experienced by the Holy Family of Mary and Joseph and the Child Jesus, Bishop Donal remarked: "Life is difficult. But that is precisely where God is revealed."

He added: "The characters in the Holy Family knew that life is difficult. If we are able to accept this as our starting point, then we do less complaining about difficulties and ask where God is at work in the middle of the mess that life often turns out to be."

Saying that the Church of the Holy Family in Ballymagroarty had been built during difficult years in Derry, the Bishop noted: "In the early 70s, houses for the nationalist community were being built in Shantallow, Carnhill and Galliagh. That meant three new churches. Then, as we moved into the 80s, more were being added on this side of the Buncrana Road and the Cathedral parish was divided, in order to provide a place to worship for the new populations.

"But the Troubles were in full swing. Death, injuries, imprisonment were features of daily life. And the intercession of the Holy Family was associated with this building. For, like Mary and Joseph, people knew that

family life was tough. At a time when people were often under threat of violence or death, they remembered that the Holy Family had to flee when Herod set out to kill the Child Jesus.

"This church got its name, not because there is some ideal model of family life that everybody should have. Rather, the title of the Holy Family reflected the reality that life is messy and complicated. But people of faith know that God is in the middle of the mess – just as God was present from Bethlehem to Calvary, at work even when people assumed that God was completely absent. Jesus met people where they were, not just where the Pharisees insisted that they should be."

He continued: "Everyone starts off with big dreams about how their life should work out. But many relationships are scarred by drugs, alcohol, violence and illness. Some young people do not have the best role models for how people can be great. On the one hand Jesus meets us where we are. On the other hand, He loves us to too much to leave us where we are. Thus, whatever the circumstances of our lives, no matter how much we have had to cope with failure and disappointment, we are still called to be saints wherever we find ourselves.

"In our second reading, St Paul talked about putting on 'sincere compassion, kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same'. That is not easy but is possible. We are made for greatness, not for low expectations."

Blessings

Referring to 'Fiducia supplicans', the recent document about blessings issued by the Vatican, Bishop Donal said that, for him, "the core message of the document was that Christ wants us to start where we are and to



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move towards a situation where we can become more like what He wants us to be. And everyone who wishes to have the grace of God in their lives has the right to prayerful accompaniment on the journey.

“For all sorts of reasons, often not of their own making, people find themselves in irregular relationships. Prayer is not a statement that anything goes, but a commitment from Christ and His people that He will walk with us, whatever our starting point. He called forward the awkward leper whom everyone else wanted to keep hidden, He called down Zacchaeus from the tree where He was hiding, He spent time with the Samaritan woman. Those on the edges are those who most need to know divine mercy and not human scorn.”

“This church,” he added, “was built 40 years ago to enable the community to meet Christ and to journey with one another, it has seen happy times and many sad occasions. This anniversary is a call, not merely to make the church attractive but to reach out to the community, saying not just that the building is warm, but that Jesus is welcoming.

“Give thanks for all who worked here in this parish. Work afresh because so many people need to hear Good News. Model healthy, life-giving, grace-filled relationships, be a community that listens to one another and to Christ. As St Paul writes, ‘Let

the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom’. That is how parish families are built up, and how we look forward to a thriving parish here for the 50th anniversary in 2033.”

The Mass was part of a number of faith events to mark the 40th anniversary, and was followed by Bishop Donal blessing a new statue of the Holy Family outside the Church, within the little remembrance garden in memory of the late Holy Family parish priest, Fr Paddy O’Kane, who was remembered in prayer during the ceremony.

Thanking all involved in the celebrations, and the parishioners and the two excellent primary schools in the parish for their contributions to parish life, Fr Joe led all in a prayer of petition: “We ask Jesus, Mary and Joseph to be with us all so that we can draw closer to the Holy Family”.

Refreshments were served afterwards in the neighbouring Holy Family Primary School.

The Holy Family Parish is currently keeping Fr Joe in prayer, with him having taken ill since the anniversary celebration.

Saying that Fr Joe is “sorely missed”, former Parish Pastoral Council member, Josephine Hasson told ‘The Net’: “I wish Fr Joe well on behalf of the parishioners of Holy Family, who hold him in such high regard. We are praying for his speedy recovery and return to our Parish.”



AS well welcoming a New Year, there is a warm welcome this month for the latest addition to the Young Writers' team, Cara-leigh Doherty, a Steelstown parishioner and Year 12 pupil at St Cecilia's. In her first article for 'The Net', Cara-leigh shares her discovery that no sin can lessen the love God has for us...and her desire to make it her mission to share this amazing news with as many as she can.

James also shares big news...his involvement in the setting up of a new youth group to give young people an opportunity to gather together regularly to share thoughts and experiences regarding the living out of their faith, and to journey together as they grow in their relationship with God.

With the celebration of Catholic Schools during this month, Bronagh reflects on the theme of Catholic Schools Week 2024 - Communities of Service, and how it ties in with the aims of the Pope John Paul II Award that she is a past recipient of.

Erin writes about her very enjoyable experience at her first Girls Get-Together during Advent, on a residential weekend with the Home of the Mother Servant Sisters, at Crossroads, Killygordon, Co Donegal, and Niamh reflects on the start of a New Year being a good time to consider a more faith-filled life.

Evan shares his thoughts on the importance of reverence for the Eucharist, while Seán considers the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments, and how life is lived today in relation to these, and Luke writes about the influence of technology on religion, and the pros and cons of this.

John reports on a special occasion in the calendar of the Syro-Malabar community, when they celebrated their Catechism Anniversary and Parish Day in the Waterside with Bishop Donal, while Niamh Kehoe writes about 'The Mystery of the Eucharist' study that she enjoyed attending in Aras Colmcille, at the Long Tower, before Christmas.



Cara-leigh Doherty - Derry City Deanery
Bronagh Doherty, Co Derry Deanery
Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery.
John Augustine 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

Respect for the Eucharist by Evan

RECENTLY, I was scrolling through YouTube searching for some spiritual inspiration, and I came across a Catholic programme presented by a devout Catholic man in America, who takes time to make videos to explain the teachings and traditions of the Church.

He also helps people grow closer to God and to strengthen their belief in Christ and His Church.

The first video that stood out for me was one on the handling of the Eucharist at Mass and how Jesus, truly present in the Sacred Host, is often handled without reverence.

We, as Catholics, must truly appreciate the Eucharist, and fully understand and take into consideration that although it appears like a simple piece of bread, it is the Body of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ,

who was broken on the Cross to open the gates of Heaven to us, His people.

I plead to Church goers to respect the Blessed Sacrament and to take care when receiving Our Lord's Body. I receive the Eucharist on my tongue as I feel that there is no other way to receive the Body of my Saviour reverently, remembering that it is the Bread of Life.



Young and passionate about Christ? There's a new group for you! by James

STARTING this year, a new group aimed at bringing young people together to discuss their faith will be established and we'd love to hear your feedback!

It can be difficult for the youth of today to openly engage in dialogue about their faith and issues regarding the Church. In an increasingly secular world, the importance of the Church and Christ in people's lives are not highlighted and talked about enough, especially among young people. However, a few others and I seek to change this.

Starting in early 2024, we hope to set up meetings and events so that young people of the Diocese

can meet each other and feel part of a community and space that truly recognises the necessity of Christ and Christian values in our own lives, and in society as a whole.

We will also aim to take part in volunteering, pilgrimages and activities in our communities to help those in need of it.

Inspired by the example of individuals like Carlo Acutis, we hope to lead by example and display that the burning desire to honour a higher cause is still existent among the youth of today, and we want to display that through our words and our actions.

Our focus will be on having mature conversations on our faith, struggles we may have as practicing Catholics in this generation, and what we can do to better our Church and our local communities.

The approximate age range will most likely be 16-21, and based in the city of Derry. However, our ambition is that if this is a success, we can branch out to other places and dioceses (maybe even countries!) so that we can proclaim the Good News to all, and inspire a new generation of passionate young Catholics to defend our faith and what is most important to us.



Get involved! Things are still in the early stages at the moment and so we're constantly looking for feedback and engagement on what we can do to make this a success, so please get in touch. We are looking forward to hearing from you soon!

You can email me at Jamestourish@outlook.com

Technology and Religion by Luke

IT is undeniable that technology has influenced religion in many ways, and continues to do so. This is not a new phenomenon. How we treat Christianity may have been very different if not for Gutenberg's printing press, one of the leading causes of the Reformation in the 16th century. While I don't think modern technology has had an impact as large as the printing press, it has shaped many aspects of religion, for better and for worse.

To begin, the Internet has allowed much higher ease of access to information about religion. Online copies of the Bible are available for free in a multitude of languages, making it easier than ever before to take the time to study our sacred text. It is also possible to use this to search for specific passages and quotes from the Bible, even if you do not remember the exact location.

It is more than just having access to the Bible from anywhere,

information technology exposes us to a variety of different interpretations. This exposure to similar yet slightly different ideas regarding faith can be an opportunity to learn from our fellow Christians across the globe. In short, it can help us to deepen our faith.

Technology also allows us to connect with other believers in a more meaningful way. As I mentioned above, we can conveniently share ideas about our faith and support others in their journey.

As many people discovered during the pandemic, technology can also allow people to worship together, even when they are incapable of meeting up and doing so physically. While it isn't really a substitute for attending Mass, it is preferable for many as opposed to sitting at home and praying alone. Even though the pandemic has ended, it is still incredibly useful to be able to participate in Mass while unwell, or away from home.



Technology does have negative effects too. It can be used to spread misinformation about religion. Loud minorities can also warp an observer's perception of religion in an inaccurate and often negative manner.

It can also enable heated virtual conflict between strongly opposing views, without the in-person social aspect which often

tempers these situations, by reminding people that the other opinion is held by a real person.

In addition, technology can serve as a dangerous distraction for faith if relied upon too heavily. In the end, technology is a useful tool, but like all tools, it has its place and shouldn't become a crutch.

Love knows no borders! by Cara-leigh

SINCE rebuilding my relationship with God, last summer, I have had many conversations that have revolved around the same topic. There is this widespread belief amongst people that they are "too far gone for God", or they sin too much that He would never forgive them. I find this idea absolutely absurd! My usual way of combating this is by telling the person my testimony and my life before coming to God.

I had the same view as these people in my times before coming to God, that I was unworthy of His love. I thought the weight of my sin was too much of a burden for God; I had taken the 'easy' road of life, which only proved to be actually more difficult. I had fallen for the world's façade that

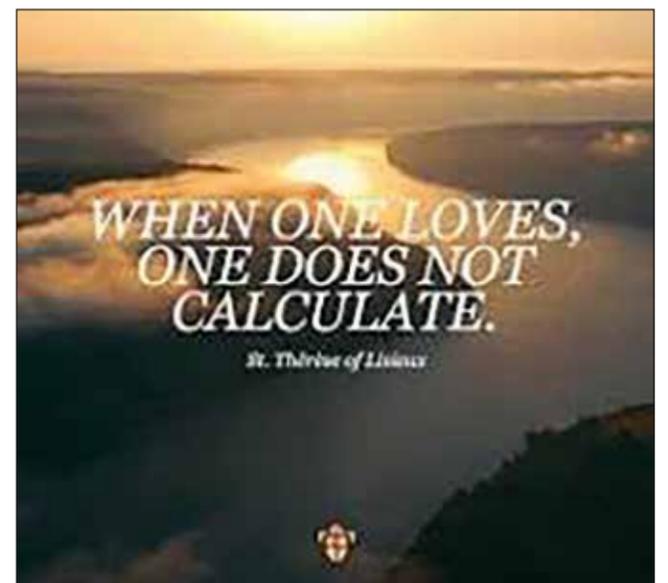
I could find happiness in money, crystals and how I looked to others around me. I hated God, as I blamed everything that went wrong on Him and eventually started to completely deny His existence. I was so miserable, and I hated my life.

I was searching for something to fill me, whether it was wearing certain clothes to fit in with the right crowd or lighting candles and burning paper believing it would do something. Eventually, I realised that this was not what I needed, but I still did not know what it was I was craving.

The people who are now in the position that I once was in measure God's love and mercy on human scales. In our society, we are told that revenge is the best way to heal, but Jesus has

a vastly different opinion on this, He tells us to forgive! On the Cross, Jesus actually said,

"forgive them; they know not what they do." Already, there is a major difference in the ideas of



New Year start a good time to consider living a more faith-filled life *by Niamh*

AS we said goodbye to 2023 and celebrated the incoming of the New Year, many of us began with resolutions, and I believe, as Catholics, we should take this opportunity to look for ways to begin a deeper commitment, to living a more faith filled life.

It is a time to reflect on our faith journey, over the past year, and to give thanks to God for all the blessings we have received. Additionally, it is a time to look at how we could improve our spiritual life and relationship with God in 2024.

As Catholics, there are many

ways that this can be done, for example, praying the Rosary, giving to charity, supporting a pro-life group in their mission to protect God's greatest gift, or getting more involved in your parish.

In Proverbs (16:3), we are told to "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed." So, as we make new plans for 2024, we must keep this in mind. If we solely rely on God, we will have success when it comes to any plans we have.

A personal resolution of mine, as a young Catholic, is to develop

a consistent prayer life, and I have chosen to include a prayer for the intercession of Padre Pio in my daily prayers. Padre Pio said: "Prayer is the best weapon we possess; it is the key that opens the heart of God."

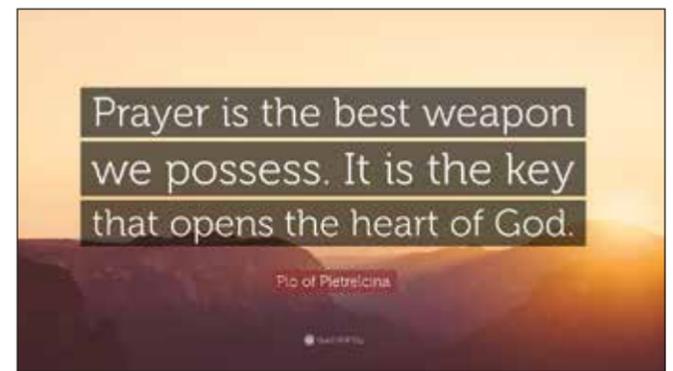
Sometimes, we might feel that we are unable to devote more time to our faith because of how busy we have become in this modern world. However, we can begin by doing something small, like the addition of an extra prayer.

Padre Pio also said: "Be content to begin with small steps till you have legs to run, better still wings

to fly". This shows us that we can begin in small ways to deepen our spiritual lives until we have the time or opportunity to do more. The most important thing is that we are making some effort to include God more in our life.

St Therese of Lisieux said: "This sweet Saviour has long since forgotten our infidelities. He sees only you are longing after perfection, and the sight makes His heart glad." This reassures us that any effort made toward living more like Jesus pleases God, no matter how small.

In conclusion, a Catholic



approach to the New Year should include a hopeful heart, praying to God for help throughout the year ahead. The hopes that we have as part of a Christian community are not just personal, many of us will find ourselves praying for peace and justice for all God's people around the world.

At the beginning of the New

Year, we are reminded that our faith is the most important thing we have. A new year will undoubtedly bring challenges and tribulations, however, we as Catholics can take comfort from having a loving God in our lives, a Father who will strengthen and guide us on the next part of our journey.

No one can compete with the sheer power of God *by Sean*

I find that many people misinterpret the meaning of Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount, the pinnacle of His preaching in the New Testament. It is the longest monologue that the Bible provides to us of Christ's wisdom provided by His heavenly form. To explain, I mean to say that some people do not understand the transition from Old Testament Law like the Decalogue to the Beatitudes (Jesus' fulfilment of the Decalogue).

The Decalogue is the Greek term for the Ten Commandments, as they are more commonly known. 'Decalogue' is derived from the Greek 'dekálogos', meaning 'ten words'; the ten rules or terms of God's Covenant with the Israelites. The Israelites received this ancient law through Moses, who met frequently with Yahweh on Mount Sinai, in the desert, after the Israelites escaped from Egyptian captivity.

The series of personal interactions with Yahweh that Moses had on Mount Sinai are recorded extensively in the Book

of Exodus, specifically, beginning in Exodus 19. Yahweh delivered the Covenant in Exodus 20, beginning with, "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Yahweh's delivery of the Decalogue is sharp and direct, leaving no room for any unnecessary talking. He gets across the necessary information immediately. The rest of what the Israelites need to know to please their God is delivered afterwards. The Decalogue is laid out very simply, and they are very easy to understand. The Commandments are direct and simple, understandable to anyone, and that was God's intention for the Israelites as they wandered the deserts of the Middle East awaiting their new promised homeland.

But, as human nature has always been, the original copy of the Ten Commandments was defiled by the Israelites in order to worship a false idol. Ironically, two of the Commandments directly

denounce this act, the most distinguishable being the Second Commandment, saying, "Do not have other gods before me." Human nature never changes. We all can see that humans are still the same.

Personally, in my basic everyday life, I meet people who worship beings who are far lesser than God. Far lesser. What do I mean by this exactly? In this modern age, people extensively idolise other human beings. We are, of course, important as individuals, however, only one human ever existed who is worthy of the worship that some people devote to celebrities. It is disturbing sometimes seeing how much a person can be obsessed with another person. There is loving a person close to you, and then there is literally worshipping someone who you know, but they do not know you and never will know or care about you like God does.

I look at a select few famous people and I can agree with them on many things, and respect and admire them for their work, but that is as far as it goes. Because no single person on this earth, no matter how influential and impactful, can compete with the sheer raw power of God, who, with a single, loving thought created this big, challenging, yet beautiful world for us, where we are privileged to live our life.

However, humans trying to be God is not new. I like to take the example of the Roman Empire. Julius Caesar was the first wartime dictator who did not hand power back to the Senate when peace was once again restored, and he held on to this supreme power until his assassination in 44 BC. After this, the Roman Republic became an Empire, ruled by a single man.

But, how do you get a massive population, spread out across thousands of miles, to accept one man as their absolute leader? You make him a god. It was

easy to achieve this in a society that believed in a polytheistic pantheon (several deities). You added an emperor to this ongoing list of false gods and the people had no choice but to accept this 'god' on earth.

Christianity played a massive part in the social deconstruction of Rome. Not only did it change the Roman perspective of morality, but it also removed the concept of the emperor as God. An emperor no longer had the authority of a divine and, therefore, they didn't have to be followed.

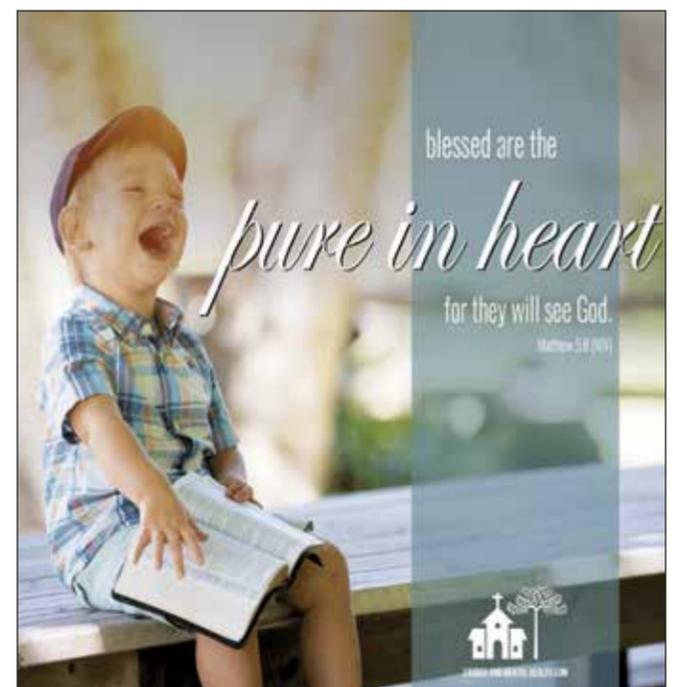
Free will

Humans are certainly strange creatures mentally. This world is not perfect, but what good would it be if it was? We would learn nothing and leave it with nothing. Without free will and an earth with some error, how could God love us for who we are, if we do not choose who to be?

For some time, the Decalogue did hold out well and the Israelites lived by God's law. But all good times come to an end, and the spirit of the law was lost in a mass of regulations that practically dismissed God's meaning for His people. By the time Jesus walked the earth, Judaism enforced well over 600 rules, the vast majority of them not derived from scripture.

Eternal life was not a promise perfectly laid out by God. It is hard to follow rules that you cannot remember. We are still humans now, so you should understand this well – it is not easy to avoid sin, it is impossible. What matters is recognising that we have sinned and learning to avoid it as much as we can.

God sent Jesus as a renewal of the scripture that included the Old Law. Jesus was not sent to the Roman provinces of Palaestina to dictate and overwrite the Covenant – He was there to fulfil and renew it with a much more practical set of values; values, not rules. These He delivered in His



Sermon on the Mount, the apex of New Testament ethics, which became known as the Beatitudes. I find that they are a much more human alternative to the Decalogue. I am not dismissing the Decalogue, I am simply saying that the Beatitudes are more accustomed to the human mind, as strange as it is. They promote a peaceful and forgiving human being, a person who aspires to be like Jesus, accepting what we can change and what we cannot change, what we should do in certain scenarios and how we should react to them, in order to live up to Jesus' legacy and the pain He went through for us.

I try to be a forgiving and merciful person, to be pure in heart. Such things are hard to achieve, but some people do not even try. I attempt to be kind and pleasant to the people around me, even when I am annoyed, or they don't try to be kind to me. It is those who are calm and peaceful in the face of human greed and ego that will "inherit the earth", or "be called children of God".

It is our duty to work towards peace, first personally, and then for others. Importantly, and especially today, I have to try not to take offense when I am looked down on like a primitive, unintellectual being for my Catholic faith. I urge the atheist

to think more in order to unblock their hardened bias rooted in modernity. I know I am not behind the times; I know that I am a thinker and that I am not consumed by the sin of ever-growing modernism.

Matthew 5:1 says, "When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up the mountain." It is beautifully symbolic how Jesus fulfilled and renewed the Old Law on a mountain in the Promised Land of the Israelites, at a high point, higher above the diktats of egoistic leaders. It also mirrors the teachings of God on Mount Sinai.

God sending His essence to Earth in human form was impeccable. Who better to teach the Word of God to humans but someone they can relate to and understand? Jesus Christ is the Messiah, and He came to fulfil God's promise in a way comprehensible to humans, although most still fail to understand it, unfortunately.

Perhaps, one of Jesus' most important sentences is in Matthew 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to annul the law and the prophets. I have not come to annul them, but to fulfil them. I tell you this: as long as Heaven and Earth last, not the smallest letter or dot in the law will change, until all is fulfilled."

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the world compared to God's.

So how can we measure God's Love and Mercy to our standards? The first time I ever realised God's unconditional Love and Mercy was the summer of 2022. I went to my first Camp Veritas... little did I know that I was going to find the thing I had been searching for! After my first Confession in many years at camp, I suddenly felt as though this weight that I had been carrying was gone and that I was free! I then went in front of the Eucharist and as soon as I looked up I began to cry, not out of sadness or fear, instead out a feeling of what I can only describe as pure, overwhelming joy and love. I finally realised that my sins were not 'too much' for God!

I have made it my mission to tell

all my friends, family, and peers about my experience, as I hope it will show them that nothing is too big for God. I know a lot of people who are in the same position that I was once in – turning to the world instead of God – I hope by spreading my story that I will be able to show people that God's Love doesn't have conditions. He unconditionally loves us as His sons and daughters.

St Therese of Lisieux said: "When one loves, one does not calculate", which is so evident in God's love for us. If this message was more widely spread, I truly think that many more young people would turn back to God and realise that He is the missing bit they have been so desperately trying to fill.

Home of the Mother Girls Advent Get-Together

by Erin

BEFORE Christmas, I took part in an advent get-together for girls with the Home of the Mother. This was in Donegal and lasted from Friday, December 15 to Sunday, December 17.

Friday

We arrived on Friday and began our weekend by baking and decorating cookies. There were 21 girls at this get-together. This was my first event with the Home of the Mother and I was able to meet lots of new people, and also recognised some girls from Camp Veritas.

We then had Mass in the Sisters' Oratory with the Parish Priest. After Mass, we played some games and got to know each other before starting to craft our own icon of Our Lady and Baby Jesus.

I found this look into the Sisters' work very interesting. Then we got settled into our rooms and went to sleep, as we were all tired from the journey and packed day.

Saturday

On Saturday, we woke early and headed to Gortin Glen Forest Park, in Omagh, for a hike. We did not have our phones on this weekend, so I had lots of great conversations with the other girls as we did two different trails. This was also a good opportunity to really take in nature.

When we got back, we had more time to spend finishing our icons. I found this whole process very enjoyable, and we even got to take them home as gifts. We then headed to a Holy Hour in the church, where we had

confessions and silent prayer. We also celebrated Mass.

Later, after dinner, the Sisters invited the local community to a Blessing of the Crib outside their home. After the priest blessed the crib, we served hot chocolate and the cookies we baked. Everyone sang Christmas carols, and this felt like a very special opportunity to serve people.

That night, we learned about temperaments. I found this particular meeting very interesting, and researched it even more when I got home. The Sisters had allowed us to put deep, meaningful questions into a jar, for them to explain to us. I thought this was a great idea as we were encouraged to pitch in, and we had some very

deep, meaningful conversations. We finished the night off with a Rosary.

Sunday

After morning Mass, we played lots of games and had a good laugh. Eventually, it was time to pack up and we were all sad to leave, but also exhausted. We finished the weekend with another few deep, meaningful conversations before saying our goodbyes.

I found this whole weekend very enjoyable. All of the Sisters and girls were very kind, and it was such a positive experience. I will definitely be looking forward to the next get-together with the Home of the Mother!



SATURDAY GIRLS GET-TOGETHER!
A Day of Faith, Fun, and Friendship for Girls ages 8-12

GAMES CRAFTS
LEARN ABOUT THE FAITH
LOADS OF FUN! PRAYER TIME

Place: Parochial House, Crossroads, Killygordon Co. Donegal

Date: Saturday January 27 12:00pm-5:00pm

To sign up contact Sr. Ruby: hmactivitiesireland@gmail.com

ORGANISED BY: Servant Sisters of the Home of the Mother

Catholic Schools Week 2024

- Communities of Service by Bronagh

EACH year, Catholic schools run various activities and celebrations to embrace and become more involved in their faith. This year it runs from January 21-27, and the theme of 2024 is 'Communities of Service'.

This theme is expanded to include the service of our friends, school, family, local community and faith community.

Teachers lead in the footsteps of Jesus, a teacher of wisdom, to encourage children to become fully immersed in their faith and understand the strength of the Catholic faith.

Jesus taught the 'Lord's Prayer', known more commonly as the 'Our Father' to His disciples, which encourages Christians to stick by their faith, seek forgiveness and ask God for help in times of need.

These are three themes through which children begin to understand the concept of

faith. Catholic Schools Week encourages children to align with God's teachings and understand His power, through an age-appropriate programme designed to help teachers and staff.

The theme of 2024 closely links to the Pope John Paul II Award, with its 'Service of our local community' aspect. The PJP II Award runs in post-primary schools for pupils undertaking A-level or similar courses. This programme is designed to get pupils integrated within their communities and help them realise the power of a community working together. It also enables students from local schools to mix with local organisations and charities within the parish, as well as getting involved with the local parish activities.

The power of young people interacting in their communities brings a new outlook on issues and can make previously

impossible things possible.

The power of many Catholics coming together is also described in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them". I recall this line frequently, as we were always reminded of this in primary school; the power of prayer and praying together. This is one of my earliest memories of faith, a reminder that Catholic Schools Week is fundamental in the school calendar.

We are also encouraged to celebrate our faith community, which involves celebrating vocations. Vocations are what people are called by God to do. Although for some people this means joining a ministry, becoming a priest or nun for example, we all have a vocation. We all have a vocation to follow and serve God, living our lives the way He taught us.

During Catholic Schools Week

2024, we could pray for increased vocations to the priesthood and religious orders, and maintenance of our lay vocations to continue to pray to God, care for His creation and ask His forgiveness.

Family is always at the heart of Catholic Schools Week, as home is the first classroom for many children. Parents are the first teachers of faith and make the choice to enter their child into God's family through baptism. Catholic Schools Week is a great opportunity to have faith-centred conversations as a family, attend Mass and pray as a family. It brings pupils, teachers, families, and the wider parish community, including people around the globe, together in prayer.

"Let us thank all those who teach in Catholic Schools. Educating is an act of love; it is like giving life" (Pope Francis).

Sunday, 21 January – Saturday, 27 January

Catholic Schools Week 2024
Catholic Schools: Serving Our Communities

Syro-Malabar catechism anniversary and parish day by John

THE catechism anniversary and parish day of St Mary's Syro-Malabar community in the Diocese of Derry was celebrated with much enthusiasm on November 26, at St Columb's Parish Hall, Waterside. The celebration began with a thanksgiving Holy Qurbana (Holy Eucharist), acknowledging God's many blessings to the community.

Rev Fr Dr Joshy Parokkaran, Chaplain of Syro-Malabar Community, Derry presided over the Holy Qurbana. In his homily, he mentioned that every annual celebration is an occasion to look into the past and to thank the Lord, as the Psalmist says, "I will

give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds" (Ps 9:1).

At the same time, he added that it is also a day to look into the future with hope, as the prophet Jeremiah declares, "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (Jer 29:11).

The celebration of Holy Qurbana was followed by the public meeting. Rt Rev Bishop Donal McKeown, Rev Fr Dr Joshy Parokkaran, Mr Jolly Joseph (Trustee), Mr Anil Thomas (Trustee), Mr Joseph Augustine (catechism headmaster), and Mrs Ayona Joseph (PTA member),



DERRY YOUTH PILGRIMAGE TO MEDJUGORJE YOUTH FESTIVAL

30th July - 8th August 2024 This pilgrimage is for 16+.

If Interested in coming on this Pilgrimage please email lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org

@derryyouth

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were present for the public meeting. The prayer song by the catechism children marked the opening of the public meeting.

In the presidential address, Fr Joshy reminded the community of the need to be the real witness of Jesus wherever they are planted, through the practice of their Catholic faith and tradition. He also lauded and appreciated the relentless efforts of the catechism teachers.

The presidential address was followed by the inauguration of the public meeting by Bishop Donal. In his inaugural speech, the bishop appreciated and remarked on the vibrant faith and rich tradition of the Syro-Malabar community in the Diocese of Derry. He exhorted the community to preserve, deepen, and hand over the rich heritage of the Syro-Malabar faith and tradition to the coming generation. Moreover, he added that the Syro-Malabar community should be a witnessing model.

The inaugural speech was followed by the presentation of the annual report by Mr Joseph Augustine, catechism headmaster. In the annual report, Mr Joseph appreciated the efforts that the parents put in bringing children for catechism classes. He also stated that the parents have to shoulder a collective responsibility of leading their children in the right direction. The annual report was followed by the felicitation speech by the

members of the community.

This was then followed by the distribution of awards to catechism teachers, Mrs Siji Joseph and Mrs Jain Jolly, who have completed 10 years of meritorious service in the department of catechism. The children and adults who won prizes in various competitions, conducted by the catechism department, were awarded by Bishop Donal.

Soon after the prize distribution, the children as well as the adults performed various talents that wonderfully embellished the day. The stage performance was followed by the vote of thanks by Mr Anil Thomas. Bishop Donal then graced the dinner and the community, along with the bishop, enjoyed a sumptuous dinner.

The Syro-Malabar community continues its journey while remembering the words of St John Paul II: "You have not only a glorious history to remember and to count, but also a great history to be accomplished. You have to look into the future where the spirit of God is sending you in order to do even greater things."

Relying fully in the providence and love of God, may the Syro-Malabar community continue to be inspired by the past, to evolve in the present, and to initiate into the future.

Thank you to Fr Joshy Parokkaran for providing me with all the details!

Reflection on Long Tower video study...

The Mystery of the Eucharist

by Niamh & Kieron Kehoe

THE Long Tower Parish held a video study on 'The Mystery of the Eucharist' for the first three Wednesdays in Advent 2023. It was led by newly ordained priest, Fr Stephen Ward CC and located in the Aras Colmcille café, which is situated within the grounds of the Long Tower Church.

Each study session lasted an hour and began with a welcome and a blessing given by Fr Stephen, who also kindly provided notes containing relevant points relating to the video. We watched the video and had tea and refreshments while discussing what we had just seen and heard.

Each episode followed the format of a personal experience and focused on a segment of the Eucharist: 1 - God is with us; 2 - The story of the Eucharist; and 3 - Bread for the journey.

Episode 1

The first episode opened with the reference to two priests, Fr Daniel Burke and Fr Joseph Congedo, who risked their lives to save the Eucharist in 1912, in the fire that destroyed the inside of the Roman Catholic Church of St Philip Neri, at Grand Boulevard, New York. This was the pinpoint allowing us to ask ourselves why they risked their lives to save pieces of bread? To a non-believer, this was just bread. But to those of the Catholic faith it is called 'The Eucharist'.

What is the Eucharist?

The Eucharist is one of seven sacraments. It is the sacrament of sacraments. This is when the bread and wine changes into the Body and Blood, Soul, and Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is called transubstantiation. Eucharist means thanksgiving. Dr Edward Sri tells us that thanksgiving in biblical times would be the sharing of a meal. A meal was more than food and fuelling the body; meals were about being with people, sharing life with others and establishing a relationship with each other, furthermore, striking up a friendship with each other.

Who is the Eucharist?

God was preparing us for the revelation that Jesus would come into the world as a man so that men may become children of God. He would be called Emmanuel, which translates as 'God with us'. Scripture enlightens us that God was communicating to us through foreshadowings that He wanted to be with us; to dwell in us. For example, the burning bush, the pillar of fire by night and the pillar of cloud by day. Dr John Schorn summarises that "He wanted to be with us in a unique and very real way".

At Mass, we must remind

ourselves that Jesus wants us to become brothers and sisters and deepen His union with us each time we receive the Eucharist. God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - wants us to be in communion with Him also. Sharing in His life and His love, He is always seeking us out.

Episode 2

From the beginning of 'The Story of the Eucharist Episode 2, I was intrigued as the words were familiar. I realised they were from the book I was reading, called 'The Lamb's Supper', written by Professor Scott Hahn. Prof Hahn was a Presbyterian pastor who proclaimed that he had no interest in the Catholic Church or Mass, until one day he entered what was known as a basement church, where, for the first time, he attended Mass. During the Mass, he realised that he was not just hearing the Mass but that he was also reading the Bible, with references to Lamb of God (John 1:29), which we hear four times in less than a minute, and Holy Holy Holy Lord (Revelation 4:8-11). He summarises his first experience of the Mass, saying: "I don't have to die to go to Heaven, Heaven is where I just went. The Mass is what takes me there."

John 6:5-14 tells us about the 'Feeding of the Five Thousand' and how these people had followed Jesus and wanted to hear more from Him. But when He declared to them that they must eat His flesh and drink His blood to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, it was at this point that people started to withdraw from Him, leaving only His disciples. When Jesus turned and asked the disciples if they too would leave, Peter answered: "Lord, where would we go? You have the words of eternal life!"

Story of Salvation

Adam and Eve separated themselves from God by way of a meal: they ate of a forbidden fruit. Then God spends the rest of history trying to bring us back. He will send us a Saviour. In the first Exodus, God had promised to take the Israelites out of Egypt, and now He was about to inaugurate a new Exodus through Jesus Christ, His Son; the promised Saviour, which was His ultimate goal in the story of salvation history all along.

During the Feast of the Passover, also known as The Lord's Supper (Mt 26:17-30), Jesus reveals Himself as the new Passover lamb, who is to be sacrificed for the forgiveness of sins. He instituted the sacrament of the Eucharist when He said: "Take this all of you and eat of it for this is my Body, which will be given up for you." When supper ended, He took the

cup and said: "Take this all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my Blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant which will be poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins, do this in memory of me".

The gift of the Eucharist is the fulcrum of the story of which the universe turns, just as Adam was the first man of the old creation, Jesus becomes the new Adam, the first man of the new creation inaugurated by His resurrection. The Cross becomes the new tree of life and Jesus becomes the fruit of a new tree. The Eucharist is the fruit of the tree of life. Jesus offers Himself as food, life-giving food.

The Mass is the fruition of the desire to be with us: Jesus comes to restore and gives the gift of His very presence in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

Episode 3

Episode 3 begins with a Jewish family relating back to their Passover, where they would sit around the table and the story of the Passover would be re-told to them, not in the way that it was about their ancestors but about themselves, in the present day. On this particular year, it was the turn of an 11-year-old girl to look in the corridor to see if the Messiah had come but, of course, there was no one there.

Fast forwarding 20 years, this same girl, then grown-up, found herself in a Catholic Church receiving the Eucharist for the first time. She felt dramatic change coming over her. She later became a nun called Mother Miriam. She has dedicated her life to the Eucharist.

Bread for the Journey

When God took the Israelites out of Egypt, He fed them with Manna from Heaven, now the new Manna is Christ Himself. He is the bread for our journey that will lead us to Heaven, where we will be in full communion with God and with those who are also in full communion with God. The more we participate in

receiving the Eucharist, the more we become like Christ.

The road to Emmaus is the Story of the Mass, where Christ interpreted the scriptures in light of Himself. The Mass comes in two halves. The first being the Liturgy of the Word, where God is present in His revealed Word, and the second part being the Liturgy of the Eucharist, where the bread and wine are consecrated, becoming Christ's Body and Blood, and the climax of the Liturgy is when we receive Jesus in the Eucharist.

Fr John Riley reminds us: "When we are at Mass, it is always the Last Supper, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday made present!"

To receive the Eucharist, we must:

1. Not be in a state of mortal sin.
2. Fast for one hour before receiving the Eucharist.
3. Receive it at least once a year.

Dr John Schorn and Dr Scott Powell reiterate what Scott Hahn had experienced at his first Mass, communicated to us in the previous episode. A reminder of what Prof Hahn shared with us in the previous episode is: "I don't have to die to go to Heaven, Heaven is where I just went. The Mass takes me there."

In this episode, Dr Powell shares with us: "The Mass is a taste of Heaven, when Earth and Heaven meet, all of Heaven and Earth is present".

Furthermore, Dr Schorn says: "The new Manna, also known as the Eucharist, which is Jesus Christ, is bread from Heaven, bread for our journey and a foretaste for the end of that Journey - Heaven".

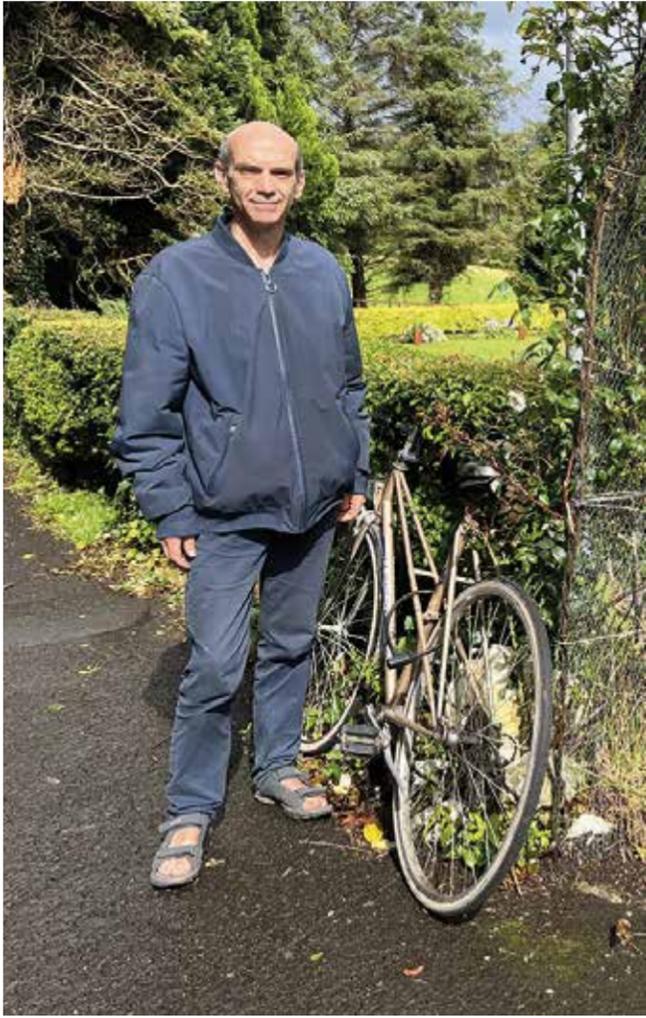
Conclusion

As we are a number of weeks into a brand new year and discerning what 2024 will bring, I would like to finish with an important reflection that Luis Soto and Chris Stefanick shared for us to take away: "He is with us to accompany us on our Journey."

Jesus said: "Follow me and I will always be present".



'The Living Word' stirring hearts and minds in Claudy



Andrew Kieran, who facilitated the introduction of The Living Word gatherings in the Claudy Parish.

'THE Living Word' is the very apt name for the weekly reflection on the Sunday Mass Readings as experienced by the growing number of people gathering, on Thursday nights, in an upper room in St Patrick's Church, in the village of Claudy.

It is based on the practice of Lectio Divina, a meditative way of reading the Bible, but rather than having lengthy periods of quiet time in meditation and contemplation, 'The Living Word' approach, as experienced in the Claudy group, prompts sharings, in confidence, of how the Word, read and reflected on, speaks directly into the lives of those gathered around the table.

From the first moment each encountered the Word of God shared in this way, they sensed a joy and a draw to return the following week for more, for as well as experiencing the reality of it in their lives, they were learning from it and supporting each other.

The story of how the group came to be has that 'something special' about it, having been initiated by one of life's characters...a man called Andrew Kieran, from Drogheda, who felt called to encourage parishes in the Derry Diocese to set up 'Living Word' gatherings, during a contemplative period last summer when he was residing in a friend's home in Omagh.

Having contacted Bishop Donal, and then the parishes of the Diocese about his Bible study proposal, the 52-year-old

former lay missionary, who also spent 12 years living with the Neo Catechumenate community in Drogheda, within the Armagh Diocese, and is a member of the Third Order of Franciscans and lives a simple life of Franciscan spirituality, decided one day to set out on his favourite mode of transport and cycle to Derry City to visit some of the parishes he had contacted.

However, he went astray at a fork in the road and ended up in Claudy village, so he decided to call with the parish priest there instead, Fr David O'Kane, who welcomed him in to talk about his Bible Study proposal and agreed for a notice to go in the parish bulletin to gauge interest, with a view to starting in September.

A small number got back to Andrew to express their interest and, taking into account God's promise that where two or three are gathered in His name He is there amongst them, starting details were established and he cycled the scenic route from Omagh to introduce his first group to 'The Living Word' experience.

Moved by his passion in promoting meditation and contemplation of the Word of God, using the Sunday Mass Readings, and his sharings which revealed his deep yet simple faith, as well as his very simple way of life, those gathered agreed to give it a go, with Andrew committing to stay with them until they felt confident to continue without

him leading.

After three or four gatherings, the group shared their concerns to Andrew about his safety in cycling back to Omagh around Gortin Glens etc, in the dark evenings, and the outcome was that they would give it a go on their own as a group. Gathering for the first time without Andrew to lead them, they got a bit of an insight into how the disciples would have felt gathered in the Upper Room without Jesus there as their leader. They also realised that, unlike the disciples at first, before Pentecost, they had received the Holy Spirit through their Baptism and Confirmation. With their confidence now buoyed somewhat with this awareness, they did as Andrew had shown them and haven't looked back. Indeed, their numbers have grown from five to 10, and amongst them is a former teacher with knowledge of the Scriptures who is greatly appreciated for guidance lovingly given.

In addition, another member of the group remembered that they had copies of books of reflections on the Sunday Gospels by the late Fr Jack McArdle ss.cc, entitled 'And that's the Gospel truth', and this is read following sharings on the forthcoming Sunday Mass readings. So impressed were the members by Fr Jack's insights, that they expressed interest in getting their own copies.

Published by Columba Press in 1999 (ISBN 1-85607-283-5), Fr Jack wrote in the introduction: "I know many people who are reflective and contemplative by nature, and the word of the Lord is a personal word for them. They would like to know what the Sunday Readings are beforehand, so they can prepare their hearts to welcome that word. They also continue to ponder that word throughout the following week. They are too mature in their Christian responsibility to settle for sitting back, and leaving it all to the preacher.

"The church that is being reborn today is one in which each of us must share equal responsibility. We are no longer like the FA Cup Final in Wembley, where nearly one hundred thousand spectators, badly in need of exercise, are sitting down very comfortable, criticising twenty-two pressurised human beings, badly in need of a rest! In today's church, we are all invited to get down out of the stands."

Adding that the book was written in particular for "the ordinary punter in the pew", Fr Jack continued: "It is written for the small groups in parishes who meet during the week to reflect on the Readings for the following Sunday. It is written for the house-bound. Indeed, it is written for anyone who needs material for

reflection, and who benefits from being presented with material that has some structure and order to it. There is no reason why someone should not pick up this book, and open it at any chapter, irrespective of what time of year it is."

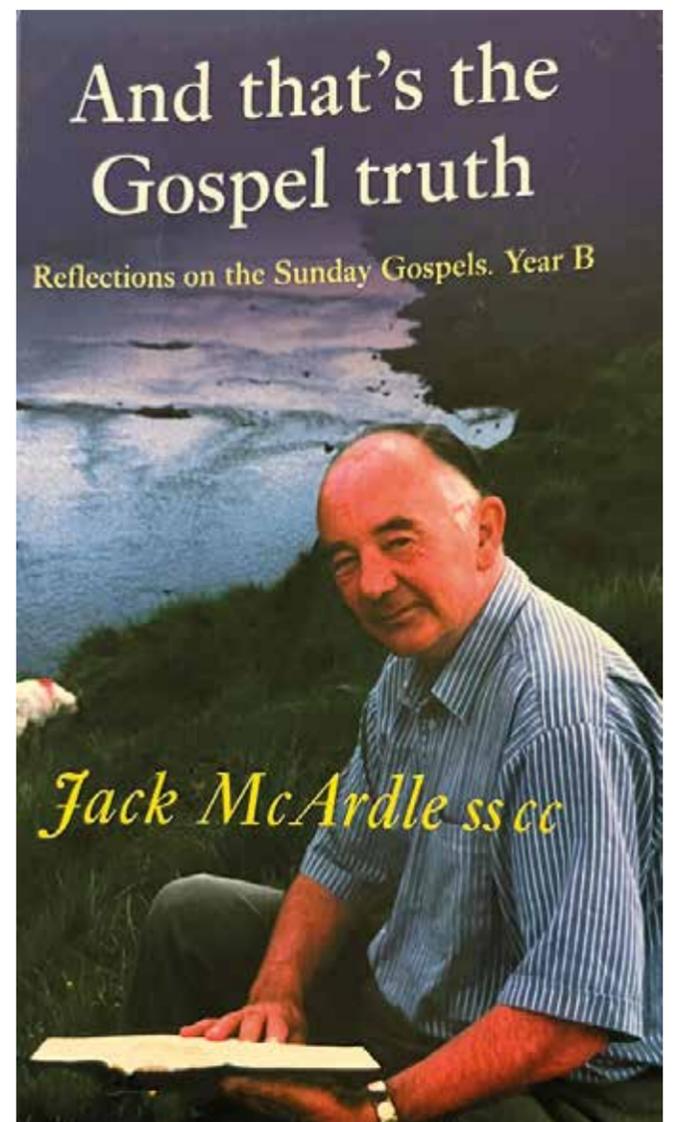
Open to anyone interested in reflecting on the Sunday Readings, 'The Living Word' meets in the room above the sacristy in St Patrick's Church, Claudy, on Thursday nights, from 7-8.30 pm.

The following are comments from some of those who attend 'The Living Word'...

"In the hustle and bustle of life and all its distractions, it is just so good to take time out to study God's Sacred Word in a deeper way, to reflect on the saving message of Jesus. To listen to the Scripture, to read it and to meditate on it, on how God interacts with His people and how He is still speaking to us today. We open God's Word with prayer invoking His Holy Spirit, that He will transform us through His Sacred Word. Each week, there is always something new to learn and it is enjoyed by all. We close up again with a prayer of thanksgiving, To God be the Glory." - Annie

"In our Living Word group, we come together to discuss the Scripture for the following Sunday. I have found that it really helps me to understand the Readings much better and to get involved with what is being said. They are not just words that I listen to at Mass on Sundays anymore. I have got to know God at a more personal level, which is my ultimate goal, to know and love God and a closer relationship with Him. An added bonus is that I have developed a closer relationship with the others in the group; their insights and personal thoughts on the Scripture is greatly valued by me and bring us together as children of God. It is a 'Win! Win!' I always look forward to it each week." - Pauline

"Opening up a Bible, rather than maybe only ever reading a Mass missal, can be a daunting experience, but with the help and support of others it can become an adventure. The teachings of Jesus bring us guidance in this earthly life; they bring us the way to follow as He leads. The Word becomes alive as we imagine what it would be like to live in those ancient times. Putting ourselves into the story can bring a new perspective, leading to enlightenment. Our discussions lead us to revelation for previously unanswered questions, a touch of humour on a topic leads to laughter, all orchestrated harmoniously by the



Holy Spirit. This gathering enables us to seek the truth, to find it and so to endeavour to share it and to live it out with the grace that God has given us. Indeed, the word of God is living and active (Hebrews 4:12)." - Catherine

"Taking time out each week to study and ponder the Word of God, with like-minded friends, is really enriching my faith journey. I realise how alive and relevant the Word of God is today as it was over 2,000 years ago. It also makes me realise how the Old Testament, Psalms and New Testament are all linked. Taking time out weekly to ponder the richness of the Word of God and His message means, at Sunday Mass, the readings and the Gospel come fully alive for me. God is continuing to speak

to us if we only take the time to listen. Exploring the Word with others provides great insights and understanding that I would never see on my own. The Holy Spirit really guides us when we ask for His help." - Rosemary

"I attended 'The Living Word' for the first time recently and got so much from that hour-and-a-half. It was so powerful because when I heard the readings and homily at Mass on the following Sunday, our previous readings and reflections had already broken it down for me and it made so much more sense. God is calling us all in quiet ways and we need to listen carefully to hear that call. Our bodies are Temples of the Holy Spirit, so God's Spirit lives in our hearts. I now look forward to the weekly group." Shelaine

Eangach

In ainm an Athar a fuair an bua,
Agus an Mhic a d'fhulaing an Pháis.
A Spioraid Naomh, bí dár neartú,
's a Mhaighean ghlórmhar, bí 'nár dtriail.

Tríonóid trí shíorghlóir i m'ghlacadh go buan
is guím fós an Rí gan ganghaid gan ghruaim
go síoch sóil sítheoilte suairc
i m'chruinneoladh i bhfíorchóngar
Flaitheas an Uain

“A Íosa, a Mhuire, tá grá agam daoibh”
Naomh Kateri Tekakhwitha



Kateri, Lile na Móchácach

San alt seo, pléifear de cheann de na mná is mó i stair na mbundúchasach i Meiriceá Thuaidh agus I stair an chreidimh ina measc. Is í ná Naomh Kateri, nó mar glaodh uirthi chomh maith – Lile na Móchácach.

Rugadh í sa bhliain 1656 sa tsráidbhaile Ossemenon i dtuaisceart Nua Eabhrac. Ba nion í le taoiseach Móchácach darb ainm Kenneronkwa, chomh maith lena máthair Kahenta, bean Algancach a ceapadh sa chogaíocht ach a tugadh isteach i bpobal na Móchácach ina dhiaidh sin. Tugadh ar an leanbh an t-ainm Tekakhwitha ó dhúchas.

Bhí a muintir – na Mhóhácaigh – ar cheann de ‘na cúig náisiúin’ a rinne an Chónaidhm Iroquois ag an am, a bhí cumhachtach sa réigiún, tuaisceart Nua Eabhrac agus piosaí de Ontario agus Quebec an lae inniu. Is minic a bhí siad sa lár idir fhórsaí Shasana agus na Fraince, agus na coimhlintí a bhíodh ann eatarthu. Am corrach a bhí ann. Nuair a bhí sí óg, fuair a tuismitheoirí bás de bharr an ghalair bolgach, ach tháinig Tekakhwitha slán. De réir a chéile, tháinig sagairt Francacha le fanacht ina sráidbhaile agus ghlac a huncail leis an chreideamh. Nuair a bhí sí 17, rinneadh iarracht pósadh a eagrú idir í agus fear, ach nuair a dhiúltaigh sí don rud, bhí ar a muintir éirí as an phlean. An bhliain ina dhiaidh sin, bhuail sí le Sagart Íosánach, an

tAth. Jaques de Lamberville, agus d’inis dó gur mhaith léi bheith ina Críostaí. Rinne sí staidéar ar an chaiticíosma leis.

Scríobh an tAth. de Lamberville fúithi i ndiaidh a báis, gur bean shéimh a bhí inti a rinne a dícheall fánacht naofa i sochaí saolta. Bhí coimhlintí ann le daoine ina pobal mar sin agus luann daoine eile go ndearnadh fóiréigean uirthi. Ar Dhomhnach na Cásca 1676, baistíodh Tekakhwitha agus ghlac sí an t-ainm ‘Kateri’ in onóir Naomh Catherine de Sienna. Ós rud gur chuir daoine dá muintir in éadan a Críostaíochta, mhol an tAth. de Lamberville bogadh go Kahnawake, pobal caitliceach Móchácach, cóngarach de Montréal. Is anseo a chónaigh sí, ag guí ar son a muintire. Deirtear gur thug sí uirthi cleachtas an aithrí a bhí crua go leor, ach tugadh comhairle di éirí as roinnt díobh, léiríonn seo cé chomh domhain is a bhí a spioradáltacht. Fuair sí bás go hóg in 1680 ar an Chéadaoin roimh an Cháisc, agus na focail, “A Íosa, a Mhuire, tá grá agam daoibh”.

Ba mhór an t-urraim a bhí ag caitlicigh bundúchasacha do Kateri Tekakhwitha i ndiaidh a báis, ní amháin i measc na Móchácach, ach sna náisiúin bhundúchasacha eile ar fud Mheiriceá thuaidh. Tá cuntais ann go forleathan faoi mhíoriúlta a bhain léi (leigheas dhaoine agus í á taispeáint féin dóibh) agus bhí sí mar chuid den saol spioradálta



Naomh Kateri Tekakhwitha

bríomhar a bhí, agus atá, ag chéad naomh bundúchasach as caitlicigh bunúchasacha. Bhí áthas Mheiriceá Thuaidh. le feiceáil ó dhaoine dá muintir in 1980 nuair a d'fhógair an Pápa Benedict XVI gur naomh í, an Naomh Kateri Tekakhwitha, guigh orainn!

Muire: Áirc an Chonartha Nua

Is mór an ról a bhí ag an Áirc (nó Áirc an Chonartha lena theideal iomlán a thabhairt) i scéal phobal Dé sa Sean Tiomna. I ndiaidh do na hEabhraigh teacht amach as a gcuid sclábháíochta san Éigipt, d'ordaigh Dia do Mhaois go dtógfar an áirc, agus thug na hEabhraigh leo é isteach sa Tír Naofa. Is mór an mistéir a bhain leis níos moille nuair a imíonn sé ón stair agus é “cailte” agus mhachnaigh daoine ar cár imigh sé, nó cá bhfuil sé anois. An raibh a fhios agat, áfach, gur í Muire Áirc an Chonartha Nua, agus gur seo an tuiscint atá ag an Eaglais le fada?

Sa Sean Tiomna, tógadh an Áirc san fhásach, agus coinníodh trí rud ann. Ar dtús, na taibleid cloiche ar scríobh Dia a dhlí orthu ag Síonaí .i. briathar Dé. Ansin, bhí Manna

ann, an t-arán mistéireach lenar chothaigh Dia na hEabhraigh ar a n-aistear fríd an fhásach. Sa deireadh, slat Áróin faoi bhláth, a dhearbhaigh a shagartacht. Ach cad é faoi Mhuire? Is iontach an comparáid a thig a dhéanamh! D’iompar Muire ina broinn Íosa, Briathar ionchollaithe Dé, i bhfeoil. Chomh maith leis sin, d’iompar sí arán na beatha, mar a chuir Íosa síos air féin, a chothaíonn muid mar chríostaithe ar ár n-aistear fríd ‘ghleann na ndeor’. Agus sa deireadh, in áit slat Áróin, is é Íosa Ardsagart ár gcreidimh. Uaireanta, labhraíonn Dia fríd na Scrioptúir ar bhealaí ar leith mar seo.

Is sa leabhar deireannach den Scrioptúr (Apacailipsis Eoin) atá rud eile suntasach le feiceáil.

Anseo, déantar tagairt den

chéad áirc – a bhí cailte le blianta – a bheith léirithe d’Eoin, le comharthaí de chumhacht Dé. Go díreach ina dhiaidh sin, is é seo a bhíonn feicthe ag Eoin: “bean a raibh an ghrian mar bhrat uimpi agus an ghealach faoina cosa agus coróin de dhá réalta déag ar a ceann”. Bhí an bhean ag iompar clainne agus rug sí mac, a rialódh na ciníochá “le slat iarainn”. Is soiléir an nasc idir an seanáirc anseo agus Muire, a bheireann a mac, Íosa. Tá cath mór ina dhiaidh idir an “dragan” agus clann Mhuire (.i. muid féin). Sa Sean Tiomna, d’iompar pobal Dé an áirc leo agus iad i mbun catha. Is amhlaidh a dhéanann muid, agus muid i mbun catha. Sa chath in éadan an pheaca agus an olcais, glaoimis ar Mhuire!

Ag tús na bliana, is minic a

bhaineann muid triall as rud éigin nua. B’fhéidir gur fiú smaoinemh air seo don bhliain romhainn; thig linn brath ar Mhuire i mbliana, le cuidiú linn sa chath.

Tabharfaidh sí cúram dúinn inár saolta. Iarraimis a cuidiú. Smaoineimis faoin Phaidrín!



Tribute to the late Margaret Knight *by Father Roland Colhoun*



Margaret Mary Knight, Derry (1953-2022)

It was with enormous sadness that I learned of the sudden death of Margaret Mary Knight, née McCourt, in Derry, over a year ago. She had been a loyal servant of the Church in multiple capacities. I had worked with Margaret for 14 years and it was a privilege to know her.

In 2008, I placed a notice in the Long Tower parish bulletin:

“Volunteer needed to type up the history of St Columba’s Church for its centenary – 2009”. Margaret Knight spotted the ad and rang me to offer her help. I had never met her. She was a Pennyburn parishioner, but had affection for Long Tower since her childhood days in Bridge Street, her Baptism and Confirmation in St Columba’s, and her primary education in the ‘Wee Nuns’.

Having completed 29 years’ service in the Housing Executive, the dedicated civil servant decided to devote her early retirement to serving the Church. So, this very capable and highly intelligent woman arrived at my door. That was a blessed day. I was seeking a volunteer for a few hours every week, but Margaret came every day to the Parochial House.

She worked free of charge in the office from morning until evening, preparing for the 100th anniversary of the church. She typed, researched, consulted, telephoned and organised, washed dishes and answered the

door, all the while smiling and entertaining us with her comical observations. She designed the booklet for the centenary Mass and the commemorative publication at the end of 2009, often working late at night to meet the printer’s deadlines.

She also helped me design the new statues for the Church roof, Long Tower School, St Cecilia’s College and St Columba’s PS, Newbuildings. She prepared the launch of the Latin Mass in the Diocese, in Long Tower on December 8, 2008. She purchased many items for the Parish and refused to accept repayment. Nothing was too much to ask and there was no limit to Margaret’s giving.

When I moved to Glendermott & Strathfoyle in 2010, Margaret continued her generous service every day. She organised the Derry buses for the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin, in 2012. It was the first of many pilgrimages she coordinated, including pro-life trips to Belfast and Dublin,

and a group of pilgrims for Iona, Scotland, in 2013. This entailed booking a flight for each person individually online, but Margaret had endless patience and perseverance. No task was allowed to beat her. If she didn’t know how to do it, she set herself to learn it and master it. I was in constant admiration of her ever-increasing skillset.

Alongside serving our parishes, Margaret began assisting the religious Orders, newly arrived in Derry; the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and the Sisters of St John. Many a food-hamper and donation she and her husband, Sean delivered quietly to the friary and convent, seeking no reward but the knowledge they had helped the missionary Church.

Generous, hospitable and helpful, harmless, humorous and wholesome, Margaret had very high standards of behaviour, endeavouring never to offend God or hurt her neighbour. Hers was a very soft heart, full of compassion for relatives, friends

and neighbours. Therefore, she was naturally alert and constantly keeping an eye out for people in need. Contemplating the Gospel, you could say Margaret was the eight Beatitudes on two feet!

One Sunday night in 2015, Sean and Margaret came to the Novena in Newtownstewart Oratory, my new parish. During the Devotions, a woman began to feel unwell. Without a moment’s hesitation, Margaret rushed up the aisle, caught the woman to prevent her falling and stayed by her side for the rest of the liturgy. For this act of kindness and courage, she was sent a gift from the grateful parishioner, a sizeable box of chocolates. I’m not sure that Margaret had a passion for sweet things. She was more attached to cigarettes!

Behind her lifelong outpouring of generosity to the Church was Margaret’s outstanding faith. With faith, comes hope and charity. These three theological virtues Margaret had in abundance. Of course, virtue

is the fruit of prayer. Margaret built her life on devotion to God, daily Rosary, the Divine Mercy Chaplet, Novenas, and complete attentiveness to the Holy Mass. She prayed for guidance before every assignment and in gratitude after its completion.

Alas, serious illness slowed her down, early in 2018. She never lost her holiness or zeal, but didn’t have the same energy again. Sadly, Margaret’s health continued to deteriorate, and her 69 years drew to a close on Sunday, October 16 2022 in Altnagelvin Hospital. Many tears have been shed but beautiful memories remain.

If any Purgatorial time is needed for Margaret Knight, it will surely be brief. Where I to outline all the good deeds of her life, this tribute would be difficult to draw to a close. The good Lord knows them all and will exalt her in glory. As Christ puts it in the Gospel, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven” (Matthew 5:12).

Living Family

FAMILY RETREAT DAY

10pm-5pm/Sun 4th Feb 2024
 Summerhill College, Sligo
 10:00am Registration
 11:00am Opening Mass

Talks, reflections, games & activities
 Guide donation €80 - €100 per family
 Dinner & refreshments included
 Spaces are limited
 Booking essential
 Email info@livingfamily.ie or phone
 Thérèse on 086 8228174

An initiative of former leaders of Youth 2000



Newtownstewart Legion of Mary Christmas sing-song at Omagh Care Home

Newtownstewart Legion of Mary members and Fr Roland Colhoun led a Christmas sing-song during their weekly visit to Slieve na Mon Care Centre, Tircur, Omagh, on Friday, December 29, 2023.

Ninth Walk for Glenock Church raises over £3,000



Fr Roland Colhoun, Newtownstewart, with some of the participants on the ninth Walk for Glenock, on November 12, 2023. The walkers explored sections of the disused railway line (GNR: Derry to Portadown) which closed in 1965. The Parish walk raised £3,092 for the restoration of St Eugene’s Church, Glenock.

Lovely time of prayer for Steelstown Pastoral Council



Steelstown Pastoral Council members enjoyed a time of prayer in the IOSAS garden, on the Derry-Muff border, with their Parish Priest, Fr John Devitt and some members of the Columba Community during Advent.

Knights of St Columbanus support for Foyle Foodbank



Grand Knight of CK5 Derry, Robert Glackin giving a donation to Foyle Foodbank. A charitable organisation, the Derry Knights of St Columbanus make a donation every year to a local charity, and with the cost of living crisis this year they decided to award it to the Foodbank.

THE BIG LENT WALK

WALK 200KM IN 40 DAYS TO HELP FIGHT GLOBAL POVERTY

SIGN UP NOW

cafod.org.uk

Craigavole sacristan retires after 38 years' devoted service *by Grainne O'Kane*

AFTER 38 years of devoted service to caring for St Mary's Church, Craigavole, in the Parish of Kilrea & Dersertohill, sacristan, Kathleen McMullan has decided to embrace retirement. In appreciation, Fr Brendan Crowley PP Errigal and Adm Kilrea & Desertohill, presented her with a gift on Sunday, December 17, to mark the occasion.

Kathleen took on the role of sacristan in partnership with her husband, the late James, following the death of her uncle John McKeefry, on December 24, 1985. Together, they looked after the beautiful rural church of St Mary's and, following the death of James in 1990, she continued the role of sacristan in his memory.

Kathleen has witnessed many changes during her tenure as sacristan, serving under Fr John McGaughey, Fr Michael Mullan, Fr Brendan Doherty, Fr Colm O'Doherty, Fr Eddie McGuinness, Fr Charlie Logue, Fr Dermott Harkin, Fr Chris McDermott, and the late Fr John Cargan. She also saw the church undergo two major renovations. Visiting priests always commended Kathleen for her help and support in setting up religious ceremonies.

Although she shirked the

limelight, Kathleen was happiest washing and starching altar cloths and cleaning the church. This gave her great satisfaction as it echoed her role as a wife, mother and grandmother. She saw this Chapel as her second home, taking great comfort in visiting the graves of her parents, Pat and Susan, her husband, James and her two sons, Ciarán and Donal.

She dearly loved the church she had attended as a girl, growing up in the nearby town land of Ballydullaghan. Kathleen often talks about the journey to Mass with her family on a Sunday morning. They walked across the fields and over the stile - a far cry from the current 100m drive in her little blue Renault, from her marital home in Craigavole.

Fr Crowley presented a very thoughtful gift of an engraved, chiming mantle clock; gift which holds great significance for her, due to her husband's love for antique clocks.

Everyone in the Parish of Kilrea & Desertohill would like to wish Kathleen a healthy, holy and happy retirement. We thank her for her 38 years of dedicated service to S Mary's Church, Craigavole.



The amazing Ruby Druce – 108 and still enjoying her cake!

THE inspirational Ruby Druce has celebrated another birthday... her 108th! The former Urney & Castlefin parishioner clocked up another year on December 31, 2023, when her loving family helped her celebrate with a delicious birthday cake.

Residing now with family in the Letterkenny area, Ruby was delighted to receive a special birthday blessing and gift from Fr Ciaran Harkin, of the Church of the Irish Martyrs, Letterkenny.

Fr Ciaran brings Holy Communion to Ruby every month, and to mark her 108th year he came along on her birthday with a beautiful bouquet of flowers and the very special gift of Holy Communion.

Ruby, who has the distinction of being the oldest living person from the Derry Diocese and the oldest person living in the Raphoe Diocese, still follows Mass daily on YouTube and says at least two Rosaries a day!



The remarkable Ruby Druce celebrating her 108th birthday, with Fr Ciaran Harkin, Church of the Irish Martyrs, Letterkenny.

Belated birthday wishes to 89 years young Burt Church cleaner *by Kathleen Grant*

NOVEMBER 22, 1963, is etched in people's minds because it was the year we lost President JF Kennedy, and Burt Bingo lady, Carmel McDermott shares November 22 as a significant date in her life because it's her birthdate.

Carmel was born in 1934. At 89 years of age, she is in good health and still cleans St Aengus' Church with her friends and helps run the weekly bingo.

For many years, Carmel helped with baking and making tea in St Mary's Hall, and helped raise a lot of the funding for the building of the new St Aengus' Church.

She is also blessed with a good memory and is often called upon to settle an argument about the old days.

Carmel has very deep faith and is a regular Mass attender, which gives her much comfort, and she is thankful to her very good neighbours who provide the lifts and look out generally for her welfare.

Over the years, she has really enjoyed visiting places of pilgrimage, such as Knock, San Giovanni, Assisi, the Holy Land, Fatima and Rome, and has even climbed Croagh Padraig.

An avid reader, Carmel enjoys



Fr Paddy Baker, Valerie Shanley, Carmel McDermott and Patricia Smith attending the Burt book sale.

reading 'The Net', the 'Irish Catholic', 'Ireland's Own' and the local papers.

She is also a big fan of Daniel O'Donnell. This loyalty was severely tested during Christmas 2022, when she needed a stay in Letterkenny hospital! She had stood on a chair to decorate his picture with holly and down she came! However, recovery was swift, thankfully, and she was back selling bingo books in a few

weeks and forgave Daniel!

Carmel was 29 years old the day President Kennedy was shot, 60 years ago. She had been on her way with a friend to visit another friend and they called in with the late Fr Laurence Keaveney in the Parochial House, who told them the sad news.

Having now celebrated her 89th birthday, Carmel is wished all the best from us in the Parish.

Burt bouquet of thanks for Sacristan Anne's decade of voluntary service *by Kathleen Grant*



THE Parish of Burt has expressed its appreciation of their dedicated sacristan, Anne Harrigan with an unexpected Christmas gift to her.

At the end of Christmas Day Mass in St Aengus' Church, Fr Paddy Baker surprised Anne with a beautiful bouquet of flowers as he expressed heartfelt thanks on behalf of the Parish for her 10 years of service.

Fr Paddy spoke about how Anne loved her work, and how good and dependable she was, always there early to set-up the altar for Mass.

Anne does the work of sacristan in a volunteer capacity, and with great devotion and attention to detail, going far beyond what is expected of her. We, as a parish, were delighted to see this very valued person being recognised.

Keen to see St Patrick's prophetic word about the light of faith in Ireland come to pass...

New Friar Antonio impressed by organic growth of faith in Derry and beyond



Fr Antonio Maria Diez de Medina cfr

AN Aerospace Engineering graduate with martial art skills under his belt, Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, Fr Antonio Maria Diez de Medina hasn't let the dust settle under his feet since arriving at his community's friary in Galliagh last September.

The 43-year-old was instrumental in organising a Eucharistic Procession around the Galliagh area in the lead up to Halloween, and is now in the midst of preparing to lead another one between the Long Tower and the Guildhall, in Derry City, as part of a worldwide Effatha (Be Opened) Revival on February 3.

The Revival event takes place two days after the Feast of St Brigid, when Ireland will begin the build up to the 1500th anniversary of the passing of Brigid of Kildare. One of the island's three Patron Saints because of her great work in spreading the Catholic faith, Brigid (meaning 'fiery arrow') is also known as 'Mary of Ireland', and had been with St Patrick in prayer when it is said that he received a vision of Ireland illuminated by a great light... the light of Faith. He saw that this light continued to shine on Ireland throughout the centuries and was given to know that it would never extinguish.

And so, it seems fitting that Fr Antonio has 'Maria' in his name, with his burning desire to help revive the flame of faith through Eucharistic prayer for the opening of hearts and minds to God.

Sharing the story of his own faith formation and call to religious life, with 'The Net', Fr Antonio, who was born in Bolivia, South America, recalled his parents, Ricardo and Hisae raising him and his younger sister as Catholics and attending Catholic school through to Fifth Grade.

One special memory he has is of reading the Children's Bible he received in Holy Redeemer Catholic School, Maryland, in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States, where he moved with his family when he was three years old.

"One of my favourite stories was David and Goliath, and I loved reading the words of Jesus, like the Beatitudes, even though I didn't understand them at all," said Fr Antonio.

He went on to recall a particular word in Scripture through which, he believes, God planted a seed in him as a seven-year-old preparing for First Holy Communion: "Jesus said, 'He who wishes to be my disciple must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it, but anyone who loses his life for me and for the gospel will be saved' (Mk 8:35). Something in that inspired me to be a disciple of Jesus when I was about seven or eight years old."

He added: "I also wanted to be a scientist and an astronaut, but then I read about St Francis giving all his money away and I decided that I wanted to be a Franciscan. As a child, I tried to tell my father that we should give our money away to the poor, even though we were poor, but he didn't like that idea."

"When we moved to Maryland," continued Fr Antonio, "we lived with my grandmother, and aunts and uncles in a big house. I got to know St Anthony through my grandmother, and now pray to him if I lose anything."

"My grandfather passed away when I was five or six years old and that had a big effect on me. It was my first experience of the death of a loved one. The family never really talked about how to deal with grief like that."

Commenting on this, he said: "There is a story where there is a hero and a bad guy. The hero was untouchable and the bad guy couldn't do anything to him. The hero fell in love with a damsel in distress, and the bad guy kidnapped her. Then the hero became weak in his distress from loving the damsel, so I gathered from this story that you become weak if you love."

"As a result, in time I tried to live without emotion and to be stoic. I put a brick wall around my heart as a way of trying to keep God out of there too, but that didn't work. I tried to stifle love, so by the time I was eleven the more accessible emotions were self-hate and anger."

When his father started working as an American Diplomat, the family moved around a lot, firstly to Mexico City, for three years. Fr Antonio has memories from this time of serving as an altar boy, visiting the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and also taking part in a very special praying of the Rosary.

He said: "During the month of May, the nuns at school had all the children praying the Rosary together outside. It was an enormous Rosary made of balloons, and when we finished

praying we let go and it drifted off into the blue sky above."

The next move took the family to Tokyo, in Japan, which Fr Antonio recalled being a challenging time in his life, from the age of 11-15 years: "I went to an international school in another suburb of Tokyo, lived on the American compound in the city, and experienced some bullying, especially at school. I was a bit rebellious and played a lot of video games. I also got into Judo and Jujitsu, as well as basketball and American football, which helped as outlets for anger and as a good use of physical energy."

"When I look back, I can see that was a time when Jesus was carrying me. We went to the Franciscan Chapel in Roppongi and that is where I received Confirmation, which was a great grace. I started having thoughts of priesthood, and it also helped me with some typical family issues and with the bullying at school."

Popular

The family then moved to Santiago, Chile, in South America. Again attending an international school, Fr Antonio recalled that during his time there he had wanted to be popular.

"I was trying to hang out with popular kids and going to parties and drinking, but I never got drunk," he said, adding: "I felt fake trying to be somebody that I wasn't, but the Lord was protecting me. I began asking deeper questions about the meaning of life, like why go to College, to get a job, why get a job, to make money, why make money, etc. There was something more I was seeking, or rather Someone."

Wanting to go back to the United States when he turned 18, he got a scholarship to study for a degree in Aerospace Engineering at the University of Michigan.

"I was tired of trying to be good and of my family telling me what to do," recalled Fr Antonio, "I wanted to live the crazy life of a typical university student, but I went to a student retreat in my first year there and went to Confession, which changed everything. I had peace and joy, and a sense of being cleansed, like a new creation."

"I also felt a very strong calling to the priesthood, and my language changed; I stopped swearing. I then became involved in different events in the student parish. I went to two Bible Study groups; one was Catholic and the other Evangelical, which was run by Campus Crusade for Christ. They told me that I was worshipping statues as a Catholic and I believed them and got angry, as I didn't know my Catholic faith."

"I started going deep and looking for answers in books like Scott and Kimberly Hahn's

'Rome Sweet Home', and Steven Ray's 'Crossing The Tiber - Evangelical Protestants Discover the Historical Church', and Karl Keating's book 'Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on 'Romanism' by 'Bible Christians'. God was providing answers to my questions."

He added: "I remember saying at one stage, God if you want me to leave the Catholic Church, I will. The praise music and having a personal relationship with Jesus was something that I hadn't heard about in the Catholic faith, but I was hearing about this from Evangelical friends."

"However, during the Easter Vigil in 1999, I decided to stay in the Catholic Church because of the beauty of the liturgy, and God had provided the answer as to whether Jesus had founded the Catholic Church. I then wanted to help other Catholics to be more fully alive and other Christians to know where the fullness of the truth is - that is, in the Catholic Church."

"So, I became more involved in the Church, helping to run student retreats, and I started to meet Catholics who were Charismatic. Through University Christian Outreach, which was great in building my faith, I participated in a 'Life in the Spirit' Seminar, and this opened up deeper realities. I also did the Alpha course and it was helpful too."

Meanwhile, he continued studying for the Aerospace Engineering Degree, but didn't have peace in thinking about being an engineer.

"If I had been honest with myself," remarked Fr Antonio, "I knew what God was calling me to. Rather than going partying, I would spend my Spring Break doing service projects, such as helping refugees, Habitat for Humanity, and different ways to help the poor. This gave me meaning more than going to parties."

"When I was 20, I did a summer programme in the inner city of Chicago, which was one of the most difficult experiences I had up to that point, as we had to take care of inner city youth who have hard shells and tested us. When I look back, I give thanks to God for the experience, even though I nearly gave up."

"The Lord was slowly guiding me in a particular direction. I remember saying 'Yes' to God and then 'No'. So, the Lord was very patient with me. I was testing it, trying to pursue one or two relationships, but there wasn't peace in it."

"I said to God at one point that I would become a priest if I met the perfect girl. I met someone on a student retreat who was thinking about becoming a nun, while I was thinking about being a priest."

I fell in love with her but she became an idol. I loved her more than God. I got my heart broken but God gave me a new heart. I had to learn from this experience to love God first."

While at the University of Michigan, Fr Antonio sometimes frequented Christ The King Parish in Ann Arbor, which he described as an amazing help in developing a relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Recalling an occasion where he had sensed the Holy Spirit at work during Confession, he said: "I remember saying to the priest that I was afraid of saying 'yes' to a calling to the priesthood, as I thought it would mean a life of suffering. The priest said that in this life the more you love the more you suffer. I think he meant this generally. I needed to hear that as I had been trying to live without love. I sobbed for about 10 minutes. It was cathartic, as deep emotions were being released. I had tried to live without love and he was telling me that love and suffering go together. God needed me to hear that."

Don't be afraid

On graduating with an Aerospace Engineering Degree, he decided to stay in Ann Arbor and secure work, though he didn't want to be an engineer: "My focus after graduating was to go to World Youth Day with Pope John Paul II in the summer of 2002. It was held in Toronto. I went up there with a few friends. Pope John Paul was awesome. I remember him saying that if you feel called to priesthood or religious life, don't be afraid."

"My friends and I had participated in a new group started by the local youth minister, Glenn Smith, the group was called 'Students for Catholic Evangelisation', and we evangelised our peers in front of the graduate library on the Diag with an A-frame of evangelization booklets and prayer. It was wonderful. One friend who was part of that group became a nun, and another likened her World Youth Day faith experience to being like a little match going into a bonfire and coming out a torch. It was great to hear that analogy."

Fr Antonio went on to reflect on his last year in Michigan: "I lived in a men's household, most were

Catholics and some Evangelicals, some working and some studying, but we prayed together. I worked for a while as a waiter, but then quit as I was tired of it and had other priorities."

"In his book, 'Rome Sweet Home', Scott Hahn comments on his realisation that God was calling him to be a Catholic, but that he was delaying it. He wrote, 'Delayed obedience is disobedience.' So, I knew what God was calling me to, but I was still delaying."

"Then, in December 2002, while visiting my family for Christmas in Switzerland, I read a book called 'Fire Within', by Fr Thomas Dubay SM. One of the saints featured in this book is St John of the Cross, and reading this got me fired up. He wrote about a mystical union with God in this life and that is what I desired, and still desire."

"I remember thinking that I had to make a decision, so I got down on my knees and said, 'I promise you, God, that if You want me to join a religious order or the seminary this year, I will do it.' I knew that if I didn't make that promise, I would keep on making excuses."

He added: "However, when I went back to Michigan, I continued to delay what I was supposed to do, which was contacting religious orders. One morning, about 11.30 am, my room-mate passed me the phone, it was my mum calling from Switzerland. I was still in bed and when I was talking to her she knew I was groggy with sleep and blew up on me, telling me to go get a job, stop being a bum, we should have never helped you with college, etc."

"This motivated me to go visit religious orders. The last one I visited was the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal in the Bronx. For my first visit to the Friars, I was waiting for my friend to give me a ride to the airport. After he arrived late because he had slept in, when we were trying to get to the airport, the engine caught on fire! I called the airline and they rebooked me on a later flight without charging me."

"God was looking after me. I'm blessed with directional dyslexia, and if I had made it to my first flight, I would have gotten lost getting to the Friars, but because I



Fr Antonio at the Men's First Saturday Rosary in Derry

arrived so late, the Brothers picked me up at the airport. It was a good experience and I got accepted for the two-week visit.

"I had applied to FOCUS Ministries and been accepted, but I decided to say 'no' to FOCUS and 'yes' to the Friars. I would say that I entered with about 55% of my heart, but as I continued through those early months with the Friars, while there were struggles, I could see that I was growing through the pain. I joined when I was 23, in New York."

Amongst the first group of Friars to be at The Most Blessed Sacrament Friary, an old monastery in Newark, New Jersey, Fr Antonio found it a place with a rich history of prayer. Making his first vows in March 2005, he also spent two years at the St Felix Friary, in New York, helping in the soup kitchen.

Recalling his assignment to the St Seraphim Friary in Honduras, he spoke of his love of being in Central America: "It was a breath of fresh air to be out of the city and be with the poor. I was there for one-and-a-half years before we started a new friary in Nicaragua, in October 2008. I made my final vows in July 2008 and four of us moved to the new friary. It was awesome. I loved it. Growing up, we had moved around so much, so it was a home for me."

He added: "In 2010, I left to begin seminary. It was very difficult to go back to New York as I didn't care for it, but I had to start studies for seminary. I did two years of Philosophy and four years of Theology. It wasn't easy being in the classroom again,

especially with Philosophy, as when working with the poor you are not having philosophical conversations! So, I had to learn to think like that again.

"While in the seminary, I was reminded of what St Francis said to St Anthony about teaching Theology to the friars, 'as long as you do not extinguish the spirit of prayer and devotion'.

"During my summer assignments, in between semesters, I was usually assigned to Central America, either Honduras or Nicaragua, but one summer, in 2014, I asked to be assigned to the friary in Limerick. The kids were challenging but it was great, and I found that I liked the Irish sense of humour. It was refreshing to experience something new."

Ordained

Fr Antonio was ordained on May 28, 2016, in St Patrick's Cathedral, New York, where he had met Pope Francis briefly during his visit the previous year, when he had served as one of the deacons in the Cathedral during solemn Vespers.

After his ordination, Fr Antonio went to World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland. He was assigned to the new St Mary of the Assumption Friary in Newburgh, New York, where his ability to speak Spanish led to him working with many Hispanic people... until COVID hit.

Recalling this period, he spoke about how he had volunteered to be a hospital chaplain for the first four months of COVID, saying: "I felt that I was being deployed and

had to be geared up. I asked people to pray and I could feel their prayer. One of the first things that I noticed was fear, so I prayed into that. It was a joyful time despite the challenges. I would go in and anoint people. Doctors and nurses were putting on full PPE to help patients' bodies, so I just thought why could I not do that for their souls."

After this, Fr Antonio was assigned to London, which surprised him because his heart was for Central America and working with the Hispanic community, however, he was happy to meet again with Brothers he hadn't seen in years.

Commenting on his London experience, he said: "I was working in the soup kitchen and met some amazing people. I prayed about whether I was to stay long-term and I had peace about that, so after I got my visa I moved to London officially in February 2021.

"Since then, it has been such a blessing. While in London, I met new friends and got involved in initiatives. I set up a men's group called 'Sacred Heart Men's Group', as I wanted men to have hearts like Jesus. We were working with the homeless on a programme called 'Jesus Run', where we visited the homeless, bringing food and clothing, praying with them and acknowledging them, loving and interacting with them.

"With some friends, I started 'The Res: Live The Real'. The aim of this is to encourage young adults to get off their phones and interact with each other, doing fun things. It's not exclusively

Catholic, but has very definite Catholic components. We have had swing dancing, salsa dancing, canoeing, kayaking, outdoor Mass, Christmas dinners etc. The idea is to bring people together; most are in their 20s and 30s, with some in their 40s. It is a good way for them to interact and, thank God, it is still going. We showed them a must-see movie too, 'It's a Wonderful Life.' They don't make movies like this anymore!

"I also took a mission group of friends to work with the 'Missioners of Christ' in Comayagua, Honduras, a lay community who are also my friends and often collaborate with the friars there. This year, another group went to Honduras to work with Fr Augustine, CFR up in the mountain villages. It was a wonderful experience, not without its challenges of course. Such as a snake in the sacristy while I was hearing confession, for example. But the wildlife in tropical climates is part of the fun."

Since moving from London to Derry, to St Columba Friary in Galliagh, on September 18, 2023, Fr Antonio has been spending time getting to know people, some of whom got involved in the Eucharistic Procession he organised on October 28 and are now looking forward to the Effatha Revival Eucharistic Procession on February 3, in preparation for Lent. Some of his friends from Cenacle Charismatic in London, a charismatic group he was involved with during his time there, will also be taking part in the Effatha Eucharistic

Procession.

The Derry Effatha Revival campaign is an extension of two Eucharistic Processions that Fr Antonio organised in London, with friends from Cenacle Charismatic there.

He explained: "When I was in London, two friends and I did a Eucharistic Procession and 40 Days of Eucharistic Adoration during the lockdown and again at the start of the Russia-Ukraine War. We also invited Patrick & Joy Campbell from America to lead a Breakthrough Healing Workshop in London.

"The Derry Eucharistic campaign combines two words: 'Effatha' (also spelled Ephphatha), which means 'Be Opened'. This is what Jesus said to the mute and deaf man in Mark 7:34, and he was opened. The second word is 'Revival,' which – as an Evangelical Christian once told me – means 'God bringing order to His house.' The desire is for Jesus' words of Effatha to bring new life and order into our homes, our families, the Church, the world, and all Creation."

Surprised at being moved to the Derry Friary, where he is in charge of the St Pio House Café, Fr Antonio remarked: "The Lord has His reasons. Even while in London I received the image of Jesus as the Lion of Judah, but as a lion with the Sacred Heart. While here in Derry, this image continues to inspire me and comes up in my preaching. It really speaks to me for men to have hearts like that, and I spoke about this at my first monthly Healing Night here, in St Joseph's Church, back in October.



Lion of Judah.

Chapter 5 in Revelation refers to Jesus, the Lamb of God, as the Lion of Judah – 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed' (Rev 5:5)."

Since arriving in Derry, he has attended the Men's First Saturday Rosary in the City Centre, and the Men's Prayer Group, 'Be Still', based in the Three Patrons Parish. "There are a lot of things happening. I have been meeting a lot of wonderful people – disciples of Jesus. It is an organic growth, notably with the theme of fire" said Fr Antonio, who is keen to see the prophetic word of St Patrick about the light of faith in Ireland come to pass.

Recalling an experience in London in early February 2021, he said: "I was going through some spiritual desolation and asking people for prayers. I asked someone I had just met for a word and she said, 'People are fearful of the future but God is doing new things in the midst of disruptions.' That was helpful for me in my own disruption, and in what we see going on in the world. It is true, God is doing new things. And He is teaching us how to walk on water."

Eucharistic campaign for opening of hearts to God...

Eucharistic campaign for opening of hearts to God...

BUILDING on the success of its Eucharistic and Marian Procession around the streets of Galliagh, in Derry, on October 28 last year, to pray and ask for God's blessing on the land, the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal are organising a similar faith event deeper within the City of Derry.

Recalling that the October procession had been "a joyful

occasion which brought people and groups together", the new member of the CFR community at the St Columba Friary in Galliagh, Fr Antonio Maria Diez de Medina is delighted to have the blessing of Bishop Donal for the follow up event known as an Effatha (Be Opened) Revival, which will run from February into March.

Fr Antonio explained that the

Effatha Revival, a world-wide initiative, was a Eucharistic campaign consisting of two parts: A Eucharistic Procession on Saturday, February 3, in the City; and 40 Days of Eucharistic Adoration from February 8 through to March 18, ending on the Feast of St Joseph, March 19.

The event will start at St Columba's Church, Long Tower, at 1 pm on February 3, from where the Eucharistic Procession will make its way to the City's Guild Hall, and will end with Benediction in St Columba's.

Fr Antonio and his fellow friars will lead the procession, supported by Dom Basil and some of the Benedictine monks from Silverstream Priory, Stamullen, Co Meath. Youth from the Derry and Limerick Franciscan Youth Ministry groups are also expected to take part, as well as many lay people from communities around the island of Ireland.

Encouraging people to sign up for at least one hour during the 40 days of Eucharistic Adoration, with the hope that some will sign up for an hour each week of it, Fr Antonio explained that the aim

was for prayer to be offered up for "hearts to be open to God and to others, reparation and repentance for the world's turning away from God and His Church, the end of human trafficking, abortion and euthanasia, the Spirit of Truth to bring freedom, and priests to be deeply Marian and Eucharistic".

Extending an invitation to all to get involved, Fr Antonio also asks for prayer that "this be, indeed, God's work, for without Him, Our Lord Jesus says, we can do nothing."

The event will be remembered in prayer during the Friars' monthly healing night taking place on Friday, February 2, at 7 pm in St Joseph's Church, Galliagh, which will be hosted by Cenacle London, a Charismatic Catholic Prayer Group for young adults. The Cenacle team will be staying on to offer support during the Eucharistic Procession and the start of the worldwide 40 Days of Adoration.

The Cenacle community in London, which Fr Antonio was involved with during his time ministering with his Franciscan Friars of the Renewal community

there, are the pioneers of the Effatha (Be Opened) movement, and the Derry-based Effatha Revival campaign will be the third session of 40 Days' Eucharistic Adoration. The first was in November 2021, during the Covid pandemic lockdown, and the second was at the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in March

2022, both of which took place out of London.

Further information on the Derry Eucharistic Procession and 40 Days of Adoration can be obtained by emailing effatharevival@gmail.com, and to sign up online for a Holy Hour, from anywhere in the world, visit effatha.live/

Resolving to make Jesus' Mercy available in frightened world a great use of real intelligence - Bishop Donal

In his New Year's Day homily, Bishop Donal focused on the Pope's message to the world for World Day of Peace regarding Artificial Intelligence and Peace - LVII World Day of Peace 2024 - Artificial Intelligence and Peace | Francis (vatican.va), saying...

WITH all the horrible wars going on around the world and the appalling slaughter of unarmed men, women and children, it may seem to be almost a waste of time to celebrate the World Day of Peace.

We seem so incapable of living peaceably with one another. The first World Day of Peace was celebrated in 1967, little more than 20 years after the Second World War ended. Then there was still hope of a more peaceful future. Now, despite much prayer, we seem to have found it much easier - and much more profitable - to make weapons than to make peace.

But Pope Francis is never without hope. In his message for today, he addresses the subject of Artificial Intelligence and Peace. He knows that the human mind

is blessed with great insights and inventiveness. But he is very aware that every technological progress can be used for either good or evil.

We know that nuclear energy can be used to make electricity - and to make horrific weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, we can see from wars in Ukraine, Middle East and elsewhere just how much technology and finance have been invested in creating arms to slaughter people and defend power bases - while health services cry out for crumbs to help people to stay alive.

The most important advances that we can make are not in how we develop technologies but in how we use them for the benefit of all and not just for the profit of a few.

If we start off with a purely earthly vision of who the human person is, scientific advances in the absence of a moral framework or anthropology will always risk being useful for some, but not for human flourishing. If we don't have a rich understanding of human dignity and of what we are capable of becoming through grace, then scientific

developments will instinctively be used to suit the strong.

The information technology revolution has made a few phenomenally rich people with inordinate wealth and influence. That gives them power to shape the world in a way that they think is right. They dominate much of the media to which we are all exposed. They have the power to promote their message as the only sensible values and priorities. It is easy for the strong to believe that what suits them is good for everybody else. Why would they want that situation to change?

Pope Francis insists that "the voices of all stakeholders should be taken into account, including the poor, the powerless and others who often go unheard in global decision-making processes" (para 8).

We could spend a lifetime arguing and getting angry about the rights and wrongs of the horrific things that happened in our Troubles, in Ukraine, and in the current onslaught on Gaza. We can disagree about why people are fighting or why it is morally justified. But people of faith come

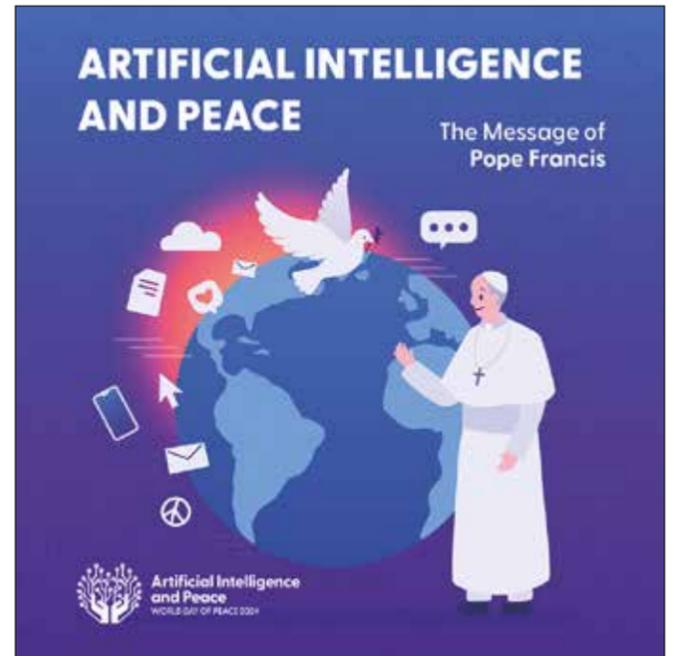
not merely from a secular political perspective, but with a worldview that is formed by what God has revealed in Jesus.

Power

For people of faith, conflict is so often in the service of someone's power. We see that in situations from King Herod wanting to kill Jesus to the blindness of the powerful Pharisees and Sadducees wanting Jesus crucified.

There is huge pressure in every conflict to take sides and to condemn one or other of the parties involved. Christ's followers have always been at their best when they posed difficult questions to the strong, asking not who is fighting but who is benefitting from others fighting. War is always good for somebody. Otherwise, it would not be happening and being funded.

Thus, the message of Pope Francis is clear. We can use scientific progress to build a path to peace, by promoting human dignity and fighting disadvantage. Or we can let it to be used by the strong to make their position more solid, whatever the cost to others.



The task of Christ's followers is to be on the side of those who suffer and peaceful coexistence are threatened whenever human beings yield to the temptation to selfishness, self-interest, the desire for profit and the thirst for power. We thus have a duty to broaden our gaze and to direct techno-

answers. Pope Francis writes: "Freedom and peaceful coexistence are threatened whenever human beings yield to the temptation to selfishness, self-interest, the desire for profit and the thirst for power. We thus have a duty to broaden our gaze and to direct techno-

Cursillo weekends – an encounter that can last a life-time

by Aoife O'Neill

DERRY Cursillo will hold their next weekends on February 22-25 for ladies and February 29-March 3 for men.

Cursillo is a lay movement within the Catholic Church. It was founded in Spain in the early 40s by a group of men concerned about the disinterest and disaffection shown by many people within their Church, and the growing secularisation of society. After much prayer, reflection, deliberation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Cursillo, as a lay movement, was formed.

Cursillo (pronounced Coursee-o) is a Spanish word meaning a 'short course'. It is a short course on the fundamentals of being a Christian, which is delivered through 15 talks presented by lay people, priests and religious. The talks, while dealing with what is fundamental to being a Christian, also examine the fundamental questions of life and the claims made by Jesus and the teachings of His Church. Talks are followed by group discussion led by table leaders.

Cursillo has a practical spirituality which is explained during a 'three-day weekend'. It

hinges around a tripod of piety, study and action.

You can only ever do a Cursillo weekend once in a lifetime. Cursillo is not a retreat but an encounter. During the weekend you will encounter yourself, Christ and others. It is an encounter that can last for the rest of your life.

Any adult aged 21 and over who wants to improve their life, their relationship with God and others, can do a Cursillo weekend. It is very appropriate for those who have become disaffected or distanced from the Church, for those who may feel 'far away' from God, for those who want to make a fresh start spiritually.

Cursillo is often ideal for anyone who would like a way to participate in evangelization. Priests and religious also benefit from the Cursillo experience. Cursillo does not, and cannot, solve your problems, but it has been shown to give people the strength, support and encouragement to do that themselves.

Further information regarding the upcoming weekends can be obtained by contacting Aoife on 028 71 262512 or emailing termonbaccaderry@gmail.com

Deepening your faith through understanding of the Church's Doctrine

15th February

"I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT"

Growing in awareness of the Divine indwelling.

14th March The Angels.
The relationship between the visible and the spirit world.

18th April The Demons.
The reality of Spiritual combat.

16th May Mary.
Eschatological Icon of the Church.

13th June
The role of Authority in the Church.

16th May
The role of the Lay Faithful in the Church.

Venue

Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre, Derry, BT48 9XE

When

One Thursday per month 7:30pm to 8:30pm

QUERIES CONTACT FR CAJETAN
02871262512 OR 07933123633

Monthly Catholic faith talks resume at Termonbacca

THE monthly talks on different elements of the Catholic faith will continue in the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, on Thursday, February 15, from 7.30-8.30 pm.

Fr Cajetan Ikedi Apeh ocd will lead the group. He received his formation in philosophy at the Dominican Institute Ibadan, Nigeria, and then his theology formation at Institut Catholique de Toulouse, France.

As a young priest, Fr Cajetan is very passionate for the faith maturity of Christians, by guiding them through the rich spirituality of the Discalced Carmelite Order and the Doctrines of the Church.

The talks are aimed at leading the participants towards personal development through meditative prayer and convivial discussions

of the Church doctrines.

The planned themes for 2024 are: February 15 - I believe in the Holy Spirit - Growing in the awareness of the Divine Indwelling; March 14 - The Angels - The relationship between the visible and the spiritual world; April 18 - The Demons and the reality of spiritual combat; May 16 - Mary - Eschatological Icon of the Church; June 13 - The role of Authority in the Church; July 18 - The Role of the Lay Faithful in the Church.

These nights are open to everyone aged 18 and above who has an interest in growing more in their personal faith development. Anyone who wishes to know more can speak to Fr Cajetan by calling 028 71 262512 or 07933123633.

Bible Study for ladies seeking deeper understanding of Scripture

LADIES...are you interested in coming to a deeper understanding of scripture? If so, you are invited to join us in Termonbacca, Derry, every Tuesday evening from 8:30-9:30 pm, when Fr Stephen Quinn ocd leads a ladies' Bible Study.

Fr Stephen is currently working through the Gospel of Mark,

which is the Gospel for Mass for this year.

This Bible Study is open to all women who are interested in coming along. There is no need to book, you can simply show up.

For further information contact Termonbacca on 028 71 262512.

Ladies Bible Study

Tuesdays 8.30- 9.30pm

Cursillo

Ladies Weekend
22nd- 25th February 2024

Mens Weekend
29th February- 3rd March 2024

continued from page 22

scientific research towards the pursuit of peace and the common good” (para 2).

Pope Francis also puts out a challenge to education. Do our schools simply train young people to take part in the competition that is often biased in favour of decision makers? Or do we help young people to develop uncomfortable critical thinking about all ideologies and to aim to build peace and not merely to promote personal success? Does the teaching of Christ form our minds as well as our hearts – or does it remain of the level of something for special occasions but of no real significance?

On this island, will our secular political leaders actually ban us from promoting a rich view of the human person and relationships and reduce education to mere content and information? The Christian worldview is not meant to limit our freedoms but to enhance our dignity. But some

want it excluded from schools.

At the beginning of the new year, we often make new year resolutions. We believe in a God who is Emmanuel, with us in Jesus, in the Word made flesh who dwells among us. This Christmas mystery has to inform all of our synodal conversations about discerning God’s way forward. Otherwise, we end up making decisions based on secular agendas rather than on Christ among us, our hope of glory.

This is not a time for Christ’s followers to retreat from the pain of the world, to be frightened away from speaking out. The voice of Jesus is needed as much today as it ever was. Can we make our resolution, not just about our health or our weight but that we will make the mercy of Jesus available in the wilderness of our angry and frightened world. That would be a great use of our real intelligence!

Vocations gathering hopeful start to New Year



BISHOP Donal with a group of Diocesan seminarians and other men currently discerning their vocation, along with members of the Diocesan Vocations team. Included is Oran Gartland, of Holy Family Parish, Derry, who has just begun his propaedeutic year of studies at the Scots’ College in Salamanca, Spain.

The gathering took place in St Mary’s, Creggan, at the beginning of January, and was an opportunity to discuss the ‘Come & See’ experience in Maynooth last November, which

was attended by 37 men from all over the country, including nine from the Diocese of Derry.

There are currently plans for a get-together in February of discerners from the dioceses of Down & Connor, Dromore, Armagh, Clogher, Kilmore, Raphoe, and Derry, as well as an inter-diocesan retreat in March.

The Derry group hope to meet again when our four seminarians are home from Rome, Maynooth, and Salamanca for the Easter holidays. Meanwhile, please keep them in your prayers.

Pope’s monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during January for:

The gift of diversity in the Church:

Let us pray that the Holy Spirit may help us to recognise the gift of different charisms within the Christian community and to discover the richness of different traditions and rituals in the Catholic Church.

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 to 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.

At the Long Tower Novena for Vocations before Christmas, Aoife O’Neill spoke about...

Nurturing the seeds of Vocation

I grew up in a family of seven children and was raised Catholic by my parents, however, once I entered late teens and early 20s, I fell away from the practice of my faith. It was around this time 17 years ago that I found myself in crisis, when my mammy had been diagnosed with cancer and I was in an unexpected pregnancy.

As a family we were all praying hard for mammy, and I did the novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help with her and daddy that year. It was held on Monday nights in Galliagh. After having been away from Mass and all things faith related for a while, I must say those nights were amazing. With the old hymns and prayers and the ‘Tantum Ergo’ being sung, I felt like I had come back home. Each week I was dusting off my memories and being led by Our Lady back to the Father.

Fast forward from that and, thankfully, since then I have stayed on the journey of faith. The seeds of faith that had been planted in me by mammy and daddy began to grow. After mammy died, I did a Cursillo weekend, where I met a lot of great people who helped and supported me in growing in my faith. Then, in 2012, I went on pilgrimage to Medjugorje. I had a lovely week; nothing spectacular, just full of peace and prayer. On the bus returning to the airport to go home the young guide who had spent the week with began talking about her recent visit to Ireland and her shock at the state of the faith in what had once been the land of Saints and Scholars. As she shared her experience, looking at her face it was like I got a glimpse of the Lord’s pain and hurt. As she spoke something stirred in me. I knew then that if there was anything I could do to help the Lord, then I was all in. Since then, I have been trying my lousy best to grow in my own faith and to help others too. Thank God, He is the great multiplier - He can

take our little bit and make great things.

So, in the last few years, I have been blessed to have been actively involved with faith development through Cursillo and also employed in faith development, working first for the Derry Diocese as a youth minister and I then moved on, and for over two years I have worked for the Carmelites in Termonbacca. It really is a dream job. Through my job, I have the opportunity to do my small part in helping to nurture seeds of vocation.

As part of my job, I work alongside a small group of young people in our youth group, Anam Og. Anam Og means young soul, and the work we do is mainly to help nurture the souls of these young people.

In 2017, during a visit to Bangladesh, Pope Francis gave a speech about religions vocations. He said that each vocation is like a “little seed” that comes from God, but we have to watch over it, “water it”. We must tend to it with human tenderness, prayer, and discernment, to know if it is growing well, being attentive to the environment of the future consecrated soul.

Anam Og

With the young people who come along to Anam Og, this is what we try to do. We don’t have any flashy programme or major funding, but we simply share our Catholic faith with the young people. We gather on the first and third Sunday each month and explore matters of the Catholic faith through fun, games, friendship and prayer. I love every second of it! In these young people, I have the privilege of walking alongside them, getting to know them and watch as they discover the plan that God has for their lives.

Every single Christian has a vocation, and the job of nurturing and supporting people as they



Aoife O'Neill, Termonbacca Retreat Facilitator and Youth Minister, with Fr Gerard Mongan at the Long Tower Novena

discover that does not fall to a chosen few, but to us all. It isn’t only for the priests, or those involved in ministry. We are all members of the one body and every single one of us has a role to play in helping that body to build and flourish.

We can all get involved. We often hear talk about the vocations’ crisis in the Church, but our Church does not have a vocations’ crisis, it has a faith crisis. As a Church, we do not have enough people living a life of true faith in Jesus Christ. Many people reach young adulthood without ever exploring or coming to understand faith, or having any serious thought about what God might want from them in their life.

One of the main ways that we can all help nurture seeds of vocation comes through the Universal call to Holiness. We are

all, without exception, called to be Saints. Taking that call seriously, and giving it a focus in your life, will produce more fruit than we could ever imagine.

We should never underestimate the power of example; people watch you, how you live your life, how you live your faith, and they are affected by that. Young people are so clued in, and they can spot authenticity a mile off. Growing in your own faith and being unafraid to share it with others is one of the best gifts you can offer to the world. Every single day we have numerous opportunities to inspire others to live their faith more fully.

Prayer is another thing we can all get involved with. Pray for an increase in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life. Jesus says in Matthew 9:38 “to beg the master of the harvest to send labourers into the vineyard.” If

Remember in prayer during January:

- Fr Alex Anderson (Jan 1st)
- Fr Patrick Arkinson (2nd)
- Fr Patrick Baker (3rd)
- Fr Declan Boland (4th)
- Fr Eugene Boland (5th)
- Fr Francis Bradley (6th)
- Fr Manus Bradley (7th)
- All Priests (8th)
- Fr Brian Brady (9th)
- All Priests (10th)
- Fr Thomas Canning (11th)
- Fr Michael Canny (12th)
- All Priests (13th)
- All Priests (14th)
- Fr James Devine (15th)
- Fr Colum Clerkin (16th)
- Fr Roland Colhoun (17th)
- Fr Michael Collins (18th)
- Fr Oliver Crilly (19th)



- Fr Patrick Crilly (20th)
- Fr Brendan Crowley (21st)
- All Priests (22nd)
- All Priests (23rd)
- All Priests (24th)
- All Priests (25th)
- All priests (26th)
- Fr Peter Devlin (27th)
- Fr Fintan Diggin (28th)
- Fr Brendan Doherty (29th)
- Fr Shaun Doherty (30th)
- All priests (31st)

Diocesan Adoration Apostolate continues Eucharistic mission

AS another year of promoting Eucharistic Adoration in parishes throughout the Diocese gets underway, the chair of the Diocesan Eucharistic Adoration Apostolate, Gwen Lagan shares the Committee's hopes for 2024...

WE hope that 2024 will bring many blessings to us all. One of the many blessings available to us is Eucharistic Adoration, when we all have an opportunity to sit and talk to the Lord in our own space.

As a member of the Derry Diocesan Eucharistic Adoration Committee, I have the wonderful pleasure, along with many others, to sit and enjoy the peace of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament in Termonbacca every month.

This is very special to us, and I know many share this prayerful experience. Never be afraid to talk to God and ask Him to help you with your needs.

One of the greatest concerns in our Church at present is the need to pray continually for the Lord to send labourers to His Harvest, and to ensure for the future that the Church will have shepherds to lead and serve God's people.

I hope, in 2024, that we can bring this very special experience to many more parishes in the Diocese of Derry, and leave them with the exceptional gift of Adoration.

As well as continuing with setting up Eucharistic Adoration in more parishes, we will be responding to requests for renewal in some of the parishes where it has already been established.

continued from page 23

we want more priests, sisters and brothers, we all need to ask. It is good to remember we are not asking God to call more people; He isn't slacking on His part. We are asking for hearts to be open to hear that call. So, in order for that to happen, we must teach young people how to pray.

Pray

Pope Benedict XVI said that unless we teach our youth how to pray, they will never hear God calling them into a deeper relationship with Him and into the discipleship of the Church.

That is what we try to do through Anam Og. Life today is so full on, busy, full of noise and distraction, and there is little opportunity for us to be still and make space for God to speak. We try to do this at Anam Og and the young people love it. Faith is not boring to them, that's a misperception, most young people who are given the proper understanding of prayer and faith actually enjoy it.

With the young people at Anam Og, we are able to go to Mass, sit in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament, do Lectio Divina using scriptures, have them write their own prayers and share their prayer intentions with one

Appointed by Bishop Donal as the spiritual director for the Apostolate, Fr Gerard Mongan, Adm Long Tower, looks on the role as an honour.

"The Apostolate of Eucharistic Adoration is an Association of Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, embracing God's call to weekly Eucharistic Adoration," he said, "striving to be a people of prayer, vision and mission, and accepting the challenge to live the Good News of Jesus Christ."

He added: "What is really important is that this Apostolate is organised, maintained and developed by lay people. I understand that the mission of the Apostolate is to assist parishes in the Diocese to establish, maintain and develop viable weekly Eucharistic Adoration for the upbuilding and renewal of parish life.

"We are very blessed in our Diocese that Eucharistic Adoration is an integral part of the liturgical life in the majority of our parishes. In addition, a growing number of schools have members of the Apostolate lead the children in Eucharistic prayer time as part of their faith and prayer development. The children and their teachers love it!

"From the short time that I've been with the Apostolate, I can see that the vision is being realised already: a nucleus of people, in every parish of the Diocese, formed by sitting at the feet of Jesus Christ, truly present in the Blessed Sacrament."

another. They pray Stations of the Cross, May crownings, and have all been enrolled in the brown scapular. And I haven't heard one of them complain yet. You will all have young people in your lives I am sure - children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, friends' children and neighbours - teach them and encourage them to pray. Walking or driving in the car in the mornings, saying the Angel of God prayer. Take small simple steps to help put prayer into their lives daily.

During our latest summer scheme, some ladies from the Iconographers of Ireland came and gave a session on reading icons. During that, they showed an Icon of the Ulma family who had been martyred for their faith. That evening I got a phone call from one mother who told me that she had passed the room where her seven-year-old son was playing Xbox with his wee friend. She found them with the game paused, while the young boy told his friend the story of this family who "loved God so much that they died for Him". An example of young people sharing what they hear, it is just amazing.

There was an old BT ad years ago that said "It's good to talk", and that's another thing we can

St John Vianney's thoughts on Eucharistic Adoration

THE Apostolate of Eucharistic Adoration takes inspiration from the life and words of St John Vianney, the Patron Saint of Priests who is often referred to as the Curé d'Ars (the parish priest of Ars).

The French priest was known for spending long hours in Prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. Here are some of his quotes about the importance of Eucharistic Adoration in our lives:

"Our Lord is hidden there in the Blessed Sacrament, waiting for us to come and visit Him, and make our requests to Him."

"When Our Lord sees pure souls coming to visit Him in the Blessed Sacrament He smiles on them. They come with the simplicity that pleases Him so much."

"When we are before the Blessed Sacrament, instead of looking about us, let us shut our eyes and open our hearts; and the good God will open His. We will go to Him, and He will come to us, the one to give, and the other to receive. It will be like a breath passing from one to the other. What delight we find in forgetting ourselves that we may seek God."

"What happiness do we not feel in the presence of God, when we

find ourselves alone at His feet (in Adoration)!...We should want to stay always at His feet; it would be a foretaste of Heaven; everything else would become insipid to us."

"If we really love the good God, we should make it our joy and happiness to come a few minutes to adore Him, and ask Him for the grace of forgiveness. We should regard those moments as the happiest in our lives."

"When we speak to Jesus during our adoration of the Blessed Sacrament with simplicity and with all our heart, He does like a mother who holds her child's head with her hands and covers it with kisses and caresses."

"Have a Holy Hour every week. Start praying. Pray for guidance and trust in God."

"When you awake in the night, transport yourself quickly in spirit before the Tabernacle, saying: 'Behold, my God, I come to adore You, to praise, thank, and love you, and to keep you company with all the Angels.'"

"How sweet and full of comfort are the moments spent before the Blessed Sacrament! Are you in trouble? Come and throw yourself at his feet."

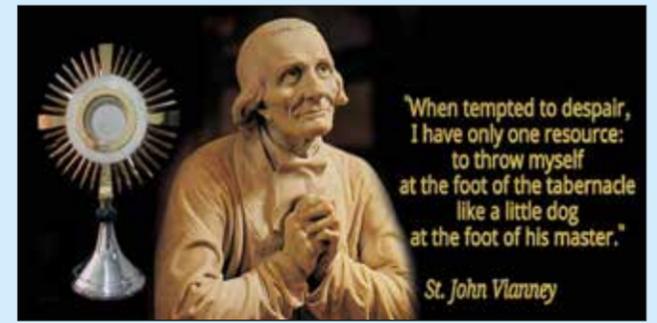
"You will always find a friend in Jesus in the Holy Eucharist to console you in your moment of need. He will never fail to help you."

"How pleasing to Him is the short quarter of an hour that we steal from our occupations, from something of no use, to come and pray to Him, to visit Him, to console Him for all the outrages He receives!"

"Grieve over the contempt cast upon Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and try to make amends for it by a greater and more ardent love."

"He wishes to see us near Him, to tell us that He loves us, and wishes to load us with good things."

"When tempted to despair, I have only one resource: to throw myself at the foot of the Tabernacle like a little dog at the foot of his



master."

"Every good Christian must be grieved at the contempt which is so often shown Him (Christ), and must strive to make reparation to Him; and those Christians who have the good fortune of belonging to societies having for their object the adoration of Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist, they are in an especial manner bound to do this. I say those 'who have the good fortune,' for can there be a greater happiness than to undertake reparation to Jesus Christ for the insults which are offered to Him in the Sacrament of His love?"

"We ought to visit Him often... When He sees pure souls hurrying to Him, He smiles at them."

"We know that Jesus is there in the tabernacle: let us open our hearts to Him, let us rejoice in His Sacred Presence. That is the best prayer."

do to nurture seeds of vocation - talk about it! Vocations must be talked about regularly if a 'vocation culture' is to take root in parishes and homes. This means, first and foremost, that people need to hear about vocations from priests through homilies, prayers of the faithful, and discussions in the classroom, and around the dinner table at home. Vocations kept out of sight are out of mind.

Exposure to religious life and vocations is important if we are to inspire young people. It is hard for them to feel called to something unknown. Talk to them about priesthood, religious life, etc, showing them what the call to priesthood means - a call to be a spiritual father to the whole family of faith. Similarly, the consecrated life for a young woman is a call to be united to Christ in a unique way, and to be a spiritual mother to those she encounters in her life and service.

Hope

We had the privilege of sharing a family day out with some members of the Anam Og group and their families. We went to Downpatrick, where they learned all about St Patrick and how he, as a young man followed the call of God and converted Ireland. We visited his grave and the first Church at Saul. We then went to the Benedictines at Holy Cross Abbey, Rostrevor, and joined the community as they sang the Divine Office. The children then were able to have some time with

Brother Thierry, learning more about the life of a Benedictine and prayer. And finally, we were really blessed to be in attendance at the first profession of vows of Sr Muire Banrion na hEireann into the Servant Sisters of the Lord and the Virgin of Matara. That was something special to be present to see a young girl dedicate herself in spousal love to Jesus Christ, to take on a life of prayer, that has no pedestal or earthly glory - that is a sign of life and hope in our Church. For young people and families to have exposure to these things, life in other parishes, life in religious communities, to see the very often hidden life of the Church, is so important.

Finally, what we try to instil in the young people is that our faith, the Gospel, is Good News! Following Christ should be joyful. Pope Francis in a homily said, "Sometimes these melancholic Christians' faces have more in common with pickled peppers than the joy of having a beautiful life." Joy should be the hallmark of a Christian's life, a reflection of knowing that one is loved by God, saved by Jesus Christ and committed to leading others to Him.

Pope Francis asked how we communicate the joy of being loved and saved. One of the main things to spend time on with the young people is trying to teach them about their identity and belovedness as a child of God. In a world that teaches us that our

identity lies in the way we look, the things we do and the things we own, it is vital that we constantly remind one another that our identity comes from God and nothing can change how He loves us. When we can really grasp that, joy will come naturally. Working on rooting out lies we carry about our own true identity and replacing it with the truth that 'I am a beloved daughter of God' will, naturally, bring joy.

The challenge is for us all - laypeople, priests and religious - to be joyful models of our vocations. As St Teresa of Avila said: "Lord, save us from gloomy saints."

We all have a choice in life, we can be like a human weed choking the life out of all those around us through despair and negativity, or we can be like fertilizer helping bring life and growth through our words and our actions. When you talk about your faith you bring about faith. God can use the good in your life to cultivate spiritual growth in somebody else's. So, get busy talking - go share Christ with others.

Vocation

What is a vocation? What can that be? Surely it's not something that's meant for me? It sounds like a thing that would be hard to do, Not for us all, but for a chosen few.

Sorry you're wrong, at Anam Og I found out that it's not brains or ability that vocation's about.

It is what you were made for, what God calls you to, It's more about who you are, than the things that you do.

It's the way that God calls you to serve others in life, It could be through priesthood, or becoming a wife.

You can spend your life single, dedicated to God, you might go out on mission, helping people abroad

Christ has no body on earth now but ours, And He doesn't have access to schools or to bars.

But through us He can reach every single lost sheep, With Christ in our hearts there's a harvest to reap.

God does not leave us orphaned; He gives all that we need, He protects and sustains us and makes sure we succeed.

Now the main thing in life, is that we're all called to love, We're all made to be Saints and to join Him above.

(Aoife works as a youth minister and retreat facilitator in Termonbacca, and co-wrote this poem with some members of Anam Og)

The Divine Mercy Image explained... The Blessing

by Sr Benedetta Hutnikiewicz ZSJM

“O Eternal Love, You command Your Sacred Image to be painted And reveal to us the inconceivable fount of mercy, You bless whoever approaches Your rays, And a soul all black will turn into snow.” (Diary, 1)

WE are going to look at the blessing in the Divine Mercy Image. As you can see from the quote above, the very first paragraph of the Diary mentions that blessing. For St Faustina, it was a great source of grace. And it is that also for us, and may become increasingly more so.

Our God is one who constantly blesses us. We can see that beautifully in the Image of Merciful Jesus, where the Saviour has His hand raised in blessing. The image is not so much a moment frozen in time, it actually expresses the constancy of God's will for each of us. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Our God is good! He wishes only what is best for you, for your salvation. Why? Because He can't wait to spend the rest of Eternity with you! Because He loves you so much! However, this does not mean that we will never have a bad moment in our lives. We certainly will, as all human beings do. But knowing that His plans for us are full of good, not evil, we will trust in Him and lean on

Him when things get tough. We will learn through experience that great truth expressed so well by St. Paul: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (Romans 8:28).

God's blessing is present all throughout Scripture. It is there at the very start of human history and extends to all generations: “And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’” (Genesis 1:28).

In His Son, we have received every blessing. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 1:3).

St Faustina saw the Lord blessing her on many occasions. But one seems to stand out to me. She writes: “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).

God the Father blesses us through Jesus and because of Jesus. Remind yourself of every blessing you have received (if you

can!): it comes from the Father's heart!

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). The grace of God's blessing enables us to do good works. We are unable to do what is good on our own; it is His blessing that makes us respond with goodness, generosity, sincerity, forgiveness and so on.

God speaks words of truth about us and over us. His words are full of goodness. “To bless” in Latin is ‘benedicere’. ‘Bene’ (good) plus ‘dicere’ (speak) means to speak well. The enemy is the accuser; he always tries to find our weak points and bring them to light. But God is totally different. God sees into the very depths of our being and sees what is good in us. He draws it out to show it both to ourselves and to those around us.

Good

John Paul II in his encyclical about Divine Mercy wrote: “Mercy is manifested in its true and proper aspect when it restores to value, promotes and draws good from all the forms of evil existing in the world and in man.” (Dives in misericordia 6)

The Lord transforms our hearts so that we too can speak words full of truth and kindness. “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of

his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). His grace makes us capable of blessing even those who hurt or wrong us! “But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you” (Luke 6:27-28). Without heavenly grace, these words of Jesus would have been impossible to fulfil.

A great example of this to me has always been Fr Christian de Chergé, a monk martyred in Algeria and beatified in the recent years. His testament, published after his death, gives testimony to a love that surpasses our human understanding. I sincerely encourage you to find it online and read it in its entirety. I will only quote a few sentences here...

“If it should happen one day – and it could be today – that I become a victim of the terrorism which now seems ready to engulf all the foreigners living in Algeria, I would like my community, my Church and my family to remember that my life was given to God and to this country. (...) I should like, when the time comes, to have a moment of spiritual clarity which would allow me to beg forgiveness of God and of my fellow human beings, and at the same time forgive with all my heart the one who would strike me down. (...) For this life lost, totally mine and totally theirs, I thank God, who seems to have

willed it entirely for the sake of that joy in everything and in spite of everything. In this thank you, which is said for everything in my life from now on, I certainly include you, friends of yesterday and today, and you, my friends of this place, along with my mother and father, my sisters and brothers and their families, You are the hundredfold granted as was promised! And also you, my last-minute friend, who will not have known what you were doing: Yes, I want this thank you and this goodbye to be a “God-bless” for you, too, because in God's face I see yours. May we meet again as happy thieves in Paradise, if it please God, the Father of us both.”

In God's Mercy, each of us can experience His blessing. We can experience His presence with us in times of trial. We can appreciate moments of joy, grace, friendship, beauty. We can experience the spiritual blessings coming to us in the Sacraments, in Scripture, in prayer and in so many other ways (God's grace is so creative!) We can, like Bl. Christian, be able to bless even those who take our life. We can forgive everyday wrongs and offences. We can speak well of those who speak badly of us.

In this New Year, which has just begun, I pray for you that the beautiful blessing from the Scripture may be fulfilled in your life:

“The LORD bless you and keep you;

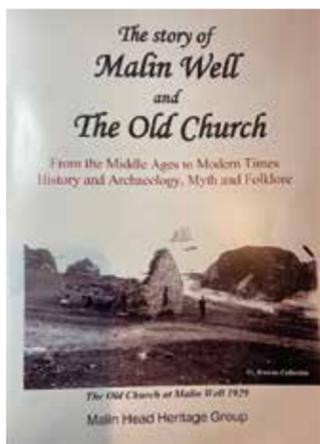


the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” (Numbers 6:24-26)

(Sr Benedetta is of the Sisters of Mercy, and was based in Letterkenny until the start of the New Year. She is currently in Poland, preparing to move to Canada.)

Malin Well and the Old Church by Dr Seán Beattie



VISITORS to Malin Head generally travel to Banba's Crown, to enjoy the spectacular views, with Inishtrahull island six miles distant and Tory visible on a clear day. Lloyd's Tower can be seen for miles around, as the visitor heads towards the Head.

A number of lesser-known historic sites lie eastward of the Tower, in the townland of Ballygorman, at a place along the shoreline known as Malin Well. The most important of these is the old church ruin, sometimes called O'Gorman's Church, probably after a local family who lived in the area. The name Gormán can be traced back to the twelfth

century. The church sits just above the high tide mark, overlooking a pebble beach with two giant rocks, known as the Old Man and the Old Woman, standing solemnly by as guardians.

This was once a busy port before Malin Head pier was built. No definite date or century can be ascribed to the church, but it belongs to the late medieval period, roughly between 1300 and 1550. Few churches in Ireland from this era have survived, as many were wooden structures.

Inside the Church

Once inside, the remaining walls look like a one-roomed dwelling, with what appears to be the remains of an altar to the east. Some pebbles lie on the altar, similar to those deposited by pilgrims on a journey of faith in former times. A large carved head was also part of the stone structure, but it has been removed to the National Museum in Dublin for safe keeping. It has been suggested that a replica should be put back in its place.

Currently, the old church is being looked after by the Malin Head Heritage Group, which has published a book on the history of the church and its surroundings.

The Group is currently engaged in the conservation of the building and in the maintenance of the surrounding area.

The grassy ground outside the structure may have graves buried underneath but, as no archaeological work has been carried out, this remains speculation. Traditionally, bodies recovered from the sea were interred at religious sites like Malin Well. Unbaptised babies were also buried here, as they were excluded from consecrated graveyards under Church control.

The Wee House at Malin

The small cave opposite the church is known as ‘The Wee House of Malin’ and may have been used by a medieval hermit. One of the prime monasteries was at Cloncha, outside Culdaff, which has a famous High Cross. It is possible that monks from Cloncha may have stayed here as a form of penance, which was part of the monastic rule, and where monks could pray as they removed themselves from the world. The whole area is rich in folklore and it is said that the “Wee House” could hold all who tried to enter it.

Malin Well Fair

Malin Well was an important place for our forefathers. They gathered here on August 15, the Feast of the Assumption. Throughout Europe, seafarers have had a special devotion to the Blessed Virgin.

In earlier centuries, a famous Fair was held here. There was also a ‘turas’, or pilgrimage, to the Well. As a port, known as Malin Well Port, it was ideally placed to host an annual regatta, when local fishermen pitted their skills against the highly experienced fishermen of Inishtrahull island. Bands were frequently in attendance, so there was an air of celebration and entertainment.

There were sad times, too, at Malin Well, especially in the month of October 1870, when the ‘Cambria’ ran aground off Inishtrahull Island with loss of life. Barrels of flour and clothing belonging to passengers were washed ashore at points between Malin Well and Malin Head.

The Well was supposed to have been blessed by St Muirdealach. Pilgrims who came here were in search of cures and they believed the Well had curative powers. However, there is also speculation among historians that Malin

Well may have been a place of worship in pre-Christian times, when Druids were active in the peninsula. Sea bathing was also an attraction at the site as the waters are warmer in the summer season.

Visitors may locate the Well of St Muirdealach, whose name is also linked to the church, only at low tide. It is covered by the waters of the Atlantic at high tide. The dates of festivals and pilgrimages at Malin Well have varied over the centuries, but since 2001, the annual ‘turas’ takes place on the first Sunday in May and draws large crowds.

St Muirdealach

The saint associated with the well and the church is St Muirdealach. Little is known about his life but his reputation as a man of faith has survived through the centuries. Historians have no record of his birth but it is believed that he was prominent because of his piety in the Early Christian Church.

The Inishowen peninsula has a large number of saints in its history. A distinguished former Diocesan historian and Parish Priest of Culdaff, Fr Walter Hegarty, (1885-1950) listed 24 saints who are associated with this area and Muirdealach is one

of the prominent names. Because of the proximity of the sea, it has been suggested that Muirdealach was a missionary at one time.

The Future

The work of a small number of volunteers in the Malin Head Heritage Group has attracted attention to this important religious site in recent times. Their efforts at fund-raising have been successful and enabled reports to be carried out and conservation work to be undertaken by qualified professionals. Preservation of the church ruin, the cave and surroundings are currently a major focus.

For more information on the site, the Group has published a 64-page booklet, ‘The Story of Malin Well and the Old Church’, which is available in local shops, including Mullin's shop at Bree, Malin Head. The editor, Billy Kelly, formerly of Magee College, Derry, has published research by Brian Lacey and myself, together with folklore collected from local people, conservation assessments, and newspaper reports on the site over the years.

Malin Well has a unique place in the history of the Diocese of Derry and the Early Christian period in the North West.

In praise...of PRAISING! *by Fr John McLaughlin ssc*

DURING Easter week, as I settled in a new parish in the Eastern Zone of Santiago, Chile, I got a 'phone call from the parish that I had just left. There was a funeral in one of the chapels of a person who had been a friend of mine. The Community wanted me to go over and lead the funeral in the Chapel of Cristo Resucitado, in the Parish of San Luis in the Northern Zone of the Diocese. I can remember well thinking of the Gospel on the drive over, being the Wednesday of Easter Week and the Journey to Emmaus, of the two disciples and where it would all open up for them.

Sra Bertha Lagos had, indeed, been my friend in that chapel, and we were often seen together in deep and sometimes humorous conversation. Small and solid, she had been a faithful member of the Seniors' Club which met on Tuesday afternoons, often with a strong prayer context. Not overly charismatic, the group held up all society to the Lord in their prayers, songs and testimonies.

With one of the catechists, I often made it my business to assist in the mid-afternoon, as it radiated hope and joy and openness to the world and to the Country, in controversial Pinochet times. In perhaps all of those celebrations, there was a moment where Bertha arose to share her doubts or testimony of life, making a stir in the group as they listened to the self-demeaning but florid humorous narratives. Bertha had the reputation in the locality of having the gift of healing and, on a given evening, people would be arriving at her house asking her to accompany them to the house of a sick or embattled person. She would, of course, go with them. But she had to consult her group on Tuesday if she had done right and, maybe, there might be a little of self-promotion in the mission, as she confessed. So, my presence made the story and the testimony even more vivid and always carried a touch of humour and self-deprecation.

Bertha never missed the Mass in the chapel, nor the celebrations of a common meal (convivencia), and the dancing of the 'cumbia' or the 'cueca' at the time of the National Holiday in September, when generally I would be her first dance partner and the Community would applaud loudly. She was the first to arrive for these celebrations and one of the last to leave. She was, in a way, the mascot, the 'regalona' of the chapel.

For the funeral Mass, there was a full attendance, and I had no doubt of how privileged I was during that celebration and the later journey to the cemetery.

Praise and joy and humour seem to have been often key elements in much of my pastoral life in Chile and in whatever

pastoral settings. It was always good to be able to slag, or tomar el pelo, and make sure it was a two-way process; that meant giving a lead and getting in early with the chiste, or the cumplido, or the talla, as I came to get into the real life of the people and find myself the butt of the joke over a mispronunciation, or just putting my foot in it. Friendships opened up that way and barriers came down!

When it often came down to acknowledge the service, or the donation, to the community, a light and acceptable way of Praise was within reach in the modismo chiste, tall, etc. "El padre conoce mi nombre, the priest knows my name, some could be heard whispering as I entered a group and the praise or compliment went down easily.

One of the early surprises that I put to myself when working with groups of poor people was to hear the phrase, "God be praised," and "His holy will be done." I wondered where that lack of self-pity or bitterness and generosity of spirit came from in a society where so many seemed to have abundance, as the Tele showed them nightly. I came to regard it as a grace to be taken and lived in my own life, and in difficult moments knew where to go to share a sorrow or a personal sickness or family loss, of which there were a number in all of those years.

Ecumenical

In the pastoral year of the Diocese of Santiago, I came to appreciate, and on occasion attend, the 'Solemn Ecumenical Te Deum in the Cathedral on the occasion of the National Holiday, September 18-19. The Government with Legal, Defence Forces and leading members of the State would be accompanied by the Church and religious leaders of all denominations, and the occasion was open to members of the public. In the times of Pinochet and the Dictatorship, and in other calmer years, the Discourse of the Archbishop or Cardinal of Santiago as well - awaited for its content and comment on the state of the Nation and its people.

I remember on one occasion in the company of some catechist friends, who were active in the prison ministry and who felt overlooked in these discourses, the reaction provoked when the Archbishop, Carlos Oviedo, who was a member of the Mercedarians and with their history of prison ministry, spoke of his own monthly visit to one or some of the prisons. He was making a gentle criticism of the conditions and care given to the prisoners. This was something that Pope Francis did and commented on during his visit to the Women's prison, and the gentle but firm words of the well-appreciated Nun: "This is where

the Poor end up, Holy Father!"

The Te Deum is, of course, the supreme liturgical prayer of Praise of the Church in the Divine Office, or Prayer of the Church; as many, many lay people are now coming to know and treasure, in finding their personal and communal prayer enriched by this former Breviary, heretofore seen as reserved only to priests and nuns.

In one of the accompanying pictures, I have put Jaime Cisternas standing and praising 'The Virgen' at a 'Month of Mary' celebration in November. Jaime is the recent widower of Helga and the pair were the inspirational founder persons of the chapel of 'Virgen Peregrina', during which she had to face many battles with cancer and a heart condition. However, that did not prevent her total involvement as Catechist and leader of the chapel council and another group of families, who met weekly to share Gospel themes; many of them from Padre Manuel Arroyo, who died later on in ministry in Cuba.

Helga was never one for recrimination and brought her group along, giving witness to their lives and ailments, without ever mentioning any of her own. Jaime was the catechist dedicated to preparing families for the Baptism of their child, and still is. On so many occasions, I heard the same words of Praise and Thanks from Helga as she refused to get tangled in the precarious condition of her own health or the gossip (pelambre) around the two chapels and their members.

She died shortly after going in to a coma during Mass in that Capilla of the Virgen Peregrina, and the whole Comunidad turned out for the 'Velorio' and the funeral Service, paying tribute to her wise and generous leadership.

There is a favourite phrase of my own, which people often used largely in praise and gratitude for their lives, 'Lo comido y lo bailado' - what we have been given to live and celebrate no one can take away from us. For me, it is the ultimate form of Praising the Lord for the time and the gifts and the friendships of my life!

Sometimes, of course, it is from a male friend that the same sentiment springs forth. I can recall during some of my dialogue homilies in the chapel of Enrique Alvear (a much remembered Chilean Bishop, not canonized... yet). When the usual people had made their comments on the Gospel themes, Belarmino would lift himself out of his seat in the back of the chapel. As with the others, I had learned to await and appreciate his 'take' on the theme of the day. A recovered alcoholic, Belarmino was very present in the community AA group on an almost nightly basis, and he had a deep and self-deprecatory sense of humour that would



come out in those commentaries, which always ended with a word of Praise and thanks for his own redemption from the addiction.

Away back in my days in Arklow Parish, one of the great friends of the priests and my own priesthood, was a man called Paddy Lynch. Neither a smoker nor a drinker, Paddy was a central part of the community, as entertainer in the Marion Arts group and then in steering the Entertainment Centre for many years. He knew the young people who would have their little tittle before and after the dances of the well-known bands of the time, many of whose parents had no notion of their imbibing, and he knew all the Dance Bands and leaders of the time, the politicians and the solicitors.

Rosary

Paddy was seen in the Chapel on his own with Rosary in hands almost on a daily basis, and I often walked the streets at night with him during a shared Rosary while May, his beloved wife, prepared a supper for the three of us. He never missed the local Court hearings and described to me later, in graphic form, those up for whatever misdemeanour, with the representations made on their behalf by the local solicitors.

In all of these occasions, there was humour and a gentle praise, while the narrative never lost colour. His interventions and songs with pianist, Gerry Fennell, were the highlight of the dinner of the Chamber of Commerce, with humour and poked fun overriding the eccentricities of the gathering, which often included a Government Minister invited for the occasion! In those days, the humour was never malicious nor mordant, and people knew they would be well treated, no matter what might be said or sung or recited.

A huge part of my early life

in parishes turned out to be the growth of the Charismatic Renewal, where we all learned, perhaps for the first time, what Praise in community could mean. Those early moments in Eustace Street, in Dublin, were more than eye-opening for many thousands of people, and standing to praise and worship no longer provoked embarrassment, but rather a deep sense of liberation. Spurred on by the interest of many younger people in the parish of Marino, in Dublin, I was moved to open my house on a Sunday night, where people were free to join and help prepare the prayer meetings of Thursday night. It was often a moment of liberation for me and, indeed, for all, as barriers were taken down and the Word of God could be commented on by people and priest as equals. People grew into a love of the Scripture; and just a couple of weeks ago, after 45 years, a person of that time wrote me a three-page letter of thanks for the gift of being invited to read the Lesson at Mass, and the many blessings it had brought to that life. That was a rare gift for a priest who has just been celebrating 60 years of ministry!

When I heard one of the invitees at the recent showing of RTE on Priests and Nuns and Katy Hannon, remark on the Mass that "she does not get much out of it", I could not but wonder how much she might be 'putting in, and whether a little thought on Praise during the celebration might not bring about a change in her mind-set. Even taking on the Acclamations at the various moments of the Eucharist, and the Gloria, would lift most people out of their self-absorption or personal cocoon! The Alleluia at the Gospel, the Sanctus, the 'Great Amen' and the Lamb of God are moments of grace and liberation for many Mass-goers.

I feel that many people today,

and led by Laudato Si, have taken up the practice of Praise, as they regard, perhaps for the first time, the great gift of Nature and Climate in which we enjoy our physical and, hopefully, our spiritual life. Personally, I have read the whole or parts of the document of Pope Francis on many occasions and, recently, I got myself into a couple of 'Webinars' with much younger and convinced women and men. Age does not matter there and they have, indeed, been rejuvenating! Praise is of the essence when entering the vast new dome of the Universe that surrounds and challenges us, as never before...since St Francis maybe!

As I was writing this and later in the evening, I had prepared the Litany of Loreto, with a view to rescuing, with the Legion, a long-forgotten prayer that often accompanied our family Rosary and, of course May and October Devotions, in the chapels around the country. It would be news to very many, and perhaps of interest to some, that Pope Francis proposed the addition of some invocations in recent years to that same prayer - Mother of Mercy, Mother of Hope, Solace of Migrants being the ones that I had noted at the time of reading the Decree.

My own Morning Prayer is often preceded by a walk in the garden and repeating, still largely in Spanish, the praise of Nature (Sun, Moon, plants... animals, day and night, earth and sky, birds of the air and domestic pets...) in Daniel Chapter 3, which is often a way of lifting the lethargy etc of the earlier part of the day...and as an act of homage to God who is still the God of Providence, and not of our own composition and convenience.

In the business of Pastoral Planning, and my long years of apprenticeship there, I learned

Continued from p26

many things just in the doing of it. I found it was never a waste of time, but rather a waste of opportunity, to not write into the Agenda the Revision of the activities of the month. As well as having people once more appreciate the gifts and talents of each of the pastoral agents, it gave me an opportunity, not only to say Thanks, but also to Praise the zeal and the courage behind the projects; be they retreats, workshops, visitation, capacitation in courses at local or deanery levels, initiatives in the liturgical preparation, a celebration or fundraising occasion, and many other activities. It was never just a formality, and peoples' sacrifices at the service of the community merited at least a word of praise

and recognition from the priest assessor!

Finally, in recognition of many moments in my own prayer life when the Magnificat, the Benedictus, the Nunc Dimittis, the Te Deum helped lift up my heart to the Lord. I recall an occasion in Nazareth, in the Basilica of the Annunciation well on in the night. I had decided to stay over in the town on my own, and popped over to say Vespers in the upper chapel there. Then, from the crypt below, I became aware of a lone voice chanting in German, what I immediately grasped to be the Magnificat. For me it was a gift and an uplifting of my spirit and my whole life, I thanked and praised God and Mary for a moment that will never leave me!

Work and pray for unity Christ prayed for at Last Supper

- Bishop Donal

THE Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is marked in various locations throughout the Diocese in January, and this year's theme was 'You shall love the Lord your God...and your neighbour as yourself' (Lk 10:27).

An Inter-Church Unity Service was held in St Mary's Church, Melmount on Sunday, January 21, while a Christian Church Unity Walk planned for Derry was replaced, due to weather conditions, with a service in First Derry Presbyterian Church on Monday, January 22.

Commenting on the annual joint prayer initiative, which had as its theme, 'Go and do likewise', Bishop Donal said: "Since 1908, Christian Unity Week has been

celebrated in response to the scandal of division between those who claim to follow Christ.

"Thankfully, in Ireland and specifically in Northern Ireland, inter-church relationships have developed tremendously even though political division continues.

"In Derry, there has been an on-going assumption that the main churches will work together on shared prayer and other initiatives."

Reflecting on this year's theme, he added: "At a time of much political uncertainty, I encourage all our parishes to work and pray for that unity for which Christ prayed at the Last Supper".

Bishop Donal joined in the



leading of prayers, along with Rev Colin Jones, Derry First Presbyterian, Rev Peter Morris of the Methodist Church, Archdeacon Robert Miller, the Dean of Derry, Very Rev Raymond Stewart, Rev Canon Katie McAteer, Fr Stephen Ward of St Columba's Church Long Tower, and Rev Nigel Cairns of St Augustine's Church. The annual Service is coordinated by Mrs Joan Doherty.

The Waterside churches' annual Christian Unity Service was held a couple of nights later, with

a warm welcome given by Fr Michael Canny VG, PP Waterside, to members of All Saints Clooney, Clooney Methodist Church and Ebrington Presbyterian Church, as well as his own parishioners, to St Columba's Chapel for the 2024 Service, during which participants walked between each of the churches for prayers and hymns, and also enjoyed breaking bread together with light refreshments in Ebrington Presbyterian Church Hall.

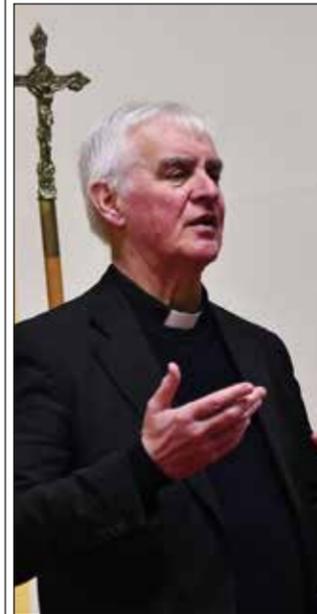
Photographs by Paul McFadden.

A Prayer For Our Earth .. and a Hymn of Praise

by Pope Francis

"All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this Earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the Earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace. Amen."

(Pope Francis published this prayer in Laudato Si', and it is meant for sharing with all who believe in our Creator God.)



Drumragh Parish Lenten Programme

Life in the Spirit

Seminars 2024

Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group invite you to
Life in the Holy Spirit Seminars

Thursdays in conjunction with 7.30 pm Mass in
Sacred Heart Church Omagh

www.drumraghparish.com/media.html

15th February	God's Love	Fr Charles Cross, The Grann
22nd February	Salvation	Rev Dr Columba M Tomar, OP
29th February	The New Life	Martina Purdy
7th March	Receiving God's Gifts	Fr Eugene Barrett, OFM
14th March	Baptism in the Spirit	Fr Eamonn Kelly
21st March	Growth & Transformation	Bishop Donal McKeown

"Let him who is thirsty come; Let him who desires; Take the water of life without price". (Rev. 22:17)

WORLDWIDE INITIATIVE

8 February - 19 March 2024

EFFATHA REVIVAL

IS HERE!

"If my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14

40 DAYS OF PERPETUAL ADORATION FOR:

- Hearts to be open to God and others
- Reparation and repentance for the world's turning away from God and His commandments
- The undoing of global forces of fear, lies, evil and sin
- Revival and unity in the Church
- The end of human trafficking, abortion and euthanasia
- The Spirit of Truth to bring freedom
- Priests to be deeply Marian and Eucharistic

ADORERS of JESUS needed

SIGN UP NOW

<https://offatha.live/>

 'Effatha Be Opened'

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 Tuesdays 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

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

St Brigid Cross: There will be a St Brigid Cross Making Night on Wednesday, January 31 at 8 pm in An Ráth Dubh. Refreshments served, all welcome.

Big Breakfast: The Moneyneena Big Breakfast will take place on Sunday, February 4, in An Ráth Dubh. Breakfasts will be served from 9 am-1.30 pm. Admission by donations. Proceeds in aid of Community Hall and projects. Everyone welcome.

Renovation Fund: To kick start Parish fundraising for emergency work beginning shortly at St Eugene's Church, Moneyneena, a Parish Dance will be held on Friday, March 1, in An Ráth Dubh. Music will be by Bleed'N Cowboys.

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

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 St Joseph's Church, 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.

Castleberg & Ardstraw West

Gospel Concert: A Parish fundraising Gospel Concert will take place in St Patrick's

Church, Castleberg, on Friday, March 8, at 8 pm, featuring Michael English.

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

Catechism Course: The Catechism Course continues on Wednesdays at 7 pm.

Bereavement Support: Parish Pastoral Bereavement Support. The Parish Pastoral Bereavement Support Group meets on the second Sunday of each month at 3 pm in the Parochial House community room. All are welcome to share a cup of tea, have a chat, remember and talk about their loved one and find support with others experiencing similar feelings. In addition to the group, there is an ongoing opportunity to speak on a one-to-one basis with an experienced grief counsellor. The contact number for more information on the group or to arrange one to one support is 07907085178.

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.

Drumquin

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed each Tuesday morning at 10 am in St Patrick's Church, Drumquin.

Drumragh (Omagh)

Life in Spirit: The Omagh Charismatic Prayer Group is hosting a Lenten series of Life in the Spirit seminars, from Thursday, March 15 to 21, starting with 7.30 pm Mass in Sacred Heart Church.

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

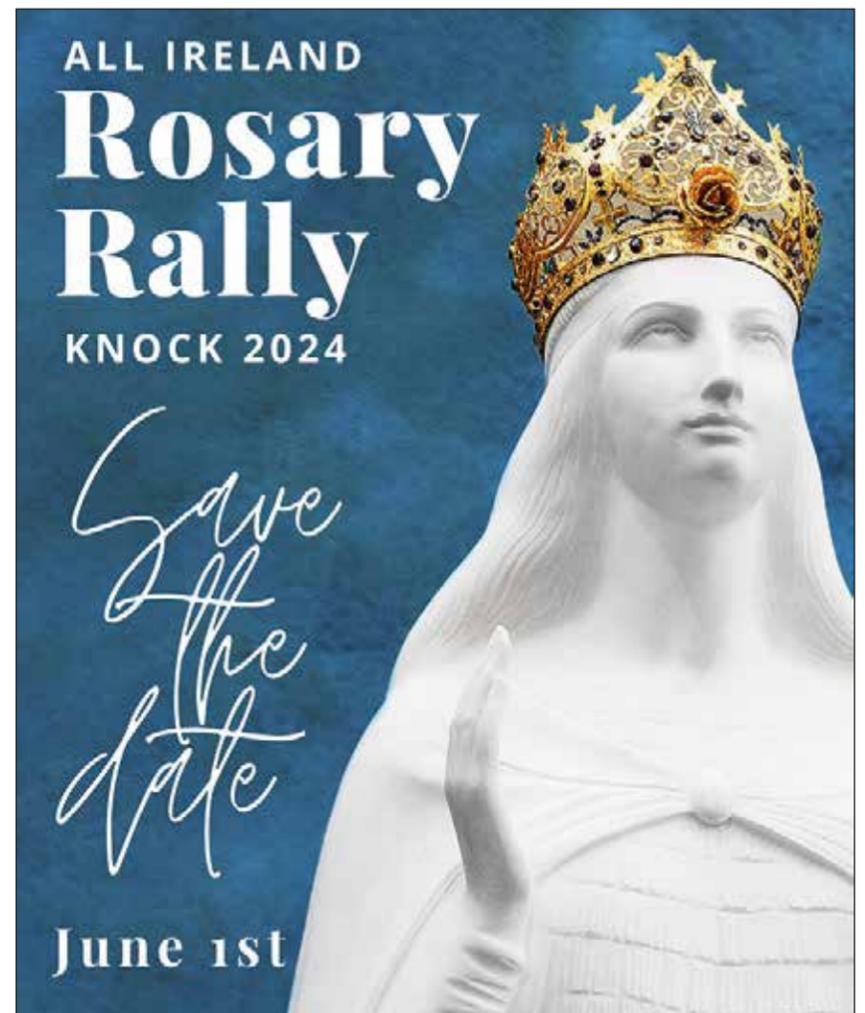
Lectio Divina: The Lectio Divina Group meet for meditation and Scripture reflection on Wednesdays, at 7 pm, in the Parish House, 30A Chapel Road.

Prayer Group: The St Canice's Charismatic Prayer Group meets each Thursday at 7 pm, in the Parish House, 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

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in St Columba's Church, Drung, after the 10.15 am Mass on the first Sunday of each month.

Kilrea

SVP: The St Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop is open on Saturdays from 10 am -1pm.

Leckpatrick

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

Limavady

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),

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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 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

St Brigid Celebration: St Brigid's Crosses will be made

in the Kildare Room, Carnhill, on Wednesday, January 31, at 7 pm, and Bishop Donal will be celebrating Mass in St Brigid's Church on Thursday, February 1, at 7 pm, as a year of celebration begins in Ireland to mark the 1500th anniversary in 2025 of the death of Brigid of Kildare, one of the island's three Patron Saints. With the Day for Consecrated Life falling on February 2, Religious from around the Diocese have been invited to attend the Mass in Carnhill on St Brigid's Feast Day.

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

Franciscan Friars: The Franciscan Friars of the Renewal will be holding their monthly healing night on Friday, February 2, which will be led by the Effatha team and Cenacle London. On Saturday, February 3, they will be leading the Effatha Revival Eucharistic Procession in the City, beginning from the Long Tower at 1 pm, going to the Guildhall and ending with Benediction in Columba House Oratory. This is in preparation for 40 days of Eucharistic Adoration worldwide.

Divine Mercy: The annual Divine Mercy Conference takes place from February 23-25, in the RDS, Main Hall, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. The theme is 'Jesus I Trust in You' and speakers include Fr James Blount, Fr Eunan McDonnell, Fr Brendan Walsh, and Fr Jamie Twohig. For further details visit - www.divinemercyconference.com

Family Retreat: Living Family are hosting a Family Retreat Day at Summerhill College, Sligo, on Sunday, February 4, from 10 am until 5 pm. There will be talks, reflections, games and activities. Spaces are limited so booking is essential. Contact via email - info@livingfamily.ie, or by phone - 0868228174.

Ladies' Bible Study: Ladies interested in coming to a deeper understanding of scripture are welcome to come along to the Ladies' Bible Study in Termonbacca,

Derry, every Tuesday evening from 8:30-9:30 pm. It is led by Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, who is currently working through the Gospel of Mark, which is the Gospel for Mass for this year. This Bible Study is open to all women who are interested in coming along. There is no need to book, you can simply show up. For further information contact Termonbacca on 028 71 262512.

Faith Talks: The monthly talks by Fr Cajetak Apeh ocd on different elements of the Catholic faith will continue in the Carmelite Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, on Thursday, February 15, from 7.30-8.30 pm. The talks are aimed at leading the participants towards personal development through meditative prayer and convivial discussions of the Church doctrines.

The planned themes for 2024 are: February 15 - I believe in the Holy Spirit - Growing in the awareness of the Divine Indwelling; March 14 - The Angels - The relationship between the visible and the spiritual world; April 18 - The Demons and the reality of spiritual combat; May 16 - Mary - Eschatological Icon of the Church; June 13 - The role of Authority in the Church; July 18 - The Role of the Lay Faithful in the Church.

These nights are open to everyone aged 18 and above who has an interest in growing more in their personal faith development. Anyone who wishes to know

more can speak to Fr Cajetan by calling 028 71 262512 or 07933123633.

Cursillo Weekends: Derry Cursillo will hold their next weekends on February 22-25 for ladies and February 29-March 3 for men. Cursillo is a lay movement within the Catholic Church, founded in Spain in the early 40s by a group of men concerned about the disinterest and disaffection shown by many people within their Church, and the growing secularisation of society. Cursillo has a practical spirituality which is explained during a 'three-day weekend'. It hinges around a tripod of piety, study and action.

You can only ever do a Cursillo weekend once in a lifetime. Cursillo is not a retreat but an encounter. During the weekend you will encounter yourself, Christ and others. It is an encounter that can last for the rest of your life. Any adult aged 21 and over who wants to improve their life, their relationship with God and others, can do a Cursillo weekend. It is very appropriate for those who have become disaffected or distanced from the Church, for those who may feel 'far away' from God, for those who want to make a fresh start spiritually, and for anyone who would like a way to participate in evangelization.

Further information regarding the upcoming weekends can be obtained by contacting Aoife on 028 71 262512 or emailing 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.

All Ireland Rosary Rally: This year's All Ireland Rosary Rally will take place on Saturday, June 4, from 9.30 am to 4.30 pm at Knock Shrine, Co Mayo. Last year over 10,000 people attended. This year, Mother Adela Galindo, SCTJM, will deliver the key address on the Rosary. She is a very well renowned international speaker, and is travelling all the way from Miami, Florida, for her 1 pm talk in the Basilica. Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan will be the Main Celebrant of the Holy Mass at 3 pm which will be concelebrated by priests from all around Ireland. The Anointing of the Sick will also

be available, so this is a great opportunity to bring along someone you know who may like to avail of this sacrament. The Stations of the Cross begin at 2 pm, followed by the Rosary Procession at 2.30 pm. This year, there will also be a Marian Conference in the morning from 9.30 am in St John's Centre. It will feature great speakers from around Ireland. Further details to be announced. Those who register for the event will automatically receive updates and information via email.

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.

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.

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+. Cost £800, with a budget plan available. Names and deposit of £100 required as

soon as possible to secure a place. Contact lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org or tel 028 71264 087.

JP II 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. The special guest will be Alexander McLean.

Diocesan Vocations: The Vocations Directors of the northern dioceses invite anyone interested in serving

the Church as a diocesan priest, to attend a retreat at the Drumalis Retreat Centre, Larne from March 8-10. Anyone aged 18, or over, wishing to attend should contact the Diocesan Vocations Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan at pgoh2111@gmail.com with their name, date of birth, and phone number.

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

A Great Veiling

STATISTICS show that human nature actually prefers the anticipation of an event over the event itself. Countdowns, surprises, and unveilings all build up to a moment. The excitement grows, along with the wonder. Consider an Advent calendar with a treat behind each door - not only is there excitement in the countdown to Christmas, but there is a smaller, but undeniable, anticipation for the treat that awaits each day. God designed us this way, and the Church, through her ancient practices, utilizes this reality of mankind in her sacred worship and other traditional customs.

Veils are common liturgical items, and the act of veiling dates back to the Old Testament. God, through Moses, established the wilderness Tabernacle, and later the Temple, as Israel's place of worship, as it housed God's manifest presence and glory over the Ark of the Covenant. Per God's instructions to Moses, the Ark was a golden box, topped by the Mercy Seat and carvings of two Cherubim, which contained the two tablets of the 10 Commandments, a bowl of Manna from the desert, and Aaron's rod which had miraculously budded. The room in the wilderness

Tabernacle, and later the Temple, where dwelt the Ark of the Covenant, was known as the Holy of Holies.

This space could only be entered once a year by the High Priest, on the Feast of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. The Holy of Holies was separated from the rest of the Tabernacle/Temple by a thick, highly embroidered ceremonial curtain veil. This is the same veil that was torn when Jesus died on the cross (cf. Mt. 27:50-51). The veil acted as a physical barrier between God and the people (symbolic of the moral and spiritual barrier between God and humanity caused by the Original Sin of our First Parents), the High Priest acting as a mediator between the two. It created a boundary, a sense of both foreboding and wonder. The Israelites know that God's mysterious Glory is present on the Mercy Seat of the Ark, but they also have an awareness that He cannot be seen because His Glory is literally blocked from view by the veil. This barrier creates a healthy fear of the Lord; a respect rooted in knowing that what is holy is not always visible to the human eye but must be encountered in the heart and through prayer.

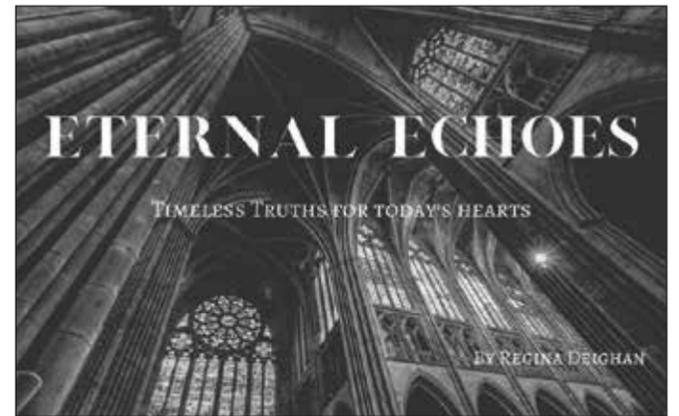
Because much of our worship remains rooted in the traditions of ancient Israel, many practices, ritual actions, and symbols of Temple worship can be found in the Holy Mass. Veiling is one of these liturgical actions that has carried over into Catholic worship, subtle as it might be. Consider the most sacred space in the church - the tabernacle. Just as the Holy of Holies housed the presence of God in the Ark of the Covenant, so too does our tabernacle contain the presence of God in the Holy Eucharist. Within the tabernacle, just after the doors, hangs a small curtain. This small veil reminds us of the Temple veil and the separation of the mundane from the presence of God.

We encounter Christ in the Eucharist, thus this precious little space, sectioned off with a curtain, acts as the barrier between the normal and the sacred. It is a reminder that there are mysteries beyond our comprehension, and we should approach our Lord with a healthy sense of fear, wonder, and awe. As the lyrics to the beautiful hymn 'Pange Lingua', by St Thomas Aquinas, state, "faith for all defects supplying where the feeble senses fail," we recognize that there are

aspects of our faith that surpass sensory understanding because they are supernatural. It is here that the veil especially comes into play, as it reminds us that many of these Truths of our faith remain 'veiled', or hidden, not only from physical sight but also from the full understanding of the intellect. These veiled mysteries require complete faith and submission of the mind and heart, even when belief seems impossible. This is particularly true of the Eucharist.

Similarly, the chalice is often draped with a veil. By veiling both the tabernacle and chalice, we are reminded of the way in which Christ's Real Presence is hidden behind the veil of bread and wine. We are similarly reminded that while the divine mysteries remain veiled from the full grasp of our human intellects, they are nonetheless mysteriously opened to us in the grace of the seven sacraments. For example, consider how the Risen Christ was made known to the Emmaus disciples in the celebration of the Eucharist.

There is also nuptial imagery in veiling. Just as a bride is unveiled before her groom, so too, is Christ unveiled to us in this sacrament. We are invited to the Wedding



Feast of the Lamb, to receive Him in His ultimate gift of self, so that someday we might join Him at the Heavenly Banquet. The nuptial imagery is appropriate then, since what we partake in is a taste of that which we hope we will enter someday. Heaven is unveiled to us in the Eucharist, and just for a moment, we are at the foot of the Cross, relishing in the graces of Christ's passion. In these sacred moments, we should recognize that a veil is not a hindrance or block, but an invitation to dive deeper into the Heart of the Lord.

We might also see women don a veil at Mass. The purpose of this is not to hide, to appear holier-than-thou, or to draw attention to herself. Rather, a veil is revealing her sanctity and dignity. The most sacred 'things' of the Church are veiled, those things that give life. Women, too, are vessels of created life and their inherent dignity

shines more brightly when it is veiled, just as is the Eucharist. It is an invitation to recognize the beauty of one's desire for Heaven and for holiness. Veils become visible reminders of a sacred space or sacred items, and thus, for a woman to veil is for her to desire to recognize her own sanctity, but also remain aware of the sacredness of a particular space. Just as the Holy of Holies and the tabernacle are set apart as sacred spaces, a woman veiling reminds herself that she is in the very presence of God.

So much of what Mother Church calls us to believe can feel challenging, since it requires the virtue of faith - not merely our senses - to accept. Veils act as an invitation to enter into holy spaces and seek the Lord with the eyes of faith. What remains hidden might require time, effort, and patience to be seen, but worth every trial to finally behold.

My favour rests on you *Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR*

ON the first Sunday of January this year we, as the Church, celebrated the Feast of the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan. For us, this is precisely what Christmas was leading up to and so marks the end of the Christmas season.

Of course, for many people Christmas ended long ago! But that was the commercial Christmas. The Christian, the real, Christmas, ends with His Baptism, the declaration of why Jesus was born in Bethlehem 30 years earlier, and it was the culmination of those years living a hidden life in Nazareth in preparation for this, His mission.

What happened at Christ's baptism?

1. John the Baptiser was calling people to repent from their sins and be converted to God. Jesus joined this procession of people as John led them into the waters of the Jordan. Although Jesus was without sin, He wanted to identify Himself with all humanity and took onto Himself the sins of the world. This would lead Him to His death on the Cross for our salvation.

2. "A voice came from heaven which said, "This is my Son, the beloved, my favour rests on him". Jesus was identified by God, through the waters of baptism, as His Only-begotten Son, living among us in our human flesh, and baptised to be saviour of the world.

3. Jesus was empowered to bring the Good News of God's Kingdom to the world. He spent the next

three years going around among God's people doing good, and proclaiming the special place that the poor and the unloved had in God's love and God's kingdom.

A very important feature of these three years was that Jesus did not have any problem being with those who were looked on as sinners and/or outcasts. He ate with them; healed them; forgave them; loved them. All He ever seemed to say to them was: "Your faith has saved you"; "Has no one condemned you? Neither do I"; "Go and do not sin anymore".

But Jesus did have a lot of problems with those who were looked on as the good people - the leaders and lawgivers of the community. He ate with them; He loved them; He tried to reason with them. To these, however, He addressed words like these: "You hypocrites"; "You brood of vipers"; "You whitened sepulchres, all shiny on the outside and inside full of dead peoples' bones". He longed that they would come to know the wonderful love of God for all people. They, however, had settled for their own goodness to save them.

What happens at our Baptism?

In the Gospel of St Mark, Chapter 1, verses 7 & 8, John the Baptiser is quoted as saying: "Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of His sandals. I have baptised you with water, but He will baptise you with the Holy

Spirit."

When Jesus was baptised by John in the Jordan this change-over took place. The Baptism that we now have, and that we, ourselves, have received, is the Baptism of Jesus proclaimed as the Son Of God by the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is Christ Himself in his Body, the Church, who baptises each one with the Holy Spirit and with truth.

1. Our Baptism proclaims each of us as 'My beloved daughter or son' in God's sight. Sometimes we might think that this means that Baptism makes us a child of God. No! Conception makes each one a child of God. Our privilege is that this is revealed to us. We can live our lives in this wonderful knowledge and live in the warmth of God's family home.

We are baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. This means that we are baptised into the life of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

2. We are chosen as disciples of Christ, because of our Baptism, to live in His company and enjoy God's favour. At the baptismal ceremony, the child is welcomed into the Community of the Church with the sign of the Cross and in everything that happens throughout the ceremony.

3. Through our Baptism, we are commissioned to be witnesses to Christ's life, death and resurrection to the world we live in, 'so that the world may believe'.

This commission is reinforced and developed by the Sacrament of Confirmation, and expressed and renewed through the weekly, and even daily, celebration of the Eucharist.

That's the theory, what's the practice?

I have put that little heading there because I think that is how many people might be reading what I have written! It is not just theory though. It is a short statement of the truth of our faith. Then we have to work out how this can be put into practice.

Responsibilities: Parents

For us as Catholics Baptism is almost entirely Infant Baptism. Parents bring their children for this Sacrament. They ask for it for their child and they undertake to bring their child up in the faith in Jesus Christ. For this to happen, there is a great need for a renewal of what we as Catholics call the Domestic Church, the Church of the Home.

This means a constant renewal of: the life of love of married couples; parents as leaders of the Church; parents and their children; the extended family life of grandparents and others who will support the parents in bringing their children up as disciples of Christ, and as witnesses of Christ's presence and power in the world.

A very important part of the renewal of the Domestic Church is also the commitment to regular and creative family prayer. It is impossible to think of a church

without prayer!

The local Church - Parish & Diocese

No matter how good parents are, they cannot fulfil their promises at Baptism on their own. They need the active support of the local community, of both the parish and the diocese in order to rear their children as Christ-followers. One of the major tasks of every parish has to be the faith development of family life. This entails support for marriage, support for parents, and support for children.

Catholic schools are one of the great support systems that have been developed for all of this. In modern society, Catholic schools are increasingly under attack and are often made to look like the reason for division in society. This could not be further from the truth.

In the Derry Diocese, we are fortunate to have Bishop Donal McKeown. He is one of the best experts on the importance of Catholic schools and their value for society in general. We need to take our place alongside him in this in support for our Catholic schools in every way we can and that they need.

Involvement:

The parish and diocese are also called to show the ways in which children, as they grow up, can be involved in using their gifts and talents for the service of others, especially those who are most disadvantaged. That is how we learn most about the beauty of, as well as the importance of, giving rather than just receiving in life. As disciples of Christ, each person has unique gifts to bring so that others

can come to know the goodness of life and so, the great goodness of God.

The Universal Church:

In Baptism, the community of the Church at every level commits itself to each individual, to accompany them through life in their journey with and for Christ. We never disown anyone, but try to help each one to find how they can personally be fully Christian.

Again, we are very fortunate to have Pope Francis as our leader in faith at this time. He is a great model of inclusion, especially of those whom society and even, at times, Church people regard as outcasts.

In December last, Pope Francis issued a document in which priests were allowed to bless couples in same-sex unions; couples in irregular marriages and relationships and so on. This has caused a storm that is largely based on misunderstanding, some of it malicious.

What Pope Francis has said and done in his leadership is all part of the implications of our Baptism. We bless each one where they are in their lives, knowing that Christ is with each one all the time and wants each one to know that, so that they can come to full life in God.

Some people today try to resign from their Baptism. They might give up on the Church and on God. God never gives up on anyone. Neither should we as God's people. That is the major challenge in the life of the Church today. God's Word to each one will always be: "My favour rests on you."

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West & Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

Let Your Light Shine!

Prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila

Christ has no body now but yours.

No hands, no feet on earth but yours.

Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world.

Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.

Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world.

Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body.

Christ has no body now on earth but yours.



**DERRY DIOCESAN
CATECHETICAL
CENTRE**



(c) Image Canva Pro



**DIOCESE of
DERRY**

A St Teresa of Avila Prayer card was presented to each school at the end of the Mass to launch Catholic Schools Week in the Diocese by Bishop Donal.

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Duramannagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,