The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 99. SEPTEMBER 2024

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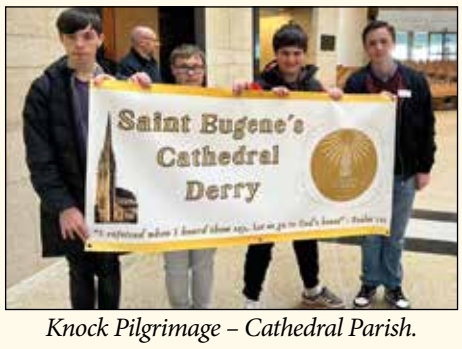
Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage – Medjugorje.

Festival Opening Mass – Clonmany

HOPE Summer Camps continuing to help parishes evolve *(see p 6-9)*

The beautiful HOPE floral display in St Patrick's Church, Dungiven, to celebrate the 2024 Parish HOPE Camp.



Knock Pilgrimage – Cathedral Parish.

St Eugene's PS Thanksgiving Mass – Tyrcur, Cappagh.

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People *in focus*

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James Bonner – Derry.

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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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Sr Nellie McLaughlin reflects on the Pope's September prayer intention…

"Let us pray that each of us listens with our hearts to the cry of the Earth and of the victims of environmental disasters and the climate crisis, making a personal commitment to care for the world we inhabit."

For the cry of the Earth

Sr Nellie McLaughlin.

THIS month's prayer intention of Pope Francis is in essence a passionate plea to 'come home' to who we really are as the community of all creation. "We require a new and universal solidarity" (LS.14). These prophetic words of Pope Francis in Laudato Si (2015) send shivers down the spine as we try to come to terms with the year just past (2023), now scientifically verified as the hottest year ever on planet earth, our Common Home.

Will these be shivers of hopelessness or of a new resolve to come home to who we really are as universal kin? "Make your home in me as I make mine in you…as the Father has loved me so I have loved you. Remain in my love." (Jn.14:3, 9).

This love unfolds a universe which is a communion of subjects, each one sacred, beloved, unique, precious, different but not separate in the amazing web of life's interbeing-ness. We have always been within God, within the cosmic whole, and we are destined to be with God for all eternity.

Imagine

Encouraged by this assurance as we try to better understand the cry of the earth, let us imagine for a moment:

What would a world be like that is born of a mindset wherein all is one and interconnected? What if we really understood that my being partakes of your being and that of all beings? That all beings depend on the living systems of planet Earth: sunshine, fresh air, clean water, fertile soil and companionship of each other for flourishing life? Pope Francis is acutely aware of this when he urges all people to a conversion that "entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion." (LS 220)

The challenging words of David Attenborough (2024) are timely: "It is one world. And it's in our care. For the first time in the history of humanity, for the first time in 500 million years, one species has the future in the palm of its hands."

We are, undoubtedly, at a critical moment in history; the evidence is all around us: eg, alarming ice-melt and climate breakdown; obscene militarism; systemic injustices; hunger and widespread impoverishment; unprecedented mass migrations of people and species. However, hope springs eternal. Humanity rose to the challenge with the Montreal Protocol 1987 to help repair the hole in the ozone layer by controlling the production and usage of HCFC's (hydroflorocarbons), eg, banning aerosols etc. We did it then, can we do so again – our Common Home is pleading?

I like to think of this as a 'Titanic Moment' in our time, a wake-up call to preserve Planet Earth, our Common Home. The Titanic, built in Belfast and ready for its maiden voyage (1912 AD), was a monumental achievement by any standards. As it set sail from the south of England on route across the North Atlantic to USA, who could have fathomed what lay ahead? The crew were meticulous in caring for their mostly rich passengers and, even though they were aware of icebergs in the North Atlantic Ocean, somehow the ship was deemed 'unsinkable' – it was such a feat of architectural magnificence. Sadly, unspeakable tragedy struck!

Does history repeat itself?

Does history repeat itself? I cannot help thinking that systemically very little has changed. Today, the rich and powerful are becoming more wealthy and ruthless - so glaringly obvious during Covid 19, while Earth and its poorest are exploited and persecuted in so many ways in the mistaken, or deliberate, assumption that our common home can absorb even the most lethal attacks!

"There are no passengers on planet Earth, we are all crew." (Marshal McLuhan)

Given the seriousness of our situation and the urgency of the cry of the Earth today, it is imperative that we try to explore an integral ecological vision – exposing the root causes and working for a more just and equitable way of life for all in the total community of creation.

As Pope Francis reminds us: "All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion, which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect" (LS 89), and further, "Many things need to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared by everyone" (LS 202).

In 2023, Pope Francis, aware of the worsening situation in our Common Home, issued a new and urgent call to all in Laudate Deum: "Yet, with the passage of time, I have realized that our responses have not been adequate, while the world in which we live is collapsing and may be nearing breaking point" (L.D 2).

What can we do?

What can we do? I believe that our journey in evolving consciousness is imploring us to wake up before it is too late as follows:

1. Change context from separation and dominance (humans only) to community of all life;

2. Make caring for our Common Home a way of life - not just an issue among issues;

3. Explore an Integral Ecological Vision - going beyond symptoms to root causes – highlight devastation of Earth, plight of refugees, indigenous peoples and those of all species most unfairly impacted by the market economy.

How might we progress this for the Cry of the Earth in our moment in history?

1. Trusting the innate wisdom of Earth garnered over millennia, Earth knows but will we listen and grow in partnership as we celebrate the seasonal blessings and natural abundance of flourishing life? This partnership will ensure safe habitat and food security for all beings, eg, organic food production, re-generative agriculture, restoration of wetlands, biodiversity promotion, reduction/elimination of toxins and harmful chemicals etc.

2. Focus on the Living Systems of our Common Home - the urgency of protecting soil, water, sunshine and air, so vital for all life, by preserving and enhancing biodiversity, eg, mitigating climate change by planting trees, flowers etc for biodiversity, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, plastics, pesticides, reducing food waste, composting, fashion waste, moving more resolutely towards a circular economy and minimum toxic landfill.

3. Supporting each other in this vital work for the sake of the total community of life, eg, partnerships, social media initiatives, subtle activism, through prayer and positive energy for front-line activists by people of all ages.

For the Cry of the Earth in this our moment in history, let us take to heart the profound insight of recently deceased Irish theologian, Anne Primavesi: "If we could see ourselves as Earth rather than Earth as existing for us, our perspective is transformed".

May we wake up before it is too late and acknowledge that we have the Awareness, Knowledge, Partnerships, Statistics, Reports - we know what we have to do…will we collectively in solidarity as the sacred community of all creation JUST DO IT!

"All it takes is one good person to restore hope" (LS. 71).

(Sr Nellie McLaughlin, BA, M.Divinity, is a native of Inishowen, Co Donegal and a Sister of Mercy in Ireland. She works in areas of Cosmology, Creation Spirituality, Ecology and Sustainable Living via Conferences and Retreats at home and overseas. Sr Nellie is a founding member of Green Sod Land Trust Ireland 2007 and author of 'Out of Wonder' 2004 and 'Life's Delicate Balance', a reponse to Laudato Si 2015.)

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

Medjugorje Youth Pilgrimage...

Youth team impressed by young pilgrims from across Diocese at Mladifest

by Lizzie Rea

THE Derry Diocesan Youth department took a group of 35 to Medjugorje International Youth Festival, also known as Mladifest. The group had young people from all over the Diocese. They left at the end of July for 10 days to Medjugorje, accompanied by Bishop Donal as their spiritual director.

Mladifest showcased lots of different experiences and testimonies throughout the week. There were 70,000 people in attendance from countries all over the world. This year, there were three Irish Bishops in attendance at the youth festival.

The young people partook in all activities, such as climbing Apparition Hill and Cross Mountain as part of the programme. The climbing of the Cross mountain took place during the night, with a sunrise Mass on top of the mountain at 5 am to conclude the youth festival.

The group had a great musical talent that shone throughout the week at our group Masses. On the last day of the trip, they took a trip to Mostar to learn all about the History of Bosnia and enjoy some shopping.

As the youth Director of the Diocese, it was great to take this trip and get to know all of the young people. They totally engaged and were inspiring throughout the entirety of the trip. We, in the youth department, are looking forward to seeing all that they achieve in the coming years and are hopeful that they will come again on more Diocesan youth pilgrimages.

Bishop Donal hopes Medjugorje pilgrimage an on-going blessing for Derry youth

"IT was a privilege to travel on pilgrimage to Medjugorje with our young people and their leaders.

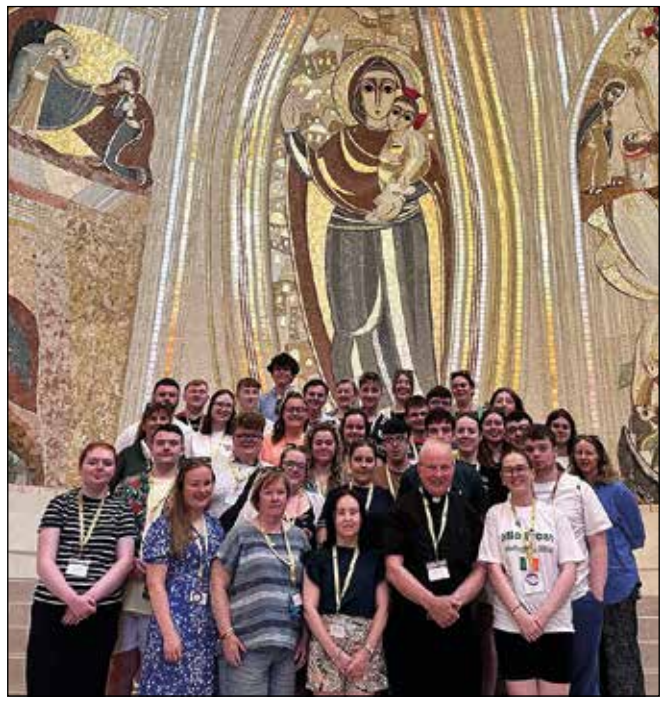
I was very touched by the atmosphere of prayer that pervades the area around the church. The huge crowds include so many young people and couples with young children.

Our own young people were very impressive. They were full of fun and a great support to each other. But they were also very committed to the prayer, to climbing both Apparition Hill and Cross Mountain, and to journeying together.

Full credit goes to those parishes that enabled their parishioners to travel with us

Our youth leaders showed great skill in animating and supporting the full group.

I hope and pray that our time together will be an on-going blessing for our young people, as they seek to follow Christ in this time and place."



Medjugorje helped me connect with God and Mother Mary on a more personal level *by Peadar Scullion – Bellaghy*

GOING to Medjugorje for the first time was a surreal experience that cannot be compared to other pilgrimages.

The immediate sensation of peace and tranquillity that I experienced from the moment I stepped foot off the bus was so rewarding and inviting.

I feel that going to Medjugorje has allowed me to connect with God and Mother Mary on a more personal level, which I have to thank the youth directors, Lizzie and Niamh, who gave us this amazing opportunity.

Medjugorje Youth Pilgrimage...

Medjugorje memories will be treasured deep within my heart *by Kate Donnelly, Bellaghy*

I had the privilege of attending the Medjugorje World Youth Festival 2024 along with Bishop Donal McKeown and members of the Derry Diocese. The trip involved time for spiritual prayer and growth.

The memories made on my trip with those from different parts of the Derry Diocese will forever remain special to me, and will be treasured deep within my heart.

Overall, my most favourite memory from my trip to Medjugorje was the singing and dancing that happened throughout the festival.

To me, this was a real way to connect with God and Our Mother Mary; to feel their presence within my life.

Experiencing Medjugorje strengthened my faith *by Edward Scullion – Bellaghy*

I really enjoyed Medjugorje. I met loads of amazing people, whom I learnt a lot from.

The Medjugorje experience has made me strengthen my faith and has definitely made me become a better person.

I loved the feeling around Medjugorje. It was very peaceful and I felt a real presence there.

The crowds were unbelievable and it was so great to see so many people from different countries.

My favourite part was climbing Apparition Hill barefoot. It was a very different challenge but gave me a great sense of accomplishment afterwards.

I would really recommend Medjugorje to anyone and I will most certainly be back.

Mladifest deepened appreciation and understanding of my Catholic faith *by Kate Gallagher - Maghera*

I am incredibly grateful that I was able to attend the Medjugorje Youth Festival 2024, 'Mladifest', from August 1-6. I am delighted to have received that opportunity and experience at the age of 18, as now I feel that not only do I have greater appreciation for my faith, but a greater understanding of the core beliefs of the Catholic Church.

Throughout the festival, I was constantly reminded of the values of our religion, but above all the duty and responsibility we undertake as we devote ourselves to Jesus. Something that was really highlighted during our pilgrimage to Medjugorje was the significance of Our Lady, as we were able to focus on her message and what was desired for us. These messages gave us time to reflect on our intentions as pilgrims and followers of Christ, as my daily performance and devotion was a focus and became a part of my routine.

From the experience, I was impacted by evening Adoration. I looked forward to the evening programme as it was an immensely powerful celebration of our faith. I always came away from the evening prayer full of gratitude, as we were able to silently reflect on our spiritual growth from the day.

In Medjugorje, my awareness and recognition of all my blessings was accentuated, as I learned how much purpose there is in placing your trust in Jesus. I found the music in Medjugorje to be very moving, and it set a positive atmosphere and feeling for the evening ahead. No matter what language everyone spoke, they were all able to connect through the music.

Although I expected the Mass and Adoration to be special, I did not expect to be amazed by the sky. Any of the people I have spoken to about going to Medjugorje, have mentioned how memorising the sky and the clouds can be during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Witnessing that was unimaginable.

On most evenings, I visited the candle garden in the grounds of St James' Church. I found the candlelight and the overall silence to be calming and quite beautiful in the evening time. It was one of my favourite parts of the domain because, in those moments, you were able to review your gifts from God, while also considering how each candle represents a different person's intentions.

One of the highlights of the trip was climbing Apparition Hill and visiting the Blue Cross. In both circumstances, we prayed the Rosary as a group. During these prayers on the Holy sites, I found it quite powerful and overwhelming, as it was not like anything I had ever experienced before.

I would highly recommend everyone to visit Medjugorje at least once in their lives, as it was an experience that I will never forget, and I hope to return there in the future.

Medjugorje Youth Pilgrimage...

Praying in Adoration Chapel felt so easy and gave me time to reflect

by Mary McKenna – Maghera

I went with the Derry Diocese on the youth pilgrimage to Medjugorje. Over the course of our 10 days there, we had so many wonderful and spiritual experiences that I'm so grateful to have had as they connected me closer to my faith.

A place in Medjugorje that was very memorable to me was the Candle Park. It is just beside St James' Church and, on the first night of the pilgrimage, as we were walking around the glow of the candles and the peacefulness of people's silent prayer was so inviting.

It was my first time experiencing the powers Medjugorje had to offer in strengthening prayer. Praying there on the first night with my friends was such a powerful first experience to have, as it truly set the tone for the rest of the trip.

Another very special experience in Medjugorje that I looked forward to was the Adoration Chapel. As soon as I walked inside, I could feel the Holy Spirit, and being around so many people all in deep prayer was surreal. Praying there felt so easy and it allowed me time to reflect on how much I was enjoying the pilgrimage and how much closer I felt to God and Mary there. After that experience, we made time on the trip to visit there often.

My favourite experience was climbing Cross Mountain. It was pitch black as we climbed but the glow of dozens of other people's torches lit the whole mountain. When we reached the peak, seeing all the people in sleeping bags who had already gathered there felt surreal. When the Rosary started at 4 am, the power of everyone praying in their own languages highlighted to me that, although so many people were there from all cultures and walks of life, we were all called by Mary for the same reason.

Personally, I felt so peaceful to be surrounded by so much diversity, yet everyone had the same core beliefs and faith, all praying to Our Lady. Then the Mass began, and it was such a beautiful service, filled with music and song. Experiencing Mass whilst looking out over the stunning views, as the sun began to shine upon us, was unforgettable. Everyone felt such a sense of achievement and strength after the Mass, and gathering together at the bottom of the mountain was so special. It was such a powerful experience that I felt very appreciative to have done with such a great group of people.

As I climbed the mountain and saw so many pilgrims of all abilities making the journey up, I was reminded of the power that the Holy Spirit has in strengthening all who visit Medjugorje. It also made me reflect on how much gratitude I have to God for my health, and reminded me how lucky I am. Although climbing the mountain was difficult, I realized that I took my health and capabilities for granted.

The pilgrimage was such a positive experience for me, and I met so many amazing people. It strengthened my faith and made look forward to doing more pilgrimages in the future.

Medjugorje helps in getting closer to God while learning importance of the Rosary *by Pauric Flynn, Maghera*

I took part in Mladifest, the Medjugorje International Youth Festival, with the Derry Diocese Youth Pilgrimage. I was especially excited to go on this pilgrimage as my granny has been several times and has spoken highly of the experience.

On our first day there, we went to visit Mother's Village, where Vesna, our tour guide, told us about how Fr Slavko, along with the help of the Franciscan Sisters, started up an orphanage to take in children left without family during the Bosnian war.

While we were in Mother's Village, we went to the gallery where we could buy handcrafted items made by those who have taken refuge in the village and have struggled with troubles throughout their life, such as addictions, loss, or finding care for their disability.

Later that day, we visited Fr Slavko's grave at the back of the Domain. Then, while we visited Cross Mountain early one morning, we saw the site where Fr Slavko had passed away while climbing down this mountain, and stopped to join in a group prayer.

A highlight of this pilgrimage for me was visiting Apparition Hill. During the pilgrimage, I visited Apparition Hill three times and the Blue Cross twice. My first time up Apparition Hill was part of Mladifest, where hundreds gathered at the top of the mountain, where Mary is said to have appeared, to say the Rosary in a range of different languages. You could feel the spiritual connection especially in singing hymns, when everyone joined in. It gave us time to reflect on the importance of our journey surrounding our faith.

My second time going up the mountain was with the group lead by Patricia and the Bishop, where we stopped at each Station of the Rosary to say a decade, and then finished with a hymn. While climbing Apparition Hill, you could feel the happiness from everyone as it felt like a safe space for all, especially those who were ill or elderly, despite the rough terrain they had to endure.

Our group visited Blue Cross at the foot of Apparition Hill to say a group prayer, the Rosary, and sing a few hymns to finish off one of the days before the night programme started back at the Domain.

I personally believe that everyone should visit Medjugorje within their lifetime, as it is a wonderful experience getting closer to God while learning the importance of the Rosary. It is also great meeting new people from all over the world, while also learning about their cultures.

Eucharistic Adoration in the Diocese

Aghyaran: Thursdays, 10.30am–12 noon.
Ardstraw West & Castlederg: Fridays, 10.30am–12 noon, St Patrick's Church.
Badoney Lower: Tuesdays, after 12.30 pm Mass until 5 pm, St Patrick's Gortin.
Banagher: Fridays, 10–11am, St Joseph's Church, Fincairn.
Bellaghy: First Fridays, from 10 am until 6.30 pm, in St Mary's Church.
Buncrana: Mondays, Tuesdays & Wednesdays, 6am-10pm, and Sundays, 2-10 pm, St Mary's Oratory.
Cappagh: Wednesdays, 8-9pm, concluding with Night Prayer, and Sundays, 3.30-6.30 pm, in Christ the King, Strathroy.
Claudy: Tuesdays, after 10 am Mass until 8 pm, St Patrick's Church, Claudy, and Wednesdays, after 10 Mass until 8 pm, St Joseph's Church, Craigbane.
Coleraine: Wednesdays, in St John's Church, 2-4 pm, with Rosary at 3:45 pm.
Creggan: Sundays 1.30 pm-6 pm; Mondays 10.30 am - 7 pm; Tue - Sat 10.30 am - 12 pm, Divine Mercy Chapel.
Drumquin: Wednesdays, 6 pm until Mass at 7.30 pm.
Drumragh: Wednesdays, following morning Mass, Sacred Heart Church until 5.30 pm.
Errigal: Mondays, after the 10 am Mass until 2.30 pm, St Mary's Church, Ballerin.
Fahan: Fridays after 10 am Mass, St Mura's Parish Church.
Greencastle (Tyrone): Thursdays, 6-10 pm, St Patrick's Church.
Greenlough: Thursdays, 9am–5 pm, St Oliver Plunkett's Church.
Iskaheen: Tuesdays, from after 10 am Mass until 2 pm, St Patrick's Church.
Kilrea: Mondays, 12 noon - 7pm, St Mary's Drumagarner. Concludes with Benediction.
Killygordon: Thursdays, after 9.15 am Mass, St Patrick's Church, Crossroads.
Lavey: Fridays, after 9.30 am Mass until 5 pm.
Leckpatrick: Wednesdays, after 10 am Mass until 5.30 pm.
Limavady: Sundays from 3-5 pm in Christ the King (with Confessions).
Melmount: Mondays, after 10 am Mass until 6 pm.
Moville: Mondays, 2-9 pm, and Wednesdays, 6-9 pm, St Pius X Church.
Newtownstewart: Thursdays, 6.30-7.30 pm, Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.
Sion Mills: Fridays, 11 am-6.50 pm, ending with Benediction before 7 pm Mass.
Steelstown: Fridays, from after 10 am Mass until 6.50 pm.
Strabane (Camus): All day in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis of Peace), at the back of the Church.
St Columba's Long Tower: Wednesdays, after 10 am Mass until 7.30 pm Mass.
St Eugene's Cathedral: Sundays, 3-6 pm, and Tuesdays, 10.30 am-7.20 pm.
Three Patrons: Mondays, after 11 am Mass, concluding with a Youth 2000 Holy Hour from 7-8 pm, in Our Lady's Chapel, St Joseph's Church, Galliagh. It also takes place seven days a week in the Adoration Room in St Brigid's Church, Carnhill, 8 am-6 pm, and on Wednesdays, from 10.45 am – 6.45 pm, in St Patrick's Church, Pennyburn.
Urney & Castlefin: Tuesdays, 12 noon-8 pm, St Anthony's Chapel.
Waterside: Monday mornings and Wednesdays, 7-9 pm, St Oliver Plunkett Church, Strathfoyle.

HOPE Limavady 2024

With 300 places filled in seven minutes…

HOPE Camp still a resounding success in its Limavady home *by Leo McCloskey*

HOPE Summer Camp Limavady started in 2013. The idea for the Catholic Summer Camp came to Fr James Devine during Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. At the first steering meeting, back in March 2013, only two people turned up but, undeterred, Fr James pushed on. The name HOPE was chosen and stands for Help Our Parish Evolve. The motto of HOPE Limavady is faith, fun and friendship. Every year the camp has been oversubscribed and attracts approximately 100 volunteers, aged 16 plus, each year.

HOPE Limavady 2024 was an outstanding success, yet again, this year. All 300 places were filled in seven minutes and over 70 children were on the waiting list. Half of the camp is aged between 13 and 15, a demographic Catholic Camps normally find difficult to attract. So why has Limavady HOPE Summer Camp been so popular since it started back in 2013?

Essentially, HOPE is a gift from the parish of Limavady to the young people. Only children living within the geographical boundary of Limavady Parish can attend. Economically, HOPE makes absolutely no sense. Each child pays £10 to register in the camp and this guarantees the child a bespoke HOPE Top, designed specially by O'Neills. A HOPE top is a must have item in the wardrobe of so many Limavady children.

With a plethora of sporting, cultural, artistic and spiritual activities, the actual cost per child for the camp is about £75 per child. The challenge for the HOPE Committee in Limavady is to raise the additional money through a variety of fundraisers. This is where the Parish starts to evolve. Over the past few years, HOPE Limavady has staged a range of family friendly events at an affordable price. There have been pantomimes, Parish Breakfasts, Singing Contests, Jigs and Reels, Quizzes, Bingo etc. All the events have been superbly attended by all ages. The Friends of HOPE fundraiser encourages local companies to sponsor the camp and this is a superb fundraiser. All the money raised is spent on the children to ensure that they have a truly memorable week.

The camp was launched this year by Eurovision winner, Dana. She was a wonderful speaker and the large crowd loved her humility and wit. Dana spent time with parishioners after her talk, despite feeling unwell; it was an amazing start to the week.

One hour each day is spent in Faith Formation. On the Monday, Elma Walsh from the Donal Walsh foundation spoke with the children. The inspirational story of Donal was well received by the 300 kids plus volunteers. On Tuesday, newly ordained Dominican priest, Fr Chris Gault, shared his personal faith journey with the children in an interactive and very entertaining session. On Wednesday the children attended Adoration. We were delighted to welcome 12 local priests to hear confessions on the Thursday, when the newly ordained Fr Benedict McGlinchey heard confession for the first time on that day. Parish Priest, Mgr Bryan McCanny celebrated Mass on the Friday and the camp closed with Mass on the Sunday, celebrated by Mgr McCanny and Fr Dermot Harkin. HOPE Limavady was a week filled with faith, fun and friendship.

During the week, there was a World Cup, an All-Ireland, an American Sports Day, a World Series, Drama, Art, a Gaming Bus, fishing, baking, orienteering, Nerf Wars, Call of Duty, It's A knockout, Dancing, Animation, Illustration, Hair and Beauty, Cardio Dance, and a visit from the PE Ninja. On the Wednesday, over 200 visited Ireland's biggest Water Park, The Lake in Kilrea. Trips were also made to Limitless Adventure Centre and Xtreme Jump. This year autism friendly activities were available each day.

An incredible week of faith, fun and friendship was had by all. Huge thanks to everyone who volunteered at the camp, to the businesses that sponsored HOPE, and to the parishioners who prayed for the success of HOPE Limavady. The camp has been blessed with the unwavering support of Mgr Bryan McCanny, who has championed the HOPE Camp since its inception. Bishop Donal McKeown has also always been a big supporter of HOPE and visits the camp regularly to say Mass. We have come a long way since that first meeting in March 2013.

HOPE Claudy-Craigbane 2024...

Spirit of togetherness sealed success for another faith and fun-filled HOPE Camp Claudy-Craigbane

HOPE Camp Claudy-Craigbane was once again blessed with good weather, great faith talks and fantastic fun, as well as the forming of friendships between campers and volunteers of all ages during the week-long summer programme aimed at helping the parish evolve in a spirit of togetherness.

It all kicked off with the special launch ceremony in St Patrick's Church led by Bishop Donal and parish priest, Fr David O'Kane. With the focus on the youth of the parish, it was wonderful to have the music and singing provided by talented parishioner, Mollie McAlinden.

The Bishop blessed those gathered with a first class relic of St Catherine Laboure and a St Dominic Savio relic, and spoke of St Catherine's association with the Miraculous Medal and St Vincent de Paul. He also spoke about Blessed Carlo Acutis and the interest in his statue in the Cathedral, and of the possibility of future HOPE Camp gatherings venerating a relic of a saint from amongst the local community. He also expressed the hope that during the week of camp the young people would learn more about hope for their generation.

Guest speaker for the evening was Galliagh-based Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, Fr Thomas Cacciola, cfr, who reflected on the deeper meaning that the word 'Hope' can have for our lives.

Brought up in the Catholic faith, Fr Thomas recalled wondering when he was at university if God was real, saying: "I lost hope of everything when I doubted God's existence. I started to be careless about life and people, as I thought if there is no God then it doesn't matter what I do. But I had no hope. This is happening today amongst all ages.

"I called out to God, asking Him to show me if He was real, and I began to notice 'coincidence' after 'coincidence' after 'coincidence', until I realised that they were actually 'God-incidences'…God's way of showing Himself to me. The very fact that we are alive is a miracle."

Asking those gathered what kind of hero they were looking for, Fr Thomas thanked God that the Claudy-Craigbane HOPE Camp had St Dominic Savio as its patron, and he also referred to Blessed Carlo Acutis, the teenage Italian in line for canonisation who had a great belief in Jesus' presence in the Eucharist.

He added: "God wants you to have a fulfilled life like Dominic Savio and Carlo Acutis. We have brothers in our community who had wealth, cars, etc, but gave it up to live our simple life, because all that they had didn't make them happy. Jesus said to keep our eyes on Heaven while here on Earth; happiness here is nothing compared to happiness in Heaven."

"I know a lot of people think that when a loved one dies that is the end of them," Fr Thomas remarked, adding: "When my father died, knowing that I will have eternity with him gave me hope that I would be with him again. Keep your hope alive, as Jesus loves you."

Fr Thomas returned during the week to help Fr O'Kane hear Confessions, along with fellow Franciscan, Fr Francesco Gavazzi cfr, Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, and Fr Patrick Lagan. The Camp programme also included a period of Eucharistic Adoration and Healing led by Fr Sean O'Donnell, with a talk by Sarah McCrystal, Limavady, and faith talks by one of the camp leaders, Dearcan O Donnghaile, from Carrickmore, Co Tyrone, about his discerning the call to priesthood, and by Youth of Acutis founder, James Tourish, Derry, who was joined by parishioner and camp leader, Niamh Sharkey, from Craigbane, who is a member of the newly founded group.

St Cecilia's teacher, Martina Davidson, who had been guest speaker at last year's HOPE Camp launch, returned this year to talk to the campers and young leaders about the importance of gratitude, having a sense of purpose, being happy to serve others, relationships…with God and with others, and about the Holy Spirit.

The closing Mass was celebrated by Fr David, with some of the campers' families as well as other parishioners joining in. Reflecting on the scripture readings for the Mass and the references to sharing and friendships, Fr David encouraged the young people to give thanks for the great week of friendship experienced during the camp and to learn to share throughout their lives.

At the end of the Mass, the HOPE Camp Cup was presented to the Camp House that had excelled the most during the week of activities. This year's House Saints included names reflecting some of those involved in Camp 2024: St Mary; St Laura; St Daniel; St Eoghan; St Ella; St Joseph; St James; St Sean; St Patrick; St Louise; St Conan; and St Kevin.

As well as faith formation, the young people enjoyed playing various sports, art sessions, a scavenger hunt, obstacle course, Ceili dancing, Zumba, a bake-off, Nerf Wars, Rosary making, horticulture, and two away days – one to Lake Kilrea and the other to Gortin Activity Centre.

Once again, the week of fun was made possible with the help of over 40 volunteers and generous donations from families, individuals, and local businesses, with the main sponsor of the 2024 Camp jersey, which was worn by all 114 campers and volunteers, being Pristine Competitions. This year's Camp charity was Children in Crossfire.

HOPE Banagher 2024

Another great week of HOPE Banagher helping our parish evolve

by Karen Feeny

IT was another fabulous week for over 150 children and 40 volunteers at Hope Banagher 2024. Fortunately, the weather was very kind to us most days and there was lots of fun and laughter throughout the week.

We had a different element of faith formation each day. Bishop McKeown celebrated a beautiful Mass on our opening day, and we were delighted that so many family members and members of our local community were able to come along to pray with us.

We are very grateful to the priests from neighbouring parishes who came along to help Fr McGavigan hear Confessions. The children also spent time in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In preparation for the upcoming parish Novena to Padre Pio, in September, the children heard about the life of Padre Pio, received Padre Pio prayer cards and each received a blessing with the Padre Pio mitt.

We were fortunate to have two very inspiring talks from our guest speakers. Brother Benedict, from the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, spoke to the children about how God totally transformed his troubled life. Martin McConnell, a former teacher in St Patrick's College Maghera, spoke about the importance of faith, family and friends in his recovery from serious illness in June 2023. Martin reminded us to be grateful each day for the many blessings we have in our lives.

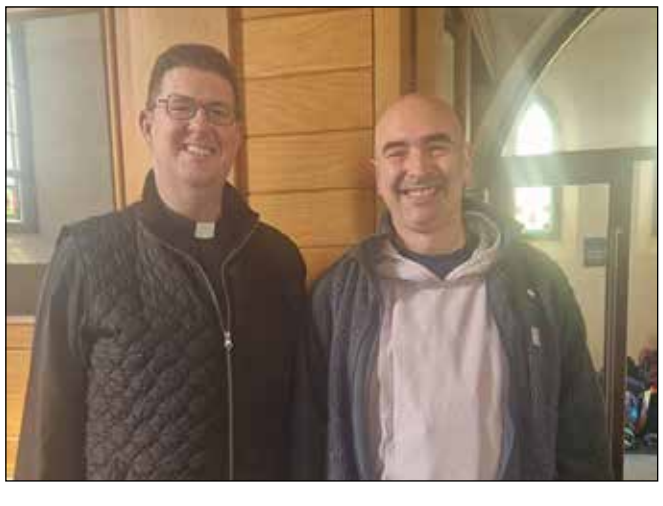
The children enjoyed a range of activities throughout the week. These included Fun with Drums, Zumba, First Aid, Ninja Warriors, kite making, art, sport, cup cake decorating and hairdressing. In addition, they enjoyed two fantastic trips to Foyle Arena and 'We are Vertigo'.

On the final day of camp, there was lots of fun and competition as the children participated in a range of team games. This was our first year to present a trophy to the winning team. When we decided to name the trophy after Fr McGavigan, we didn't know that this would be his last Hope Camp with us because of his move to The Three Patrons Parish in Derry. We were so sad to hear this news as Fr McGavigan was instrumental in setting up Hope Banagher. He has worked so hard over the past four years to ensure that the children had the best week possible each year, the best activities, the best day trips and the best food each day! There was no job too big or too small for him, and we were so blessed to have him on our committee overseeing every aspect of our camp. We will remember all his great work when we present his trophy in years to come and he will always be a very welcome visitor at Hope Banagher in the future.

We are extremely grateful to all our dedicated volunteers who helped out at camp this year. We are especially proud of our young volunteers, many of whom participated in the camp themselves in previous years. They are great role models for our children.

We would like to say a huge thank you to all our sponsors, who have been so generous in their contributions again this year. A special word of thanks to Spar Feeny, who were our main sponsors for the fourth year, and a big thank you to Coastal Core for their first aid cover all week. They did a fantastic job as usual. Thanks also to Gerald and Cora from Burkes, Claudy, who very kindly fed all the children and volunteers on Wednesday.

Another huge thank you to all those in the community who supported our fund raising efforts, and to St Mary's GAC and St Canice's PS for the use of their excellent facilities. It was a great week in our parish. HOPE has certainly helped our parish to evolve and we are looking forward already to next year!



HOPE Dungiven 2024

More children enjoyed HOPE Dungiven 2024 thanks to generous donations and volunteers *by Mary McGill*

FOLLOWING the success of our first HOPE Summer Camp Dungiven, in 2023, we met in the autumn to form a new committee. With one year under our belt, existing and new committee members set ourselves the task of ensuring we built on that success, to make HOPE Summer Camp 2024 bigger and better. With wider awareness of HOPE Dungiven, of who were and a sense of appreciation for what we offer the young people of our parish, it wasn't difficult to secure volunteers for Summer 2024.

Our first major task of the year was to begin fundraising, starting with our Big Breakfast in February 2024. Following this, we hosted another successful fundraising event in the Ponderosa, a table quiz. The support we received from these fundraisers gave us the boost we needed and things began to fall into place. Generous donations from local businesses, families and individuals ensured that we were able to meet our goal and HOPE Summer Camp Dungiven 2024 was a huge success.

Registration opened in early June, with spaces for 120 young people. It was at this stage that we quickly realised that word of the success of HOPE Dungiven 2023 had spread and the demand for spaces had increased. As a committee, we were faced with an influx of requests for spaces and back to the drawing board we went. After prayers, discussions with service providers and a further appeal for volunteers, we were delighted to announce that we could offer 150 young people spaces this year, an increase of 25% from the previous year.

HOPE Summer Camp Dungiven 2024 began with our opening Mass on Saturday, July 27. A total of 151 young people and their families joined Fr Seamus Kelly, HOPE Dungiven committee, HOPE volunteers, and parishioners to celebrate and launch HOPE 2024. Numerous camp attendees took part in the Mass; reading; singing; carrying Offertory gifts; and reading Prayers of the Faithful. This officially opened HOPE Summer Camp Dungiven 2024 and what a week it was for our young people.

Similar to last year, Faith Formation was a huge aspect of our week; we wanted to instil a sense of belonging within our parish and invite the young people to reconnect and strengthen not just their own personal faith, but their connection to our parish. On Monday morning, we had the pleasure of hearing from Frank Diamond, of ALPS. Frank focused on his life as a priest, the challenges he faced during his missionary years in Africa and his life currently; married with two young children. He spoke about the daily challenges in his family life and about his youngest child and her health issues. He talked about how he sees all these challenges presented to him as gifts from God. He encouraged our young people to think about their support network around them, consider reaching out and asking for help when they felt they needed it, and encouraged them to build on their own resilience while continuing to seek strength and love from our God.

Choices

We also heard from former Tyrone GAA star, Stephen O'Neill, who spoke to us about his commitment to his GAA career and all his achievements. He talked about sacrifices and difficult choices he was faced with while continuing to achieve his life-long goal to play for his county. He told our young people about his choice to become a pioneer, and how this choice resulted in breakdowns in friendships and had an impact on his social life at the time, but how he chose to stick on this own path, a path which led him to win three All Irelands and become All-Star Player of the Year in 2005.

Stephen's message was a simple one, 'Choose Wisely'. He asked the young people to remember these two words each day when they are making decisions and acting on them. He encouraged them to be resilient young people, to set their own goals and stayed focused to ensure they achieve them.

Each day of our week was fun filled! We had numerous activities accessible for all abilities. The young people got to experience a variety of educational, interactive fun activities, including football, combat sport, motorised Lego, virtual gaming, cookery, drumming, Ninja assault course, Nerf course, art, circus skills, team games, as well as some free time. The camp encouraged young people to mix with new people and create new friendships.

We also used the week to celebrate local superstars. Camp attendee, Aoife Gaile recently achieved her own All Ireland playing for Derry U16 Camogie team. We invited some of the local Derry GAA minors to visit us during the week and they brought along their trophies; their Ulster Cup and their All-Ireland Cup. We celebrated two birthdays during the week as well, giving recognition to each young person.

All the young people also had the opportunity to head off on two trips during the week. We visited Todd's Leap, outside Omagh, and Gortin Outdoor Activity centre. It truly was an amazing week for all who attended and volunteered, which was evident by the number of messages and phone calls from parents to thank all those involved. Upon reflection it is the feedback from parents and the young people that gives HOPE Dungiven committee the inspiration to continue to volunteer, ensuring that HOPE Dungiven and its ethos of Faith, Fun & Friendship continues to be offered to the young people of Dungiven Parish.

HOPE Dungiven Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank Fr Seamus and Fr Joseph for their guidance and prayers, and our volunteers, who graciously gave up their time to help ensure the camp was a success. We thank Mr Loane for the use of St Canice PS and Mrs Scullion for the use of St Patrick's College, as well as Jacqueline, Kevin, Sandra and Sylvia for their assistance with opening the premises and keeping them in good shape. Thank you to Fr Doherty, Fr O'Kane and Fr Michael for their help with confessions during HOPE Camp.

The committee would like to express our most heartfelt thanks to the whole parish community for their support - Dungiven, Gortnaghey and Drumsurn - and to all those who attended fundraising events and donated. Lastly, we would like to express our appreciation to the local businesses that donated and sponsored our camp. Without the generosity of these local businesses within our parish community we would not be able to continue to offer this fantastic opportunity to our young people. HOPE Summer Camp Dungiven 2024 would not have been possible without the backing of our community.

Long, noble and proud heritage of quality education, strong friendships and passing on the faith from generation to generation celebrated with…

Mass of Thanksgiving for life of St Eugene's PS Tyrcur on final closure of doors

ST Mary's Church, Knockmoyle, in the Cappagh Parish, was the setting for a special Mass celebrated by Bishop Donal on Sunday, June 16, to mark the closing of St Eugene's PS, Tyrcur. The staff and pupils were joined by their families and parishioners for the moving ceremony, along with the priests of the parish, Fr Kevin McElhennon PP and Fr Declan McGeehan.

Before the ceremony began, the principal, Mrs Margaret Donaghy welcomed all gathered for the Mass of Thanksgiving for the life of St Eugene's PS and for the pupils who would be moving to new schools after the summer holidays, particularly the P7 children who would be moving on to secondary school.

"Thank you for coming to join and support us at this difficult time for the community," added Mrs Donaghy, before various symbols were brought forward to represent school life in St Eugene's.

Saying that he appreciated from experience, the affect the closure of a small, rural school has on a community, Bishop Donal continued: "I know that the closure of St Eugene's PS is a tremendous loss to your community."

In his homily, reflecting on the invitation in the Gospel passage to be patient, the Bishop said: "We can look at the church in our own time…there are fewer clergy and not every parish will have a resident priest on tap. Small schools are deemed unsustainable by government. But a look back over the history of the church shows that we have gone through constant reformations.

"In an age of great scientific breakthroughs, Jesus challenges us all to let our relationship with him develop into a mature adult faith that promotes healing and hope in a world that, for all its great know-how, is remarkably cruel and angry. The parables of the sower invite us to be people of prayerful patience, because God is at work and knows what is happening, even when we think we are lost or powerless or tempted to give up."

He added: "Jesus points to the power of the little seeds - and big weeds! We tend to remember great figures who did amazing things. But Jesus spent so much of his time with little people who thought they were unimportant or outcasts. Mary and Joseph were not important people, but they were chosen to rear Jesus.

"Many of the renewal movements in the church began with those who cared for the poor and forgotten, or espoused poverty themselves. Blessed Carlo Acutis and Sr Clare Crockett were unlikely characters who pointed to God…Jesus asks us to have eyes to see little fresh shoots of grace in unexpected places – and to trust in the wisdom of the Cross."

Pilgrims of Hope

Noting that 2025 will be a Holy Year for the whole church, with the theme 'Pilgrims of Hope', Bishop Donal remarked: "We may have to see ourselves as springtime people – digging up the ground, pulling out the weeds, planting the seeds and spreading the manure. We may not see the fruit of our labours, as was the case for many of our missionaries. But if we do not sow with trust in the Lord of the harvest, there will be no fruit for the next generation. Trust that God is always at work in your life and our church. The seed must die to bear fruit. There is no resurrection and new growth without Calvary and dying to ourselves."

At the end of Mass, Fr Kevin reflected on the history of education in the locality, with St Eugene's PS replacing the old Castleroddy PS when it opened its doors 65 years ago, in 1959, saying: "The old Castleroddy school had served this area since 1832, so that's just shy of 200 years of education between the two. That is a long, noble, proud heritage not only of quality education for our children, but an important focus in this area of the parish, where friendships were made and the faith passed on from generation to generation."

He added: "While these are sad times for St Eugene's and this community, it is also a time of celebration and thanksgiving for the many ways we have been blessed…the whole community of St Eugene's, past and present. We are celebrating 'smallness' over 'bigness' and the great value of that.

"Bishop Donal and I were educated in small school environments, as were most of us, and we know the value of it. While we might in some way lament the passing of what is small, the value and legacy of it will remain for a long time to come. The brick and the mortar may go, but the bonds of community, neighbours, friendships, and passing on the faith, and living day by day, will never die.

"As our Bishop often alludes to in our Diocese, we must always find life-giving ways in which to continue to flourish and build upon. We stand in a world that values things that are big and showy, but God isn't impressed by that way of being, as He knows the real change, growth and healing happens in a different way… in what is small, what is deeply rooted. We are a little part of a big story and that is the way that God is changing the world."

Fr Kevin concluded by offering thanks, on behalf of the Cappagh Parish, for the staff, pupils and parents of St Eugene's PS, and all who have been part of it and supported it over the years.

Refreshments were served afterwards in the neighbouring hall, during which presentations were made to the staff members.












Cherishing memories of her time at St Eugene's PS, principal, Mrs Margaret Donaghy is looking forward to more years in Catholic education…

I love teaching and the visibility of our Catholic faith in school

St Eugene's PS last principal, Mrs Margaret Donaghy.

THE beginning of a new academic year brings first starts for many in schools across the Diocese and beyond, with mixed feelings of excitement and concern in families. This September, not only will the former principal of the recently closed St Eugene's PS, Tyrcur, outside Omagh, be thinking of her little family of pupils starting their new schools, but also her own new start as a teacher in St Brigid's PS, Mountfield.

While the closing of the doors of St Eugene's for the last school year there, back in June, was a tremendously sad occasion for Mrs Margaret Donaghy and the entire school community, the 57-year-old Tyrone native is looking forward to continuing her much-loved vocation as a teacher for this school year at St Brigid's.

She told 'The Net': "I will be teaching at St Brigid's from September and when the principal goes off on maternity leave, I will be acting principal."

Happy to teach for another few years, Margaret, the mother of three sons in their 20s, reflected on how love for the vocation in education had been passed on from her mother to her, and then on to one of her own sons, who is a teacher in England. Margaret grew up just outside Carrickmore and was taught by her mother, Mrs Kathleen McPhillips, who was a teacher and principal.

She recalled: "My mum originally taught in Cloughfin PS, which was a short distance from our home. Before it closed, she went to teach in St Brigid's PS, in Altamuskin, not far from Six-Mile-Cross, and, of course, my siblings and I went with her.

"So, I attended St Brigid's for my last three years of primary school, before going on to the Dean (Brian) Maguirc College, in Carrickmore. As 'The Dean' didn't have A'level classes at that time, I was there for five years and then at Loreto, Omagh, for two years."

"I always wanted to be a teacher," added Margaret, "and I wanted to go to university, so I went on to Coleraine University for my four-year degree, which included teaching practice each year, and graduated with a BA Hons in Education in 1989.

"After this, I taught in St Colmcille PS, Carrickmore, for about two years, and then I got a posting as an Assistant Teaching Principal (ATP). The practise had just started of giving teaching principals a day a week to do their office work, and ATPs were brought in to teach their classes on that day. So, I went a day each week to five different schools as an ATP.

"I enjoyed this role from 1991-95, and got great experience teaching all the classes, from P1-7, depending on what the principal's class was, but I always wanted my own class in one school."

This dream came true for Margaret when she was appointed as the P1-4 teacher in St Eugene's Tyrcur, with the principal at the time being Mrs Carmel Frizelle.

Reflecting on her time at St Eugene's, she said: "I started on February 1, 1995, and was in my 30th year teaching there when it closed. Giving that the school was in existence 65 years, I was there for almost half of that time.

"There were a lot of changes over the years, for example, we didn't always have classroom assistants, so the first P1 assistant was a big thing. Also, when I first arrived, the teaching aid was chalk and blackboard, then came along the pen and whiteboard, and then the interactive white board. So, I saw a lot of changes regarding technology, including the children being able to use iPads to do research and PowerPoint presentations, etc. Children are much more IT savvy now than in the past."

Challenging

Commenting on how this stood them in good stead during the Covid lockdowns, Margaret said: "Home-schooling during Covid was very challenging, but we used the Seesaw App and were in constant touch with the children. During the second lockdown, we were in school with the children of frontline workers. So, we played our part in that as a school."

She added: "It was definitely a very challenging life experience, but we can look back and say we lived through that and survived. Hopefully, the children in the future will never have to live through something like that.

"Our children seemed to manage well, probably because they were living in the countryside and were able to go out and play more freely. They seemed to settle right back into the school routine, and maybe that was because the numbers were so small. They seemed to be happy to come back to school and enjoyed being together. We were very much a family orientated school. Most of the children were cousins and so probably had contact with each other during that period."

Margaret got her first taste of life as a principal when she became acting principal in St Eugene's for six months in 2016, from January to June. The following year, she went to St Matthew's PS, in Garvaghy, Co Tyrone, as acting principal for a year.

"St Matthew's was a small school and it closed," said Margaret, who had in the meantime applied for principalship of St Eugene's PS and got the post.

Starting her role as St Eugene's principal in December 2018, Margaret recalls being kept very busy: "As a small school, there was a lot going on. There was always the threat of closure, so we were constantly trying to attract more children, and with the support of parents we were able to stave it off, but the numbers fluctuated from year-to-year.

"We had a high standard of education and a great reputation as a school but, in recent years, parents were afraid to send their children to St Eugene's in case it closed, and so pupil numbers frittered away because of that fear. When the school closed in June 2024, we had 18 children on the register – nine in classes P1-4 and nine in P5-7.

"Despite that constant threat of closure, I really enjoyed my time there. We had great staff and we were very close. We were also blessed with lovely children and families, and I wish them all the best in the schools they are starting this year. I hope to keep in touch with them and see how they get on in the future."

Cherishing her memories of St Eugene's PS, Margaret is ready to embrace the year ahead at St Brigid's Mountfield, and whatever life brings after that.

She remarked: "I still like teaching and love children, and still feel that I have a lot to offer. So, I suppose, until I stop feeling like that I will keep going."

Feeling blessed to have spent her teaching career to date in Catholic schools, Margaret said: "I love starting and ending the school day with a prayer. I like the visibility of our Catholic faith, with the whole routine of the liturgical year, having the crib out at Christmas and the May altar, etc. For me it is a positive to have Jesus present in school life."

Young Writers share thoughts...

THIS month, some of the Young Writers have been reflecting on their experience of summer pilgrimages, with John writing about an amazing week in Italy amongst the Saints, and Bronagh and Evan sharing about their inspiring time in Medjugorje on the Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage there, while Cara-leigh recalls her amazing first experience of the Youth 2000 summer festival.

Luke writes about the interaction between biases and faith, having reflected on comments by Pope Francis, while Shea shares his growing awareness for the need to have a bold, confident faith, and Bláthnaid reflects on a recent podcast she listened to about victimhood and how it affects our relationship with Christ and others.

Enjoying the arrival of a new cousin in the family, Sean reflects on the beauty and sacredness of new life, while James looks at the great need for practising Catholic politicians in these times of growing aversion to the Church's teachings, and Niamh and Erin write about the power of praying through anxiety and growing to trust God by letting Our Heavenly Mother guide us.


Cara-leigh Doherty - Derry City Deanery


Bronagh Doherty, Co Derry Deanery


Peter Grant, Inishowen Deanery.


John Agustine Joseph, Derry City Deanery.


James Tourish, Derry City Deanery.


Erin Whoriskey, Derry City Deanery


Bláthnaid McMenamin - Co Tyrone 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

Medjugorje Youth Festival – another great experience as part of Diocesan Youth Pilgrimage group *by Bronagh*

IN the early hours of Tuesday, July 31, a group of young people departed Derry to head for Medjugorje; a group of people that would soon become friends, united by their experiences in faith, and who would experience the International Youth Festival together.

We had many challenges during our time away, including the heat, which us, Irish people, are not used to, mosquitoes, the language, food, etc. But none of these dampened our experience, as we all said in agreement on the way home - what a time we had!

The opening Ceremony, much like World Youth Day in Lisbon, was a breathtaking evening. The flags paraded to the outside Altar at St James' Church, one-by-one, representing the countries present, showed just how present the Catholic faith is all over the world. Countries that all spoke different languages celebrated Mass together and, thanks to technology and through music, praised God. The upbeat nature of all the Masses held during the festival reminded us that God is good and life is so promising, thanks to Him. The whole crowd danced, laughed, smiled, and sang together as one family.

We got to listen to real life testimonies. One in particular was that of the mission of Mary's Meals and the work that it does in feeding hungry children. A statistic that highlights the extent of their work is that they are currently feeding 2.4 million children.

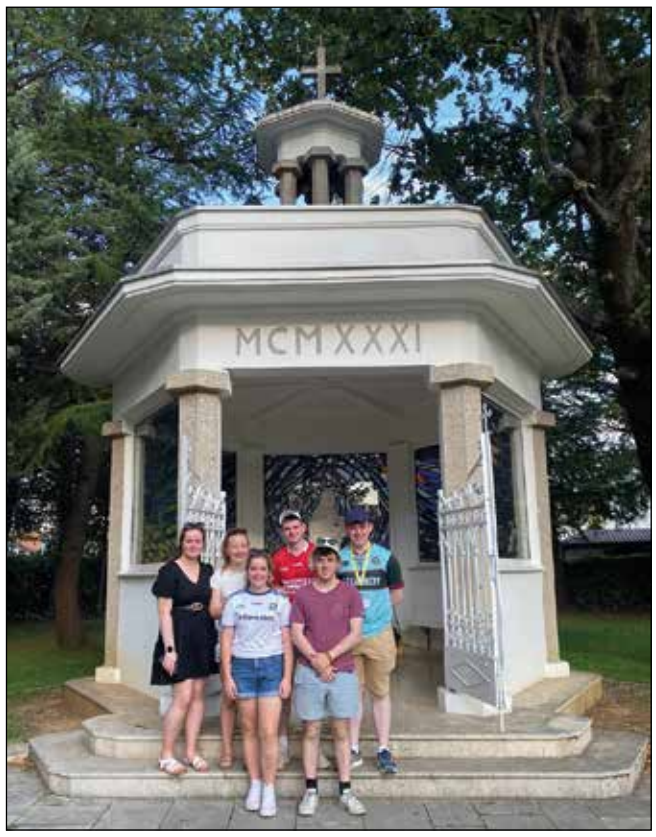
In my opinion, notable experiences had to be climbing Mount Krisevac, 'Cross Mountain', for the international Mass at 5am. We left the hotel at 1.15am to beat the heat and the crowds, which made the climb a very personal experience within our group. We had great conversations about faith, life and experiences on the way up and, when times got tough, we helped each other up, quite literally! When we reached the top, we joined the crowds from around the world who awaited Mass to begin. We watched the sun rise over the beautiful town of Medjugorje, realising how thankful we were to be a part of the youth pilgrimage.

We also visited other shrines, such as 'Blue Cross' and 'Apparition Hill', both sites where Mary is said to have appeared to visionaries to give messages. Visiting these sites were experiences I will never forget; despite the crowds of thousands, it was so peaceful, quiet and reflective. A real reflection of how Mary is the Mother of Jesus, the Mother of all, with a calming motherly nature.

Eucharistic Adoration and the said time of the Apparition, 6.40pm each evening, were brilliant times of reflection; time to slow down, think, pray and thank God for all you have. Everyone's lives are so busy at home, rushing from here to there, that we might not always have time to stop and think and have a moment of quietness with God, but this time enabled us to do just that. I thoroughly enjoyed these reflective times during the period of the festival. Each evening, we took part in this and it offered us peace and quiet amongst a very busy, fun-filled two weeks.

We did some sightseeing on the last day, going to Mostar, a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mostar Old Town was a place very worth seeing and we really enjoyed looking at all the architecture and hearing about their traditions, such as, where they jump off the bridge. Our tour guide warned us, "If you were born in the water, you can jump in the water"; hence, this is a tradition that locals take part in. This takes place on the trademark bridge of Mostar.

To round it all up, I had yet another great experience as part of the Youth Pilgrimage group.



I have made friends for life over the past two years, strengthened my faith and explored some more of our beautiful world. I would highly recommend Medjugorje to anyone thinking about visiting a pilgrimage site. Thanks to Bishop Donal, Lizzie and Niamh for leading another very successful pilgrimage

My first Youth 2000 summer festival was an amazing experience! *by Cara-leigh*

I had the privilege of attending the Youth 2000 summer festival from August 15-18. Youth 2000 holds retreats for 16-35 year olds, with the intention of young people leading young people to the heart of the church!

On the Thursday, we had our opening Mass, which was beautiful! Throughout the weekend, there was all night Adoration and every day we also prayed the Rosary together! Friday and Saturday where jam-packed days. Fridays began with praying Lauds together and then moving into Adoration.

Throughout the weekend Father John OP gave five talks. His first talk on the Friday was on the Eucharist, when he beautifully spoke about Jesus' true presence. This was followed by Mass and Rosary. We then got to hear a wonderful testimony of someone who had converted from Protestantism to Catholicism.

After the testimony, we got the opportunity to go to a workshop of our choice, and I went to Father John's, where we got to ask any questions and he would answer them! The Net Ministries team also put on a fantastic drama for us, which was very impactful.

The second talk was on Reconciliation, the beauty of Confession. Friday night was dedicated to Confession, with lots of priests present. I don't think I have ever witnessed so many people going to Confession, it was absolutely incredible! Friday night concluded with a praise concert, and you could feel the presence of God in the room. It was a beautiful experience!

Saturday started the same as Friday, but this time the talk was on 'Our Lady'. This was my personal favourite talk, with Father John giving an amazing reflection on Mary's love for us, telling us: "Mary could not love her Son and not love His Body, which is the church." This talk really impacted me and helped me to understand the importance of a relationship with Our Blessed Mother! We had Mass and then heard an inspirational testimony of someone who having gone through hardships is still in his faith and encourages others to be also.

Once again, after the testimony we had the opportunity to go to a workshop of our choice, and I chose to the Religious Life workshop, where we could ask the Sisters any questions about religious life. It was very interesting. That night, we had separate women's and men's talks, and I found the women's talk very inspiring.

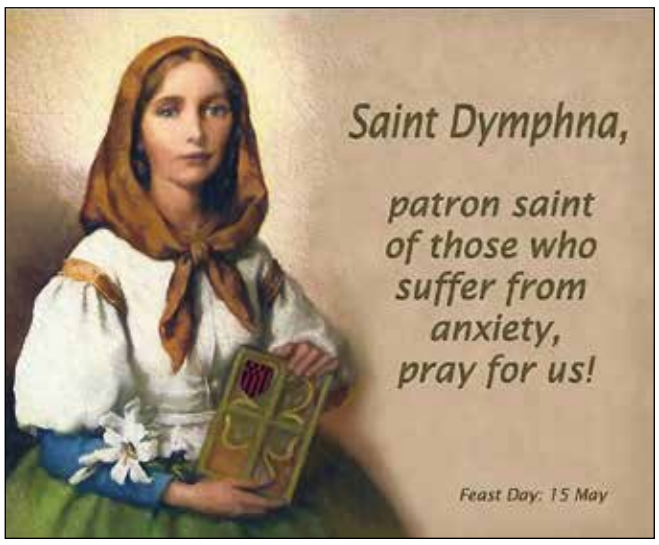
My favourite main event of the weekend was the healing night. There were so many graces poured out that night, it was a beautiful experience! Afterwards, we processed the Eucharist from the hall to chapel, with people lining the route holding small red candles. When the Eucharist got to the chapel, we celebrated Benediction, and it was a perfect end to the night.

The final day was Sunday, when Fr John gave his final talk on living the Christian life, encouraging us to be strong in our faith after leaving the rich environment of having many young Catholics around us. We prayed the Rosary and celebrated our final Mass, before everyone had lunch together before leaving for home.

This was my first Youth 2000 summer festival and I had a fantastic experience. I learnt so many amazing things and got to meet new people! If you can to go to it next summer, you would not regret it!

Young Writers share thoughts...

Praying through anxiety *by Erin*



ST Augustine says: "Trust the past to the mercy of God, the present to His love, and the future to His providence."

I believe this quote is particularly important in times of high anxiety and stress, reminding us to always trust in God and His plan. This time of year, in particular, can be stressful for many young people, for example, going back to school. Personally, I am entering sixth form and I'm most worried about joining a new form class.

Times like these are when we have to remind ourselves that God is there for us, and He has a plan unlike anything we could ever imagine to get us through these small worries. Proverbs 3:5 states: "Trust in the Lord with all your hearts, and do not lean in your own understanding."

As we get busier and busier during the year, we, as Catholics, need to remind ourselves to spend time with God and in prayer. This will not only strengthen our relationships with Him, but also relieve these irrational worries - giving us peace of mind. As Peter taught, we can cast all our anxieties onto Him.

The Bible also focuses on thanksgiving and gratefulness in place of this anxiety, emphasising praying in thanks. This can help us to notice the blessings in our lives rather than the negatives. It is also important to give thanks to God for everything He does, and we can ask God for clarity and peace in our prayers.

Lastly, the patron saint of anxiety, St Dymphna, is someone we can all benefit from praying to at this time, and all times of high stress, by asking her for her intercession and guidance through tough times.

Powerful sense of peace in Medjugorje *by Evan*

DURING the summer I had the immense privilege of embarking on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje accompanied by Most Rev Donal McKeown, Bishop of Derry. As soon as we set foot in Medjugorje, I felt a great sense of peace along with the feeling of an unexplainable presence, which hit me when we gathered for night prayer at Our Lady's statue at the front of St James' Church.

The evening programme was very special, it was uplifting and joyful, with thousands of pilgrims gathered to sing their hearts out, and many priests also from all over the world. Although I was aware that it was the Youth Festival, I was still shocked when I saw the large crowds.

One of the most beautiful moments was when we climbed Apparition Hill in the dark. The sense of peace there was breath-taking and something that I've never experienced. It was very nice to hear the Rosary being recited by people of all ages and cultures.

Due to the large crowds that swarmed, we didn't get the opportunity to move towards the statue, so a few of us made the decision to do it once again the following morning, at a later time. This time I chose to climb barefoot and I was joined by three others. Climbing barefoot whilst the rocks were scalding was quite difficult and I struggled at times, but thanks to the help of 'the two Mary's' - Our Blessed Mother and Mary Dunnion - I was successful, and pursued my mission, which was very rewarding.

In conclusion, the trip was absolutely amazing, and I met new people and made new friends. Although Medjugorje is not yet recognized by the Church, I believe it is a very strong place of prayer and conversion, with the silence being very powerful. I would highly recommend people to make the trip to experience the overwhelming peace and opportunity for reconciliation which it has to offer.

As I write this, I am in Fatima, and I assure 'The Net' and its readers of my prayers for them.

Our Lady Queen of Peace, pray for us!

Amongst the Saints – A week in Italy! *by John*

The board outside the Church of St Mary Major, where Bl. Carlo Acutis' tomb is kept. (Source: Myself)

I was blessed to be able to go to Italy recently and visit the tombs of St Antony of Padua, St Francis of Assisi, St Clare of Assisi, Blessed Carlo Acutis, St Rita of Cascia, and of some of the Popes interred in the side altars of St Peter's Basilica.

The visit to Blessed Carlo Acutis' tomb in Assisi was quite special because as I entered the church where his body was interred, I saw a church full of young people at Mass saying the Lord's Prayer. The devotion and sincerity that they showed, and the excitement and joy of the other pilgrims who came to visit, was very clear at that church. Perhaps, it could be that Assisi is in one sense a 'city of saints'.

God does many things that we want in extraordinary ways – such that we don't recognise them. Each saint that I 'visited' had a story in which God had intervened in their lives in a miraculous way. From the stigmata of St Francis of Assisi to the way that St John Paul II survived his assassination attempt, God showed His abundant grace, mercy, generosity, and love.

The saints did not try to live extraordinary lives, especially Carlo Acutis, but rather they tried to live their ordinary lives by sanctifying their lives, by loving Our Lord in all that they did. Their love of God was manifested in the works that they did; it was the fruit of being one with the Lord. These saints, who came from different eras and various backgrounds, relied on Divine Providence in their lives, and understood that their lives were not to serve themselves but to serve God by serving His children.

To give an example, on his deathbed, Carlo Acutis was not worried about death but rather he wanted to make sure his mother was not worried about him, and he offered all of his sufferings for the Pope and the Church. He didn't wish to serve himself, instead he wanted to serve others; to live for others as Christ lived and died for our Salvation.

Going to St Peter's Basilica was a totally different experience. For one, the size and scale of the church stuns you. To give an example, the letters on the top of the walls of the basilica are about nine feet tall – you wouldn't think that the case at first, but it happened that I saw two men standing around the letters, who seemed to be doing some repair work, and they were smaller than the letters themselves. From the mosaics to the tomb of St Peter, and the various tombs of his successors, the Basilica was in one sense a catechetical masterpiece; lessons from the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Gospels and more were displayed by mosaics, and many of the side altars showed the mosaics of the special moments of some saints.

I saw around the walls of the main altar, below which lies the remains of St Peter, the Gospel inscription: "TU ES PETRUS ET SUPER HANC PETRAM AEDIFICABO ECCLESIAM MEAM, ET TIBI DABO CLAVES REGNI CAELORUM", that is, "You are Peter, and on this rock (petram) I will build my church, and to you, I will give the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.".

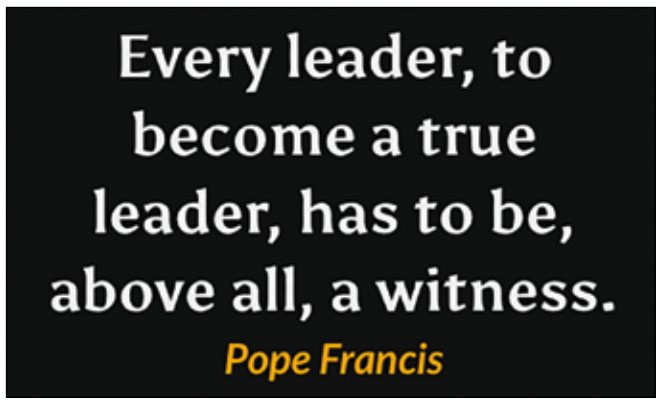
I saw a replica of the Pieta as well, the real one was taken away for works, the sculpture of St Peter in his cathedra (chair), and many other sculptures of the many Bishops of Rome. I was amongst history whilst knowing history was being made. The Church existed when Peter became the first Bishop of Rome, the Church existed when St Francis of Assisi began his movement, the Church was present when I visited St Peter's, and the Church exists now – appearances may have changed but the essence has not.

I am very blessed to have gone to see all the tombs of the saints that I did, in the short time that I had. No matter how many mistakes we humans may make, Our Lord prevails, and He keeps the Church on the right path – from St Peter in the first century to Bl Carlo Acutis in this century, the Church has kept on going, not by the strength of humans but by relying on the Providence of God. May we too be able to trust and rely on His Divine Providence.

St Peter's Basilica - The Square is great, and many people visit there to relax during the evening. The Square itself is a silent catechesis for the keen observer - the statures on the colonnades are those of the saints from the early centuries of the church till the last millennium. (Source: Myself)

Young Writers share thoughts...

Faith and votes…a conflict of interest for Catholic politicians in today's world? *by James*



FOR the month of August, Pope Francis' intention was to pray for our political leaders, and to pray that they work for human development and the common good – as well as, in particular, those who have lost their jobs and for the poor. In a video message, the Roman Pontiff has said that, "Today, politics doesn't have a very good reputation: corruption, scandals, distant from people's day-to-day lives. But, can we move ahead toward universal fraternity without good politics? No. As Paul VI said, politics is one of the highest forms of charity because it seeks the common good."

But, how exactly does one navigate the complicated world of politics, one full of dirty tricks, lies, disingenuous manoeuvres, and certainly power-driven careerists who seek the expedient solution ahead of the right one? Well firstly, it's tough. Catholic Social Teaching, for many in our secular society, is a thing of the past, its rules and ideas are of no relevance in our world today. The promotion of them is like promoting an antique that was held in great regard in the past, but has withered away after time and no longer has the value it once possessed.

In Ireland, the Church found itself on the defeated side of both the referendum on repealing the 8th Amendment, as well as the 34th Amendment to the Constitution, which legalised same-sex marriage. Despite the Church's efforts, the majority of people voted against its guidance in both circumstances.

So, can a Catholic, unwilling to compromise their faith, become a political representative amidst growing aversion to the Church's teachings and even the faith in general? The answer, must be 'yes, absolutely'. In fact, it is not just that they should, it is that they must. It is imperative that Catholics, seeking to do the best that they can by their faith and by the people they seek to represent, run for positions in the world of politics, even if it means tough decisions are required.

The reality is, many of the Church's teachings are actually exactly what people want. Believing that all humans are made in the image of God, we are taught to love all, to care for the needy, to oppose prejudice and discriminations and to fight for the common good. We are also taught to care for the environment, and to represent the beauty of God in our communities. Earthly goods are for the use of humanity under a social mortgage, meaning that while we can use them for our own benefit, we must also be responsible and act as stewards rather than exploiters.

Politicians have overcome challenges due to their faith before. John F Kennedy is known as the first Catholic President of the US, however, he certainly had challenges in his bid for the nation's highest office. Anti-Catholic prejudice was still very much in the mainstream of American life when JFK decided to seek the presidency in 1960. 'The Catholic Issue' was quite prominent during the presidential election, with many, mostly southern Protestants quite wary of JFK's apparent loyalty to Rome and the Church's authority over the US Constitution. However, Kennedy was able to convince the electorate that their issues were his issues and that he was fit to serve his nation.

In today's world, challenges still exist for those who still want to adhere to their faith, while representing their constituents, however, with politics still being one of the most effective ways to actually bring about change, we should help and support those who enter politics in pursuit of a better world, while still staying true to their own faith and beliefs.

A bold, confident faith sets us apart from the world *by Shea*

THANK you for taking the time to read my article, this time around I will be talking about faith, which is an important part of our Christian life-style, as a bold, confident faith sets us apart from the world.

My personal favourite example of faith is that of the Apostles; how, after Our Lord ascended to Heaven, they went all over the world preaching His good word, and many became martyrs as a result of it.

My take away from this is that their faith to them was worth so much more than anything this world could offer, which is a key thing also in our Christian journey.

Faith is such a strong word I find, because of what it means; to believe in something that you can't really see or physically touch, to walk by faith not by sight, which is a big stance to take. However, I believe that Catholics must take this stance because of what our faith contains.

Our faith doesn't have to be blind and uninformed. There is much to learn as a Catholic about our faith and what we believe. We have the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the Bible and church history to back up what we put our faith in, and for that I say, "Praise God!"

I would encourage people to learn more about our Catholic Faith. What I have found is that, in the past few years that I have been journeying with my faith, the more I learn and understand, the more trust I can have in my faith, in the miraculous and things that can't really be explained."

Interactions between biases and faith *by Luke*

ON Sunday, August 11, Pope Francis recited the Angelus prayer at noon in St Peter's Square in the Vatican City, as he does every Sunday. Before reciting the prayer, the Holy Father briefly spoke about the effects that prejudice can have on faith. He explained how many people alive during the same time as Jesus were doubtful of His place as the Son of God. They found it difficult to believe that God's Son would take the place of a lowly carpenter.

In Pope Francis' words: "They were obstructed in their faith by their preconception of His humble origins and the presumption, therefore, that they have nothing to learn from Him." It is often said that the reason Jesus was a carpenter was to challenge these beliefs. It is stated time and time again in the Bible that who people are, or where they come from, is irrelevant. Everyone can find peace and forgiveness in God.

The Bible teaches us that wealth is no grounds to alter your behaviour towards someone, with James (2:1-4), saying: "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory. For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there', or, 'Sit down at my feet', have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"

While those who doubted Jesus may not have told Him to sit at their feet, they still expected someone as important as the Son of God to come in the form of someone wealthy, or perhaps the son of nobility. Their sight was clouded by their biases, and this prevented them from being able to see the truth of what Jesus was saying.

This is not just to say Jesus was an exception, that you should treat both the rich and poor equally because there is a slim chance that one of the poor people may be sent by God. To think that is to miss the point of Jesus being a carpenter. People should be treated equally regardless of wealth because they are all people, and that is enough. Material wealth means nothing in the context of faith.

Biases take more forms than just materialistic ones. This is stated even more clearly in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no man and woman, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." No person is greater or less than another. It is a part of human nature to judge others, but we are taught that we must resist that impulse and see people as they are; different in a multitude of ways but identical in value in the eyes of God. Even those who are not certain in their faith are worthwhile, as we are told "And have mercy on those who doubt;" in Jude 1:22.

There are many more verses that could be used to illustrate this point, but I would like to move on to another piece of what Pope Francis said that Sunday. He goes on to say more about the actions of those who doubted Jesus: "They limit themselves to murmuring among themselves against Him, as though to reassure each other of what they are convinced, closing themselves up as if in an impenetrable fortress."

Echo Chamber

When I read this, I was immediately struck by how their behaviour was strongly reminiscent of the primarily modern concept of an echo chamber. For those who don't know, an echo chamber is essentially when a person surrounds themselves with people who agree with their own opinion. This causes everyone in the echo chamber to become more and more certain that they are right about whatever they may think, as they encounter very few contrary opinions.

What Pope Francis is describing is an echo chamber of sorts, as these people whisper and gossip to other like-minded individuals instead of talking to Jesus or His followers, and seeing how many of their assumptions stand up when faced with the facts.

The reason that I say echo chambers are primarily a modern concept is because of how the internet and social media have made echo chambers so much more effective and, therefore, dangerous. Before, a person would always have some people in their life who didn't agree with their view. While they could surround themselves with friends who thought the same way as them, they would still be exposed to other viewpoints, if to a lesser extent. Additionally, such echo chambers take longer to form, making them less dangerous.

However, with social media, it is shockingly easy to find yourself in an echo chamber. Modern algorithms can often do this almost automatically, as they expose us to content that matches what we have seen before. It can be easy to get lost in an echo chamber and forget that there are other viewpoints that need to be considered.

This ties back to biases and prejudice, as these echo chambers can be one of the birthplaces of those thoughts and patterns, and they are also a place where they can grow stronger unchallenged. Those people who assumed Jesus couldn't be the son of God because He was a carpenter, may have already been biased against those who do manual labour for a living, but the echo chambers that they unwittingly constructed fed that prejudice and prevented them from accepting Jesus.

Pope Francis said that true prayer was a way of opening the heart. That is the opposite of what these echo chambers do. As Christians, we must challenge our biases and accept that all people are truly equal and treat them as such. I would like to finish with a simple and succinct Bible verse that I think ties everything together: "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 1:9).

(Pope Francis' quotes from: https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2024-08/pope-francis-angelus-prayer-faith-prejudices.html)

Young Writers share thoughts...

Every new life is sacred, worthy and meaningful… because it was caused by God *by Seán*

THERE is something so especially significant about the creation of new life. The sheer wonder and sanctity of development and birth is something that I have always viewed as a subject of awe and deserving of appreciation. The time and uniqueness that develops and readies a new-born child for the world is a process that is so delicate and masterful, that a person with strong love and awareness of all of God's works can only wonder at.

In August, I gained another cousin, the second this year and the third in the past two years. I was so pleased for my aunt when I was told that she was pregnant late last year, and I was able to watch as her pregnancy progressed over the months that followed. Staying with her for a few nights when she was about eight months pregnant only added to that observation, and it created in me a sense of appreciation for how God allows for new human life to develop, and sheer appreciation for the journey to motherhood; likely one of the most difficult roles a woman can have, and likely the hardest of any human endeavour. Mothers have the ability to produce a human being inside their body. What is more wondrous than such an achievement?

New life is what sustains our human species, and it is the people in this human species that are responsible for nourishing that new life, raising children with all the love and care that one can muster. We create new life because it is that new life which carries our legacy forward into the future long after we have gone. That is the case for us and all those who have come before us. New life is sacred and vital to humanity.

New life is intended by God. God loves His human creation despite our sinful flaw, and therefore every human being born into this vast and complicated world exists intentionally, even if they are not seen as so by the people here. Therefore, every new life is sacred, worthy, and meaningful – because it was caused by God.

The Book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament contains great instances of how new life is God's creation and how it is worth so much to humanity as a whole. Jeremiah 1:5 states, "Even before I formed you in the womb, I have known you; even before you were born, I had set you apart." This verse implies the value that God sees in the new life that sprouts on earth every day, continuing on the legacy of the lives that have already passed and those that are passing with each moment. That is why it is so important that people see the value in new life, and that people do not view it with disdain simply because young people are unknowledgeable and oblivious to your hardships and experiences throughout your own life.

Jeremiah was commanded by God in Jeremiah 1:7, "Do not say: 'I am still young', for now you will go, whatever be the mission I am entrusting to you, and you will speak of whatever I command you to say. Do not be afraid of them, for I will be with you to protect you – it is Yahweh who speaks!"

I believe that God told Jeremiah not to be restricted from his duty as a prophet simply due to his youth. Youth is a time of learning, everything new and fresh has to grow and develop before it is of great comfort and usefulness – like breaking in a new pair of shoes. A human being is no different, as we grow and learn with time and experience. Those who are developed should not judge newer life for being immature and silly – were they really any different when they were at that stage of their life? Most people grow with age, and new life becomes what passing lives wished for them to be.

Matthew's Gospel documents one of the most famous examples of how new life should be valued by a good Christian, rather than looked at as primitive and behind. Matthew wrote of an incident in which children in Judea came to hear Jesus preach, but the disciples tried to send them away, seeing them as unworthy of hearing the word of God due to their age. Jesus said, in Matthew 19:14, "Let the children be! Don't hinder them from coming to me; for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are humble, like these children."

Why see little value in new life due to a lack of maturity? It is the adult duty to install that maturity as their age progresses. And who better to receive knowledge? The ones who will actually carry it on.

The birth of a new child is truly a wondrous and joyous occasion, a milestone in a couple's lives, and the first milestone in the baby's life – all made possible by God's love for us. Even from a young age, I saw pregnancy, the growth through the infant stages and childhood,

as fascinating, something almost surreal. It is a great privilege to have seen my brother and many previous cousins change through those many stages of new life and towards the potential that God has permitted them to have. There is nothing more important to humanity than the protection of our youth, for they are the pride of our entire existence, and one day they too will adopt these responsibilities themselves.

God, in Jeremiah 1:10, gave Jeremiah the 'authority' "to build and to plant." It is also our duty to maintain our species with a similar mind-set. New life is beautiful and refreshing, and securing our roots and building them up with love for our young is that greatest form of love for each other which Jesus commanded.

When we let Mary guide us we learn to trust God more *by Niamh*

ST Maximilian Kolbe, a saint known for his deep love and devotion to the Virgin Mary, once said: "When we dedicate ourselves to Mary, we become instruments in her hands, just as she is an instrument in God's hands. Let us then be guided by her, for she will provide for the needs of body and soul and overcome all difficulties and anxieties." This quote speaks to the power and comfort we can find when we offer ourselves to Mary, the Mother of Jesus.

To understand what St Maximilian Kolbe means, we can first think about the word 'instrument'. An instrument is something that is used like a tool in the hands of a worker. When we dedicate ourselves to Mary, we allow her to use us as instruments to carry out God's work. Just as she was chosen by God to bring Jesus into the world, she can help guide us to do good in our own lives.

Mary is often seen as the perfect example of how to follow God. She said 'yes' to God's plan without hesitation, even when she didn't fully understand what was ahead. When we let Mary guide us, we learn to trust God more and to say 'yes' to His plans for us, even when life is uncertain or difficult.

St Maximilian Kolbe reminds us that when we dedicate ourselves to Mary, she helps take care of both our physical and spiritual needs. Mary, as a loving mother, is deeply concerned about every part of our lives. She is not only worried about our souls, but she also cares about our daily struggles, worries, and needs.

Imagine a child who runs to their mother when they are hurt or scared. The mother comforts and helps the child, taking care of both their pain and fear. In a similar way, when we turn to Mary, she is there to comfort us, to guide us, and to help us with whatever we are going through. Whether we are worried about our health, our family, or any other challenge, Mary is ready to intercede for us, to bring our needs to God, and to help us find peace and strength.

Life is full of challenges, and it's easy to feel overwhelmed by difficulties and anxieties. However, St Maximilian Kolbe assures us that Mary can help us overcome these tough times. When we dedicate ourselves to her, we are not promised a life without problems, but we are promised that she will be with us through them.

Mary experienced great suffering in her own life, especially as she stood at the foot of the cross, watching her Son, Jesus, die. Because she went through such pain, she understands our struggles. When we face difficulties, we can find comfort in knowing that Mary has been there, too, and she knows how to help us.

By turning to Mary, we can find a new perspective on our problems. Instead of being overwhelmed, we can learn to trust that God has a plan, even if we don't see it right away. Mary helps us to stay strong, to keep

our faith, and to find peace in the midst of our struggles.

In dedicating ourselves to Mary, we open our hearts to a powerful source of love and guidance.

St Maximilian Kolbe's words remind us that Mary is not just a distant figure in our faith, but a loving mother who wants to help us in every part of our lives. By letting Mary guide us, we become instruments in her hands, ready to do good and to face life's challenges with strength and peace. Whether we are dealing with worries, needs, or hardships, Mary is there to provide comfort, guidance, and help. All we need to do is dedicate ourselves to her and trust in her loving care.

Victimhood ruins true companionship with Christ *by Bláthnaid*

ESTABLISHED in 2016, Holy Family Mission in the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore offers young adults, aged between 18 and 30, the opportunity to take a residential gap year for faith formation. With a focus on reviving and renewing the Church in Ireland, the mission house's primary focus, as quoted on their website, is "setting young people on fire with love for Christ so that they can share Him with the world."

Holy Family Mission also run 'Paving The Way Home' Podcast, where you can listen to many great homilies on a variety of different platforms including Spotify, YouTube and Apple Podcasts. Recently, an episode titled, "We Are Not Victims", by the organisation's spiritual director, Fr Patrick Cahill, was uploaded which I found to be a particularly interesting homily that acted as a much-needed wake up call for myself.

In his homily, Fr Cahill spoke about the many dangers of the increasing victim mentality that is rapidly growing in today's society. Encouraged by woke culture, so many of us are limiting ourselves to a label, a diagnosis, or a difficulty, and clinging to the problems that arise with it, so much so, that we are developing a "learned helplessness." Fr Cahill commented on this, saying, "Don't get me wrong, there can be absolutely valid fears and things in people, but I think we've taken it a bit too far."

He went on to discuss the many dangers that viewing ourselves as victims can cause: lack of empathy; fixation on negative events or trauma; and thinking that people would be better off without us. These are just a few of some of the symptoms that can slowly start to develop in us without even realizing. Something bad happens to us, or someone says something off-putting to us and we immediately take offence and feel victimized, causing us to retreat into ourselves, taking our focus off Jesus and back onto ourselves and our own emotions.

In relation to this, Fr Cahill highlighted a very important piece of scripture: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Romans 8:37). This idea that we are victims is a lie that makes us feel weak and defeated, leading us to believe things about ourselves that aren't true. If we let a diagnosis or grief, or whatever cross we may be carrying, overshadow our identity as children of God, we can very quickly start to lose ourselves or become selfish and bitter.

Even simple things like offering up a bus seat or washing the dishes when asked can set us off, and seem like too big of an ask, because we are stuck in a cycle of thinking our life is so much harder than everybody else's. Each time we get annoyed or frustrated and begin blaming others, it's important to remember that Jesus suffered an unimaginably painful death on the Cross, but despite His pain,

He remained full of love. If we want to grow closer to Christ, we need to stop viewing ourselves as victims and try to remain full of love even in times of darkness.

Fr Cahill went on to remind listeners that in both science and faith, we are searching for the truth, saying that this victim mentality is "not from God, it's not freeing. It's also simply not the truth." Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life. The truth is that we are not victims. The truth is that we have someone to give all our troubles, worries and woes to, someone who will willingly carry them for us because He loves us. Jesus is the victim, we are the ones who put Him on the cross with our sins and selfishness, we are not victims and we need to stop viewing ourselves as such, because personal victimhood ruins true companionship with Christ.

If you would like to find out more information about Holy Family Mission, you can do so on their website at https://www.holyfamilymission.ie or you can listen to Fr Patrick Cahill's full homily, 'We Are Not Victims', on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GLW1bDDMrwk

"What about you?" *…A Question for a New Month! by Fr Peter O'Kane*

SOME years back, the publishing world was taken by storm by the appearance of a book on the shelves. It wasn't a novel or autobiography, nor was it a travel guide or of historical research. It was a small pocket-sized book with a simple cross on the cover, accompanied by its title: 'Rule for a New Brother'. In this book, charting the daily journey of the believer, the priestly author reflects on the nature of Christian response to the call of faith. In reflecting on the small beginnings of life, there is encouragement to embrace the road along the way with others. Indeed, there will be hiccups and tumbles but also constant challenge by earthly ways that, if used properly, will give life and lead to the kingdom.

At the beginning of the book, he writes: "On the road you are called to be least of all and not master, to carry other people's burdens and not lay your own on them, to give freedom instead of taking it, to grow poor in order to make others rich, to take the cross upon yourself thus bringing joy to others, to die in order that others may live. Keep Jesus Christ before your eyes. Don't hesitate to go anywhere He leads you; don't stay where you are and don't look back, but look forward with eagerness to what lies ahead."

Invitation

As the season of summer quickly gives way to autumnal colours and temperatures, pilgrimage and down-time has drawn to a close and the rhythm of the year strikes again as the academic year beckons, this invitation is at the heart of our Christian living: to keep Jesus Christ before our eyes. Not knowing what lies ahead, our experiences of the summer months encourage us to look forward with eagerness as people prepare to engage the familiar, embrace the new and be renewed in the regularities that come when holidays end. This invitation calls for a response, perhaps best summed up in the question of Jesus himself as recorded at the end of the Gospel reading on the Twenty-First Sunday of the Year: What about you?

This invites for a reflective response on our own journey in faith as we grow in our relationship with Christ and one another. For this is the reply of St Peter, as the writer of the Fourth Gospel concludes his recording of Jesus' discourse on the Bread of Life: "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God." With Christ at the centre of life, then all things will be enlivened, faith will grow and an eager search for eternal life will endure.

As Pope Francis writes in his letter, 'Desiderio Desideravi' §64: "Our life is not a random chaotic series of events, one following the other. It is rather a precise itinerary which, from one annual celebration of His Death and Resurrection to the next, conforms us to Him, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ". This is the perspective from which we look: Jesus Christ our Saviour who conforms us to Him by the way we live in His name.

Challenge

Yet the challenge in this is that before we can be conformed to Christ, we need to know Him! These shortened days of the Autumn months might offer an opportunity for intentional and dedicated time – whether weekly or daily – coming to know the Christ who we seek, to discover who Christ is. It is in the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy and in meditating on the Word of God in the Scriptures that we respond to Christ's question: "What about you?" as we say to Him "Who shall we go to?"

The 'Instrumentum laboris' (the document preparing for the Second Session of the Synod of Bishops in October 2024) focusses on the "Who"! It notes that "Sacred Scripture constitutes the witness par excellence of God's communication with humanity. They testify that God has spoken to his People and continues to do so, and they present the different channels through which this communication occurs" (par. 61).

Salvation

So, who is the One that we want to go to? Sent by God the Father, born in time, Jesus Christ comes as the only Son from the Father. In and through Him, God recapitulates all of the history of salvation on behalf of humanity. The Old Testament narratives prefigure the New Testament realities revealed in Jesus. A brief version of the story of salvation might go something like this: This is the story of how God gathered His people together over the centuries, and how the gathered people itself became an agent of gathering. The story begins, of course, with various scatterings – the expulsion of the first family from Paradise, the collapse of social life with the Flood, and the dispersal of the people at Babel because of their inability to continue talking to one another. But from then on it is a story of gathering, and the word itself, or its equivalents, appear constantly in the text. It begins with Abraham and his family, continues with the Patriarchs, takes a new turn with Moses and the formation of the people of Israel, takes political shape in the kingdoms and becomes a religious restoration after the Exile.

Covenant

As the 'Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy' tells us: "The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He achieved His task principally by the paschal mystery of His blessed passion, resurrection from the dead, and the glorious ascension, whereby dying, he destroyed our death and, rising, he restored our life" (Sacrosanctum Concilium 5).

The perfect covenant in Christ, in which God's promises are fulfilled, completes the imperfect nature of the old covenants, echoed in the call of St Cyril of Jerusalem to the newly baptised in his Mystagogical Catecheses: "Now turn from the old to the new, from the figure to the reality. For it was from the side of Christ as He slept the sleep of death upon the cross that there came forth 'the wondrous sacrament of the whole Church'." Now, in Jesus, the gathering of God's people came to fulfilment in the New Testament as He gathered His disciples.

The Way

For three years, He trod the dusty roads of His home country with His closest friends; as He journeyed towards the cross of suffering, He showed them how to live. Jesus taught them all about God, He showed His power at work as He prayed and healed, as He worked miracles and preached God's word. By His words and actions, He showed them how to live life differently – a life filled with energy and joy, a life of love that knew no bounds, a love that even took Him to death on the cross. But that was not the end because, in the silence of the night, the rumble of God's glory was made known as Jesus rose from the dead.

As St Thomas Aquinas reminds us in the Third Part of his 'Summa Theologiae': "Our Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, in order to 'save His people from their sins'…showed to us in His own Person the way of truth, whereby we may attain to the bliss of eternal life by rising again." After His glorification, the Holy Spirit gathered the community of believers under the leadership of the apostles, and from this community, preachers went out to gather the people of all nations into the Church.

The story will reach its culmination with the revelation of the final gathering at the end of time in 'the New Jerusalem come down from heaven'. The desire of every believer is to share in this gathering of the Church in glory, participating in the eschatological banquet. This is the believer's response to Christ's question: "What about you? What are you seeking?" For it is to this Banquet that we are called, it is to God to whom we wish to go.

Searching

Whether it is through participation in the Sacred Liturgy, in the celebration of Mass, or in communal or individual reflection on the Scriptures, our searching for Christ means that we hear afresh Christ's question every day and respond amid the realities of our lives.

Fr Liam Walsh, an Irish Dominican, writes: "Human experience gives rise to shared questions and a constant search for meaning. If faith is to be about real life, then it must let itself be confronted by the questions so raised by the human mind, the questions that are dealt with in philosophies. These questions confront it, challenging it to express itself in ways that are coherent with the way the human mind expresses its grasp of reality."

And amid these questions, there must be the hope shared by St Peter in the Gospel: "Lord, you have the message of eternal life and we believe"! In another place as he writes to the early Church, St Peter comments: "In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence." And how do we give this account of this hope ...we do so through our lives as Christians within the Church, we do so by coming to Christ and sharing Him with others.

Reflect

It is always good to meditate on the Scriptures and to participate in the Church's sacramental life, but these encounters should spur us on in a new way. Perhaps this is expressed well in a question posed by Pope Benedict in his Apostolic Encyclical, 'Spe Salve': "Can our encounter with the God who in Christ has shown us His face and opened His heart be for us too not just 'informative' but 'performative' – that is to say, can it change our lives, so that we know we are redeemed through the hope that it expresses?"

So, the invitation is given to us all as we begin a new month. Even when we aren't preparing for a new beginning in the academic world or getting ready to return to schooling, September always invites us to reflect on moments of new creation. We hear the Gospel question directly from Jesus in our time: "What about you? Do you want to go away as well?" And hopefully our response will be like that of St Peter: "Lord, who shall we go to? You have the message of eternal life, and we believe; we know that you are the Holy One of God."

General Assembly Synod of Bishops October 2024…

We are on a journey…our task is to ensure we listen to Holy Spirit *by Bishop Donal*

THE Synodal Process is an initiative like no other! It is an attempt to develop a worldwide conversation to discern where the Holy Spirit is leading the church at a time of great change and huge challenges. No other body has even considered this possibility. Like Jesus, Pope Francis thinks big.

It used to be that bishops gathered from all round the world to discuss issues. New methods of communication have enabled so many more to be involved in on-going grace-filled conversations.

The church process is based on the following convictions:

• God leads His Church, and it is our job to listen for the still small voice of God. We are not a democracy where only some are heard and the loudest voice wins;

• The Holy Spirit has been given to every baptised person and the little ones have a valuable contribution to make to discernment;

• The Church has the mission of bringing Christ's healing and mercy to the world of our time. Every church structure has to be focused on going on mission, not on retreating behind high walls.

The Synodal Process is much bigger than the two General Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023 and October 2024! A careful reading of the Vatican documents shows that these two meetings have simply been looking at how we develop synodality as a way of living in our parishes and dioceses – and in the church.

Until we have opened ourselves up to spiritual conversations, we cannot begin to start proposing answers to the many challenges that we face. Decisions will be based on human priorities if we want solutions before we have learned to listen to each other and to the Holy Spirit. Only a prayerful church will be silent enough to hear the Lord.

Therefore, some people have completely misunderstood the discussions on synodality. The last two years asked us to focus on how we develop prayer-filled, synodal hearts and processes, and to see what issues are being raised. An un-synodal dash to hasty decisions is not of God.

The October 2023 Synod was preceded by a Working Document, which was based on submissions from every country. The bishops, religious and lay people discussed that Working Document in detail and sent out to the world their reflections. National synodal committees sent back to Rome what they considered most important.

And now, the next stage of the journey takes place in Rome in October 2024. It will issue new proposals and questions. And what do we do then?

The Irish Church has been continuing with the training of diocesan teams who can lead local conversations. And we begin the next stage of the journey to help us prayerfully discern where God wants us to focus our mission.

• Do we emphasise rebuilding our own structures?

• Do we focus on the needs of those who are 'harassed and dejected like sheep without a shepherd'?

• Do we prioritise young people?

• How do we care for 'the least, the last and the lost'?

• How do we help parishes to become what St John Pail II referred to as 'schools of prayer'?

This process may well involve regional assemblies or an Irish National Gathering. But we are on a journey. Our task is to ensure that we listen to the Holy Spirit. We move forward with trust and not in fear. As St Paul wrote, with God on our side, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31)

The Second Session of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops will take place from October 2-27, 2024, in order to continue the work of the Synod on Synodality around the theme 'For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission.'

The Second Session of the XVI Assembly will be preceded by two days of spiritual retreat, from September 30 to October 1 (with participants arriving on September 29).

The 'Instrumentum laboris' for the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (October 2024) is available at…

https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/07/09/240709d.html

Eangach

Regina Caeli / A Bhanríon na bhFlaitheas

Regina caeli, laetare, alleluia!
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia!
Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia!
Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia!

A Bhanríon na bhFlaitheas, déan gairdeas, alleluia!
Óir, an Té arbh fhiú thú é a iompar, alleluia!
D'aiséirigh sé mar a dúirt sé, alleluia!
Guígh orainn chun Dé, alleluia!

As Sciathlúireach na Maighdine Muire

Stiúraigh mé do d' mholadh
cé nach ollamh mé in éigeas,
a ghnúis ainglí gan locht
'thug sú a huchta dho m' réiteach.

Fágaim mé féin faoi d' choimirc'
a Bhuime mhuirneach an Aonmhic,
is faoi do sciath díon mo chorp,
mo chroí, mo thoil is mĕifeacht.

Peacach mé 'tá líonta d'olc,
sirim ort a dhéanamh,
Banlia na n-othar n-anacrach,
ar dhallchiach m'anama d'fhéachain.

Teampall na dTrí Pearsan,
Athair, Mac is Naomhspiorad,
guím thú do m'fhortacht
uair mo bhreithe is mĕaga.

A Ríogan dá dtug an Rí
an tAthair Síoraí baochas,
óghacht is 'bheith i d' mháthair,
gabhaim do pháirt do m' réiteach.

Naomh Maximilian Kolbe

I gcomparáid le halt na míosa seo caite, tá leanúnachas de chineál i gceist anseo, ós rud é go bhfuil beatha naoimh eile faoi phlé. Is iontach an rud é, mar chaitlicigh, go bhfuil an oiread sin d'eiseamláir againn. Sa mhullach air sin, ní áibhéal é a rá, gur mhothaigh mé mar go raibh mé spreagtha leis seo a roinnt. Is é Naomh Maximilian Kolbe – ceann de na naoimh is mó atá i gceist anois – fear iontach amach is amach. Mairtíreach a bhí ann, agus naomh nua-aimseartha chomh maith, a bhí ar cheann de na teagascóirí is mó atá againn maidir le spioradáltacht Mhuire. Duine ar chuir an Pápa Eoin Pól II síos air mar seo: *"Fáidh don mhílaois úr"*.

Rugadh *Rajmond (Raymond) Kolbe* do theaghlach cráifeach in Zduńska Wola sa Pholainn in 1894 agus bhog siad go Pabianice. Lá amháin, chuir iompair Rajmond isteach ar a mháthair an méid sin gur chuir sí an cheist go buartha, "A Rajmond, cad é a dhéanfar díot?" Chuir seo iontas ar an ghasúr. Chuaigh sé go díreach chuig seipéal an pharóiste agus sheas ag taobh-altóir Mhuire agus d'iarr sé, "Cad é a dhéanfar díom, *i ndáiríre?"* Tháinig Mhuire chuige ansin le dhá choróin ina lámha, ceann dearg agus ceann bán. "Cé acu ceann a ba mhian leat?" Bhí i gceist leis an cheann dearg, go dtabharfadh sé a shaol suas ar son Dé, agus an ceann bán, go mbeadh sé geanmnaí. Ba é a fhreagra: "Ba mhaith liom an dá cheann".

Agus é fásta, chuaigh Rajmond leis na Proinsiasaigh agus ghlac sé an t-ainm 'Maximilian'. Bhí sé sa Róimh uair amháin agus bhí iontas air nuair a chonaic sé buíon de Mháisiún le híomhá den diabhal lena chos ar an Ardaingeal Mícheál, agus teideal ag maíomh go rialódh an diabhal sa Vatacáin. Dar leis, más féidir leis na daoine seo a bheith i seilbh Shátain, nach dtiocfadh le buíon eile a bhunú a bheas i seilbh Mhuire leis an bua a fháil air? B'shin an rud a rinne sé. Bhunaigh sé pobal, an Militia Immaculatae *(Mílíste Mhuire Gan Smál),* pobal fear a bhí go hiomlán i seilbh Mhuire le go leanfadh siad a toil agus go ligfeadh siad di oibriú iontu le daoine a thabhairt a fhad lena mac, agus iad a dhealbhú, á ndéanamh níos cosúla leis-sean.

Ba í an sprioc a bhí leis an Militia ná an méid is mó anamacha a thabhairt chun Críost fríd Mhuire. Ardpsrioc! Léirigh Maximilian agus an Militia díogras dochreidte. Ar dtús, bhunaigh siad mainistir sa Pholainn darb ainm Niepokolanów (Cathair Mhuire Gan Smál). D'oibrigh Maximilian agus na bráithre gan stad ag craobhscaoileadh an tsoiscéil ar an raidió is ar meáin an lae sin. Chuaigh sé go dtí an tSeapáin in 1930. Cé go mbíodh sé tinn agus an-lag in amanna, lean sé lena obair mhór ansin agus muinín aige i Muire. Agus mainistir á tógáil acu in Nagasaki, chuaigh sé in éadan an chomhairle choitianta agus dúirt, "Ba mhian le Muire go dtógfar an mhainistir ar an taobh seo den chnoc". Níos moille, in 1945, phléasc na Meiriceánaigh buama adamach in Nagasaki agus scriosadh an chathair. Tháinig an mhainistir slán.

In 1936, toghadh Maximilian mar Athair Ginearálta ar an Militia

agus bhí ar filleadh ar an Pholainn. Thóg Maximilian ar theagaisc Naomh Louis de Montfort ar Mhuire. Dhírigh, mar shampla, sé ar an caidreadh idir Mhuire agus an Spiorad Naomh. Ba mhaith leis anamacha a thabhairt a fhad le hÍosa chomh gasta agus is féidir, agus dar leis, is í Muire an bealach leis sin a dhéanamh, nuair a thugann duine é féin go huile is go hiomlán di. Déanann sí níos cosúla le Críost muid, agus déantar 'Críost eile' dínn.

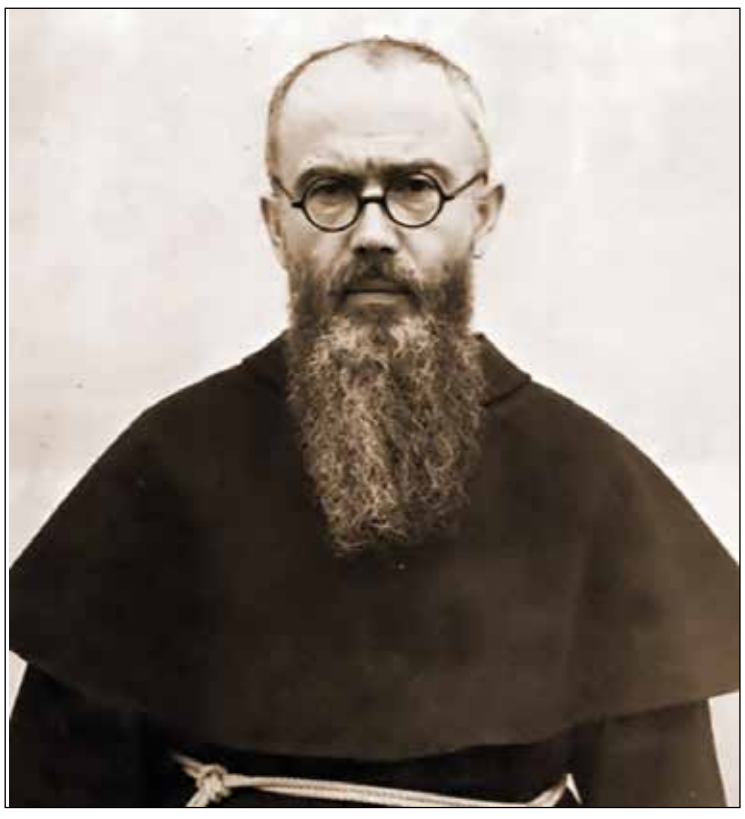
Is Sagart Caitliceach Mé

Toisc gur scéal mór atá againn an uair seo, ní mór dúinn leanstan ar aghaidh leis sa dara halt! Agus Maximilian anois sa Pholainn, bhí ceann de na heachtraí is mó suntais ina shaol ar tí a thitim amach. Sa bhliain 1939, rinne an Ghearmáin ionradh ar an Pholainn, agus bhí an tír i seilbh na Naitsithe (agus na Rúiseach, san oirthear). Roimh i bhfad, glacadh seilbh ar Niepokolanów agus iarradh ar thromlach na mbráithre imeacht. Fágadh Maximilian agus roinnt bheag acu. De réir a chéile, ina dhiaidh do Maximilian saothar a scríobh ar an toipic *'An Fhírinne'*, rinne siad príosúnach dó fosta. Ní raibh siad sásta fán teachtaireacht a bhí á cur amach aige.

Cuireadh go campa géibhinn é – campa báis – ar a dtugtar Auschwitz. B'uafásach an saol a bhí ag daoine a cuireadh ann, agus chaith na gardaí leo mar nach raibh siad ina ndaoine daonna. I rith an ama, thug Naomh Maximilian spreagadh do phríosúnaigh nuair a d'fhulaing siad, ag rá "Tabhair do Mhuire Gan Smál é uilig, thiocfadh léi úsáid a bhaint as". Choinnigh sé daoine ag dul. Bhí ministreacht aige ann, agus thug sé léachtaí do dhaoine fiú, agus iad san áit seo atá cosúil le hIfreann.

Lá amháin, rinne duine iarracht le héalú. Chuir na gardaí pionós mór ar na príosúnaigh eile, mar ba ghnách. Chuir siad orthu seasamh i línte sa chlós le tamall fada. Ina dhiaidh tamaill, tháinig an ceannasaí ag roghnú daoine amach as an ghrúpa a bhí le bás a fháil sa tseomra ocrais. Roghnaíodh fear amháin – Franciszek Gaojowniczek – a thosaigh ag gol agus ag impí, "Mo bhean chéile, mo pháistí, ní fheicfidh mé arís iad!" Tháinig Maximilian chun tosaigh as a líne, "Ba mhaith liomsa dul ina áit". "Cé thusa?" arsa an ceannasaí. "Is sagart caitliceach mé" a d'fhreagair Kolbe. "Is cuma liom cé acu muc a gheobhaidh bás" a d'fhreagair an ceannasaí, agus tugadh Kolbe ar shiúl leis na fir eile le bás a fháil.

Bhí uaféis amach is amach ag baint leis an seomra ocrais, agus cluineadh daoine ag scairteadh de ghnáth, agus fiú, rinne daoine iarracht daoine eile a ithe. Níorbh é sin a tharla an uair seo, agus ina áit sin, chuala siad Maximilian agus na daoine ag guí agus ag ceol iomann. D'fhreastal sé ar na fir seo, le gur féidir leo bás a fháil



le dínit, agus iad ullmhaithe. Thug sé dóchas agus cúram spioradálta dóibh san áit is measa dá bhfuil ann. Ag an deireadh, chuaigh gardaí agus banaltraí isteach agus thug instealladh do Kolbe agus mharaigh siad é. Ba iad na focail dheireanacha as a bhéal: "Ave Maria!"

Bhí grá aige do Mhuire, agus muinín iomlán. Scaip sé Briathar Dé sna meáin a bhí ann ag an am. Léirigh sé grá Dé agus thug dóchas sna háiteanna ba mheasa. Cinnte, Fáidh don mhílaois úr a bhí ann. A Maximilian Kolbe Naofa, guigh orainn!

Celebrating a 50th wedding anniversary and two half-century birthdays…

St Eugene's Knock pilgrimage a wonderful parish community experience

by Anne Marie Hickey – Pastoral Coordinator

A Pilgrimage of 90 people left a rainy Derry and travelled to Knock Shrine on Thursday, June 13, with Fr Colum Clerkin as Spiritual Director.

On arrival, we had an opportunity to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We then gathered in the Apparition Chapel, where two of our pilgrims, Eddie and Kathleen McCallion renewed their marriage vows on the occasion of their 50th Wedding Anniversary. Fr Colum officiated at the ceremony in this most sacred of places to celebrate the great achievement of 50 years of marriage.

Afterwards, we processed to the Basilica for Mass, where Fr Colum concelebrated.

Pupils from our Parish Post Primary Schools were part of our Pilgrimage. Pupils from St Mary's College sang at the Mass and pupils from St Joseph's Boys' School carried the banner in the Opening Procession of the Mass. Teachers from both schools accompanied the pupils. It was such a joy for all the pilgrims to see the faith in action of our young people, sharing their gifts and talents.

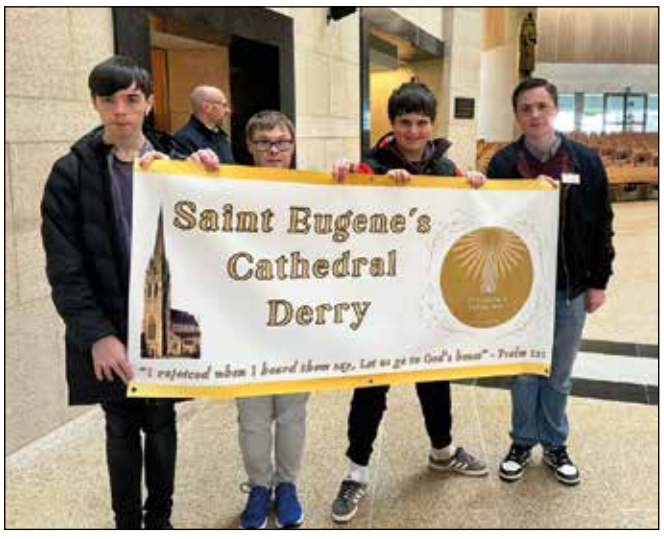
We also had two pilgrims celebrating their 50th birthday and it was great to be able to celebrate with them. Roisin Rice and Seamus McIntyre were both surprised when presented with a cake and presents.

The sense of Parish community was at the forefront of the Pilgrimage. We had pilgrims who travelled from other parishes too, as far away as Scotland and Belfast, to be part of the group. They said that they had felt so welcome and appreciated being able to join in with the St Eugene's Parish pilgrims.

At Knock Shrine, there is a wonderful facility where a small bus can take people with mobility issues from one building to another. This was greatly welcomed by some pilgrims and made their day more enjoyable.

After a lovely meal in Knock House Hotel, the buses left the Shrine with tired but joy-filled pilgrims for our journey back to Derry.

Our Lady of Knock pray for us.



Pre-order Fr McGlade's 'Five Years Tour in America' – a valuable insight into Drumragh history

FR J J McGlade, who served as a curate in Drumragh Parish from 1879 until 1905, embarked on a remarkable journey across North America in 1890 to raise funds for the construction of a new church in Omagh.

Over the next five years, he travelled extensively throughout Canada and the United States, visiting numerous communities of emigrants from Ireland and beyond. He was warmly welcomed by exiles from Drumragh Parish and the Diocese wherever he went.

Fr McGlade's goal was to raise $30,000 towards building the Sacred Heart Church, and upon his return to Omagh in 1895, he had successfully met this ambitious target.

In 1906, he published a book chronicling his five-year odyssey, titled 'Five Years Tour in America.' The book provides a detailed account of the people he met and the places he visited, with special emphasis on emigrants from Drumragh Parish and neighbouring areas, such as Dromore, Drumquin, Castlederg, Plumbridge, Strabane, and other parts of Tyrone.

It is a significant historical document, offering valuable insights into the history of our parish and the broader story of emigration to America and Canada. As part of the 125th anniversary of the dedication of Sacred Heart Church, there are plans to republish it.

It is hoped to have the hardback edition available in late October or early November, just in time for Christmas! Currently, it is believed that there is a very limited number of these books in existence and most are in poor condition. The effort to retain this story for future generations has significant historical merit.

Due to the high cost of republication, the plan is to produce a limited edition, at the possible price of £25 per copy. To ensure that an adequate number of copies are printed, those interested in purchasing the book are asked to register their intention by visiting the website at https://ciar.ie/2024/08/09/sacredheartbookpreorder/ and completing the order form by October 6. Early registration will help gauge demand and ensure that all who are interested can secure a copy. People may also wish to promote this book among their own relatives and friends in Canada and the United States, or other places abroad.

Derry 'Walk to Knock' pilgrims greatly impress American university missionaries

THE annual Walk to Knock attracted some overseas interest this year, with two Catholic missionaries with an organisation called 'FOCUS' (Fellowship of Catholic University Students) taking on the challenge.

Meghan and Becca, from California, were on a three-week sabbatical and explained that they had felt, through prayer, "called to do a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Knock".

"We have been to many Marian shrines, including Częstochowa, Lourdes, and Fatima. We thought, what if we could walk to Knock? Walking is a beautiful way to pilgrimage; there is a deeper sense of journeying, humanity, and humility in walking rather than simply driving somewhere, like we would on a normal day," they said.

Doing some research back in November about walking to Knock, they came across a documentary on formed.org about the Cursillo walk from Dublin! Inspired by the film, they decided that they wanted to do the walk.

Impressed by the support teams and the great organisation that went into the Walk to Knock, they set out to try and make contact with those involved with the walk in Ireland by contacting all the Irish people that they knew.

"During this time, we had to purchase our plane tickets, without knowing whether or not we'd be able to do the walk!" said Becca, adding that they finally were put in touch with Patsy McCallion and Thomas Gallagher, of Derry Cursillo.

She added: "Lo and behold, Thomas told us the walk began on July 16 - the very day after we would land in Ireland! Clearly Our Lady wanted us there."

Feeling blessed to have participated in the 2024 Derry 'Walk to Knock' with Cursillo, Becca said: "It was a privilege to be welcomed into the group and make this journey to Our Lady with them. Three highlights for us were the experience of pilgrimage, the knowledge we gained about the Church in Ireland, and the message of Our Lady of Knock.

"First, in pilgrimaging, we come face-to-face with our own weakness and humanity through sore feet, blisters, and fatigue. We were so moved by the love and care of the support team and our fellow pilgrims, who quite literally washed our feet and always made sure we were safe, well-fed, and rested…maybe not so much that last one…the Irish like to stay up late and get up early! Everyone went above and beyond to make us an extra bowl of porridge, make us laugh, or get us a coffee on the road, and we made many dear friends.

"Second, we are grateful to have learned so much about the history and present state of the Catholic Church in Ireland at large, and specially Northern Ireland. The Church has endured a lot of persecution and political strife, but the truth and love of Jesus Christ remains constant and enduring. We were particularly moved to have Mass at the Mass Rock where Catholics would attend secret Masses during penal times.

"Finally, we had the chance to spend time in prayer at Our Lady of Knock and received a lot from meditating on her apparition. Her silence spoke to us of her comforting presence and accompaniment. The Lamb of God, next to John the beloved, spoke to us of the Eucharist and the need to cling to the one true faith of the Catholic Church, especially through the Mass, through any difficulties, political drama, interior struggles, or persecution. This silent message is one that will always be relevant and timely, no matter the century we live in or the country we call home."

Celebrating the Eucharist at Glenshane Mass Rock

by Fr Joseph Varghese

HUNDREDS of parishioners from around Dungiven gathered at the Mass Rock in Glenshane Forest on August 15, 1974.

The late Fr Hugh Conway was parish priest, while the late Fr Desmond Mullan was the curate and Fr Art O'Reilly, now retired, was curate in Drumsurn.

Fr O'Reilly organised that special event 50 years ago on the Feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, when Mass was celebrated in memory of our ancestors who risked their lives to hear Mass in difficult circumstances.

On Sunday, August 4, this year, about 70 parishioners from Dungiven and beyond gathered to hear Mass, as they have done for the past few years despite the inclement weather.

I celebrated the Mass and the participants were very grateful to be there, in spite of the constant rain.

Let us always be grateful for the great gift of the Eucharist and never take our faith for granted.

Clonmany Festival Opening Mass

Derry SVP Area President, Sean Gallagher shares how his Catholic faith nudged him into action for others as a volunteer…

Humbling and rewarding to see joy on faces of those we help

Sean Gallagher, SVP Derry Area President

THE Society of St Vincent de Paul in Derry City has been celebrating its greatest asset – its volunteers of all ages and stages of service, and amongst them is the relatively recently appointed Area President, Sean Gallagher.

A man of action, Sean's energy and enthusiasm is proving to be a timely source of encouragement to the many volunteers finding themselves faced with ever-growing numbers of people needing the Society's support, in an era when the cost of living continues to rise beyond their means.

Humbled by his experiences as a member of St Vincent de Paul (SVP) for over a decade, Sean shared his story with 'The Net' during a visit to his office at the Ozanam Centre, based at 4 Elagh Business Park, just off the Buncrana Road, on the outskirts of Derry City.

Talking about the Catholic faith that nudged him into action for others, he recalled that it was first nurtured in his family home in the Bogside, where he was born 57 years ago: "My mother and father had great faith and passed it on to myself and my nine siblings. They always led us in praying the Rosary. My mother had a great devotion to Our Lady and was in the Legion of Mary in the Cathedral Parish for 50 years, up until she died, and it was this that eventually led me to join St Vincent de Paul.

"The chapels then would have been rammed. We always went to Mass at either the Long Tower or the Cathedral, attended Parish retreats and, once a month, we were marched to Confession. Like everyone, we just did it. Then, when I was a teenager, I lapsed a bit from practicing my faith. However, when I was 25 years old, I met my wife, Jeanette, who was strong in her faith and I went back to attending Mass."

"When our three children were young," he added, "Jeanette and I did our Cursillo weekends. I remember a man standing up talking and me thinking that I could never do that or do volunteering. I just thought it was way out of my league, but I loved the weekend from the minute I went in until I came out. I remember coming out the door singing, 'This Little Light of Mine', and singing it around the house when I got home.

"Jeanette did her Cursillo the following weekend and she loved it too. We kept going to the Cursillo Friendship Nights in Termonbacca and our faith just grew from that. It was a great time for us to do Cursillo as our kids were young, so we could incorporate what we learnt into our life as a family. We started praying the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet, and saying Grace before meals, and we still do this. If we are in the car, we say prayers together as we travel along."

After doing his Cursillo weekend, Sean said that he had felt the need to do something in return for what he had received: "I started serving on two or three Cursillo weekends a year, where I would hear talks on piety, study and action. I am more of an action man. After my mother died in 2010, I tried the Legion of Mary, following her example, but it wasn't for me. Then, at a Cursillo Friendship Night, one of the Cursillistas, Ella McCallion asked me to join the St Eithne's SVP Conference in Holy Family Parish, Ballymagroarty. At that time, 2011, she was the president of that conference. I joined it and am still a member today.

"We went out visiting people and helping with whatever the needs were; needs change from day-to-day, week-to-week, year-to-year. What people needed 50 years ago is different from now. The cost of living crisis has more and more people coming in looking for help today."

Darkness

He went on to recall his first visit: "It was in the winter time. There were three of us and we went to a house where a woman was looking for food and electricity. It was pouring the rain. We knocked on the door but there was no answer. The house was in darkness. We went to get back into the car when one of the women said that she could see a light in the house, so I went back to knock on the door. A woman opened it and she was holding a lighter. We said that we were from SVP and she told us that she needed food and electric. She hadn't had any for about six days. The three of us had a discussion amongst ourselves and decided that we needed to do something right away. So, we got her electric card charged up and got her some food, and probably gave her some money too, though we give vouchers now instead of cash.

"That night when I arrived home and opened the door to feel heat and see my children running around happy and well fed, I thought how blessed I was to have food and light in the house, when others can't afford it. That is probably the most humbling experience I have had during my time with SVP."

"I continued on with SVP and worked as a self-employed joiner full-time," added Sean, recalling: "Later, I got the job of driving the St Vincent's van, so I have seen both sides of it; people 'phoning in looking for household stuff like beds, washing machines, cookers, etc, sensing their despair, and then seeing the joy on their faces when I brought the items they needed.

"I was doing that up to three years ago. When I took a heart attack, I had to stop for a couple of months, but it was doing my head in sitting in the house doing nothing, so I started back with St Vincent's as a volunteer doing light duties, as I still couldn't lift anything.

"Then a year-and-a-half ago, the full-time volunteer Area President's position for Derry City came up and I was asked to take it on. It was a bit daunting but I decided to go for it to see how I would get on, and I love it. A great support to me in life is my spiritual director, Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, and so when I took over as Area President I asked him to be the St Vincent's spiritual director for the Derry area as well."

Also involved with St Canice's SVP conference in Pennyburn, the blessing of his active faith and serving as a volunteer with an organisation like SVP became all the more evident to Sean as he dealt with the aftermath of his heart attack: "It left me unemployed, with £35,000 to pay on our mortgage. We had critical illness insurance cover and thought that we might get a payment of between £10,000 and £25,000 from that, however, we were initially told that we probably wouldn't get anything because I had got stents in. We did the interview with the insurance company and sent off all our documents. We were told that it could take six to eight weeks before we would get any contact.

"The following weekend I was helping on a Cursillo weekend, and on the Monday after it I got up to find that I had three missed calls. There was an answering machine message saying: 'Mr Gallagher, we have settled your claim and your money will be in your account within two to three working days. Jeanette then 'phoned to find out how much the payment was going to be and when we heard that it was going to be £35,000, the two of us were jumping around the kitchen with joy. We couldn't believe it. The money was in our account the next day."

Little Miracle

Reflecting further on what he regards as another little miracle at that time in his life, when he was in hospital following the heart-attack, Sean recalled: "I got an angiogram done and was told that I was going to have to stay in hospital for six weeks, and either go to Belfast or Dublin to get a by-pass operation.

"When Jeanette called the hospital, she was told that my heart was in a really bad way. They weren't sure what exactly they were going to do and they told her that she needed to come to the hospital. Even though no-one was being allowed into the hospital with lockdown, they were making an exception to have Jeanette in for a meeting with them; that is how bad I was.

"At the time, Jeanette was with an elderly priest friend and he decided to go the Blessed Sacrament to pray for me. He rang Jeanette an hour later to ask if there was any more news. Little did I know that this priest was praying for me before the Blessed Sacrament, but an hour later I was taken down to get a heart sonar scan. The doctors then came to tell me that they were going to try again to put a stent in, and if it worked they would let me out home that night.

"Thank God, everything went grand and they got the stent in. I was told that, if it worked, I would have to come back in two months later to get another one in. That was about five o'clock that evening and I got home at 10 pm that night, and I haven't looked back.

"That may sound like something minor, but it is a miracle to us. I really do believe that the priest, in going to pray for me before the Blessed Sacrament, got me my miracle that day. The position of Area President came up a couple of months after I got my critical illness payment, and I thought it was time to give back and give it my all."

Taking to the new role like a duck to water, Sean has certainly been giving it his all, but he is quick to point out that the support and work of the volunteers on the ground is what keeps him and the SVP service going.

Stressing that the work is all voluntary, he pointed out: "We have about 80 SVP volunteers in Derry, including 10 in the office, and not one of us is paid. We have volunteers that go out at night visiting and volunteer to drive the van…and no one is paid. St Vincent's is a big family of volunteers and I am just here to steer them in the way forward. If we didn't have volunteers, I couldn't do what I do. They are a great bunch, always willing to give up their time.

"I love doing this job, which more or less involves me making sure that our clients' needs are being attended to and that our volunteers have the assets and funds to help our clients, as well as trying to recruit volunteers and managing the day-to-day running of the charity."

Highlighting the recent opening of a pop-up shop at the Ozanam Centre, below his office, which operates from Thursday to Saturday, 10 am until 3 pm, Sean explained: "We are able to do this through donations. We are so blessed to have such generous donors in Derry. We have financial donors and then people who donate furniture, clothes etc. As well as the volunteers, if we didn't have the donors I couldn't do my job and the volunteers couldn't do theirs."

He added: "The demand in Derry has gone up. It is greater than when I first started in St Vincent's, especially because of the cost of living crisis. People can't afford oil; for some it is either eat or heat, especially over the winter months, when there is a big demand for electric, oil or gas, and also food. Then our resources are stretched because their resources are stretched. We have a lot of families, especially during winter, looking for help for Christmas, with kids always looking for the best as their friends are getting it.

"I can't stress enough how our volunteers strive to do their best. St Vincent's couldn't survive without volunteers and here, in Derry, we have the best volunteers in Ireland. Some of them are 30, 40, and 50 years serving as volunteers. It is a very rewarding, humbling, and thankful experience."

Always looking for volunteers to help with the growing demand, Sean encourages anyone who would like to offer their time to make contact via the Helpline – 028 71 265489 – or by emailing: svp.derry@svpni.co.uk. And anyone who feels that they need help are also encouraged to contact the Helpline, leaving their name, phone number and a short message, and someone will contact them back as soon as possible.

Sean with some of the Derry Ozanam office volunteers.

Celebrating Mass of Thanksgiving for Derry SVP volunteers, Bishop Donal told members…

Root your work in call to holiness and to show the compassion of Christ

(Photographs by Simon Dobbins)

THANKSGIVING for the wonderful efforts of St Vincent de Paul volunteers in Derry over the years was offered through the celebration of Mass in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, by Bishop Donal, on the Queenship of Our Lady, August 22.

Paying tribute to the volunteers, many of whom have been volunteering with the Society for several decades, the Bishop prayed for the courage they needed for the difficult work facing them and for any healing necessary. Derry SVP spiritual director, Fr Stephen Quinn ocd, concelebrated the Mass with the Bishop.

In his homily, Bishop Donal spoke about the founding of the Society in 1833 by the young Frederic Ozanam, remarking that he had no idea what he was starting: "As with so many other works of the Spirit in the church, he was inspired to light a fire that quickly blazed up. No-one doubted the reality of poverty in the great city of Paris. But it took a few generous hearts who would not just lament the poverty but who decided to do something about it.

"And the Society has grown for 191 years because there is still a great need, and still generous people who will support the local conferences and others who will distribute those funds to those in need. You have been visible in Ireland for 180 years, since 1844 just before the Great Famine. This is where the Gospel hits the road, where spiritual energy is channelled in loving ways."

Highlighting the importance of giving thanks that SVP is "such a trusted organisation", he noted: "Even during the worst of the Troubles, your members had remarkable freedom of movement across all sorts of barriers. Just as poverty knows no barriers, so, too, your members have been active in so many parts of the globe and in every corner of this island.

"You will never know how much good you have done by helping individuals and families, and by simply existing. Your work is valuable to those in need, but your witness is one of those bonds that holds society together and gives hope in a fragmenting world. You point beyond the 'me-centred' ideology that dominates and you say that there are values other than obsession with self. Today we celebrate the deserved reputation that you have."

Impressed by the Society's slogan on its website – 'Changing times, continuing compassion', Bishop Donal remarked: "This is not 1830s Paris, nor 1930s Derry. But there is still a need for what you want to offer: Support and friendship; Promoting self-sufficiency; Working for social justice."

He continued: "Your work is at its best when you don't just bend down to help someone up but stand with them and share their pain. That is where support becomes friendship and where friendship leads to people ceasing to feel helpless. And your work is not easy. There are situations where you can feel immensely sorry for individuals, and are helpless to change their situation. Sometimes you are taken for granted and seen as a hand-out organisation. In some cases, individuals are unable to help themselves. But that is where graced compassion is the best thing that you give; compassion that is expressed in a smile or a warm handshake. That sort of compassion can touch hearts that often find it hard to cope with embarrassment of shame or hopelessness. Times change but the need for loving compassion does not."

As a faith-based organisation, Bishop Donal remarked that the Society's work "is about your call to grow in faith together and through your work," adding: "Charity can be reduced to a job or a well-intentioned weekly chore. But Frederic Ozanam and St Vincent de Paul would want you to encourage an integration of your work in the Society to be part of your path to holiness. That journey to sanctification can come through your shared prayer and the personal bonds in local conferences. But sanctification can also come coping with the crosses of others and the struggles to fight poverty and injustice.

Solidarity

"Your identity as a Catholic organisation is not merely an historical coincidence. It is a chance for you to live out the Church's rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. That long-standing body of teaching has been re-echoed in more recent documents, such as Pope Benedict XVI in 'Deus Caritas Est', or Pope Francis in 'The Joy of the Gospel' and 'Fratelli tutti'. In a world that promotes individualism and fragmentation, you are living out a vision of human solidarity, where human dignity is based on the infinite worth of the human person, no matter how scarred they may be by neglect or bad decisions."

The Bishop concluded by thanking the SVP volunteers for the work that they do, "quietly and without seeking notice or thanks"…for championing the rights and needs of the poor "in the face of huge political lobbying to benefit the strong"…and for putting the Gospel into practice "and pointing to the cross which looks upwards and reaches outwards".

"It is clear," he added, "that your work for the needy is so necessary and you share that task with many other organisations. But never doubt the value of your witness to Jesus, who calls us all to love our neighbour as ourselves and to prioritise the least of the Lord's brothers and sisters. Root your work in your call to holiness and to show the compassion of Christ – and, unbeknownst to you, you will help the needy, sanctify yourself and proclaim the Gospel.

"And both St Frederic Ozanam and St Vincent DePaul will smile at how the little flame that they lit has become a burning bush, afire with God and never being burnt out."

Bishop Donal and Fr Stephen joined the SVP members afterwards in The Maldron Hotel for a ceremony of appreciation, with special recognition given to long-serving volunteers. Board member, Natalie Melaugh told those gathered that the evening was not just about recognising their efforts, but also about "reflecting on the deeper purpose that drives us all - our commitment to serving those in need, and our faith in God as disciples in the world today.

"As sisters and brothers in Christ, let us take a moment to acknowledge the profound impact each of you has on the lives of countless individuals and families in your community. Your selfless acts of kindness, your willingness to lend a helping hand, and your compassionate hearts are living examples of Christ's love in action.

"Let us remember that our service is a reflection of our faith and that, through our actions, we can be instruments of God's peace and love in the world today."

Long Service Awards were presented to: Majella Cassidy, Marie Duddy, and Maureen Boyle, of Good Shepherd Conference, for 40 + years; Caroline Logan (38 years), Sheila Carlin (50 years), and Frankie McGeehan (26 years), of Holy Family Conference; Angela Brolly, Immaculate Conception Conference (31 years); Eddie Porter (34 years), Lee Cassidy (26 years), and Vera Pyne (44 years), of Our Lady of Lourdes Conference; Bernie Kelly (34 years), Pat Cassidy (51 years), and Bill Etherson (40 years), of St Canice's Conference; Margaret McSwine (20+ years), Sally Kennedy (20+ years), and Marie Gallagher ((20+ years), of St Columba's Conference; Ella McCallion (41 years) and Jeanie Doherty (28 years), of St Eithne's Conference; Dominic Burke (60 years), St Eugene's Conference; Nora Canning (32 years), of St John's Conference; Carol McGeady (39 years), Helen McKinney (29 years), and Philomena Ferry (45 years), of St Patrick's Conference; John Doherty (43 years), of St Peter's Conference; and Charlotte McDaid (20 years) and Monica Wilson (32 years), of the William Street Shop.

A special token of gratitude was presented by the Board members to their President, Sean Gallagher, for using his talents to uplift and help others, and for his dedication and hard work on behalf of the Society and the community.

Leaving behind life as a partner at an international law firm for a more life-giving role in the Church…

Newly ordained Dominican, Fr Benedict McGlinchey ready to embrace challenge of ministry outreach

THE Dominican Province of Ireland has been blessed with a second Roe Valley man joining its Order, with Limavady native, Fr Benedict McGlinchey OP ordained some 10 months after Fr Ruaidhrí Grieve OP, of Dungiven.

Fr Benedict was ordained on July 6 in St Saviour's Dominican Church, in Dublin, and celebrated his first Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving in the Church of Christ The King, in his home parish, on July 14.

It has been a rather busy time for the newly ordained priest in a different way than one might expect, for a few days after celebrating his first Mass he was off to Paris…to help out at the Olympics! What he was up to is revealed in the following story of his journey to priesthood, which he took some time out to share with 'The Net' on his return from France to begin his ministry with the Dominican community in Dundalk.

Reflecting on how his faith was nurtured in his childhood, Fr Benedict, whose baptismal name is Darran, spoke about the great living out of the Catholic faith in the family home he shared with his parents, Mary and Dessie, and younger sisters, Leona and Caroline, which included regularly attending the celebration of Mass and times of prayer in the home.

He also highlighted two other people whose faith witness had impacted him in his childhood; one being his late Aunt Eileen and the other the late Fr Philip Donnelly.

"When I was about 10 years old, my Aunt Eileen died in her 30s, leaving three young children. She had a strong Marian faith. I remember visiting her at her home, where she was being cared for, and I was struck by her tremendous faith witness and the care she received from her Catholic neighbours and friends," recalled Fr Benedict.

Regarding Fr Donnelly, who lived into his 90s, he commented: "What I saw was a very faithful priest, who really believed the truths of the Catholic faith. For me, when I was growing up, he was a great example of the Catholic faith."

Looking on his faith-filled childhood as a blessing, Fr Benedict remarked: "It was a different time than in the world today. Practising our Catholic faith was really just part of the fabric of life. Everything was connected into the Church but, as I got older, I realised that was not how everyone lived, it was just how it seemed around me.

"Catholic education was part of the follow on from the faith life of the home and the parish. I went to Termoncanice Primary School in Limavady, and then to Loreto College, in Coleraine. My memory of school is that almost everyone was a practising Catholic attending, so I suppose it was a bit of a bubble that did not really reflect the wider society at the time."

He went on to recall a different experience on going to university: "I went on to study Law at Trinity University, Dublin, and then at Oxford University, and I qualified as a solicitor in England. What I was used to in my Catholic education was challenged when I was at Trinity. Many people were not from a similar faith background as me, and my faith was challenged significantly.

Soul-searching

"I had a living, devotional faith, but it didn't equip me for that environment. I didn't have answers to the questions I was asked when I said that I was a believer. So I had to do a lot of reading and thinking on my own to come to an adult decision about my Catholic faith in the modern world, with all that science tells us and with the failures of the Church, as it was the time when the abuse scandals broke. For me, this was a period of soul-searching. Although many had negative experiences of the Church that was not my experience growing up. I had grown up with a very positive experience of Church."

Moving on to Oxford University provided him with yet another different experience. He noted: "Catholicism was not part of the mainstream there, but it was a very vibrant minority sector. At Oxford, I began to think about these issues in a deeper way. The Dominican Priory there is part of the university and it was the first time I met the Dominicans. The big questions of life came up then."

He continued: "I moved to London after that. I was working in the financial district there for one of the 'Magic Circle' law firms, as they are known. It was a very intense life. I started to go more frequently to Mass; I found that it was something that was much more important in a practical sense.

"I ended up as a partner in a large international law firm, where I specialised in mergers and acquisitions, and in equity capital markets, bringing companies to listing on the stock exchange. It involved large scale, cross border transactions. I spent a lot of my career abroad in the Middle East, mostly Dubai, as well as Asia and Africa, travelling around a lot doing international law. This type of law is very competitive and intense. I was working very long hours, so it was quite all consuming, and I did that for a period of 14 years.

"After some time as a partner in the firm, I began to wonder is this really what I wanted to do for the rest of my life. Financially, it was very rewarding and it brought with a very comfortable lifestyle. But, I noticed that the times I was most content was not in fancy restaurants, though there is nothing bad in that, but when I looked around me I just thought that it was a bit pointless, going from one event to the next. However, when I was involved with the Church I felt that it was more life-giving. It resonated with me much more deeply."

Confirmation that this was not the life for him long-term came after he had to take a number of months off work following major surgery: "When I went back to work, I found that the ambition and spark had gone. After some time, I realised that this wasn't what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

Sabbatical

"I took a sabbatical and was in Madrid at the time. I had thought of priesthood at various stages in my life and during this time the idea of priesthood really came back to me persistently. I was trying to assess it like a corporate transaction, looking at the pros and the cons, but faith is really not like that; there is the element of the unknown. I thought if I don't try this I will regret it for the rest of my life. So, I decided to try it to see, with the intention of making it work.

"Having met the Dominicans in England, I contacted the Irish Dominicans, because after years abroad I wanted to return home."

"What we see in the Dominican Order, and I think it is true of Diocesan priesthood too," remarked Fr Benedict, "is that those considering priesthood think that when they enter they are committed for their whole life, whereas it is a time of further discernment."

He added: "When I entered the Dominican house in Cork as a novice in 2017, I found it a big change. I was reasonably senior in my career, leading teams of lawyers working on large transactions, so to go from that to starting from the beginning was challenging.

"I was told by the Novice Master at the time that it was normal to find adjusting to this new way of life challenging. I found that as you grow into this new of life you come to love it.

"We pray the Divine Office in choir, so it is a sung choral office. To some extent, our lives have similarities to the monastic life; we wear a habit, we live a common life. But as well as having a contemplative dimension to our lives, we are apostolic; we go out. So, it is a constant to and fro from life in the Priory (similar to monastic life) to engaging in the apostolic work of preaching, in its various forms. Over time, I grew to love that way of working."

Two years of studying Philosophy, at NUI Maynooth, were followed by four years of Theology, starting in the Dominican Studium in Dublin and finishing in Rome. After taking his solemn (final) vows in 2022, he was ordained a deacon in 2023 and moved to Rome to study at the Pontifical University of St Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican University in Rome.

Describing his time in Rome as "a wonderful experience", Fr Benedict remarked: "You see the heart of the Church in Rome. It was very interesting to meet fellow Dominicans, as well as seminarians, lay people and religious from all over the world. I found it fascinating to see people of vastly different cultures yet with this common faith, believing the same things; an example of the universal church.

"Being a deacon in Rome gives you great exposure to the life of the universal Church, often assisting at the Mass of Cardinals, with some deacons having the opportunity to assist the Pope in the Papal Liturgies."

Olympics

Returning home after completing his studies, Fr Benedict was ordained on July 6 in Dublin and a few days later he celebrated his first Mass in Limavady, before setting off to the Olympics in Paris.

Explaining how this came about, he said: "The Archdiocese of Paris had an evangelistic outreach to those attending the Olympics, and the French Dominicans were assisting with the mission. They were looking for priests who could speak French and English, and had asked me to help with the liturgies, as well as speaking to visitors to the Church at which we were based.

"We were dealing with a real mixture of people – Olympians and their families, local people interested to see inside the Church for their first time, and people attending the Games interested in discussing the Catholic faith and finding out more about it, as well as ministry to those who are Catholics.

"Although there was significant controversy concerning the opening ceremony of the Games, which was criticised by the French Bishops, our mission was much more focused at the local level, dealing with those with whom we came into contact."

Back on home soil, Fr Benedict is happy to now be part of what he described as "a pretty vibrant church" in Dundalk: "We have three primary schools here, so I will be helping with these as well as helping to resurrect those groups that have not met since before the Covid lockdowns."

He added: "We are moving more into an apostolic age where we are reaching out much more. We need to adapt our ministry to meet the needs of the world today, both those who are actively engaged in their faith and those who are far from the Church. So, I will be looking at ways to do that."

Reflecting on the journey that has taken him to this point, Fr Benedict remarked: "When I first met the Dominicans I wasn't thinking of joining them, but on reflection later in life I can see the impact they had on me in terms of my own mind. Coming upon them when I did, in that context, was providential for my life.

"I believe that God uses the things in our life to direct us towards His goal. He is working in our lives and guides us, and we have the freedom to make choices on the back of that guidance."

The Scripture that Fr Benedict chose for his ordination prayer card is: "Sed accessistis ad Sion montem, et civitatem Dei viventis, Jerusalem caelestem" (Heb 12:22), which he explained is the vision of the heavenly Jerusalem, which serves as a reminder that our lives are ultimately directed towards that vision of God in Heaven.

Celebrating 800th anniversary in Ireland…

Dominicans honoured to stand on sacred Dominican ground in Co Derry for celebration of Fr Benedict's First Mass

LIMAVADY parishioners were joined by members of other religious traditions in the community in their prayerful support of the newly ordained Dominican, Fr Benedict McGlinchey OP, when he celebrated his First Solemn Mass of Thanksgiving in the Church of Christ The King on Sunday, July 14.

Fr Dominic was also supported by his family and friends, including representatives of HOPE Limavady, and Parish Priest, Mgr Bryan McCanny PP, who joined on the altar with his Dominican brothers.

Irish Provincial, Fr John Harris OP delivered the homily, expressing awareness that, in the midst of marking the 800th anniversary of the Dominican presence in Ireland, he was standing "on sacred Dominican ground in Co Derry."

He noted: "Coleraine was the first Dominican foundation to be established in this area in 1244, known as the Abbey of the Bann, while Derry was founded in 1274. The last priory standing in Ulster was Derry, it was destroyed in 1566 and it is said that the stones of the priory were used to build parts of the present walls of Derry."

Listing the number of brethren tortured or hanged in Derry and Coleraine in the 1600s, Fr Harris continued: "In 1657, one of my predecessors, the provincial, Fr William Burke, wrote to Rome on the state of the Irish Dominicans in this most terrible of decades. 'Notwithstanding the terror of the Cromwellians', he writes, 'there are not lacking those who expose their own lives for the sake of the spiritual salvation of their neighbours."

Pointing out that the liturgy of the day emphasised "the importance of those called by the Lord going out to preach", Fr Harris said: "We see in the history of the Dominicans in this area the price of such discipleship, no such thing as cheap grace. Our Dominican brethren, of which Fr Benedict Darran McGlinchey is one, people from this area, gave up so much to preach the Gospel."

"But why do preachers give up so much to preach? Why did your son, brother, friend and neighbour give up his life as a successful corporate lawyer to become a religious priest?" he asked, adding: "All for the same reason, because they were chosen. To be a Christian means to become fundamentally aware that you have been chosen by God. But it is a choice we have to accept, each in our own lives, be we religious, priests, parents, single or married. This choice is to accept that we are loved eternally."

Fr Harris continued: "We do not become priests to give up things, but because we have found something, indeed someone; Christ the Beloved in whom we become the beloved. Maybe it is better to say not that we have found Jesus, but we have allowed Jesus to find us, and it is our calling, as priests, to help others to be found by Him.

"Fr Benedict lived in a world of passing delights in his professional life and found them to be baseless in comparison to finding Christ. What he found in his own life is what he is called now as a priest to share with the whole world…The priest offers us the person of Christ, as no one else can do…In the priest, we have access, not only to the mercy of Christ, the healing of Christ, but to Christ himself."

"As a Church," he remarked, "we need to rediscover a priest doesn't primarily tell us about Christ or His teachings, but brings us into direct contact with Jesus Christ personally. This makes the priest different to the rest of us. Not better but yet different. In the ministry of the priest, Jesus chose us and finds us and through the ministry of the priest we accept this choice and allow Jesus to find us."

Fr Harris concluded by declaring: "The history of the Dominicans in Derry did not peter out towards the end of the 18th century, the blood of the martyrs of Coleraine and Derry has become the seed of new vocations. These newly ordained priests continue to make present in all our lives the free gift to us in the Beloved. Allow our newly ordained priest to help you to accept that you have been chosen in Christ."

At the end of the Mass, Fr Benedict expressed his appreciation for all those present. Thanking God for the gift of his call priesthood, he went on to thank his parents, family members, friends, St Joseph's Young Priests' Society, the priests of the parish and the local community for their support down through the years.

Paying tribute to Fr Benedict, Mgr McCanny made presentations to the newly ordained priest and his parents, on behalf of the Parish.

Afterwards, Fr Benedict offered his first blessing in St Mary's Church, in the town, with refreshments available for all in the nearby Bethany Centre.

THE series of talks from the Sr Clare Crockett retreat, which was held in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, back in April, continues this month with that of guest speaker, James Bonner, from Derry, who shared his experience of conversion and healing…

I owe my life to Sr Clare Crockett…I have never been so happy to be alive

BACK in 2020 when the world stopped turning, I was in a very dark place. I believed that the only reason I was alive was because I was eating. I was smoking cannabis every day and living in an anxious state. I was oppressed by constant thoughts of death. I needed help.

I had come to the conclusion at Mass one Saturday evening in the early 1990s that, even though I knew in my heart that Mary was my Mother, I was nothing more than a spectator whenever I attended Mass. I was never properly catechised and, therefore, had no idea what was actually happening. So, I decided to look to other religions to hopefully find the connection to Deity that I was yearning for.

I began by looking into Buddhism and meditation. I searched for years on and off, studying various religions and systems of belief, but I didn't find what I was looking for. However, one of the Buddhist books mentioned that modern witches used meditation, and other methods of connecting with the Divine in their practices too. I was very apprehensive about looking into Wicca, because I assumed that these people worshipped the devil. But I was desperate for some kind of spiritual connection and, after reading a few books on the subject, I naively decided to follow a Wiccan practice.

The training lasted for two years. Year one involved various meditations, or 'brain training' as it is more commonly known, and finished with a dedication ceremony. Year two was more practical, and promised an experiential encounter with Deity. I believed that I had found what I was looking for, so I decided to finish the training. I threw everything into it and performed the initiation ritual, but nothing had changed. I felt even further away from God than I did before.

Thoughts of death began to overwhelm me. I felt drawn to death but at the same time I was terrified by it. It became an obsession. It was all I could think about. I had no idea how I was going to save my soul and come back home to the person I once was. I didn't think that I would ever feel a connection to our Lord Jesus, or believe with certainty that Our Lady was my Mother ever again. I needed help, but I had no idea where to look, or who to ask.

When the pandemic hit, I was charged with taking care of my mother. She is by nature a very social person, so I had to make sure that she remained sane during lockdown. This helped to take my mind off of myself. So, I decided to say 'yes' to any requests that she made. I got her a subscription to Netflix and set up things like YouTube on her TV.

All or Nothing

One day she asked me if I had ever heard of a nun from Derry called Sr Clare Crockett. I had seen her name mentioned on social media, but I knew very little about her. She asked me if I could find a movie about Clare's life that her friends had told her about. A quick look through Google led me to the movie 'All or nothing' on YouTube. Since Mum wouldn't be very tech savvy, she asked me to play it on the TV for her. Then it dawned on me that I would have to look at it too.

We both sat in silence and watched it. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, because when I was growing up, nuns were wee, quiet women, dressed in black, that you might see at the back of the chapel. They also tended to be quite old and sombre. So the last thing I expected to find was young and happy girls in white habits. I was really moved by Clare's story, but I left it at that. Or so I thought...

Throughout the next year or so, strange things began to happen. Firstly, a lot of random people and family members gave me prayer cards with Sr Clare on them. I had one of the prayer cards on a bookcase in my room and, for some reason, I started talking to Clare as if she was in the room with me. I still talk to her every day.

On a very low day, I asked Clare for guidance, and as I glanced at the top of my bookcase, I came across a book that I had forgotten about, called 'The path of a Christian witch' by an American author called Adelina St Clair. Even though I took it as a coincidence that the author's name was St Clair, and that the picture on the cover was of a girl dressed in white, clutching a bible, I decided to have a flick through it anyway.

The main point that I took from the book, besides the ridiculous notion of combining the Pagan world with the Christian, was that I should return to Mass. Since I had not been practicing my faith for years, I looked at Clare's picture and said "Really, Mass?" I had the feeling of a resounding 'Yes!' Of course, with me being in the detached frame of mind that I was in at the time, I thought 'No chance'. But, as a compromise I decided to buy some Rosary beads and pray a decade of the Rosary every day. I also bought a wooden cross to wear around my neck, similar to the one that Clare had worn.

Childlike Faith

Sometime later, I became more curious about Clare and I discovered that she was heavily influenced by the writings of St Therese of Lisieux. I found Therese's autobiography, 'The story of a Soul' on Amazon, and I decided to order it and find out why. My book arrived and I began to read. I heard an inner voice tell me that I had better be serious before I continued. As I read I found that I could relate to what I was reading. I discovered a simple and yet very profound method of communicating with God, that relied on a childlike faith and trust in Him that I had never encountered before. It reignited a fire in me that I thought had long been extinguished.

A few months passed and, in Derry, we were preparing for the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday. I was an extra in a movie about it. My Dad bought the DVD and asked me if I wanted a copy; he also mentioned that Clare Crockett was in it. Whenever I had watched this movie in the past I would look to see if I could spot myself, but this time I decided to just watch it as a movie and see if I could spot Clare. As I was still in a state of severe depression, I knew that I would feel sad watching it. I actually believed that I was going to die. I wondered if this was how it felt when someone was contemplating suicide.

That Saturday night, I sat and watched the movie. I was so engrossed to the point that I had forgotten to look for Clare, and then I heard her voice! I heard the loveliest Derry girl voice say: 'You're ok, you're ok, you're not going to die'; but it didn't sound like it was coming from the TV, it sounded like Clare's voice was in the room with me. I didn't think I would ever stop crying. It felt like my very brain was crying, like it was being cleansed.

A few weeks passed by and I was contemplating a return to Mass. On Easter Saturday night, I decided to watch the movie 'The Passion of the Christ'. I had heard that it was harrowing to watch, so I was almost afraid to do so. Luckily for me, my mum had recently bought a blessed Sr Clare candle. So I took it down from the mantelpiece, placed it on the hearth, got on my knees, lit the candle, blessed myself, and asked Clare if she would sit with me as I watched it.

Scourging

I was fine until it got to the scourging scene. The Roman soldiers that were beating and torturing our Lord reminded me of the cold blooded evil eerily portrayed by the actors that played the Paras in the Bloody Sunday movie. I found the movie really difficult to watch, but I felt Clare's presence in the room with me and saw it through.

Sometime later, on the afternoon of May 16, 2022, it dawned on me that it was myself that I saw scourging our Lord, and I was horrified. I decided that it was time to speak to a priest. I was about to ring our local chapel, but then my mum asked me if there was First Communions that day. I looked out of the kitchen window and saw a couple of

wains running around the back square in their white dresses, and I thought that there was no point in ringing a priest now because they would all be busy.

But I knew that if I didn't call then, I might never do it. So, with a very shaky hand I rang our local parochial house. I was redirected to another parish, probably as a result of the First Communions, and spoke to a priest. He asked me how long it had been since I was at Mass and I told him that it had been years. I started to cry and he reassured me by repeating one of Clare's lines from the Bloody Sunday film: 'You're ok, you're ok.' He invited me down to his parochial house to speak with him.

It was a really horrible day. The rain was pouring down, but by now I was determined to see it through. I arrived at the door and a very soft-spoken priest invited me in, and we had a chat. He heard my confession and blessed my Rosary beads. As it had been so long since my last confession, I was given a clean slate absolution, with the promise that I would recount my sins in full at a later date. For my penance he told me to go into the chapel and pray a decade of the Rosary, but that first I should find the statue of St Joseph and introduce myself. I did that and then greeted the statue of Our Lady too. As I knelt down to pray, I heard a low rumble coming from outside. The distant storm kept interrupting me, but I persevered. I finished my penance and made my way to the door.

Mass

As I opened the door, a fanfare of thunder and lightning erupted before me. I felt like I had either made someone very happy, or very angry! I had to walk home in the lashing rain. It was so heavy that it made the news that night. I went to Mass the next morning and received Communion. I started to attend Sunday Mass every week and thought that that was me sorted, but the 'All or Nothing' girl wasn't finished with me yet.

I stumbled across an advertisement on Facebook for a retreat dedicated to St Joseph that was to be held in the local Termonbacca monastery. I had always been aware that Termonbacca existed because my grandmother had grown up there, but in my mind it might as well have been Narnia! I rang the number in the advertisement and booked my place on the retreat. A few weeks passed and I made my way up to Termonbacca. Upon arrival, I discovered that the priests leading the retreat were from Home of the Mother. I

Blessed Carlo Acutis Adoration Chapel to be blessed in Bellaghy, where…

Relics of 'Digital Saint' were venerated by huge turnout at St Mary's Church

HUGE numbers of people came to St Mary's Church, Bellaghy, from many different places on Friday, August 30, to venerate a relic of Blessed Carlo Acutis. The time of veneration began and ended with prayers led by the parish priest, Fr Pat O'Hagan.

Among the visitors to the Church were many families, parents bringing their children to ask the intercession of a young boy who, like St Patrick, many years before, heard and responded to the Lord's invitation to spread the Good News of God's love among the people of his time.

Blessed Carlo Acutis, who died aged 15 of leukaemia in 2005, is due to be canonised next year, the first Saint of this millennium. He is being called the 'digital Saint' because of his prowess in IT, a skill he used to draw up a database of Eucharistic Miracles from around the world.

He had a deep devotion to the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, which he described as his "highway to Heaven". His faith led him to be a very caring and charitable teenager who wanted nothing for himself. His practice of the faith brought his parents back to the Church and encouraged many others to pray, attend Mass, and receive the sacraments.

Bishop Donal McKeown will be the main celebrant at the 7 pm Vigil Mass in Bellaghy on Saturday, October 12, the Feast of Blessed Carlo, and will bless and dedicate the Prayer Room as the 'Blessed Carlo Acutis Adoration Chapel', where parishioners and visitors will be able to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.

Fr O'Hagan's hope is that the Adoration Chapel will become, above all, a place where young people will come to pray and ask for the guidance of someone just like themselves who found the strength he needed to follow Jesus through time spent in adoration of the Blessed Sacrament.

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could hardly believe it, here I was receiving the Eucharist from two servant brothers who belonged to the same order as Sr Clare, and had said Holy Mass in her presence.

I was still very green about all things Catholic. We had Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament one day, and we were sitting that long that I thought the two priests had sneaked out to the bar for a pint! I know better now, and sit in Adoration regularly. We had Mass every day, and I started to feel more of a participant. I felt more involved as a result of Frs Kevin and Dominic's talks. They made the whole purpose of the Mass very clear with their example and passionate dedication to the Eucharist.

One of the activities on our schedule was a Rosary walk. I assumed that we would stroll around the building, but as we left Fr Kevin took us out onto the road. I felt really uncomfortable, and when a girl in white walked by I felt embarrassed. But as she passed by I felt a strange but familiar sensation. The best way that I can describe it is that warm feeling you get when you're with someone you care about, whether you're on holiday or something and you're having a great time, that feeling you get just before you turn to the other person and say: 'Do you know what, we should do this again.'

Confession

A week or so after the retreat had finished, I decided that I needed a crucifix for my bedroom. I sent away for it and when it arrived I hung it on the wall facing my bed. No sooner had I done this when all of the sins of my past came rushing back to me. I remembered sins from my early childhood and right through to that day. Aside from the usual shortcomings that bring us to Confession, I was faced with a lot of guilt that I had been carrying for years, including times when I could have done things differently, or prevented them from happening had I only been braver. I experienced a deep panic and rang our local parish almost begging for Confession as soon as possible. I spoke to a priest and he invited me to the chapel that evening.

I compiled a really long list and took it with me. I met with the priest and he listened patiently as I read it to him. When I eventually finished, he smiled and gave me absolution. For my penance, he told me to think about everything that I had confessed the next time I attended Mass. The next Mass that I had planned to go to was held in the Long Tower the next day. I felt duty bound to attend, as it was the funeral service for Sr Clare's father, Doc, and to my surprise the two servant brothers from the Home of the Mother retreat, and the priest that had heard my life confession in St Brigid's the day before, were there to say it.

I remember feeling a great sense of peace and closure as I made my way home afterwards. I realised that not only had Sr Clare saved my soul, but with the quiet guidance of St Joseph, she had brought me home to our Lord Jesus, and to my Mother Mary.

If your experience has been that you were raised Catholic and it worked, you are truly blessed. My journey back to Catholicism was very traumatic, but I realise now that it was what I needed for my return. But if you ever find yourself in a similar situation, keep in mind that even though the descent into darkness isn't always the precondition for a more profound ascent, the quest for Divine healing does have to be taken voluntarily. But the good news is that the only thing required of you in order to receive this grace, is that you ask for it.

I owe my life to Sr Clare Crockett and I believe that we have in her a saint for our times. I am convinced that she is for the 21st century what Saint Therese was for the 20th.

I have been on a few more retreats since this stage of my conversion, including my Cursillo weekend, and I have consecrated myself to Mother Mary. And I am delighted to tell you all that, thanks to our very own Sr Clare Theresa Crockett, I have never been so happy to be alive.

Visit of St Bernadette's relics an opportunity for prayer, grace and renewal

THE visit of St Bernadette's relics to Derry in October, as part of a tour of all Irish dioceses, has been welcomed by Bishop Donal.

The Saint's relics will be at St Eugene's Cathedral for veneration on October 13 and 14, and Bishop Donal pointed out the Lourdes authorities want the 48 hours visit to each diocese "to have a focus on Our Lady's message, rather than just on St Bernadette."

He added: "After all, St Bernadette saw herself as being like a brush, taken from the cupboard by God and put back into anonymity when her job was done.

"I hope that we will be able to use both the preparations for, and the follow up to the visit as a time of prayer, grace and renewal."

Remarking that Lourdes has an important place in the hearts of the Irish, Bishop Donal noted: "There were two Irish National Pilgrimages in 1913 and 1924, and there is reference to the former at the Lourdes Grotto in the Cathedral grounds."

Archbishop Eamon Martin is looking forward to the visit of the relics to cathedrals and churches across Ireland for the first time, during September and October, seeing it as "a fitting prelude to the launch of the Jubilee Year 2025, with its theme 'Pilgrims of Hope'."

"The pilgrimage around Ireland of St Bernadette's relics will be a source of hope, great joy and inspiration," he said, "especially for the many people of Ireland who have travelled to Lourdes over the years and for the dedicated groups across the island, who work all year round to plan pilgrimages at parish and diocesan level.

"Of course, Lourdes is synonymous with care and love for sick and disabled persons, and is a special sanctuary for those who struggle with worries or decisions of one kind or another.

"The relics of St Bernadette remind us of Lourdes as a place of prayer and compassion for the sick and vulnerable. Over generations, Irish people of all ages have volunteered to help in various ways in Lourdes and have been uplifted themselves by the experience of serving and caring. In welcoming the relics, faith communities around the country will pray in the 'spirit of Lourdes' and come to know the message of Our Lady, a message of enduring relevance for us today."

Encouraging people to take the opportunity "to encounter the beautiful and inspiring person that St Bernadette was", and "to hear the powerful message she was able to convey to the world from Our Lady", Archbishop Eamon said: "Please pray also that many gifts and graces will be granted during this pilgrimage."

Change and decay…growth…more of…wonder…thanks…

Through the valley *by Fr John McLaughlin ssc*

THE subject comes to me differently in my own life and mind through these months from when I started to point it up on my jotter. Maybe that is the way it should be in what Pope Francis calls an 'epoch of change', rather than a 'change of epoch'. And even at this 'altitude' of my own life, it is still breath-taking and more than daunting.

So first, on a lighter note, I view it through music and the famous song of Mercedes Sosa, the Argentinian legend and bard – folklorist, whom so many of us accompanied and worshipped in her recitals. I can recall my own sense of 'slight envy' as Fr Jim Tormey took out his guitar and intoned it in far-off days in Chile. Jim had sung in Our Lady's Choral Society in Dublin and had a good voice.

'Cambia lo superficial cambia también lo profundo - cambia el modo de pensar - cambia todo en este mundo - Cambia el clima con los años - cambia el pastor su rebaño -y así como todo cambia- que yo cambie no es extraño.' ('Change the superficial, change the profound, change our way of thinking, change everything in this world, the climate changes with the years, the shepherd changes his sheep...and just as everything changes that I change is not all that strange.')

And much more, in another absorbing Latin American folk-classic worth downloading when you can make time for it! I can remember Padre Enrique Contreras, a lover of song and folklore, having a group of us sing an up-to-date and animated version of it at a gathering of the 'Jesus Caritas' (of Padre Carlos de Foucauld) Group; it reflected well the little physical anxieties we were all carrying, even at that earlier period in our lives!

Assisted Suicide

In these days in Moville, I am trying to interest people in the campaign of the Catholic Bishops to reflect upon where the present campaign on 'Assisted Dying' might be leading us. The accompanying video, 'Through the Valley' is poignant and sensitive, and a challenge to our own wakefulness to an issue from which there is no escape for any of us, who might not want to get involved. So, we have it in mind for the forthcoming Curia meeting of the Legion of Mary in Greencastle!

So far, on Messenger and WhatsApp, I have been testing the waters and with mixed results. One, and only one person, responded with a five-sentence reaction from heart and mind. I was spiritually enriched, once again, with that! The title of the Catholic Bishops' Message is 'Freedom to live fully until death comes', and I enclose a couple of sentences with which to maybe whet your appetite…

"'Assisted suicide' would undermine confidence of terminally ill. It is argued by some that the provision of 'assisted suicide' is simply about respecting the autonomy of the individual over his or her own life. Once life is taken away, however, autonomy is also taken away. The Church does not and never has insisted on the use of extraordinary means to prolong life. Nor is there any moral obligation on a sick person to accept treatment which they feel is unduly burdensome. A decision to end life prematurely, however, cuts off any prospect of growth or healing and represents a failure of hope. It is surely far better when a person's freedom to live is affirmed and supported by a compassionate community of care. Even leaving aside the vision of faith, individual autonomy is not absolute, and consideration must be given to the impact of legislation on the common good, as well as on the individual. By legislating for assisted suicide or euthanasia, the State would contribute to undermining the confidence of people who are terminally ill, who want to be cared for and want to live life as fully as possible until death naturally comes."

A month ago, I would not have put this on the items for an article on 'Change', which just proves the point maybe! It reminds me of an Irish bishop, now long gone, on the day of his ordination homily, remarking that he would continue to move forward, with the "Bible in one hand and the Paper in the other!"

Epitaph

On a combined class workshop in the Dublin Diocese, at Glenart Castle outside Arklow, Archbishop Dermot Ryan invited us to project forward our lives and expectations, by venturing on a version of what our final Epitaph might be as diocesan priests. I can still remember the 'horror' of picturing 'more of the same in parish after parish', with even higher demands from the people. It was one of the motivating factors some years later in my push to be allowed, for a time, to live and work abroad in Brazil; I was being proactive in making my own case, after a trip there with the Missionary Union. The same Bishop held the trump card, of course, and decided that it would be Chile where I would be allowed to face that huge change in my own priestly life. As a family member warned me at the time: "Your bottom line will change for ever, John!" No longer to hide, as it were, behind the clerical cliche of 'God's Will', while my own spirit moved me to look at life face-on.

Jesuit spirituality uses the word 'Magis' and the 'Greater Glory of God', AMDG, and a recent Webinar from the USA had the title: 'The Audacity of the Spirituality of St Ignatius'. There was such a variety of convinced and professional members of the Ignatian family, women and men, priests and some very young, that my admiration for a USA that can produce and promote such a vision once again shone. Themes like, 'The Two Standards', the 'Examen', 'listening', 'discernment', 'letting go', the use of story, the nearness of God, the 'Suscipe' or Offering all to God, simplicity of the Call and its absolute nature. Once again, it was 'a spiritual feast' on my desk, as I busied myself taking down some notes.

John Donne had written years ago, "'To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often!" The Latin American Spanish has words for all this too…'Instalado', 'apernado', mean getting stuck into your own ideas, riveted-in, as they often say. There were plenty of people around to fit that profile.

One of the expositions of the Mass that I recall from the early days made the point that the celebration was not meant to 'Tranquilize', but rather to 'Transform', and that should lead to a certain 'dis-ease', as we responded to the Final Blessing. The view of life as being members of a Pilgrim People, on a Journey, gave me a basis for many moments of formation with Catechists of the CFIVE programme, 'Family Catechesis and Initiation in to the Eucharistic Life.' There and Then, as Here and Now, so often the so-called 'First Communion' programme of two years, seemed to be just that (first and only!)... and 'see you later', maybe in a Confirmation re-awakening.

Recently, I found myself, through this new technology, looking in on-line at the ceremony in a former chapel of a group of adults in the catechumenate programme from the whole parish, presented before the Vicario of the Zone, for their reception of Confirmation and, in some cases, their First Communion, or their 'Initiation into the Eucharistic Life!' If only it were the norm! Food for the journey, in lives of endless change!

Change of attitude

A member of my own family contacted me recently about a Class project on St Oscar Romero. I was in Chile when the assassination took place and I can graphically recall the horror at parish and pastoral level, having been conscious of his Sunday Sermons and devouring them in the Church journals. His was a life on a journey, from administration and diligence to a 'conversion to the Poor', and it came through even on the occasion of his last homily that he knew it was going to cost him his life.

It is difficult for a young, Irish, Catholic today to visualise the change of attitude that meant, and why a bishop should die for it. I certainly appreciated the quality of the teaching that should present that as a project for a young mind.

In an earlier article, I wrote about Fr Henry Nouwen and his book, 'Reaching Out', and the three stages of change involved in Hospitality and enriching our own Solitude. The challenge to change is ever on-going.

Back in the day when priests seemed to abound in the Dublin Diocese, Fr Eddie Mansfield left me with a piece of friendly advice: "Take your holidays, John, and while you are young, use them to travel a bit." And I took him up on that with trips to Russia and 'The Steps of St Paul' in Turkey, and Greece, France, Brittany, Italy and Rome...all on modest budgets and very little stretching-out on beaches, where I was just going to get toasted and suffer sunburn! Later years in Latin America would offer the same challenges to personal enrichment, travel and reading, making change inevitable.

One of my Columban brothers, the late Fr Michael Cody, use to refer to Columbans and people he admired, as 'Self –Starters', and that is very much in the tradition of so many Columbans and other missionary sisters and priests whom I accompanied and admired over the years.

Reading

In recent days, I read with interest the discourse of the Pope advising young priests and seminarians on the value of reading novels and the challenge, fresh air, and growth that should bring to a possibly closed clerical mind view:

"2. Often during periods of boredom on holiday, in the heat and quiet of some deserted neighbourhood, finding a good book to read can provide an oasis that keeps us from other choices that are less wholesome. Likewise, in moments of weariness, anger, disappointment or failure, when prayer itself does not help us find inner serenity, a good book can help us weather the storm until we find peace of mind. Time spent reading may well open up new interior spaces that help us to avoid becoming trapped by a few obsessive thoughts that can stand in the way of our personal growth. Indeed, before our present unremitting exposure to social media, mobile phones and other devices, reading was a common experience, and those who went through it know what I mean. It is not something completely out-dated.

3. Unlike audio-visual media, where the product is more self-contained and the time allowed for 'enriching' the narrative or exploring its significance is usually quite restricted, a book demands greater personal engagement on the part of its reader. Readers in some sense rewrite a text, enlarging its scope through their imagination, creating a whole world by bringing into play their skills, their memory, their dreams and their personal history, with all its drama and symbolism. In this way, what emerges is a text quite different from the one the author intended to write. A literary work is thus a living and ever-fruitful text, always capable of speaking in different ways and producing an original synthesis on the part of each of its readers. In our reading, we are enriched by what we receive from the author and this allows us in turn to grow inwardly, so that each new work we read will renew and expand our worldview."

It is certainly a stimulating and short synthesis of some parts of my own life and wide reading!

Early on in pastoral life, I became conscious of the value of journaling. After the manner of the Jesuit 'Examen', it gradually became a fixed practice and it yielded many spiritual blessings and a reference for planning in the immediate term. During my time in Chile and Latin America, the texts were nearly all in Spanish, which best conveyed the atmosphere, dialogue and moods of each day, while they were still fresh in a tired mind and body, before yielding to sleep.

Finally, I return to one of the stories of Tony de Mello, which I offered sometimes as an ice-breaker in workshops and pastoral council gatherings. This, after an experience in Milltown Park in Dublin, over a weekend on De Mello, led by a Jesuit, Fr Dolan, and attended by an interesting variety of people young and old, who were not all Mass-goers. The Story is of a zealous street preacher, who sets off at some steam as people appear, then struggles as the audience begins to thin out in his mission to convert to this new Christian way of life. But he continues on regardless, even when there are very few adherents amongst his congregated group. When asked why and when he would continue to preach in the streets, even with ever diminishing numbers, he explained: "When I set out, there was a good number of people interested in making a change in their lives from this modern culture and being converted, then there were less and I kept on insisting on the need for change. Now that there are so few, I realise clearly that I must continue to preach lest they end up changing me to their ways."

In an ever more secularized world of change, it seems to me that Christians are now finding themselves in that same situation.

Fr Jim Tormey, Dublin and Chile.

Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during September for:

The Cry of the Earth

Let us pray that each of us listens with our hearts to the cry of the Earth and of the victims of environmental disasters and the climate crisis, making a personal commitment to care for the world we inhabit.

Prayer for Priests

Heavenly Father, I ask you to bless our bishops and priests and to confirm them in their vocation of service. As they stand before us as ministers of Your Sacraments, may they be channels of the love and compassion of the Good Shepherd, who came not be served but to serve.

Give them the grace they need to respond generously to you, and the courage to proclaim your Word of justice, love and truth. Bless, in a special way, Your servant Father, Send your Spirit upon him So that he may always walk in the path of faith, hope and love, in the footsteps of Christ, the eternal priest, who offered Himself on the cross for the life of the world. Amen.

Remember in prayer:

Fr Pat O'Hagan (Sept 1st)
Fr David O'Kane (2nd)
All Priests (3rd)
Fr Peter O'Kane (4th)
All priests (5th)
Fr Arthur O'Reilly (6th)
All priests (7th)
All priests (8th)
Fr Michael Porter (9th)
All priests (10th)
Fr Ignacy Saniuta (11th)
All Priests (12th)
Fr Gerard Sweeney (13th)
Fr Joseph Varghese (14th)
Fr John Walsh (15th)
Fr Alex Anderson(16th)
Fr Patrick Arkinson (17th)
Fr Patrick Baker (18th)
Fr Declan Boland (19th)
Fr Eugene Boland (20th)
Fr Francis Bradley (21st)
Fr Manus Bradley (22nd)
All priests (23rd)
Fr Brian Brady (24th)
All priests (25th)

Fr Thomas Canning (26th)
Fr Michael Canny (27th)
All Priests (28th)
All priests (29th)
All priests (30th)

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

The Purpose of Mass

BEFORE I became a homemaker, I used to teach religion to 11–14 year-olds. They were an interesting, quirky bunch, who had a real knack for asking very particular hypothetical questions (especially regarding sin and morality). Answering them could be fun at times, but tedious at others, especially when they were being used as a means of distracting from the actual lesson. But even myriad questions asked of me in the classroom does not remotely compare to the number of times my children ask me "Why?" There's something that must kick-in in their brains when they turn two - they aren't merely asking questions, but following nearly every statement with "Why?" Even when it isn't logical! The other day, my son pointed to an object and asked what it was. I answered, "A bucket." He followed up with, "Why?" How does one even answer this question?

The primary role of a Catholic parent is to get their children to Heaven, which likely includes answering questions - even very difficult ones. At some point or another, I imagine all parents encounter the question: "Why do I have to go to Mass?" And if our goal is to get our children to Heaven, then we must provide them with a truthful and compelling answer; not simply, "Because that's what we do." The Church explains that the purpose of Mass is fourfold: To adore God; to atone for sins; to give thanks; and to make petition. Adoration, atonement, thanksgiving, and petition should remain at the heart of our prayer during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; and furthermore, the answer to the inquisitive minds of our children.

Adoration, atonement, thanksgiving, and petition are four forms of prayer. All prayer is bound up in these four forms. While all are essential and meaningful for our personal prayer lives, the Holy Mass is the most perfect fulfillment of them all. In the Old Law, given by God to the Israelites through Moses, there were different kinds of sacrifices for each of these kinds of prayer - a different way to adore, a different way to atone, a different way to give thanks, and a different way to make supplications. However, because Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Law, His perfect sacrifice (established at the Last Supper and consummated on the Cross) takes the place of the variety of the original prescribed sacrifices in the Torah.

Attending Mass is truly and mystically standing in the Upper Room at the Last Supper and at the foot of Calvary with Jesus on the cross as He inaugurates and consummates, as both Eternal High Priest and Sacred Victim, His one, perfect sacrifice. In this way, the sacrifice of Jesus is renewed in an unbloody manner and is made present along with its fruits in the celebration of every Mass. These four ends, or purposes, of the Holy Mass are contained within the very heart of the Mass itself, the great Eucharistic Prayer.

Four Ends of Mass

Adoration: To give honour and praise owed to our Lord and God. Truly, the only sacrifice worthy of our Lord is that of His Son. We find adoration, for example in the 'Sanctus': "Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and Earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest." The words, recalling the prophet Isaiah (6:3) and the apostle John in Revelation (4:8-11), as well as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (Mt. 21:9), proclaim the glory of the Lord.

Atonement: To make reparation for our sins. Through the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Christ, Who died for us and in our place, is able to apply the merits of His atoning sacrifice for the forgiveness of our sins. Atonement, for example, can be found in the words from Eucharistic Prayer I, the ancient Roman Canon: "Therefore, Lord, we pray: graciously accept this oblation of our service, that of your whole family; order our days in your peace, and command that we be delivered from eternal damnation and counted among the flock of those you have chosen." The priest, acting in the person of Christ, intercedes that atonement for our sins might lead us to everlasting life, and we bind our prayer for the same to his with great hope.

Thanksgiving: To give gratitude for all that the Lord gives us. It is through Christ that we are able to best offer our thanks for all the gifts that the Lord lavishes on us, especially through the grace we encounter in the sacraments. The greatest of all thanksgivings is itself the Eucharist! The word itself, and the word as descriptive of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in general, and the Blessed Sacrament in particular, is from Greek which means 'thanksgiving.' The Preface of Eucharistic Prayer II, begins with, "It is truly right and just, our duty and salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Father most holy, through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, your Word through whom You made all things, whom You sent as our Savior and Redeemer, incarnate by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin." It expresses that we have a duty to give the Lord thanks for all that He does, which is living the virtue of justice.

Petition: To express our needs and intentions to the Lord. Through Christ, the great Intercessor, we hope that we might gain the Lord's grace for all of the needs and petitions we hold in our hearts. In the Eucharistic Prayers, we petition especially for the Church's sacred hierarchy, for those who have died, and for the true good of those of us present worshipping in the pews. Eucharistic Prayer I, the Roman Canon, states, "To us, also, your servants, who, though sinners, hope in your abundant mercies, graciously grant some share and fellowship with your holy Apostles and Martyrs: with John the Baptist, Stephen, Matthias, Barnabas, (Ignatius, Alexander, Marcellinus, Peter, Felicity, Perpetua, Agatha, Lucy, Agnes, Cecilia, Anastasia) and all your Saints: admit us, we beseech you, into their company, not weighing our merits, but granting us your pardon, through Christ our Lord." These prayers seek the Lord's benefit and grace on our lives and in hope of Heaven for those who have died. In addition to the Eucharistic Prayer, and preceding it, the Mass contains the 'Universal Prayer,' often called 'the Prayer of the Faithful,' where the worshipping Church seeks the Lord's graces regarding many aspects of ecclesial and secular life.

Enrich

Knowing these four ends, or purposes, of Holy Mass can help enrich our prayer lives, especially as we assist and actively participate in the Holy Mass. When we know the purposes of Mass, we can better enter into the great mystery of the Lord's Sacrifice and Supper unfolding before us. We can approach the Lord with an awareness that we are standing at the foot of the cross, in humility, adoring our God, seeking forgiveness for our sins, thanking Him for His manifold graces, and requesting of Him the best solutions to our needs and those of the whole Church and world. And when our children ask us complicated questions, we can assure them that the reasons for which we go to Mass are beautiful and straightforward and help us to become the Children of God that He created us to be.

Medieval hand-bells of Derry Diocese *by Dr Seán Beattie*

IT is estimated that there are about 300 medieval hand-bells which survive in Ireland and Britain. Of these, 11 originate in Co Donegal and there are a number of others in Co Derry. Ecclesiastical bells provided an important function in medieval liturgy. They were also used as guarantors of oaths and maledictions. Because of their prestige, they were often regarded as religious relics. Few bells remain in the custody of the original parish; the most comprehensive collection of bells can be seen in the Hunt Museum in Limerick.

St Conaill's Bell

During the Ordnance Survey of the 1830s, John O'Donovan made a detailed study of a bell in Ardara, Co Donegal, known as the 'Bearnán Conaill', after St Conaill. The bell was produced in public during the 'turas' (pilgrimage) on Inishkeel island, when pilgrims kissed the bell as they toured the sites of the island in Gweebarra Bay. The bell was sold by Major Nesbitt of Woodhill for £6 and is now in the care of the British Museum. A detailed history of this Bell is covered in the current issue of 'Donegal Annual', 2024, published by Donegal Historical Society.

Carndonagh's Donagh Bell

The Donagh Bell is associated with the ancient monastery founded by St Patrick at Carndonagh. The bell was hidden in the townland of Keenaclug, Carndonagh (Ceann-na-Clug, clug - bell) and was usually known as the Bell of Keenaclug. It was in the care of Philip McColgan of Priestown, Carndonagh, but it was subsequently owned by a pawnbroker in the town who offered it for sale. The Royal Irish Academy had the Bell in its possession for a period, but its whereabouts now is unknown. It is presumed that it may currently be in a collection in the National Museum in Dublin.

The Bell of Aileach

The Bell of Aileach, associated with the Grianán of Aileach, dates from the eight or nineth century. It was covered by a beautiful shrine which bears an inscription in Irish, which records that the King of Aileach, Donal McLoughlin, was the person responsible for its manufacture; the shrine or cover is dated to the late 11th century.

Medieval church bells are usually associated with a particular family, or clan. The heads of the clan were called the 'erenaghs', who were tenants of lands owned by the bishop. They collected dues owed to the bishop, including death duties and the bishop's share of marriage dowries. The title passed from one family member to the next. Thus, when the 'erenagh' died, a senior member of the clan took over the role. Some of them were ordained or had minor orders. Visitors to monasteries, guests and travellers seeking hospitality were also the responsibility of the erenaghs. They held the right to retain the medieval bell of the monastery. In Malin Head, the O'Gormans were the descendants of the 'erenaghs' and were in possession of the 'holy stone of Malin' as late as the 19th century.

St Boden's Bell, Culdaff

In the Parish of Culdaff, the Ua Dubhaighs were the 'erenaghs' and they had possession of the bell of the patron saint, St Boden. The family line became extinct in the late 19th century and the title then passed out of the family. They lived in the town land of Dunross, outside Culdaff. Sorcha Ní Dhubhaigh was the last survivor of the family and she died towards the end of the 19th century. The bell was then handed to the custody of the O'Doherty family of Glacknadrummond. Charles O'Doherty's mother was a member of the Ua Dubhaigh family. On his death, the bell passed to another family member, William, who lived in Cashel. He died in 1928 and the bell was handed over to the custody of the parish priest of Culdaff. Currently, he acts as the custodian of the bell. However, a member of this family living in Carndonagh still claims that they have rightful custody of the bell but are content with the existing arrangement.

St Boden's Bell is made of bronze and is cast in one piece. It is difficult to give a precise date for its manufacture, but experts have dated it to the nineth century. It is 11 inches in height and has a circular hole near the top. The bell is intact and in excellent condition, but the clapper is missing. A small handle sits on top of the bell, suitable for two fingers to act as a holder. The bell was treated as a religious object by the people of Culdaff. It was taken to the well of St Boden in the village and used to extract water from it in the hope of a cure for certain ailments. A local tradition stated that if the bell ever passed out of the Ua Dubhaigh family, the family of the new owner would become extinct.

The fact that the bell remains in the parish of Culdaff is important because of the associations of the parish with the saint. Boden was a disciple of Colmcille and worked as a missionary in Scotland.

Hertford House, off Oxford St., London, where the Bell of St Mura (Fahan, Buncrana) is on display with its ornament.

His Feast Day is on July 22 and, according to local lore, this was the occasion for a great gathering at the well. Pilgrims knelt on the cut-stone steps leading down to the well. Fanny McLaughlin, of Culdaff, had a railing put around the well in the 1930s and she used the water for cures. This was covered in recent times due to building work, but discussions are underway locally about restoring the ancient stone steps.

A stone in the river is known as St Boden's Boat, so-called because he is reputed to have sailed from Scotland to Culdaff in the stone boat. The Protestant church is also known as St Bodens.

Other notable medieval hand bells in the Derry Diocese include the Black Bell of Drumragh, in Omagh parish. There are also references to a hand bell in Ballinascreen, which was used for making pledges. The Bell of St Mura, Fahan, Buncrana, is preserved in the Wallace Collection, Hertford House, London, where it is on permanent display.

Parishes which retain their medieval handbells are in a unique position and are very keen to ensure that they have maximum security and protection.

Parish *Post-its*

Aghyaran

Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Thursdays after 10 am Mass, and finishes at 12 noon.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, and 11 am.

Ardstraw East (Newtownstewart)

Holy Hour: 6.30 pm, Thursdays, Oratory of Mary, Mother of God.
Weekend Mass Times: 11:30 am, St Eugene's Glenock.

Badoney Lower (Gortin-Rouskey)1

Adoration: Adoration takes places in St Patrick's Gortin, after the 12.30 pm Mass until 5 pm on Tuesdays.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick's, Gortin; 10 am, St Mary's, Rouskey.

Badoney Upper (Plumbridge-Cranagh)

Evening Prayer: Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of Hours (Vespers) takes place on Sundays at 7 pm in Sacred Heart Church, Plumbridge.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick's Cranagh; 10 am, Sacred Heart Plumbridge.
Ballinascreen
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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, Holy Rosary; 9 am in St Columba's Straw; 11 am in St Patrick's, Sixtowns; 12 noon in St Eugene's, Moneyneena.

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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil; and 9.30 am, 11 am, and 12.30 pm on Sunday.

Banagher

Blessing of Graves: Blessing of the Graves takes place at St Mary's Church, Altinure, on Sunday, September 8, at 10.30 am.
St Pio Novena: A Novena to St Pio gets underway on Sunday, September 22, at 7.30 pm.
Adoration & Chaplet: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and Divine Mercy Chaplet take place in St Joseph's Church, Fincairn, on Fridays, 10–11 am.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil in St Joseph's Church, Fincairn, 10.30 am in St Mary's Church, Altinure, and 12 noon in St Peter's & St Paul's Church, Foreglen.

Bellaghy

Blessed Carlo Prayer Room: Bishop Donal McKeown will be the main celebrant at the 7 pm Vigil Mass in Bellaghy on Saturday, October 12, the Feast of Blessed Carlo, and will bless and dedicate the 'Blessed Carlo Acutis Adoration Chapel', where parishioners and visitors will be able to pray before the Blessed Sacrament.
Community Café: The Open Door Community Café is open on the last Sunday of each month, from 11.30 am until 1 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil in Bellaghy, 10 am in Ballyscullion, and 11 am in Bellaghy.

Buncrana
Adoration: Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament now takes place in St Mary's Oratory every Monday, Tuesday & Wednesday, 6 am-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.
Weekend Mass Times: St Mary's Oratory – Vigil 6 pm, 9 am and 12.30 pm; St Mary's Cockhill – Vigil 7 pm, and 11am; Star of the Sea, Desertegney – 10 am.

Burt, Inch & Fahan

Adoration: Adoration in St Mura's Parish Church, Fahan, takes place each Friday after 10 am Mass.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10.15 am, St Aengus' Burt; 9 am, Our Lady of Lourdes, Inch; 7.15 pm Vigil, 11.30 am, St Mura's, Fahan.

Cappagh (Killyclogher)

Corpus Christi Church 70th: Mass will be celebrated on Sunday, September 29, at 10 am, to mark 70 years since the dedication of Corpus Christi Church, Mountfield. Refreshments in the Community Centre afterwards. All are invited. Any photos or memorabilia from celebrations in the church, such as baptism and wedding photos will be gratefully received. Contact corpuschristi70@outlook.com
Eucharistic Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesday from 8-9 pm in Christ the King, Strathroy, concluding with Night Prayer, and on Sunday from 3.30-6.30 pm, in Christ the King.
Rosary: The Rosary is prayed in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher, Monday-Saturday at 9.15 am, and in Corpus Christi, Mountfield every Thursday evening at 8 pm.
Legion of Mary: Legion of Mary meets every Monday after 10 am Mass in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher. New members always welcome.
St Pio Novena Devotions: Novena devotions through the intercession of St Padre Pio take place on the first Wednesday of the month in Christ the King Church, Strathroy. Rosary at 7 pm, followed by Mass as 7.30 pm. Veneration and blessing with relic will be available after Mass.
Polish Mass: Mass is celebrated in Polish in the Church of Christ The King, Strathroy, Omagh, on the first and third Sunday's of each month at 10 am.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 12 noon, Christ The King, Strathroy; 9 & 11 am, St Mary's, Killyclogher;

Castlederg & Ardstraw West

Adoration: Adoration takes place following 10 am Mass in St Patrick's Church on Fridays, until 12 noon.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil and 11 am, Castlederg; 9.30 am Dregish; and 12.30 pm Drumnabey.

Claudy

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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick's; 10 am, St Joseph's; 11.30 am St Patrick's.

Clonleigh (Lifford)

Other Jubilee Events: Jubilee Walk to old Clonleigh Graveyard in September; Celebration of parish schools, October; Annual Mass for the Dead, Monday, November 4, at 7 pm, with special remembrance of those who have died in the past 60 years; and Nativity Concert on Sunday, December 15, at 7 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 10 am.

Coleraine

Lough Derg: A Parish Pilgrimage to Lough Derg will take place on Saturday, September 7.
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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 11 am, St John's; 7.30 pm Vigil, St Mary's Dunboe; 9.45 am, Our Lady of the Assumption, Aghadowey.

Creggan

Adoration: Exposition of Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Divine Mercy Chapel on Sundays from 1.30 pm - 6 pm, Mondays from 10.30 am - 7 pm, and Tuesday – Saturday from 10.30 am - 12 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.
Polish Mass: Mass for the Polish community will be celebrated at 4 pm every second and fourth Sunday of the month in the Divine Mercy Chapel, at St Mary's Church.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil; 10.30 am; 12.15 pm.

Culdaff

Weekend Mass Times: 8 pm Vigil; 10 am Sunday.

Desertmartin

Knit & Natter: Knit & Natter classes take place in Knocknagin Hall on Tuesdays at 7.30 pm. Bring your own project or you can help with knitting for local charities.
Weekend Mass Times: 7.30 pm Vigil in St Patrick's, Keenaught; and 10 am in St Mary's, Coolcalm.

Donagheady (Aughabrack & 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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, St Patrick's, and 10.30 am, St Mary's.

Drumquin

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed each Tuesday morning at 10 am in St Patrick's Church, Drumquin.
Eucharistic Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays from 6 pm – Mass at 7.30 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: Vigil 6.30 pm, and 11 am.

Drumragh (Omagh)

Prayer Group: The Charismatic Prayer Group meetings take place in The Pastoral Centre on Thursday evenings, with Rosary at 7.30 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 10 am Mass.
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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 12 noon, Sacred Heart Church; 10.30 am, St Mary's Drumragh.

Dungiven

Prayer Group: The St Canice's Charismatic Prayer Group meets each Thursday at 7 pm, in the Parish Committee Room, and invites anyone who wishes to deepen their faith through shared Scripture, Prayer and Praise.
St Pio Healing Mass: A St Pio Healing Mass is celebrated monthly, on the first Tuesday, in St Patrick's Church at 7 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 11.30 am, St Patrick's; 10.15 am, St Matthew's; and 4.30 pm, Immaculate Conception.

Errigal

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Mondays after 10 am 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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, and 10 am, St Mary's, Ballerin, and 11.30 am in Glenullin GAA Hall.

Faughanvale

Rosary: The Rosary is prayed every Friday at 7 pm in Star of the Sea Church.
Weekend Mass Times: 5 pm Vigil, 12 noon, Star of the Sea; 6.30 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Mary's.

Granaghan (Swatragh)

Weekend Mass Times: 12 noon & 7 pm Vigils; 10.30 am.

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 7.30 pm Mass on Mondays, with Confessions.
Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are

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prayed after 7.30 pm Mass on Fridays in St Patrick's, Greencastle.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Patrick's, and 11.30 am, Our Lady of Wayside, Broughderg.

Greenlough

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Oliver Plunkett's Church from 9 am-5 pm on Thursdays.
Weekend Mass Times: 5.30 pm Vigil, and 9 am.

Iskaheen, Drung & Muff

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Tuesdays after 10 am Mass until 2 pm in St Patrick's Church, Iskaheen.
Divine Mercy: Divine Mercy Devotions take place on Wednesdays after 10 am Mass in Sacred Heart Church, Muff.
St Peregrine: The St Peregrine Novena Prayer and veneration of relic takes place on the first Friday of each month, alternating between the three churches.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 11.30 am, Sacred Heart Church, Muff; 8 pm Vigil, 10.15 am, St Columba's, Drung; 9 am, St Patrick's, Iskaheen.

Kilrea

Eucharistic Adoration: Mondays, from 12 noon - 7pm, at St Mary's Drumagarner. Concludes with Benediction.
Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are prayed on Sundays in St Anne's Oratory at 7 pm, with Confessions beforehand from 6.30-6.50 pm.
SVP: The St Vincent de Paul Thrift Shop is open on Saturdays from 10 am -1pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm, Vigil, St Anne's Oratory; 10am St Mary's, Drumagarner; 12 noon, St Mary's, Craigavole.

Killygordon

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place in St Patrick's Church, Crossroads, every Thursday after 9.15 am Mass.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Patrick's; 8 pm Vigil, 9 am & 11 am, St Mary's Sessiaghoneill.

Lavey

St Pio: Fr Bryan Shortall OFM, Capuchin, will celebrate Mass on Thursday, September 26, in the Church of Our Lady of Mercy. A blessing with a St Pio relic will take place afterwards.
Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Fridays after 9.15 am Mass Adoration until 5 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9 am and 11 am.

Leckpatrick

Adoration: Eucharistic Adoration takes place on Wednesdays after 10 am Mass until 5.30 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Mary's Church, Cloughcor; 10 am St Joseph's Church, Glenmornan; 11.30am, Sacred Heart Church, Derry Road.

Limavady

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Sundays in Christ the King (with Confessions) from 3-5 pm.
Children's Prayer: A Children's Prayer Group is held in the Drummond Hotel, Ballykelly, on the First Saturday of every month, from 2.30-3.30 pm. All welcome. Contact: Kathy on 07538749627.
Weekend Mass Times: 4.30 pm Vigil, 9 am, 12 noon, Christ the King Church; 6 pm Vigil, St Finlough's Church; 10.30 am, St Mary's 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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil and 11.30 am, St Mary's; 9.30 am, St Patrick's.

Malin

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, and 10.30 am, St Patrick's Church; Vigil 8 pm, Star of the Sea Church; 9 am, St. Mary's Church.

Melmount

Exposition: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the church on Mondays after 10 am Mass until 6 pm. The Rosary will be recited prior to closure of Adoration at approximately 5.40 pm. Everyone is welcome.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil, 10.30 am and 12.30 pm.

Moville

Stations of the Cross: The Stations of the Cross are prayed after 10 am Mass on Fridays.
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.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil, 10 am, St Pius X Church. 12 noon on Sundays as follows – St Mary's Ballybrack, 1st and 3rd Sundays; St Columba's Ballinacrae, 2nd and 4th Sundays; St Pius X 5th Sunday.

Sion Mills

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place on Fridays, from 11 am-6.50 pm, ending with Benediction before 7 pm Mass.
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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil; 9 am & 11 am.

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: Fridays after 10 am Mass until 6.50 pm.
Stations of the Cross: Come along to reflect on the Way of the Cross on Fridays at 7.30 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil; 9 am, 11 am, and 12:15 pm.

Strabane (Camus)

Adoration: Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament takes place all day in the Adoration Chapel (Oasis of Peace), which is situated at the back of the Church.
Prayer Group: The Contemplative Prayer Group meets on Mondays at 8 pm in the Prayer Room in the Parochial House. All welcome. Entry by Parish Priest's front door.
SJYP Society: The St John Vianney branch of the St Joseph's Young Priests' Society (the three combined Strabane parishes) meets on the first Tuesday of the month, excluding January, July and August, with Rosary in the church after 10 am Mass and continues 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 is welcome.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.30 pm Vigil, 10 am & 12 noon.

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 Talbott 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.
St Dymphna Mass: The St Dympna Mass with Anointing of the Sick takes place on the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm. This Mass is to give thanks to God for positive mental health and to pray for those who are struggling with mental health issues and those who care for them.
Cathedral Club: The Cathedral Club meets after the 10 am Mass each Thursday in the Cathedral Hall. Everyone is welcome to this parish social group. Refreshments will be served.
Weekend Mass Times: 6.15 pm & 7.30 pm Vigils; 9.30 am, 11 am, 12.30 pm & 7 pm.

Templemore – Long Tower

Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 10 am & 12 noon.
Purple Hearts: The Purple Hearts group gathers every Tuesday in Aras Cholmcille after 10 am Mass in Long Tower, for a cuppa, conversation, and some activities such as dancing, knitting, bingo and organising day trips. All welcome.

Three Patrons

Men's Bible Study: Men's Bible Study takes place in the Upper Room in St Brigid's Chapel, Carnhill, on Tuesdays at 7.30 pm.
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, from 7-10 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.
Vocations Society: The Vocations Society of St Joseph hold monthly meetings on First Fridays after 10 am Mass, in the Emmaus Room, Pennyburn. New members welcome.
Women's Laugh & Craft: The Women's Laugh & Craft Group meets every Monday from 7.30 -9 pm in the Kildare Room, St Brigid's, Carnhill. £3 per class. Spaces limited.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, 9.45 am & 12.15 pm, St Patrick's, Pennyburn; 6 pm Vigil, 10.30 am &12.30 pm St Brigid's, Carnhill; 7.15 pm Vigil, 9 am, 11 am & 6.30 pm Youth Mass, St Joseph's Galliagh.

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.
Weekend Mass Times: 6 pm Vigil, St Columba's, Doneyloop; 10.30 am, St Mary's Castlefinn.

Waterside & Strathfoyle

Eucharistic Adoration: There is Eucharistic Adoration in St Oliver Plunkett Church, Strathfoyle, on Monday mornings, and on Wednesday evenings from 7-9 pm. All welcome.
Lectio Divina: Reflect on the Scriptures with Lectio Divina in the side chapel in St Columb's Church, Chapel Road, on Thursday nights, starting at 8 pm.
Weekend Mass Times: 7 pm Vigil, 10 am,12.30 pm & 6 pm, St Columb's; 6 pm Vigil, 10.15 am & 12.15 pm, Immaculate Conception; 6 pm Vigil, 11.15 am, St Oliver Plunkett; 9.15 am, St Mary's Oratory.

Diocesan *Diary*

Vocations Day: For those considering diocesan priesthood, a Vocations Day will be held in The Oratory, in Buncrana, on Sunday, September 8, from 12–6 pm. Anyone interested should contact the Diocesan Vocations Director, Fr Pat O'Hagan by email: pgoh2111@gmail.com

Knock Pilgrimage: The annual Derry Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock takes place on Saturday, September 28.

ACCORD Mass: Bishop Donal will celebrate Mass on Monday, September 30, in St Eugene's Cathedral, to celebrate 50 years of ACCORD in Derry. There will be refreshments afterwards in the Cathedral Hall.

ACCORD Derry: ACCORD Derry Marriage Preparation Courses will take place on the weekends of September 20-21 and October 18-19. These courses are now online for booking at www.accordni.com and are in person and not virtual.

St Bernadette's Relics: Relics of St Bernadette will be visiting St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry, on October 13 &14.

Have a heart *Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR*


Fr Johnny Doherty CSsR

SOME years ago three of us Redemptorists were giving a Parish Mission in a rural town in the South of Ireland. One of the tasks of the Mission was to visit as many of the homes of the parish as possible to meet with the people, to listen to them, to pray with them and, if they wished, to bless their homes.

One of my confreres, I'll call him Jimmy (not his real name), visited a family where there were serious problems because of alcoholism on the part of the husband and father. He was not there at the time. But, listening to his wife and seeing their children, Jimmy could see that they were in great need because of neglect. He gave them as much time as they needed and he promised to keep them in his prayers.

A few days later, Jimmy was walking down the street of the town when he saw a man approaching him. This man had obviously a few drinks in him and there was no way of avoiding him. The man introduced himself and thanked Jimmy for visiting his home and family and apologised for not being there because, as he said, he was otherwise engaged!

This man then produced a 50 Euro note and pressed it into Jimmy's hand saying: "I want you to offer a Mass for my family". Jimmy immediately thought back to his visit and to the obvious neglect there was in that home. He tried everything he could think of to refuse the money, saying that he would certainly offer the Mass but that the man should spend the money on his wife and children.

As I'm sure you know, it is almost impossible to argue with someone who is drunk, as Jimmy was finding out. So, eventually, he told the man that he would offer six Masses for them. The man then looked Jimmy straight in the eye and he said: "You will offer one Mass for us, but you will put your (expletive) heart into it."

Whatever we might think of a person who is drunk and who is neglecting his family as a result, we have to admit that his theology and his spirituality was spot on!

The Scriptures

In the Mass of the first Sunday of September – the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Jesus is having great trouble with the religious leaders, who were accusing His disciples of breaking the law by eating their food with unclean hands. He said to them: "It was of you hypocrites that Isaiah so rightly prophesied in this passage of Scripture: 'This people honours me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me'."

It is an age-old problem for people of all times and places that we can spend our lives doing the right things but with the wrong motivation. Learning to live, putting our hearts into how we live, is what will bring us fulfilment and happiness. It is the way of what is called 'intentional living', which is the opposite to 'drifting along'. Unfortunately, drifting along, taking so much for granted is all too common in so much of our living of our lives today.

The heart, a symbol of life

In the body, the heart is one of the most vital organs that keeps us alive. Great things can now be done when there is heart trouble, even to the point of a heart transplant. But when the heart is diseased, life itself is threatened. Sometimes sudden death occurs because the heart gives out.

The same is true of the heart as a symbol of life, and it is that symbol in a number of ways.

The heart, a symbol of love

Around St. Valentine's Day, February 14, each year this is most obvious. There are hearts everywhere on cards, balloons, gifts, as people try to express how they feel about each other. From young, new love to older, committed love, the heart speaks volumes.

But this is also there throughout the year. In our normal language, we often talk about 'how my heart is bursting with love', 'my heart overflows with love', my heart sings with love'.

The heart, a symbol of bitterness

We also often talk about having a bitter heart or a cold heart. This is usually when we are at odds with someone, possibly someone who is close to us, like a wife or husband, a sister or brother. But we can also have bitterness towards others that has a deep effect on our close relationships.

Where there is bitterness there will be anger. And where there is anger there will be serious divisions that affect everything in life. In the Scriptures we have a very important teaching: "Never let the sun go down on your anger."

This does not mean simply to put your anger away for the night and you will sleep better. No! It means that we have no right to get up today with yesterday's anger. It is so very destructive of love and the joy of love.

To be able to put your heart into your love relationships, it is so very important to find ways of letting go of anger and bitterness, no matter who it is towards, as quickly as possible, and move forward into the freedom of love. Forgiveness is very often a vitally important part of this letting go.

The heart, a symbol of joy

"My heart leapt with joy". People often speak like that when something great and unexpected happens to them. And people also express this joy in terms of having 'peace of heart' or 'the joy of love'. When we are like this, we are very positive about everything. Gratitude fills our heart. And we can count our blessings and be thankful for life and love. The world is good and everything is humming.

The heart, a symbol of pain

However, we also often speak about having a heavy heart, or a troubled heart, or a broken heart. At these times, it is difficult to see anything positive or encouraging in life. We go through times of illness in ourselves or in the lives of people we love. We are worried. We are upset, we are even lost.

We can go through times when we are hurt by life or by the people in our lives, sometimes even by betrayal in love. And there can be great darkness in our hearts. It is difficult to see light or goodness. It is almost impossible to count our blessings.

There is a saying that 'time is a great healer'. And there is a truth in this. But it is only really true if we use the time to get healed. It does not happen on its own. Unless we are taking steps towards healing, our hurts and pains and worries only get worse by going down into our hearts and acting like a kind of spiritual cancer that eats away at us.

We need to seek appropriate help in our anxieties and in our pain. Sometimes this is medical help; sometimes it is the help of a counsellor; sometimes it is the help of one another in our relationships of love, like marriage and family life. What is common to all the helps we need is that we are willing to talk about what is troubling us and to want to be free to love and to be glad.

Spirituality

"You will offer one Mass for us but you will put your (expletive) heart into it." That was the message of the alcoholic man to my confrere, Jimmy, at the beginning of this article. It is a profound message that also comes from the Word of God in the Scriptures and is addressed to each one of us in the important aspects of our lives.

It is the message of God to each of us who are priests, in everything that we do in our ministry and in our spirituality.

It is the message of God to every wife and husband in their relationship of love, for better and for worse, etc.

It is the message of God to every parent as they bring their children up to be the best that they can be in life.

It is the message of God to every one of us individually and as communities of faith in our parishes, as we respond to the call of Christ to follow Him.

Put your heart into all that you do and you will find joy and happiness and eternal life

The Sacred Heart

One of the lovely images we have in our Catholic tradition is in the picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. In it we see the ultimate sign of love. Christ literally gave His last drop of blood and water to show the extent of His love for us.

In another scene in the Gospels, when Jesus washed His disciples' feet as a sign of His love for them, He told them: "I have given you an example, that as I have done to you, you too should do to one another".

As we look at the picture of the Sacred Heart, we can apply those same words of His and find the ways of love. He put His whole heart into loving us.

Schedule of Prayer in St. Eugene's Cathedral

Ordinary Time

Monday to Friday
8.00am – Morning Mass
10.00am – Morning Mass
12.00noon – Angelus & Rosary
3.00pm – Divine Mercy Chaplet
7.00pm – 7.20pm - Confessions
7.30pm – Evening Mass followed by Rosary & Night Prayer

Saturday
10.00am – Morning Mass
(11.30 am – 1.00 pm) (5.30 pm – 6.00 pm) (7.00 pm – 7.20 pm) - Confessions
6.15pm – Vigil Mass
7.30pm – Vigil Mass

Sunday
7.00am – Sunday Mass
9.30am – Sunday Mass
11.00am – Sunday Mass
12.30pm – Sunday Mass
7.00pm – Sunday Mass

EUCHARISTIC ADORATION
Sunday 3.00pm – 6.00pm
Tuesday after 10.00am Mass until 7.30pm Mass

CONFESSIONS
Saturday (11.30 am – 1.00 pm) (5.30 pm – 6.00 pm) (7.00 pm – 7.20 pm)
Eves of Holy Days (5.30pm – 6.00pm) (7.00pm – 7.20pm)
Monday – Friday 7.00pm – 7.20pm

DEVOTIONS
Sunday 6.00pm

ST EUGENE'S CATHEDRAL
1873-2023
I REJOICED WHEN I HEARD THEM SAY LET US GO TO GOD'S HOUSE. PS 121

...*other* Diary *Dates*

All Night Vigil: 'Sisters in Prayer' is a ladies prayer group that meets in Termonbacca every Tuesday evening, from 7:15-8:15 pm for prayer and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. On Friday, September 6, they will be holding an all-night Vigil of Prayer and Adoration. The evening will begin with Mass at 8 pm, and will also conclude with Mass at 8 am on Saturday morning. Any woman who wishes to come along and join in this evening of prayer and adoration is more than welcome.

Termonbacca Faith Talks: The Termonbacca Carmelite Retreat Centre monthly talks on different elements of the faith resume on Thursday, September 19. Fr Cajetan Ikedi Apeh OCD leads this group, and is very passionate for the faith-maturity of Christians, 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 the remainder of 2024 are: September 19 - "He Ascended into Heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father"; October 17 - "From thence He will Come again to judge the living and the dead"; November 14 - "I believe in the Communion of the Saints"; December 10 - "I believe in the Resurrection of the Body"; and February 13 - Purgatory and the purification for Eternal Life

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 02871262512.

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.

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 is celebrated in the Church of Christ The King, Strathroy, Omagh, on the first and third Sunday's of each month at 10 am, and at 9.30 am every second and fourth Sunday in the Divine Mercy Chapel, at St Mary's Church, Creggan, in Derry City

Liturgical Calendar for September

Sept 1: Twenty-Second Sunday of the Year
Sept 2: Ferial (Ordinary)
Sept 3: Memorial of Saint Gregory the Great
Sept 4: Memorial of Saint MacNissi
Sept 5: Optional Memorial of Saint Teresa of Calcutta
Sept 6: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 7: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 8: Twenty-Third Sunday of the Year
(Other years when not on Sunday: Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary)
Sept 9: Memorial of Saint Ciaran
Sept 10: Optional Memorial of Saint Peter Claver
Sept 11: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 12: Optional Memorial of the Holy Name of Mary
Sept 13: Memorial of Saint John Chrysostom
Sept 14: Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross
Sept 15: Twenty-Fourth Sunday of the Year
(Other years when not on Sunday: Memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows)
Sept 16: Memorial of Saints Cornelius & Cyprian
Sept 17: Optional Memorial of Saint Hildegard von Bingen
Sept 18: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 19: Optional Memorial of Saint Januarius
Sept 20: Memorial of Saints Andrew Kim Taegon, Paul Chong Hasang & Companions
Sept 21: Feast of Saint Matthew
Sept 22: Twenty-Fifth Sunday of the Year
Sept 23: Memorial of Saint Pio of Pietrelcina (Padre Pio)
Sept 24: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 25: Optional Memorial of Saint Finbarr
Sept 26: Optional Memorial of Saints Cosmas & Damian
Sept 27: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 28: Ferial (Ordinary Time)
Sept 29: Twenty-Sixth Sunday of the Year
Sept 30: Memorial of Saint Jerome

Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

HELLO children. Welcome to the month of September. The summer holidays are over and we are all ready to begin the new school year. This month is dedicated to the Seven Sorrows (or Dolours) of Mary. The Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows which is celebrated on September 15, recognises the sadness experienced by Mary, the Mother of Jesus, during Her life.

The Seven Sorrows are:

1) The Prophecy of Simeon
2) The Flight into Egypt
3) Jesus Lost in the Temple
4) Meeting Jesus on His way to the Cross
5) Standing at the foot of the Cross
6) Jesus being taken down from the Cross
7) The Burial of Jesus

Mary's Birthday

We celebrate Our Lady's Birthday on the 8th day of September. Mary was born without Original Sin and full of grace (CCC 491). She was chosen to be the Mother of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, the spiritual Mother for all of us. She is the holiest of all God's creatures. We celebrate this wonderful Feast with rejoicing, for on this day the dawning of redemption for the world came about through Mary's birth.

Father of mercy, give your people help and strength from heaven. The birth of the Virgin Mary's Son was the dawn of our salvation. May this celebration of Her birthday bring us closer to lasting peace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God

Saints of the Month

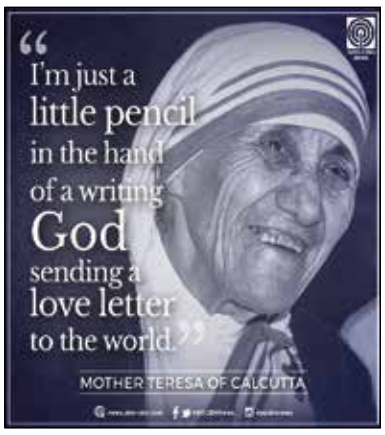
St (Mother) Teresa of Calcutta – September 5
St Matthew – September 21
St Pio – September 23
St Jerome – September 30

Feast of the Holy Cross

The Feast of the Holy Cross is celebrated on September 15. This Feast recalls three historic events: (1) The finding of the True Cross by St Helena, who was the mother of the Emperor Constantine; (2) The dedication of the churches built by the Emperor Constantine on the site of the Holy Sepulchre and Mount Calvary; (3) The restoration of the True Cross to Jerusalem by the emperor Heraclius II. Although this Feast recalls these historic events, we also celebrate the True Cross as the means of our salvation.

Jesus suffered death on a cross to save us from our sins. Crucifixion was the Roman death penalty, given as a punishment to the most dangerous criminals. The Cross is important for us because, on the Cross, Jesus silently suffered a horrific death for our sins in order to win our salvation.

Jesus tells us in scripture that anyone who wants to follow Him must take up his cross daily and follow Him (Luke 9:23, CCC 1435). This means more than simply giving something up. It means uniting ourselves to the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. Sometimes things happen in our lives which make us feel sad and cause us great hurt. We should offer up the pain we experience with the sufferings that Jesus endured on the Cross for the sins of the world, and remember that in God we place our trust.



Mother Teresa (St Teresa of Calcutta)

Agnes Bojaxhiu was born in Skopje, Macedonia, on August 26, 1910. She came from a devout Catholic family which owned its own business. From an early age, she was always fascinated with missionaries and by the age of 12 she knew that she would commit herself to a religious vocation. When she was 18 years of age, she left home and joined the Sisters of Loreto in Rathfarnham, Dublin, and became known as Sister Teresa. Since the day she left for Ireland, Teresa never saw her mother or sister again.

Having spent a year in Ireland learning English, she returned to the Sisters of Loreto Convent in India, where she taught daughters of the wealthy for 15 years. However, it was on a retreat that Teresa realised that her true calling was to give up everything and follow Christ into the slums of India and to serve Him among the poor who lived there.

It took two years of preparation before she could start this work. She needed to get permission from the Sisters of Loreto to leave their Order, and from the Archbishop of Calcutta to live and work among the poor.

In 1948, Sr Teresa ceased to wear her habit and instead wore the simple sari and sandals that the women wore whom she worked among. She moved into a small house in the slums of Calcutta and began her work. It was here that Teresa worked tirelessly helping orphans, lepers and the homeless. Soon others heard of her work and came to join her.

In 1950, Mother Teresa set up a new congregation called the Missionaries of Charity. This mission aimed to help the poor, homeless and those uncared for in the community. She showed great love and compassion for humanity as she dedicated her life to serving the poor.

Mother Teresa was honoured with many awards throughout her life for her work in helping to ease the suffering of many people. She was awarded the Peace Prize in 1971 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979. She continued her work with the poor and leading the Missionaries of Charity until her death in 1997. Mother Teresa was beatified in 2003 and canonized a saint in 2016. We celebrate her feast on September 5. Her diligent work and determination to help others is inspirational, and her selfless acts of charity are beacons of God's love for humanity.

St Mother Teresa pray for us.

The Year of Prayer 2024

The 'YOUCAT for Kids' tells us why we turn to Mary in prayer (Q150). It explains that we ask for Her help because She is the Mother of Jesus, and She is our Mother too.

It then continues to explain the beautiful prayer, the 'Hail Mary' (Q151).

The first part of this prayer can be found in Scripture. The first sentence of the prayer is spoken by the Angel Gabriel, as he greeted Mary with the message that She was chosen to have a child from God.

The next sentence is Elizabeth's greeting to Mary. Elizabeth was Mary's cousin, whom She went to visit, and when Her cousin caught sight of Mary, she shouted out with joy, "Blessed art thou among women." This was Elizabeth's way of saying that Mary was especially chosen to be the Mother of God.

The last part of the prayer was added by the Church, and it is a beautiful ending. Here we ask Mary to pray for us at the two most important moments of our lives - "now and at the hour of our death." One day, these two moments will become the same moment, our last, and how blessed we will be in that hour to have prayed this wonderful prayer faithfully throughout our lives.

This prayer is also known by its Latin name, 'Ave Maria'.

Quiz Time *with Lawrence*

1. What body of water separates Northern Ireland and Scotland?
2. Name the popular 'live' RTE game show that was taken off air due to Covid, in March 2020, and has never returned?
3. What charitable organisation was founded by Canon James O'Neill in Belfast in 1915?
4. Who wrote the novel 'Of Mice and Men'?
5. In what TV 'mocumentary' does John Krasinski play the fictional character, Jim Halpert?
6. What League of Ireland football club plays their home games at Eamon Deacy Park?
7. Who is known as the Patron Saint of music?
8. What iconic land mass stretches between Northern China and Southern Mongolia?
9. In snooker, what is the highest possible break that can be made without ever potting the black ball?
10. What famous French statesman is the main airport in Paris named after?
11. Who played the role of pilot, Chesley 'Sully' Sullenberger in the 2016 movie, 'Miracle on the Hudson'?
12. Of which Balkan country is Tirana the capital city?
13. What did Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew, Cuthbert, Dibble and Grubb do for a living?
14. What country is the world's largest producer of Olive Oil?
15. What English author and satirist wrote the books, 'Golfing for Cats', 'A year in Cricklewood' and 'Tissues for Men'?
16. What former Premier League goalkeeper is currently on the books of Belfast Giants Ice Hockey team?
17. Who is the youngest member of the US musical family, 'The Osmonds'?
18. TV Presenter, John Torode is the host of what popular food programme?
19. What popular UK festival was hosted for the first time in 1970?
20. What is the US state capital of Florida?
21. What rock band released the Album, 'Back in Black' in July 1980?
22. Which is Ireland's smallest county, both in area and population?
23. What does the dreaded VAR stand for in football?
24. What English actor played the character, 'Rigsby' in the sitcom 'Rising Damp'?
25. The first episode of what television soap opera was actually broadcast 'live'?

Quiz Answers: *1, The North Channel; 2, Winning Streak; 3, Knights of St Columbanus; 4, John Steinbeck; 5, The US Office; 6, Galway United; 7, St Cecilia; 8, The Gobi Desert; 9, 125; 10, Charles de Gaulle; 11, Tom Hanks; 12, Albania; 13, Firemen in Trumpton; 14, Spain; 15, Alan Coren; 16, Petr Cech; 17, Jimmy; 18, Masterchef; 19, Glastonbury; 20, Tallahassee; 21, AC/DC; 22, Co Louth; 23, Video Assistant Referee; 24, Leonard Rossiter; 25, Coronation St.*

Aghyaran, Ardmore, Ardstraw West &Castlederg, Ballinascreen, Ballymagroarty, Banagher, Bellaghy, Buncrana, Carndonagh, Claudy,

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culdaff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamanagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,

Moville, Newtownstewart, Omagh, Plumbridge, Sion Mills, Steelestown, Strabane, Swatragh, Templemore - Long Tower and St Eugene's, Three Patrons, Waterside

Let Your Light Shine!

Echoes of the Penal Days

The faithful flock had gathered beneath a leaden sky,
The midges were a sign of rain; all hoped it would stay dry.
The priest prepared for Holy Mass at an altar made of rock,
The heavy rain did not dissuade the shepherd and his flock.

This wasn't in the penal days, in The Rocks or Kearney's Glen,
When danger reigned upon the priest who said the Mass back then,
But the Mass to bless the graveyard, the altar and the cross,
Near the Church of John the Baptist, that's where this service was.

In the newly laid out graveyard, right next to Davy's Acre,
Where rest those of the faithful who have gone to meet their maker.
With rain, they say, comes blessings, as in Knock in years gone by,
May blessings fall on Granaghan like rainfall from the sky.

Our thanks to Father Keaney and all who toiled with care.
God bless all those who braved the rain for the Mass and blessing there.
God bless the folk who passed the faith from penal times long past,
May we pass on what they passed on; their legacy is vast.

by PJ Lagan – August 23, 2024.

Granaghan parishioners braved the rain for the outdoor Mass celebrated by their parish priest, Fr Charlie Keaney, for Phase II of the Graveyard Plan, and the blessing of the magnificent new altar and cross there.

Greenlough, Iskaheen, Killyclogher, Killygordon, Kilrea, Lavey, Leckpatrick, Lifford, Limavady, Maghera, Magilligan, Malin, Melmount,