



The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

ISSUE 60. DECEMBER 2020

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“Wishing all a Blessed Christmas”



People in focus



Dr Joseph Varghese, Dungiven



Fr Francesco CFR - Galliagh.



Fr Roni Zacharias - Glendermott.



Fr Stephen Kearney, Aughabrack, RIP



Pat Carlin - St Eugene's

Also featuring: Online youth activities, JPII reflections, Youth writers share about Christmas, Inspirational Garvan Byrne story, Drawing God and Advent, Melmount prayer for deceased, Connecting Generations Campaign, Irish Section, Termonbacca Novena to Child Jesus, Children's Catechism Club and Quiz... and much more...

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Bishop Donal reflects on the Pope's prayer intention for December...

"We pray that our personal relationship with Jesus Christ be nourished by the Word of God and a life of prayer"

WE all know the phrase from St John's Gospel - used in the 'Angelus' - 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us'. That is the heart of the Christmas message.

This is an important teaching. Sometimes we can imagine that the 'Word of God' is made up of words written in the Bible. And, we proclaim at every Mass that the scripture readings are 'The Word of the Lord'.

But the first Word of God is Jesus. As Pope Benedict wrote in his first letter to the whole church, 'Deus Caritas Est' (2005): "Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction". (para 1).

Elsewhere Pope Benedict

wrote: "The word is not simply audible...It has a face...that of Jesus of Nazareth". (Verbum Domini 2009 para 12)

Our deepest encounter is with the person of Jesus. A Church document from the Second Vatican Council puts it this way - "Christianity is not a religion of the book but a religion of the word of God...The incarnate and living Word". (Dei Verbum, 1965, para 10).

In Catholic teaching, we encounter that Word in the scriptures, in the sacraments and in prayer. Often in the Catholic Church, we believe that we know little about the scriptures. In one way, we have a lot to learn from our Protestant brothers and sisters. But, while not having a great tradition of studying the Bible, we have been saturated

in Bible stories through Mass readings, stained glass windows, Stations of the Cross and other non-verbal retelling of the Bibles stories.

Pope Francis has a clear invitation to us all. In this season when we celebrate the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us in Bethlehem, he invites us to be nourished by the Word of God as we find it written in the Bible - and by prayer.

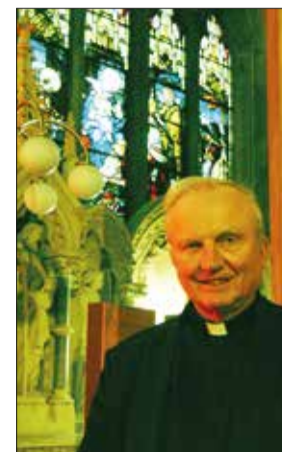
Reading the Bible and prayer are not two separate places where we meet Christ. In lectio divina, we read and re-read a passage of the scriptures. We allow that reading to touch our heads - and then our hearts, leading us into prayer to the Word who is Jesus Christ.

But the Jesus, Word of God, comforted the afflicted - and

afflicted the comfortable! As Pope Francis wrote in 'The Joy of the Gospel' (2013): "God's Word is unpredictable in its power... The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the Word...in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking", (para 22) and "The word is always beyond us...we are neither its masters or owners, but its guardians, heralds and servants". (para 146)

St Jerome loved the scriptures and translated the Bible into Latin from the original Greek and Hebrew in which it was written. He said: "Ignorance of the scriptures is ignorance of Christ".

At Christmas, we celebrate Christ's birth in a stable. The



Bishop Donal

Holy Father wants us to make a permanent resting place in our hearts for the Word of God, verbal and in flesh. If we do that, the prayer will flow spontaneously from our hearts.

Celebrating 1500th anniversary of St Columba's birth



Protestant, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches.

Over the next year, there will be a series of events commemorating the life of Derry's Patron Saint, and Bishop Donal has encouraged people to celebrate his legacy in some way during the Columban Year.

In his homily, Bishop Donal asked that Columba be remembered "as a real human being who grappled with the human problems of his day and would challenge us to do the same in this generation".

Considering what the Donegal-born Saint might have to say today, he suggested: "Columba would tell us that if we pamper ourselves, we lose any sense of the greatness to which we are

called. Comforts are great, but in a world where it is all about me, no-one thrives".

He added: "Columba grew in his belief that he was loved by God and that forgiveness was always available for our mistakes".

Bishop Donal went on to highlight that the Columban Year was not just a Catholic celebration, saying: "The main Christian churches in Derry and Donegal are working together so that we can remember one who is part of our shared history".

And he noted that the year of celebration was "a chance to reconnect with the Celtic spirituality that left an indelible mark on Europe".

The Columba Community also marked the start of the

MON 21ST DEC 2020 9PM

George Hutton, Roisin Rice, Plunkett McGartland, Anne Marie Hickey

LOVE CAME DOWN AT Christmas

ONLINE CONCERT

A celebration of Christmas in Scripture and song at St Eugene's Cathedral, Derry.

JOIN US

www.steugenesacathedral.com

celebrations by holding an all-night vigil of prayer for health and healing, through the intercession of St Columba, in St Canice's Oratory in the Celtic Prayer Garden, at the

IOSAS Centre, on the Derry-Muff border.

Fuller coverage will be included in the January edition.

Parish Post-its

Burt Inch & Fahan

The highly popular Burt Inch and Fahan Calendar for 2021 is due in the shops mid-December. Kathleen Grant and Lily Elder wish to acknowledge the solid support from their advertisers, the business fraternity for selling the calendars, the media, Paddy and Louise at Bizz Print, those that kindly allowed the use of their photos, and the public for purchasing the calendar

since the first one appeared in 2012. Over €35, 000 has been raised since then for deserving charities. For further details email kathleengrantburt@gmail.com.

Long Tower

Novena: The annual Solemn Novena in honour of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, which runs for the nine Sundays before Christmas in Long Tower Church, is underway. Starting at 6 pm, each night includes

the praying of the Rosary and Novena prayer, petitions, and a short talk given by various guest speakers, followed by a ceremony of healing, with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

St Pio Mass: The next St Pio Mass to be celebrated in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, for healing in mind and body, will be on Monday, December 14, at 7.30pm, and can be viewed via webcam.

St Eugene's Advent Programme: The Cathedral's Advent Programme runs until December 24, and includes

Morning Prayer of the Church at 7.45 am on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays and Rosary and Night Prayers at 8 pm, Monday to Friday. On Advent Tuesday's the Rosary will be prayed for all families, and, on Wednesdays, Fr Patrick Lagan will led a Gospel Encounter after Night Prayer.

The programme includes events in the Cathedral Hall viewed via webcam. On Mondays, Anne Marie Hickey and Trevor Burnside provide live music from 3.15-4pm, and on Wednesday, December 9 and 16, pupils

from St Mary's College, Derry, will read Scripture, poetry and sing songs. 'Preparing for Christmas in Strange Times' continues on Thursday nights at 8pm, and on Fridays, at 11am, Mary Murphy presents short Christmas reflections.

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.

The NET

Sharing the fruits of the faith in the Derry Diocese

Contacting us:

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

Hollie Frystal writes about Holy Cross College, Strabane, RE competition...

Walking with Jesus amidst a pandemic

EVERY year in Holy Cross College, we have our annual school Mass to mark the start of the academic year. Our primary aims are 'Excellence in Education, Formation in the Catholic Faith and Care for All.'

In Holy Cross, we are very fortunate to be surrounded by fantastic priests from our parish, teachers and staff of rich faith. As a Catholic school, we see faith as our priority to share and to teach the lessons taught by Jesus, and to inspire and guide the young people in their faith and vocational journeys throughout post-primary.

Like most schools, sadly we had to cancel our school Mass

due to the coronavirus, as it was vital to maintain safety regulations. However, we did not let such valuable time pass without thinking of something else for our young people. The initiative was taken to engage the Year 8 pupils in a faith-based activity. The task involved keeping with the theme of November, which was the 'Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed'.

The Head of RE decided that the competition would involve the Year 8 pupils reading and reflecting on the beautiful poem, 'Footprints'. The poem is said to date back to the first half of the 20th century, and although it is famous, the author remains unknown. This

creates a sense of wonderment and the young people were invited to open their minds and hearts to the meaning of 'Footprints in the Sand'. They were also asked to be creative in drawing a poster with the poem centered in the middle.

The beginning of 'Footprints' expresses a deep feeling of loneliness, fear, sadness and, most of all, confusion. The man expressed his confusion over why there was only one set of footprints, "I don't understand why when I needed you the most you would leave me." This is a common misunderstanding of Jesus' love and support; in which we mistakenly feel abandoned and that challenges our faith.

Especially this year, the world has undergone severe heartache, anxiety, fear and stress, amidst the pandemic. However, Jesus comforted the man by settling his confusion when He responded, "...when you see only one set of footprints in the sand, it was then that I carried you." For young people, it is so important that we understand that 'Emmanuel' - 'God is with us', and that the poem represents the challenges that lie ahead of us in life, and that we are not alone in them.

I am a student in upper-sixth and I assisted my teacher in co-judging the top three winners of this competition. We were delighted with the phenomenal



The Year 8 winners in the Holy Cross College, Strabane, RE competition were, right to left, Aimee (1st), Luke (2nd) and Lily (3rd). Photograph by Hollie Frystal.

response of so many fantastic Year 8s who decided to take part in this wonderful activity. We both found the judging difficult as the posters were absolutely brilliant! Their creativity and their dedication were so apparent in their work and so rewarding. The style of handwriting, colours and symbols used were amazing!

A big thankyou and a well done to all those who participated, and congratulations to our winners:

In 1st place - Aimee O'Donnell; in 2nd place - Luke Bogle; and in 3rd place - Lily McAleer, whose posters were terrific! Enjoy your prizes!

This December, in keeping with the safety regulations, Holy Cross College will hold its annual Carol Service pre-recorded and will be available to watch on the school website, and on other social media platforms via Facebook and Instagram

Sr Clare devotees gathered in heavy rain to pray birthday Rosary



THE growing devotion to the late Sr Clare Crockett amongst the people of Derry was again reflected in the number who braved heavy rain to gather around her mural, painted on a gable wall in the Brandywell area, to pray the Rosary together on what would have been her 38th birthday, November 14.

Amongst them was Bishop Donal, who had just returned to the city following the funeral and burial of Fr Stephen Kearney, in Co Tyrone. Speaking to 'The Net' afterwards, he said: "As I arrived in the Brandywell, it was great to find a very large crowd standing in the rain at the Sr Clare mural; people of all ages, proudly saying the Rosary to mark what would have been Sr Clare's 38th birthday.

"It is impressive to see how the life of one of their own has become a focus for not just prayer but also pride in their community."

Bishop Donal went on to say: "I know that the Home of the Mother is keen to keep her story before the eyes of the world, and that there are moves to promote her cause for canonisation.

"According to Church Law, such a move would have to be led by the bishop of the diocese where she died."

Sr Clare Maria of the Trinity and the Heart of Mary, who grew up in Long Tower parish and

was pursuing a promising acting career, shocked her family and everyone who knew her when she announced that she was going to become a nun, after an amazing conversion experience.

Entering the Servant Sisters, of the Home of Mother Order, in 2001, she took her perpetual vows in 2010 and went on to touch the lives of many, particularly young people, through her ministry, before her sudden death during an earthquake in Playa Prieta, Ecuador, on April 16, 2016.

Since her death, a growing number of people in her home city, and across the island of Ireland and the world, have been attributing prayers answered, many in a seemingly miraculous way, to her intercession, leading to calls for her cause for beatification and eventual canonisation to be considered by the Church.

The waiting period before this initial step can be made is

normally five years after death, which will be April 16, 2021 in the case of Sr Clare, and the hope is that steps will be taken then to open the process for canonisation.

Meanwhile, back in her hometown, plans are afoot for a series of celebrations to mark the fifth anniversary of Sr Clare's death in the week after Easter.

Such is the interest in Sr Clare that her Novena prayer cards are continuously selling out, while 10,000 Sr Clare candles have sold since they were launched in August to help cover printing expenses, and over 3,000 Sr Clare calendars have also been snapped up since the start of November.



Home of the Mother Servant Sisters pray at Sr Clare's grave on her birthday.



Bishop Donal looking forward to WYD 2023

THE date of the next World Youth Day has been put back to 2023, when it will be held in Lisbon, Portugal, and Bishop Donal is hoping to make the pilgrimage there accompanied by a large group of young people from the Derry Diocese.

As a former teacher and principal, Bishop Donal has a great interest in young people and promoting youth initiatives, and has wonderful memories of the uplifting experiences of past World Youth Days.

Initiated by Pope John Paul II in 1987, WYD usually takes place every three years, but while the last WYD was in January 2019 in Panama, the next one is now scheduled for the summer of 2023 in Portugal, because of Covid-19.

Last month, Bishop Donal took part in a world-wide Zoom conference of 240 delegates, organised by the Pontifical Council for Laity, Family and Life.

Explaining that the conference was organised to evaluate Panama 2019 and to start preparing synodally for the Lisbon gathering of huge numbers of young people, Bishop Donal added: "I hope to be

travelling with a substantial group of young people and their leaders from the Derry Diocese to Lisbon".

The official dates for WYD Lisbon 2023 will not be announced until further details about the pandemic are known, but the organisers are hoping to release these in 2021 and expect to provide the typical WYD schedule, which includes the Opening Ceremony, Catechesis, Youth Festival, Papal Welcome, Via Crucis, Pilgrim Walk, Prayer Vigil and Closing Mass.

The event is open to youth of all faiths and is attended by thousands of young people from various parts of the world, just as Pope John Paul II had hoped for.

He told pilgrims at the last international WYD he attended: "I imagined a powerful moment in which the young people of the world could meet Christ, who is eternally young, and could learn from Him how to be bearers of the Gospel to other young people".

In the years between the major, intercontinental WYD, dioceses celebrate the event locally. The diocesan WYD celebration usually takes place on Palm Sunday, but Pope Francis has announced that,

from next year, this will be held on the Solemnity of Christ the King.

The theme for WYD in Portugal is 'Mary rose and left in haste' and the logo includes a cross with a road running over it, representing the road Mary took to visit Elizabeth, as well the figure of Mary and a Rosary to represent the spirituality of the Portuguese people and their devotion to Our Lady of Fatima.

With Fatima less than 70 miles from Lisbon, many of the young people may take the opportunity during WYD to visit the place where Our Lady appeared to Lucia, Jacinta and Francisco.

Surrounded by thousands of youth from around the world, World Youth Day has helped many young people deepen their faith and grow closer to God, through prayer and the celebration of the Sacraments.

Encouraging young people to answer the call of WYD, Pope Francis has said: "Dear young people, cry out with your life that Christ lives and reigns! If you keep silent, the stones will cry out!"

For further information on WYD Lisbon 2023 visit www.lisboa2023.org/en/

Advent Sunday Holy Hours for Vocations

AS 2020 comes to a close, the Diocese is encouraging prayer for vocations through the provision of vocation themed Holy Hours during the Sundays of

Advent.

This time of prayer is being led by four parishes and is broadcast online, with the first two Sundays having been led by Creggan and

Cappagh.

Fr Pat O'Hagan, PP Moville, will lead the Holy Hour on Sunday, December 13 from St Pius X Church, and the final one, on Sunday,

December 20, will be led from St Joseph's Church, Banagher by Fr Micheal McGivigan.

See the Diocesan website for viewing link.

I gained so many new skills and confidence through my JPPII experience *by Lisa Brennan*

I completed a lot for my Pope John Paul Award, both in the community and parish, for which I had to do 20 hours of each because I was doing the Gold Award. Through my parish hours, I either took part in the Offertory at Mass each week or organized primary school children to do it, so they could be more involved in the parish.

I also helped out at special Masses throughout the year, including the Mass for Deceased Children, at which I handed out candles and then lit them for people, so they could pray for whoever they wanted. At the Youth Day Mass, I handed out wrist bands to all the young people afterwards and helped at the Penitential Service, where I handed out leaflets for the Mass. After this Mass, the other JPPII students and I had tea with a couple of the priests in the sacristy. When it came around to Christmas time, I made Advent trees for the two parish chapels and we hung the quotes on it from the primary school children about Christmas.

Then, when lockdown hit, it was really hard to get my Award finished because we couldn't do anything in the chapel because it was closed, but Lizzie Rea started up an online programme where we would watch a live on a Monday evening at 8 pm. We

were set a task with a different theme to complete each week and it was worth one parish hour. This was a bit difficult, but it was also a unique and fun way to do the Pope John Paul Award.

When things settled down a bit, and we could go back to the chapel, I helped as a steward to make sure everyone was following the Covid guidelines properly. We had to take their name for contract tracing and took them to a seat. We also had to give them a sanitising wipe to wipe down their seat before they left the chapel. My job was to make sure that everyone stayed two metres apart at the main door when waiting to get into the chapel, and I had to make sure they were wearing a mask and sanitising their hands. I really enjoyed this because I got to know the people of the parish a lot more.

For my social hours, I wrapped boxes for the SVP Christmas food appeal and placed them in each form class, so they could donate food to people in poverty. I also filled up Holy Water bottles with Holy Water from the local wells, for the people of the parish for New Year's Day.

Another activity I helped with was organising the parish GIFT programme for the primary school children. We discussed what activities to do with them and what days suited everyone

to help out, then, once it was up and running, I helped out at the sessions. We played games involving religion and did many things for the chapel and parish, so the children felt like they were part of the community and parish. We sang songs and did a prayer and reflection as well. On the last night, we had a party for them and made a hamper for Fr Farren, for the parish.

I also collected money for the school outside the chapel gates before Mass started, and helped out at my local youth club on a Saturday night, doing different activities in the kitchen with the girls, like making bracelets and painting their nails. I served in the tuck shop as well.

Again, when lockdown hit, the youth club shut down, so it was really hard for me to get hours. However, I came up with the idea of doing shopping for old people. My daddy has a gardening business and a lot of his customers are elderly people who have no families to get them things like bread and milk throughout the week, so they would leave out money and I would go down to the local shop and get what they needed and leave it at the door for them, or if they lived in the countryside with no shop close, they would text daddy what they needed and I got it for them at my

local shop and brought it up the



Lisa Brennan, Parish of Iskaheen.

next time I was going up.

I loved doing the Pope John Paul Award. I gained so many new skills and more confidence to talk to new people and get involved in my parish more often. I loved getting to know the people in my parish more too, as I didn't know many older people before I did the Award.

I also learnt a lot about the different special events that happen in my parish and what really goes on behind closed doors. There are so many hard working people that do a lot to make sure that the chapels are well looked after and the people of the parish too, which was nice to see.

My parish involvement helped my relationship with the church *by Caoimhe Melaugh*

TAKING part in the Pope John Paul II Award was a great experience and I looked forward to complete my parish and social volunteering hours every week.

For my parish hours, I helped to clean my church with my friends after school, which comprised of things such as polishing the seats, mopping the floor and dusting the religious statues and displays. I also did activities including handing out leaflets at Mass and taking part in the Offertory Procession, which also contributed to my parish hours.

In addition, for my social hours, I volunteered to assist with fundraising for my school's PTEA team, which involved selling break-time snacks to the junior students. I also helped with the St Vincent de Paul Christmas Hamper Appeal; packaging Christmas gifts for children from poor backgrounds.

A further social activity I participated in was as a FLARE ambassador. FLARE is a project run by the Education Authority, which supports young people and promotes positive mental health. By being a FLARE ambassador, I received mental health training and participated in and produced a social action project, which was a short movie on mental health awareness.

Overall, I really enjoyed taking part in the Pope John Paul II Award. Something I really loved about taking part in this award was being able to contribute in some form to my parish and community. I was able to express my love for helping people in need, especially through the social awareness aspect, and I feel that my parish involvement definitely helped me with my relationship with the church.



Pope John Paul Award 2018-2019 Loreto College, Omagh.

My JPPII Award experience helped me grow in my faith *by Ellen McCloskey*

I am a Year 14 pupil in Thornhill College and, over the past year, I have had the opportunity to complete the Pope John Paul II Award. This has been such a fulfilling and rewarding experience and has encouraged me to partake in many things I otherwise would not have done.

I am a part of the Claudy Parish and completed most of my parish hours there but unfortunately, due to Covid-19, they were cut short. However, prior to this, I took part in the 'Growing In Faith Together' (GIFT) programme, where Year 8 pupils in our parish learned about their faith in a modern and fun way in the year following their Confirmation. We helped to show them how the Gospel relates to our lives today and how we can keep it active and relevant in our everyday lives.

I thoroughly enjoyed connecting with local youth through our parish and helping them grow in faith.

I also started reading at Mass on Sunday mornings, and helped to give out and collect Children in Crossfire Advent collection boxes prior to Christmas last year.

Before our chapel re-opened after lockdown, I assisted with the new seating arrangements according to the new Covid-19 guidelines.

All of these activities encouraged me to grow in confidence, interact and learn from local parish leaders and allowed me to help give back to my parish.

I also volunteered at 'Follow The Star' before last Christmas, which is a Christmas trail with a spiritual twist, aiming to teach children about the real meaning of Christmas time, beyond all the materialistic meanings.

For my social hours, I completed a range of different activities. I arranged a bag pack in Iceland to raise money for Children in Crossfire. I also made up a beauty hamper and sold tickets around the school to raise money for the charity. Inside school, I helped with a range of activities as well, including helping the Year 8 pupils prepare for their talent show, and I participated in charity bun sales and other fundraisers before the school closed due to Covid-19.

I regularly volunteered at the Foyle Foodbanks Social Supermarket over the summer,

which has been the most rewarding experience and has taught me so much. I have dealt first-hand with people in need in our community and have enjoyed getting to know them and being able to help them get on a better path.

Overall, I would highly recommend the Pope John Paul II Award to anyone considering it as it has helped me grow on both a spiritual and personal level. It has allowed me to grow closer to God and helped grow my faith that I had started to drift from. It also helped me give back to my community and gain a greater community spirit.



Ellen McCloskey, Claudy Parish.



The JPPII Award enabled me to feel more involved in my Church and community *by Orla Kerrigan*

I participated in the Pope John Paul II Award of 2018-2019, beginning my journey in Year 13 through my parish, Ardstraw East, and my school, Loreto Grammar Omagh.

Participating in both parish and social activities was extremely enriching and I gained a lot from these experiences, including increasing my own confidence and allowing me to explore my faults.

For my social awareness, I worked with young people, both as a leader in my youth group and as a friend to a special needs child, where we created a lesson plan to engage with the child.

For my parish hours, I had weekly sessions where I and five others engaged with the YOUCAT (Youth Catechism). It was led by our priest, Fr Colhoun and catechists, Veronica and John. Our goal was to better understand and increase our faith, while we debated modern issues faced by young people on their faith journey.

It allowed me to feel more involved in my Church and my community, and provided me with insight and opportunities that I never would have stumbled upon if not for the Pope John Paul II Award.

Completing JPII Award during Covid-19 shows how teamwork can get you across the line! *by Peter Grant*



IN undertaking the Pope John Paul II Gold Award, I completed 20 hours for both parish and social activities, even during the Covid-19 pandemic as well. We started by attending the Award opening ceremony at Knock Shrine, where the Derry Diocesan Youth Group and Fr Farren explained what it was about and how to achieve it. This was a wonderful experience and a great way to launch the Award.

We had Pope John Paul Award Group meetings regularly in our parish of Iskaheen, organised by our parish leader, Helen Grant, where we discussed what we had been doing and our experiences of it, and if we found it difficult or easy. We also had our sheets signed at these.

I participated in Church Collections, Reading and also organised the Offertory gifts every Sunday before Covid-19. The kids were delighted to be part of this in bringing up the gifts to our priest, Fr John Farren, and some even did it every week which was great to see at the Church.

The first activity outside the Mass was to help out at the GIFT programme, which our parish was hosting for the first time. Myself and some of the other Pope John Paul Award students in my parish helped out every Friday evening for the eight weeks it was on. I also helped the Children and Young People Group organise the activities for the participants every week and tidy up afterwards. The young teenagers looked up to us as role models for them and, of course, the craic was mighty every week we did it.

I then helped with our annual parish trip to 'Follow the Star', which is in the IOSAS Centre and also part of the Parish. There was a full bus load of families and other parishioners. After helping with the bus, I had to go straight to the IOSAS Centre, where I was a tour guide of the garden, taking families to different huts where Christmas stories were read to get the children and families into the Christmas spirit.

I met new friends through

my experience there, and I also recognised some familiar faces there too, from my parish, who visit the trail every year. The IOSAS Centre staff were very kind to all the volunteers, giving us soup and rolls whenever we arrived from school during the weeknights it was on. It was a wonderful experience as it got me into the Christmas mood, and it snowed on one of the nights!

Our parish has an annual 'Eye and Head Well' Mass, which consists of blessing the water gathered up from the two local wells and this is then given to people to take home for blessing themselves with. I and another Award student helped gather the bucketfuls of water from both wells, which involved taking some dangerous paths along the way. We had to bend down, on our hands and knees, to get the water from both wells like people in our parish had done in the past.

Next we had to fill the water into small bottles for the people at the Mass to take home with them, and thankfully we got help with that from some of the Children and Young People Group and some youths from the parish. There were 500 bottles to fill for the service, and as the old saying goes 'many hands make light work'. We helped organise the Mass too, which was a great success and we look forward to keeping this tradition alive for as long as we can in the future.

Reconciliation

I was also involved in preparing our Church in Muff for the Service of Reconciliation. We lit candles and placed them around the Church and handed out the reflection sheets to those who came. Fr Farren led the service, which helped me to see Confession in a different way. There were six or seven priests there for the occasion. Fr Farren made us feel really part of the Parish when he thanked us and told everyone of the work we had done. We all took the opportunity to go to confession.

Once again, we really felt valued members of our parish and honoured to be invited afterwards to come and have tea with the priests, which enabled us to get to know them, like what they did and where they were from. This made

us feel really special, with everyone giving us great praise for our hard work.

After Christmas, we helped at the meeting of the parents of the First Communion and Confirmation children in Muff. Here we helped set up the church, passed out the candles to the parents and helped those presenting the evening to pack up their belongings, which we helped carry to the car. We received great praise for this too.

Some of us Pope John Paul students took part in the annual Diocesan Sleep Out for the Homeless in February. We learned and understood a little of how it felt to be a person who is homeless, as we were given talks by different homeless organisations across Derry City and we took part in activities throughout the night, including saying prayers for people who are homeless. Everybody had to spend an hour outside with their groups to understand what it is like to try and sleep like a person who is homeless in the cold and wintry conditions. Overall, everybody enjoyed the Sleep Out. It was a great success once again.

Unfortunately, Covid-19 came and we were forced into lockdown across the country, but that did not stop me from completing my Award. Lizzie Rea set up a Derry Youth Group account on Instagram for all the Pope John Paul Award students, and we took part in activities that we did ourselves for the Award. We also took part in games and quizzes through Zoom, which cheered me up all the way through lockdown.

Whenever restrictions were lifted, I wanted to get back into volunteering at the church and I decided to help out in stewarding at Masses to keep people safe and happy in the Church. Some weeks were quiet and some the Church was just about full to its new limited capacity, but the stewards and I handled it perfectly.

The Award participants all took photographs of our home May Altars and these were displayed during the month of May in St Patrick's Church, Iskaheen. During May, our leader, Helen organised for us to say the Rosary each day at 8 pm. We did this within our own families and sometimes as an Award group, through 'Zoom'.



During that time, Bishop Donal McKeown made a surprise visit to Iskaheen chapel, in my parish, and that gave me a sense of positivity during uncertain times ahead. Bishop Donal was impressed with the involvement of some of us Pope John Paul students, who had come along to help. We were given so much praise for our work during that time period before the second lockdown, and we again

felt honoured to serve the parish and the community.

During my experience of the Pope John Paul Award, I learned so many different new things that I never knew I could do and that also got me out of my comfort zone, including being a part of 'The Net' publication's youth writing team.

We still managed to continue the Award during Covid-19, which it

was a massive achievement by the Derry Youth Group and it was a great experience for me. I couldn't have done it alone without my friends and other Pope John Paul II students and the Award leaders in my parish and school. For me, this sums up how teamwork can get you across the line. Covid-19 didn't stop me in my tracks with regards completing the Award.

Reading at Mass is helping me grow in confidence *by Eimear McGarrigle*

MY name is Eimear and I started the Pope John Paul II Award last month. I have always had an interest in this award, as my twin cousins both did it when they were at Holy Cross College. Seeing them read at Mass and listening to them talk about it to me, I knew I'd love to take part when I was in 6th Year.

I'm currently also studying RE as one of my chosen A'levels and I have a big interest in it. After leaving school, I'm hoping to go to university to study to become a teacher and RE is a subject I could teach.

For the Pope John Paul II Award,

I am to read at Melmount Mass every Saturday night for 20 weeks and I am currently a month in. For my social hours, I have been completing tasks online with the Derry Youth, as with COVID-19 restrictions I am unable to volunteer.

I'm really enjoying taking part in the Award and my confidence is definitely growing with reading the Prayer of the Faithful at Mass each week.

By doing the tasks online, I am becoming more aware of my faith, such as different saints and how we feel that God fulfills His mission and how it relates to us.



Eimear McGarrigle, Melmount Parish.

I look forward to the months ahead and being able to complete my Award and, if restrictions ease, volunteering could be an option I would enjoy.

Delighted with the growing engagement of youth in parish life, Pope John Paul II Award national coordinator, Tony Brennan encourages...

Parishes to offer more opportunities for youth involvement in lead-up to Christmas

THE Pope John Paul II Award is a tool to assist parishes in engaging with young people, so that they are visible in their church. If you take what is happening in parishes such as Iskaheen in Co Donegal, the Award is being used exactly for the purpose it was created for in 2006, by Fr Paul Farren in St Eugene's.

We can see that clearly in the testimonies shared here, of young people being welcomed and actively encouraged in their parishes. They are learning about life in their parishes and how faith is part of that. They are discovering that faith isn't something they just learn about in school, and it's not being forced on them.

In parish life, they are growing in confidence and faith and that is the whole point of it. Schools are doing great work in teaching young people about their faith but it is important that this is done in partnership with the parishes, so that the young people are also learning it as part of their parish community life.

There are some fabulous examples in young people's

testimonies of the wide range of activities that they can engage in within their parish, even during Covid-19. Yes, Covid did have an affect but when parishes began to reopen and were calling for volunteers, many young people stepped up to take on roles as cleaners, stewards, readers and Eucharist Ministers, etc. They are visible in their parish not only at weekends but during the week.

When you have a parish where you have a very active volunteer team, or salaried leaders, and they are working well and engaging with the young people, you can see the fruits of all that work, and that is where the Award comes into play in assisting the parishes in getting that active engagement.

It's great to see that particularly here in the Derry Diocese. Throughout the country, there are small pockets of these, but during Covid it was really obvious in the Diocese of Derry that when parishes were opened, their young people were engaged in that. I was delighted to see this.

In the coming weeks leading



up to Christmas, we want to see more and more opportunities for young people to get engaged in their parishes, and I would encourage any young person to get involved in the life of their parish community.

The Diocesan Youth Ministry Team has a very active online weekly programme, so I would ask young people, if they have enrolled in the Pope John Paul II Award and are trying to make up hours, to seek out @Derryyouth on Instagram and engage with the Youth Ministry Team, who will help them get actively engaged in their parish and faith.

THIS month, Hollie, Peter, Oisin, Gemma, Zara and John, 'The Net' youth contributors from the Co Tyrone, Inishowen, Co Derry and Derry City Deaneries, share their most treasured memories of Christmases past and their hopes for this one, as well as their thoughts on the inspiring story of 12-year-old Garvan Byrne, of Irish background, who died of a rare form of leukaemia in 1985 and showed such great courage and deep faith in God that his legacy is still impacting those who view videos of him talking about life and death, and his love for the Eucharist. To mark World Drawing God Day, they also share images that express how they see God, with Bishop Donal taking up the invitation to do so as well. In addition, Hollie, and fellow Derry Youth Ministry Scholarship member, Filip Betlejewski, reflect on the meaning of Advent.



Hollie Frystal,
Co Tyrone Deanery.



Oisin Mulhern,
Co Derry Deanery.



Peter Grant,
Inishowen Deanery.



Gemma Gallagher,
Derry City Deanery



John Augustine Joseph,
Derry City Deanery.



Zara Schlindwein,
Derry City Deanery.

Let's pray in thanksgiving and for all those who will be heart-broken this Christmas *by Oisin Mulhern*

CHRISTMAS is a holiday that many people look forward to; some looking forward to time off and relaxation, others the many presents that Christmas day offers, and some even the snow of the winter months.

Christmas has become increasingly commercialised and indulgent over the years. Many love Christmas solely for receiving gifts, which is the least integral part for me. This materialistic side of the holiday is less important due to the fact that it focuses us totally on ourselves. This is the more secular side of the holiday, where gift-giving, etc, replaces the process of Advent and the birth of Christ is given less focus, which in my opinion is not the true meaning of Christmas and, in fact, actively undermines it.

For me, one of the parts of Christmas that means a lot to me is the selfless and caring aspect. We are invited at Christmas time to become more aware of each other rather than ourselves, and give ourselves up for the sake of others. This can be seen in certain areas like giving money or food to those in dire need of it.

I do enjoy opening presents with my family on Christmas Day, however, I have always tried to keep a selfless attitude in regard to others at Christmas time, by engaging in the Christmas Shoe Box Appeal through school and making donations to the poor and needy with the expectation of nothing in return.

The most important part of Christmas is getting to spend time with my family and meeting family members I have not seen in a while around the festive period. On Christmas Eve, I attend the Midnight Mass with family and then we all go to visit my aunt. On Christmas Day, we enjoy a lovely family meal and afterwards go to visit the graves of all our deceased relatives. It is a time of joy mixed with a tinge of sadness as we remember all those close to us that have passed on. The graveyard becomes a solace, going to pray for those who have died. I then call into the Church to visit the crib, light a candle and say a few prayers. This is what Christmas is about; being close to family, both living and deceased.

During Christmas, I often find myself reflecting on life and the year as a whole. I often feel gratitude for the amazing family I have, who look after and care for me. This year, in particular, has been an extremely hard year for all and I know I am blessed to be able to spend it with those I am closest too.

There are many people this year who may not be as lucky as me due to travel restrictions, or may have lost loved ones due to the virus. For those of us who are as lucky as me, we should pray in thanksgiving to God and pray for all those families who are going to be heartbroken at Christmas.

Finally, the most important aspect of Christmas is the birth

of Our Lord Jesus Christ. During Advent we prepare for His coming. It is such a special and meaningful part of the liturgical calendar and one which I thoroughly enjoy each year. It is a season of hope as we remember that Christ our Light came into our World to lighten up the darkness and bring us hope and salvation. It is a time to celebrate His birth and rejoice in His coming.

In our home, we also light a candle on Christmas Eve and put it in the window as a sign to welcome Jesus into our homes. These special touches make Christmas extremely meaningful to me.

It is with great sadness though that Advent begins this year like no other, with no access to Mass in person for the first few weeks. Let us all hope and pray that the Church doors are once again opened to welcome parishioners in to prepare for and celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ.

All in all, the true meaning of Christmas is not gifting presents and enjoying snow, it is about coming together and being with family, acting selflessly for others and celebrating the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.



Hollie Frystal reflects on Christmas in a pandemic...

We do not need to try and 'save Christmas'...it is Christmas that saves us!

WHEN the government released new and stricter Covid regulation measures to try and 'save Christmas', the news of closure of places of worship for two weeks, from November 27, was devastating, especially when this meant that we would 'miss' the first two weeks of Advent.

However, we have learnt from the season of Lent that the element of preparation is still doable and is greatly required. Preparation consists of penance, fasting, prayer and, most importantly, reflection.

This year greatly requires valuable time given for reflection, because not being able to attend Mass and Confessions means we could spend more time in a quiet and solitary place in prayer. Reflection can be done in any shape or form, from doing an activity, for instance, the LIVE virtual Nativity arranged and launched by the Derry Youth, or private prayer, etc. Try to make that personal connection with God.

I am a Melmount parishioner and this year we, unfortunately, have to book tickets for the Christmas Mass or choose to

watch it through the webcam. This is happening all over the Diocese, and it is something that we would never have anticipated.

In Melmount, we are currently about 60% down in our congregation size, however, the virtual congregation has increased. Melmount Chapel is built to accommodate 1,300 people. At last year's Christmas Mass, the Chapel held an estimated 1,400 people! This year, it can only accommodate 250 people for the Christmas Masses. This is terribly sad, although, the enormous cut in the size of the congregation to prevent or, at least, weaken the rate of infection.

Thankfully, the Chapels are permitted to stay open for private prayer at least, especially during this Holy season. Also, we need to be thankful for the gift of technology that has substituted physical attendance to the Holy Mass.

Although many would argue that Christmas has become very commercialized throughout the years, we must not forget the true

meaning of this very important and wonderful season. I love the religious aspect of Christmas! It has a real, touching, and heartfelt atmosphere, which brings to our attention the most important things in life, and what it is that we are grateful for.

I remember having a conversation with someone whilst on the youth pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick. We were speaking passionately about the life of Jesus, and how extraordinary it is that the Son of God was born into the world, delivered by Mary His Mother in a humble stable in Bethlehem and suffered, died and rose from the dead for us! That is just mind-blowing.

My memories of Christmas are crystal clear. In my family, we are traditional. We go to Christmas Eve Mass and the Chapel would normally be jam-packed. A huge congregation clearly reflects the true Christmas Spirit which is present. It is amazing!

What strikes me is that everyone makes it their priority to unite and rejoice for the birth of our Saviour, especially those who may not be

regular Mass-goers. It is so special and wonderful to have everyone together, as a Church, celebrating the birth of our Lord.

Afterwards, my brothers and sisters and I change into our new pyjamas and, sometimes, get trying a bit of the turkey for the next day. We have the same routine every year and wake up in the morning with excitement to open our presents and then visit Granny and Granda.

This year will be a lot different, however, we will have to try our best to have a joyous Christmas, and to keep in mind those who have gone before us and to understand that these fearful times will not last forever.

Finally, I think I speak for many when I say that we will sorely miss the first two weeks of Advent, and that we will be praying that we will miss no more than that. Although, we must remember that if things are not normal, we can still celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, with access to online Mass via the webcams.

There is so much chaos over trying to 'save Christmas' by trying



Hollie's Christmas story - Hollie with her sisters and little brother celebrating a Christmas

to diminish the rate of infection through closing shops, restaurants, etc. then reopening them a couple of weeks before Christmas in order to get the 'big shop' done.

However, the irony is, that we do not need to try and 'save Christmas', because it is Christmas

that saves us. Let's not lose sight of what is important. If we can think of anyone who maybe lonely at Christmas, maybe we should try to call or visit them, socially distanced in the garden, etc, to wish them a Happy Christmas.

Happy Christmas!

Maybe this will be an opportunity to celebrate a true humble Christmas

by Zara Schlindwein



FOR me, the most important feature of Christmas is the time my family and I spend together. The time which allows us to share in the love and joy that Christmas grants and allows us to show our true appreciation for each other.

The warmth and wonder that contrasts the weakening winter is a marvellous gift that we all excitedly wait for each year.

Christmas, for many, is one of the most merry and celebratory times of the year, but for others,

it can be a time that awakens the loneliness and melancholy of their world. Despite the woeful situations that we may find ourselves in, the light that Christmas provides will almost always lift someone's spirits.

I believe that the message of Christmas is that even on dark days, there will always be hope. That message should be preserved, even more so, this year. As we all face so much uncertainty, we can still find the light during the caliginous winter months. Our lives can become illuminated by the peace and joy that the birth of Jesus provides. Meaning, that we should not seek contentment in shallow commodities that supply short term and empty delight.

Christmas means celebrating the birth of Jesus. It is not about presents or parties but about spending time with our loved ones, finding peace in the time we spend together, and helping others find peace for themselves. I feel that the true essence of Christmas has become buried beneath the false happiness that we all seem to crave.

As we approach the end of a very dramatic year, I believe it's time to reflect on how we choose to live our lives, if we have not done so already. We can either

decide to become easy pickings to the easy and unfulfilling way of life or we can choose to live by God's message, and live out the true meaning of Christmas. It may be more challenging, but the gifts do not even compare.

I, personally, consider myself extremely privileged to be part of a big and loving family, to not be alone during the loneliest time of the year for many. That is why it is our duty to help those in need, to live out our collective responsibility and ensure that no-one feels alone. That is the true challenge that we will face on this especially different Christmas. Not whether or not we will be able to get out to shops, indulge in fine cuisine or host plenty of parties. But rather improve our lives by forgetting our meaningless wants and immersing ourselves into the real problems of the world, and using our gifts to do good for those in need.

There will be no doubt that this Christmas will be different from those of the past, but that doesn't mean that we need to rebel against the way things should be. Maybe we have become too obsessed with nonsense and have finally been given an opportunity to celebrate a true humble Christmas, just like the first.



A Christmas like no other

by Peter Grant

THE first thing that comes to my head whenever I think about Christmas is not presents or spending whole wallets of money on gifts to give to others. No, it's family.

Every Christmas, whenever I was young, I was like any other child on Christmas Day; waking up early in the morning and going to my parents' bedroom and shouting from the bottom of my lungs, "It's Christmas Day! Santa came!"

I would sit in front of the Christmas tree and open all my presents that Santa had brought and be amazed at what I got; ripping the wrapping paper off all my presents as my parents opened theirs too. After that, my mum would cook the breakfast for everyone while I played with my new toys.

However, the most important thing on Christmas Day has always been to have Christmas Dinner with my family, including with my Great Auntie Nancy and Fr Michael Keaveney. They have come every year from their home in Eglinton, as far as I can remember, and always put a smile on everyone's face around the table from funny jokes, as we listened to Fr Keaveney's old stories and about his journeys in the priesthood and, of course, pulling open the Christmas crackers at the table and wearing the hats that were inside them.

Afterwards, we would all sit down in the sitting room to have our trifle and ice-cream, with our cup of tea or Americano coffee, as Fr Keaveney likes it. We would have a nice warm fire lit and watch some Christmas movies.

My mum would also give some of our Christmas food to my Great Auntie Nancy and Fr Keaveney to take with them back to their small retirement flat over in Moville, and we then would go and visit them in the New Year.

Those are the Christmas memories that I will cherish for as long as I live, but this year will be different due to Covid-19. In the Republic, restrictions have been eased to Level 3, which means everyone is allowed to visit up to two other households nearer Christmas and churches will re-open.

Unfortunately, this year, my Great Auntie and Fr Keaveney can't visit, as they can't cross the border to see us this year. This is devastating for our family, but it is their health we must consider this Christmas and this year. They won't be coming with the fun and laughter they always bring, and I will miss their critique on mum and dad's cooking!

But I have thought of a great idea about how we could possibly still see them this Christmas and keep our tradition going; by setting up a Zoom call at the dinner table, so we can still socialise by staying safe and catch up on everything they did this year, as we couldn't see them too often. However, we won't be pulling any Christmas crackers with each other!

Technology has had a huge impact and use during this pandemic, keeping families together the whole year round. There are probably other people thinking like me about communicating through video calls to family members across the world, so they can enjoy Christmas together while staying safe at the same time.

Yes, this year hasn't been a great one, but Christmas is going to be unique compared to past Christmases and, due to the uncertainty about Covid, maybe in the future too. But this year, at least I will get to see my Great Auntie and Fr Keaveney living across the water and we can talk to each other through a screen. I never thought I would ever see that day come!

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel by John Augustine Joseph

THE 2020th year of Our Lord has been quite an unusual year for many of us. It has brought us Brexit, a Pandemic, high unemployment and, quite

unusually, a well-functioning Stormont. Nevertheless, the first highlight of the new liturgical year approaches – Christmas. The day of the Nativity of Our Lord,

like Easter, will also be affected greatly by the pandemic which we are still undergoing, albeit with fewer restrictions than which we endured during Easter.

Christmas, the days preceding and succeeding it are days of great jubilation and excitement for me and others. Decorating our homes with lights, putting up the Christmas tree and buying presents are all things that many families usually do as they prepare for the big holiday. People book flights, make food, and gather as big families to celebrate the end of the year through this great holiday. However, that does not seem to be the case this year.

Whilst many look forward to Santa Claus and Christmas dinner, we often forget the primary focus of Christmas, Jesus.

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us"; that's the great gift Christmas offers to us, and yet many among us choose to neglect this wonderful mystery. That's their choice. But this year, I believe it is time to change, to be radical, and to go back to the roots of what Christmas is meant to be. To return to God the Father and celebrate the wonderful gift that He gave to this world, 'His begotten son' – Jesus.

The pandemic may have placed us with many obstacles, but in my

eyes, they are only challenges to overcome, and I think that it is the best way to look at it.

As an Eastern Catholic, it is quite traditional for us to prepare for Christmas, during the season of Advent, by abstaining from certain foods, praying more regularly and giving more to charity, just like one would do as if it were Lent.

Instead of preparing for Christmas, by the usual overindulgence and commercialisation which has overtaken our homes and our cities, this year, it would not only make financial sense but spiritual sense, to wait and to prepare for the baby in the manger through these spiritual means.

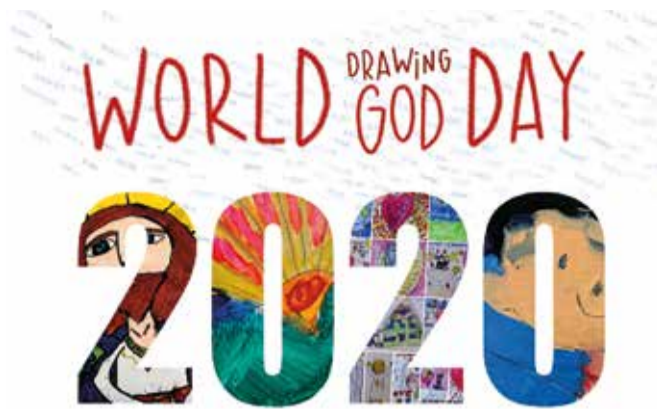
The experience of forgoing something dear to you, to talk to God more often and to help those in need, each year during Advent allowed me to better understand the mystery behind Christmas.

And there could be no better time than this year to start this new tradition of preparing for Christmas like you would for Easter.

And when Christmas comes, enjoy it, and remember the reason for it, Christ, who is always with us.

(Sources: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/785104147510158425/>)





Rublev's Trinity is Bishop Donal's favourite depiction of God

MY favourite depiction of God is the famous 15th century Icon of the Trinity by the Russian painter, Andrei Rublev.

The three figures of the Trinity sit in contemplation around a table. I love the idea of God in the divine fullness having a place at the table for each one of us.

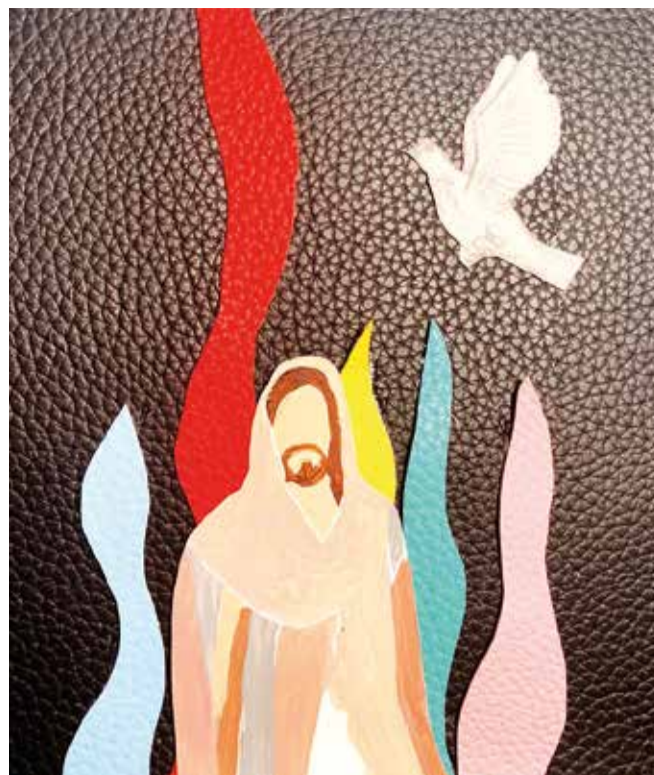
We are welcomed by name and invited to share in the divine life.

And, of course, the connection with the Eucharist is central. In the breaking of bread, we recognise the Risen Jesus, and we welcome among us, the God who welcomes us.

a prayer for guidance

Dear Father,
Thank you for being
The Almighty God
who holds the entire world
And yet cradles my heart.
Today I humbly recognize
the need for your guidance.
How I crave your presence to lead me.
Without your light to shine down,
The path is dim and unclear.
Without your voice to order my steps,
The journey is confusing and obscure.
Show me the movements to mirror your will.
Reveal the master blueprint as only you can;
So that I may boast
in your glory and your plan.
Amen.

rachelwojo.com



Gemma's image of God...

IN honour of World Drawing God Day, I created this image as my visualisation of God.

I decided to draw flames as a visual of the Holy Spirit, and

include the dove because it shows peace and love.

This image came to me because I see God as having an everlasting love for all of His people.



Oisín's image of God is as a guiding light

WHEN I was drawing this picture, and even before I had drawn it, I had an image in my mind of God as a guiding light and a beacon to bring others together.

I have mentioned many times before how I believe that God shows us how we should act, and that we should follow His example. This piece shows this, as we can see people looking up and following God. This is my depiction of Him

as a guiding light.

My other idea for the picture was God as a beacon to bring people together. This was also shown with bright light behind the image of God and people near Him, because I believe that God can bring a collective peace and hope to many people, and that people's belief in Him can form relationships and bond people together.

Peter sees God as a kind, old man

I see God as a kind, old man with a beard, who welcomes anyone into the Kingdom of Heaven.

I also see Him as the Shepherd of His flock.



Zara sees God through the medium of nature

I think that God can be seen through the medium of nature.

I decided to draw this pointillism piece in order to represent everyone; we are all part of God's picture.

Despite how consuming and important our lives may seem, we can only contribute our talents when we are united.

In my opinion, our main cause that we must unite for now, is the world in which we live.



Online youth activities for Advent

THE Derry Youth online programme has plenty happening during Advent in preparation for Christmas.

For the Pope John Paul II Award participants, as well as the Advent programme, there will be a take over from Mary's Meals.

The JPPII programme can be accessed through @derryyouth social media pages on Facebook and Instagram.

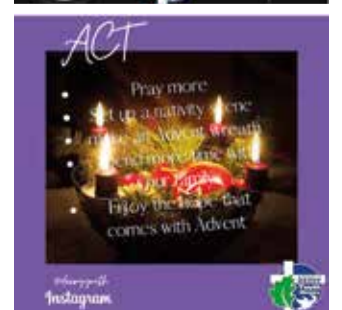
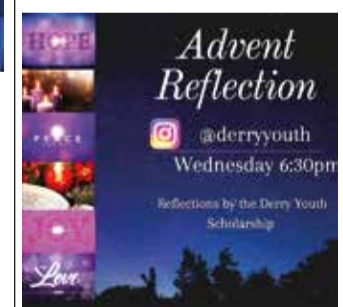
The youth from the Derry Youth Scholarship will give a short Advent reflection live on Instagram on Wednesdays at 6.30 pm, during the weeks of Advent.

There will also be a virtual youth Nativity Live on @derryyouth

Facebook page on Monday, December 21, at 8 pm.

And, the Youth Alpha course will continue during the month of December.

For youth resources visit: www.catecheticalcentre.org/category/youth-resources





Hollie sees God through others

LAST month, November 9 was 'World Drawing God Day'. This is an excellent initiative that has got me thinking and reflecting on how I see God and where it is that He is present?

When I was asked the question, "How do I see God?" it struck me, because I was never asked that question before and, more importantly, I never thought about it before.

Instantly what sprung to mind was Community and Church. I see God through others. As we know from the Book of Genesis, God created us in His own image and likeness. I see a deeper and further meaning to this, when people respond to God's message to love Him and one another. For instance, look at our charity volunteers who give up their free time to help others, and our support network from family, friends, helpline services and even the stranger! Also acknowledge those who give up their lives for the sake of others and God's Church.

These are only a few of so many wonderful examples, ranging from small acts of kindness to big acts of love and sacrifice. Human nature can be extraordinary and, sadly, we do not always get to see this. Likewise, in the media, we are mostly bombarded with negative news, rather than acknowledging and celebrating all the positivity out there.

Personally, my faith journey has been continually assisted by a range of different people, who have provided their support and expressed their enthusiasm, interest and, most importantly, have kept their patience in times

when I may have had many questions to ask.

I thought about Church Community because I feel a real strong sense of belonging when I am with others of great faith, and the Church becomes visible to me. For example, our new monthly meeting for 'The Net' consists of a group of young people coming together to share stories, and to discuss the themes of our articles across various different topics.

As Jesus said, "Where two or three have gathered together in my name, there I am with them." The dynamic that we have is so important and it brings the faith to life. It is a chance of spiritual growth; a time to learn and make friends across the Diocese.

My drawing consists of a range of bright colours connoting joy, hope, positivity, inclusivity and different walks of life. Keeping in mind that our identity as 'Catholics' means 'universal', I have drawn a group of characters representing men and women of different ethnicities. My drawing presents a general view of how I see God, present in each and every person, no matter who you are, as we are all God's children.

In my opinion, the Church community is the biggest sign of God's presence, as we stand as brothers and sisters in Christ with firm belief. In relation to the coronavirus, the sense of a Church community has remained strong during these unprecedented times, where a virtual congregation has bonded successfully and emotionally together. It proves that God is the bond and connection between us all, even if we can't physically meet.

Gemma's thoughts on Garvan's story...

WHEN I first noticed what age Garvan was, and heard what his health problems were, I was amazed at how a 12-year-old boy could deal with such major health issues.

I am beyond mesmerised by Garvan's story, as he seems so joyful and free even about his health condition.

Everyone commented on how Garvan had an amazing sense of humour and how he dealt with

things in such a beautiful way.

His story will always be stored in my head as I find it absolutely amazing how a boy his age dealt with such things.

His mother and father were also very strong and commented that Garvan was always laughing and looking for the good.

This will be a story I will always remember; it is so very interesting and special.

Zara Schlindwein comments on the inspirational story of Garvan Byrne...

We can always be guided and strengthened by faith

GARVAN Byrne was a 12-year-old Irish boy who died in 1985 of a rare leukaemia called Fanconi's Anaemia. In an extremely emotional video, he talks to a nun about his faith, revealing that he believes Jesus will look after him and his family after his death. He speaks with conviction and confidence; with no doubt in his revelation.

The inspiration that transpires through this young boy's story is remarkable. Garvan knew perfectly well that he was going to die, but did not appear reluctant or downhearted, instead he spoke of his impending death with passion and enthusiasm. He became reminiscent of the loved ones in his life who had gone before him, mentioning his granny and uncle who he would soon meet in Heaven.

The nun went on to ask if he would miss his family, and a troubled look emerged on his face, which was then dismissed as he explained how he would be in their midst, always watching over them.

He said "They may not see me, but I'll be there watching them, looking after them all the time". Garvan was borrowing the words of Jesus, "for where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Despite the unbearable pain that Garvan had to endure, he never

lost his faith. He never questioned why it would have to be him, why he would die so young. Instead he accepted his fate in such a mature way for such a young age and always held his faith to account for his strength, with the help of his family and the medical staff that helped him. No matter how difficult things got, he always remained strong in spirit.

I believe that Garvan's story is truly inspiring. It shows that no matter the circumstances you may find yourself in, you can always be guided and strengthened by faith.

The fact is that Garvan's story, no matter how depressing it may be, has a glimmer of light within it. The light that Garvan himself shone on the situation. The rare inner peace that he possessed is something that many people may never find, but he was able to acquire it in such a short space of time. I think that that is amazing.

Some may say that despite Garvan's unending love for Jesus, that he was neglected by him. How he was never healed. I don't believe that, I think that Garvan was healed and nurtured in a different way, spiritually. He was never afraid and, when it came down to it, he accepted his plan and never questioned it.

Garvan's condition was aided, through the work of the medical staff at Great Ormond Street Hospital. He was certain that the



hands of the surgeons, doctors and nurses were guided by God to ensure that he was met with care and compassion. This thought can be applied today. As we are in the midst of a global pandemic, we must have faith that the incredible work provided by all key workers is the true work of God. They have been sent with a mission to try and save lives.

Although Garvan's life could not be saved, he will still live on through the wonderful optimism and hope that he left behind. There are some in the Church asking for Garvan to be considered for sainthood, which is, of course, an indication of the sort of inspiration he has been to countless people around the world.

Garvan's story shows the great hope God and the Eucharist can give in any situation

by Oisin Mulhern

WHILE I had not heard of 12-year-old Garvan Byrne, who died of a rare leukemia in 1985, until recently, when I watched a series of videos on him that had been recommended to me, I am now greatly inspired to find out more about him.

It was because of his condition that Garvan developed a deep and connected bond with God and the Eucharist. In the videos I watched, he speaks candidly about life both before and after death and his great belief in both God and Jesus. What amazed me about hearing him speak was his confidence and sheer conviction in God, for a young boy aged 12.

Throughout the whole interview there is never a shred of doubt in his voice, never a wavering in his beliefs; he merely continually affirms his belief. There are even areas in the interview where speaks with joy about death and

going to Heaven to meet relatives that he had not had the chance to meet before they died.

Furthermore, when discussing the relatives he would leave behind when he died, after showing only a mild troubled look he calmed instantaneously and began discussing how, even when he was gone, he would watch over them. He quotes Matthew 18:20 verbatim, saying "Where two or more are gathered, there I am in the midst of them."

Watching this interview, it becomes harder to acknowledge that this is a 12-year-old boy, rather it feels like a person at peace and content which is unusual for such a young person.

After learning of Garvan's story, it was difficult to see him as anything else other than a great inspiration to not only young people but also to others that may have life-limiting conditions or even simply

a fear of death in general.

There have been many times where I have found myself worried about death and, with the ongoing pandemic, it is a thought that we are all grappling with, so to see such a young boy handle the issues with grace and dignity is quite amazing.

Garvan's story and interview illustrates to me in particular the great hope God and the Eucharist can bring to each and every one of us, no matter what type of situation we are in. Many in Garvan's situation would be consumed by sorrow and despair, knowing that they are soon going to die, yet Garvan faced this head on because of his great belief in Christ and a life after death and his hope to meet his relatives.

We can all learn from Garvan that, no matter what situation we are in, God is there with us and is constantly helping us, and



even when we are dying, we still have the great hope that God will take us up to Him and a world of eternal joy and happiness. For it is as both Garvan and the Gospel of Matthew said: "Where two or more are gathered I will be there with them", and no truer statement can be said.

AS part of their preparation for Christmas, Derry Youth Ministry Scholarship members, Hollie Frystal and Filip Betlejewski share here their thoughts on the special time Advent and Christmas can be in our lives as people of faith.



Hope and Love

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned”. (Isaiah 9:2)

by Filip Betlejewski

Hope

This is a quote from the Prophet Isaiah which perfectly describes what hope is. Hope is something that everyone can have, regardless of sex, age or race. It doesn't matter whether we are poor or rich, healthy or sick, happy or sad; regardless of all that, a light of hope can dawn upon all of us.

In the Advent wreath, hope is represented by the evergreen leaves which it is usually made of, and it represents all our hope for eternal life brought by Jesus Christ. Most of us probably use the term hope for many things, like “I hope I get this new game”, “I hope I get a good grade”, or even “I hope I get this for Christmas”, but there are some people who simply hope they will have something to eat today or maybe hope they will be able to give someone a simple gift.

No matter how big or small our hope is, or what is it that we are hoping for, the one thing that connects all of us is hope and we should never forget that, especially during a time like this, when we may not be able to have our family over for Christmas. So, the one hope I can safely assume everyone has is to be able to see them during such a special day.

Instead of physical gifts, we should reach out to those with the same hope as us to be able to spend this time of the year with someone, be it your love, friends or family, or maybe even that one person you started talking to recently, and show them that they are not alone. Maybe by just simply calling or messaging them during a time like this and showing you are there for them,

will be a bright light for them, full of hope, even if you may not think that is necessarily true.

Love

“At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart? Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern”. (Mother Teresa, ‘Love: A Fruit Always in Season’)

Love is a very beautiful feeling that can be expressed by anyone towards anyone or anything. It can range from a simple love towards materialistic things, familial love, romantic love or maybe spiritual love towards God. In the Advent wreath, love is represented by the circular design of the wreath, which symbolizes God's infinite love towards us and every living thing.

During these hard times of a pandemic, we may have a hard time expressing this love, especially towards our family as we may be separated, be it by towns or even countries, but what links us all together is that desire to express that love and feel that love and be surrounded by it during the time coming up to Christmas, which we all know is a time we could be spending with our family.

Unfortunately, that may not be possible for all of us, as not all of us may live with any of our family members, or even friends, to spend this time with but, as Mother Teresa says, “Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others with God's own love and concern.”

We should take example from this and, even when we aren't happy with this current situation

or find it hard to cope, we need to remember that we are not alone. The strings of love won't break easily because, even over long distance, we can try to show and express that love and concern to others, maybe not even to any of our family or friends but maybe to others who may not have anyone to spend this time with. So we all should remember, we aren't alone and we will never be, as it is our desire to love and be loved. So let's share that love with others.

Christ

The Christ candle represents that Jesus Christ is a symbol of light to all of us that repels all darkness, so we should never live our lives fearing death but rather embracing life. We should live our lives like there is no tomorrow, try to be the best we can, make as many happy memories as possible with the ones closest to us but, most of all, make your own family. What I mean here is not a family related by blood to you or someone you must love romantically, but simply creating strong connections with various people and have people you can really rely on and trust no matter what; have someone to share your hope, love, joy, peace and life.

This is what I would think of as a true family, personally, as that would be the type of family I would feel like I am the happiest with. So, during a time like this, when we are possibly distanced from our family, those family bonds won't break. What matters is maintaining those bonds and making sure we can spend this time the best we can.

Advent – The ‘Coming’ of Christ

This Season marks the beginning of the Great love story between God and Man by Hollie Frystal

ADVENT is a four-week long period given for preparation on the lead up to the Lord's birth. The word ‘Advent’ comes from the Latin, ‘Advenio’, which refers to ‘the coming’ of Christ. Our preparation must consist of penance, fasting, prayer and reflection.

On November 27, we entered a two-week lockdown, therefore missing marking the first two weeks of Advent as we normally do. Similarly, this also happened in mid-Lent and at Easter. Although it is devastating, we can still prepare for the coming of Christ and the joy of Christmas. In doing this, we can take part in various activities, for example, participating in the virtual Nativity launched by the Derry Youth, or we can follow the online Advent programme in St Eugene's Cathedral or other parishes, private prayer/practice, etc.

We must remember...“When God closes a door, He opens a window”, in other words, if we have learnt anything in this pandemic, it is that we have discovered alternative ways to unite and celebrate the most important days in the Church's year. However, we do pray that the lockdown will only last two weeks, and that we will get back in the Chapel for Gaudete Sunday, the fourth week of Advent representing Peace, and most importantly Christmas Day.

The third week of Advent is also known as ‘Gaudete’ Sunday, which involves lighting the pink candle. ‘Gaudete’ comes from the Latin word for ‘rejoice’ and the pink candle symbolises the joy of the Lord's birth that is ‘coming’ closer at hand. It marks the midway point in the season of Advent, to take a break from the preparation of the penitential season to reflect, celebrate and rejoice on the ‘coming’ of Christmas Day.

The season of Advent is very similar to the season of Lent, and we often compare ‘Gaudete Sunday’ to the fourth week of Lent – ‘Laetare Sunday’. Both days are celebrated and practiced as a day of rest in the preparation leading up to these joyous events. This year, on Gaudete Sunday, we hear in the Gospel of John, John the Baptist being questioned by the Priests and Levites. John the Baptist is a perfect example of how we should prepare for the ‘coming’ of Christ. We know that he wore camels' skin, and a leather belt around his waist, and ate locusts and wild honey as a form of penance. John became a “witness to speak for the light” and we are called also to “prepare

the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him”.

During this season of Lent, let's reflect on our baptismal promises and respond to God's call to be the light amidst the dark, just like John. We acknowledge that, at this time of the year, Christmas can be a struggle for so many people. As Christians, we should help one another in times of difficulty and distress and remember the less fortunate. John proclaimed, “I am the voice crying in the wilderness.”

This Christmas, let's open our ears to hear the cry of the poor and also our hearts to respond to them with love. In some way or another, we may all be destitute in some areas in our lives, which need attention and time given to it. We should use this holy period to reflect on the poor aspects of our lives, and to welcome the Son of God on December 25 with joy.

The fourth week of Advent falls on the last week before Christmas. We light the third purple candle representing Peace. The colour purple symbolises prayer, penance and sacrifice, and it marks the closure of the penitential season. The purple candle is also known as ‘The Angels Candle’, reminding us of the message of the angels, “Peace on Earth, goodwill to men.”

During Advent, we should reflect on our relationships and bridge the divides in our community by making peace. We must keep in our thoughts countries that are at war, and other

social injustices around the globe. The theme of Peace for Christmas reminds me of an advert which presented the heart-wrenching true story of Christmas Day in 1914, 106 years ago. Men of different language and uniform, opposed to each other, stopped fighting on Christmas Day and played a game of football. This decision to stop fighting reflected the true meaning of Christmas, as the men welcomed the Prince of Peace. For once during that war, there was a genuine sense of humility and humbleness. However, we should maintain that peace and not let ourselves lose control or go backwards.

Finally, the white candle represents Christ. The Christ candle is lit on Christmas Day and signifies purity reflecting Christ born sinless and pure. It is extraordinary to believe that the Son of God was born into this world, lived, suffered and died for us, then rose from the dead. It is mind-blowing and His love for us is beyond our understanding. To think that he was rescued from King Herod's decree on a donkey, and thirty-three years later He was brought back by a donkey to suffer and die for us.

This Season marks the beginning of the great love story between God and man. Let's prepare and welcome the ‘Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince of Peace’ this Christmas with faith, hope, love and joy.



Hollie Frystal, Tyrone Deanery youth contributor, reports on the Melmount Parish service for the deceased...

Lights of hope lit for each of deceased

"I will stand between my Father and the dying person, not as a just judge but as the merciful Saviour"
(Jesus' words to St Faustina – Divine Mercy Chaplet)

I am a parishioner of St Mary's Church, Melmount, in Strabane. On November 15, we had our annual service for the deceased. The year of 2020 has been a chaotic one...a rollercoaster of ups and downs. As a result of Covid-19, there has been much devastation throughout the world, the main being the dangers of the coronavirus and its capability of making people very ill.

Since March, the traditional Irish wakes and funerals have been suspended for the unforeseeable future, and the size of the congregation has been reduced in accordance with Covid safety restrictions. This is heart-breaking, because a typical Irish wake is a time when family and friends come together and tell old stories and reminisce about past events and share memories. It is considered a huge part in the process of healing and acceptance.

However, if we have learnt anything about dealing with the coronavirus, we must acknowledge that "when God closes a door, He opens a window." We need to stay hopeful and think of what other, but 'safe' ways we can have these special moments.

I, personally, lost my granny this year on February 16 – a month before lockdown. We were very fortunate in being able to have a 'normal' wake and funeral, and we acknowledge that so many did

not get this. We keep them in our prayers.

Every year in Melmount, we have a massive turnout at the annual service for the deceased; however, very sadly, it could not happen this year. Adhering to safety regulations, the service was broadcast live to a virtual audience via the webcam. The opening hymn was the 'Old Rugged Cross', reflecting the pain and hardships which the family and friends of the deceased are bearing. It is also a reminder that Jesus knows exactly how we are feeling and that His are the footprints in the sand.

I remember once having a very interesting conversation with someone whilst on the pilgrimage to Croagh Patrick in 2019. It was about two weeks before Easter Sunday and we were talking about the Resurrection and Pentecost. To cut a long story short, we were speaking of the disciples grieving over the death of Jesus and their fear to go forth and do the Lord's work. Finally, 50 days after the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit came in and helped them by giving them that encouraging and consolidating push.

The Resurrection represents the fact that there is life after death, and we should find some comfort and joy in that, and until then we ask the Holy Spirit to give us the grace to bear the difficulties of life.

Whilst the 'Old Rugged Cross'

was sung, there was a display of lit candles set flat upon our Good Friday Cross. The Paschal candle was also lit. The light represents hope amidst the dark and signifies eternal life. A candle was lit in memory of each person who died since last November. The photographs show the display and the candle that I collected, which was lit in memory of my granny. Although under unique conditions, it was a beautiful and serene moment.

Comfort

Sr Margaret read the Scripture Reading from 'The letter of St Paul to the Romans'. St Paul first presented the question, "Brothers and Sisters, what will separate us from the love of Christ?" When death occurs, this is a common feeling, and we can become anxious and possibly doubtful of God's love, His intentions, and His existence. However, St Paul responds by telling us, "No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us...I am convinced...nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." In other words, nothing can stand in the way or separate us from God's love. I find peace and comfort in St Paul's words.

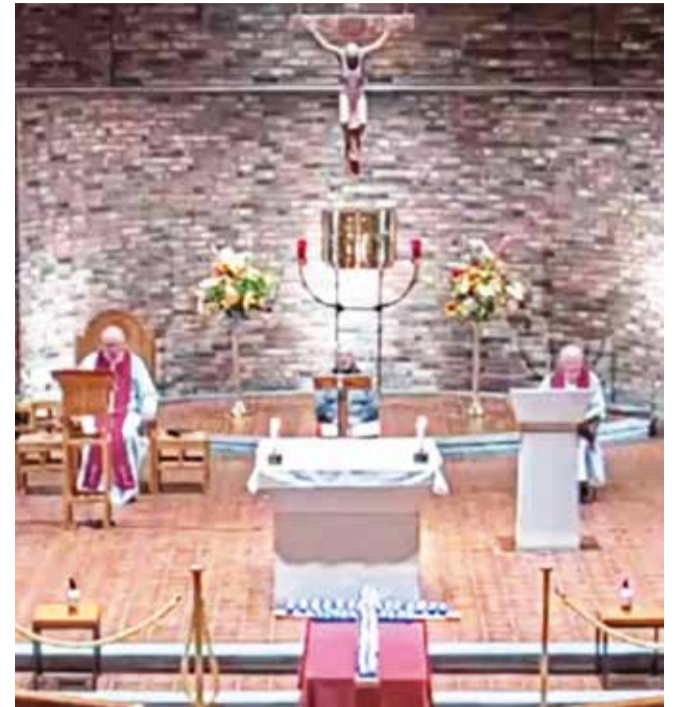
Followed by the hymn, 'Hiding Place', which continues to reflect the 'search' for light amidst the dark, Fr

John Doherty then read the Gospel according to St John. The Gospel acclamation proclaimed, "Blessed are those that mourn, for they shall be comforted." The beatitude reminds us of Jesus' presence and His continued love and support whilst we grieve.

Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one can come to the Father, except through me." Similarly, Jesus said to St Faustina, "I will stand between my Father and the dying person, not as a just judge but as the merciful Saviour." I love this quote, as it reiterates that the deceased person is not alone in their journey, nor are the family left on their own.

Fr Michael addressed the virtual congregation by reading aloud the published pastoral message of the Irish Bishops. Speaking in the context of the coronavirus, the message said, "The virus has already taken the lives of almost three thousand people, across the island of Ireland." This is a scary statistic that makes this global situation more real and hard-hitting. The letter also acknowledged people who had died due to other illnesses – both natural and tragic – and remembered those who have put their lives on the line for the sake of others.

The Bishops finished on a positive note, "...with Faith, Hope and Love we are called to support one another so that we will emerge



stronger and more resilient from this testing time".

Following the Irish Bishops' words, our deceased parishioners names were called out, and then the first Glorious Mystery – the Resurrection – was prayed. Concluding with a prayer dedicated to 'Our Lady of Knock for liberation from the epidemic' – adapted from the prayer Pope Francis prayed before St Peter's Basilica, in his 'Urbi et Orbi' blessing this year on March 27. The final hymn was 'Laudate Dominum omnes gentes' (first line from Psalm 117), meaning 'Praise the Lord, all you nations'.

I want to say a word of thanks to all our parishes around the Diocese for continuing to minister

to the faithful amidst these unprecedented times. Online resources have been difficult to use for some, and I am so appreciative that our Diocese has pulled together to support each other, and to ensure that we can still unite and celebrate Masses and Services, feasts and seasons throughout the Church Year. I also would like to thank all our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers who work tirelessly to try and keep us safe and well.

And finally, we pray for those who have died, 'Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. May their souls, and the souls of all the faithful departed through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.'

Cherishing the importance of faith when the going gets tough, St Eugene's parishioner and community worker, Pat Carlin is delighted at...

Great support from City Churches to 'connecting generations' campaign



Pat Carlin.

AFTER 30 years of teaching in the primary sector, St Eugene's parishioner, Pat Carlin has been keeping busy in continuing to put her time and talents to good use through her work with the Greater Shantallow Area Partnership (GSAP); the support agency for communities across Galliagh, Shantallow, Carnhill, Culmore, Skeoge, Pennyburn, and Ballynashallog, as well as the wider Derry City & Strabane District Council Area.

One of the positives to come out of this time of upheaval and devastation in the lives of many as a result of Covid-19, is how



Grainne Nugent

many have gone out of their way to help others. Pat is particularly appreciative of the prayer support offered online, not only from St Eugene's but across the Diocese and the island of Ireland, and to the many thoughtful people who come for window visits to the home she shares with her dear friend, Grainne Nugent, and offer help, as they are shielding for health reasons.

This kindness is a response to the kindness and generosity of Pat and Grainne, themselves, to others through the community and parish initiatives that they are involved in. Pat's qualities as

a teacher, which shone through during her years teaching in St Anne's PS and stemmed from her belief that education is about the whole person, have also been central to her contributions to community projects.

"There is no one size that fits all", she told 'The Net', adding: "It is important to see each individual's needs and that they know they have a gift/talent from God, without which the world wouldn't be the place it should be".

She also believes in the importance of the spiritual aspect in education and in general, especially when life gets tough: "We have a lot of suicide in this city; it is a lack of hope. Faith-based education gives hope to children, and to adults, that there is someone there who loves them despite everything. We don't have to earn God's love. We need to show that our God is a God of forgiveness."

"People have had bad starts but that doesn't mean that they are a bad person. We need to help people realise that faith makes life a bit easier. The lack of hope can become hope when you have a relationship with God".

"In all the ups and downs, and I have these in my own life," she added, "I have an awareness of how Christ has been very much part of it".

Smiling as she thinks about her place of work, where she is the Families Connect Coordinator, Pat said: "Our organisation is sensational. Our manager and staff are the most caring people I have ever encountered. They go above and beyond".

She went on to talk about how GSAP, along with many of the City's churches, had embarked on a campaign aimed at digitally connecting older people across the city, in a bid to offset the harmful effects of the isolation caused by Coronavirus.

"Apart from the horrendous human cost of the pandemic, one of the most insidious effects of Covid-19 has been the dreadful loneliness that it has caused," remarked Pat, pointing out that older people in particular had felt the impact of this, with enforced disconnection from family and friends known to severely impede upon mental health.

So, with this loneliness greatly

alleviated through the use of modern technology, GSAP has launched a campaign entitled, 'Let's Get All Generations Connected', in partnership with many local churches and are seeking used or new iPads, or monetary donations, to be left with local churches, in a bid to help reconnect our older people.

Celebrating its 25 anniversary, Pat recalled how GSAP had worked tirelessly over the years to provide a voice for many who have found themselves marginalised, adding: "Our older citizens are also badly in need of a way to link with the outside world. Many of our older people are devoted and highly valued members of our city's faith communities. So, we have turned to our church leaders to use their cherished leadership in spearheading the 'Let's Get All Generations Connected' campaign, to appeal to their parishioners to donate IT equipment."

"If the donation of iPads is not possible, then we would ask people to make a contribution to their church, so that materials such as dongles can be provided, which will allow internet connections to

be made, if none is available. These donations will also be used to pay for IT experts to overhaul iPads in the interests of data protection."

She continued: "The plan is that once the churches have gathered the iPads, GSAP will be on hand, to help allocate the materials to those who need them. We will contact our church and community partners across the city, to ask for the names of older residents who they believe would benefit most from the campaign."

"At the point of delivery, we will then allocate church and community volunteers to help set the equipment up. We will also help reassure any recipient that the helpers, will fully abide by government guidance on social distancing and will use PPE on their visits, to avoid any undue anxiety or stress about that issue".

These volunteers will also be able to arrange for follow-up visits, through GSAP, to make sure that any ongoing assistance will be available on the use of the iPads, so that the links to family and friends and their spiritual community continues.

Pilgrimage of Remembrance in Clonleigh Parish a special time, with...

Hundreds of pilgrims drawn to Good Shepherd prayer trail

by Fr Colm O'Doherty, PP Clonleigh

WELL over a year ago, I was appointed to Clonleigh Parish to serve the people of Murlog. Little did I know, or for that matter, little did anyone know, how different things would be in terms of ministry, in terms of building parish relationships, in terms of attending to our spiritual well-being, in terms of coming together to pray.

I actually had hoped to launch a Church Decor Group in the parish and, because of earlier efforts, was delighted that quite a few people had expressed an interest in this ministry of support to the Liturgy.

Having invited Thornhill Ministries to do the training, you can imagine that the cancellation of it was just one of many disappointments, when Donegal was lock downed all those weeks ago.

In trying to think positively, the call to support parishioners in their private prayer in visiting the church was both challenging and essential. The people of Lifford are so faithful to visiting the graves of their loved ones. From morning until night has fallen, and sometimes after, our parishioners make their constant visits to the resting place of their beloved dead.

And so, conscious of the month of the Holy Souls and knowing

how people carry the pain of loss for many, many years, I felt something special was needed.

What occurred in the immediate days post the lockdown, was an evolving, inspired development of what was to become our 'Pilgrimage of Remembrance'.

I wish to go on record as expressing my sincere gratitude Geraldine, Noreen and Sr Perpetua from Thornhill Ministries, for developing, with me, a unique and profoundly moving prayer experience for all who have engaged with our pilgrimage throughout November.

The Pilgrimage of Remembrance

When the idea of building the pilgrimage around 'The Good Shepherd' Psalm was presented as a possibility, it resonated with me. Many decades earlier on a trip to Jamaica with a number of other priests, I was presented with a beautiful carved statue of the Good Shepherd from an ex-prisoner I had met in the parish I was visiting, who had a wonderful talent in detailed workmanship. I remember carrying it all the way back to Ireland and hoping it would travel safely.

While I keep it as a prayer focus

in the parochial house, I was delighted to have it incorporated into the pilgrimage.

St Patrick's Church, in Murlog, lends itself to a prayerful walkway within. Mindful of the need to maintain boundaries and social distance between stopping points, we created a prayer trail.

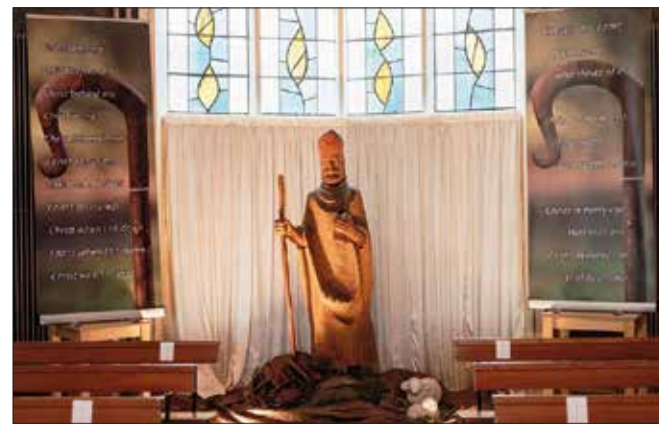
Taking some key lines from verses of the psalm, a variety of media was chosen, meditative chant and an accompanying reflective prayer leaflet all combined in the making of the 'Pilgrimage of Remembrance'.

I am humbled by the engagement of the people in undertaking this pilgrimage. While in any hour of the day in the weeks of November, it would have seemed as if a steady trickle of people were doing the pilgrimage, the numbers of copies of the prayer leaflet that needed reprinting was a great indicator to me that many hundreds of pilgrims came to St Patrick's, Clonleigh. For that, I am very grateful.

The virtual pilgrimage is now on Clonleigh Parish Facebook page. Thank you to three most generous parishioners who took photographs or who filmed the prayer-trail. Clonleigh is blessed, indeed, with so many good and committed people of faith.

The volume of the online engagement, the comments of appreciation and prayer, and the messages received from across the globe, have helped our stay-at-home and our emigrant parishioners to touch into their faith roots as collectively we have prayed for our faithful departed friends.

May all our beloved dead, for whom we are asked to pray throughout the year, be assisted by our prayers. May all our deceased hear the call of the Good Shepherd leading them to their heavenly home.



Newtownstewart gets a new relic! *by Fr Roland Colhoun*

TO celebrate the 20th anniversary of the new Oratory on Main Street, the parishioners of Newtownstewart were delighted to receive a new relic for the altar. Since the early centuries of Christianity, relics of the martyrs have been associated with the Mass.

At the beginning of Mass and at the end of Mass, the priest makes an important gesture. He kisses the altar. This is an act of reverence because the holy sacrifice of the Mass takes place on the altar. But there is another aspect to it. The part of the altar that the priest kisses contains the relic of a saint. It's specifically the relic of a martyr; a saint who was killed for the Faith.

The word 'relic' comes from the Latin verb 'relinquere', meaning 'to leave behind' or 'to remain'. Therefore, a relic is what is left behind of the martyr, the remains of the body. It is usually the bones, the durable parts of the body. Every altar has a tiny relic of a martyr, inset, beneath the surface of the wood or marble, on the spot where the Blessed Sacrament will be placed.

The Mass is a sacrifice because Christ sacrificed His Body and Blood on the Cross to give us His Eucharistic Body and Blood on the altar. The martyrs also sacrificed their lives, in union with Christ's sacrifice. Therefore, the united sacrifice of the Saviour and the Saints is at the heart of our reverence for the Mass.

Scripture authenticates this practice of placing relics of martyrs in the altar. In the Book of Revelation it is written: "And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God, and for the witness they had borne". (Rev 6:9).

In the early Church, the bodies of the martyrs were placed in table tombs above the ground, rather than buried in the earth. During the persecutions of the Roman Empire, the Christians used to gather secretly for worship in the catacombs, where the martyrs were entombed. To celebrate the Eucharist, they used the table-tombs of the martyrs as altars, so that the bodies of the martyrs were under the altar during Mass.

In the fourth century AD, Christianity began to be tolerated and then became the official religion of the Empire and Christians were allowed to build churches. The practice of throwing Christians to the lions ended but the followers of Christ still wanted the martyrs to be near them, so they opened the tombs, removed some of the bones and put them into jars, which they placed beneath the altars in their new churches.

To this day, in some of the churches of Rome, you can see the jars with relics on display beneath the altars. And many churches have the complete incorrupt bodies of saints behind glass panels in the altars. Pope St John XIII is a recent example in St Peter's Basilica.

At the end of the eighth century, the Church decreed (Second Council of Nicaea, 787AD) that every altar should contain a relic. The practice continues in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches to this day. Veneration of the relics of the saints reflects our faith that the saints in heaven are in perpetual worship of God in the

eternal liturgy, united with us in the Mass on earth.

So, on November 12, exactly 20 years after the Consecration of the new Oratory in the Jubilee Year, I solemnly deposited a bone-relic of St Oliver Plunkett inside the altar. As Archbishop of Armagh, St Oliver visited the Derry Diocese in 1670. He is eminently suitable as the new companion in the Oratory and intercessor in heaven.



First Saturday Prayer for Ireland

THE call to pray the First Saturday Devotion for Ireland has been taken up by a number of parishes in the Diocese.

Archbishop Eamon Martin encouraged parishes around the island of Ireland to organise the First Saturday prayer for the first five Saturdays of the new Church year, with the first being on December 5.

The First Saturday Devotion was requested through Our Lady, during her apparition in Fatima, with the intention of making reparation to God for the sins

against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

Responding to the call, the Coastal Rosary team promoted a First Saturday programme including three hours of Adoration from 12 noon to 3 pm, the recitation of three Rosaries, with meditations, in this period, with time for silence in between each Rosary.

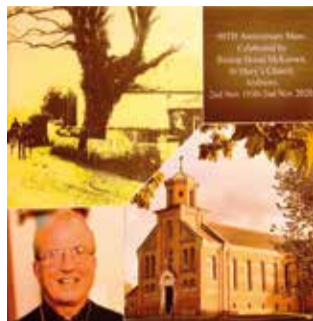
The intention of the Joyful Mysteries is for The Protection of Family and Youth, while the Sorrowful Mysteries are offered for The Conversion of Sinners,

and the intention of the Glorious Mysteries is Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life.

The time of prayer finishes at 3 pm with the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, followed by the prayer to St Michael the Archangel, and, if possible, Benediction.

Confession is also encouraged, either on the day if possible or within eight days to fulfil the five First Saturdays obligations, and the celebration of Mass either on the First Saturday or, again, within eight days.

Ardmore marks 90th anniversary of St Mary's Church



THE 90th anniversary of St Mary's Church, Ardmore, was marked on the Feast of All Souls, when parish priest, Fr Neil Farren and his parishioners were delighted that Bishop Donal was able to join them for the celebration of evening Mass.

While the congregation size was restricted in accordance with Covid-19 restrictions, and organ music, with no singing, filled the air of the yellow and white ribbon bedecked church, the 90th celebration was not quite what the parish had been planning and looking forward to before the

pandemic wreaked its havoc.

But maybe the low-key celebration was more in keeping with how things were when people first gathered for Mass in what was a much more rural chapel then, before it became a parish church in its own right.

Noting that it was 90 years to the date when the church was dedicated to The Blessed Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, Bishop Donal felt it was fitting that Fr Neil Farren was the priest of the parish nine decades later, as his great-uncle Fr Neil Farren had been based at Chapel Road, as president of St Columb's College, at the time of the dedication.

"Our understanding of Church is much richer now," noted Bishop Donal, saying: "The Church is the disciples of Jesus in every time and place, and we give thanks for those clergy and religious who made up the praying body of this parish down the years."

"It is the people, who gather

here to worship and support the church, parish and schools, etc, and it is people that Jesus came to mix with. The Church exists to make Jesus known and loved."

Bishop Donal paid tribute to the parishioners of Ardmore for their passionate response to the pandemic, in seeking to ensure the safety of all coming to the Church for worship.

Mindful that the winter months will be a real challenge for everyone, he encouraged families to practice prayer in their homes, and highlighted the abundance of resources available free online.

"The whole focus," he stressed, "is not what we can't do in Church in these times, but what we can do in our domestic churches; our homes."

Highlighting the example of St Mary, Patron of the Ardmore Parish, Bishop Donal told those gathered: "Remember her plans were turned upside down and she was told, 'Do not be afraid.'"

He continued: "This is our time and our place to minister in Jesus' name. As we celebrate 90 years of this Church, we do so with deep gratitude".

Thanking Bishop Donal for coming to celebrate the anniversary Mass with them and for his words of encouragement, Fr Neil said: "The various associations that we have here is what makes a parish very healthy. It's good to stretch our muscles."

"We thank the generations who came before us for their endeavours and I thank you for your endeavours as well," said Fr Neil to the congregation.

A photo canvas was then presented to Bishop Donal to mark the occasion, featuring an image of the old church of St Columb and one of St Mary's Church, Ardmore, along with a photo of Bishop Donal.

The ceremony was broadcast online via the church webcam and also on Facebook.



Peace filled the air during special time of prayer around Creggan

ON The Feast of Christ the King, a special time of Eucharistic blessing and prayer took place around the streets within the Parish of Creggan, for the relief of addictions and for the Holy Souls.

The Sunday prayer preceded three days of prayer and talks in the parish leading up to Red Wednesday, during which St Mary's Church was lit up red in recognition of all those who are being persecuted for their Christian faith throughout the world.

From Monday to Wednesday, each day started with the celebration of Mass and Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and included Confessions in the Divine Mercy Chapel from 3-6 pm, followed by Mass in the evening.

During this time of prayer, parishioners heard a talk on

The Persecution of Addiction and joined in prayer for persecuted Christians, with visual testimonies.

Launching the prayer programme, Fr Joe Gormley, PP, and Fr Daniel McFaul, curate, set off early on the Sunday afternoon on foot from St Mary's Chapel, carrying the Blessed Sacrament to Lower Creggan and Upper Creggan, respectively.

Each was accompanied by two parishioners, one carrying a banner of Our Lady and the other leading the prayers during the four-hour blessing session.

On each street, the prayer to St Maximilian Kolbe for those suffering from addictions was prayed, followed by the Divine Praises, and then an Our Father, Hail Mary and the Creed for the Holy Souls, as the Blessed Sacrament was held up and a

blessing bestowed on all living there.

Earlier in the year, the Creggan pastors undertook a similar time of prayer for the protection of all in their care, praying the Rosary on that occasion, as they walked the daily paths of their parishioners.

And on each occasion, they were greeted with words of appreciation by those who stood at their doorway to receive the blessing; from young families to elderly couples.

Soaking in the peace that filled the Sunday air during this time of prayer around the many neighbourhoods making up the Creggan Parish, including the spot where young journalist, Lyra McKee had been fatally shot during rioting in the area in 2019, it was hard to imagine scenes like that taking place here.

Feeling the same sense of peace, Fr Joe remarked: "That's how it is here most of the time. The Creggan is just a beautiful place with beautiful people to minister to. I love it."

As darkness fell and their soles tread the pathways leading back to St Mary's Church, in time for Benediction at 6 pm...the thought came that new shoes might well make a fitting gift for Fr Joe and Fr Daniel this Christmas!



Tributes flow for late Fr Stephen Kearney

...the compassionate, witty pastor who wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty



MINISTERING for over 50 years in various parts of the Diocese, the late Fr Stephen Kearney touched the lives of countless people who were greatly saddened to hear of his death on November 12, after a period of illness.

Although the number attending his Requiem Mass in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher, was restricted to 25 due to Covid-19, huge numbers paid tribute to the 76-year-old Tyrone stalwart by sending messages, paying their respects as his remains reposited in St Mary's Church, Knockmoyle, and standing outside Killyclogher Church and in villages en-route to St Mary's Aughabrack, as the funeral cortege made its way to his home parish for the burial.

Fr Eamon McDevitt, parish priest of Donagheady, encompassing Dunamanagh and Augbrack, concelebrated the Mass with Fr Stephen's close Cappagh colleagues, Fr Kevin McElhannon PP and Fr Declan McGeehan CC, who was privileged to have known, and learnt from, such an experienced pastor in his first years of priesthood. Bishop Donal was also in attendance.

In his homily, Fr McDevitt said that it was "difficult to do justice in words, to the multi-faceted man that Fr Stephen Kearney was", and recalled his "unique style of being provocative, contrarian and even outrageous", which had endeared him to many.

Having entered Maynooth in 1962, Fr Stephen was ordained, along with Fr Eddie Kilpatrick, by Bishop Neil Farren in St Patrick's Church, Killenagh, in Dunamanagh on June 15, 1969, and within weeks was appointed

to look after Aughabrack following the sudden death of Fr Brian McKenna. His first permanent appointment was as a curate in Glendermott, in the Waterside area of Derry, where he ministered until 1980.

Remarking that the Waterside Parish offered a great start in ministry to a newly-ordained priest, with its "very varied ministry", Fr McDevitt noted that Fr Stephen had been given responsibility for the Top of the Hill – Gobnascale Estate, where there had been a lot of social deprivation, with a number of young men getting caught up in The Troubles and ending up in Long Kesh Prison.

Saying that Fr Stephen had "ministered untiringly to them and to their families", Fr McDevitt pointed out that these had been difficult years for everyone in Derry, during which five men watching a football match were shot dead in Annie's Bar at Top of the Hill in December 1972.

Transferred to Sessiaghoneill, in Co Donegal, in 1980, Fr Stephen ministered there for 11 years before moving to Faughanvale, where just two years later, on October 30, 1993, he found himself deeply involved in ministering to a community traumatised by the shooting of eight people in the Rising Sun Bar, in Greysteel.

"His work for cross-community projects as a means of healing some of the wounds, was widely admired and respected by all denominations and their leaders," recalled Fr McDevitt, adding: "Many remained in contact over the years. He also won the esteem of Lady Jean and Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Secretary of State".

Fr Stephen moved to Newtownstewart in 1995, when he was appointed as parish priest of Ardstraw East, where despite chronic ill health, he worked hard on behalf of his parishioners;

building an oratory dedicated to Mary, Mother of God, and a new parochial house, amongst other projects.

"He had suffered over many years from myasthenia gravis, a rare long-term condition that causes muscle weakness. Yet he never let it define him," said Fr McDevitt.

He continued: "As his health deteriorated, he moved seven years ago to Cappagh where he was very happy in Knockmoyle – blessed with supportive and caring colleagues, and readily winning the fond regard of the parishioners".

Empathy

Indeed, Fr McDevitt noted that, in all his parishes, Fr Stephen had "identified totally with his people, in a truly remarkable way, through his empathy and natural warmth and interest".

"Parishioners responded to this," said Fr McDevitt, "and he won the love and loyalty of great numbers of people in the course of his life. This was obvious in the celebration of the golden jubilee of his ordination last year, attended by people from all arts and parts."

In addition to his parish ministry, Fr Stephen served many years within the Marriage Encounter community in Ireland, presenting Marriage Encounter weekends around Ireland and in England, America, Germany, Norway and Denmark.

Highlighting also Fr Stephen's exceptional care for the sick, including those suffering from anxiety, depression or mental illness, Fr McDevitt noted: "Time meant nothing to him if his presence could bring comfort to someone in distress. He never allowed his own bad health to prevent him from doing good".

Fr Stephen's interest in drama was mentioned too, with Fr McDevitt remarking: "There was something of the comic actor about him; he would dress in the most bizarre costumes at Christmas parties and other get-togethers. He enjoyed playing to the gallery, and it really pleased him to know that he was a source of light-hearted amusement to others".

Going on to talk about Fr Stephen's "great love of the land, and of nature, identifying birds by their song", Fr McDevitt said: "He was supremely faithful to his roots. He loved getting back to Clogherney to be with the family, and to get his hands dirty either at farming or at working with machinery. His love of the land extended to his love of his garden, growing his own



At Maynooth.

vegetables and herbs".

He also had an interest in engines and motors, with Fr McDevitt describing him as an electrical or mechanical engineer at heart, as well as a builder, farmer, horticulturalist, comic actor, naturalist, apiarist, counsellor, lover of people and brilliant conversationalist.

But it was family that meant everything to the eldest born child of Patrick and Bernadette Kearney, with Fr McDevitt remarking: "The family bonds were never stronger than in his last months and weeks, when he was never, for a moment, without someone to care for him".

At the end of the ceremony, Anne McNamee, who had been Fr Stephen's secretary and housekeeper when he was in Newtownstewart, paid tribute to his "wisdom, compassion, humour and humanity" and expressed a hope that his legacy will live on.

She concluded: "Let us bring his humanity, his charity and his deep faith, and the deep value he placed on family life into the lives of all those we meet".

In a tribute to Fr Stephen, Bishop Donal said: "He was from farming stock and never forgot what a good shepherd does. He was a highly intelligent man who carried his learning very lightly."

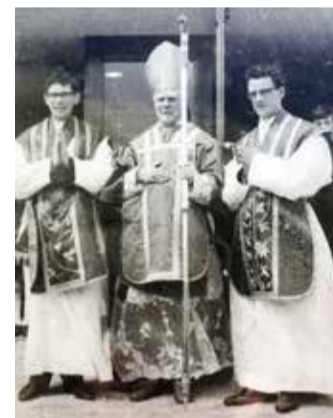
"Last year, at the celebration of his 50th Ordination anniversary, I was very impressed to see the huge crowd who wanted to celebrate with him. We still need good pastors who can gather people on their faith journey and who do not mind getting their hands dirty, physically and metaphorically!"



Fr Stephen enjoying producing a special going away gift for Fr Daniel McFaul, following his appointment to Creggan from Cappagh.



Fr Stephen on his Ordination Day, with his parents and siblings, l-r, Mary, Teresa, Gerard, Philomena, Eugene, Bernadette, Paddy Joe, Dolores, Seamus, Kevin, Margaret and her husband, the late Brendan Donaghy.



Fr Stephen and Fr Edward Kilpatrick with Bishop Neil Farren, on their Ordination Day.



Fr Stephen wearing his Marriage Encounter vestments for the marriage of his sister, Mary to Denis McLaughlin.



Fr Stephen giving his blessing to his sister, Dolores on his Ordination Day.



Dungiven Parish celebrates doctoral success of beloved curate, Fr Joseph Varghese



THE parishioners of Dungiven have been joined by the many people that have come to know and love Fr Joseph Varghese, in congratulating him on being awarded a Doctoral Degree in Systematic Theology (PhD) from St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the Syro-Malabar priest had been unable to go to Maynooth for the graduation ceremony, but Fr Seamus Kelly, the parish priest of Dungiven where Fr Joseph ministers as curate, along with the Parish Pastoral Council, stepped in to ensure that the occasion was a special one for Fr Joseph.

In front of the restricted congregation gathered in St Patrick's Church, Dungiven, for the weekend vigil Mass on the day of the virtual graduation ceremony, Fr Kelly presented a gowned-up Fr Joseph with his doctoral certificate

and congratulated him on behalf of the parish.

With the ceremony broadcast through the church webcam, Fr Kelly welcomed those watching online as well, including Fr Joseph's family and friends. To add to the occasion, the clip from the recorded conferral ceremony in which his name was formerly called out, was screened in the church.

Fr Kelly noted that Fr Joseph's had been one of only three doctorates conferred during the Maynooth ceremony, before introducing Dr Eugene McElhinney, of the Pastoral Council, to speak on behalf of the parish.

Familiar with the workload required in studying for a doctorate, Eugene commended Fr Joseph for his commitment and for doing so without compromising his priestly duties in the parish,

where he has faithfully ministered for the past four years.

He also pointed out that their curate had already secured a Master's Degree in Aramaic (Syriac) – Jesus' own language – from university in India and a Master's Degree in Theology from Heythrop College London in 2009.

"In the Gospels we find that Jesus praised the quality of perseverance. He reminded his disciples that when you place your hand on the plough there is no place for looking back," said Eugene, adding: "Well, Fr Joseph, without looking back, has ploughed a long and lonely furrow for the past four years to enhance his ability to proclaim the kingdom and dialogue with his compatriots when he eventually returns to his native India".

Offering congratulations, he remarked: "The disappointment that we feel about the scarcity of Irish priests to minister to us is matched by our deep gratitude to this dedicated priest from far away Kerala, in India, to be our curate. Ireland has been known in the past as the island of saints and scholars. I hope it is not too fanciful to suggest that now we are allowed to include Kerala in that category".

Fr Joseph was transferred from London to Northern Ireland 10 years ago by his Archbishop, His Grace, Mar Joseph Perumthottam, and has ministered in parishes in the Derry Diocese, including St Eugene's Cathedral, Long Tower and Waterside, as well as to the Syro-Malabar community.

Entitled 'Mission and Dialogue: An Emerging Christology of Henri De Lubac: A Hermeneutical Tool for A Wider Theological Dialogue', Fr Joseph's doctoral study focussed on the Lubacian Approach – a Model for Inter-Faith Study and Dialogue, especially relationships between the world religious – Christianity and Hinduism.

Fr Joseph explained that he had been "inspired by the theological method of French theologian Henri de Lubac, especially the two principles that can be gleaned from his inaugural theological lecture in 1929, viz. the Principle of Auscultation (the action of attentive listening) and the Principle of the Catholicity of Truth, the latter being the basis for the former", adding that Lubac's theological method "provides a template for mission and dialogue".

Happy to be a source of some good news "in this time of doom and gloom", Fr Joseph expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to all those who had helped and encouraged him along the way, especially his thesis guide, Revd Dr Noel O'Sullivan, "for his valuable advice, thoughtful guidance and unflagging support", Bishop Donal, for his "exceptional support and ongoing encouragement regarding both his research project and ministry", Fr Seamus and the parishioners of Dungiven, and the Syro-Malabar Church.

"It all began with my parents and family; that is where I was introduced to the faith," he added, saying: "The encouragement, concern and prayers of my beloved parents, Mr Mathew Varghese and Mrs Annamma Varghese, loving siblings and their families are much appreciated.

"In total fulfilment, to my heavenly Father, who called, inspired and guided me all the way, I express with heartfelt sincerity, Deo Gratias".

Congratulating Fr Joseph, Bishop Donal remarked that a healthy adult Christian faith "touches the head, the heart and the hands".

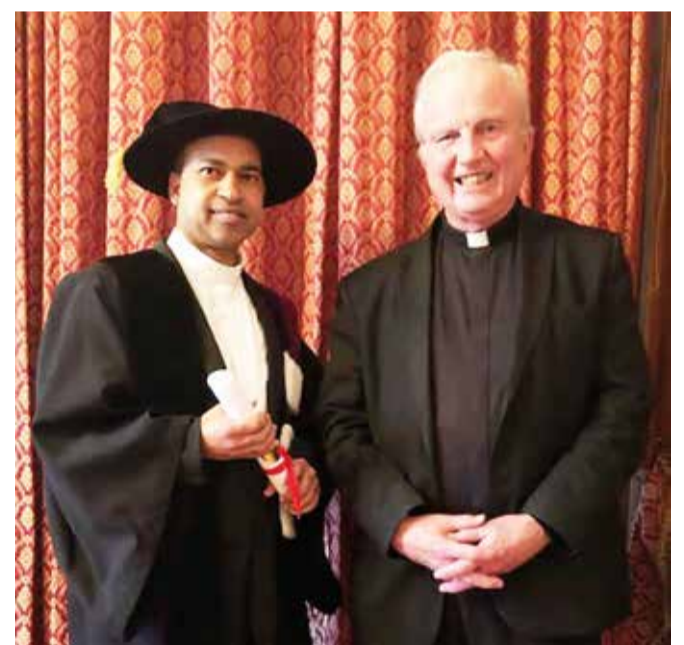
"There is a need," he added, "for a balance between faith, knowledge and action. As with any three-legged stool, if one leg is missing, the whole lot will fall. Thus, the

Derry Diocese needs to be a place where prayer, pastoral outreach and intellectual formation are all taking place.

"It is great that Dr Joseph has achieved his doctoral award, while also doing all his pastoral work. That will be a blessing for himself as well as for the Syro-Malabar community. But it is also a sign to us all that we have to be prepared

to engage in dialogue with civic society.

"Christianity is based on a strong rational basis and in its engagement with society it seeks, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote in Deus Caritas East 28, to 'help purify reason'. There is no role for church to hide behind walls and lob theological firecrackers at the infidels outside!"



Dr Joseph Varghese with Bishop Donal.

Fr Roni arrives from India



Fr Roni Zacharias, on loan to the Derry Diocese from the Archeparchy of Changanacherry.

THE Derry Diocese has welcomed the arrival of Fr Roni Zacharias, on loan from the Archeparchy of Changanacherry for a three-year period.

Bishop Donal explained that the Syro-Malabar priest, of the same Archeparchy as Fr Joseph

Varghese, will be ministering as curate in the Glendermott Parish following the required period of self-isolation due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I am most grateful to Mar Joseph Perumthottam for sending Fr Zacharias on loan," he added, "and to Fr Zacharias for his generosity in coming to Derry. I wish him a most fruitful ministry among us. May God bless him in his ministry."

The 39-year-old priest is reputed for his excellent ministry while serving as a director of Lourde Matha Cancer Care Centre in the Archdiocese for 10 years.

Delighted with the arrival of his fellow countryman, Fr Joseph told 'The Net': "I am extremely happy because Fr Roni is from my own Archeparchy, and not far from my



Fr Daniel McFaul, CC Creggan, welcoming Fr Roni from self-isolation.

home.

"The Indian family will be happy to see another priest from India here, and the relationship between

the Archeparchy of Changanacherry and the Derry Diocese is enriched through this."



...a sculptural perspective on the history of the early Irish Church...

Following the stone *by Fr Oliver Crilly*



Sculpture Week, Co. Wexford

THE last great Irish scripture cross was carved in AD 930 at the Columban monastery in Durrow, Co Offaly. The period of the scripture crosses was initiated by the unique Carndonagh cross, the first example of the tall stone slab taking on the shape of the cross, rather than having a linear cross inscribed on the stone. The continuous creativity of nearly two hundred years of sophisticated sculpture coincided with the movement of the Céilí Dé - a great movement of spiritual renewal in the early Irish Church.

The end of the scripture crosses coincided with the decline of the

energy and creativity of the Céilí Dé renewal. There were external pressures also, of course, in the aftermath of the Viking invasions. One way or another, the great scripture crosses didn't just peter out gradually: they fell off a cliff.

The climax of the sculptural achievement was reached with the extraordinary crosses of Monasterboice, Clonmacnois, and Durrow. And then nothing. The Durrow cross (AD 930) was created about a third of the way into the tenth century. For the rest of the tenth century and all the way through the eleventh century there were no High Crosses.

Into this vacuum, in the twelfth century, strode two amazing men, whose vision and energy would dominate the Irish Church throughout the century. One was from the North, the other from the South. The southern figure was St Lorcán Ó Tuathail - Laurence O'Toole - of Glendalough and Dublin. The northern figure was St Malachy of Armagh. With them a whole new renewal movement swelled up in the Irish Church. This movement wasn't just inspirational - it was structural. It is usually referred to as the twelfth century Reform of the Irish Church, and central to it was the

idea of bringing the Irish Church into line with the diocesan and parish structures of the Church throughout Europe.

It wasn't that Malachy or Laurence O'Toole didn't appreciate the contribution of monasticism: both had the roots of their spirituality and ecclesiology in the monastic life. Laurence O'Toole will always be associated with Glendalough, and Malachy had restored and renewed the great northern monastery of Bangor before being sent to the monastic centre of Armagh. But they were disillusioned with the direction the Irish monasteries had taken. They had lost their energy, and in some cases powerful families had taken over monasteries and used them to promote their own family fortunes.

When Malachy set about the reform and renewal of the Irish Church, he kept closely in contact with the Pope in Rome. He travelled to Rome several times, and on his journeys he used to stay with St Bernard in the new Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux. Malachy and Bernard became close friends. On his last trip to Clairvaux, Malachy became ill and died. Bernard had him buried in the grave he had prepared for himself, so that these two friends and spiritual leaders are buried in the same grave in Clairvaux.

Malachy hadn't forgotten the potential of the monastic life, and he was impressed with the Cistercian renewal of the

Benedictine spirituality. He invited Bernard to send some monks to Ireland, and they founded the great monastery of Mellifont - an Mhainistir Mhór - which became the first of several Cistercian monasteries in Ireland, and though in ruins is still a significant tourist attraction off the M1 between Armagh and Dublin.

Like the Céilí Dé spirituality, the twelfth century renewal and reform was accompanied by enormous spiritual and creative energy: the High Crosses came back! The twelfth century high crosses are just as big as the earlier scripture crosses, and just as impressive, but they are different. Interestingly, the earlier scripture crosses were found in Leinster and Ulster, and associated with monasteries, especially the monasteries of St Columba. The twelfth century high crosses are in Munster and Connaught, and they are associated with kings and bishops. Sponsorship had its attractions long before the Tour de France or the Aviva stadium!

Perhaps the most significant difference is in the iconography of the crosses. Among the things I miss are the extraordinary scriptural detail in the images, and the clear emphasis on the Church as community — the earlier scripture crosses are peopled crosses, and the Church is represented by panels of the twelve apostles. (In the Derry Diocese, we have a great example of that ecclesial emphasis in the

Maghera Crucifixion, Co Derry.) Having said that, the twelfth century crosses are recognised internationally as hugely significant in the development of European sculpture: they are part of the back story which led to the great Romanesque and Gothic stone carvings in places like Paris (Notre Dame) and Chartres.

Domhnall Ó Murchadha, the great sculptor and lecturer, with Françoise Henry, in early Irish art in UCD, wrote beautifully about the Irish crosses (see e.g. The Capuchin Annual 1969). He believed the teams who worked on the great Irish crosses provided what could only be described as a school of sculpture which fed into the European experience. Sculptors had no hesitation in travelling widely in pursuit of their craft, and in search of work. Domhnall Ó Murchadha had a lovely phrase for it. He said: 'The sculptors followed the stone.'

The sculptors of the early scripture crosses created panels in relief on the four sides of the cross. The twelfth century sculptors moved from figures in relief to rounded three dimensional figures, and sometimes even attached additional parts to emphasise the movement in space. It didn't always stand the test of time, but their work pointed the way to a future that would flower in the great Gothic cathedrals, and in the Renaissance.



The Cross of Muiredach, Monasterboice



The Last Judgment, Cross of Durrow

Eangach

Ár nDúchas



A Mhuire agus a Mháthair

A Mhuire agus a Mháthair Bheannaithe, molaím thú ó mo chroí ós tú rug ár Slánaitheoir, ár dTiarna 'gus ár Rí, i stábla i mBeitlethem ar uair an mheán oíche, is nár bhreá binn ceol ainglí an uair 'rugadh é an Rí.

Míle glóir leat, a Rí na ríthe, ós tú d'iompair an chroich amach go Sliabh Chalcáirí is tú loite ins gach ball. Glacfaimid misneach ó doirtíodh an fhuil agus leanfaimid ár Slánaitheoir, ár dTiarna 'gus ár Rí go Cathair na Glóire i gcuideachta an tréad naomhaspal agus ainglí go háras Mhic Dé.

(Ár bPaidreacha Dúchais 442.)

Françoise Henry

Ba í uair na cinniúna ag Françoise Henry í nuair a tháinig sí ar saoire go hÉirinn agus nuair a rinne sí teagmháil le hoidhreacht ealaíne agus ailtireachta na hÉireann. D'aithin sí go raibh obair a saoil leagtha amach roimpi. Ach bhí an tsaoire sin cinniúnach d'ealaín na hÉireann chomh maith, agus do dhuine ar bith ar spéis leo eolas a chur ar oidhreacht chultúrtha na tíre. Tháinig sí ón Fhrainc, agus bhí sí ábalta súil neamhchlaonta a chaitheamh ar na saothair a raibh sí ag déanamh staidéir orthu. Ach bhí daonnacht inti, agus anam íogair oscailte. Ní hamháin go raibh sí in ann fíoraicí na staire agus éifeacht na saothar ealaíne a aimsiú go cruinn, ach bhí sí in ann dul taobh

thiar den ábhar cruthaithe agus teagmháil a dhéanamh leis an duine a chruthaigh é.

Scríobh sí leabhar ar ealaín Leabhar Cheanannais. D'inis sí fán triúr ealaíontóir a chruthaigh cuid de na píosaí is áille atá i Leabhar Cheanannais: *an gabha óir*, a rinne leithéidí an leathanaigh *Chi-Ro*—mionliníocht gheoiméadrach chruinn agus dath buí an óir a chuirfeadh obair mhiotail i gcuimhne duit; *an porráidí*, a rinne pictiúir de Chríost agus de na soiscéalaithe—leathanaigh iomlána agus fráma geoiméadrach orthu, ach porráid shainiúil taobh istigh den fhráma; agus *an scéalaí*, a rinne pictiúir d'imeachtaí i saol Íosa (a bhreith sa stábla, agus é ag fulaingt i nGairdín na nOlóg, mar shampla) — léirithe le saorliníocht bheo agus dathanna geala corcra agus uaithne uirthi.



Cros na Scrioptúir, Darú

Tá an daonnacht agus an íogaireacht chéanna sa chur síos a rinne Françoise ar na crosa is mó agus is áille i measc ardchrosa na hÉireann: dhá chros i Mainistir Bhuithe, Cros na Scrioptúir i gCluain Mhic Nóis, agus Cros na Scrioptúir i nDarú (Darmhagh Cholm Cille). Ní thugann Françoise ainm ar bith ar na healaíontóirí sa chás seo, ach tá sí cinnte go dtáinig na saothair seo ó lámha na scoile céanna dealbhóirí, ar a dtugann sí *Scoil Mhainistir Bhuithe*. Sár-ealaíontóir amháin a bheadh i gceannas na hoibre, agus a chuirfeadh críoch chruinn ar na máistir-phíosaí seo d'ealaín an dealbhóra. Ach is cinnte go raibh foireann ag obair leis, agus go raibh manaigh oile taobh thiar



Françoise Henry

de agus eolas an Scrioptúir agus an liotúirge ar a dtoil acu. (Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*.)



Chi-Ro, Leabhar Cheanannais



Dextera Dei, Mainistir Bhuithe

Beart de Réir ár mBriathair

Nuair a bhronntar Sacraimint an Chóineartaithe, caithfimid a dhéanamh cinnte go bhfuil comhluadar ag an duine óg, agus tacaíocht faoi leith istigh i saol na hEaglaise. Sin é an fáth go roghnaíonn sé naomh-phátrún le bheith mar chompánach aige ina shaol spioradálta, duine a bhfuil eolas an bhealaigh aige agus a bhfuil aitheantas tugtha dó i saol na hEaglaise, duine a dtig leis stiúir a thabhairt don duine óg ó na flathis agus don duine fásta agus é ag dul anonn in aois.

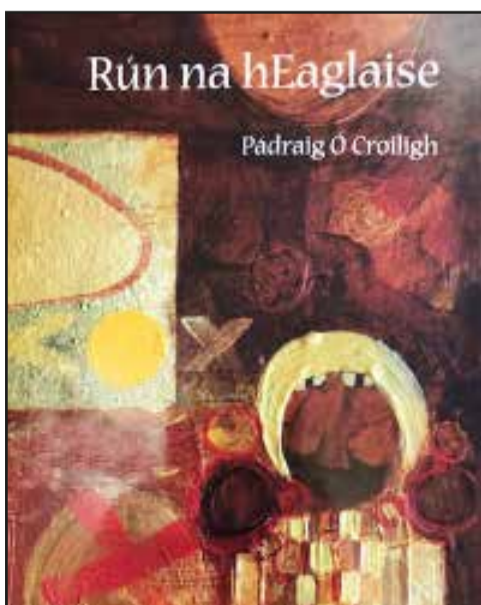
Cuirtear an t-ainm breise sin le hainm an Bhaiste istigh i leabhar san Eaglais, ach cuimhnítear go speisialta ar an naomhphátrún ar leis an t-ainm. In amanna shílfeá gur rud deas a bhí á dhéanamh nuair a tugadh ainm eile don duine óg agus é ag dul faoi lámh easpaig. Ní rud deas é, ach rud tábhachtach, go bhfuil an duine óg seo ceangailte de theaghlach na naomh, agus faoi stiúir ag naomh amháin, faoi léas an Spioraid Naoimh. Uaireanta roghnaíonn duine ainm naoimh a bhí mar ainm ag duine muinteartha dó, nó

ag a charas Críost. Tá ciall agus tábhacht leis sin. Ach níl ciall ar bith i saol na hEaglaise le ainm a roghnú ó aisteoir teilifíse nó scannáin, nó ó dhuine clúiteach an lae inniu. Ní ar an ábhar sin a thugtar ainm breise don duine óg ag an Chóineartú.

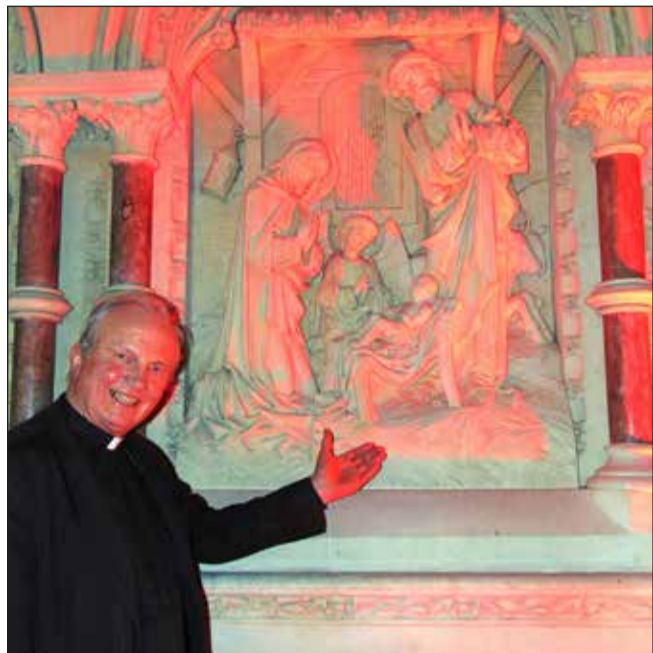
Is chun obair a dhéanamh a chóineartaítear an duine óg mar bhall iomlán den Eaglais. Is ar mhaithe le buanna a úsáid agus le pobal a chruthú a théann sé faoi lámh Easpaig. Tugann na daoine óga seo dúshlán an tsaoil

nuair a théann siad faoin lámh an Easpaig, agus séala an Spioraid naoimh orthu in ola an Chriosma. Braithfidh a lán orthu lá is faide anonn, agus le cuidiú an Spioraid Naoimh chéanna beidh siad ábalta troid a chur ar chaighdeán agus ar luachanna an tsaoil. Is ar mhaithe lena neartú le luachanna an tsoiscéil a chur os comhair an phobail a Chóineartaítear iad, agus táimid uile mórtasach astu ina mbeart úr.

(Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*.)



A blessed time is the prayerful wish for all this Christmas



AS we prepare for the celebration of the birth of Our Saviour, still in the midst of the upheaval, uncertainty and suffering caused by Covid-19 that has dominated 2020, a number of people from various parts of the Diocese have shared their memories of Christmases past and their hopes to be able to celebrate this one safely with family, and with a deeper sense of the peace and simplicity of that first Christmas. A blessed time is the prayerful wish for all.

A message from Bishop Donal...

THE first Christmas was a very simple event; an almost unnoticed birth of a poor child in poor surroundings.

This year, we know something of the uncertainty and worry that must have hung over Mary and Joseph. But in the middle of the

turmoil, the angel announces, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to people of good will".

God speaks that message of reassurance to us this year, in the different circumstances of our lives.

May the peace of God be in your

hearts, and may you find light in the birth of Christ our Saviour.

One of my recent Christmas memories was at my sister's house. Four of her adult children were there, simply enjoying each other's company. The fifth sibling was in the US. They called her

up on Whatsapp video, and for a while it was as if all five of them were on the floor together, laughing and just so happy to be in each other's company though 5,000 miles apart. Love changes everything.

Our beautiful crib will adorn our home and give us true Christmas cheer for many a year *by Ashlene Canning*

THOUGHTS and memories of Christmas past will certainly be prominent in the minds of many people during our first, and hopefully last, COVID Christmas. The families and friends who have suffered the extreme devastation of a premature loss of many who were greatly loved will, undoubtedly, be at the pinnacle of our prayers.

As a family, we endeavour to have a silent prayer daily for the victims of this horrendous pandemic and their loved ones left behind. I have no words to understand or describe the anguish and suffering that the bereaved people are experiencing. I simply want to offer a silent prayer for them.

The one thing which instantly springs to mind when asked what I'll miss most this season is our parish choir, St Eugene's. My daughter, Darcey and I joined the choir in late 2018 and it has been the main activity we have sorely missed since our last Mass on March 17. The weekly practice on a Tuesday evening in the Oratory of Mary Mother of God has, on every occasion, left us both

feeling cheerful. Singing in a choir is a natural dose of serotonin if ever there is one! The sense of accomplishment which we all felt after the weekly Vigil or Sunday Mass is one that we cherish and sincerely look forward to, in the hopefully not too distant future.

At the 9 pm candlelight vigil on Christmas Eve 2019, there was a nervous excitement among all the members. Since early autumn, we had been learning and practising a beautiful hymn, The Blessing of Aaron. It sounded the way the musical director intended, with all four vocal ranges in perfect harmony. It was a moment of humble elation and accomplishment for Eugene McGonagle (organist), Mickey McGurk (guitarist) and the entire team of choristers. I felt very privileged to be a part of such an amazing group of talented people who all contribute in their own special way. It's hard to describe the joy of having my then seven-year old daughter beside me while we sang together the beautiful sacred hymns to a full congregation.

Our 10-year-old son, Oscar



greatly feels the loss of his altar serving duties during this time of Covid. Although he still has the opportunity to ring the bell from our pew during the Consecration, he quite often comments that he misses his work and his singing together with Fr Colhoun at Mass.

Each year, my father gives us a gift before Christmas; money to spend on the family. Last year my husband, Nicky and I decided that we would ask our children, Oscar, Darcey and Tilly, if they could help us decide how best to spend Grandad Kennedy's gift. After a very short deliberation between the three, they were unanimous in their decision that we should invest in a great crib for Christmas. And so, to the Holy Shop in Omagh's High Street we headed. It had success written all over it because the children had a great plan. Oscar would do the negotiating with Lucia, the shopkeeper. Darcey,

with her great attention to detail, would determine the best crib. And Tilly, three-and-a-half years old, was set to find the perfect Baby Jesus. Nicky and I were mere chaperones!

After some discussion around the displays, they reached agreement on the perfect crib for our family home. But it was down to Oscar to seal the deal with Lucia and get a reasonable price. This simple little experience has given us a wonderful memory of Christmas 2019. And we would never have had it, had we not shopped locally.

The click of a button and a debit card transaction online does not last very long in the memory of many, but an actual in-person buying experience and the haggle of a good bargain will last a lifetime in the memory of a child.

This beautiful crib will adorn our home and give us true Christmas cheer for many a year.



We will have to be creative about how we can share joy of Christmas *by Bronagh Currie*

I have lots of memories of Christmas which I have cherished over the years. I remember, as a child, all the joy of the Christmas presents from Santa, decorating the house and getting the crib (hand made by my dad) made up at home with the nativity scene, and the excitement of seeing the big crib in the chapel and all the life-size statues, and finally seeing the baby Jesus statue being put into it on Christmas Eve.

I also remember, as a child, being fascinated by the whole Christmas story and thinking of what it might have been like the night baby Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph in the stable. I have lovely memories of the Christmas Carol services and everyone singing along to all my favourite Carols.

I have special memories of Christmas dinners and the warmth of home with my mum, dad, brothers, and sister, and meeting up with friends and wider family.

Now, with my husband and our

own family, we get to share this joy and wonder with our family, putting up our own crib, visits to Nana and Grandad's with all the cousins, and seeing our aunts and uncles.

The photograph I have shared is one of my children a few years ago at my mum and dad's house for the 'all important' visit before we went to Christmas Eve Mass.

This year will be different because of Covid-19. We will have to be creative in thinking of how we can share the joy of Christmas and the Christmas story without putting the ones we love, who are vulnerable, at any increased risk.

This year, we will be keeping that social distance and finding other ways to make new Christmas memories, and maybe appreciating it all the more when we can share a hug with mum and dad, family and friends, and we will look forward to the time when all our choirs can sing and play again and restrictions aren't needed anymore.



A Christmas past in Newtownstewart - junior choir members with Fr Roland Colhoun.



Whatever Christmas looks like this year...it will be just as special if not more so

by Charlotte Gormley

WHEN I think about Christmas, I immediately think about family. I know that Christmas can be a sad and lonely time for many people, which makes me appreciate my family and the Christmas we have together even more.

When I think about past Christmas, each one brings me back to very happy, funny, joyful and loving memories. There is never just one memory that stands out to me, just lots of great ones that will stay with me forever.

I am from Northumberland, in the North East of England, and have lived in Derry for a couple of years now. I love living in Derry, but naturally there are times when I miss home and all my family and friends in England. I'm sure a lot of people can relate to this, even if they haven't moved away from home, because of the world that we currently live in; where maybe we haven't been able to see our family or friends, due to the pandemic.

However, I look forward to Christmas every year for the fun, food, games, time to relax and

everything else that comes with the season of Christmas. Even though I will be looking forward to all the same things this year, what will be the most special part of Christmas for me will simply be going home and seeing my family; something that a lot of us haven't been able to do for a long time.

Christmas 2020 will definitely be different from Christmas past, for example, my family and I would normally go to our local parish carol service and Mass on Christmas Eve night. We then come home full of joy and excitement and maybe wrap up 'pigs in blankets' for the big dinner the next day, and give each other our secret Santa presents.

This year, however, we will not be able to go to a carol service and we might have to gather around the TV to watch Mass on the webcam on Christmas Eve.

But for me, whatever Christmas looks like this year, it will be just as special, if not more special, as I will be able to spend time with my family, enjoying old traditions and also embracing new ones!

Maybe Christmas doesn't come from a store... Maybe Christmas means a little bit more

by Deirdre McElholm

WOULDN'T it be wonderful to not hear the words, 'lockdown', 'self-isolate', 'Covid-19', 'R-rate' for just one day?! The reality is that Christmas this year will be very different for many of us. There is already an air of caution and anticipation of what is to come in the next few weeks. However, I believe that this Christmas can still be one of joy, hope and camaraderie.

This year has given us all a harsh wake up call to the true fundamentals in life. What people are yearning for most this year is human connections, hugs, family time and togetherness. Gifts, material possessions, all seem somewhat superficial and secondary in this current pandemic.

Christmas is normally a time to rekindle with school friends, to attend Christmas party nights in the most sparkly dress possible, and to eat all the

beautiful delicacies in Christmas continental markets. This year, it will be punctuated by a tone of sadness as these events will no longer be possible.

Additionally, I will remember and reflect on the loss of loved ones, including my late granny, Anna, who is pictured, and seeing empty chairs around the table. However, I have a lot to be grateful and thankful for.

When I think of Christmas Day, I will be surrounded by my close family and all that springs to mind is joy and contentment. We have stocked up on board games and will be tuning in to a variety of virtual Carol services and Christmas Masses, and there will be an unlimited supply of hot chocolate and marshmallows! No doubt, there are preparations already in place for a McElholm quiz night!

As Pope Francis reminds us, "Christmas is joy! Christmas isn't a temporal celebration in the memory of a beautiful event. Christmas is an encounter with God!"

When I think of my past Christmases, I have fond memories of pure joy, thrill, and love. The build-up and anticipation are arguably the most exciting moments in December. Particularly, in school, there is a palpable atmosphere of the Christmas festivities. Secret Santa, Christmas jumper days, Nativity plays and Talent shows are the highlight of both staff and pupils' December. There is a happiness in the chaos!

One thing I will miss most this year are the Carol Services. The



nativity scene, combined with 'O Holy Night' echoing the Chapel, is a hauntingly beautiful call to experience the humility of that first glimpse of Jesus' life. Mary experiences the birth of Jesus in a condition of extreme poverty: she has to lay him 'in a manger', with shepherds the first people to visit the baby Jesus.

Today, I think of charities at this time that have struggled so much in this pandemic and it is important to remember the words of Jesus, "Whatever you did to one of the least of these my brother, you did it to me."

Health and happiness are the true gifts this year; we must thank God for this and pray for those less fortunate this Christmas.

Finally, with the news of

vaccinations in sight, the words: "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices", can still ring true today.



A past school Christmas.

A sense of belonging...

...the essence of Christmas by Edel O'Connor

FOR me, the essence of Christmas is that warm magical feeling of belonging. To be human is to belong; to belong in the community of family, friends, neighbours, colleagues at work and our faith community.

I grew up in Wexford in a house with three generations living together. I was blessed to have our dear granny live with us and thus benefitted from that extra source of love, comfort and belonging.

The magical season of Christmas was and continues to be loved by all in my family. Over the years, each generation brought their own special touches, including my late granny's homemade Christmas pudding and my dad's handmade wreaths for the graves, now made with the assistance of my nieces.

I have included my favourite photo from Christmas 2019, which is of my daughter, Emma

Rose walking hand-in-hand with my parents. Every year, Christmas brings us all the opportunity to bring alive the chain of connectedness; linking generations between the past and the present.

In my role as RE teacher in Scoil Mhuire Buncrana, a community spirit across generations is celebrated every year during Advent. The students organise the senior citizens' Christmas party, make St. Vincent de Paul hampers and perform at carol services in the parish and local nursing homes. Our faith is allowing us to weave connections between people in our community. It is wonderful to see the students responding to the call of the Holy Spirit to be true witnesses of Christ in our society.

2020 has become the year of the community with that message, 'we are all in this together.'

However, in reality it has been a lonely, isolating year for so many and our trust in the future has lost its innocence, with a real sense of crisis hitting our world. Crisis comes from the Greek word 'krinein'; meaning 'to sift'.

This year has also given us the opportunity to sift through our thoughts, to listen to our hearts and become aware of what it truly means to belong. Like never before, we have valued the people in our lives.

My prayer for this Advent season is that people get to celebrate Christmas with their loved ones. Christianity is built on and rooted in relationships. May the founder of Christianity, the Lord Jesus Christ shine his light brightly on our world and may this Christmas be filled with faith, hope, love and a real sense of belonging.



Christmas for me has always been about The Crib

by Jacklyn Roberts

CHRISTMAS for me, for as long as I can remember, has always been about The Crib. From a very young age, it was my privilege to be given the job of putting up my Granny's crib - a small paper mache manger which symbolised love in abundance in the most simple of forms.

Granny always reminded me a few days before the Feast of The Immaculate Conception that it was almost time for the masterpiece to be revealed. It was such a special occasion. If it was a school day, I remember I would be so excited, I couldn't wait to get granny's as I knew the amazing memories to be made lay ahead.

When the day arrived, the box was placed in front of me and enclosed where some of the most fragile yet important pieces of the Nativity, which included cotton wool, hay from previous cribs in the Long Tower Chapel, a golden star and, of course, the tiny figurine of the baby Jesus. It was all about simplicity.

Granny taught me the art of contemplating the Crib and now, when I look back on it, the art of getting lost in love and adoration of Jesus. For something so small, I spent hours making it fit for a king. And, after all, there I was waiting for the arrival of our King Jesus. The figures were old and worn and I held them tenderly with love and affection, as Granny taught me the importance of each figure. I listened with the wonder and awe of a child at how



each symbolised something so mystical and magical, which I can only wish and pray for my own son.

Year after year, the memories made truly became a testament not only to my granny's faith but I have absolutely no doubt this tradition shaped the person I am today. Togetherness, love, simplicity, purity and hope were among the graces bestowed during these moments and forever memories.

More than ever, especially this year, how I wish that she was here to walk me through Mary and Joseph's journey to the birth of our Lord just one more time. If Covid-19 has taught us anything, it is to never underestimate the value of human connection, to appreciate those we love just that little bit more and to gently touch each other's souls in the humblest

of ways, through a smile or a kind word.

The Jesus I know and love, born in a lowly manger with hay for a bed, reminds me every year to pause, wait, follow that shining star, breathe and contemplate the majesty of the Chosen One, who every day graces us with breath in our lungs and spirit in our souls, that we may recognise Christmas isn't about the lights, trees or the presents. Christmas is for Christ; the Christ that loves you with an everlasting love and has shaped your destiny all from the beginning, from a tiny manger. The Boy Child of Mary who came that we may all experience a Christmas in our hearts everyday by knowing we are loved beyond measure.

Since my Granny made her way safe to the arms of Jesus 15 years ago, this little crib I speak of sits

pride of place in my own home, that I share with my husband and my son, and each year I spend sacred moments placing the cotton wool, the stable, the hay and the golden star all as an act of prayer and love, knowing she is right there beside me, watching and smiling, as I now pass on this family tradition to my own child.

This Advent, as we await the arrival of the Christ Child, may we be enriched with hope as we contemplate the nativity in our own homes and witness love in abundance in our own families, in our friendships, in our communities, and in the kindness and compassion we show to our neighbour. For after all, Jesus will always be the reason for the season. May your memories reflect this always.



A real Christmas

by Jean Doherty

I have lots of memories of Christmas which I have cherished over the years. I remember, as a child, all the joy of the Christmas presents from Santa, decorating the house and getting the crib (hand made by my dad) made up at home with the nativity scene, and the excitement of seeing the big crib in the chapel and all the life-size statues, and finally seeing the baby Jesus statue being put into it on Christmas Eve.

I also remember, as a child, being fascinated by the whole Christmas story and thinking of what it might have been like the night baby Jesus was born to Mary and Joseph in the stable. I have lovely memories of the Christmas Carol services and everyone singing along to all my favourite Carols.

I have special memories of Christmas dinners and the warmth of home with my mum, dad, brothers, and sister, and meeting up with friends and wider family.

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own family, we get to share this joy and wonder with our family, putting up our own crib, visits to Nana and Grandpa's with all the cousins, and seeing our aunts and uncles.

The photograph I have shared is one of my children a few years ago at my mum and dad's house for the 'all important' visit before we went to Christmas Eve Mass.

This year will be different because of Covid-19. We will have to be creative in thinking of how we can share the joy of Christmas and the Christmas story without putting the ones we love, who are vulnerable, at any increased risk.

This year, we will be keeping that social distance and finding other ways to make new Christmas memories, and maybe appreciating it all the more when we can share a hug with mum and dad, family and friends, and we will look forward to the time when all our choirs can sing and play again and restrictions aren't needed anymore.

As daylight falls, so rises the joy and happiness of welcoming the birth of the Saviour

by Fr Patrick Lagan

SHORTLY after I arrived at St Eugene's Cathedral, I was told that one of the highlights, one of the many treasured moments in the life of our parish, was the atmosphere that surrounded Christmas Eve. Not only for the altar server rehearsals, the sound of choirs practicing, but in the strained distance, the sound of muttering. You might say a type of sacred muttering, for these words were noises of people coming throughout the day for Confession.

Following the 10 am Mass, the Cathedral was prepared and as the day progressed so did the many smiles, the greetings and the warm wishes from so many who had come to this very sacred ground to have an encounter with

the mercy and compassion of Christ.

It is a powerful reminder that, despite the many hours and laborious efforts to celebrate the season of Christmas, the greatest preparation we can have as Children of our loving Father is to encounter Him in His compassion, to come before the priest, to humble ourselves and to name that which may be causing us hurt or shame, and to hear those words uttered that we not have only been forgiven but that we are sent forth in peace, a peace we are told by Jesus the world cannot give.

The image that I have chosen captures the almost dark Sanctuary. As the daylight falls, so rises the joy and happiness of



so many who come here on that blessed day to receive strength to welcome the birth of the Saviour.

My hope for this Christmas, albeit in certain restrictions, is that this same joy and peace will still be

celebrated. That even during days and weeks of lockdown, people will still have the opportunity to come and have that encounter with the Lord of love and mercy.

We can only do our best to make this Christmas just as special as others

by Niamh McLaughlin

MY favourite thing about Christmas is a family tradition that occurs every Christmas Eve. Every year, my family go to Mass on Christmas Eve, and then after Mass, most of my mum's family come to my house after.

We stand by the stove to try and get heated from the cold, get the kettle boiling for the numerous cups of tea and coffee, and then we exchange our gifts.

I just love the hustle and bustle that comes with that tradition; it has been happening for as long as I can remember, and I look forward to it every year.

Throughout the years, we have lost loved ones who would have been there every other year, but even though they haven't been with us in the last while, we never forget that they are still there with us.

With Covid-19 here, I am gutted that we won't be able to have our gathering on Christmas Eve. I don't know what it will be like this year, but I know that we can only do our best to make it just as special.





Kathleen Grant and her twin, Briege, enjoying a past Christmas.

This year has been difficult and sad but we are there for each other

by Kathleen Grant

CHRISTMAS past for me held great excitement for Santa's visit! Dandy, Beano and Bunty annuals, the board games and windup toys, colouring books were amongst the presents he brought. I also remember getting a range once, with all the pots and pans.

Christmas meant as well that members of my family, who in the 50s had to emigrate for work, came home to spend their Christmas with us and that meant financial gain to my little purse!

Later in life, lovely memories I have are of my mother mixing and boiling the plum pudding in a flour bag that had come from Swan's Mill, in Buncrana, with the name washed off. She had to make two because one of the brothers ate most of one of them. The aroma in the kitchen was mouth watering, but all the water stains on the ceiling were not welcomed! My mother did not weigh any of the ingredients; her judgement was spot on. The turkey was reared by us, and thankfully I never had to get it table ready! Wasn't it wonderful way back then that each family could provide so much of the food themselves.

On Christmas Day, my father had a rule that the cattle and horses got an extra meal that day. In the 50s, that must not have been easy. It touched my heart to learn that is what Christmas is about.

It was a must in years past that you went to confession and the numbers were big; something that is sadly not seen now.

One Christmas Eve, our local curate paid a visit to our old home one as the following year we were moving house. It was around 8 pm and I had the turkey in the sink getting it ready. I showed him into the kitchen, where some neighbours had gathered

and the yarns were great, tea made, and photos were taken. When everyone was leaving, two hours later, I remembered I had forgotten to come back to the poor turkey. I had to sit up late to see the cooking project through.

I now mark Christmas by sending lots of cards. It's lovely to think of each one as you write their name and, sadly, each year a name or two must be crossed out. I use battery candles for the windows for safety and, on Christmas Eve, a blessed candle is lit and placed in a window.

I look forward so much to Christmas Day Mass, celebrating this beautiful feast and singing along with the choir the old traditional Christmas hymns.

I think the current pandemic might change the way we celebrate socially this year. Perhaps no handshakes or hugs and having to wear a mask. I look forward to visiting the crib in the church and there's one at home that my brother made and it takes pride of place each year. Thankfully, all parishioners can view Mass on our newly installed webcam if numbers are restricted.

Burt community puts up a fine Christmas tree with lights that brings warmth to Christmas for us all and strangers that pass through the area. This year has been a difficult and sad one for a lot of the families but we are there for each other. This time of year does bring the best out in people.

Our parochial bingo is also a casualty of Covid, and the Christmas one was always extra fun with all the goodies in the raffle.

May you all be blessed with the beautiful peace of Christmas. One last wish I have is that it snows in Burt around Christmas, so that my garden will look as good as the next and I can capture some photographs too. Keep safe.

All my best Christmas memories have nothing to do with the presents

by Margaret Keys

WHAT a year! As 2020 draws to an end, I find 'surreal' coming top of my mind. For a brief moment in our lives, this Christmas we can pause, with time to stop, think, and consider what is truly important, and all due to a global pandemic that brought such despair to the world.

As Christmas approaches, if, like me, you are worrying about whether you've got the right Christmas presents for your family, we have to stop and think about our memories of Christmas and what truly mattered.

Thinking back to my childhood, I've realised that all the best Christmas memories have nothing to do with the presents.

My fondest recollections are mostly of special events I had with my family. In the run up to Christmas, journeys to and from relatives were fun, when there were Christmas trees to count in the windows of the houses we'd pass. One special night each December, we'd stroll through Derry City admiring the lights

put up to decorate the town and, in particular, visit the wonderful animated moving toy display in Austin's window.

And then there was the excitement of Christmas Eve. My mum always used to leave us a set of brand new pyjamas on the bed. She said that they were "delivered by the elves so we'd look smart for Santa". I loved the idea of the elves sneaking in to make sure we ready for the big man.

And, of course, there was Christmas morning. It was full of anticipation, excitement and thrill. We only had one rule: mum and dad told us we couldn't wake up before 7 am. That was torture! My sisters, brother and I would all anxiously wait until the clock finally hit 7. Then, we would sprint down to mum and dad's room and open our stockings in bed together. We all got into my parents' bed – which was quite a squeeze!

We would, of course, put on our new Christmas clothes and attend 12 o'clock Mass every Christmas

morning. I would usually sing! 'O Holy Night' was a very special hymn in our family. Until I sang that, my father only then felt his Christmas had started!

The times that really stand out as good memories are the ones where my family focused on helping others have a great Christmas too.

I have been blessed to have been part of many amazing stories. Understanding the gift of giving as a child has completely shaped the person I am today – all thanks

to my parents.

For 2021, I can only pray that we may have many more memories. May we move forward after this watershed year to remain focused on what is truly meaningful in our lives.

(Margaret will be doing a live online concert on Christmas Night and has been busy with recordings for *Songs of Praise*, which will be broadcast in the New Year. Check out her website, Facebook and Twitter accounts for further details.)



Margaret (right) and her twin sister, Rosemary, with their parents, Bill and Mary Keys.

The first Christmas was pretty simple... It's ok if yours is too

by Fr Gerard Mongan

AMONGST my memories of Christmases past has to be Thumper and Nelly, the donkeys who graced both Long Tower and Carnhill with their presence at Carol services and Christmas Mass.

Thumper was bold enough to get in to Long Tower Church in 2009, leave Mary off and get out as quickly as he could in case of accidents! Much to the delight of

the children present nonetheless.

That was the same year that the Baby Jesus couldn't be found and someone kindly brought a crying doll from Creggan. It roared all the way up the middle aisle as it was brought to the crib at the beginning of Christmas Eve Mass.

This year, things will be a lot quieter. But perhaps that's the way the first Christmas was.



Jesus is our hope...and we can celebrate His birth regardless of what lies ahead

by Mary McMenamin

CHRISTMAS in our home has always been a very happy time of year. We have always tried to remind ourselves what Christmas is really about and to keep that at the centre of the celebrations.

When we decorate our home, my husband's handmade crib is the most significant feature, holding a special place in our house.

Each year, we prepare for Christmas and the birth of the baby Jesus by going to confession and Mass on Christmas morning as a family.

I am a member of our local Church choir in Castlefinn, and I particularly enjoy the beautiful hymns and carols sung at the Masses during the Christmas

season. Fr Oliver Crilly is a wonderful priest and he always makes everything very special.

Christmas is so important to us as a family, especially since my son, Christopher was born on Christmas Day 21 years ago this Christmas. He was born a few minutes after midnight, so I spent that Christmas Day in the hospital, but it was truly special.

I have hosted Christmas dinner in our home throughout the years with our family gathered together but, for the last few years, our children have been taking turns at hosting Christmas dinner for all the family.

The sound of laughter and grandchildren playing echoes through our home and we feel

truly blessed that God has given us this wonderful gift of family.

This year will be different, no doubt, without the same freedoms of Christmases past but, please God, we will be allowed to attend Christmas Mass and still enjoy the company of our families.

It is important to remind ourselves that Jesus is our hope. He is always with us and we can celebrate his birth regardless of what lies ahead.

Wishing you all a very Happy, Holy & Peaceful Christmas.



This Christmas...less buying could give more time to be with oneself, with others and for prayer with God! *by Noel Bradley*

MY first strong memory was hoping for a bicycle for Christmas. I believed in Santa at the time but was on the edge of unbelief and wondering. I do not remember telling my parents what I would like for Christmas. But there it was in the kitchen, as I came down the stairs early in the morning with great expectation: a black Raleigh bicycle! It was the happiest moment of my life so far, at that time. It brings joy and a tinge of tears even now recalling it.

Over all the Christmases of many years, it was being together as a family that I appreciated the most; just being together. There were seven children in all; three boys and four girls. It meant so much because we had a business to run, with a family hotel, bar and grocer shop. We were always busy serving people in one way or another, in the shop or hotel or bar. So, there was always work to be done and no time to sit together as a family.

My mother was in the hotel cooking all day. She baked a big

scone every day, made marmalade jam for the shop and hotel, and made other jams when fruit was in season. She often recited the long poem, 'Sam Magee' while baking, leaving me with plenty of homely memories and smells. I can still see her lovely, strong hands baking; the shape and smoothness of their skin. She occasionally sang 'She moved through the fair'.

All lovely memories! But the main one is that for one day in the year, Christmas Day, the hotel, shop and bar were closed and we could be together, as a family, around the table eating a meal and together in the sitting room after the meal.

This was the only day in the year that this could happen. We never got the opportunity to sit down together during the year. One or other of the parts of the business would be open. It is hard to believe looking back. Now I see that work and business can take over the life of a family and you pay a price for letting it happen. Hindsight is great but foresight

is better. How do you get that at the time? Life is lived forward and understood backwards as the philosopher Kierkegaard said.

Anyway, you can imagine how precious that time was for us. Of course, who did all the cooking? So even at this precious time my mother had still to worry about the bulk of the cooking. Then there was always the odd person ringing the door bell looking for a carry out from the bar - half a dozen stout or bottle of whiskey! A pain in the neck!

My hopes for this Christmas would be that people would appreciate that it is the closeness and unity of family or friends that matters. I cannot understand all the talk and concern, during these restrictive times of Covid-19, about getting out for Christmas shopping. Do most people not go over the top in all the buying at Christmas anyway? Would it take away from your happiness if you bought less? And while we need to celebrate, do we need to do so much shopping to celebrate with each other. More and more stuff



won't add to our happiness. Less buying could give more time to be with oneself, to be with others and even for prayer with God!

"Less is more", Pope Francis says. It certainly can be. I have seen people in Nigeria happy with each other and celebrating

Christmas with just the basics of a plate of rice and a miniscule bit of goat meat and sauce, pausing and praying devoutly in gratitude for their food.

I'm dreaming of a waste-free Christmas, less buying, more sharing of companionship and

friendship, plenty of kindness and forgiveness and love all round.

We did not take spontaneous photographs back in the fifties and sixties. This photo is a very formal one in 1963. I like it because I am the best looking of them all!

To share a happy family Christmas would be highlight of difficult year *by Shaun Doherty*

WHEN I think back to the 1950s, I was living on the Northland Road, Derry, with my parents and seven siblings - later to rise to 10 living; five boys and five girls. I became an altar boy in St Eugene's Cathedral in the early 1950s, having gone through the ritual of being taught the Latin responses for the Mass by my Principal teacher in St Eugene's Boys Primary School, in Rosemount, Mr Lawrence Duffy, who had picked us out in Primary 1, now it would be Primary 3, after Baby Infants and Senior Infants. He would take us out of class, which was in one of the Nissan huts on the Rosemount site, for practice and rehearsal of the Latin Responses for the Latin Mass.

So when Christmas beckoned, I was on the rota for the 6.30 am Christmas Mass; the Mass of the Dawn. Due to my tender years, I was spared having to serve at the First Mass at Midnight. There were more senior altar servers appointed for this! I was probably one of six altar servers appointed to serve at the Dawn Mass and the pecking order was important. The older altar servers, some aged 14, hogged the main jobs of the bell ringing at the consecration and moving the Roman missal and stand from one side of the altar.

I had to wear my soutane and white surplice, along with my black gutties aka plimsolls. No Nike/Adidas in those days! These items were deposited in my little,

cheap suitcase for carrying to St Eugene's at 6 am on Christmas morning - no time for examining Christmas presents that I can remember.

The weather that morning was cold and icy. Because I lived on Northland Road, opposite the Fire Station and next to the old Asylum, the road down to the Cathedral allowed me to sleigh down the main road to the Model School and walk the rest of the way. I was excited and honored to serve Christmas Mass.

The old sacristy is still there, modernised. We got dressed in red soutanes for the occasion, lined up at the sacristy door in pairs and waited for the priest to exit from the priests' sacristy, which became a confessional. The priest may have been Fr Dessie Mullan, Fr Anthony Mulvey or the ADM, Fr Hugh Browne. The altar was lit up with candles, including the tall ones at the back of the altar, which, at the end of Mass, if you were lucky, you were sent out by the sacristan, Paddy Gormley, to extinguish.

My memories of the Dawn Christmas Mass and the Mass of the Day are blurred, as we went through the rituals. What I do remember is myself holding the paten reverently under the chin of each communicant as they received Jesus on the tongue, while they knelt at the altar rails, which also had a cloth folded over them. I don't know what purpose



the cloth played, as the paten I was holding was there to catch any particles of the Most Sacred host.

As a seven or eight-year-old, it was hard to have to wait until after the Dawn Mass for the Day Mass, when my thoughts were wandering towards my Christmas pressies.

Those old days have long passed; Vatican II has brought the Mass face-to-face, with us using our own language. We are now actively responding when we attend daily/Sunday Mass with our priests. One great difference in 2020 is that we know our priests on a personal level. They have come down from the rarefied atmosphere of the 1950s to a position where we can share our thoughts and needs with them, and even suggest ideas to them.

Sandra and my hopes for Christmas 2020 are: the churches

will be open for Midnight Mass and Mass on Christmas Day, with full participation; if no choral singing, at least the participation of all of us who can attend Mass, while remembering those people who have to isolate and are sick; and that we will be able to share a happy family Christmas with our children and grandchildren. It will be the highlight of a difficult year.

The photo I have chosen is from the Christmas we took our first grandchild to Causey Farm in 2016. We might have been looking for the spirit of Christmas, but we didn't reckon on a camel, reindeer and a whole host of furry friends too, when we visited there. Causey is a real working farm in Co Meath, with cows, pigs, geese and chicken. And the rumour was that Santa Claus was holed up there too, with Mrs Claus and his army of elves.



This Christmas we are being forced to return to simplicity of Christ's birth *by Sonya Darcy*

CHRISTMAS has always been my favourite time of year, so I have many happy memories of Christmas; Nativity plays, lights being switched on in the town centre, new pyjamas on Christmas Eve, Santa coming and, of course, having to leave my new toys to go to 'God's house'.

As I grew up, Christmas became much more about family. Christmas Day and Boxing Day meant meeting up with cousins and uncles and aunts, who all were home and, somehow, we all fitted in Granny T's house at the one time! Christmas Mass was always packed, and everyone joined in singing Christmas carols.

As a teacher, Christmas is usually about community, Advent Prayer Services, Carol Services, SVP food hampers and our coffee mornings for past and present staff.

As a parent, I usually welcome the peace and tranquillity of Christmas Eve. The mad dash for last minute presents is all forgotten, the fire is lit, and the house is tidy for a short time!

This year, more than ever, it is less about the glamour and glitz, the presents, and the rush. It is very poignant that we are being forced to return to the simplicity of the birth of Christ born in a manger, and the hope that came with His birth.

I know it will be different in many ways. We are being forced to slow down once again, to recognise the important things in our life and to remember the lessons from the first lockdown.

I can't wait to have my family around me and to put on our Sunday best to go to 'God's house'; something we all took for granted.

The real joy of Christmas is the good news of a Saviour born to us

by Rhonda McColgan

AS I sit here and reflect upon Christmas' past, I cannot help but notice a range of different emotions being stirred up in my heart. When I think of the joy of Christmas, I am filled with warm thoughts of family, treasured friends, Christmas parties, wrapping presents, turkey dinners, mince pies and festive cheer! Another emotion that presents itself is sadness. Sadness, as I think back on loved ones no longer here, failed friendships, and regrets over poorly handled situations.

For many years I didn't particularly look forward to Christmas. When I was 15 years old, I celebrated what turned out to be my brother's last Christmas with us, as he died the following April of 1991. Mark was 22 years old when he died of pneumonia. A fragile boy from birth, he was prone to infections and frequented St James' Hospital many times in Dublin, where we grew up. In fact, his last Christmas turned out to be celebrated around his hospital bed, as he had been admitted for a few days over Christmas for yet another chest infection.

For many years, I was filled with feelings of guilt because if I had known that that would turn out to be his last, I'd have made a bigger fuss! Instead, I remember feeling a bit bored in the hospital and was anxious to get home to the

tv and, no doubt, plenty of treats. So the dreaded guilt marked my thoughts of Christmas for quite a few years.

So, fast forward to 15 years later, and the photo I chose is of us feeling proud as punch as we presented our baby girl on her first Christmas to friends and family (she's in her baby seat). This photo reminds me of how I found my joy in Christmas again! I knew that I owed this to God, who blessed me with a loving husband and three beautiful children.

I am reminded of how our dear Mother Mary presented her precious bundle to those who were sent to find him in a manger. It makes me think of my own mother, Lord have mercy on her. Did she contemplate how perhaps her baby boy would be taken home too soon, given his fragile diagnosis at birth?

Mary, having known the scriptures very well, most likely wondered about her baby being born in this place as she approached the cave. I recall an explanation given from an American author, Sonia Corbett; she states that this place was a watchtower in Bethlehem, where sacrificial lambs were guarded by shepherds to ensure they were unblemished. Therefore, they were wrapped in swaddling cloth to keep them from injury or harm. How amazing that this was



prophesied approximately 700 years before, in Micah 4:8, and how Mary, having pondered all things, must have been filled with different emotions as her son was being born.

However, this is the real joy of Christmas, the good news of a saviour born to us. Jesus loves us so much that He gave Himself in the most brutal way, so that we could spend eternity with Him. 'For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but will have eternal life' (John 3:15)

This year, amid the pandemic, we may have uncertain feelings about what lies ahead. Mary and Joseph surely felt the same, but always kept their eyes fixed on the Lord. They listened to the Lord and observed the signs. Perhaps the signs of our times are permitted by the Lord to wake us up. Maybe we should use this time to stop, look around and ask ourselves what is truly important; the luxuries of this life that are passing or being together with our loved ones in the next.

Jesus tells us that the way to the kingdom is through Him; "No one comes to the Father except

through me". (John 14:16) He tells us many times in the bible to "Follow me".

There will be sadness over loved ones taken by this dreaded Covid, other illnesses too and death caused by tragic circumstances. But we must always know that the Lord loves us and is with us during these trials. We were reminded a few days ago at Mass, in Luke's Gospel, of how Jesus wept bitterly over the city of Jerusalem saying, "If this day you only knew what makes for peace".

Maybe we could use this special time of the year to be that joy of the nativity at Christmas. Perhaps, by offering to help out an elderly person with shopping, sacrifice a gift to give to one in need, drop a meal or a treat into a neighbour. Maybe, make that olive branch 'phone call that you know would make a difference. Jesus tells us, in Matthew 25:45, "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of those brothers of mine, you did it to me".

May the peace of Christ be with us all and may we, in turn, share that light with others. We can do this together, united in the body of Christ and thus remain unshaken!

We come in truth to another December...keeping faith...that peace will come

by Sr Perpetua McNulty

IN the last number of years, the Crib Festival has been synonymous with Thornhill Ministries. And while a festival was not going to be possible this year, the planned 'Celebration of Cribs' has become yet another casualty of the more recent Covid restrictions.

A fascination with the crib has been with me all of my life. When asked about the source of this, I struggle to offer explanation. Maybe it is the simplicity of it, or perhaps its capturing of the mystery of God becoming one of us, or the inconspicuous way the same crib sat on the same window sill in our house, year after year - going sometimes unnoticed, but always present, always an essential part of our family's Christmas tradition.

During Advent, the musician in me awaits the singing of the great 'O come, O come Emmanuel' hymn that heralds the imminent celebration of Christmas. Its edict to 'Rejoice! Rejoice!' stirs the consciousness to marvel once more at the wonderful exchange and relationship between our God and all of us.

At this time of year, we refresh again our Christian faith when the God of Love assures us of God's presence in eternity, God's coming in time at Bethlehem, God's coming to us in every moment of our lives, God's presence in the hearts of all who love and God's promise to come for us at the hour of our death.

In the last few years, one of the 'in-vogue' expressions has been to speak of 2020 vision. The pandemic, which has been so prevalent throughout this calendar year, has given us all a new vision, a new way of seeing.

We have begun to reflect on a number of questions: What is it that is core? What is it that is necessary? What is it that really matters?

In the absence of a more eloquent response to these and other questions I offer this prayer-poem of mine that holds a hint of



understanding.

Emmanuel

God-with-us, Emmanuel - we come in truth to another December visiting again the joys and sorrows born from love and struggle and keeping faith in Your promise that peace will come.

God-with-us, Emmanuel - we know the natural impulse to reach out to others to gift a world in need of generous hearts where refugee and stranger re-echo a pregnant couple from Nazareth in seeking a place where Love enfleshed brings hope and possibility.

God-with-us, Emmanuel - we live through fear and isolation in Covid times when familiar norms of greeting and comforting have been denied to giver and receiver and communities of faith have hungered anew for the Sacrament of Your presence.

God-with-us, Emmanuel - we celebrate your birthing at Bethlehem and hear once more Isaiah's comfort where those who walk in darkness experience the greatness of Your light that shines in the manger of our hearts when faith proclaims You our Emmanuel Our God is with us! Amen.

Christmas is about celebrating the Lord's birth...and that I will be doing

by Brenda Deery

EVERY Christmas to date has been special with many and varied lovely memories, but I guess the most memorable Christmas was the one spent in Iceland as a volunteer with the Legion of Mary.

It was the Christmas of 1986 and I was with Ann Marie Hasson, also from the Derry Diocese, together with a number of other volunteers from different parts of Ireland and other countries. We had the privilege of living in community with Fr Robert Bradshaw, a diligent and holy priest. He was always joyful and never missed an opportunity to evangelise, but always in very respectful ways.

Christmas in Iceland was particularly special as we had lots of snow and wind. I remember having to go to collect our parcels from the post office during horrendous winds. I literally remember holding onto each lamp post, to ensure that I stayed on my feet, and being blown to the next one. I've never experienced a wind like that in Ireland and

never want to.

We also had the beauty and challenge of dealing with real snow. We would have to clear away the footpath everyday to get out the door. Inside was very cosy, but outside not so. However, my memories of assisting at Christmas were lovely, as we got to decorate the tree and get cribs sorted in the local Church and our oratory. We got to prepare our Christmas dinner for approximately 12 people and Fr Bradshaw did his yearly brandy sauce.

Christmas Day was so special sharing it within our little community and, after our Christmas Masses, we did our weekly meeting and greeting parishioners and making them tea with Christmas goodies. We were always conscious of ensuring everyone got an Irish welcome. The whole Christmas story was so alive with all the beautiful cribs and beautiful sermons. It was a joyful day, with lots of sharing stories, opening presents and

playing the usual board games.

Christmas is always a special time and being in Iceland with so many wonderful people merely added to our joy. We all missed our families but knew we would get to talk to them at some point in the day, and would be returning home the following year.

With Covid-19, it would be easy to dismiss this Christmas but, to be honest, it will still have the same focus for me. The crib will go up first and the decorations will follow sometime early December. I could easily not bother as no-one will get to see them but, for me, Christmas is about celebrating the Lord's birth and that I will be doing.

I do hope we get back to Mass soon and that would be the best Christmas present. I like Advent as it is a chance to reflect and, like Lent, change myself in some way. I think there will be less pressure this year as, with the lockdown, it has made me realise that I have too much anyway and I don't need to be running to the shops

all the time. I do want to get a few presents but definitely not going overboard.

I am very conscious of the many people out there who are so worried about their jobs and finances. I will miss not getting to visit my friends and celebrating with them but will keep in touch other ways.

For me, Advent is a lovely time of the year to stop and ponder on the real meaning of life and how fickle life is for all of us. In a time of so much doom and gloom, celebrating Christmas and the birth of Our Lord will continue to restore my joy and hope in God and His people.

I am so conscious that in times of great evil, grace abounds and we are blessed to be living in a time of grace, where Our Mother will, at our request, shower down many of God's graces.

My Christmas wish is that more and more of us join the great chorus of prayer to ensure we are doing, and continue to do, God's will in all things.



What is the reason for the hope that you have? (1 Peter 3:15)

My faith journey

by Fr Francesco Gavazzi CFR

MY earliest prayer experience happened while singing the hymn, 'Here I Am Lord', in my First Grade class, when I was about six or seven years old. At home, I remember saying bed-time prayers, and mum and dad taking my twin brother and I, and our younger brother and sisters, to Mass on Sundays.

During my teenage years, I went to a Jesuit High School in Sydney. I loved surfing, skate-boarding, basketball and playing guitar, so my teenage years were fairly typical. The significant year in my faith journey was when I was 17. That year my mum gave birth to my youngest sister, Emma, who has Down's syndrome, and just after this a lump was discovered in mum's neck which turned out to be cancer. I remember our family really shifting with regards to our prayer life at that time. Mum began rising early to pray and our family was praying more together too.

That same year, I met a young Jesuit priest, who was in his 30s. He came to visit our school and I saw something different and alive about him. He had a peace and a joy, and was just so natural when discussing his relationship with God. I was amazed that his relationship with Jesus seemed to be the most true and meaningful relationship in his life. He was a witness of someone in love with God and he was free. We reconnected years later and are still friends today.

The third significant thing to happen that year was the impact on me of a novel I had been reading, about a missionary priest who had been given two years to live and was sent by his bishop to a native American village, somewhere in Canada. I remember finishing the book one evening, and then walking into the room where my twin brother was and saying that I thought God was calling me to be a priest. I wasn't

too excited about that because I wanted to get married and have a family and, hopefully, a house near the beach so that I could continue to surf. So, when that sense of a call from God started to surface at that stage in my life, my reaction was that I was young, only 17, and I was just going to live my life and ignore this; which I did for about three years.

After High School, I went on to university in Sydney and got a degree in Business Administration. Through all these years, I was trying to keep God at arm's length, so to speak, but I was still going to Mass.

One day, our parish priest announced that there was going to be a week-long parish mission in the evenings. Our family decided to go every night together. It was led by a Redemptorist priest called Fr Joe, and, again, I just found that there was something about him; he was alive and joyful. My brothers, sisters and I were the only young people at this Mission, so Fr Joe must have seen something and came and introduced himself, and we got chatting. He became a good friend of our family and we had him over for dinner often in the years that followed.

Fr Joe invited my twin brother and I to a silent retreat and it was during this time that he taught me how to pray and listen for God's voice in the Scriptures. The biggest fruit of that retreat was that I was genuinely open to God's Will, whether it was marriage, religious life, priesthood or anything else. There was a real openness and

that was something new.

In 2005, during the final semester of my time at university in Sydney, my twin brother and I went along with a Jesuit group to World Youth Day in Germany. We turned up at a church one morning for a Catechism session with one of the bishops and the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal were facilitating it. They introduced the bishop, played music and gave some witness, and it was pretty significant hearing their stories. One of the friars who shared his story that morning was Fr Columba Jordan; he was Brother Columba at that stage. The way he described his own journey really spoke to me. He said that he had heard a call but had almost put on ear muffs to block it out, and that was exactly what I was doing. That day, as I watched and listened to the friars, I was pretty sure that if marriage wasn't for me and I was going to join a community, it would be the CFRs.

I finished my degree but, in the last month of university, I felt a real strong desire and some kind of inspiration to settle the question about vocation. I was only 21, but I wanted to give myself and God some space and time to make it clear. I had been listening to cassette tapes of American theologian, Scott Hahn, which my mum had given me. During my university days, I was a courier driver and drove all around Sydney delivering magazines to Real Estate agents, and I listened to Scott Hahn talking as I drove around. It was like a formation of my faith while I was driving. I was getting catechised by a great teacher of the faith.

Steubenville

After finishing my degree, mum suggested out of the blue that I go to the Franciscan University of Steubenville, where Scott Hahn teaches. I hadn't been thinking about going there, but when mum said this to me I began to think of it as a possibility. So I decided to apply, thinking I probably

wouldn't get in, but that if I did get accepted then I would know that it was God's Will.

Part of my reason for deciding to apply to Steubenville was to discern about vocation, as it is a solid Catholic university. There was still a hope in me that I would meet a young Catholic girl and get married. I got accepted and began studying for a Masters in Theology at Steubenville in January, which was the beginning of the second semester. It was a two-year course but I only ended up being there for six months.

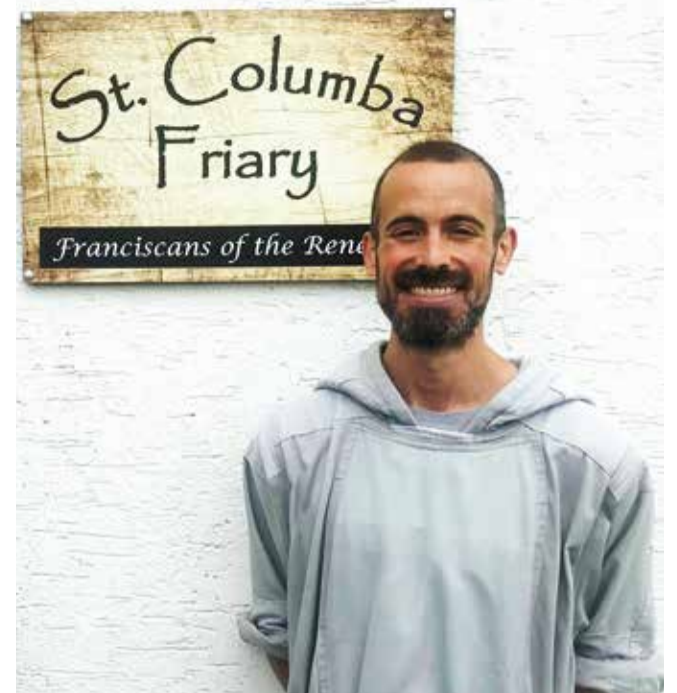
A lot happened in those six months. I visited the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, in New York and, for the first time, met a girl I thought I could marry. I also went to Russia for a month with a group from Steubenville University, which did mission trips all over the world. I would have liked to have gone on mission to a nice, sunny place but I ended up in Vladivostok, on the Sea of Japan. It's about as far east as you can go in Russia. I got my love for travel and venturing off into the unknown from my dad. He always encouraged my twin brother and me to travel. These days, both he and mum are great examples of trusting God to take care of everything, no matter what.

In Russia, we were involved in a number of things with the local church. It was really a mission to the poor in that city. We visited hospices where conditions were horrendous. People were dying and only had the bare basics of what they needed. We did quite a few visits to different hospices and to the homeless on the street, as well as the local high school and a soup kitchen for the homeless.

It was really a mission to bring Jesus to the poor there. We did some evangelising with words and preaching, but also with our presence and through getting to know them and sharing our resources with them. I was 22 at that time. It was at the end of my first semester in Steubenville and was a very interesting experience. The girl I mentioned was also on this mission but I think God was getting me in touch with a deeper desire than marriage – to follow Him wherever He leads in a total way. By the end of the trip, I knew I was going to join the Franciscan community that I had been visiting in New York.

The Redemptorist priest, Fr Joe was an old friend of Fr Benedict Groeschel, who was one of the six founders of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, and one night he got Fr Benedict on the 'phone to talk to me and my brother. I had got a sense of their community from their website and felt drawn towards them in a way I never felt towards diocesan priesthood or any other religious community.

So, when I was at Steubenville, I drove the eight hour journey to New York to spend weekends with the friars. During those six months, I had been in touch with the CFR vocations director and



Fr Francesco Gavazzi, the new local servant of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, in Galliagh.

made about three or four visits for 'Come and See' weekends, which give the experience of living with the Brothers for a few days. The beautiful thing about the friars was that I never felt that they were recruiting me. They just wanted to help me discern if God was calling me.

By the end of that semester, I had enough information and enough clarity. I had spent a lot of time in Adoration during that semester as well and that is where that deeper clarity and conviction that God was calling me, not only to be a priest but a Franciscan, had come from. There was a little Perpetual Adoration Chapel on the campus, where I was able to go any time of the day or night and pray before the Blessed Sacrament, and that was so important. I was able to sort through my feelings for the girl I had met and was friends with. It could have been confusing but that clarity and confidence of the call of Jesus to really follow Him as a priest/friar was given there in Adoration.

So, after the mission trip to Russia, I returned home to Australia and then joined the CFRs in New York, in September 2006, as a postulant. Those first five years before making final vows is a period of discernment. It's kind of like an engagement... you can always leave. While there were struggles and trials during that period, I had this underlying certainty that this was my path. I may not have looked back but I still thought about the ocean a lot...waking up in the concrete jungle of New York, I certainly missed the ocean and surf.

I made my final vows in 2011, five years after joining. I went to the seminary in 2012 and was ordained for the priesthood in 2018, aged 35. I was assigned to the community in London for two years, before being assigned as the local servant here in Derry, which I was delighted about as, four years ago, I spent the summer with the community here in Galliagh. Seminarians

have the summer months free and are sent to another friary outside New York. So, in the summer of 2016, I was sent to Derry to spend the summer with Fr Columba, Fr Isaac, Fr Thomas, Brother Patrick and Brother Seraphim. I had an amazing couple of months here. It felt special and that there was something for me here, but I didn't know what that meant at the time. I remember flying back to New York feeling really renewed and excited about finishing my studies and getting ordained. In the days before I left, people were saying to me that I would be back and that they would be praying that I would be back.

Derry

I remembered quite a few people on my return and was surprised that they remembered me. It wasn't quite like a homecoming but it definitely felt like a return to something familiar, which has been great in helping me settle in. It certainly made a difference having spent those months here in 2016. The Derry hospitality, generosity and welcome are a great gift. London is a big multicultural city and less personable, less friendly in general, so it was really beautiful to be welcomed here by people coming with food and cakes.

I arrived on June 8 to join Fr Isaac, Fr Thomas, Fr Charles and Brother Benedict in the community here, and Fr Columba before he was assigned to England. With Covid-19 restrictions, I have not been able to do much yet. So, the ministry so far has been fairly organic; encountering people on the street, at Confessions and Mass in St Joseph's Church.

This has been a bit challenging as I was expecting to hit the ground running. However, I think it is the new season that we are moving into – it has been a slower time for us in terms of ministry. Within our community, we feel that this is from God to give us time to listen and really hear what it is that He is calling us into, so that when we open St Pio House,



New local CFR servant, Fr Francesco, second left, with Fr Isaac, Fr Thomas, Bro Benedict and Fr Charles at the Galliagh Friary.

we are following Him rather than blazing our own trail. It is helping us to clarify both the vision and mission that God is calling us to.

The work on St Pio House started the year after I left and it is almost finished now. We are hoping to open in January. I'm so grateful to God and every one of His people who have been involved in the project, because through each of them God has provided for every aspect needed for the work. We have been blown away by the generosity of the people and have a real excitement about what God has in store for His people through that place. We have a real sense that God wants to bring renewal and do amazing things in the life of the people. All of us brothers have an excitement and a growing sense that God is going to continue to do something wonderful here in

Derry. We are anticipating that there is more to come.

I would love to continue our presence in St Brigid's College. It is just a joy to be with the sixth formers who are in that critical time in life. Derry is full of amazingly beautiful and gifted people and we have a desire to see them flourish.

I remember hearing one time that Assisi, in the Umbria region of Italy, where St Francis was born, was known as the Italian Galilee. I find the similarity in the names of Galilee and Galliagh an interesting connection; maybe Galliagh can also become a little Galilee, where the goodness and power and love of Jesus is not only spoken about, but really experienced in our midst.

I am reminded of the story in Luke's Gospel of Jesus in the Synagogue, where he opens the

scroll of the Prophet Isaiah and reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me...He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". Then he rolls up the scroll and says, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing".

That scripture is really speaking to us at this time. All of the baptised are given the gift of the Holy Spirit, but so many of the baptised don't know that they have gifts and charisms. We want to help people discover the gifts that they have, so that they can give them away with joy. We feel that there will be such a renewal in the area and St Pio House will be a place where that can happen; where the Gospel is shared, community is lived, God's people are served, healed and empowered. It will

be a place where we can gather to worship God, and there will be music. In the Gospels, when Jesus goes to a place, the people are amazed at the way He teaches with authority and heals all who come to Him. And because of what they experience all give praise to God on His account. So that is the hope, that God will be praised as all of us here in Derry become more and more fully alive, because this is the reason we're alive – the glory of God.

(The Franciscan Friars, in Galliagh, continue to have their First Friday Healing Nights, with the December service to be online because of Covid restrictions. Fr Charles will give the main talk and Christy McQuaid will provide the music. The Living Disciples Prayer Group is still meeting only online, through Facebook, on Tuesday nights at 7.30 pm.)

Derry Carmelites respond to suffering and upheaval of Covid-19 pandemic by instituting...

Novena to the Divine Child



THE Discalced Carmelites in Termonbacca, Derry, is instituting a Novena to the Divine Child this year, which will run from December 15-23 and will be streamed live from the Retreat Centre each evening at 7.30 pm, writes Denis McGowan.

With its strong emphasis on protection from harm, the family and young people, it is very fitting that the Novena is to be introduced in this time of pandemic, with Covid-19 causing much suffering through serious illness, death, and impact on lives and livelihoods.

The Novena to the Divine Child highlights the real meaning of Christmas - that Christ has come among us. It presents for us all, as believing Christians, an opportunity to be still and ponder the incarnation and what that event means to us today. It provides time for personal and family prayer and allows us to refocus our attention on the Christ Child, the nature of His coming - born in a byre - and, importantly, why He came.

The answer to that question is provided in the Gospel of John, "Yes, God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in

him may not be lost but may have eternal life." (John 3:16)

As Christians, perhaps we are in need of a change of mindset that opposes the world view that has almost eliminated the birth of the Christ Child from Christmas. However, it most certainly is an occasion for Christians to exclaim with great joy, as the angel told the shepherds "that a savior has been born to us; He is Christ the Lord". (Luke 2:10-11)

This novena will have a unique aspect to it, mirroring the Carmelite tradition of housing the image of the Child Jesus in a nun or monk's cell prior to it being installed in the crib. The image of the infant Child Jesus will be carried to nine homes, in nine different local areas, by an escort of volunteers. It will stay overnight in these homes each day of the Novena. This journey in many ways will also call to mind the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem to be counted in the census; a journey of some 90 miles.

The novena will comprise of nine evening Masses celebrated by the Carmelite Fathers and followed by the public Novena prayers. Prior to the Christmas Eve Vigil Mass, at 11 pm, the image will be installed in the crib. Everyone is encouraged to take part and join in the Mass and devotional prayers, placing their daily intentions before the Christ Child. This Mass will also be streamed live via Termonbacca Facebook and YouTube.

While there is an emphasis on the protection of families and young people during the Novena, everyone, who can, is invited to join along with Carmelite Fathers in Termonbacca in this first Novena to the Divine Child.

The Novena has a long tradition dating back centuries in many countries throughout the world. The religious images can be

traced back to the 14th century in Europe, with several depictions in paintings and statue form venerated in many Churches throughout the world.

Child of Prague

Over many years devotion and personal communal veneration has taken various forms. Probably one of best known in Europe and Ireland is the devotion to the Infant Child Jesus of Prague. Indeed, many Irish homes will place the 'Child of Prague' statue in a prominent window, facing outside, for protection of the home and all who live there. A tradition, still very much prevalent in Ireland, is to place it outside in the garden on the eve of a bride's wedding and pray for protection from inclement weather on the day. Many devotions to the infant Child Jesus will focus on protection from harm of one sort or another.

The Carmelite Order has a rich tradition of devotion to the Child Jesus and can trace their beginnings back to the hermits that lived on Mount Carmel. Later, when the Carmelites spread out in Europe, they carried the devotion to the Divine Child everywhere. It was most popularized by St Therese of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, known popularly as St Therese of Lisieux, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross.

Following the example of their founding saints, St Teresa of Avila and St John of the Cross, the Discalced Carmelite Order has made the point of explaining that the devotion to the infant Child Jesus is not the belief that an image made of plaster, metal or wood, will perform a miracle for us, because images cannot work miracles for anyone. It is an image that helps us call to mind and to honour the first hidden 12 years of Jesus' life on Earth, His childhood years, and to draw from the merits

that Jesus gained during his 12 years of childhood by asking the Divine Child to help us.

In 1636, Our Lord made a promise to Venerable Marguerite of the Most Holy Sacrament that became famous: "Everything that you want to ask for, ask for it through the merits of my childhood and your prayer will be heard".

In many Carmelite monasteries or convents, an old tradition grew up of placing the image of the infant Child Jesus, which would be placed in the crib at Christmas, in a nun or monk's cell for one night. This was part of a nine-day novena, during which, they prayed and venerated the infant Child Jesus, reminding themselves that the whole purpose of the incarnation was 'the word becoming flesh and living among us' (John 1:4).

So, in following on from those rich associations and traditions of the Order, the Discalced Carmelites in Termonbacca decided to institute this Novena to the Divine Child in the lead-up to Christmas this year.

Whether you are taking part or not, the Carmelite Fathers are encouraging that old Christian tradition of placing a lighted candle in the window of homes in Derry for the entire nine nights, as a sign of hope in the midst of this pandemic and as a welcome of the infant Child Jesus into your homes this Christmas. They are also encouraging those taking to erect and display a crib prominently in their homes.

Novena prayers will be available from Termonbacca or by going into the Termonbacca Facebook page or emailing termonbaccaderry@gmail.com. Those living close can call up to Termonbacca and collect them. Please note if doing so, masks will need to be worn before entering the Monastery.

Derry Diocesan Vocation Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, gentle shepherd,
You know your sheep,
and you know how to reach their hearts.
Give to the people of the
Diocese of Derry,
hearts that are open to the call of the
Holy Spirit.
Speak to the hearts of the (young) men
of our Diocese,
that they may hear your call to follow you
and serve your people as priests.
Awaken in them the courage to answer:
'Here I am, Lord, Send me.'

St Eugene, pray for us.
St Columba, pray for us.
St John Vianney, pray for us.



Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during December for:

A life of prayer:
We pray that our personal relationship with Jesus Christ be nourished by the Word of God and a life of prayer.

Prayer for Priests

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

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

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

Bless, in a special way,
Your servant

Father....
Send your Spirit upon him
So that he may always walk

in the path of faith, hope and love, in the footsteps of Christ, the eternal priest, who offered Himself on the cross for the life of the world. Amen.

Remember in prayer:

Fr John McDevitt (Dec 1st)
Fr Micheal McGavigan (2nd)
Fr Kevin McElhennon (3rd)
Fr Daniel McFaul (4th)
Fr Dermot McGirr (5th)
Dr James McGrory (6th)
Fr Brian McGoldrick (7th)
Fr Neil McGoldrick (8th)
Fr Patrick McGoldrick (9th)
Fr James McGonagle (10th)
Fr Edward McGuinness (11th)
Bishop Donal McKeown (12th)
Fr Con McLaughlin and Fr George McLaughlin (13th)
Fr Peter McLaughlin (14th)
Msgr Ignatius McQuillan (15th)
Fr Peter Madden and Fr Anthony Mailey (16th)
Fr Gerard Mongan (17th)
All priests (18th)
Fr Aidan Mullan and Fr Kevin Mullan (19th)
Fr Michael Mullan and Fr Patrick Mullan (20th)
Fr Seamus O'Connell (21st)
Fr Joseph O'Connor and Fr Colm O'Doherty (22nd)
Fr Kieran O'Doherty and Fr Brian O'Donnell (23rd)
Fr Francis O'Hagan and Fr Patrick O'Hagan (24th)
Fr David O'Kane and Fr Patrick O'Kane (25th)
Fr Peter O'Kane and Fr Kevin Mulhern (26th)
Fr Arthur O'Reilly (27th)
Fr Michael Porter (28th)
Fr Sean O'Donnell (29th)
Fr John Ryder and Fr Gerard Sweeney (30th)
Dr Joseph Varghese and Fr John Walsh (31st)

The Stable and The Cribs *by Vera McFadden*



St Luke's Gospel tells us about the birth of our Lord... "She gave birth to a son, her first born, and she laid him in a manger because there was no room at the inn." So, we know that Jesus was born in an animal shelter, for the manger was a container for their food.

I remember once, at a Christmas Mass, a priest pointing out that the baby Jesus being placed in a manger, a feeding trough, was very symbolic for He would eventually offer Himself as food for His people in the Eucharist.

Traditionally, there was an ox and an ass in the shelter. When my mother told us the Christmas story, she said that the animals had knelt. They are not even mentioned in the Gospel story, but surely their presence can be taken for granted. The manger indicated at least one resident animal, and Mary and Joseph would most likely have used one to make their long journey more comfortable.

In chapter one of the Book of Isaiah, we can read the following – "The ox knows its master, and the ass its owner's crib, but my people do not know me, they do not understand." The two animals in the shelter at Bethlehem could have been given an awareness, just as centuries later an ass would fall to its knees in adoration before the Eucharist which St. Anthony had brought.

Mary and Joseph felt great adoration and awe. They knew that this little boy was the Chosen One, the Son of God made man. God had revealed that to them. He had also shown the baby's identity to Elizabeth, and the child in her womb, nine months before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.

Nobody else knew. Although there was a prophecy about Him



coming from Bethlehem, people did not know that it had been fulfilled. That was soon to change. Visitors came to the stable – shepherds, who knelt in adoration of the child and excitedly told of great glory in the sky, of wonderful music, of hosts of angels, of the great news of the Saviour's birth, of how they had been directed to come and find Him wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And Mary pondered these things in her heart. And there, in that animal shelter with all the sweat and odours about it, they knew that all Heaven was rejoicing with them and they adored the Child, overcome with joy by it all.

Later, other visitors came to welcome the child – wise men who had journeyed an exceedingly long distance, bringing special gifts for Him. St Matthew's Gospel tells us that the star they had been following stopped over the house where the Child was and, when they went in, they found the Child and His mother and they worshipped Him.

We are not told that Mary was in a different place. Some of the people who had come to register may have gone home again, and so the Holy Family may have been able to get more suitable accommodation. Otherwise, they were still in the animal shelter.

St Claire of Assisi once had a vision of the birth of Jesus when she was singing in the choir, and it was St Francis of Assisi that created the first crib. He wanted to remind the people of the great discomfort and poverty of Our Lord's place of birth.

The first crib was on the top of the hill at Grecio, in Italy, on Christmas Eve, 1223. Thomas of Celano told of it. St Francis wished to create a deepened awareness of the great discomfort and poverty of Our Lord's place of birth. Francis had also been born in a stable, near his home. A passer-by had knocked at the door of their house and told Pica, his mother, to go there when the time to give birth was approaching, and she did.

Francis asked Sir John Valette to organise the people. He was the Lord of Grecio. They came, climbing up the steep mountain to the cave at the top. A donkey and a cow were brought, and a woman and man and a baby represented the Holy Family. It was an experience that they would remember for the rest of their lives – the wonder of it – on this anniversary of the Nativity, the prayers and the singing, and how it emphasised the hardship of the Holy Family.

Grecio

I visited Grecio twice. The first time we were on an outing from Assisi, several weeks after I had a pin removed from my ankle. Our coach had been driven

through woodland and been parked in a clearing. We were going up to Grecio for Mass in the little church that held the cave. I looked up at the top of the hill. It was quite a distance away. Then I looked at the steps. They were short, even and roomy. I felt that I could go up at my own pace, for my walking was still quite slow. I told my friend to go on with the others. I really enjoyed my climb, stopping every now and again to admire the beauty of the wooded valley below. I was in time for Mass and afterwards we visited the nearby crib museum and saw cribs of various sizes from all over the world. They were behind glass along the corridor. There were few buildings in the area, but the city of Grecio was hidden from our view on the other side of mountain.

The second time we went to Grecio, the itinerary was very badly organised. We left Dublin airport at four o'clock in the morning and, on the way to Assisi, we were to stop for Mass at Grecio. My eyesight had deteriorated rapidly for three weeks before the journey and I was to have an operation one week after my return. I had been thinking of cancelling my journey but was told to go anyway. When we got to Grecio, I began to climb the steps. The courier passed me and told me that I should not make the endeavour. She was surprised when I told her I had been there already, after I had rehabilitated following my accident. I went up another stretch, but then decided that I was keeping my friend back because I was being slowed down due to my limited sight and the lack of rest. I told her to go on and very carefully manipulated my way back down, telling a passing man to ask the priest to bring me Holy Communion.

There was another lady waiting on the bus. As we sat there and prayed and waited, I could see the little statue of St Francis sitting with his walking stick at the bottom of the steps. His feet must have been very sore. He had had an operation on his eyes also and, on my last visit to Italy, I had been in the upper room of an ancient house in Fonte Columbo where it had taken place.

When I was a child, the only crib in Derry was in the Nazareth House. It had been there in 1898, and there is a photograph of it in 'Derry Columbkille'. During the Christmas season, our parents took us there to pray by it, and many families did likewise. Apart from this, our reminders of the Nativity came from stories at home and in school and, of course, from the graphic word pictures in the carols.

Sometimes we drew a picture of the stable and star, the Holy Family, the angels, shepherds and kings. I remember that, even at a

young age, I was deeply aware that no matter how carefully I drew, I could never achieve the beauty of the Child and His Mother. This is surely emphasised in the third verse of 'Silent Night' – 'Silent night, holy night, Son of God, loves pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus Lord at Thy birth, Jesus Lord at Thy birth'.

We never tried to make a crib. There was a war on and everything was scarce. Packaging in those days was remarkably simple. One time, there was a cardboard box in our house and it served as a cart, cradle, container, or something else, depending on who was playing with it. We thought it was the most wonderful thing ever to come into the house.

Years later, there were more cardboard boxes and a variety of materials with which Hilden could make their own herbs – paper, corrugated cardboard, pipe cleaners, Plasticine, felt, paper mache, twigs, moss, straw, and lichen.

When the little clay and plastic figures came into the shops, families were able to have their own little cribs. Ours was always put on top of the piano. My brother made a plywood stable for it and painted a little window at the back. A tinsel star was attached to the middle of the roof.

I still have the little crib that we had when my children were growing up. A friend gave me a gift of a beautiful, white, porcelain crib from Fatima. There were no shepherds as it was a little Christmas crib and there were touches of gold on the edges of the clothing. Unfortunately, as they were being moved from the cupboard upstairs to the table downstairs, they broke. However, two paper clips held the heads and bodies together and no one noticed. I added some shepherds and angels of various sizes, a couple of sheep, a church, a house, and a little coniferous tree.

A few years ago, I was given knitted crib figures, some of them about eight inches long. They had been made by Fiona, a friend of my daughter. The little wool manger had its own blanket, and the figure representing Mary had been made with the left elbow bent so that the baby could be held there also. Where could I put it? The only place left was the corner of the kitchen by the end of the big table. Two low tables would hold the figures, but some background was needed. Fortunately, I had been saving cardboard rolls in case I got some creative impulse. These provided a wall for the crib, and a fence, with a couple of posts, on the uphill approach, for one table was lower than the other. A tinsel star placed above and a tinsel angel on each side provided a little more atmosphere.

Inspiring



I have found some cribs very inspiring. There was the outdoor crib in the garden at St Anthony's Retreat centre, and the torchlight procession there, with the Joyful Mysteries and the carols. The rural setting and nearby hills added to the wonder. The Columba Community also had an outdoor crib outside the window of the Adoration Chapel in Queen Street, to remind passers-by that this was the anniversary of His birth.

The Austins building at the Diamond was always one of Derry's architectural gems. It was one of the first stores to display a crib. I will always remember when the beautiful, almost life-size figures appeared in the big window at Ferryquay Street. I stood there examining every detail. Sadly, the store has been closed for a long time, but coincidentally once, a few evangelists standing by that window were offering gifts of lovely bags to passing shoppers. On one side the reason for Christmas was shown – a picture of the globe and the words, "For God so loved the world that He gave up His Only Begotten Son so that all men who believe in Him may have eternal life."

Everyone loved the crib in the Guildhall Square. It seemed to bring a greater joy to our town. We gathered near it for the pro-life candlelight procession on the Feast day of The Immaculate Conception. We went over Foyle Street, up Orchard Street, turning the corner into Castle Street and then into Linenhall Street, then walking towards the Diamond, round it, and down Shipquay Street, and back to the Guildhall Square. We had been saying the Rosary and singing hymns, and it was reminiscent of Lourdes. My artistic daughter had

inspiring memories of the crib in the Guildhall Square, and made little ceramic pictures of it, that included Shipquay Gate and some of the Guildhall.

The most meaningful crib that I have ever seen is the perpetual one at Rossnowlagh. All the outdoor prayer gardens there are beautiful, but this one has a wealth of symbolism. Near the entrance, there is a statue of St Bernadette kneeling. She is looking upwards. A little distance away, there are two flights of steps, one going to the right and the other to the left. Either of these leads to a statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Immaculate Conception. This is where Bernadette was looking. Behind Mary, there is a representation of a scallop shell. The other half of the shell contains a pool of clear water, with a fountain in the middle. The shell represents the special protection from sin that God gave to Mary. This singular privilege, the Immaculate Conception, made her worthy to be the Mother of the Son of God. She was the Chosen One. The water represents purity, grace and the action of the Holy Spirit. The steps on both sides lead to a spot near a stable and cave-like shelter and beautiful Nativity figures. There is a great feeling of peace. The message of Gabriel is fulfilled. Jesus is born, and it was for this that Mary was preserved from all stain of sin.

When our churches began to display cribs, everyone was delighted, and family groups gathered beside them. They were placed in different parts of the church; whatever position was thought the most suitable. Several years ago, I remember a live donkey being brought in one of the side doors of St Columba's Church, Long Tower, and taken

around the left-hand side of the altar, where there was a nativity pageant at the front of the church. It was very well behaved.

The crib was moved a few years ago in St Columba's Church to beside the Padre Pio statue. When Padre Pio was a boy, he remembered that St Francis had created the first crib and he and a friend then made a little crib, guided by his parents. When I was in Pietrelcina, a low shed, on the other side of the little road and near Padre Pio's parental home, had figures, crib and background, which included the hills and city of Bethlehem. It was beautifully illuminated. When Padre Pio was 15 years old, he served

the Christmas Mass, spent the Christmas period with his parents and then went up the mountain to the monastery with his teacher and a friar. They had one shared donkey between them.

Everybody loves the crib; it reminds us of new beginnings and helps us to reflect on the birth of Jesus. No matter which is the favourite crib or what it consists of, none of them can equal the one which St Francis created in 1223. And even that cannot recapture the wonder, humility and poverty of the stable in the first nativity..."Away in a manger no crib for a bed the little lord Jesus laid down his sweet head".



An Advent like no other Advent by Fr John McLaughlin

LIKE I would say to others many times, "Where are you this Advent?" Ronaldo Muñoz, the lovely man and theologian of my times in Chile, used the phrase 'tejer pueblo'; put the pieces together from your own experiences and its many strands, weaving in the strands of the national consciousness from its own reality.

What are the strands in my life? Almost all spent in Moville and with a Columban worldview and Church experience.

There was the absorbing and indelible celebration and funeral of John Hume, passing through Moville on a very wet night, with hundreds on the roadside in silent tribute to a prophet for our time and whose legend will never tarnish.

There was that awful tragedy, where Geraldine Mullan became a national figure, in grief and in the nobility of her mourning, shared by friends in Dublin and Moville, people the world over, in the streets and on the Zoom.

I had seen the same family in the pews in front of me on a Good Friday, first as a possible distraction, then bemused and admiring as she, Geraldine, helped Amelia through the ceremony and sang everything that could be sung in that celebration. We smiled warmly at each other at the end of that Good Friday service, me recognising John from the Garden Centre. Later, with the Legion of Mary, I shared the story as they told about taking the Statue of Our Lady to that family's house and the

warm reception they were given.

Can I ever forget the 'phone call from Margaret that sad day as she prepared me for the news of the tragedy..."Of course Father, you know them!" There was almost immediately a 'phone call from Dalgan and I could not get the words out.

Seeing the recent coverage of the planting of a little tree in the Community School, I read it with wonder and gratitude. Surely there is a hope and a gratitude in my own, and others, lives from all this bravery, for this Advent.

This Advent and Christmas, we, in Moville, will miss the care and the presence of Fr Paddy McGoldrick after spending 22 Advents here, his simplicity and measured reflection on all the events in the life of the Parish community, fire-tried in his own personal faith; an embedded memory in the lives of so many families and individuals. Another strand to be woven into my Advent wreath, surely.

Another positive memory of the Covid comes in the form of a little video sent on by a Dublin priest colleague, Fr Paddy Gleeson. It showed St Mark's in Tallaght, where we both served, but this time in the care of Fr Patrick McKinley and his curate. They took out their chairs to the car park and a book for comfort for two hours, on three afternoons, and heard confessions. And there was no lapse to read any book while waiting. Fr Patrick had been an altar boy while we both served in his home parish in Marino. Could we older men not

take joy and hope for Advent out of that pastoral initiative!

On the Columban front, there were many moments of hope and thanks. Lay Missionary, Kevin Sheeran gave a lovely narrative from Hong Kong of getting away from General Administration and venturing on a soup run amongst the poor in the city. Places that my own nephew and his children there will hardly ever see, not least the attractive leader living like a philosopher whom Kevin encountered amongst the vagrants. Kevin had the same dedication to the poor in his time as a Lay missionary in Santiago, and in my own former parish on the hills of Valparaíso; a calm and gentle listener whom they had loved.

On one morning recently, as I celebrated Mass in my sitting room reading from the texts on my iPad, I finished saying aloud the final collect, "through Our Lord Jesus Christ", only to be startled by a voice that came apparently from the iPad..."I am unable to locate the item "Through Our Lord Jesus Christ", but I will continue to search in the Web to locate your item". Here, to my shock, spoke Alexa, now a cultural figure to many young people on the media, but hardly putting forward an 'item' like that!

Maybe some of us know a little more about Jesus the Saviour to bring us into and through this Advent actively and prayerfully. Isaiah and his words still hold a challenge to a world that is more than slightly adrift. They will be

different for me in their meanings through the Masses of this Advent.

And a big hope that one lady has just expressed to me that her mother, Noreen, in a home in Fahan, might be once again around the family table with them for this Christmas. She is surely not alone in that, as people worry over the welfare of their mothers and fathers.

Finally, why not share, once more, the poem I put on my Christmas card for the beginning of the year 2000? A friend even quoted me on the Late Late Show...leading to confusion in my family, as to whether I had become a poet-author overnight!

Our time is now

*Dark and cold we may be, but
this is no winter now.
The frozen misery of centuries
breaks, cracks, begins to move,
The thunder is the thunder of
the flocks;
The thaw, the flood, the upstart
Spring.
Thank God our time is now
When wrong comes up to face
us everywhere.
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul men
and women ever took.
Affairs are now soul size,
The enterprise is
Exploration unto God".*

*(Christopher Fry- 'A sleep of
prisoners')*

A Word of God for your Family Life Ambition by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR



THE month of December marks for us, as Christians, the beginning of another year in our journey of faith. With the first Sunday of Advent, which we celebrated on November 29, we begin to prepare for Christmas and the coming of Christ, the Son of God, in our human flesh. But we are also preparing for beyond Christmas Day, to the Baptism of the Lord and His mission to the world on January 10.

In this we are reminded of our own mission, to bring Christ to the world through the way we live our lives in marriage and in family life, and in our parish community. This year, Christmas is going to be different because of the

restrictions imposed on us by the Covid-19 virus and the urgent need to protect ourselves and one another from contracting it. This may be a real blessing for us because we can now focus on what Christmas is really about and on where we most need to celebrate Christmas, in our homes and families.

Look where you are going!

At this time of the year, the nights are closing in quickly, the temperature drops and there is need for heavier clothing, and nature takes on a certain bleakness. All of this tends to force us to look inwards and to withdraw into ourselves.

Towards the beginning of the year, either Church or calendar, we can be inclined to look back at what has happened or not happened in the year just gone. Sometimes, what we see there gives us joy and comfort. Some of what we see might fill us with regret or anger or self-blame.

Faith teaches us to keep looking ahead, to see all the wonderful possibilities that are there for us in God's love for us and our love for one another. That is why the

theme 'Ambition' has been chosen for this month of December. St Paul writes in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Be ambitious for the higher gifts" and then places love at the top of all of those. We need to place it there also.

What is your ambition for your own life in the year ahead?

That may seem a strange question to you, but it could be a very important one. What would you like to have accomplished by this time next year? So many people just drift along year after year and are surprised at so much that happens – sometimes surprised even to find themselves still alive!

Life will always hold surprises, but they are more enjoyable when we are going somewhere. Where are you going in your life? Is it leading to eternal life? Is that anywhere in your ambitions or is it just a vague hope for you?

What is your ambition for the Sacrament of Marriage in the year ahead?

This is a valid question for all of us, whether we are married or not, since it is about one of the great

Sacraments of the Church and we all have a stake in it as Catholics.

The marriage relationship stays very alive when husband and wife are working together to make it happen. You can only work at a marriage when you are going somewhere with it! So many couples simply settle down and get into a rut. It becomes dull and dreary rather than being strong and wonderful. Where do you as a couple want your marriage to be this time next year? How will you work at bringing it there? For those of us who are not married: how will you encourage married couples to work on their marriage not just for their own sake but for the sake of the Church and the world?

What are your ambitions for your children and the children of your parish, in the next year?

Parents always want the best for their children, and it pains them when they are not able to give them as much as they want. That pain will be experienced by many parents in the next few weeks if they cannot give what their children want for Christmas, or maybe cannot give as much as the

parents of their children's friends give to them. Are your ambitions purely centred on material things, on success, on advancement?

How much of your ambition is focused on wanting your children to grow and live in freedom, in joy, in faith, and in the security of knowing they are accepted and forgiven and admired? That ambition might mean some changes with your time, your attention, your ability to show them your love.

What are your ambitions for the Church in the year ahead?

This may seem another strange question to you, but it is one that both laity and clergy need to learn to ask and to pursue. The Church has been given so much power for the world by Jesus Christ. Much of it remains unused because we do not have ambitions for setting it free. What would you like your parish to be like this time next year? How could you contribute to bringing it to that point?

What is your ambition for our world in the year ahead?

At Christmas and the New Year, Pope Francis, among many world

leaders, will express his hopes and dreams for the next year. What are yours? How would you like to see the world in twelve months' time? What can/will you do about it in order to bring that dream at least some of the way to reality?

It is easy to have vague hopes about things. This generally shows when we spend our time blaming others and even God for the way things are. When we develop ambitions in all these areas, we are immediately involved ourselves and it is in that involvement that we experience life to the full.

Ambition in the Word of God

The ambition for us in the Word of God is that the future will always be better than the past ever was. We can see this, if we look for it, in every celebration of the Eucharist, especially in the Sunday celebration each week.

It is up to us to grasp the possibilities that are there for us and to commit ourselves, week by week, to all that is good and best for ourselves, for one another in marriage and family life and in our faith communities, so that the world may believe and give praise to God. Happy New Year!

It is a holy duty to hand on the faith *by Roseann O'Donnell*



Roseann O'Donnell

IN a recent homily, Bishop Donal presented an interesting challenge to the people of the Diocese, when he observed that: "Limitation in church attendance means that the domestic church has to take on a greater part of handing on the rich treasure of faith".

What does that mean? The website of the Diocese of Cincinnati defines the "Domestic Church", as "the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ", adding that "the home [is] fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness". (<http://www.catholiccincinnati.org/ministries-offices/family-life/family/parenting/what-is-a-domestic-church/>)

What does that mean in practical



Prayer space.

terms? Well, the term, 'disciple' (from a word that means 'to learn') usually refers to anyone who follows Jesus Christ and shares His message with others. 'Sanctification' means 'to make holy' and 'holy' means to be set apart for God.

So, the 'domestic church' refers to any household where people learn about God, choose to follow Him and share His Word, and grow in relationship with Him. This is, undeniably, something worth striving for, but how can it become a reality?

It is a holy duty to hand on the faith, and we have been given all the necessary means to do it. We might be tempted to think that, because most of us are neither catechists nor theologians, we are ill-equipped to take any responsibility for handing on the faith. However, as baptised Christians, we are commissioned to share God's message of salvation. We are also re-commissioned at the end of every Mass, when the priest tells us to, "Go in peace to love and serve the Lord".

When He gave us the Holy Spirit in Baptism, and again in Confirmation, God did not merely stamp us with a label marked 'Christian'. He gave us access to all

the treasures of Heaven and, if we claim those treasures, we will have at our disposal all the necessary means to become saints, and to help others to become holy as well.

Remember what Jesus said: "Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion...how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11:11-13)

Family prayer is not expected to replace the Mass; nor are parents asked to take on the role of the priest - that would be impossible. Instead, we are asked to claim the grace which comes from our spiritual adoption as sons and daughters of God, Our Father, and to use it well. Let us ask our Father in Heaven for what we need, and trust Him to give it and to help us to use it to good effect.

A very practical way to witness to faith within the home, or family setting, is by having an attitude of joyful reverence for the Mass. Now that the Sunday obligation has been (temporarily) suspended, every family member has a golden opportunity to witness to the value of the Mass by attending anyway - not because we have to, but because we want to. We are no longer compelled by duty; now, when we attend Mass, we are impelled by love.

There are, of course, many who cannot attend weekly Mass for a variety of reasons - even in 'normal' times. However, most have the opportunity to 'attend' online, or on TV, giving us the opportunity to demonstrate, by our manner of participating, the great value that we place on the Eucharistic sacrifice. It takes no more than a humble demonstration of reverence and love during participation, whether at home or in the parish church.

Suggestions

Below are some suggestions, relative to the celebration of Mass online, which can help to add a spirit of respect and devotion to the online participation in the Holy Mass:

*Prepare your prayer space. Maybe put your laptop or tablet on a white cloth, or simply light a small candle and place it beside your TV or computer. This shows that we're not just 'watching' a video or TV programme, but giving the Mass its due place of honour.

*Dress for Mass. This shows respect for God and helps you to feel that you are attending a special event. It also shows the younger family members, or the older, cynical members, that the Mass is something important that you will take part in, rather than something to be 'watched' with detachment.

*Turn off your phone before Mass begins, and keep it off until after the final blessing. You can explain to your children that this



is God's

time and that we show love when we give Him all our attention instead of taking calls or reading texts while the Mass is in progress.

*Deal with any potential distractions before Mass begins, so that you can stay focused from the opening prayer until the priest has left the altar.

*It is helpful to pray for a few minutes before Mass begins, asking the Holy Spirit, the Blessed Mother, your Guardian Angel and the souls of those you will pray for during Mass, to help you to pray well. With that practice, it will become easier to stay focused during Mass.

You can also ask your family members to think of an intention for the Mass and encourage them to put that intention into the Chalice at the Consecration. It is said that our Guardian Angels bring our intentions to the altar during the Eucharistic prayers.

This is also a good opportunity to explain Jesus' death on Calvary and the resurrection, explaining that the bread and wine really become His Body and Blood. Jesus made an unimaginable sacrifice for us, so the power of the Mass is beyond our understanding, especially when we have difficult or painful intentions to place before the Lord.

*Reflect on the Mass readings in advance and invite the Holy Spirit to explain them to you. If you Google 'Mass readings today', you should find several websites which provide the readings. There are also apps which send you the readings every day. Have a look at the links at the bottom of this article.

If you have small children, explain in advance, that you are going to spend time with Jesus. Do what you would in the chapel to keep them occupied, eg an age-appropriate Mass book or Mass-themed colouring book might be useful. Explain what is going on.

*After Mass is ended - this might be a good time to take a few minutes to thank God for His blessings and to pray some simple family prayers. If your children hear you ask God to stay with you all throughout the day, they might grow to have a

better understanding of prayer as a loving conversation, rather than as something to be got over with so that you can get on with your day. If God is invited into the daily activities of the family, He becomes more familiar and a welcome part of the day, rather than a remote entity to be kept at a distance.

There are many other ways to share the faith, if we just have confidence to do it. For example, during lockdown, a lot of people shared their beautiful prayer spaces online. The prayer space, like the work space or the TV-watching space, can help to focus the mind. Again, it might give rise to useful questions from family members. You don't have to be an expert theologian to answer the questions. Just be sincere and keep it simple!

Some ideas for the prayer space:

*Don't clutter it up with too many pictures and other objects, but have a central focus, eg the Sacred Heart picture, the Divine Mercy image, a crucifix or a statue of Our Lady.

*You could keep your Rosary beads there, along with your prayer book, if you use one, so that they are easily accessible.

*A blessed candle is an appropriate addition, along with a small bottle of Holy Water or a Holy Water font.

*Finally, make sure that your seating/kneeling arrangement is comfortable, so that you don't spend your prayer time focused on sore knees or a creaky chair!

*Overall, the prayer space can be as small or big, plain or elaborate as suits your personality, finances and available space.

Be ready to explain to family members why this space is important, but keep it simple. This could be a beautifully simple way to witness to your relationship with God. I still have memories of seeing my father kneel in prayer by his bed each morning, before he started his day, and I am still encouraged by the simplicity and humility of that gesture. He had a simple faith, but it was deep. Many times, the memory of it has given strength to my own faith, especially when it has been weak or challenged.

Talking with teens

Allow your teenagers to ask questions and to express doubts. A young person whose questions are not answered, might not ask again, but they might look for information elsewhere, which leaves them open to false teaching.

If you don't know the answer to your children's questions, tell them so. Most young people will respect an honest response, rather than a made-up answer. Look for the answers together, maybe using YouCat (a Catechism for young people, which is also online). You could also have a look at such YouTube channels as Ascension Presents, which posts videos on a wide range of topics, ranging from how to pray to questions such as 'How far is too far?' (when dating).

If you want to develop your own knowledge of the faith, have a look at any of the excellent online resources, such as:

Discerning Hearts - www.discerninghearts.com/catholic-podcasts/

Ascension Presents - <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVdGX3N-WIJ5nUvkIBTNhAw>

Home of the Mother (Sr Clare Crockett's congregation) - website has a section for youth: <https://www.homeofthemothor.org/en/about-us/hmy>

YouCat (not just for young people!) - youcat.org

Bible online - <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

Ask the saints!

The saints are our friends in Heaven, and many of them led interesting lives before becoming holy! It can be encouraging to learn how their lives turned around, through grace. You could start with your name saints, or with a favourite saint. What do you know about your Confirmation saint?

Children's books can be an excellent way to find out about the lives of the saints. There is a wide range of inexpensive books and colouring books by Fr Lovasik which can be ordered online or found in the shops of our local monasteries and religious goods shops. In addition, if you are on Facebook, you can find pages dedicated to the saints, such as 'Portraits of Saints', to name but one. These post short descriptions of the lives of the saints, usually on their Feast Days.

You can explain to your children that the saints help us from Heaven and that, if a child has a saint's name, that saint takes a particular interest in the soul of the child and will pray for him or her, especially when the child asks for prayers.

Take delight in learning with your children and don't be afraid of their questions! There is a lot of freedom in saying, 'I don't know' because then you are free to learn together without feeling that you have to be the expert.

Pray Together

St Teresa of Avila writes, in her

autobiography, that "mental prayer is nothing else...but being on terms of friendship with God, frequently conversing in secret with Him Who, we know, loves us". Mental prayer is sometimes also referred to as the 'prayer of the heart'. In fact, St Therese, the Little Flower, wrote that, in her opinion, "Prayer is an outburst from the heart; a simple glance directed towards Heaven". No-one understands this better than children. They can pray from the heart without much need for guidance. They don't use big words or fancy imagery - love and intention are all that are needed.

Sr Breige McKenna, in her book, 'Miracles Do Happen', tells of a family whose youngest child was very seriously ill. She advised the parents to pray together as a family with their children, and to ask the older children to pray for their little brother's recovery.

Every evening, they did as Sr Breige had asked, and the parents were surprised to find that their children had no awkwardness or difficulty in praying for their sibling. The child's condition continued to worsen, but the family persevered in prayer and, after almost a year, the child's condition - which had been very serious - began to improve. As he continued to recover, the family maintained their daily routine of prayer and, even after the tumour had disappeared, the older children never left the house without having prayed with their parents and the younger children. The parents told Sr Breige that the experience had changed their family for the better.

Teaching children the joy of conversing with God is, perhaps, one of the most precious gifts we can give to them. Prayer is a treasure that will never lose its value and that nobody can take away from them. It is the doorway to a lasting relationship with God who loves them, and it is a gift that will last them a lifetime and beyond. When we have nothing, we still have God.

The Rosary

Fr Peyton, the 'Rosary Priest' coined the phrase, "the family that prays together, stays together". The family in Sr Breige's book certainly seem to have proven that maxim.

There are many ways to pray - either individually or as a family - and, while it is a very good thing to teach children to pray in their own words, it is equally good to teach them the value of vocal prayer, or praying formal prayers.

Some people complain that the Rosary focuses too much on Mary, the Mother of Jesus. However, a very little observation will show that this is not so. In fact, when praying the Rosary, we meditate on the life of Jesus. The advantage of praying the Rosary is that we focus on the life of Jesus in the company of the person who knows Him better than anyone - except, of course, God the Father and the



St Teresa of Avila

Holy Spirit.
If the full five decades are too much for your children or teenagers, choose one decade and pray it slowly, but first talk a little about the Mystery and/or show a picture that illustrates it.

You can find the mysteries of the Rosary here: <https://www.catholiccompany.com/mysteries-of-the-rosary/> and here: <https://www.catholic.org/prayers/mystery.php>.

There are also YouTube channels dedicated to prayer, which include the recitation of the Rosary, with images to help you focus on the Mysteries, and a virtual set of Rosary beads to help you keep count. No need, any more, to count on your fingers, if you can't find your beads! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sSy77qPkgRE>

Overall, the Rosary is an excellent way to introduce the life of Jesus through prayer, and an easy way to introduce the prayer of meditation. Even one decade prayed with love, perhaps with a Scripture verse between the Hail Marys, will help anyone (young or old) to reflect on the mysteries of Christ's life and love. Even the youngest child can have his/her own beads.

Holy Souls

Teach your children about Purgatory. Many people, nowadays, refer to those who have died, as being in Heaven. Purgatory is hardly mentioned, yet the saints such as Padre Pio, prayed unceasingly for souls. In fact, Padre Pio was often visited by the souls of the dead, who begged him for prayer.

St Faustina, in her diary, tells of visits from souls, including those of Sisters in her own convent, who had not gone directly to Heaven.

The Catholic Catechism tells us that Purgatory is a "purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven," which is experienced by those "who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified" (CCC 1030). <https://www.catholic.com/tract/purgatory>.

If someone is loved in this life, why would we not love them after



St Therese of Lisieux.

they have left us? Moreover, we know that the souls love to pray for those they have left behind. They cannot pray for themselves, but they can pray for us. We can help each other, then, by praying for each other - they for us and we for them. We can also offer little (and large) sacrifices for them. Children love to show love, so it would not be difficult to tell them that a little sacrifice made with love, consoles the heart of God and helps someone in Purgatory - maybe someone that they loved. If the loved one is already in Heaven, the sacrifice is not lost, as it will go towards helping another soul, or to helping someone in this life who is struggling with temptation or some other difficulty.

The Angels

Finally, we can teach children

that the angels are messengers of God, who are also our friends and our protectors. It is a good opportunity to warn young people against the dangers of taking part in occult practices. There is no need to be sensationalist, or to over-emphasise the dangers. It can be enough to say that, in Scripture, we learn the names of only three angels - Gabriel, Raphael and Michael.

Michael, whose name means, 'who is like God', is the one who defeated the rebellious angels and who helps us when we are tempted or in danger. We can invoke him as a powerful protector against evil.

St Raphael accompanied Tobias on his journey, on behalf of his father, Tobit. It was Raphael who helped Tobit regain his sight and he is often invoked for healing. His name means, 'God has healed'.

The angel Gabriel, of course, appeared to Our Lady, bringing her the message that she was to become the Mother of Jesus. His name means, 'God is my strength'. Gabriel is mentioned in the Angelus and his words are used in the Hail Mary - it was he who greeted Mary with the words, "Hail, Mary, full of grace".

Each of us has a guardian angel whose task it is to help us get to Heaven. In Matthew 18:10, Jesus says: "Take care that you do not

despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven."

The angels are our friends. We won't get to know them through cards or fortune tellers. There are fallen angels who long to bring us into error, but if we pray to the angels in Heaven, whose names we know, and to our Guardian Angels, who are also in Heaven, they will delight in teaching us about God and helping us to know Him, to grow in right relationship with Him and, ultimately, to take our places in Heaven. For, as Scripture says, "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" (Jn 14:12).

Witness

We have been given many opportunities to witness to faith. If we teach our children to pray to God as Father, if we attend Mass every Sunday (in person or online) and do so with joyful respect, if we learn the basics of our faith and share them with our young people, if we answer their questions and

learn with them, asking the souls of our loved ones, our Guardian Angels and the three Archangels, to help us, and if we pray for one another and, most importantly, love Jesus in the Eucharist, in His Word and in each other, we will do more than we can ever imagine to hand on the rich treasure of faith.

Let us claim our inheritance as the sons and daughters of God and, as His children, let us stride out in faith, trusting Him to provide us with all that we need.

Useful Links:

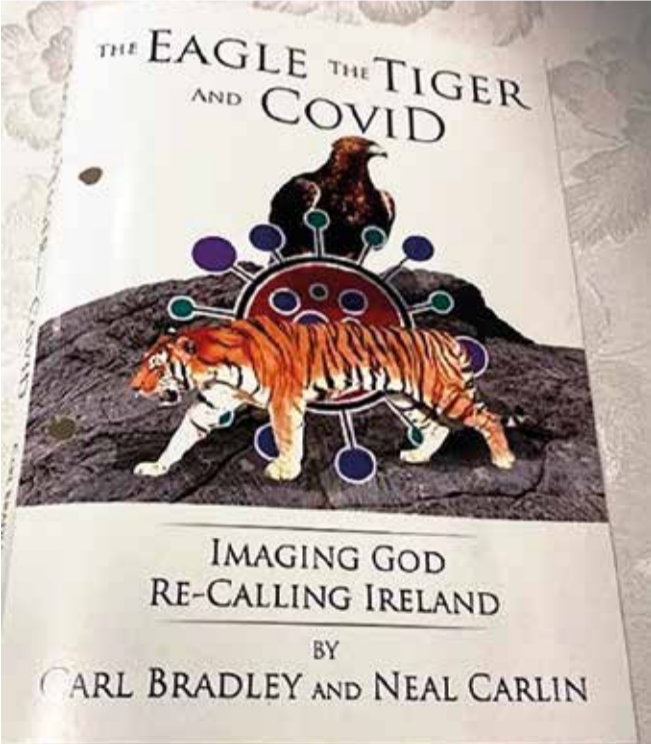
Daily Mass Readings - Google 'Today's Mass Readings'. Google '9 best Catholic apps for 2019'. Apps - Laudate; Universalis.com; MissalDaily.com; Magnificat (also available by post, in booklet form - daily readings and short reflections on the saints and on aspects of the faith).

Roseann is from the parish of Moville, where she is part-time sacristan. She is also a lecturer at the North West Regional College, in Derry.

Shaun Doherty reviews Fr Neal Carlin's latest book...

The Eagle, the Tiger and Covid

Imaging God Re-calling Ireland



WHILE lockdown has presented many challenges for people, Fr Neal Carlin set himself a challenge. He decided to write another book! Set in the context of a grim, Covid gripped Ireland, Fr Neal takes us on a journey clearly based not only on his vivid imagination, but weaved intricately into real life experiences that offer an insight into today's culture and tomorrow's possibilities.

The story is an engaging read

not just for those searching for meaning in today's society; its fiction fact novel-based format is a thoroughly gripping and fascinating piece.

The book describes the journey undertaken by Sean Conway, a retired journalist who goes in search of the Native American Indian prophet who spoke, back in 1987, on the Late Late Show of a "good omen" for Ireland, following the flight from the USA to Ireland

of an eagle a month earlier. The Indian's wisdom and humility touched Sean deeply and propels him to seek him out so that he can better understand his philosophy of life.

In the searching, Sean reflects on his own alcoholism, faith, loves and losses, and gains some insights into the "new normal." He reconnects to a philosophy and way of life that has already been tried and tested in the early Celtic Christian communities that once thrived in Ireland, and evangelised millions in Europe. Celtic Saints like Colmcille, whose faith was fuelled by a powerful contemplative lifestyle, fired Sean's imagination.

Sean Conway has a Kairos moment during the journey, which leads him to stop, to pray and move to the margins. He reconnects with the poor and the addict that is in all of us. He sees a new model for church in the Christian Community in the Native American reservation, where the wisdom of the elderly is valued and the young are initiated into healthy, wholesome choices.

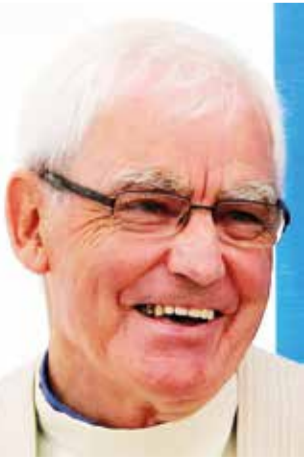
Sean Conway has listened to another voice that speaks when one is truly silent and able to listen. That voice, he discerns, is inviting us to change. "The sheep who belong to me listen to my voice."

The book exudes hope in a God

who works good out of evil. The author invites us to visualise, pray and work not only for a reformed church, but for the island of Ireland where unity and mutual respect for differences allow for real and lasting peace.

Fr Brian Grogan SJ, in reviewing the book, commented: "The author condenses a lifetime of wisdom into this book. It will stretch your imagination, challenge your values and broaden your heart."

'The Eagle, the Tiger and Covid' may be purchased from the Iosas Centre Muff. Telephone 0749384866/00353749384866; and later will be available from bookshops and the Columba Community's other centres.



Fr Neal Carlin, Columba Community.

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Radio Maria – A great faith resource by Sarah Moynihan

AS Ireland's gently growing Catholic Radio Station, Radio Maria has been extraordinarily providential for these trying times and is bringing tremendous solace and sound faith formation to a great number of people, thank God.

Most popular among our daily programming is prayer – the Holy Mass, Liturgy of the Hours and Rosary. There is of course a lively mix of chat and music each day, and a plethora of interesting testimonies and stories

of apostolates and local Church activity.

We are learning together how important the digital realm is in the work of evangelisation in the 21st century.

May I take this opportunity to extend the service of Radio Maria to all readers of 'The Net'. We seek to be an extension of parish life and a real support and encouragement to clergy, religious and laity alike. Do please tell your friends about this great faith resource.

St Teresa of the Andes – Part IV

Suffering and dying with love *by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD*

IT is hard to believe that we are now in the very teeth of Christmas, given all that has unfolded in this last year. It is not a difficult assessment to make that this Christmas is quite unlike any that we have known before. The Coronavirus pandemic has imprinted this time, usually dominated by light and excitement, with the gloom of sickness, death, and empty seats at the table.

We, here at Termonbacca, are not immune from this grief. We lost one of our own, early on in the pandemic, to this deadly disease. It would be an obscenity to pretend that all this did not happen and that it does not continue to burn through other families at this very moment. Baubles and tinsel cannot make us forget! It is maybe a moment to throw away the trifles of so many celebrations of Christmas and to return to the great truth of these days that, because of the Child, death is overturned and humanity can live for ever more.

In the little, insignificant child that was born in the grime and straw of a stable in Bethlehem, the Lord God repeated the words that He had already spoken through the lips of the Prophet Jeremiah, “I have loved you with an everlasting love”. Only this time, He made those words that He spoke become flesh and blood; tangible enough for the Virgin Mary to reach out and hold. And, in response to that child, the human heart can only exclaim with St Paul, “What now can come between us and the love of Christ?”

There is one perturbing aspect about that love, it never seems to come to us in the ways that we imagine and plan. It always seems to want to come in the most unexpected and unrecognisable fashions, just as it did in Bethlehem. Who would have thought to look for the King of kings in a stable?

The unexpected and unrecognised Love of God came to Teresa of the Andes in the most shocking way just ten months into her first year as a Discalced Carmelite nun. She was just beginning her first Lent in the Carmel, when she had one more of her regular experiences of the Eucharist. We do not know when the experience happened, but we can guess that the Lord did as He had done so many times before and spoke with her about events that were about to transpire. The only thing that we know for certain is that Teresa shared the message with the Discalced Carmelite friar who was the confessor for the monastery. The Lord had told her that she would die within a month. Within days of this admission, she had contracted typhus, a flea borne disease that slowly undermines its victims over a number of weeks.

This disease seems to have

originated in the primitive conditions that continued to endure in the newly founded monastery at Los Andes. In Teresa's day, the disease was incurable. Even in these times of rapid advances in medicine, unless this disease is caught at an early stage and medicines prescribed rapidly, the patient cannot be expected to live more than a few weeks. The disease incubates in its first stages, giving few signs that there is anything at all wrong, only in the third stage does the patient become aware of the serious situation that they are in, and in the final stage, this terrible disease races to its fatal conclusion, with pain and sufferings that are excruciating.

Teresa, in her reading of the lives and books of the Carmelite saints, had become aware of Carmel's witness in regard to suffering and death. She was utterly familiar with the testimony of Elizabeth of the Trinity. Elizabeth had said in the midst of her own terminal diagnosis of Addison's disease that “there is an interchange of love that takes place only on the cross.” And it was with these words ringing in Teresa's ears that she made the turn into Holy Week 1920. In the holiest week in the Liturgical Year, Teresa attempted to personally respond to the invitation of the Lord to His disciples in Gethsemane; “keep watch with me”; a request to keep company and walk with Jesus as He made His journey from Gethsemane to Golgotha and to the garden of the Resurrection.

Cross

Teresa said of herself that she wanted “to be a little Cyrenian” for Jesus; to be like Simon of Cyrene in picking up this secret message of her impending death and to go with it through the growing signs that it was all about to happen. This was her cross and she chose to carry it on her shoulders in love, walking directly behind her Lord. She said of this experience of the cross, “In the shadow of the cross all bitterness disappears. No one suffered as much as Jesus, and from the cross He taught us to bear all with resignation, with His outstretched arms on the cross. He said to all ‘come to me, all you who are bowed down by the weight of sorrows, because I will grant you rest’”

Teresa spent very nearly the whole of Holy Thursday in prayer and, most particularly, after

the solemn Mass was finished and the Blessed Sacrament was exposed for adoration. The Mother Prioress noticed nothing that was particularly alarming or even out of the ordinary; Sr Teresa simply demonstrated her habitual recollection and contemplative spirit. She remained in the chapel beside the Lord as He literally sweated blood for the sake of the World until one in the morning. When Teresa returned to her little cell, hidden from the gaze of her community, she discovered that she was so exhausted that she was too weary to even fall asleep, she only managed a few hours of fitful sleep the whole night long. On Good Friday, she rose with the community and followed the schedule of the day without a complaint. She spent three hours in prayer and meditation, she sang strongly during the solemn liturgy, and she remained in prayer in the chapel before the exposed crucifix on the altar.

Again, it was only sometime later, when she had returned to her cell that she felt the same exhaustion overwhelm her. Her novice mistress, with her customary astuteness, guessed that all was not as it should have been with Teresa. When she came to Teresa's cell, she noticed that her face was extremely flushed. She believed that Teresa had a fever and ordered her immediately to bed. The doctor was called for and only then did Teresa reveal that she had been feeling ill for a number of weeks. She said that she had simply accepted this illness as a cross but now felt guilty for keeping her superiors in the dark, and attempted to ask forgiveness of the Mother Prioress.

Six different doctors were called successively, each attempting to reduce her fever without any real success. The last of the doctors diagnosed that Teresa had perforated typhus in its final stages. By Easter Week, Teresa was slipping in and out of consciousness, she was at times delirious with fever and her body was racked intermittently by convulsions. She received Viaticum and Extreme Unction, as her grip on life became ever more tenuous.

Mother Angelica suggested that this novice, who had not lived in the monastery even a single year, should take her final and solemn vows in danger of death. During a period of lucidity on April 7, she made her religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. She forced herself to speak the vows in a good loud voice and seemed to do so with a truly joyous spirit. Her community that gathered around her sick bed was no longer blind, they now realised that every word that she spoke cost her much energy and pain. At the end of the hastily assembled ceremony,

Teresa thanked her prioress and community for the confidence that they had shown in her.

After April 7, 1920, Teresa's delirium became more severe as her disease came to its awful climax. The pain that she was in seemed to grow exponentially and there was no pain relief that could touch it. Convulsions began to shake her body with awful regularity. There was but one rally after that point. On Saturday, April 11, they celebrated Mass in her infirmary room. The nuns noticed that she sang out with a particular beauty and she was able for the first time in days to recognise her sisters who came to celebrate the Eucharist with her. That very afternoon she slipped into a coma that she did not wake from until just a few moments before the end. The sisters gathered around her to recite the prayers of the dying. Some observed Teresa as she awoke for some moments and they saw that “her gaze was upward, her face shone, she seemed to radiate intense peace and even joy at such a moment.” The end came to her at 7.15 in the morning on April 12, 1920.

Teresa's last month is, indeed, a sad and painful story; in being that it could simply be one of many. How many other people and families have been through exactly the same excruciating experience, even in the last few weeks and days? The fact that Teresa's story ends in a sad tale is not of particular interest to us here. Neither do we take sadistic pleasure in the details of her pain and suffering. Rather, we are fascinated in what makes this tale stand out from other multiple stories.

Accepted

It was Mother Angelica who put her finger on what stood out as different, as she sat all those days beside Teresa's sick bed. Mother Angelica wrote, “One never heard her complain through all this or to ask for anything which would relieve the pain. She accepted everything and refused nothing, painful though it might be. She did not show the least desire, not even for changing her position or even

for drinking a little water. She never indicated what might be bothering her. And her infirmarians do not remember her giving them the least hint in this sense. She obeyed, even concerning the most painful and mortifying things. She always had a smile on her lips and a thankful word for her sisters. Sr Teresa believed herself unworthy of such attention and care.”

What are we to make of such a commentary on Teresa's death? Is this simply what happens whenever someone dies, in order to be polite, a person air brushes out all the negative stuff, and talks up all the positive? You hear it all the time at funerals, but I do not think that it applies in this case. These are the words of someone who had sat at a bedside, at close range, and had carefully taken in the details of a sickness and a death. Mother Angelica had no interest in manufacturing a fake heroine. The behaviours that the prioress carefully recorded, although good in themselves, have a significance beyond the value of each; they were indicators for the prioress of how Teresa was internalising what was going on in this tragic situation. Teresa was not just surrendering to the inevitable, passively undergoing this trauma, or even waiting for death. Teresa's silence, her resignation, her serenity, and her selflessness, were her action, her response, and her language as she faced the situation head on. These responses came together to form an ‘oil’ that she placed in her lamp to welcome not death, but Life. To welcome the One who was coming to her in this most unexpected manner.

To correctly interpret Teresa's decline and death, we have to put it in its proper context. Jesus, in Matthew's Gospel, shared with us a parable about two distinct groups of ten bridesmaids: one group brought lamps with oil to burn in them and the others did not. The group that brought no oil for their lamps are representative of the manner so many of us are ‘doing’ sickness and death these days. Far too often, we surrender to the feelings of unfairness, we



St Teresa of the Andes.

bemoan our ‘luck’, we only see it as darkness and loneliness, and as an end in itself. Surely, we can see that that means there cannot be any oil in our lamps, there is absolutely nothing to light our way through sickness, coronavirus, pandemic, and even death.

Teresa shows us the way out of the darkness that surrounds this pandemic. From her own sickbed she points out the light. She shows us how to fill our lamps with oil. She tells us that no matter what comes, we should not take our eyes away from the everlasting love of God. He will not come in our tried and tested rationalisations; instead He will come in the most unexpected and unorthodox places and manners but, no matter, His everlasting love goes on shining on us. He is coming. He is always coming.

By living sickness with patience, silence, selflessness and serenity, we can turn these ‘terrible’ moments into what St John of the Cross calls a “sweet encounter” and allow Christ to come up close to us. St Teresa did this and she was transformed into a human being in whom Christ renewed His whole mystery. The Church recognised that fact on March 23, 1993, when Pope John Paul II canonised her a Saint of the Church.

Now the only thing that remains to be said is a question for each of us: What are we prepared to do with the witness of St Teresa of the Andes? I suggest to you all to ask her to lead you to the Bridegroom, for He is coming to you!



St Teresa of the Andes lying in state.

Children’s Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

Hello children. C3 welcomes you to the month of December. This is a very exciting time of year as we prepare during Advent for the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day. The month of December is dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, which is celebrated on December 8.



Immaculate Conception

On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, we celebrate and honour the holiness and innocence of Mary. Our Catholic faith teaches us that God kept Mary free from original sin. She was conceived immaculately, which means that from the moment of her conception she was free from original sin and in a state of grace, pure enough to be the Mother of Jesus (CCC 490-493). She was a fitting tabernacle to hold within her the body, the flesh and blood of Jesus our Saviour. When we receive Holy Communion, we also hold within us the Body and Blood of Jesus, so we should try not to sin and to be pure and holy like Mary.

The Season of Advent

‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths’ (Matthew 3:3)

The beginning of our Church year is marked with the season of Advent. The word ‘Advent’ comes from the Latin word adventus which means ‘arrival’ or ‘coming’. It begins four Sundays before Christmas and ends on Christmas Eve. Advent is a season of preparation for Christmas. It is a time of reflection and hope as we keep in mind both ‘advents’ of Christ, the first in Bethlehem and the second at the end of time.

The Advent Wreath

The use of the Advent wreath, with the five candles, has been a tradition for hundreds of years. The wreath is a symbol of the four weeks in which we prepare for the birth of Jesus, with a candle being lit each week; three purple candles and one rose candle. The green branches remind us of the new life we have in Jesus, the circle

signifies the eternity of God’s love for us (with no beginning or end) and the candles represent hope and light, which Jesus brings into a dark world. The fifth candle is lit on Christmas Day as a symbol of Christ, born as the Light of the world.



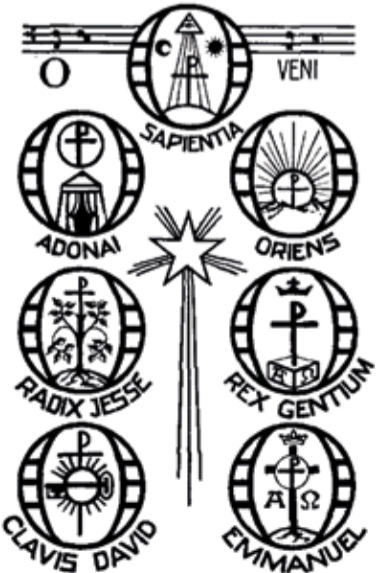
Saints of the Month

- St Ambrose – December 7
- St Lucy – December 13
- St Stephen – December 26
- St John – December 27

Traditions - O Antiphons

During the season of Advent and Christmas, there are many traditions which we carry out in our homes; lighting the Advent wreath, putting up the Christmas Tree and decorating our home with holly or tinsel. The most important tradition is giving our family crib a special place in our home, so we can welcome the baby Jesus on Christmas Day. Since Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas Day, it is also important to pray, read the Word of God from our bibles and praise God by singing. Our faith has a beautiful tradition which begins on December 17 every year and ends on December 24. This tradition is known as the O Antiphons. This special time in Advent is known as the ‘second part of Advent’, or the ‘Golden nights’.

Every night, eight days before Christmas, we ask Christ to come and we call him by a different



name. Each of these names begin with ‘O’, for example, ‘O Come O Come Emmanuel’. They are called O Antiphons, which means they are prayers which are sung or chanted. They are seven jewels of liturgical song which sum up all our Advent longing for our Saviour. The O Antiphons tell us the different names which speak of Christ (listed below) and also highlight the prophecy of the prophet Isaiah, who foretold the coming of the Messiah. If you take the first letter of each name and write them backwards, you get “ERO CRAS.” This means “Tomorrow, I will Come”, in Latin.

- Dec 17: O Sapientia (Wisdom)
- Dec 18: O Adonai (Lord and Ruler)
- Dec 19: O Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse)
- Dec 20: O Clavis David (Key of David)
- Dec 21: O Oriens (Dawn of the East)
- Dec 22: O Rex Gentium (King of the Gentiles)
- Dec 23: O Emmanuel (God With Us)

Christmas Day

Christmas Day is celebrated every year on December 25. The word Christmas comes from the combination of Christ and Mass; it is the birth of our Saviour Jesus Christ (CCC 525). This was the day Jesus was brought into our world to reveal God to us. Christmas is a very special



Quiz Time with Lawrence

- Which political figure has a residency called Steward’s Lodge?
- In which European country are modern Christmas lights said to have originated?
- Which US state is nicknamed the Peach State?
- What two books of the New Testament detail the account of the birth of Jesus?
- Name the Everton and England goalkeeper who was in the news last month for a tackle on Liverpool’s Virgil van Dijk?
- To which UK city was Chris Rea travelling when he came up with the song ‘driving home for Christmas’?
- Which country has applied to re-join the British Commonwealth, having left it in 2003?
- What is the French name for Santa Claus?
- What type of building is the Spanish ‘Biblioteca’?
- In what year was the UK’s most recent widespread white Christmas?
- Who played the lead role in the 2003 movie, ‘Bad Santa’?
- The Cotswolds, in Gloucestershire, provide the backdrop to which UK horseracing course?

Quiz Answers: 1, The Irish Taoiseach. 2, Germany. 3, Georgia. 4, Matthew and Luke. 5, Jordan Pickford. 6, Middlesbrough. 7, Zimbabwe. 8, Pere Noel. 9, A library. 10, 2010. 11, Billybob Thornton. 12, Cheltenham. 13, Saturnalia. 14, Matt Le Blanc. 15, Donner and Blitzen. 16, Rocinante. 17, New Zealand. 18, Countdown. 19, Richard Attenborough. 20, Angela’s Ashes. 21, I Hear You Knocking. 22, Quebec. 23, Jingle All The Way. 24, Candlemas. 25, See Amid the Winter Snow.



feast and it is one of only three feast days on which the Catholic Church celebrates birthdays. The other two are the births of the Blessed Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. All three of these birthdays have one thing in common – John the Baptist, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus were all born without Original Sin.

Christmas is a special time when we gather together to celebrate the Birth of Jesus. We exchange gifts in our homes and give thanks to God for the wonderful gift of His Son to us.



Feast of the Holy Family

The Feast of the Holy Family is celebrated on the first Sunday of Christmas. This feast day is dedicated

to the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. We ponder their life together in Nazareth and pray for our own families.

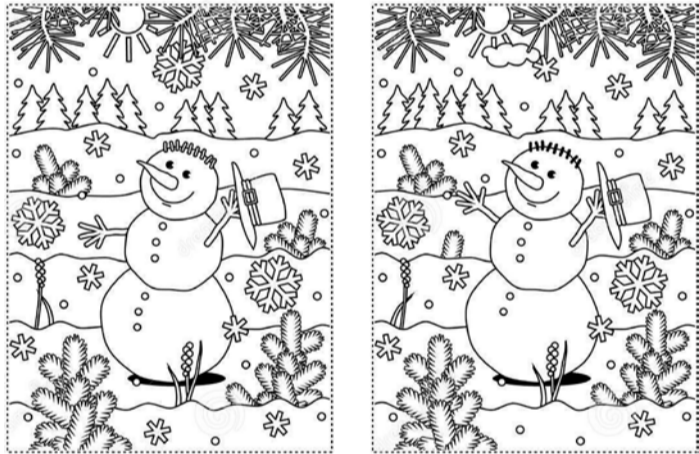
The Gospels do not tell us anything about Jesus’ life when He was growing up in Nazareth. The last story St Luke tells us is the finding of Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:41-52) and so we have the hidden years of Jesus’ life (CCC514). We know that during this time Jesus’ relationship with Mary and Joseph helped Him as He grew to maturity, increased in wisdom and found favour with God.

The Holy Family provides us with a perfect model of how to live: they loved God and one another. Families are like ‘schools of love’, for within our families we learn how to receive and share love (CCC 2207). God’s love is transmitted to us through the love of our families, through the ordinariness of family life, God is present. The family has been described as the domestic church (CCC 2204) - a place of ecclesial community and a communion of persons, an image of the Triune God.

Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer, authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches. Jesus, Mary and Joseph graciously hear our prayer.

Amen

Find the ten differences between the two pictures.



- The tradition of kissing under mistletoe is traced back to which ancient Greek festival?
- Which former ‘Friends’ star is currently appearing in the TV sitcom ‘Man with a Plan’?
- The names of which two of Santa’s reindeer translate in German into ‘Thunder’ and ‘Lightning’?
- What was the name of Don Quixote’s fictional horse?
- Excluding the Pacific Islands, which country is the first to ring in the New Year?
- Which television programme, still broadcasting today, was the very first show to air on Channel 4?
- Who played Kris Kringle in the 1994 remake of ‘Miracle on 34th Street’?
- The 1999 book, ‘Tis a Memoir’ is a sequel to which bestselling novel?
- Dave Edmunds topped the music charts 50 years ago this Christmas with what song?
- In which Canadian province is the city of Montreal?
- In which 1996 Christmas film did Arnold Schwarzenegger star?
- Which Christian holy day is celebrated 40 days after Christmas?
- From what Christmas Carol does the lyrics, ‘Sacred infant all divine, what a tender love was thine’ come?

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

Let Your Light Shine!



“Do not be afraid. I bring you news of great joy”.
(Luke 2:10)



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

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

Clonmany, Coleraine, Creggan, Culladuff, Culmore, Desertmartin, Donnybrook, Drumquin, Dunamansha, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,