



The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

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See inside...




Sacramental Preparation – McGill Family



Chastity Book – Derry Teen Writer




Exodus 90 – Derry prayer friends



Prayer Vigil – St Eugene’s

“Joseph’s rest revealed God’s will to him. In this moment of rest in the Lord, as we pause from our daily obligations and activities, God is also speaking to us...But like St Joseph, once we have heard God’s voice, we must rise from our slumber; we must get up and act.”

(Pope Francis to families in the Philippines, 2015)






St Patrick’s Way – Bernie Doody, Omagh



Leaving Lagos – Fr Peter McCawille, Dregish



Vocations Prayer – Fr Declan McGeehan, Cappagh

People in focus



Owen Doherty – Derry



Maria Doherty – Buncrana



Tanya McHugh – Donegal



Roisin Doherty – Derry



Frs Donal & late Terry Bennett – Omagh

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Pope Francis encourages us all to make use of the Sacrament of God's rich and abundant mercy

by Bishop Donal

A reflection on the Pope's prayer intention for March... 'Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth to taste the infinite mercy of God'.

DURING the lockdowns, people of faith have missed so much of our rich sacramental life. That was felt most acutely in the inability to attend Mass and to receive Holy Communion.

But the 'keep your distance' message has made it more difficult for churches to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In many churches, the Confessional facilities are too small. Distance between Confessor and penitent meant that a low voice was no longer effective – and that has had a limiting effect on where the Sacrament could be celebrated.

Over 20 years ago, on

January 6, 2001, Pope John Paul II wrote that it was necessary that "Pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting (the Sacrament of Penance) and leading people to appreciate it." (Novo Millennio Ineunte, para 37).

This year, we will need a lot of creativity and perseverance in order to respond to the hunger of many Catholics – and the need of many who feel burdened by their past!

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is focussed on facilitating reconciliation between me and God, me and myself, and me and others.

So much mental stress and

distress occurs when people cannot find that peace – and Jesus offers it as a free gift. We should not underestimate the power of those words, "I absolve you from all your sins".

As recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation has fallen, the use of counselling services has soared. People have not stopped needing reconciliation. They have simply turned to other sources – and are willing to pay substantial sums of money.

Pope Francis encourages us all to make use of the Sacrament of God's rich and abundant mercy. The forgiveness is free – and the service is free!

The mercy may be free – but

it comes with strings attached! In the 'Our Father', we pray that God will forgive us our trespasses – as we forgive those who trespass against us. St Paul wrote that "God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ has given us the ministry of reconciliation." (2 Cor 5:11-21).

We live in a very confrontational world. There is a temptation, even in some church circles, to criticise and burn bridges – and to take pride in that.

God has reconciled the world to Himself in Jesus. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ, bearers of reconciliation.

In our current context,



both for personal healing and for reconciliation between people, there is a crying need for forgiveness. That is what Pope Francis asks us to pray for in the final weeks of Lent 2021.

In preparation for Divine Mercy Sunday, Mary McMenamin writes...

Jesus, in His great Mercy, is offering us Heaven in spite of our sinfulness



Mary McMenamin

I feel it is appropriate at this time to remember the messages Our Lord gave to St Faustina, which are taken from her diary, 'Diary - Divine Mercy in My Soul'.

Divine Mercy Sunday is the Sunday after Easter; a feast day instituted by St Pope John II in the year 2000.

Jesus revealed the Divine Mercy image to St Faustina in 1931, in Poland, and asked her to get the image painted. It is now very well-known all over the world.

In the image, Jesus is clothed in a white garment with one hand raised in blessing. His left hand is touching His garment in the area of the heart, where two rays come forth, one red and the other pale, representing Jesus' blood

and water.

Jesus told St Faustina, "by means of this image, I shall grant many graces to souls". He wanted the world to know about His inconceivable mercy.

In her Diary, St Faustina wrote that she heard Jesus speak to her. He said, "My daughter speak to the whole world about my mercy. Let all mankind recognise my unfathomable mercy. It is a sign for the end times. After it will come the day of justice, while there is still time let them have recourse to the fount of my mercy. Let them profit from the blood and water which gushed forth for them".

He also said, "I desire that the Feast of Mercy be a refuge and shelter for all souls and especially for sinners...I will grant complete pardon to the souls that will go to Confession and receive Holy Communion on the feast of my mercy".

Jesus has asked that we prepare for the Feast of Divine Mercy by saying a Novena of Divine Mercy Chaplets from Good Friday until the Feast Day, which has an intention for each day of the novena.

In St Faustina's Diary, 687,

she wrote that she heard these words in her soul, "say unceasingly the chaplet that I have taught you. Whoever will recite it will receive great mercy at the hour of death. Priests will recommend it to sinners as their last hope of salvation even if there were a sinner most hardened, if he were to recite this chaplet only once he would receive grace from my infinite mercy. I desire that the whole world know my infinite mercy. I desire to grant unimaginable graces to those souls who trust in my mercy".

In another part of the Diary, 881, Jesus tells St Faustina, "At the hour of their death, I will defend as my own glory every soul that will say this chaplet or when others say it for a dying person, the indulgence is the same".

Jesus has also asked us to prepare for Divine Mercy Sunday by doing deeds of mercy. In St Faustina's Diary, she wrote that she heard Jesus say, "I demand from you deeds of mercy which are to arise out of love for me. You are to show mercy to your neighbours always and everywhere. You must not shrink from this or try to excuse or absolve yourself from it. I

am giving you three ways of exercising mercy towards your neighbour. The first - by deed, the second - by word, the third - by prayer. In these three degrees is contained the fullness of mercy and it is an unquestionable proof of love for me. The first Sunday after Easter is the feast of Mercy but there must also be acts of mercy".

Jesus, in His great mercy is offering us heaven in spite of our sinfulness. What a wonderful gift; the gift of complete forgiveness for all our sins and of punishment.

Hopefully, we will get the opportunity to receive the sacraments this Divine Mercy Sunday. We should always be ready to meet the Lord because none of us know the day or the hour He will call us.

How to say the Divine Mercy Chaplet:

- The chaplet can be prayed on rosary beads
- Begin with the Sign of the Cross
- Our Father, Hail Mary, The Creed
- On the Our Father bead say this prayer, 'Eternal Father, I offer you the body and blood, soul and divinity of your dearly beloved son, our Lord



Jesus Christ, in atonement for our sins and those of the whole world.

- On the Hail Mary bead say this prayer, 'For the sake of his sorrowful passion, have mercy on us and on the whole world'.
- Finish the chaplet by saying, 'Holy God, Holy Mighty One, Holy Immortal One, have mercy on us and on the whole world' x3

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

While appreciating online efforts for the continued celebration of the faith during Covid-19, young Owen Doherty yearns for more of what he experienced live with Youth 2000...

I loved the crazy atmosphere, staying up late and singing together



Owen Doherty

YOUTH 2000 is a Catholic youth organisation that was first set up in response to a call by Pope John Paul II at World Youth Day in 1989, when he told the 400,000 young people gathered before him from around the world that it was up to the youth to bear witness to the faith and bring “into the Third Millennium the Gospel of Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life”.

Since 1993, Youth 2000 has been organising lively faith festivals, retreats, prayer groups and other events for young people aged 16-35 throughout Ireland, and has changed lives and deepened the faith of many in the last 28 years, including people from the Diocese of Derry.

Greatly interested in young people and promoting initiatives that help them grow in their faith, Bishop Donal is well aware of the ministry of Youth 2000, which once had a group within the City, and he has expressed a hope to see it flourish here once again.

He told ‘The Net’: “One of the great riches of the Church is the range of spiritual traditions that have developed under God’s grace. One of those movements of the Spirit that have borne fruit is Youth

2000.

“I would really welcome another local flourishing of that spirituality to promote friendship with Jesus - and, through him, with one another. In a very fragmented world, we need places for our young people to gather, and to be nourished by Christ.”

One young man, who lives within the Cathedral Parish and who would also welcome the opportunity to attend a local Youth 2000 group is 19-year-old Owen Doherty, whose faith was nurtured as a child in attending Youth 2000 events with his mother and siblings, when there was a Youth 2000 prayer group in the Long Tower led by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal.

Just before the first lockdown last year, Owen had attended the Youth 2000 Christmas Retreat in Newbridge, Co Kildare, where he enjoyed meeting many young people who were happily living their faith, and he has kept in contact with them.

“I was hoping to go to the big summer festival last summer, but it was cancelled,” he said, adding: “My family watched the Mass and listened to the talks online, but it wasn’t the same as being there. I loved the crazy atmosphere, staying up late and singing together.

“I also enjoyed the whole camaraderie of going on the bus, having a burger and chips with strangers on the way there and then, after just days, feeling like you have known them for much longer. That was the only Youth 2000 event I was at without my family, but much was taken from it!

“I went to the Youth 2000 prayer group that the friars organised, with my mum, and brothers and

sisters, when I was younger, and it was brilliant. It’s sad that it is not the big thing that it was back then. It would be great to have that again in our city; I would definitely get involved.”

Commenting on what he thought the interest would be amongst his peers for a group like Youth 2000, Owen said: “There has been a hunger for something like Youth 2000 to bring young people together in that way, but now, after what we have been through, I think more young people will be looking for that sense of community through faith-based relationships.

“We have had so little contact this past year. Much of our celebration of Mass and Adoration has been online, so it would be good to have an opportunity to meet up again, when it is safe to do so. I can instantly think of 10 people within the city who would be interested in a group like Youth 2000, and each of them would probably know others.”

Owen’s earliest memories of encountering the faith community in Derry, when he came to live in the City with his mum and siblings as an eight year old, are their encounters with the ‘Grey Friars’.

“I really took to Bro Patrick and we became friends,” he recalled, adding, “I would ask him questions about the faith as I was so curious, and he always had something to say. As my faith grew, so did my friendship with Bro Patrick. I particularly remember, when I was about 10 years old, him giving me his old Rosary. I had seen it hanging from the rope he had around his robe and I said to him that I thought it was very cool. He said it was very special to him, but then he took it off and gave it to me. I told him that I didn’t want to

take it because it was so special to him, but he said that that was their ministry, to give people whatever they had and that he thought I needed the Rosary more than him.

“They were my first Rosary beads. From then on, I prayed the Rosary on them until they disintegrated with my use of them! I only have the Cross left now.”

Baptised

The journey in faith with the friars led to Owen getting baptised when he was eight years old, along with his younger brothers and sisters.

“The five of us were baptised on the one day by Fr Paddy O’Kane, in Holy Family Chapel, Ballymagroarty,” he said, “It was a very special day. I remember it was perfect weather, the sun was shining and there was sweetness in the breeze, but I was glad to find inside the chapel was nice and cool.

“I also remember feeling God’s presence in a very special way. I really did feel that He was celebrating with me. The friars had talked to us about our baptism and mum had also done some study on it. I remember her telling us that we were going to be invited into God’s Family and that the Holy Spirit was really going to be there in our baptism. That was very special to hear. It was great to have our grandparents and aunts and uncles there as well to celebrate as a family together.”

Owen has special memories too of his First Confession and Holy Communion, and of receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation: “After I was confirmed I felt so full of energy. I was ready to jump around! I really felt like celebrating and shouting from the hilltops that the Holy Spirit had descended on me like it had on the disciples at

Pentecost!

“I remember going out to get a suit for my Confirmation. I hadn’t worn a whole suit before. The whole occasion was well organised but what was happening with the Holy Spirit was anything but organised! It was a very memorable day. I ended up using two saints’ names because I couldn’t choose between my two favourite saints – St Pio and St Francis. I was the only Pio Francis in the whole cathedral! So, that felt very special too.”

Recalling another very positive experience in his faith journey, Owen spoke about his initial encounters as a 14-year-old with Bishop Donal at a series of Lenten youth faith evenings held in St Mary’s College, in the city.

“Bishop Donal was so kind,” he said, “and the sessions were very good. We all chatted about our faith and got to ask the bishop questions, and I admired how, if he didn’t know the answer, he referred to the Catechism. He was very humble. We were able to ask him the toughest questions about our faith and he was happy to tackle them head on.”

He added: “Eventually, my faith journey became more of a personal one that I walked with Jesus. I started inviting Jesus into everyday situations. Every day at school, I asked Him to walk with me. It gave me loads of confidence to know that He was at my side, and it felt very special to know that God loved me.

“So, I am trying to develop the relationship that I have with God now, and I have also started to develop a relationship with myself, and God is involved in that too.”

That journey led to Owen joining Net Ministries on finishing his studies at Oakgrove Integrated College. He explained that he had been considering whether to go on for further study or get a full-time job, when a third option came by word of mouth about spending a year with Net Ministries.

“I prayed about it and felt that I

was being called to go on mission with Net Ministries,” said Owen, adding: “I did the interview and got in, and did a month of training. After that, I was put into one of the mission teams, and the team I was in was sent to Co Westmeath, to a little town called Kilbeggan.

“We spent our time there with another Catholic group, the Ceili Community. We worked with them and it was great getting to know them. However, with the Covid-19 pandemic, it became very difficult to mission in schools or public places, to spread the Good News about Jesus, so I decided not to go back after Christmas as there was very little mission experience.

“While my mission year didn’t work out, I still take with me the blessings that I received from the time I spent with Net Ministries, and I am continuing my faith journey. During the past year, I have been enjoying getting to know people in my parish whom I meet while out walking. I have met so many lovely people.”

During this time of discernment, Owen feels that the Holy Spirit is guiding him back into education and he hopes to study IT at the North West Regional College.

With regards to the impact of Covid-19 on life, he spoke about the serious worries some people have, with particular fears experienced by some for vulnerable members of their families.

“When I see that people are very worried, I try to help them by mentioning that Jesus tells us to not be afraid,” said Owen.

Looking forward to having the public celebration of Mass and the Sacraments again soon, he said: “The Sacraments are so important and there is something about people being together in a congregation. It is so special having that connection between people. I am hearing this from a lot of people, including my peers.”

Lenten focus for Derry Youth online by Niamh McLaughlin

DERRY Youth are continuing with the online programme for the Pope John Paul II Award during this season of Lent.

We have our live event on every Monday evening at 7 pm, where the theme for the week and the task are disclosed, as well as any other updates.

We are currently running another Youth Alpha Series this Lent, with 40 young people from around the diocese participating in conversations about their faith.

In addition, Hollie Frystal is holding the ‘Christus Vivit’ Book

Club every Thursday for the duration of Lent. There are 20 young people signed up, who are exploring the document and the position of young people in the church.

Derry Youth co-ordinator, Lizzie Rea will be having a live conversation with Bishop Donal McKeown on March 9. All are welcome to tune into this. For more details, keep a close eye on Derry Youth’s social media platforms.

Derry Youth are also planning a Live reflection for Holy Thursday.

If anyone is interested in signing up, please message @derryouth on their social media platforms or email Lizzie at lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org. Anyone who is doing the PJPII Award will gain hours from participating in this.

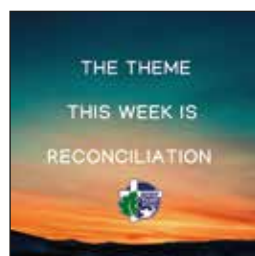
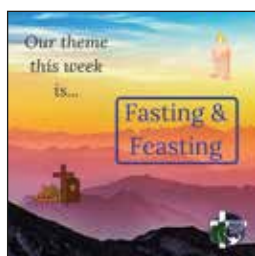
The Diocesan Scholarship group are continuing to work hard during these times. They hosted a Live Pancake Tuesday Cook-Along, which is available to watch on the Derry Youth Instagram page.

And, as well as continuing to work alongside Mary’s Meals,

they are working towards gaining a Level 1 certificate too, with Youthlink NI.

We, at Derry Youth, are hoping to hold a series of webinars after the Easter period. For more information and updates on this, keep a close eye on Derry Youth’s social media platforms.

Any queries or questions, please do not hesitate to email Lizzie Rea at lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org or send @derryouth a message on social media.



Lockdown with Youth 2000...

YOUTH 2000 are running lockdown sessions on Monday, Wednesday and Fridays, at 7.30 pm via Zoom.

The Monday ‘workshops’ are talks and lectures by guest speakers, with a time for Q&A on the topics requested.

Wednesday is the online prayer group night, which is led by young people from around Ireland each week and includes music, lead prayer and live Adoration of Our Lord. To watch the livestream connect via www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YwMdkzW20A&feature=youtu.be

The Youth 2000 Quiz is on Friday

nights, and includes general knowledge, music, and picture rounds. Join for the fun, the craic and banter, and bring your favourite cuppa!

To join any of these events send an email to Emma at office@youth2000.ie with the tagline ‘I’d like to join!’

You can get the Youth 2000 weekly Gospel reflection sent to you directly by contacting Emma also. Fr Frank Trias will be writing the weekly reflections for the month of March. They can also be viewed online at <https://youth2000.ie/home/gospel-reflections/>

We will be forever grateful for God's grace being brought into our hearts and homes in a unique way

by Jennifer McGill



I have the pleasure of being a teacher in Nazareth House Primary School, Derry, for nearly 20 years now. I am the youngest member of a devout Catholic family. As children, our family played an active role in our Church, St Eugene's Cathedral, from altar servers to singing in the choirs throughout the ages.

In fact, my recently deceased dad was one of the longest standing members of the heavenly adult choir and my mother was one of the founder members of the Thursday dance club for the elderly in the Parish Hall. I attended Rosemount Primary School and Thornhill College. These interwoven communities nurtured a rich, spiritual, practical and life-lasting Catholic Education deep in my heart, which has helped me in both the good times and most definitely, the not-so good!

I am now a teacher in Nazareth House Primary School, under the guidance of our principal, Mr Antoin Moran. When I was first employed by the Sisters of Nazareth, Sr Bernardine Hannan, ex-principal, I worked alongside Sr Annette, Sr Veronica and our recent ex-principal, Mr Paul O' Hea. Under the influence of these inspirational leaders, I can put my hand on my heart and say I could not have asked for any better insight on how to deliver the core message of God's unconditional love for all children. I only had to watch, look and listen to this, loving and inspirational array of

people.

I am also blessed with the greatest gift from God, a child of our own. My little boy is eight years old and currently in Primary 4 at Nazareth House. I am now in the privileged position of enriching the faith development of our primary children, from this tender, young and influential age.

After teaching Religious Education to both Primary 7 and Primary 4 pupils, I always looked ahead with excitement and bated breath to the year that my own child would have the pleasure of experiencing the sacramental programmes at our school. In keeping with the renowned religious teachings of the Sisters of Nazareth and the gift they have passed on to us, the time has now come.

However, here we are and never did I ever anticipate the possibility that my son would not receive the 'same' spiritual experience that we, as a school, have provided for all our past pupils, due to the 'restrictions' of Covid-19.

Yes, it has certainly been an upheaval to many aspects of our daily lives and tapped into our creativity, regarding adapting to these unforeseen changes. My part of this teaching is only a miniscule part of a much wider network of teams. Our children are fortunate enough to have several partners working together to nurture their faith development.

Linked with the Long Tower Church, our school Chaplain, Fr Aidan Mullan, makes the time

to visit our children on a weekly basis, amidst his ever-increasing busy schedule and makes it his point to get to know the children on a named, personal level. The children just love to see him and really enjoy his teachings, especially his latest online innovation of Chaplaincy videos, directed at the sacramental classes.

Our pro-active, dynamic Pastoral Co-Ordinator, Emmet Thompson is constantly linking in with the children, through various projects and helping them to not only participate, but to reciprocate within the wider religious community, taking their faith development to the very much needed practical level, outside of the classroom environment, with the ongoing support of the DYC (Derry Youth Community).

One of the many projects is that of the 'Do this in Memory of Me' programme. This involves children attending Mass with their families. However, during the Gospel, they are invited to gather in their own space, with the support and guidance of the DYC, to learn the message of Jesus in a fun, age appropriate and child-friendly way.

Finally, we have the ongoing support of the Derry Diocesan Catechetical team, who are pivotal in the continuous faith development and Religious Education of the children today; from supplying innovative resources and ideas for us teachers, to being 'hands-on' with the children and reaching out to

their families.

Thérèse, who is the Diocesan RE Advisor for Primary Schools, and the extensive team of inspirational colleagues and volunteers work to bring Jesus to the very hearts of these children and their families.

Preparation

In regard to Sacramental Preparation, usually this takes the form of families being invited to attend a meeting in the school hall prior to their child making their First Confession, First Communion and Confirmation.

Initially, I, as a parent and teacher, was devastated at the thought of the children, their families and my son, missing such an invaluable experience. However, being the innovative team they are, this meeting was conducted on a 'virtual' basis, delivered into our very own homes, via the Catechetical Centre Webcam.

I couldn't have imagined the impact that this meeting would have, adapting to Covid restrictions. Of course, we were well prepared by Emmet Thompson through receiving the Catechetical Centre's Sacramental booklets and the children's worksheets prior to the meeting and setting the scene, encouraging us to light our Baptismal candles.

We sat as a family watching the computer, tucked in together on our sofa, with the fire blazing on that cold, wintery night and we had a very different...but beautiful experience. The message that is conveyed so personally at the usual meeting format, in our school hall, was conveyed in such a way that it actually managed to go beyond the barrier of home/school/ Church divide. It was

delivered directly into the very heart of our home! My husband, my son and I watched intently.

Ironically, the virtual meeting felt so personal to us...the advantages of technology! We gained a deeper insight regarding the graces and fruits of the Sacraments in our daily lives, as we were gently reminded of our parental responsibilities, and promises that we made at our child's Baptism, by Fr Aidan, Thérèse, Emmett, and Mary O'Boyle, who was the co-presenter for the talk.

When the meeting concluded, a beautiful thing happened... our family faith development blossomed. We, as a family, were graced with what I would say 'divine spirit'. The questions and discussion in our home began. This discussion, induced by the issues covered at the meeting, took us to a level of closeness to God that we had not encountered as a family before. I was so grateful.

There it was again...the dichotomy of Covid 'restrictions'. Our family faith took a new perspective and it didn't happen in school hall...it happened in the core of our homes, in front of the fire, alive in the heart of the family hub.

Next day at school, the feedback from the Primary 4 and Primary 7 children was also so enthusiastic! They, too, talked about sitting in the safety and comfort of their homes, together with their families. They chatted about how they, as a family, were planning to prepare in full engagement of the sacraments. They all wanted to share their thoughts and what their mummies and daddies were saying. There was a meaningful,

spiritual buzz.

So, I would like to conclude that although Covid has incurred many sad, negative and restrictive aspects, it has also provided us with a unique opportunity, in this fast-paced, digital era, to stop...yes, just STOP!

After all, how can we nurture our faith when we are always 'busy'? How can we see, hear and fulfil God's purpose for us? We have a golden opportunity to take control of our destiny, reset our thinking, our actions and the faith development of our children.

So, with the same intricate web of interwoven communities that helped my faith journey, amidst a pandemic, history is repeating itself. It is nurturing a rich, spiritual, practical and life-lasting Catholic education deep in the hearts of these children and their families, even during restrictive times, thanks to the advantages of technology and human creativity.

We have overcome unforeseen barriers, have taught our children the skills of resilience and touched the hearts of many because with God on our side, all things are possible.

Sincere thanks to Thérèse, and the team at the Catechetical Centre, and the aforementioned, for their guidance, continual support and innovations during these ever changing and challenging times. We will be forever grateful for bringing God's grace into our hearts and homes, in a unique way.

Let's just hope and pray that we can enter back into God's home to receive wholly the gifts of His Sacraments, as soon as is safe and possible.



Great response to virtual sacramental preparation evenings *by Therese Ferry*



FOR the past 16 years, the Diocesan Catechetical Centre has been engaged in Sacramental Preparation Evenings for families throughout the Diocese. Parishes or schools book the evenings through the Catechetical Centre and, from the end of September until completed, Centre staff and a great team of volunteers set off two or three evenings a week to support parents, parishes and schools in this very important stage on the children's faith journey.

A sacramental preparation evening will include a time of prayer, reflection on the gift of the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation, and activities for the children, often delivered by the Derry Youth

Community, young teachers and Pope John Paul II Award students. The parents also receive a family preparation booklet and a candle to use throughout the year at home.

This year, amidst the challenges of the pandemic, with travel and contact restricted, the Catechetical Centre had to rethink how they could continue this aspect of their ministry. As with so many other Church activities, we decided to go online and try virtual sacramental preparation evenings!

Using the newly installed webcam at Cathedral Hall and armed with two new parent booklets, 'Friends of Jesus' for First Reconciliation and First Communion and 'Disciples of Jesus' for Confirmation, we offered parishes and schools a 'Virtual Sacramental Preparation Evening'.

Once the talk is booked, packs with the preparation booklets and children's activities, with the link to the webcam, are sent to parishes and schools to be distributed to families prior to the evening.

Whilst it has been a very different

experience for the presenters, it has also been a privilege to be welcomed, albeit virtually, into the homes of so many, for what is a very sacred time in the life of their family. The feedback has been very positive and we have been delighted to see the children's activities shared afterwards on social media.

At a time when we can't gather to pray and prepare for the reception of the sacraments in the normal way, it was very important that we found a way of keeping families connected and to reassure them that they are not on their own in this journey - they have the support of their schools, their parishes and the Diocese.

If you are interested in booking a Sacramental Preparation Evening for your parish or school, or would like any further information, please contact the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre, email: amhickey@derrydiocese.org, Tel: +442871264087.

Further resources to support families for handing on the faith are available at www.catecheticalcentre.org



Therese Ferry, Diocesan Primary RE advisor, right, and Mary O'Boyle, Diocesan Post-Primary RE advisor, delivering one of the virtual sacramental talks.

Victims and survivors of abuse remembered in prayer

THE vigil of prayer in St Eugene's Cathedral marked the Day of Prayer initiated by Pope Francis for victims and survivors of abuse,

People were encouraged to light a candle of atonement as the Catholic Church across the island of Ireland prayed for victims and survivors of abuse, with All-Ireland Primate, Archbishop Eamon Martin offering an apology "for the terrible failures and crimes" in a video message.

"No wonder so many people who have been abused find it so very difficult to forgive or to trust the Church anymore," said Archbishop Eamon, adding: "They need to hear from Church

leaders like me, that we realise the harm that has been done to them, that we are sorry for that, and that we want to make atonement.

"And I repeat that to them today. I am sorry for what happened to you. I am sorry for the terrible failures and crimes that happened in your Church, and I want to do my best to ensure that no one else suffers in the way that you did."

The Day of Prayer was first marked in dioceses and parishes across Ireland in 2017, and saw the Irish bishops blessing and dedicating Candles of Atonement for use in cathedrals and parishes throughout the country, symbolising repentance, a light in the darkness and hope.



A real sense of strong prayer during virtual Lough Derg pilgrimage *by Hollie Frystal*

"Coinciding with the season of Lent and our Diocesan Columban Year, we focus on three common elements: Fasting, Prayer and Penance."

ON February 19, St Eugene's Cathedral began a virtual Lough Derg pilgrimage with the Angelus and Morning Prayer at 6 am, followed with Mass at 6:30 am, followed by seven traditional Lough Derg Stations during a 24-hour vigil.

At morning Mass, the first reading was taken from the prophet Isaiah on "True Fasting". The people asked: "Why should we fast if the Lord never notices? Why should we go without food if He pays no attention?"

God tells us that fasting requires sacrificing and sharing, not pursuing one's interests and becoming violent. He teaches us the correct way to fast.

God answered, "The kind of fasting I want is this: remove the chains of oppression and the yoke of injustice and let the oppressed go free. Share your food with the hungry and open your homes to the homeless poor. Give clothes to those who have nothing to wear, and do not refuse to help your own relatives."

When fasting, we are reminded of those who are in need and are without basic living essentials, for example, those who are deprived of food, electricity and heating, shelter, and people who live in poor and dangerous conditions.

God asks of us to let go of the harnesses/sins that hold these people in the captivity of a whirlpool of poverty and distress, by asking us to help our neighbour and to love them as ourselves. Fasting is a traditional penitential exercise that opens our eyes to the hungers of the world. It puts the important things in life into perspective.

God added, "Then my favour will shine on you like the morning sun, and your wounds will be quickly healed...When you pray, I will answer you."

Fasting can give us the time and opportunity to reflect on our relationship with Christ. Recalling

the Temptation in the Desert, we too can ask God for strength in bearing the difficulties that we face.

The second element is prayer. Lough Derg consists of a stark ascetic style of 'prayer', which involves the whole person - body, mind, lips, heart - carried out through movement in bare feet. Keeping vigil and depriving oneself of sleep and rest, whilst fasting, provides the pilgrim with more time to reflect, rely on and communicate with God.

For example, this year we commemorate the life and legacy of St Columba, an ancient figure of this monastic era where Lough Derg has its roots. According to St Columba's hagiographer Adomnán, "He could not pass the space of even a single hour without applying himself either to prayer, or reading, or writing, or else to some manual work...He endured hardships of fasting and vigils without intermission by day and night; the burden of a single one of his labours would seem beyond the powers of man" (Adomnán, 7th century).

Lough Derg connects us with the early Irish Church and its prominent figures. It basically gives us an insight into the life of St Columba too, over a day or weekend pilgrimage. St Columba demonstrated great faith, concentration, dedication and determination through prayer. He showed that he relied on prayer and believed in the power of prayer.

Lough Derg focuses on the soul rather than the flesh, which prayer helps to nourish. The third element is penance. Pilgrims on Lough Derg practice a range of penitential exercises: fasting,

persistent prayer, keeping vigil, constant movement in bare feet, etc. The idea of vigil came from Jesus' request in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Can you not keep watch with me for one hour?"

The deprivation of sleep and food are exhausting, although at the same time, we continue to pray through the hardship which reflects what Jesus said to His Apostles: "The Spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." It is a real challenge of faith, but a refreshing and fulfilling experience.

Additionally, we must take into consideration the environment in which we pray. When kneeling, our knees are on concrete ground, and so become stiff and sore. As well, because it was a virtual pilgrimage due to Covid, we have faced the challenge of being closer to our food and beds in the house. The practice of bringing the body under subjection is a very old and traditional type of penance exercised in atonement for our sins.

I have undertaken both the virtual and, in 2019, the traditional three-day pilgrimage on Lough Derg. Even though the pilgrimage is so strictly disciplined, I would say that it is one of my favourite Irish places of pilgrimage. The experience is so refreshing and fulfilling, and the conversations you have with people you meet are so interesting.

However, the virtual pilgrimage also had its unique features. One of which was the real sense of strong prayer from around the Diocese and in St Eugene's. It was a wonderful and positive sense of community, which was an experience so many people needed during this time of pandemic.



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 thoughts about Lent and Confession and how the story of St Patrick still inspires young people today.

Zara writes about the important work of Trocaire and the need to continue to support the charity, and also reflects on Catholic School education, while Peter reports on an interview by Pope John Paul II Award participants, from the parish of Iskaheen & Upper Moville, with one of their inspirational parishioners about her faith and how it has helped her as a nurse working on the frontline amidst the Covid-19 pandemic.

Hollie shares her experience of Lourdes to mark the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and World Day of the Sick, and Gemma uses her artistic talents in reflecting on The Way of the Cross.



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.

With the Sacrament of Confession we can always start again with a clean slate

by Peter Grant



THE first thing that comes to my mind whenever I think about confession is just simply being sorry for your wrong doing. Whenever I received the Sacrament of Confession, it gave me the opportunity to talk to God and understand Him more, too.

Confession isn't just about having that relationship with God but it helps us learn from our mistakes, especially whenever you're a teenager like me and my peers in today's world; making choices and not knowing the outcome of them and how that may affect our future

too.

The opportunity you have with the Sacrament of Confession is that you can always start off on a clean slate. At times, Confession can also give you a sense of peace and relaxation, after letting go of the thought of your wrong actions that keeps reminding you of it.

In life, many people find it very hard to say sorry to the face of the person they may have hurt physically or mentally, but Confession gives you a sense of comfort in sharing the wrong actions to your local priest. For me, it was always easy to say sorry whenever you're at Confession with your local priest and God, because I, and many others, know that we are part of God's house and we will always be part of it, even when we do something wrong or make mistakes.

Another thing that comes to

Confession helps me to put God at the centre of my life

by John Joseph Augustine

IF there was to be a sacrament more misunderstood than Holy Communion, Confession would fit the bill. The entire idea of confessing your sins to a priest is seen by some as heretical, whilst others see it as a violation of human rights. Whatever your perspective as a Catholic may be, for many out there, Confession and its utility make no sense.

Confession, also known as Penance or Reconciliation, is briefly explained as the sacrament in which you are forgiven of your sins, through a priest (who is in the person of Christ) absolving you from your sins.

The important thing to note is that Christ is the one who forgives our sins in Confession, but this is where most people misinterpret Confession. For example, I asked my friends what they thought confession was, and the first answer that came out was that 'priests forgive your

sins'. To be fair, this is what most people think when they imagine a confession; a priest and another person sitting in a room, with the person recounting a list of sins they had done.

My friends also referred to confession as 'judgemental'. Looking at Confession, the very fact that you have to confess your sins to God, so that you may be forgiven, seems very judgemental and unloving.

Before I understood the sacrament of Confession, I thought that it seemed quite archaic as well. But Confession is not anything like that. Pope Francis gives a very nice insight into Confession – "In Confession, Jesus welcomes us with all our sinfulness, to give us a new heart, capable of loving as He loves".

The modern world offers very little of the privacy and mercy that God gives through the sacrament of Confession. As our

world becomes more and more connected, the privacy that used to be commonplace before is being replaced by petabytes of data about us and many, which are being stored in data centres throughout the world.

The forgiveness that we used to see in people, and the times in which people gave each other another chance to become better, are gone. However, Confession rejects these negative things that have become a part of our culture. God gives each and every one of us another chance to be His child again, even if we falter later.

To quote Pope John Paul II, "Confession is an act of honesty and courage – an act of entrusting ourselves, beyond sin, to the mercy of a loving and forgiving God".

As someone who prefers to regularly take part in Confession, the pandemic has certainly restricted my access to the



sacrament.

My friends often ask why I bother going to Confession so often, and oftentimes I'm left with no answer other than that "I'm a sinner and Confession helps me to better myself".

But I can say more than that – Confession helps me to go over my imperfections. It helps me to root out the bad and replace it with the good. More importantly, it helps me to put God at the centre of my life.

Confession for me is like a weight being lifted off my shoulders

by Oisin Mulhern

THE Sacrament of Confession is one that most people take part in at some point and it usually refers to a genre of prayer primarily focused on expressing sorrow for their specific sins. There are many different versions of the act itself, mostly dependent on where you reside.

When I think upon the act of Confession, I personally see it as an intense moment between a person and God, where the person reveals actions that they believe will move them farther from God. Although we all make these mistakes, as that in itself is human nature, we show a deep devotion to God by deciding to identify and speak our sins to Him. In addition, many consider Confession a conversation between a person and a priest, but it would be more correct to define the priest as an intermediary between the confessor and God.

Another area of Confession I personally feel strongly about is the belief that we should not

continuously ponder our sins after Confession, instead we should leave Confession with the belief that God has forgiven us and we can move on.

If we continually think back on our sins, after we have confessed, then there was no point in asking for them to be forgiven. Instead of this, we should endeavour to quickly move on with the knowledge that God has forgiven us for our transgressions against Him. If God forgives us, we should be able to forgive ourselves.

In regards to how important the sacrament is to me, I think it has a significant level of importance due to the fact that it allows me to directly ask God for forgiveness. There are many sacraments that bring you close to God but Confession is much more direct, as we are essentially speaking directly with God.

In recent times, many have fallen away from Confession, they choose not to believe in its power. They have decided that there is no

need to tell the priest your sins, God knows them already.

However, I feel that it is a mark of respect to God. It is a chance for us to be sorry and to admit to our wrong doing in the way that we should. I feel that deciding not to go to Confession is more of a convenience; many have no time for an activity that makes them question their behaviour or actions. They are not willing to take the time to identify wrongdoing and thus choose not to believe.

Nonetheless, I also believe that over the years Confession was not expressed in a positive light within the Church. It is something people became scared of participating in; they grew anxious and hated the experience.

It can be nerve wracking for many. Therefore, I feel it is also important that the priests teach the value of Confession in a positive light, so that young people do not feel apprehensive. When young children make their First



Confession, we should move away from the tradition of putting ideas of sins in their heads. This immediately puts a negative stance on a very important sacrament. Young children should be welcomed and encouraged to come to Confession with an open heart and if they have nothing to tell, that is fine.

Confession should be a spiritual and enlightening experience, not one filled with dread. I am lucky though that I see the true meaning of Confession and come away from it feeling as if a weight has been lifted off my shoulders.

mind whenever I think about the Sacrament of Confession is a famous parable of Jesus' teachings, 'The Lost Sheep'. I remember at my primary school that my teacher often read about the lost sheep and how the shepherd of his flock

never gave up on his lost sheep, but searched the whole day looking for it. This symbolises what God would do for us; even if we sin against him, we are "his sheep of his flock" and he will always look out for us and many others too.

In a strange but true way, I would describe God in the famous lyrics of a famous song by famous singer Rick Astley, "Never gonna give you up, never gonna let you down, never gonna turn around and desert you".

Confession may be hard to access during this pandemic but we all must remember that God is always looking out for us no matter what and, with light at the tunnel, we'll hopefully be back to normal with Mass and Confession very soon.

Let's combat poverty with compassion

by Zara Schlindwein

POVERTY is a state or condition in which a person or community lacks the financial resources for a minimum standard of living. Poverty has become one of the most prominent issues in our global society today, as the world becomes increasingly separated by finances.

One half disposes of almost everything, indulging in expensive luxuries, while the other half starves. The imbalance surrounds the earth and, as it grows evermore, the less the richer half care to admit to the problem.

Charity can stall this problem, a strategy that our community is well aware of. We are all well accustomed to the Trócaire boxes that reside around the country and the tradition of filling it does more good than we can even imagine.

Trócaire is the Irish word for 'compassion' and they turn the compassion of the Irish people into life-changing support for some of the world's poorest countries. They work in partnership with communities all over the world to relieve poverty and tackle injustice.

Last year, Trócaire brought support and relief to 2.5 million people living in poverty and conflict. From civil wars in Central America to the campaign to end apartheid in South Africa, Trócaire has been vocal in speaking-up on behalf of the oppressed and marginalised, since 1973. They support people regardless of culture, ethnicity, gender or religion. And that is how we all should act.

As members of the Catholic Church, we can sometimes forget the roots upon which our faith was built, and the example we

were given on how to lead our lives. Jesus told everyone to love one another, to reach out to the marginalised and help those in need.

Some people do not want to see justice, as they fear rocking the boat and ruining their perfect set-up. Some parade their endeavours of good work and seek glory out of profiting from someone else's misery. Some perform acts of charity, to relieve their own guilt, rather than fulfil their passion to tackle injustice. That is not a crime, however, it only silences the symptoms of the problem.

If we want to diminish poverty, then we must reevaluate the root and make some changes. The possibilities are amazing when a mindset is altered. We must envisage the future as a bright and prosperous place, just like Trócaire do. They crave for a just and peaceful world where: people's dignity is ensured and rights are respected; basic needs are met and resources are shared equitably; people have control over their own lives; and those in power act for the common good.

So, this Lent, when we put our change into the Trócaire box, we should remember the true values for which we stand and begin to let them dominate our lives. Only then can we achieve the fair and just world that everyone deserves to live in.



Not all superheroes wear capes

by Peter Grant



Nurse Rhonda McColgan who was interviewed by the JPPI parishioners of Iskaheen and Upper Merville.

in the Parish of Iskaheen and Upper Merville organised a Zoom call meeting to interview health care worker, Rhonda McColgan, who is a nurse in Letterkenny Hospital.

The students came up with questions about Rhonda's job during these Covid times and how her faith has helped her overcome the challenges she faces every day.

They also told the story of St Bernadette and how she witnessed Our Lady appearing in Lourdes and how that changed her life. Bernadette became the Patron Saint of the ill and poor and, famously, Lourdes.

Rhonda shared the experiences she has had as a nurse, from caring for the sick in Lourdes to working in Altnagelvin and Letterkenny Hospitals. She also shared what life is like fighting on the frontline

Young people can relate to St Patrick's Confessio

by Hollie Frystal

'Ego Patricius peccator rusticissimus et minimus omnium fidelium'
(Opening words of St. Patrick's Confessio)



I am struck by the first words of St Patrick's Confessio: "My name is Patrick. I am a sinner, a simple country person, and the least of all believers".

This opening declaration highlights St Patrick's humility. He opens with a humble recognition of his own failings and shows determination to make up for them.

The 'Confessio' is an account of St Patrick's life in his own words. It also concludes with a striking phrase of utter humility: "This is my confession before I die".

St Patrick 'was about sixteen'

when he was captured and taken prisoner to Ireland. He believed that this was a punishment for not following God and His commandments. He said, "It was there that the Lord opened up my awareness of my lack of faith. Even though it came about late". St Patrick shows us that repentance is never too late, and that God is always waiting with open arms to forgive and embrace us.

In relation to some young people, St Patrick demonstrates the lack of knowledge and consideration regarding faith and Church growing up. His young teenage life mirrors some young people's lives today, as faith nowadays can be easily overlooked and taken for granted, until someday it reawakens when they find themselves in need of God's help.

St Patrick highlights and apologises for his lack of education: "I did not learn as others did...For me, however, my speech and words have been translated into a foreign language, as it can be easily seen from my writings the standard of the instruction and learning I have had".

We all know how it feels to be misunderstood and rejected. Some young people across the globe are deprived of their right to an education, and so they must find themselves in St. Patrick's position – a sense of limitation regarding words and expression, although, actions speak louder than words.

St James teaches us that "faith and good works must go together", therefore, the language of action is just as important as words. It is as necessary as words.

St Patrick also speaks of how his "youthful ignorance" and kidnapping impacted on his final years of education: "Now in my old age, I want to do what I was unable to do in my youth. My sins then prevented me from really taking in what I read...I was taken prisoner as a youth, particularly young in the matter of being able to speak, and before I knew what I should seek and what I should avoid."

St Patrick teaches us, young people, to not take the gift of education for granted, and he also expresses his distress on growing up too quickly. There is a distinction between the words 'young' and 'youthful'. When

a person is 'young' they are estimated to be between 18-29 years of age. It is an age-related period in every person's life. However, 'youthfulness' is an attitude of the mind and heart, and everyone can possess this attribute. St Patrick is relatable to people of all ages, especially when you venture further into his Confessio.

Regarding Lent, I think of St Patrick's practice of fasting, prayer and penance on Croagh Patrick. He faced many challenges throughout his ministry as bishop, which serves as a continuous inspiration for people of all ages today.

St Patrick had shown courage, especially when faced with Christian persecution from Coroticus and his soldiers, great faith and strength obtained through prayer and, more importantly, he demonstrated what it is to be human. He wasn't for hiding his downfalls but confessed them with a heavy heart and was forgiven.

Young people can also take from St Patrick, his faithful and obedient response to his calling.

St Patrick taught us to pray and trust in God and good things will come

by Oisin Mulhern

ST Patrick is one of the most well-known saints in modern day, with many areas of the world taking part in St Patrick's Day celebrations. However, rather than focus on the celebrations of St Patrick's Day, I would like to focus on how the life and ministry of St Patrick has inspired me.

As many will know, St Patrick was captured and sold as a slave, which saw him end up in Ireland working as shepherd, attending sheep on a mountain. It is almost hard to envision such a traumatic experience; being torn away from your family, your home and your country to be held as a slave for six years.

Such an experience would become all consuming and would inevitably leave one's heart full of

anger and hatred. However, that is where St Patrick was different. He chose to forgive his captors without hesitation.

The message in this is to step back and look carefully at situations that have left us feeling hurt or angry. These situations generally will never come to close the suffering endured by St Patrick, therefore, shouldn't we practice forgiveness much more easily. We should forgive others and forgive ourselves. St Patrick shows us that we must forgive these past transgressions and keep moving forward, as we gain nothing from looking back.

'Forgiveness sets you free'. A heart filled with bitterness will hold you back from being happy. When we forgive, we open our

hearts to God's love.

Another lesson that the ministry of St Patrick can teach us is that we should practice both patience and a calm obedience, even if in certain cases it may seem outlandish to do so. For example, there can be many situations where we are annoyed or angry in relation to others or problems that we had no control over.

However, St Patrick teaches us that instead of becoming angry and rising to these events, we should be patient and calm, not allowing ourselves to fall into further issues that may arise along with this. We should be obedient to God and believe that He will help us to deal with these issues or lead us to rectifying them.

St Patrick taught us that we must

pray and place our trust in God and good things will come, change will happen and problems will be overcome. Faith is key.

Although the celebration of St Patrick's Day can, in some ways, overshadow his ministry and it's message, I have many good memories with regard to St Patrick's Day and it's celebrations.

Some of my favourites include travelling up to our holiday home on the coast of Donegal and spending St Patrick's Day there. We would begin the celebration by attending Mass for the Feast day, wearing shamrocks, dressing in green and spending time with family watching the parades.

There is no harm in celebrating as long as the true meaning of the celebration is not lost.

in helping Covid patients, and many others too.

Regarding the times some patients don't make it passed the line, Rhonda explained how she and other healthcare workers deal with many difficult decisions on the frontline. She highlighted that her faith is always very important to her in everyday life, as she was raised by a family devoted to God. She also had a brother who had needed a lot of care due to his

illness and who sadly passed away at a young age.

Rhonda mentioned that this had inspired her to become a nurse as she had been very close to her brother and had looked after him, and tried as best she could to give him a happy life.

She also highlighted this verse in the Gospel of Mathew (11:29), "Take My yoke upon You and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and You will find

rest for your souls". She said that it had always stood out for during difficult occasions in her nursing, as it means that all of God's burdens shall come to Him and He will take care of them and us.

The interview was a great success for the students in the parish of Iskaheen. The video of Rhonda's interview can be viewed on the Iskaheen, Drung and Muff Parish Facebook page.

The students will continue to

interview inspirational workers and many other people in their parish, and outside their community, during the time of Lent. The next road they will be taking is to Hollywood, meeting all the famous actors, going by the great number of views of Rhonda's interview, and the many other videos that they are doing in their parish and wider community

DURING the Feast Day of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Pope John Paul II and Papal Cross students

Commemorating the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes and World Day of the Sick

St Bernadette is a shining example for young people today *by Hollie Frystal*



ON the February 11, 1858, at about 11 o'clock in the morning of the Thursday before Shrove Tuesday, whilst living in very cold, unhygienic and poor conditions, a young French peasant girl named, Bernadette Soubirous, went with her younger sister, Antoinette, and their friend, Jeanne Abadie, to the area of Massabielle, near the local town dump, to gather bundles of firewood and to pick up some bones to sell.

When making the journey, Bernadette's asthma slowed her down and she fell behind her sister and friend. There and then, whilst she was on her own, she beheld the first apparition at the Grotto of Massabielle.

Bernadette described the atmosphere and the vision of Our

Lady: "I heard a noise like a gust of wind...I raised my eyes towards the grotto and saw a lady dressed in white. She was wearing a white dress, a white veil, a blue girdle and a yellow rose on each foot."

St Bernadette was only 14 years old and, between February 11, 1858 and July 16, 1858, she encountered 18 apparitions. There were times when she simply prayed with Our Lady in silence, and other times she was spoken to and given a message.

After the third apparition, Bernadette went to Fr Peyramale, PP, to give him a message from Our Lady, "Go, tell the priests and that people should come here in procession and to build a Chapel here."

'Come here in procession' was an invitation to come together and pray for those who are suffering in sin and sickness. 'Build a chapel here' was requested in order to accommodate the pilgrims and to also build a Church community in Lourdes. As we know, Lourdes attracts the sick and suffering. The central prayer in Lourdes is the 'relief for those who are poor' in any state.

St Bernadette had suffered immensely in her life; therefore, she is someone we can relate to and

we can pray for her intercession. When Bernadette was about 10 months old, her mother lost her milk due to an accident and could no longer breast-feed Bernadette, so she was entrusted to the care of a family friend, Marie Lagues, in Bartrés, who had lost her son, Jean at the time of his birth.

On June 24, 1854, Bernadette's father lost his job at the Boly Mill, which left the Soubirous family in poverty and suffering, which eventually led them to the dungeon. Interestingly, in the autumn of 1855, there was a pandemic/plague. Bernadette was 11 years old then and she got very sick. Her sores were treated in a rudimentary way; repeated friction with rags of straw exposed her sores in order to eliminate the cancerous parts and dress them. Although it was an effective treatment, Bernadette suffered from chronic asthma for the rest of her life, and later the combination of tuberculosis of the bone led to her death at 35 years old.

Bernadette also faced abuse, torture and torment from people who made fun of her because they didn't believe her, and she suffered the exhaustion of constant investigation into the

apparitions. She lived in appalling conditions growing up, and had to choose a different way of life to what she had planned.

In celebrating the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes and observing World Day for the Sick, which Pope John Paul II established as a day of prayer, reflection and observation in 1992, we are reminded that we are all in need of healing in some way or another, and through St Bernadette, who suffered excruciating pain physically, emotionally and mentally, we can ask for her intercession and we can respond to Our Lady's invitation in forming a procession of prayer and assistance to those in need.

I have always loved the story of Lourdes and have found St Bernadette an absolute inspiration. As a young person growing up in the midst of a pandemic, I find the message of Lourdes relatable, comforting and hopeful.

This year, Pope Francis asked us to pray for those who have fallen ill due to the coronavirus, and to pray for the protection of our frontline workers.

Lourdes is now a very popular pilgrimage site that attracts mass



numbers every year from around the globe. I went to Lourdes back in 2018, and it was the most wonderful and amazing experience.

St Bernadette is a shining example for young people today, as she demonstrated great faith, humbleness, strength obtained through prayer, persistence, loyalty and obedience in doing the will of God.

Very interestingly and importantly, Bernadette was a young lady of only 14 years old when she was chosen and entrusted by God to bring forth the miraculous spring that would heal the sick for centuries.



Catholic Schools' Week through the eyes of a Catholic school student *by Zara Schlindwein*



Lumen Christi pupil, Zara and her sister, Saoirse, who attends Rosemount PS, Derry.

THIS year's theme for Catholic School's Week was 'Communities of Faith and Resilience', and I believe that message to be alive already in the presence of our parish and community. We are a community of faith, whether it be our schools, local churches or even our homes, we rekindle the fire of our faith every day. It may be through prayer or devotion, or even better, through simple acts of kindness that may affect others in profound ways, that we may not be aware of.

As young people, we can sometimes wrongly lose the necessity for faith. We can be won over by thoughtless and shallow propaganda that gets fired at us all the time. However, we cannot be the only ones blamed as victims

to this 'acceptable society', there are others too, of all ages.

Sometimes I feel as though we are misunderstood and branded as easily influenced, however hard we may try to balance the goings on in our lives. Granted, there are countless shadows that young people may be more susceptible to fall into, but that does not mean that we are not strong in mind and spirit. That is why I believe that our faith should be respected and nourished at such an 'influential' age.

I know we are not the first generation of young people to walk this earth, and many of you have walked in those steps before us, but certain circumstances have forced us to take an alternative route in the path known as growing up.

I can speak from my own experiences and express the joy surrounding my life within my parish and school. Attending a Catholic school allows me to broaden my knowledge intellectually, whilst extending my vision of faith. I have attended Catholic schools for almost my entire life, beginning in Rosemount Primary and Nursery School, which led me to Lumen Christi College.

Having my education intertwined with my faith has given me a very clear view of my morals at such a young age. The

idea that we are all made in the image and likeness of God has always been presented to me, furthering my regard for every human being, no matter what race, religion or anything that we may lack in similarity.

With the Catholic faith at the heart of our education, everything else just falls in place around it. This is because love must lie at the core of everything we do.

Going to school every day feels comfortable, knowing that I belong to a caring community, where we are encouraged to be our best selves and not let any opportunity pass by. We are all strong-minded, ambitious individuals, who when joined together become a circle of mutual respect and support.

Our Catholic Schools have faced many setbacks in these recent times, with the pandemic controlling our every move. There is no doubt that the difficulty has been felt by countless students across the world, but we cannot fail to recognise the perseverance that has been portrayed by the overall community.

Adapted

We have adapted our skills and continued to pursue our educational aspirations, whether they are achieved in different settings or not.

As it says in Corinthians 4:8-

9, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed."

That message has been living through the work provided by our Catholic schools. Although we may not be able to attend the school building, the school ethos and values still lie central to our everyday living. The moral learning that has already been centred allows us to face off these challenges easier than other establishments.

The schools may come under battles with covid cases, lockdown or even budget cuts. However, they still thrive, educating and inspiring generations of young people, coinciding with the faith that the community shares.

The trait that separates us from any other type of school is the trust that we place in something above ourselves, and that faith encourages us to be the most wonderful versions that we can be. Despite this, we can all stumble upon hard times, but having the knowledge of offered support can help you through anything.

As we continue to grow in knowledge, we also grow in faith. Our teachers have made it clear that top marks may be one of our main goals, but overall health should be our focal objective.

Everyone is striving for the same thing, success, but at a Catholic school we are taught to seek for more; love, honesty, respect and integrity.

At Lumen Christi College, our school motto is 'In Tuo Lumine Videmus Lumen', which translates to 'In your light, we see light', and is based on the principle that the light of Christ will inspire us all.

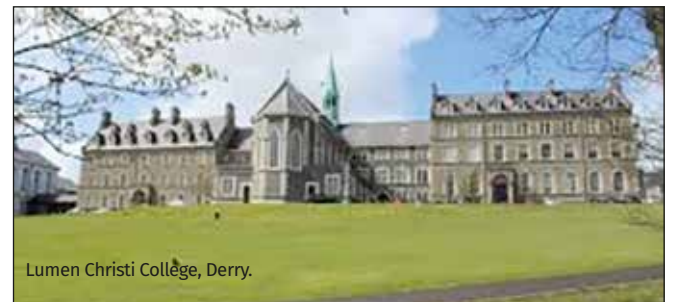
We hold the belief that academic excellence derives from a caring environment imbued with the Christian Gospel in action, as we look to Christ for inspiration.

Normally Catholic Schools' Week is one of the biggest celebrations in the Derry Diocese, when pupils, teachers and parishioners from every corner of the Diocese come together to celebrate the caring and inclusive culture that is so fortunately rooted within our community. Of course, this year is very different. We were unable to celebrate together as we have become banished to

our individual classrooms, each differing from the next. However, our challenges have been eased through the gift of technology. We can connect through the medium of the parish webcam, online Masses, assemblies, reflections and prayers. This may not be the same, but it still allows us to celebrate our community of faith and give thanks for the resilience that has been shown.

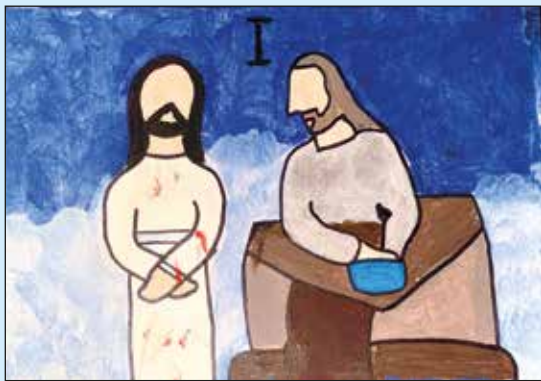
Catholic Schools' Week is a reminder to us that strong people will withstand strong challenges and that we must look forward to brighter times. I hope that everyone may feel included and valued within our community and that we may all work together, for the mission of maintaining the moral ethos provided by our Catholic schools, that we may appreciate every individual for who they are and encourage them to be their best self.

We must also clarify the beauty within our world, by educating and exemplifying the good work of caring for the environment.

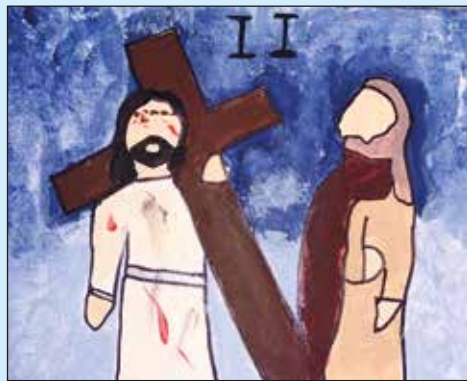


Lumen Christi Collège, Derry.

The Way of the Cross *with Gemma Gallagher*



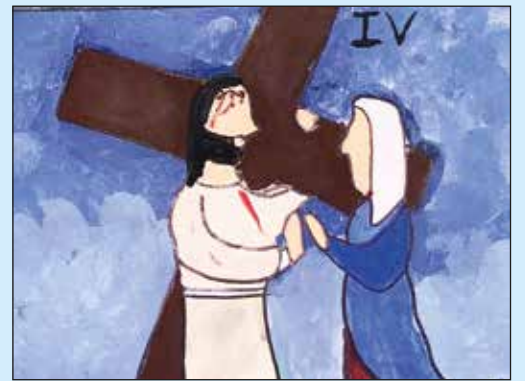
I. Jesus is condemned to death
Jesus' suffering begins so that we might have eternal life.



II. Jesus takes up His cross
Proving His everlasting love for us, Jesus takes on the heavy burden of the Cross.



III. Jesus falls the first time
Falling under the weight, Jesus unites Himself with us in times of suffering.



IV. Jesus meets His Mother
I see the love between a mother and her child and how it is never ending.



V. Simon helps Jesus to carry His Cross
This shows me that during struggles in life we should be there for one another, and we will pull through.



VI. Veronica wipes the face of Jesus
Again, I see Jesus showing us that there are people in our lives, such as our friends and loved ones, who can help us through life's storms.



VII. Jesus falls the second time
Out of love, Jesus unites with us again and again in our times of suffering. We are not to worry if we fall, He will lift us up.



VIII. The women weep for Jesus
The women were crying because they loved Jesus and were there for Him in His struggles. Mary Magdalene was a woman of struggles but Jesus saw the past these. This shows me to never judge someone but to help them instead.



IX. Jesus falls for the final time
Exhausted, Jesus is still ready to give His life for ours. What an amazing and loving God He is!



X. Jesus is stripped of His clothes
I see great power in Jesus to stay strong for what He believed in, and He did so with grace and great dignity.



XI. Jesus is nailed to the Cross
Here, Jesus is showing us how to love even those people who hurt us sometimes.



XII. Jesus dies on the Cross
Jesus' Mother Mary stays with Him, though she suffers watching Him in pain. I see how strong Mary is here and I look up to Her.



XIII. Jesus' body is taken from the Cross
Mary, Our Mother, knows the pain we suffer when someone we love dies. I see her here taking us in Her arms when we are suffering, and helping us to stay strong.



XIV. Jesus' body is laid in the tomb
Jesus is free from all pain and suffering now. He wants us to believe that we can get through any difficult time, with Him leading the way.

Down through the ages, women have been pillars of strength to those around them in troubled times, and now, in this time of a pandemic that has caused disruption to life worldwide...

Three female prayer friends join forces to give life to ‘Deirfiúr’ – an online Catholic sisterhood



AMIDST all the increased challenges and concerns over the past year, as a result of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, there have been some powerful positive responses from people that have kept the light of hope burning for many, and amongst them is a faith

and friendship outreach by three prayer friends which has gone global during Lent.

Buncrana parishioner, Maria Doherty, along with Roisin Doherty, Derry, and Tanya McHugh, of Donegal Town, became good friends a few years

ago after meeting at faith events run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and Youth 2000, and feel very blessed by the faith friendship that they still have with each other. So, when they discovered that some women, especially young mothers, were feeling very isolated in their homes during lockdowns and had a longing for heart to heart discussions and prayer with other women, they put their heads together to see what they could do to help.

And the fruits of their prayer and discernment are now being shared during Lent with the launch of an online Catholic sisterhood movement called ‘Deirfiúr’, which is Irish for sister. It involves various small groups of women coming

together regularly online to read Scripture, pray and chat.

Within a month of putting out feelers for such a movement amongst their prayer friends in different parts of the country and the world, they had over 60 women signed up who come from parts of the Derry Diocese as well as other parts of the country, the United Kingdom, America, Belgium, and France, and they expect this number to grow as word spreads.

Blown away by the response, the trio pooled their experiences of leading small group faith discussions and got to work preparing a booklet guide to help and encourage the groups of women as they embark on this exciting faith initiative, which will

be a completely new experience for some.

Explaining the meaning of the name ‘Deirfiúr’, pronounced jerrif-er, to the ladies who sign up, they write in the guide booklet: “We hope you will find sisters and friendship in your groups. Friends are the sisters we choose”.

They added: “We have women from all over the world, in different states of life. We would love each group to make this their own and find what works for them. But it is so important to us that any books, programmes or formats chosen are in line with the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”.

Recommending various faith resources and inspiring books, including ‘Alone with God Alone’,

which is the life story of the late Derry-born nun, Sr Clare Crockett, that the groups could use, Roisin, Maria and Tanya have assured them of their ongoing guidance as mentors, with each having taken a number of groups to keep in regular contact with.

Excited by this new faith venture, the trio are keeping it in prayer so all will be guided by the Holy Spirit, and are looking forward to welcoming more women on board. The contact email is sisterhood.21@outlook.com, and those signing up are asked to give their name, contact number, country and age, to enable grouping in similar time zones and with women of a similar age, which can help when sharing.

Maria’s Story... God doesn’t leave you idle for long



Maria Doherty.

BUNCRANA musician and singer, Maria Doherty feels very blessed in life, having grown up in a family with a strong Catholic faith that has led to many opportunities for her to develop a deeper relationship with God, through such experiences as an annual silent retreat in Knock, Youth 2000 events, various prayer initiatives with the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Children’s Ministry, Overseas Missions and her own Gospel hour television show.

Reflecting on her faith journey so far, the 34-year-old daughter of Hugh and Roisin Doherty said that while she had always believed in God, it was an experience about 13 years ago that led her to realise that not only was God real, He also wanted her to have a relationship with Him.

This revelation came during a Fr Bill Retreat in Knock Convent given by Fr Anthony, a Vincentian priest based in Uganda, and with her parents and younger brother, Rónán, similarly experiencing a great depth of Divine love during the week-long silent retreat, the family have made a point of

returning together for a top up each year.

“My mother was the first from our family to attend the retreat in Knock, which was the last led there by Fr Bill before he died and then Fr Anthony was appointed to take over,” said Maria, “and when she saw the joy on my face after my first encounter with him, she wanted other young people to experience this as well about their faith, so she organised a youth retreat in Ards Friary with Fr Anthony. A lot of young people came to this retreat and many found it a really beautiful experience. I would say that it changed their hearts and lives.

“My mother now organises the annual week-long silent retreat in Knock, which is for people of all ages. Unfortunately, we didn’t have it last year with lockdown and we really missed that. A lot of people say that it is their nourishment for the year”.

She added: “For me, Fr Anthony is the closest to a saint that I have met. It was through him that I started singing for God. He asked me to sing a song at one of the retreats in Knock. I would have sung with my father, who has been singing and playing music all his life, but I never would have thought of singing in the chapel and I hadn’t sung holy songs. But, when Fr Anthony asked me to sing during the retreat in Knock, I couldn’t say no as I felt it was from God and for Him.

“I tried to sing the hymn as a prayer and afterwards I was taken aback to see big muscley men and older people crying. It was a lesson to me that God can do anything through people, no matter how little they are, and He had touched these people through me singing

that hymn. They said that they had received healing. My father and I now do the music for this week of retreat each year.

“After that, I started singing at Mass back home in St Mary’s Oratory, with my father, who would have played a bit with the folk group, and we have been doing that ever since. This led to us recording a CD because a lot of people started asking about that. One week a man even came to the chapel with a tape recorder to tape us singing!”

Explaining that Fr Anthony ran an orphanage in Uganda, called the DePaul Boys’ Home, Maria said: “We decided to record the CD, called ‘A Living Prayer’, to give something back. A lot of money was raised through sales and the proceeds went to the orphanage and Foyle Hospice”.

The summer after experiencing her first Fr Bill retreat, Maria went to the Youth 2000 festival in Clonmacnoise and has been involved with it ever since.

“I started playing music at Youth 2000 events and now I am the national music coordinator for it, overseeing the music for the big summer festival and Christmas retreat, as well as for the retreats within Ulster, Munster, Connacht and Leinster,” said Maria, who also plays the piano, guitar and tin whistle.

During lockdown, Youth 2000 has gone online, with a workshop on Monday nights, prayer and Eucharistic Adoration, with the Dominicans in Cork, on Wednesday nights, and a quiz on Friday nights.

Maria organised its recent online Valentine’s ‘Blind Date’ event: “We got all the volunteers from Youth 2000 to take part and we

had a raffle, and a good number of people tuned in. As well as raising some money, we helped people have fellowship. I think this is something people are really missing out on – coming together. Even if just sat at a screen, you are still in some contact.

“We also had the big summer festival and the Christmas retreat online, which was a blessing. A lot of young people were watching who are not part of Youth 2000, so it was a great way of introducing what it is about to them”.

Musical

Her musical contributions at Youth 2000 events led to Maria being asked to play music at the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal healing nights, when they first came to Derry, and she went on to spend about eight years working on prayer initiatives with the friars.

“Bro Tansi, from Nigeria, had been in charge of the music then with the Friars,” she recalled, “and I ended up playing the music at the First Friday healing services for about four years and spending a lot of time in the friary each week, because I also got involved with the youth group they ran on Sunday nights and the Bible Study on Wednesday nights with Fr Columba”.

And it was through her involvement with the friars that Maria and her brother, Rónán, went on to set up a local branch of the Dead Theologians Society (DTS), which educates young people about the saints and how they lived like Christ.

She explained: “The founder of the DTS in America, Eddie Cotter, was coming over to Ireland once a year at the time, and we got an opportunity to meet him, along with Fr Columba and Bro Patrick.

When Rónán and I decided to give it a go, Bro Patrick said that he would help us.

“Every month, we had young people coming to our house in Buncrana. Bro Patrick is into walking and he organised beautiful hikes up mountains, to waterfalls, and through forests. He also led us in prayer at some stage during the trek.

“Afterwards, we came back to our house, where we have a converted attic. Eddie had said that the DTS appeals to the senses, so we had incense and Gregorian chant playing and displayed holy pictures. A charism of DTS is to pray for souls in purgatory, so every month we focussed on a different saint and prayed.

“Then we would all go downstairs and eat all the food that my mother had prepared, and would finish up by sitting around singing songs and saying Night Prayer. The gathering lasted from afternoon until night-time. It was so much fun. People heard about it by word of mouth and came from Derry, Donegal, Belfast and Fermanagh... one girl was from Portaferry.

“We ended up having about 40 young people, aged 18-35 years, which was too much for our small house, so we moved the group to St Joseph’s Pastoral Centre, in

Derry. However, shortly after that people started falling away and it eventually stopped”.

“But God doesn’t leave you idle for long,” remarked Maria, “because when the DTS ended, I was asked to present a Gospel show on television! When my father and I made the CD, my father’s friend made a couple of music videos with us and we put them on YouTube. These were seen by a man called Phil Mack, who owned the Spotlight TV channel and wanted a Gospel music show, so he asked me to present it and I have been doing that for over four years now.

“I sing songs that I think are meaningful and I share something about the artist or song that I think will touch people’s hearts. I like presenting this show because most times I would be singing hymns to people who already believe in God, but this is a music channel that people are watching for the music, so the faith message is reaching people that it wouldn’t normally reach”.

The show is called ‘Maria’s Gospel Hour’ and it airs on Sundays, from 4-5 pm on Sky and Freeview, and has around 100,000 watching it every week!

Maria is heavily involved in bringing the faith to people



Maria and her father, Hugh P Doherty

through other ministries as well, like Children's Catechesis, overseas missions with The Missionaries of Charity in Norway and Belgium, events in Europe and Africa, and has played music all over Ireland at faith events, as well as weddings and funerals, and also overseas.

Just as the Gospel show has enabled God to touch many hearts through Maria's singing, His hand seems very much to be in the creation of the online Catholic sisterhood, Deirfiúr, that she and her friends, Tanya McHugh and Roisin Doherty, have been inspired to launch.

Recalling how this had come about, she said: "Just before the virus struck, some of the girls I had met through faith events and small group prayer with the friars had

moved for one reason or another. We had gone our separate ways. Tanya and I have been friends for years after meeting through Youth 2000, and she had gone to Belfast for her work as a nurse.

"I had been wondering how they were on their own and I mentioned to Roisin that I wanted to hold a women's group in my home, in Buncrana. We did that for about 6-8 months, but when the virus came we couldn't continue meeting like we were, so we decided to meet online. I also had the Youth 2000 online."

With a desire in her heart to help people grow in their faith, Maria added: "I wanted other women to have that support and sisterhood in the faith. It so happened that my friend, Tanya, who was also in a

women's group in Belfast, wanted to do something similar to me. Through good fortune, we ended up discussing it along with Roisin and decided to do something about it together.

"We knew how beautiful it was to have the support of the other women in our wee groups, and we wanted other women to experience this too".

Praising the great work by Tanya in producing the guide booklet for Deirfiúr, Maria added: "When we started Deirfiúr, we didn't realise the response we would get. A lot of people can feel alone, and if one girl finds a friend out of all this and they support each other through this time, then all the work will have been worth it".

Tanya's story... A turning point in my life was realising God loves each of us individually



Tanya McHugh

AS a young nurse working in The Royal Belfast Hospital's ICU, Tanya McHugh has found her Catholic faith to be a great source of strength and comfort, particularly during this busy time with the pandemic when her role has meant working once or twice a week in the Covid unit.

Qualified five years now, the 30-year-old grew up in Donegal Town along with her younger sister in a family grounded in the Catholic faith, thanks to her parents, Raymond and Rosemary McHugh.

Recalling an experience that led to a deeper understanding of her faith, Tanya told 'The Net': "Growing up, I believed in God but my faith was just a small part of my life. Then, in my last year of school, we had a Net Ministries retreat which had a massive impact on me.

"It was the first time that I really realised that God loved me; that He loved each person individually not en masse, and that was a turning point for me in my faith. I went on to do two years on mission with Net Ministries and it was a fantastic time of formation in my faith.

"My parents brought me up really well in the dos and don'ts of our Catholic faith, but I didn't know the why behind the teachings. The time with Net Ministries was a great opportunity for me to learn".

After the period with Net Ministries, Tanya went on to study nursing at the Magee Campus of

the University of Ulster, in Derry, and during her time living in the City she was delighted to meet the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal and travel further in her faith journey with their support, and that of the many wonderful prayer friends she met en route.

"When I first met the Friars they were based in the Long Tower Parish, and then they moved to Galliagh," she recalled, adding: "It was through going to their Bible Study group that I first met Roisin, and Maria, whom I had already known through the Derry Youth 2000 prayer meetings, was also involved in this.

"The friars were fantastic. As well as the Bible Study, I was involved in the Dead Theologians Society and with the prayer teams for the healing nights in St Joseph's Church, in Galliagh. It was a fantastic time. We were involved with so many different things with them each week and there was so much time to chat, particularly during the DTS hikes up mountains. It was almost like they were big brothers in the faith. You didn't feel like you were there to be converted as part of their ministry, but that they were taking us on as friends.

"It broke my heart moving to Belfast when I started nursing in the Royal, as I was leaving such a beautiful group of friends and community".

However, Tanya was blessed in having a Youth 2000 friend living in Belfast, who introduced her to the Catholic community there and, within a short time, she was helping her friend start a women's faith group. Called 'Fiat', the group invite speakers to give talks on various topics.

Over the four years since starting, the number of women in 'Fiat' has grown to 20. While passionate about it, Tanya eventually found herself unable to make the meetings as they collided with her nursing shifts, but the group continues to meet, though online now because of lockdown.

"It was amazing," she said, "to see

girls come along, who had heard about the group by chance, and share their whole life story on their first visit, saying that this was what they had been looking for".

Again, God had a plan and the Holy Spirit wasn't long prompting a friend of Tanya's, who lived in Monaghan, to get in contact with her and ask if they could get together to pray online.

Commenting on this, Tanya said: "Just before lockdown, along with two other friends, we started meeting to pray online. As we are all friends, we enjoy a wee chat and then we pray the Rosary together at the end, and this has become such a beautiful source of friendship, prayer and consistency during lockdown.

"This is where the idea of a sisterhood started to come into my thoughts. God put it on my heart that people needed the same as I had with my wee group, and He had simultaneously put it on the hearts of Roisin and Maria. The three of us decided to put the word out to see if anyone would be interested in meeting, chatting and praying together with others in a group.

"I was praying about it and felt that God was saying to just write a post and see if anyone is interested...and there were. It is so exciting. People have been emailing me about it and one girl, from Ireland, wrote that she had just been at Adoration asking God for faith friends and then she came home to find the link on her phone about this online sisterhood starting.

"A few people have emailed in who are young mums living out their faith, but do not have any friends at the same stage of life that they can share their faith with. So, they are looking forward to being in a group with other young mums in their faith too".

The friends set to work creating their Catholic Women's online sisterhood, 'Deirfiúr', with Tanya putting together a booklet: "I wanted it to be beautiful to reflect the beauty of women's femininity.

Roisin's story... My Catholic faith has been a life-saver for me



Roisin Doherty, Derry.

A mother of three boys and two girls, Roisin Doherty has been living in Derry with her young family for just over 10 years. Having lived in England with her Derry-born parents since she was eight, she decided to return to her childhood home to bring up her own children, when she became a single parent.

And she is delighted that she did because amongst the first people to befriend her were the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, who were based at Victoria Place, in the Long Tower Parish, at the time, and who inspired her to, once again, begin practising her Catholic faith and pass it on to her children.

"All five of my children were under the age of seven at the time and the Friars came to my aid, because I had nothing," said Roisin, who now works with a Catholic charity.

She recalled: "Fr Fidelis was speaking in Holy Family Church, Ballymagroarty, which I was attending with the children as it was the Children's Liturgy at that Mass, and I was struck by what he said. I felt that I really needed to find out more about my faith if I was going to bring my children up Catholic.

"I got chatting to Fr Fidelis and he invited me to the Friary, and from then the friars took us under their wing, because I was a single mother and poverty stricken at the time. That is what they do in their ministry; they reach out to help those in need, and my children really took to them.

"That is how my journey with them started and then my faith journey. I started going to Bible Study with Fr Columba and got to know about the Holy Spirit through the Net Ministries missionaries, who were coming

Maria came up with the idea for the logo, which is a little crown of stars to represent Our Lady's 12 stars, so that we can be under Our Lady's protection".

Aware of the great benefits of female fellowship, Tanya remarked: "We all have had our good and bad experiences. I have

in as visitors to the Bible Study nights. I joined in Prayer Ministry with the friars. My Catholic faith has been a life saver for me".

Roisin and her young family have particularly special memories of the Youth 2000 prayer group that Bro Patrick had started up when the friars came to Derry.

"I was young enough to be able to go to Youth 2000 retreats and I took my children with me, so they grew up in that great environment, with the involvement of the Friars and going to Youth 2000 events. They also went to Camp Veritas, again through the Grey Friars, and when Youth 2000 stopped, we went to the Holy Hours that they led.

"We have been so blessed to have had the friars accompany us on our faith journey; they have helped bring great depth and joy to our faith. My oldest son, Owen really enjoyed going on his own to his first big Youth 2000 retreat before Covid, and he got an opportunity to work with Net Ministries, and now he is discerning God's plan for his life, while my 15-year-old daughter, Susie, and her boyfriend are working on writing a book about relationships and chastity, with the help of Fr Columba. He was encouraging them about it before he left for London and he is still guiding them."

Healing

It was through Bible Study with the Friars, and the wider community of people coming to the Healing Nights, and being invited by Net Ministries to their praise and worship sessions, as well as attending the Open Skies Christian Festival, held at Shane's Castle, and Youth 2000 retreats, that Roisin got to meet many other people in their faith, including Maria Doherty and her whole family, from Buncrana, and Tanya McHugh, from Donegal Town, who is now living and working as a nurse in Belfast.

"Once I found women to travel in my faith with, I stayed in contact with them", she said, "and I found myself walking more closely in my faith with Maria and Tanya."

The Grey Friars' Bible Study Group went on to become known as the Living Disciples' Group, and through this Roisin gained valuable ministering experience in leading small groups for over

come across relationships and friendships that strive to build each other up and lead each other to God, but I also think women can hurt other women in a way no one else can.

"Through Deirfiúr, we want to help people have friendships that are founded in Christ, as these

four years.

When the Living Disciples Group moved away from the small groups' format to focus more on Scripture teaching, some, including Roisin, Maria and Tanya, wanted to continue meeting in small groups because they valued all that this offered and went on to form groups with those who had a similar work-life balance, and met in each other's houses.

"We knew, as women, that we were really being nourished in the small groups and we were keeping each other going," remarked Roisin, adding: "We have been doing that on and off for about two years. I am in a group of four, including Maria, whose house we mostly met in before the Covid lockdown. We meet weekly and have been doing so through Zoom these days. Each group is different. Our's does Lectio Divina and we talk about our dreams and our hopes. Sometimes we do sessions on the saints, and we did our Marian Consecration together and the 33 Days to Merciful Love.

"I found all of these so enriching. We try to tie in with the liturgical year and are always looking for a new angle on our faith and explore the different teachings of our Church.

"We also have a Whatsapp group, on which we share Scripture and prayers or some inspiration that we had that day. For me, it's about a single parent sharing my faith journey, and learning to love and receive love. Our group is a safe place; you can talk about anything and you will be accepted. I don't have a partner at home to share this with, though my kids are living their faith. But women grow with other women – heart to heart – walking together.

"It's great to know that I am not alone, that there is always a listening ear, someone to talk to and share with. It's great to feel supported as I prepare the way for my children."

Through her faith journey so far, Roisin has become very aware of the need for groups like this: "There is so much hunger for the faith and knowing this is what led to Maria, Tanya and I launching 'Deirfiúr' as a Catholic online sisterhood. It's a very exciting time. We're just stepping out in faith; leaving it in God's hands how it turns out."

types of friendships have a depth that other friendships don't have. This sisterhood is for women of any age and we have someone aged 68 that has signed up. We want women of whatever age to be part of Deirfiúr, and we look forward to getting to know them along the way."

Exodus 90 – empowering men to reach their full God-given potential



A growing number of men in the Derry Diocese are taking up the Exodus 90 challenge – the 90-day spiritual exercise for men based on the three pillars essential for the Christian life: prayer, asceticism and fraternity.

While it is known to be an extremely challenging programme, it is appealing to men who want to grow in personal freedom and in their relationship with God and those around them, and, seeing the fruits of it in the lives of others who have undertaken it, more and more men in the Diocese and around the world are giving it a go.

The programme involves: making a daily holy hour; reading each day's provided scripture and reflection; taking short, cold showers; practicing regular, intense exercise; getting a full

night's sleep (at least seven hours is recommended); abstaining from alcohol, desserts and sweets, eating between meals, sweet drinks (white milk, black coffee, and black tea are permissible), television, movies, or televised sports, video games and non-essential material purchases; and listening only to music that lifts the soul to God, only using the computer for work, school, or essential tasks (eg, paying bills), and only using mobile devices for essential communications, cutting out non-essential texting, app, and internet use.

In addition, Wednesdays and Fridays are days of fasting, so participants abstain from meat and only eat one full meal, as well as two smaller meals that together are not equal to a full meal.

Exodus 90 was first created as a seminary formation programme by Fr Brian Doerr, at an American Theological Seminary, with the aim of helping the young seminarians grow in personal freedom and many of them credited the programme with being the most critical factor

in their formation for priesthood. Following years of success, consideration was given to opening up the programme to laymen, so that they too could benefit from this life enhancing spiritual exercise...and thousands of men have.

The programme takes its name from the Book of Exodus, wherein the story is told of the Israelites, a strong people who were oppressed not because they were weak but because they were strong and growing, and co-founder of the programme, James Baxter notes: "This is so similar to men today, who are so full of potential and power, that the devil enslaves them to sin and worldly distractions out of fear for what they might do if they responded to God's high calling."

To tie in with the making of New Year resolutions and Lent, Exodus 90 is commonly started in January to end on Easter Sunday, whatever date that is each year.

To join the challenge, or for more information, visit Exodus90.com or check out the mobile app in the App store or Google Play store

A lot of us who did Exodus 90 are more secure and happy in our faith

by Martin Healey



Martin Healey with his late mother, Moya, after she had completed her Cursillo weekend.

AT the start of 2020, a group of male prayer friends from the Derry City area took up the challenge of Exodus 90. One of those who lasted the distance of the 90-day programme was 59-year-old Galliagh parishioner, Martin Healey, who found it great preparation for the challenges faced in the past year with Covid-19 and the resultant restrictions on life.

Aware that some of the men in the group are currently making

their way through the programme again, Martin decided to give it a miss this year, but happily recalled his experience for 'The Net', as he believes that it is a tremendous way of learning more about yourself and developing a deeper relationship not only with God, but with those near and dear to you.

Just prior to being introduced to Exodus 90, the Cursillo inspired prayer group that Martin is a member of were talking about

the Holy Spirit and how it works in their lives, so when one of the men suggested that they do the Exodus programme as a group, he decided to give it a go.

"Six of us signed up for it 90 days prior to Easter Sunday last year," recalled Martin, "and as part of the programme, I was going to Mass daily. I was also going to Confession every week, which was unusual for me, and I was reading more Scripture.

"I took an hour every day for meditation or reading Scripture, and each day we got a reading from an online source, which was from Exodus and about the Israelites; a strong people who felt that they were weak, but with God leading them in their exodus, through Moses, they discovered who they were".

He added: "We weren't to watch TV or use the internet except, for example, to watch a video of someone giving a talk. So, while my wife was watching programmes on TV, I read the Bible or went to spend an hour or two in front of the Blessed Sacrament. It turned out, that we all ended up doing this. Something was changing in our lives once we detached ourselves

Exodus 90 is a great programme for men

– Stephen McCafferty



Stephen McCafferty and his wife, Deborah.

Another Cursillista who took up the Exodus 90 challenge at the same time as Martin was Stephen McCafferty, of Foyle Springs, in Derry.

"I was shocked at the start that it was for 90 days, but I decided to go for the challenge of going off drink for that long and for the exercise," recalled Stephen.

He managed to keep going with the programme for 70 of the 90 days, but got knocked off track when the Covid-19 restrictions first led to the closure of churches, around this time last year.

"When the virus started," he said, "it sunk my boat as I couldn't get to Mass or receive the Sacraments. Fr Sean O'Donnell explained that it was because of the seriousness of the virus that churches were closed but I threw the dummy out of the pram".

Reflecting on his experience of the programme, Stephen said: "The first two weeks were hard as I was trying to get into a routine, and the thought of giving up television or the internet was difficult. I also found the cold showers hard, so I didn't stay in there too long!

"I went off drink for the first time. With men, it's a habit to take a drink and watch a film at some stage on a Saturday. A lot of men are just a slave to drink and sport and I am the same. You just want your own pleasure, but Exodus 90 is about sacrifice; it just broadens your mind.

"I found the exercise easier than spending an hour in prayer, but this improved as I felt myself having more of a relationship with God; starting to understand God's love and then my relationship with my family; my wife and children. Developing that deeper relationship with God was a great experience and had a real impact on me".

Undertaking the Exodus 90 programme as a group was a great help to Stephen: "I found being part of a group doing it made the difference. I feel you would struggle otherwise. People feel better having someone encourage them to carry on.

"I think it is a great programme for men, especially young men who feel lost; Exodus 90 would help them to get back on track".

He also spoke of the great

support he received from his wife: "Deborah was very much part of the Exodus 90 programme, helping me with the dinner on Wednesdays and Fridays, when I ate fish".

He added: "I have suffered from depression over the years and, at first, I was afraid to do the programme as I thought that it would put more pressure on me, but it didn't, it gave me strength. I found that each day's reading prepared me for the stage that I was at.

"I really enjoyed the experience and it prepared me for the time of lockdown because it was something similar. I would definitely do it again if there were no virus restrictions as the sacraments are a big part of the programme, for example Confession, which is very important to me".

Commenting on his lockdown experience, Stephen said: "I have got used to Mass online but I don't get anything out of it. At the start, when I listened to Mass online from St Eugene's Cathedral, I found the prayer for a spiritual communion very powerful and this encouraged me to go online for Mass when the churches were closed.

"You think if you don't receive the sacrament you don't get the graces, but I found a lot of grace in that spiritual communion prayer and I hope that they continue with that after lockdown".

The father of nine added: "These are God's times now. This situation with the virus has made me look at my life and stick to priorities for my family. I have packed in racing, triathlons, which were a big part of my life, but it was the right thing to do. One thing I have learned about this virus and God's plans is our acceptance of suffering."

from the modern things around us.

"It wasn't anything over the top. I still had my normal work life but I had more of a sense that I was created by God for God, and the others felt this as well. We were heading in the same direction, deepening our relationship with God without any real direction within the group".

Noting that physical exercise and diet were part of the programme as well, he said: "I went for walks to physically improve my health, and abstained from sugar, chocolate, beer, fizzy drinks etc, so much of that went out of my diet."

"It was a struggle," admitted Martin, "but you learn a lot about yourself and you learn not to over

analyse. You start realising that as a human being you are weak and vulnerable, and that if you want to follow God it is about getting back up every time you fall. You also had more time to get back up again. If you fall and watch a couple of movies, you decide to pick yourself up. To struggle and pick yourself up was all part of the journey.

"It was surprising how many of the readings reflected where I was at the time I was reading them. It was very accurate, for example, when I was struggling I found myself reading, in the Book of Exodus, about how the Israelites had struggled. There were many such similarities".

He said that he had been surprised at the number of people

throughout the country and closer to home who had taken on the Exodus 90 programme over the years.

"It's not just for Catholics," he added, "many non-believers have done it and come out believers. There are a lot of people throughout the world who do it, and it was a great support to know that many others around the globe were doing the programme at the same time.

"I found it a great preparation for the times we are in now. I have no fear, but just keep trusting in God that all will pass. Detached from the world, you get into a position where your faith deepens as you discover what God is to you and what you are to God."

Explaining that the 90 day

Exodus 90 has been a wake-up call - Thomas Gallagher

FATHER and son, Thomas and Stephen Gallagher are a great support to each other during their journey with Exodus 90. While Thomas, a St Eugene's Cathedral parishioner, got his first taste of the programme last year, it's a first for Stephen, who lives in England.

The pair are over half-way there, and after stepping away from the programme last year when the Covid-19 pandemic caused frustration with the closure of churches during lockdown, Thomas is finding the experience a very revealing and fulfilling one this time round.

Recalling his initial decision to not tackle the programme again when the suggestion was mooted amongst his prayer friends before Christmas, Thomas said: "My first thought was that I definitely would not be doing Exodus 90, but then it came to me in prayer about the need to make spiritual preparation for the times we are in, so when a couple of the men asked me if I was going to sign up for it, I decided that I would and that I would give it more effort than I did last year.

"However, over the first part of the journey, up to before the start of Lent, I was falling down in certain areas of the programme. You have to work at it."

Considering the three essential elements of the programme, prayer, asceticism and fraternity, Thomas has found the pillar of asceticism, involving severe self-discipline and avoiding all forms of indulgence, as a means of drawing nearer to God particularly interesting.

A Cursillista, he recalled a recent discussion at an online Cursillo gathering, when it was mentioned that the great mystics had used certain practices to draw closer to God.

"Lent," said Thomas, "should be used as a way of drawing closer to God, which is a call for every Christian, not just the great mystics."

He is also reminded of the calls for prayer and penance in the messages of Fatima, Garabandal and Medjugorje, with penance to take the form of offerings from everyday life, rather than severe mortifications.

"Reflecting on these messages,

I have discovered that we are to turn our everyday life into a living practice of our faith," said Thomas, adding: "It is not just a call for saints but for the everyday Christian, and that is what I found happening through the Exodus 90 programme."

"It is not about what you give up but about deepening your relationship with God. The call is to draw very close to Christ. I know now that it is so important for me to surrender everything and to step out in faith."

"When you really step out there is more reward than there is loss. So my prayer is at that level now. Exodus 90 has shown me that prayer will give you strength. I am not perfect at it but I know that I am making progress and I have a great sense that God is in total control."

He continued: "I am a devotee of Medjugorje because it led to my conversion, but I have come to realise in the time given to the Exodus 90 programme, that while I had heard the Medjugorje message to pray and fast many times over the years, I had not put this into practice because I was

distracted by the world.

"Exodus 90 has shown me that so much time is wasted. It has been a wake-up call. I now want to put into practice what I can. I am going to clear as much of the useless things out of my life as possible."

Referring to the annual Cursillo Walk to Knock, with its opportunities for walking, praying and sharing, Thomas remarked: "When you make the effort to step out, God will draw you closer to Him and that is why the Walk to Knock has a profound effect on people; they are taking time to step aside from the normal and God draws them closer."

Each week of the Exodus 90 programme so far, Thomas is feeling more enlightened: "With Covid, there is a lot of talk about boosting your immune system, and when I thought about the different undertakings that are part of the Exodus 90 programme, such as cold water showers, staying off fatty and sugary food, fasting and doing exercise, I realised that everything is covered in Exodus 90."



Thomas Gallagher, with his son, Stephen.

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aspect referred to how long it took a human being to reprogramme their way of being, Martin said: "The thinking is that if you do it for 90 days you will keep doing it. Although there were struggles during those 90 days, the changes just became natural to do. The fasting a couple of days a week became a natural way of life. It is very easy to do this once it is structured."

"The fears, anxieties of the world have now become quiet within me," he reflected, adding: "I've become aware of the power that God is in my life. God loves me and wants what is best for me. I am more aware of looking around me and sharing with people."

Searching

"There was a lot of searching within to get a greater sense of God within you; a lot of tilling your own soil, thinking about why you do the things that you do etc. I learnt a lot about myself. It was certainly a different programme for Lent than the usual going off something. There was a great sense of the person God wanted you to be, and a deeper understanding of who God is."

He added: "A lot of us who did Exodus 90 are more secure and happy in our faith. The spirit has made us a lot more content and less worried about what is happening in our lives and around us. There is a sense that God has a plan for our lives and so we are more at peace. A lot of things that we had been watching or reading doesn't matter as much now. What matters more is reading Scripture, Mass and

spending time in Adoration".

Commenting on how having come through the Exodus programme had helped him during the past year's Covid challenges, he said: "All that I gained from the experience of doing Exodus 90 stood to me well in the year since, especially in having developed a deeper relationship with God."

"It has really helped me to have a more positive outlook and it is also helping me with Lent this year; so far I am finding it much easier than I would have in previous years. Usually, I would struggle with whatever I had decided to do for Lent after a week into it, but I did not have that issue this time. I just decided what I was going to do and got on with it. I am also more spiritually organised, so it has helped me to be more disciplined in my approach."

"While I am not doing the Exodus 90 programme this year, I make a point of joining in with the others who are doing it for the Holy Hour. With the lockdown restrictions, Fr Sean O'Donnell, who did the programme last year and is doing it again now, is the spiritual director for the group and contacts us when he is set up for Adoration in his oratory, and we can take part virtually from our homes."

Looking back on his faith journey, Martin said that he hadn't really been practising his Catholic faith until he was in his mid 30s, when he had an enlightening experience during his Cursillo weekend in Termonbacca, back in 1996.

He recalled: "A couple of friends

asked me if I would like to go on a Cursillo weekend and I decided that I would, to find out about this God...was He real or not? I had a lot of questions that I needed answered...Who created the Cosmos?...Who was God?..."

"And it happened in an instant for me that I came to believe in God during the weekend. I was in the oratory when I realised that God was real and that my questions were irrelevant. I realised that all I needed to do was to follow Him in faith."

"At that stage in the weekend, I was for going home. I had packed my case and had told the boys it wasn't for me. But my mate and the fella I came on the weekend with asked if I wanted to go into the oratory before I left. I told them that I wasn't sure about God but after some prayer there I had a personal encounter with Jesus, and that was the changing point for me. I felt that He had spoken to me in my own being."

"I had a gradual change from that instant to accepting God as real and that He loved me. I didn't trust in anyone when I went into the oratory for prayer, so what happened had to be a grace given by God."

"On the weekend and for a time after," remarked Martin, "you feel raised up by the whole experience, but I never came down. I felt on fire after my Cursillo weekend and I am still as joy-filled about the Gospel as I was that day coming out of the oratory, after that time of prayer. I still have my struggles but I know that God is real"

People think priests don't need the like of Exodus 90...but we probably need to do it more

- Fr Sean O'Donnell



Fr Sean O'Donnell, CC Waterside.

HARDY Donegal born priest, Fr Sean O'Donnell is over half-way through Exodus 90 and feels blessed to be joined not only by some members of his Cursillo friendship group in Derry, but by men from other parts of the Diocese as well, such as Castlederg, Omagh and his home county.

Tackling the intense programme for the second year in a row, Fr Sean is happy that his priesthood has enabled him to be a spiritual director for the Exodus

90 group, as they brave their way through the daily challenge of cold showers, exercise, no snacking between meals and fasting two days, as well as reading passages from the Book of Exodus and committing to a Holy Hour each day, 20 minutes of which is in complete silence.

Not keen on the cold showers, Fr Sean finds the dietary element of the programme beneficial in helping him to not consume foods that he shouldn't be having anyway with his Type 1 diabetes.

He also likes the aspect of the building of prayer life individually and with the group, as well as the awareness of others on the programme around the world: "We pray for everyone on the Exodus 90 journey, so there is a great universal sense."

"Another important part of the fraternity element is that each person buddies with someone as an anchor. As well as the benefits of having someone check in on you for support, having a buddy as someone to go on a walk with, for example, can make it easier for some to get themselves out for exercise."

"The Exodus 90 programme is definitely not a breeze if you enter into it fully," remarked Fr Sean, adding: "You feel that you

have done something difficult but worthwhile for the glory of God. It does help you to advance in spiritual growth."

"You do it because you know that you need to - that you have sinned against God. I want to offer it as an act of reparation, for my own sins and the sins of the Church. I want to grow in greater appreciation of the journey that I am on and become more detached from what is materialistic in this life; to be in this world but not off the world."

"In the Book of Exodus we read about the Israelites falling away and worshipping false gods after all that God has done for them. This helps us see our own sinfulness and that we are potentially rejecting the great gift of eternal life from God. Through the Exodus programme, we can focus on our weaknesses, eg sins, on our mortality and on our salvation."

Recalling last year's Exodus 90 experience and the added challenge of Covid-19, Fr Sean said: "We were getting on great last year until Covid and lockdown happened and threw a spanner in the works. Our Cursillo group was meeting up before that to support each other, so we had to find other ways to do

I have reached a maturity in my faith that I didn't have until now - Stephen Gallagher

WHEN Stephen Gallagher received a call from his father, Thomas, asking him if he would like to sign up for the Exodus 90 programme which was starting a couple of days later, he decided to go for it...a decision the 36-year-old may not have made with more time to consider, but which is turning out to be one leading to a most positive, life changing experience.

The father of two, a three-year-old boy and a baby girl just born in October, said that his reason for undertaking the challenge was to become a better father and husband, by becoming more present and so more attentive to them.

Commenting on his experience of the various elements of the programme so far, Stephen highlights daily Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament as having the most impact on him: "I have always enjoyed Adoration any time I have done it, but I have never spent time so regularly in front of the Blessed Sacrament until I started Exodus 90. It is something I do about two or three times a year, when the opportunity arises.

"It has really been a revelation to me spending this much regular time in front of the Lord. I love it. I have never felt the presence of God more in my life than during these last couple of months, and I feel that I have reached a level of maturity in

my faith that I never had before. I don't think I would have been able to achieve that without this Exodus programme."

A practising Catholic, Stephen strives to live out the messages of Medjugorje, which highlight the importance of the Mass, monthly Confession, fasting, reading Scripture and praying the Rosary.

"I attend Mass every week," he said, "and I say the Rosary every day in the car during my 40-minute drive to work, but I have struggled with the fasting and regular Confession, and reading Scripture every day is not something I would have done.

"However, I now find that I am making an effort to go to Confession much more. I am more aware of my sins, so if I feel that I have fallen or slipped, then I get an urge to go to Confession that I would not have had before.

"I thought I was doing alright in the practise of my faith before, but I feel that I have reached a maturity in my faith that I didn't have until now. I have this awareness that there is a lot more on offer if I would only commit."

Noting that many men on the programme don't like the cold showers, Stephen said: "I take the cold shower every day and don't find it that bad. In fact, I have found that a cold shower in the morning physically wakes my body up and gets my brain going. I used to feel tired during the day,

but since I started taking a cold shower each morning, I have a lot more energy and feel more awake during the day. Cutting out snacks and sugary food, etc, is probably contributing to this as well."

Greatly surprised at how well he has been able to fast, he explained: "I have been to Medjugorje six or seven times and fasting is something I have never been able to do for long. So, at the start, I thought there was no way I would manage the fasting but, for some reason, I have been able to do it every Wednesday and Friday. Maybe it's a result of getting up in the morning and my prayer being a cold shower, which I present to God. This may have helped open me up to fasting."

Just before starting the Exodus 90 programme, Stephen had been reading the book on the late Sr Clare Crockett's life, 'Alone with Christ Alone'. Saying that he had known Sr Clare before she left Derry for Spain, he went on to remark: "When I thought of the young girl that I had known and read about the journey she went on, I felt that I couldn't come near to the level of spirituality that she came to, but on this programme I have started to realise that the more you open up and give to God, the more graces you get to do these things.

"I would not have had the willpower to fast and get up in



Stephen Gallagher, with his father, Thomas and friend, Fr Sean O'Donnell

the morning and have a cold shower, so I have discovered that when God asks you to do these things, He gives you the ability to do them."

Stephen has found that undertaking the programme during this time of pandemic has greatly helped him through the worries and stresses he experiences as a teacher and a

parent, particularly the times spent in Adoration.

"Sitting in Adoration before the Lord, the stress and worry leave and you think that this is the way we need to be living," he said, adding: "I feel fitter now and more at ease. I am less anxious than I have ever been in my life. When you look at what is involved in the programme, you

think it is crazy, but when you see the outcome then you realise that it is not.

"Going forward, I am going to try and keep up a lot of what I am doing through Exodus 90, and I am hoping to undertake the programme every year to refocus me. It really is that good."

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that and we did, through social media.

"This year, men who are doing it in other parts of the Diocese got in touch to ask if they could join in our Holy Hour because of the lockdown restrictions. I have the Blessed Sacrament in the little oratory in the house, so I let them all know when I hope to have the Holy Hour and they can join in online whenever it suits them. Sometimes there are up to 17 of us in Adoration like this together, so my oratory is working as a wee online chapel for that.

"It is great encouragement for me as well to have the others spend time in Adoration with me, albeit online. People think when you are a priest that you don't need to do a programme like this, but priests probably need to do it more. It is a great mechanism. It's so well put together to help you advance on that spiritual journey by making the sacrifices that you make on it. It builds your prayer life and fraternity with the other fellas looking to do the same thing."

He added: "With this lockdown so rigid, it is a way of coming

together but not physically together; that is the wonder of the mystical Body of Christ, we can all join in, giving of ourselves equally to the Lord. So we have 20 minutes of silence in Adoration with the Lord, and sometimes we do the reading for that day and the reflection from Exodus. The silent time benefits everybody as a time to let the Lord speak to us, and the graces flow out to us. Sometimes we can be too busy asking the Lord and not listening.

"There is always going to be work to do in our spiritual advancement because we slip back all the time and that is why we do Lent each year. Exodus 90 is another programme that offers an opportunity to advance and not fall back, because it is for a longer period of time and so there is a sense of reprogramming."

Describing Exodus 90 as "hard going but good", Fr Sean expressed the hope that one day, "everyone who takes part in it will find themselves further down the road to holiness and maturity of spirit, keeping our mortality in mind, to be ever ready, and the salvation won for us by Christ".

Holy Hour for Vocations



THE series of monthly 'Holy Hours' organised by the Diocesan Vocations Team, as part of the Columban Year of celebrations in the Diocese, continues on Thursday, March 11, at 8 pm.

Focusing on the example of men and women who have lived their lives by faithfully answering

God's call, like St Columba, the time of reflection and prayer will encourage awareness of Jesus knocking on the door of our hearts.

This month's prayer and reflection will come from the Cappagh Parish, with Fr Declan McGeehan focusing on St Patrick, St Joseph and Our Lady.

Looking at the similarities between the three, Fr Declan will talk about how attentive they were to the call of God in their lives and their openness to respond, and how their silent moments enabled this.

"What mattered most in each of their lives was eternal life. They put themselves in the firing line because they realised eternity is the end goal," said Fr Declan.

You can join in the Holy Hour via the Cappagh parish webcam - www.cappaghparish.com/webcam.html

Derry Diocesan Vocation Prayer

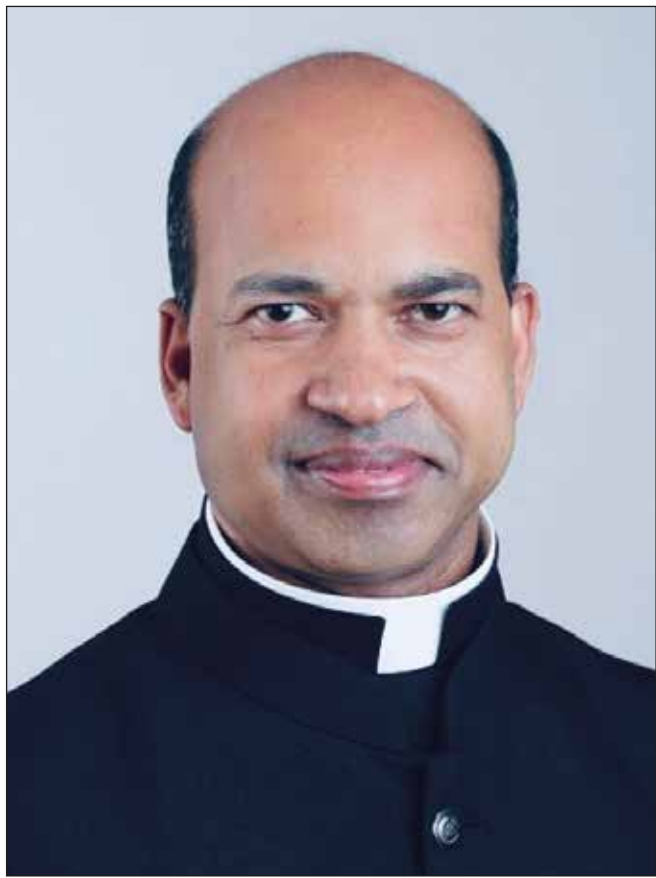


Lord Jesus Christ, gentle shepherd,
You know your sheep,
and you know how to reach their hearts.
Give to the people of the
Diocese of Derry,
hearts that are open to the call of the
Holy Spirit.
Speak to the hearts of the (young) men
of our Diocese,
that they may hear your call to follow you
and serve 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.*

Set the embers ablaze

by Fr Joseph Varghese



Fr Joseph Varghese.

ST Paul exhorts his beloved disciple Timothy, "I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you" (2 Timothy 1:6). This is a personal and encouraging letter to his beloved disciple. Be strong and faithful when time is getting hard. This is when we have to think of ways of fanning the flame of our God given gifts to help alleviate the situation.

I am not a native of Ireland, but I have become aware of many of the customs and traditions of the Irish way of life. I learned that until comparatively recently the fires in Irish homes seldom went out. Indeed, I used to visit a couple who always had the fire on, even in summer. Sadly, both have now gone to be with the Lord, but those visits taught me a lot about the importance of fire in the Irish home down the ages.

The main source of energy was peat which was harvested from the bogs all over the country. Turf cutting was a way of life that often involved the whole family as it was very labour intensive. It was great for bringing everyone together and there would have been great delight when the peat or turf was safely home. Families took great comfort in knowing that they had all the firing needed for at least one year ahead, although many families attempted to have more than one year's supply stored up.

For centuries the fire was vital to the Irish way of life as it provided heat and comfort for all household members, it allowed for the provision of family meals as all cooking was done on the fire, it provided all the hot water needed for personal hygiene

and domestic requirements and as mentioned, it seldom ever went out. The fire would have been fuelled late at night and in the morning, there was always enough life in the embers to light fresh fuel once the ashes were raked out. This cycle continued throughout the year.

Faith could be compared very easily to this traditional method of kindling and rekindling the Irish fire. The raking of the fire to remove the ashes, enabling the embers to blaze again or the pump from the bellows to provide fresh oxygen to invigorate the fire, can be compared to putting our total trust in God as a means of rekindling the fire of our faith. Just as our house fire will grow dim and eventually die if we do not rake it or add fuel to it, so will our faith grow dim and wither away if we do not pay attention to it and develop it along with all our other vital God given talents.

God has granted every person a spiritual gift in order to edify and build up one another. In Romans 12:5-8 we read: "So, we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

We must realise that every single Christian has received the gift of the Spirit. We can see this when Paul, standing in support of all Christians, declares: "We all

have different gifts according to the gifts given to us" (1Cor. 14:6).

These gifts have an extraordinary range and are vital in the current climate. While the practice of ministry has been severely curtailed by the current regulations surrounding the coronavirus pandemic, there are many different things we can do to support others and never has it been more necessary. Many people feel isolated, alone, afraid and abandoned. We need to keep our senses aware of the Lord speaking to us in so many different ways. We must keep tuned in to the 'God station'.

More than ever, in recent times, I can feel God calling me to be innovative in how I can cater for the spiritual needs of parishioners who are suffering greatly. People are worried about hospital appointments, upcoming treatments, health concerns, the effect that the lockdown is having on the mental health of others and the constant worry about family members. There is an onus on all of us to be aware of the worries and concerns of others and to do what we can to help. We might never know just how much difference a kind word, a short phone call, a text message, a note or letter or a video call could make in the life of one of these vulnerable people.

Today, whatever our role in the body of Christ, we have been touched by the Spirit and are ablaze with its fervour, so watch out for those finding things tough, do what we can personally to offer support. Without doubt that the divine fire of the Spirit, received in the Sacraments, gives us unparalleled capacity to fulfil God's plan so that we continue to be red hot in our devotion to Him, as a member of the Body of Christ.

Perhaps, we need to realise more fully that, despite all the marvellous advances in technology, in science, medicine and in understanding the development of the world, we are not in control at all. We, as always, are totally dependent on God and turn to Him in prayer as we seek the best way to address our current problems.

While this pandemic has presented us all with huge challenges, it has also provided us with great opportunities to look out for others, to put our God given skills to maximum use, to allow the Spirit to flourish abundantly and openly in our daily lives so that other members of the body may witness and adapt into their own lives. It is simple practices like those mentioned previously that "set the embers ablaze", just as St Paul requested.

Plans for week of prayer to mark Sr Clare's anniversary



PLANS are progressing to mark the fifth anniversary of the death of Sr Clare Crockett in her home parish and city.

Amongst the events during the week of prayer, to and for the late Home of the Mother Servant Sister, is the celebration of Mass by the Carmelite Fathers

in Termonbacca and in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, with family and friends of Sr Clare giving a short talk each evening.

The opening Mass will be celebrated on Sunday, April 18, by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD at 7 pm, and will be streamed from

the Iona Monastery via the Termonbacca YouTube page.

Fr Aidan Mullan, Adm Long Tower, will celebrate the Monday evening Mass in St Columba's Church, at 7.30 pm, when the speaker will be Sr Clare's sister, Shauna Gill.

Fr Joe Gormley, PP Creggan, will be the celebrant for the Tuesday evening Mass in Long Tower, at 7.30 pm, when the speaker will be Sr Clare's close friend, Sharon Doran.

Fr Patrick Lagan, St Eugene's, will celebrate the Wednesday evening Mass in Long Tower at 7.30 pm, when the speaker will be Gretta McTaig, a teacher at St Cecilia's College, which Sr Clare had attended.

The Thursday evening Mass in the Long Tower, at 7.30 pm, will include a healing service celebrated by Fr Michael McGoldrick OCD, with music to be provided by Lauren and Beth Doherty.

Fr Gerard Mongan will celebrate the Friday evening Mass in Long Tower, at 7.30 pm, when it is hoped that the talk will be given by one of the Home of the Mother Servant Sisters.

Over the weekend, Mass will be celebrated in the Long Tower chapel at 3 pm on Saturday, April 24, and at 6 pm on Sunday, April 25, by Bishop Donal, bringing the week of prayer to a close.

Derry teen penning book on chastity



this for other teens. I felt called to do it after praying about it and talking with my mum."

Saying that she had become Christian at the age of five, Susie added: "One of the most important things that my mum has told me is that my body is a temple and that God would want anyone I was in a relationship with to respect me."

"I told my friends about this and they saw the sense in it. Some people say that it is silly what I say, and so there is a lot of judgement too".

She has been working on the idea since the start of January, with the help of her mum and Fr Columba Jordan, of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, whom she got to know when he was with the community in Derry.

"When I spoke to mum about it, she was very encouraging," said Susie, "and she and some of her friends are helping me. It would be good to back up my writing with Scripture and Fr Columba is helping me with that, so we

have been talking about this over Zoom".

An added bonus is that her 17-year-old boyfriend, Ben, who she has been going out with for almost a year, is happy to contribute his thoughts, so giving both perspectives.

"I am going to ask my friends about their struggles with teen chastity, and their experience of societal pressures or expectations," said Susie.

Saying that the book plan included about 20 chapters, on such topics as 'Sex...Why wait until marriage?', 'Temptation', 'Self-respect', 'Sacredness' and 'Relationships', she added: "I have covered 10 chapters so far, but I still need to add the scriptural back-up from Fr Columba".

Once the book is published, Susie hopes to have opportunities to talk about its content to other teens to encourage conversation and to offer an alternative from what has become the norm for many of her peers with regards to relationships.

Journeying with the Holy Spirit *by Fr John McLaughlin*



THE tradition of having in every parish a Pentecost Vigil in my time on mission in Chile, brought many lovely moments. One year, in the Hills of Valparaíso, on a new territory without chapel or church, we had to improvise in the Tenant's Association building. I had a scheme adopted from the suggested national one. With the texts from Acts, etc, on the Young Churches in Antioch, Corinth, Jerusalem and Rome, youth leader Sebastian Clarke showed on a drawing where the places where and what were the strengths of the communities in each.

With that as a motivation, we posed to a largely young gathering with some of their parents, what would be the priorities of our new young community. I had arrived well-armed with old newspapers and a large chunk of pottery clay. The images that emerged, with the prayers and the comments that accompanied them, were a feast to the eyes and the touch of their materials. New little chapels sprouted from their nimble fingers, doves and crosses, and satisfied families gave me a near 100 % participation for any church activity I had ever attempted.

The Gifts and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit were all around that Pentecost Vigil in Las Palmas, in Cerro Placeres in Valparaíso, and hymns and litanies sprouted forth. There was, of course, a good bit of cleaning up to do, even with all the newspapers on the floor, but everyone was happy. It would still be a couple of years before they had the first of their two chapels.

At college with the Holy Ghost Fathers, the Spartans as they later established themselves, there was also plenty of motivation around the prayers to the Holy Spirit. 'Fides et Robur' was the motto, whether looking for more rugby success or making something out of our privileged lives. Fr Anthony

Hampson I knew to be also a man of prayer and his words, in gentle irony, still stay with me all these years afterwards: "Ah, sure it'll do!" Years later in Maynooth, the boast of getting by with just navigating was for most of the ordinary foot soldiers, a bit of a myth.

Other phrases occurred in my own discernment. The film 'Amadeus', on Mozart and some outrageous plagiarism, prompted the passionate defence of the guilty one, "I hate mediocrity!" In 'Macbeth', I think, there was the niggling challenge from Lady Macbeth "to be more than that which you were, then you would be so much more the man!"

'Exchelsior', as we learned also in our school English classes, "The Spirit blows where He will". I was never allowed to settle into just mediocrity! Maybe in the golf, where I could seldom hit that same sweet spot on the woods, as my great friend, Johnnie Lott, of Arklow days, enthused over on occasion. Seldom in song, though I loved the folklore music of Altan and others at home, as well as the great groups in Chile, Inti-Ilumani, Las Jaivas and the great Violeta Parra. And there was a part of the Spirit in those songs for liberty and freedom and gratitude (Violeta Parra and Mercedes Sosa in Gracias a la

Vida). They surely spoke of the Spirit, at least to my own inner singing bird over many years. Mediocrity was always a warning.

In the Chilean Pastoral Orientations, of around 1989, there was a compact little litany around what might be a developed Catholic emerging from our catechetical and liturgy and community service: an experience of the Presence of God - a fully human person - convinced and convincing of our faith - an outward direction of being a witness and giving testimony - and a person where the word Catholic is the noun rather than the adjective.

Over a long life, I now reflect on how many of those men and women in that last category that I have had the great fortune to have known. The Spirit shone through in those persons, and as I write this (Febr 20th) there is one lady in Valparaíso in what seems to be her final coma. Helga Hansen gave her whole life to her chapel and making the Community a happy and welcoming place.

Charismatic

Baptism and its meaning has been a constant with Pope Francis: Christian, Disciples and Missionary are the three markers. In the great moments of the Charismatic Renewal, many Dublin parishes grew once more into that sense of what Baptism really involves. Through sometimes those joyful 'Life in the Spirit' Seminars, The Word was shared amongst us, often starting from the non-clerical member of the group.

Later, in Marino and Glasnevin (an older group) parishes, in succession, I had the privilege of hosting a small group in my house to pray on Sunday nights. There, too, my own Ad Gente missionary calling was certainly being slowly affirmed, before

I applied for permission from Archbishop Ryan to work for a spell in Latin America, where he opted to send me to Chile. Though my initial proactive thrust had been towards Brazil, where some of my Maynooth classmates were well settled.

On an early parish seminar in my first parish, San Luis, I had brought along that wonderful text from Pope Paul VI 'Evangelii Nuntiandi', and there, the challenge towards evangelization for those catechists was palpable: the apostolate of like-by-like, the Kingdom as the end of the Church, and not the opposite, the criteria and values we indicate with our every decision.

Pope Paul's other great Pastoral Letter on Our Lady, 'Marialis Cultus', became my own little bible during the November Month of Mary nightly celebrations there, whether on the street, in a house meeting, or in the local chapel. Since his reign covered my own early years as a priest, and having been in his presence in Rome on August 15 on two moments, Pope Paul VI always seemed to inspire me in the Spirit that he radiated.

This Journey in the Spirit is beginning to go overboard. But I cannot begin to end it without a mention of the Scripture reading and sharing. One of the great gifts to the Maynooth of our time was the Dominican, Wilfred Harrington, then a very young and enthusiastic priest-teacher. The Parables of Jesus became alive for us, as he mentioned some of the great scholars of the time, such as C H Dodd, and encouraged wider reading on our part; not that common in the Maynooth of the time.

My Elphin classmate, Tony Conroy, who has worked nearly all of his life on that topic in the favelas of San Paolo in Brazil,

travelled out to Tallaght on a visit home, just to thank Fr Wilfrid for his enthusiasm, which inspired him in Brazil, and me in Chile, in much of his pastoral work.

A word on the witness of the Jesuits to many of us in Latin America. From the years of the leadership of Pedro Arrupe, the 80s, the teachings poured forth on the equal importance of their Christian commitment to orthodoxy in Justice as in the Faith. And so, there was the witness of Bishop Romero, the Salvadorian Jesuit Martyr, and the worker priests. My own Spiritual Director, Jose Correa SJ, faced some of the ire of his own established family when he embraced that role for some years and gave a moving testimony to his new apprenticeship. It upped the ante for many of us in our own parishes, as they strove to obtain a social and missionary commitment beyond the domestic one.

Finally, if there can ever be a final to the influence of the Spirit, there has been my own reading and literature. Marilyn Robinson's 'Gilead' series is full of the Spirit. And so is my recently downloaded 'Jack', where she works through spirit themes of grace, and trust and encounter in a most wonderful prose style. Her own serious, if you like, essay on 'The Givenness of Things', is challenging but certainly from a deeply faith-filled person.

Maybe, you might again pardon me for finishing with a favorite piece of my own choice, perhaps somebody competent could read it at my funeral, God willing!

When the Hour Comes

When the hour comes, you shall change my desert into a waterfall, you shall anoint my head with fresh oil and your strength shall

overcome my weakness.

You shall guide my feet in your footsteps, and I will walk the narrow path, that leads to your House.

You shall tell me when, and where, I will walk your path, totally bathed in joy. In the meantime, I ask you, God, that you awaken, in the most intimate place in my soul, the Feast of Life! That of the Empty Tomb! That of the Victorious Cross!

Let your Gardener's voice, awaken my hearing each morning, with news that is always fresh: "Go and tell my brothers and sisters, that I have overcome death, that there is a place for everyone, there where the New Nation is built. There, where neither earth, love nor joy, can be bought or sold, where wine and milk, are shared without money and without a price. There, where all my little brothers and sisters, sit as princes and princesses, at GOD'S TABLE."

Keep reminding me loudly every night, that you have overcome, him who confuses this world. Tell me it does not matter, how bitter the cup of affliction may be, so that the heart can cease trembling; and this desert of indifferent development, does not impede our hope, nor prevent us from holding Your Hands, round the Fire, which burns brighter in the Mountain, Your People are the Mountain!

Be strong, within me, so that the thousand excuses, with which the heart, seeks to escape, from the essential, don't make me forget, that in Your House, there is always WINE and BREAD, and that Your House, God, is where, the humble search for the Justice, that will shine in the New Society, that already enlightens us, with glimpses, of your Kingdom!

(Julia Esquivel 'Threatened with Resurrection')

Parish of Templemore

BE KIND TO YOUR MIND

A series of talks during Lent to promote Positive Mental Health.

1. Recognising and strengthening your resilience (4th March)
2. Top tips for Anxiety (11th March)
3. Managing Setbacks (18th March)
4. Getting A Good night's sleep (25th March)

Time-3.30pm
Via Zoom

More info at
emmet.thompson@derrydiocese.org

Eangach

Ár nDúchas

Lúireach Phádraig

Éirím inniu
i gcumhacht na bhFlaitheas,
i soillse gréine,
i ngile na gealaí,
in áilleacht tine,
i mire lasrach,
i luas gaoithe,
i ndoimhneacht farraige,
i mbuanseasmhacht talún,
i ndaingneacht carraige.

Éirím inniu
Neart Dé dom stiúradh,
cumhacht Dé dom chumhdach,
críonnacht Dé dom threorú,
súil Dé ag faire dom,
cluas Dé ag éisteacht liom,
briathar Dé ag labhairt liom,
lámh Dé dom chosaint,
slí Dé dom tharraingt,
sciath Dé mar dhídean dom,
slua Dé dom chaomhnú
ar ghaiste diabhal,
ar chathú duáilcí,
ar mhianta mí-ionraic,
ar lucht mo mhille,
i gcéin is i gcóngar,
im aonar nó i gcomhlúadar.

Críost do mo chumhdach
inniu
ar nimh, ar loscadh,
ar bháthadh, ar ghoineadh,
go dtaga chugam
luach mo shaothair.

Cuimhní Cóivide 2

— An Sagart Brian Ó Fearraí, Gaoth Dobhair



Cuimhneachán, le Mary Dunnion

Bhí mé den bharúil i dtólamh go raibh cur amach ag lucht leighis agus eolais ar sheacht ngalair an tsleibhe, ach le leathadh an choróinviris, a tháinig aniar aduaidh orainn, is cosúil gur fágadh go leor i ngalar i ngan fhios. Is saothúil ar fad, agus is scáfar, leoga, go dtig leis an mhiocrób nó an bhitheog ghalair is lú an bheatha is mó a thabhairt go talamh agus leoga a chur faoi thalamh.

Covid-19 faoi scáth Chóheilit 1:9

Bhí briathra Chóheilit, a théann siar chomh fada leis an tríú céad roimh Chríost, agus atá ar fáil i gcanóin na scríoptúir, mar chrann

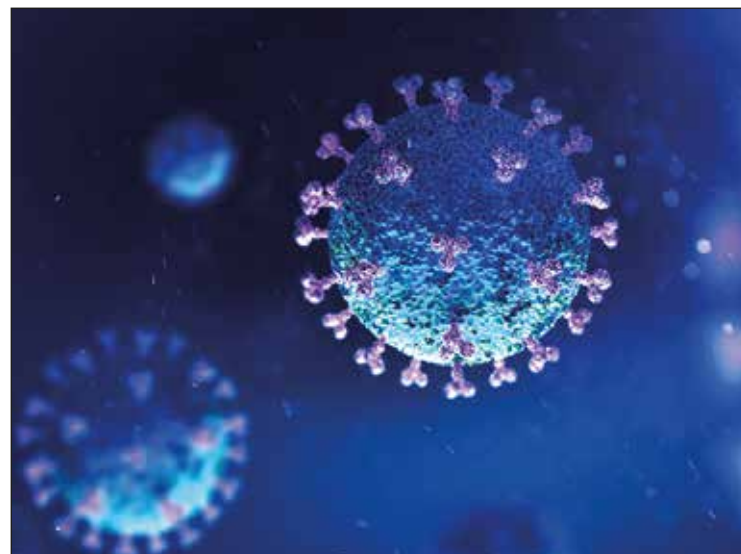
taca domh ó chualathas trácht don chéad uair ar an ghalair Covid-19. Ba iad tobar na heagnaíochta na briathra beannaithe céanna domh, agus is iomaí ábhar misnigh agus tacaíochta a d'fháisc mé astu agus mé ag treabhadh liom le linn na géarchéime. Bhí tráthanna ann le linn mo chuid léitheoireachta, agus mé ag tumadh i ndoimhneacht na scríoptúir, gur léiríodh domh splancacha beaga éargnaí a spreag machnamh agus meabhrú níos doimhne ar chastacht an tsaoil agus na géarchéime a bhí ag teacht chun solais go laethúil os comhair mo chuid súl. Bhog an taithe seo an croí ionam le meabhrú ar eagna Sholaimh, a d'fhógair óna chríonnacht, 'níl aon ní nua ann faoi luí na gréine' (Cóheilit 1:9) — ábhar a neartaigh mé le leanstan orm i mbun mo chuid ministreachta. Mar sin féin, bhí tráthanna ann, agus mé go domhain i nduibheagán, i gceartlár Covid-19, ag streachailt le lámh láidir Dé a fheiceáil ar chúl achan chor sa tsaoil, gan trácht ar an sciath chosanta céanna a fheiceáil liom féin agus leis an phobal a bhfuil sé de phribhléid agam a bheith ag freastal orthu.

Ceannógaí Covid-19

Agus i dtaca le cúram na n-easlán, smaoiním go háirithe ar amantaí agus mé i mo sheasamh ag fuinneoga tí, fliuch is tirim, agus mo ghuthán póca suite go socair ar leac na fuinneoge ar mhód lámhshaor agam, guthán eile ag bunadh an tí istigh faoi dhíon agus muid ag gabháil dólámhach agus ag guí, ag ofráil paidreacha ar son an



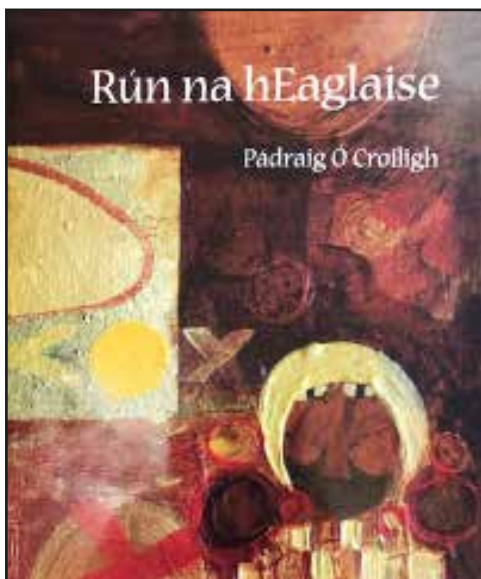
An Sagart Brian Ó Fearraí, Doirí Beaga



Covid-19

othair a bhí sínte tinn sa leabaidh. 'Go mbeannaí Dia an tAthair thú. Go leigheasa Dia an Mac thú. Go soilis an Spiorad Naomh thú. Go

gcumhdaí Dia do chorp agus go slánaí sé d'anam. Go lonraí sé ar do chroí agus go dtreoraí sé chun na beatha síoraí thú.'



Críost Linn sa Tinneas

Nuair atá duine tinn inniu, thig leis a bheith sa bhaile nó in otharlann, nó i dtearmann nó óispis. Go minic tiontaíonn sé a dhroim leis na daoine, agus a ghaidh leis an bhalla ionas nach bhfeicfidh duine ar bith é nó nach mbeidh air féin amharc idir an dá shúil ar an chuairteoir nó an rud atá i súile an chuairteora a aithint. Tarlaíonn sé seo go speisialta nuair atá an duine le bás agus nach bhfuil leigheas ná biseach i ndán dó. Ní fheiceann sé fiúntas ar bith sa tinneas. Ní fheiceann sé ach a oiread go bhfuil

fiúntas ar bith fágtha ann mar dhuine. Ní aithníonn sé fiúntas ar bith san fhulaingt ná sa phian, agus é cinnte nach bhfuil ann ach mallacht ar a shaol.

Ach cá bhfuil Íosa Críost sa scéal seo? D'fhulaing seisean cuid mhór ar mhaithe linn, agus leigheas sé cuid mhór fosta. Is é an Críost seo ba mhaith linne san Eaglais a thabhairt chuig an duine tinn, ionas go leigheasfadh sé é, nó ar a laghad go dtiocfadh sé ina araicis agus a chuid féin a dhéanamh den

tinneas. Iarrtar orainn a bheith in éineacht le Críost sa tinneas, cosúil le gach gné eile dár saol. Sin é an fáth go gcaitheann an sagart cuid mhór ama ag cuartaíocht ar na daoine tinn, le solás a thabhairt dóibh agus lena spreagadh sa bheatha spioradálta nuair is lú an dóchas iontu.

Bhí am ann, agus ní fada ó shin é, nuair a shíl daoine gur dhrochchomhartha é an sagart a bheith ag teacht chuig an duine tinn. Shíl siad gur chomhartha báis

é. Thug siad an Ola Dhéanach ar Shacraimint na nEaslán ag an am sin, nó Ola an Bháis, nó Ola na Síoraíochta. Má chuala tú ag an am sin go raibh an ola curtha ar dhuine, bhí tú ag fanacht le scéala báis go luath ina dhiaidh, nó fiú socruithe sochraide. Ag an am sin, is ullmhúchán don bhás a bhí i gceist.

(Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta*.)



Reflections on Lent and the gift of Confession

AS we journey through Lent and prepare for Easter, a number of people across the Diocese have shared what Lent and the gift of Confession means to them, with some reflecting on a quote from St Patrick's 'Confessio' – "Each and all shall render account for even our smallest sins before the judgement seat of Christ the Lord".

Some also shared their favourite memories of celebrating St Patrick's Day, as we approach the Feast Day of Ireland's Patron Saint on March 17

This Lent I felt God inviting me to join Him every day in the garden of my heart by Tanya McHugh

THIS Lent, I have felt God inviting me to join Him every day in the garden of my heart, for a heart-to-heart chat.

Instead of getting my prayers said and moving on to the next task of the day, I take the time to be quiet and really listen to God; to let Him into the part of my heart that no one else sees.

I so enjoy those moments of contemplative prayer that it didn't feel Lenten enough, so I asked God, in this time with Him, if He was sure that's how He wanted me to pray.

And I felt God gently say that my coming close to Him, giving Him my heart, telling Him my worries and trusting in Him, gives Him consolation in His Garden of Gethsemane.



Tanya McHugh

What the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches about Lent...

"Jesus' temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is Messiah, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him. This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter for us: 'For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning.' By the solemn forty days of Lent the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert". (CCC 540)

"The seasons and days of penance in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works)". (CCC 1438)

St Patrick had no problem calling himself "a most unlearned sinner"

by Bishop Donal

RIGHT from the time of Adam and Eve, there has been the temptation to blame somebody else when I make mistakes.

Christian faith always calls us to move away from that childish mindset.

Our own St Patrick had no problem beginning his 'Confessions' calling himself "a most unlearned sinner". Children make excuses and dump the guilt on others. Adults accept responsibility for their actions.

But our 'sins' are not just a

list of misdemeanours. We ask forgiveness for not being "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Mt 5:48). And then we accept that we are still offered a share in the divine life - as a free gift.

I hope that, over the next weeks, we will be able to facilitate all those who want to lay their sins before the Lord in Confessions.

Then, as a Church, we can celebrate the Lord's Resurrection and the gift of Christ's risen life, when we have died a little bit more to ourselves.



Lent is a time to let go in order to grow by Edel O'Connor

MY favorite season of the year is springtime. The sense of hope, rebirth and renewal are palpable in the air. In springtime, the branches long for the buds to bring new life. Lent, for me, symbolises the opportunity to reflect, to listen to the calls of the Holy Spirit reaching to the depths of my longings, and it is a time to respond to that call and renew my faith.

Lent is a time for reflection. I ask myself what I need to let go of in order to grow. It is a time of discernment and questioning for me, to ascertain for myself how I can renew my faith.

Faith is surrendering to God, opening myself up to the mystery of life and to the risks of the unknown future. Jesus surrendered Himself to God in

the wilderness of the desert. The world does not offer certainty to humanity; however, faith and hope involve a risk to trust that God will never fail to uphold His creation. In these uncertain times of this global pandemic, that trust and faith in God is sustaining me.

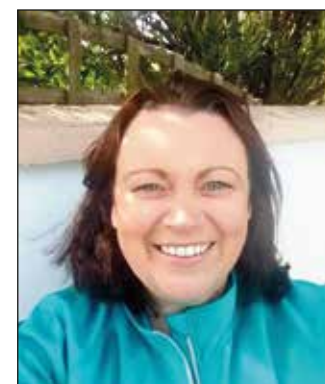
My understanding of Lent has grown over the years. Traditionally, as a child, I always associated Lent with giving up sweets and chocolate. However, over the years I have discovered that my Lenten journey is an opportunity to lighten my load and let go of my own heavy crosses and burdens I may be carrying. Removing the things that harden my heart and planting the buds of renewed hope, faith and love.

In the words of the Prophet

Ezekiel: "I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you."

Lent and, in particular, the sacrament of Confession are an invitation to receive this new spirit. It is an invitation into God's mercy, but what is not acknowledged cannot be healed. I am offered forgiveness, compassion, courage and strength when I may be at my weakest. To forgive and to be forgiven is to enter a world of freedom. Certainty that God is an all forgiving God can be a healing power. The sacrament of Confession is a gift of healing and renewal.

Brendan Kennelly noted: "Though we live in a world that dreams of ending, that always seems about to give in, something that will not acknowledge



Edel O'Connor

conclusion insists that we forever begin."

I believe that the Holy Spirit is continually in the hearts of people, insisting that they forever begin. During this Lent, as I wait for spring blossoms to appear and the sounds of the birds singing in the air, I pray that I will acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit encouraging me to continue to sing that song of hope within me.

Without the Father I am fallen, but with Him I am lifted by Shauna Fitzsimons

AS I begin to prepare my child to celebrate his First Confession, I think back to my own experience of this occasion. As I sat alongside the priest telling him of my sins, my heart pounding, I recall him looking at me saying, "Are you sure this is it?" Did he know something? I was going through a process, one that I would only appreciate many years later.

As a family, we would attend the Reconciliation Services in our local church. I would always prefer to sit next to the priest face-to-face, telling all my sins. I had a fear of the Confessional boxes; unsure of whether to sit or stand, to speak aloud or whisper. These issues clouded the process and they grew and grew to the point where I stopped going to Confession for a number of years. The longer I left it, the more difficult it was to return.

It was not until I started going to the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal Healing Nights, in

Gallagher, that I took that first step back. Each month, I sat in the service listening to the encouraging words to go to meet the Father; watching the line upon line of people waiting to go before the Lord in humility. I longed to get up and join the queue, and each month that longing grew and grew.

Unbeknown to me, the Lord had been working within me, preparing me. I had been reading St Faustina's Diary, each chapter preparing my heart and soul to make that step closer to reconciliation. For me, the idea that in my human failings I can sin and yet with a contrite heart be forgiven by a Loving Father, was a lot for me to grasp, and yet, once I had experienced it, it is the one thing that provides me with solace.

Eventually, I was able to go to Confession during the Healing Night and that first Confession brought closure to the fears that had built up. Being honest, I was

scared, really scared, and yet I shouldn't have been. With it being my first time back, the nerves got the better of me. I had to remind myself of the Prodigal Son and the image of the Father standing arms outstretched. To be forgiven, as easy as it sounds, can be hard to accept, but what I have found is that once I took that step, it became easier to take the next step and the one after that.

The closer I grow towards God in my life, the more I can see that He is calling out all those "smallest of sins". Each fall is a reminder of my weakness but also of my need of God the Father in my life, of how much I depend on Him. Without the Father I am fallen, but with Him I am lifted. Of course, I still fall, but it becomes more of a conscious effort now to live a life that is pleasing to God.

I want my children to know and grow in a relationship with a loving, understanding and forgiving Father. I try to lead by



Shauna Fitzsimons

example, through experiencing the compassion and forgiveness of The Father, so that my children will be encouraged to walk this path. To learn when I am wrong, to say I am wrong, and when I have been forgiven, to accept this.

"Be ashamed of when you sin, not when you repent." - St John Chrysostom.

Now I can say that I fully appreciate the beauty and grace of reconciliation.

The light and hope we long for can be found through prayer, fasting and almsgiving *by Sonya Darcy*



Sonya Darcy, Drumragh Parish, Omagh.

THIS year, more than ever, we have been finding our own way of celebrating Lent. We may be celebrating alone in our houses, but we still follow the centuries of Christians who have spent this period of 40 days and nights preparing for the celebration of the Resurrection of Christ, by sacrificing something in honour

of Jesus.

The word 'Lent' of course means forty in many languages, but I am drawn to the derivative from Anglo Saxon origins meaning 'lengthen.' Lent for me has always been a sign that the darkness of winter is drifting away to allow for the brighter days and waiting for the signs of hope to appear with the first buds of spring and the celebration of Easter. It is also a time of growth, as the exam classes reach Easter it signals a time of transition perhaps academically and spiritually.

Ordinarily, our CBS students would have gathered in Sacred Heart Church, Omagh, and celebrated Ash Wednesday together as a school community, and our Pope John Paul II students would lead our Morning Prayer in St Brendan's Chapel. This year we have moved our morning prayers online and our senior pupils lead the prayers on our social media platforms. Our Year Heads connect online to lead our Lenten

Assemblies. This gives us some sense of connectedness in this important liturgical season.

In this period of coronavirus and lockdowns, we have been asked to sacrifice many things, such as family gatherings, social interactions with friends, celebrating Mass with our fellow parishioners, and even a simple hug that we took for granted. For many, the darkness and struggles have been especially hard to endure and our long fasting has made us weary. We are longing for a sign of hope; the lighter days to lift our Spirits.

This year, for me the season of Lent is also a period of fasting from each other and the routine of our daily lives, but Easter is a sign of hope as always and no better way to celebrate the Resurrection than to be reunited with our loved ones.

Some may be dismayed at the thought of Lent and 40 more days of fasting and sacrifice, especially when many have been isolated

and alone for so long, whilst key workers have been on the frontline throughout the pandemic working hard and sacrificing for all of us. But the light and hope that we are longing for can be found within by drawing closer to God through our prayers, fasting and our almsgiving.

We are called to live a life of prayer and service all year round, but Lent is a time to refocus our thoughts and energies, to remove distractions and look closely at how we can improve our relationship with God. Drawing closer to Him will give us the warmth, hope and light that we seek.

Many self-help books talk about 21 days being the magic number to make a habit stick, so the discipline of sticking at something for 40 days really should reinforce our Lenten sacrifice and make it a part of our daily lives, whether that be giving up salt in my younger days or, this year, setting aside a quiet time each day to devote to prayer. Sacrificing or denying

ourselves anything is a form of discipline and, just like in popular culture, it can provide a balance or a new perspective in how we think about things.

This season can bring about a spiritual renewal, as Pope Francis said in his Lenten message, "Lent is a time for believing. For welcoming God into our lives and allowing Him to 'make His dwelling' in us". It can be a time for us to readjust and examine where we place God in our lives.

The liturgical colour of Lent is purple which is a symbol of both joy and penance, highlighting that it is impossible to talk about renewal and conversion of our hearts during Lent without talking about the gift of Confession, which will cleanse and heal our soul.

In James 5:15-16, we are told, "...If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."

My own experience of

Confession ranges from my childhood feelings of fear and apprehension, at having to account for my sins out loud to another person, to the feelings of joy and liberation and being freed from the feeling of sin. The same feeling experienced, no doubt, by many others, but perfectly captured by one of my own children, who reported feeling much better and closer to God after their first experience of the sacrament.

We must not forget this childhood feeling of joy and peace that can be found in this sacrament, which Pope Francis described as not only returning to God but returning home, just as the Prodigal Son reluctantly returned home but was welcomed with open arms. He reminds us that "God never tires of forgiving us, we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy."

The key is we must return to fully experience the joy of His limitless love and mercy, which will bring us peace this Lent.

Confession is a beautiful encounter with our loving Father *by Rhonda McColgan*



Rhonda McColgan, Iskaheen Parish.

AS I reflect upon this Lenten journey, I find that I must look back whilst at the same time moving forward in order to answer this question. I recall the different experiences that I've had with the Lord as He calls me to 'Come and see.'

God has offered me many invitations to come closer. He calls me deeper into the mystery of His very being. He invites me into a personal relationship with Him; a relationship of discovery. He shows me His very nature as my Father, Friend, King, Lord and Saviour. At the same time as revealing Himself to me, He is

revealing myself to me, as if on a parallel journey of hearts. Lent is one of those invitations.

This, indeed, sounds like an exciting adventure of discovery. But what I've discovered, in this upside down Kingdom, is that it's not an outward journey of adventure but rather an internal one and, sometimes, one of struggle and pain.

This journey enters into the depths of my being. I know that the destination rests with the treasure of what is the dwelling place of the most Holy Trinity. If I keep my eyes focussed on this prize, I know that one day I will get there. As St

Augustine famously stated, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

So, how do we start out on this journey? Well, I've discovered that it begins with the acceptance of that invitation. Then, along with our cooperation and trust, God does the rest in leading us through this journey that is like no other. It is one that takes you through many trials as if breaking free from slavery, escaping our inner Egypt and entering onto Mount Nebo that overlooks the Promised Land.

During the invitation of Lent, we have the opportunity to examine ourselves and take a fresh look at our relationship with God. Giving up certain luxuries and food habits helps us to highlight the weakness of our flesh. It is this saying 'no' that allows us to deny our flesh, thus becoming stronger in the Spirit. It helps us to shift our focus towards God and, at the same time, helps us to root out any areas that we have perhaps placed before the Lord.

One of the biggest gear shifts for me along this journey has most definitely been through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

St Patrick said that each of us shall render account for even our smallest sins before the judgement seat of Christ the Lord. This is a very sobering thought!

However, I call to mind a story related to St Margaret Mary Alacoque. After she received a vision of the Lord, she looked for a confessor to ask for direction.

This priest was Fr Claude de la Colombiere. In looking for proof of this vision, he instructed her to ask God to reveal the last sin that he had confessed. St Margaret Mary asked Jesus this question and His answer was, as the story goes, "I have forgotten". This answer was enough to reassure the now St Claude de la Colombiere of the authenticity of the visions.

It was during Lent a couple of years ago that I discovered the power of the Sacrament of Confession. I was at a Bible study talk. Fr Columba Jordan, a Franciscan Friar of the Renewal, was explaining scripture and I found myself being completely convicted of my sin.

I had a strong urge to go to Knock and make a big confession. So, a few days later, I got up really early and headed off to Knock. Once there, I made my way down to the confessional area and in there I poured my heart out.

Perhaps going to Knock was an indication of my lack of humility by not going to a local priest. However, God provided the right priest for me that day and proved His love for me through the consoling words He spoke to me through that priest. After some prayer time and reflection at Knock, I skipped out of there and felt as free as a bird!

So, reflecting on St Patrick's sobering words to us, I like to think that, in giving God our sins in this life, when we stand before Him in the next He will have blotted out our sins.

"I, I it is who blot out your offenses for my own sake and remember your sins no more". (Isaiah 43:25)

St Faustina, too, reassured us of God's unfathomable mercy. He revealed to her that our sins are like a drop falling into an ocean of mercy. (Diary 718)

This is good news, and my own personal experience is that God is our loving Father, who waits for

us to return; the prodigal son or daughter. He waits at the gate and, when He sees us coming over the field, He runs to meet us with arms outstretched to welcome us home. This truly is the joy of confession. It is a beautiful encounter with our loving Father.

During this Lent, I'm using this great opportunity to go deeper still with the Lord and, as I go deeper within, may I climb higher above.



What the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches about Confession...

"Conversion is first of all a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to him: 'Restore us to thyself, O LORD, that we may be restored!' God gives us the strength to begin anew. It is in discovering the greatness of God's love that our heart is shaken by the horror and weight of sin and begins to fear offending God by

sin and being separated from him. The human heart is converted by looking upon him whom our sins have pierced: Let us fix our eyes on Christ's blood and understand how precious it is to his Father, for, poured out for our salvation it has brought to the whole world the grace of repentance". (CCC 1432)

Confession in Covid *by Fr Gerard Mongan*

FOR the past year, the unprecedented circumstances caused by the spread of Covid-19 has forced the Church to adapt, making use of digital technology to stream services and find new ways to respond to the spiritual needs of believers.

During that time, and in particular during the periods of lockdown, many people have expressed to me their longing for the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist in the midst of the global Covid crisis. Indeed, it has been a time when many have begun, perhaps for the first time, to really appreciate how vital they are for the nourishment of their spiritual lives.

Fundamentally, they long to receive Jesus sacramentally. I've seen some people kneel in tears in adoration as the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession around a Derry City estate last Palm Sunday.

I admire and have been inspired by many priests throughout the world who have used their initiative and sought creative ways to bring the sacraments to people while respecting safety and social distancing. For example, the experience of 'drive-thru' confessions, has been a great source of spiritual comfort and consolation to many in the USA and other parts of the world.

For people who find it impossible to access the Sacrament of Reconciliation at this time, Pope Francis' reassurance of the Church's guidelines at this time is also comforting. During one of his live-streamed morning Masses in the chapel of his home, the Casa Santa Marta, he said: "I know that many of you go to Confession before Easter...Many will say to me, 'But Father...I can't leave the house and I want to make my peace with the Lord...How can I do that unless I find a priest?'"

The Pope continued: "Do what the catechism says. It's very clear. If you don't find a priest to go to Confession, speak to God. He's your Father. Tell Him the truth, 'Lord. I did this and this and this. Pardon me.' Ask His forgiveness with all your heart with an act of contrition, and promise Him, 'afterward I will go to confession.' You will return to God's grace immediately."

The manner of 'going to confession' has clearly developed over the centuries since Jesus uttered his instituting words on Easter Sunday night: "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained" (John 20:23).

A glance at the early history of this sacrament makes it clear that Penance has had a lively and varied past. The primary sacrament of forgiveness in the early Church was baptism. To the first Christians, it seemed unthinkable that anyone who had been converted to Christ would return to sin after they had been baptized. Nevertheless, the

Church soon found that it had to deal with post-baptismal sin.

In the early Church, the Sacrament of Penance could be received only once in a lifetime. The penances assigned were often very long and severe, sometimes lasting several years. During this time, penitents usually had special places in church, wore special clothes, and commonly left the Sunday liturgy after the homily, just like the catechumens preparing for Baptism.

In the 5th-century, discipline of the practice was to hear confessions at the beginning of Lent and to reconcile the penitents on Holy Thursday in preparation for Easter. Gradually, however, the practice of reconciling, or absolving, sinners immediately after confession and before fulfilment of penance was introduced. In Ireland and England, people began to consult holy men (monks) when they were in need of forgiveness. The penitent went to private confession and received penance – the monks had devised books ('Celtic penitentials' or libri paenitentiales) which contained lists or scales of penances commensurate with various sins. The community was not involved, and the ritual was very private and repeatable.

By the end of the 11th century, only notorious sinners were reconciled on Holy Thursday. Often, those guilty of serious, mortal sins put off penance until death approached. To correct this abuse, the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) established the rule that every Christian should confess to a priest at least once a year. Through the centuries, the Church has continued to develop in its understanding of this sacrament so that it can be more responsive to the needs of the people and more meaningful in their lives.

Community

Reconciliation, like all sacraments, has a fundamental community dimension. This was most obvious in the early Church with the Order of Penitents. But even with the later development of private penance, the Church has always insisted on the importance of the priest in the experience of reconciliation. This is not because God will not forgive us directly (God always forgives those who repent), but because the priest is the representative of the Church community. Reconciliation with the Church community is the sacramental sign of reconciliation with the Lord. The priest is the representative of the community, as well as the representative of Christ.

Normally, the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation is an important part of our Lenten observance. There is no better way to prepare for the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord at Easter than by this Sacrament, 'which brings about a true spiritual resurrection, restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of

the children of God' (Catechism 1468).

What do we do then during this time of restriction? Please God we will be able to celebrate this wonderful life-giving Sacrament soon. In the meantime, we can only do what the Church prescribes for a time like this and follow the clear direction of Pope Francis if one can't find a priest: to ask God for forgiveness and then to go to Confession when one is able.

And there's no better man to inspire us this season to trust in the Lord's infinite mercy than our national patron himself, St Patrick. Patrick's 'Confession' is a declaration of the mercy and faithfulness of God to him in Jesus Christ.

Always and throughout his writings, Patrick speaks of himself as only a lowly sinner who was pitied by the Lord. We see his humility in the immortal first line of his 'Confession': "I am Patrick, a sinner, most uncultivated and least of all the faithful and despised in the eyes of many" (Conf 1).

He speaks of the sins of his youth and he presents them as being committed against God. He knew that "We shall all certainly render an account even for the smallest sins before the judgment seat of the Lord Christ" (Conf 8).

In his waywardness, he had deserted the God of his fathers and disobeyed His commandments and neglected the church's message of salvation, but the Lord

was gracious to him (Conf 1).

We see Patrick's sheer dependency and trust in God's mercy when he writes: "...it was [in Ireland] that the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart, so that I should recall my sins even though it was late and I should turn with all my heart to the Lord my God, and he took notice of my humble state and pitied my youth and my ignorance and protected me before I knew him and before I had sense or could distinguish between good and bad and strengthened me and comforted me as a father comforts his son" (Conf 2).

May God comfort us as inheritors of Patrick's legacy of faith in God's infinite mercy to all his adopted sons and daughters in Baptism. May we use our Lenten lockdown to reflect on the sins that separate us from God and from one another and, perhaps also, to refresh our knowledge and understanding of the great gift of Christ's pardon and peace in the sacrament of penance.

Christ is the centre of this sacramental act; that meeting with Christ who makes himself present in the priest. God's glory and love must be more important than our sins. Each time we receive the sacrament, a rebirth of the life of grace takes place within us. We receive greater light from God, and increased strength, special graces to struggle against the inclinations which have been confessed and to



Fr Gerard Mongan, CC Three Patrons.

avoid the occasions of sin so as to try not to fall again into the same faults.

The sincere confession of our faults always leaves great joy and peace in the soul. As Blessed Paul VI said, "the moments of a sincere

Confession may well be amongst the sweetest, the most comforting and the most decisive moments in life", (Address, 27th February 1975). Perhaps we can, at least, look forward to that moment.

For many years I dreaded going to Confession...but I needed release from my sins

by Lexie Morrison

FROM my late teens, as I encountered Jesus, I regarded my spiritual life as a combination of good or bad, and right or wrong. I was either in the middle of sin or trying to avoid it. This perception of my journey had an impact on me because I saw the almighty God as a judge looking down on me with contempt, when I fell into sin. It was as if He loved me better when I was trying to avoid sin. I seemed to see God as being more human than divine.

The lives of the saints demonstrated their own struggles but highlighted that call to holiness, which is a call for each of us. The idea that I could live a similar life to these saints seemed a fantasy; something impossible to me. It was something I felt I could never attain. Maybe I was looking at myself, and my life, with my own eyes. If I could have seen myself with the eyes of Jesus, I could have seen something different. But, then again, that was my problem – I saw Jesus as the eternal judge. So, confession was a sort of difficult task for me over the years. Was the priest going to judge me too? Or did I pass judgement on myself as I entered the confessional?

I always looked forward to Lent, but for so many years I just abstained from chocolate, lemonade or take-aways. Did this bring me closer to Jesus? Weren't all my Lents just the same?

For so many years I dreaded going to Confession, but I needed the release from my sins. At different times I felt my penance wasn't enough or hoped that it wasn't a priest who knew me. Lent for me was a way that I could 'make up' to the Lord for my failings and sins. It was a chance for me to perform some physical action of reparation, as if the Lord was requiring it.

So many times I had high expectations of journeying through Lent, in the desert, and reaching the promised land of Easter. But, so often, it felt I lost something during Holy Week in my expectation. So where was I going wrong?

In recent years, I have come to a deeper relationship with Jesus and the journey has been something similar to a series of on-going 'lents' and 'easters', with perseverance in the struggles and then enjoying the consolations of the Holy Spirit.

Today, I still struggle slightly with Confession, but I don't see Jesus as that judge looking down on me. He is the righteous judge with eternal Love and Mercy. You see that is the secret! Do we really believe Jesus loves us? Not to say it only as words, but to live his 'Love' and to live his 'Mercy'.

It's truly awesome having God as your best friend too. It took me a long time to get to that point as I looked in different places for God. And, indeed, in a lot of those places I found him; in the church, in His people and in nature.

I always had the habit of looking up to the sky, as if looking to Heaven, when I chatted to God as I walked, but recently I felt as if an inner voice was saying to me, 'Why do you look up, look inside!' That's where God is! That's where He dwells. But this only happens if I love Him and obey His commandments and keep His Word. Jesus tells us that if we do this, our Heavenly Father will love us and God will make His home with us. So, when the Almighty Trinity dwells within me, do I need to fear the judgement Seat of Christ?

This Lent is a time of extra



Lexie Morrison, Derry.

praying for me. I'm not interested as much in 'going off chocolate', but I am fasting to some extent and I'm taking on more spiritual reading. This Lent, I feel the call to a 'deeper trust' in the Lord and to spend more time with Him. He must be our light in the darkness.

To love the Lord is to do His will, so that when we come before the Lord in Judgement, the prayer of our lives, and of our souls, will already have been: "Thy Will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven". Amen.

Growing further in their faith together during Lent...
...Roisin Doherty and her five children share the joy of being Catholic



Roisin Doherty

We found our home in Jesus during Lent in Derry by Roisin Doherty

IN late winter 2010, my five children and I arrived in Derry seeking to make a new life in the hometown I'd left as a child during The Troubles. We were just settling into our new home as Lent approached.

The Cathedral bells rang across the city each Sunday morning and our yearning for belonging and community got us wondering what the bells were celebrating. Our new neighbours said one of the churches had begun a Children's Liturgy they thought my children would love.

We bravely set out to our first time at Mass together. It would be my first time at Mass since I was a teen. I had no idea what to expect.

Inside the church my young family indeed loved the Children's Liturgy and ran off to enjoy the activities. I sat alone in the empty bench as Mass began, surrounded by friendly strangers.

I didn't know Jesus and I was looking for safety, acceptance, hope and a community to lean into.

A man in grey walked across the altar. He was wearing long hooded robes with a rope around his waist. He read the Gospel about the woman at the well. As I listened,

the woman's ache to be seen, to be known and to belong became so real as I identified with her.

The man in grey spoke about Jesus and I found myself crying, recognizing God's presence in these words of profound, radical, scandalous love.

I realized in these moments of newness that the Catholic Church in Derry was where my children and I would come to know Our Lord, the God of Love.

After Mass, the friar invited the children and I to their friary where we began the most amazing journey into our faith. We learned about the sacraments, Holy Communion, Confession, prayer, the Rosary, joy and perseverance, holiness, happiness, the Holy Spirit, Our Lady and the saints.

All through the rest of Lent and Easter that year was an excited frenzy of the five children preparing for their Baptism, which happened in summer.

We found our home in Jesus during Lent in Derry. We met our new faith community and we made friendships we still hold dearly 11 years later.

Glory, praise and thanks be to God.

Lent reminds me to try to live like Jesus by Owen Doherty



THINKING back on Lent in previous years, I have come to see that no matter how many times I break my Lent, do the things I said wouldn't and fall, Jesus allows me to get right back up and start again.

I feel like this is very similar to the gift of Confession. As Jesus and I walk together through the desert, we continue to walk together even after coming out of it.

Lent is a time when I remember Christ's strength and forgiveness

and to try to live like Him.

My favourite memories of Saint Patrick's Day are all of my family being out together, wearing green, eating cotton candy from the ice cream vans and feeling the rumble of the city even once we come home.

St Patrick's Day makes me think of the love that people have for him; to be dedicated enough to celebrate a day every single year in his honour.



Owen Doherty.

Lent gives me a chance to change and challenge myself by Tom Doherty (aged 17)

I find that Lent is a time that not only gives me a chance to change and challenge myself, but to also remember the difficulties Jesus faced.

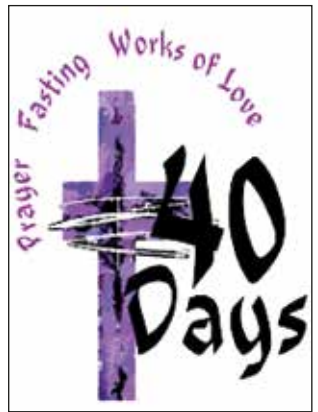
The trial He went through is a reminder to keep my head up and have faith when things are tough.

The gift of Confession is a unique opportunity to be free from sins I've committed; I often find myself under appreciating it.

It's sometimes hard to be honest with myself and face my sins, but through the act of Confession, I become clean and open to Jesus.

St Patrick's Day always brings

fond memories and joyful experiences. Most years I spend it with my friends, watching the parade and just enjoying the company. It's a vibrant day that always has a strong sense of community and makes me feel at home.



During Lent I'm focusing on what Jesus did for us by Susie Doherty (aged 15)

MEMORIES I will always have with me are those surrounding the time of Lent. I found myself in awe at having the ashes on my forehead each Ash Wednesday, which I never wanted to wash off.

Hearing my mum talk about Jesus' time in the desert drew me into wanting to know more about my faith, and the sacrifices He made for us.

One of my fondest memories around the period of Lent is of being part of a Folk Choir. On the lead up to Easter, we learnt the most joyful songs about Jesus and His Resurrection, which we sang with pride in Long Tower Church on Easter Sunday morning.

An Easter egg-hunt followed,

with food and drinks, which made me realise the importance of joy and how much God loves to see His children happy.

Not only is this time a time of joy, but one of reflection.

Although still young, reflecting on my faith had always been a sacred space for me. Having fruitful, and sometimes chaotic, family discussions about Jesus' life paved the way for an intimate relationship with my Father in Heaven.

I can still remember having arguments about what colour Mary's robes were with my brothers and sister.

Spending my first St Patrick's Day in Ireland was a colourful



and overwhelming experience. Picking out green clothes and setting off for the parade felt like the biggest adventure.

I clambered onto a bench to see above the busy crowd, only to find a huge float of St Patrick who, at the time, I wasn't familiar with.

An avalanche of questions later

and I found myself completely intrigued by St Patrick's vocation of being a missionary, and I knew I wanted to be like him.

I'm focusing on what Jesus did for us, and using this Lent to reflect on the past and what's to come in the future.

Confession is an opportunity to feel free from sin by Eddie Doherty (age 14)

WHEN I remember the time of Lent, I think of the days Jesus spent in the desert going through all that pain for all of us. It warms my heart to know His love.

The courage, strength and faith Jesus had is amazing and I'm glad and grateful for all that He's done.

I feel that Confession is an opportunity to feel free from your sins and to really feel God's love. I think without it I would be more lost and stray further from God



Every Lent I try to become more and more like Jesus by Eilish Doherty (aged 12)

LENT to me is a wonderful time of year. From the dog walks through the parks to picking flowers in big meadows, it blows my mind that God has created all of that beauty and nature.

Not only is Lent a great cleansing for my soul, it is a cleansing for my body and mind.

Every single Lent, I try to go on new things and go off things to stop bad habits, and try to do good deeds in an effort to become more

and more like Jesus.

This Lent, I have tried to go on a long walk every single day, which has really helped to keep me busy.

Saint Patrick's Day is also a big part of our life here during Lent. It is the day where a bunch of people come together and celebrate Saint Patrick. We have big parades and eat special foods.

It is considered a very big holiday in Ireland and reminds me of how much I love Jesus.

What greater power than forgiveness...it brings the chance for a fresh start and freedom

by Martin McKeever



Martin McKeever, Faughanvale Parish.

"EACH and all shall render account for even our smallest sins before the judgement seat of Christ the Lord" (St Patrick). That's a pretty scary place to start if you grew up like me, thinking God had

some kind of big book where He kept a check on everything we had ever done wrong, and no mention of a place where you had done something right.

Thankfully, Pope Francis said:

"The church is not a museum for saints; it's a hospital for sinners". Also, Fr Neal Carlin, founder of the Columba Community, speaks of sin as "missing the mark or falling short". Both of these men of God give me hope when I fall short; there's a chance of repentance, of recovery and making a fresh start. Repentance is turning towards holiness, returning to receive "the happiness for which we were created". It's like the prodigal son who turned towards home and began his journey back to a fresh start, after admitting that he had fallen short and got it wrong; even the servants back home were better treated and cared for than he was in this foreign land. He knew he'd fallen short of the standards expected of him by his father, but he still trusted in the kindness and compassion of a loving father.

Fr John Farren told me in Confession one time that God didn't expect me to do everything at once, but would like me to lean towards a particular situation and He would make up the difference. It worked out without me hardly even noticing it had changed.

I would like to share two very different experiences of confessions I had in Knock. They took place years apart, but each had its own powerful message for me.

The first one seemed very negative to me until I came to understand it fully later. I had just finished the five-day Peace Walk from Derry to Knock and then stayed on a few days in the caravan park with my family. Walking 135 miles gives you plenty of time to pray and reflect so, in my own opinion, at the time I was 'perfectly prepared' for 'a good confession'... whatever that might be.

I joined the queue and eagerly awaited my turn because I had the expectation that this was going to be one of those life changing experiences. And it was, but not in the way I expected. The young priest, who, in hindsight, looked pretty tired and worn out, seemed totally uninterested in anything that I said as I 'bared my soul', and at one point even trimmed his broken fingernail.

My ego was screaming inside of me saying, 'After all the time and effort I put in, you'd think he'd at least pretend to be interested!' After absolution, I left the confessional with a huge chip on my shoulder, making all sorts of rash promises to myself about never going through that again. In my frustration and anger, I missed the most important part of the sacrament, my confession was never between me and this young weary priest, it was between me

and God.

Hurt

It took me a long time to get past that 'hurt', and it was only by talking it through with another priest at home that I started to move on. I used it as the perfect excuse to stay away: "Sure why should I bother if they can't be bothered". I had no thought or consideration for how many hours or days that young priest might have been sitting there. It was almost as if I expected a prize for just showing up.

The next experience was some years later, when passing through Knock en route to a men's retreat in Cork. I was driving the minibus and running a bit late because of a diversion at road works, but I had promised everybody the chance of confessions on the way through. I remember telling them not to be hanging about too long and joking about "only tell the big ones so it'll be quicker", so we could get back on the road again to do 'God's work' in Cork.

I joined the shortest queue that was moving along fairly well, so I was all set for a quick spin through without losing too much precious time. It was almost as if God was having a laugh because the old priest seemed to sense my impatience and frustration. He introduced himself and made me

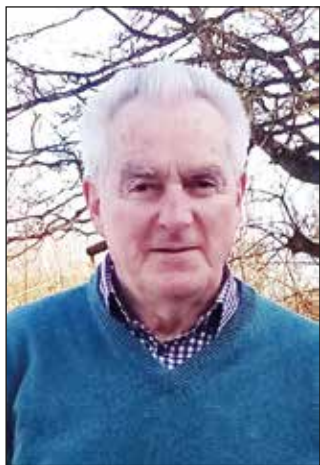
welcome, and then invited me to have a seat and settled back into his own chair for a long chat about everything in my life, including our trip to Cork. We talked for ages and, as I was leaving, he leaned forward and said, "Now, what does it feel like to be leaving here as a saint?"

I was a bit stunned and said I had never really considered the possibility, given the conversation we had just had. He sat back smiling and said, "That's the power of this sacrament, you're leaving here now washed as clean as the day you were born and should you need to come back in 10 minutes, 10 days or 10 months, the result will be exactly the same, as long as you come with an open heart and pure intention".

I certainly don't think of myself as a saint, but I am delighted to be part of the 'Hospital Church' that Pope Francis speaks of. I am a member of The Columba Community and our Mission Statement is: "To joyfully come together as a group of individuals believing and celebrating the power of Jesus Christ, for mutual support and to minister to other people".

What greater power can there be than forgiveness, it brings the chance for a fresh start and freedom.

Confession and sorrow for sin with joy by Noel Bradley



Noel Bradley, Buncrana.

THE practice of sacraments has always changed with time. We used to attend Mass in Latin. If you were living in the 17th century you would go to Communion only very rarely. In 1970, I remember trying to persuade my mother that she did not need to go to Confession every time she wanted to go to Communion. She was brought up with the idea 'Confession before Communion'. She said: "You never know what

sins you might be committing!"

As a teenager 60 years ago, I went to Confession about twice a month, but I have to say that it was to keep on the right side of God. It was all very self-centred and guilt-centred. I saw God primarily as a judge and a harsh judge at that, especially in regard to sexual pleasure of any kind outside marriage. That was considered 'grave matter' and needed to be confessed. Many of us at that time thought we were committing mortal sins quite frequently and felt guilty and needed to go to Confession, otherwise, if you died in mortal sin you could go to hell. Someone compared it to 'Snakes and Ladders'. You went to Confession and went up a ladder, only to fall down a snake later. You never really got started in growing spiritually.

The teaching of St Thomas was also there: "Although grace is lost by a single act of mortal sin, yet it is not easily lost. For it is not easy for a man (or woman) in the state of grace to perform an act of mortal

sin because of his inclination in the contrary direction" (De Veritate 27, 1-9). But that was not emphasised. I only found that out much later. There was also the teaching that if you were sorry for your sins they are forgiven. You had to have 'perfect sorrow', but that did not refer to intensity or to the absence of less worthy motives than the love of God; it just meant that whatever motives you had the love of God was present. But that did not get the emphasis either. So, I think that a lot of people lived with a lot of unnecessary guilt, and fear of God.

Some readers will remember the long queues for confessions on a Saturday night. Now there are fewer and fewer Catholics going to confessions regularly. I don't think this is necessarily a bad thing. A more communal penitential rite is also becoming popular. There is also the teaching that the Eucharist is THE sacrament of Reconciliation and the pastoral implications of that. I'm sure there is need for the sacrament

of Penance at various times in a person's life, but there was something a way out of balance in the past. I think that people are just leaving this kind of practice behind. How it develops we will have to wait and see.

St Patrick

'St Patrick, Bestow a Sweet Smile...Look down in thy Love'.

When St Patrick says that 'each of us shall render account for even our smallest sins before the judgement seat of Christ the Lord', I would like to think of that in a positive way, and not get myself or others into thinking that God is a harsh Judge and is just waiting, like a heavenly policeman, to pounce on us with punishment from some 'judgement seat', 'for even our smallest sins'. That is not the God revealed in Christ in the Gospels.

On the positive side, I would like to think that St Patrick wants us to have a sensitive conscience and consciousness about all our thoughts, words and deeds; that he would approve of the practice to examine our conscience and

consciousness at the end of the day. Where have I been moving towards or away from God during the day, in my thoughts, words or deeds? Where has He been gifting me with an increase of love, faith or hope, joy, gratitude? Where have I been weak or blind?

All this is done before the loving gaze of God, not the gaze of a Judge or Policeman. The whole purpose of Christ in the Gospel is to communicate that we are His 'beloved' (Rom: 1:7), being drawn into His (eternal) life and (eternal) love; the love 'that casts out fear' (1 John 4:18).

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15) is very rich in symbolisms; the younger son comes 'to his senses', and sees himself 'as one of your hired servants' who gets his wages and what he deserves. His sin has changed him from seeing himself as a son to seeing himself as a hired servant. Luke repeats this twice. The vital thing is that he recognizes his sin for what it is: something that changes God into a paymaster or a judge. Of course, as

soon as he really sees and accepts that he is a sinner, he ceases to be one. Knowing that you have sinned IS contrition. Forgiveness comes with that. That is the nature of contrition. You notice that the rest of the story is not about the father forgiving his son, but about the father celebrating, welcoming his son with joy and feasting. He runs towards the son, who does not even get a chance to speak, embracing him and calling quickly to get a robe and sandals and a ring, and kill the fatted calf. This is the God of Jesus, unconditionally in love with us.

It is not the case that if we do good, God will reward us, and if we do evil, God will punish us. God is just in love with us. In a way, He doesn't care if we are sinners. Sin doesn't alter God's attitude to us; it alters our attitude to Him, so that we change Him from the God who is simply love, and nothing else, into a punitive judge. Imagine the opposite of that and going to Confession to celebrate your experience of forgiveness!

The Sacrament of Confession has helped me a lot over the years

by Dale Krause



Dale Krause

LENT is an interesting one this year. A common theme of discussion amongst people at the moment seems to be: Since we have had such a truly difficult last 12 months with the pandemic, why make things more difficult for ourselves this Lent?

It's a fair question, especially as many of us have had it so tough this past year. But when you think back to 'normal' years gone by, it's nice to remember how much closer to God and our loved ones, Lent can help us to be.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation has always been an important part of Lent, although the classic image of closely packed, Lenten lines of people in pews won't be the case this year, of course.

I've had some tough Confessions over the years. It can be hard to take a good, hard look in the mirror, particularly when you're young and a bit hot-headed. But the Sacrament of Confession has helped me a lot over the years.

My first proper brush with the works of St Patrick coincidentally came after one memorable Sunday evening Confession at St Bernadette's RC Church, in Manchester, around 10 years ago. My penance from the Monsignor was to go and sit in the pew and silently read the hymn, St Patrick's Breastplate, from a hymn book. Since then, it has been one of my favourite hymns and the words resonate with me even now:

*I bind unto myself today
The power of God to hold and lead,
his eye to watch, His might to stay,
his ear to hearken to my need,
the wisdom of my God to teach,
his hand to guide, His shield to ward;
the word of God to give me speech,
his heavenly host to be my guard.*

*Against the demon snares of sin,
the vice that gives temptation force,
the natural lusts that war within,
the hostile men that mar my course;
or few or many, far or nigh,*

*in every place and in all hours,
against their fierce hostility
I bind to me these holy powers.*

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.*

*(Verse extracts from CF
Alexander's 1889 version of 'St
Patrick's Breastplate')*

I have lots of memories of various St Patrick's Day celebrations as a younger man, but my favourite St Patrick related memories did not come until later life. The first, is that my now wife and I officially became 'an item' on one distant St Patrick's Day, as quaint as that seems to say now.

In later years, we named our first born after St Patrick. Patrick had always struck me as a solid name and a hard one to go wrong with. As a teacher, when you're naming your children you always inevitably end up thinking of the names of children that you've taught! I have to say though, hand on heart, all the Patricks that I have taught over the years were very good!

At the time of our eldest son's birth, a good friend gave us a small porcelain statue of St Patrick which currently sits guarding the

utility room. At times the statue gets moved to more salubrious locations for veneration purposes and on occasion gets to visit school on St Patrick's Day. Our son loves to hear the tale of St Patrick expelling all of the snakes from Ireland - a popular bedtime story request.

Though we were at Banagher Forest last weekend and saw the sign in the accompanying photograph, I didn't have the heart to point it out to Patrick least he question St Patrick's efficaciousness!

To all readers of 'The Net', I wish you a decent Lent and a very happy St Patrick's Day, during these difficult times.



During the late 6th century it is said that a great serpent called Lig na Paiste, lived in the waters of the deep pool frightening the community of Banagher. The local people turned to a Holy man named Murrough O'Heaney, who banished the serpent downstream to Magilligan Point, where it is said it remains caged to this day and could be the cause of unusual currents and changing tides.

A Lenten reflection for St Patrick's Day

by Teresa Hodgins



Teresa Hodgins

I have always loved music and dancing and, when I think about it, both are inspired by St Patrick.

My mother's family are from a small townland in Co Dublin called 'The Black Hills'. Back in the day it was considered rural, sandwiched between the coastal towns of Balbriggan and Skerries, and on the doorstep of what is now known as the popular Ardgillan Demesne.

I have clear memories of this time. I attended a two-teacher primary school, called Milverton, until I was seven, then we moved to the outskirts of Balbriggan. In the Hills, I shared a bedroom with my Granny Cleary and the abiding memory I have is of being beside her in bed as she devoutly recited the Rosary. She always had a handkerchief over her eyes, so I copied her thinking it was part of our Marian ritual. I would peek over at her as she sang her prayers and I fell asleep to the comfort and security of this nightly practice.

When reflecting on the teachings and life of St Patrick, it is the above

memory of my devout Granny that resonates with the life and humble example of St Patrick. In his, 'Confessio', Patrick writes, "... in a single day I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night almost as many".

During Lent, our sense and duty to pray is heightened, it is a wonderful time of year when time is set aside by the Church to focus on prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

The faith and example of prayer by St Patrick reverberates from generation to generation, from Church to Church, and his legacy is universal in its appeal and global in its impact on mission and community.

For years, as a child, I proudly put on my Irish dancing costume and we danced our way through the streets of Balbriggan in the annual St Patrick's Day Parade. In those days, it was pure community joy. Every group in the town participated. Farmers turned their tractors green and local haulage companies took the sides off their lorries and provided the stage for robust traditional music that filled the air and, whilst the theology of St Patrick might not have been evident to many of us, the craic and sense of community was indeed mighty!

Having spent many years teaching in England, I found myself back in Derry in 1999. How fortunate was I to land a job teaching in Thornhill College. God is good! I was delighted to find that I was teaching A Level, as this remains a passion of mine to this day. However, the syllabus was slightly different to my experience of teaching Philosophy of Religion, indeed, I was to teach

Celtic Church!

Well, thank you Fr Walsh and Thomas Bradley, as it was a Baptism of fire for me but armed with the fulcrum of the wisdom of these Celtic scholars, I embraced all that the Celtic Church had to offer and it was here that I learned of the wisdom, faith and vision of St Patrick.

It was not the dating of Easter or the 'two Patricks' controversy that piqued my interest in St Patrick. It is rather, the abiding impact of the story of how Patrick prayed earnestly before being ambushed on his way to the hill of Tara. Whilst there might be much scholarly debate to the origin and exact content of this prayer, the legacy of the prayer of St Patrick's Breastplate and The Deer's Cry have impacted greatly on Celtic spirituality and, indeed, in modern Church culture.

'I arise today through God's strength to pilot me.

God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me afar
and anear, alone or in a multitude.'

This is the legacy of St Patrick that resonates with me in my life, and every time I pray those words or hear that beautiful hymn, I feel a connection to God that is inspired by the faith of St Patrick, who placed his trust in God during the most difficult of times and had the patience and mindfulness to, 'Be still and know that I am God'.

<https://youtu.be/fqxzBxZooqc>

Lent is a time for me to reflect on my relationship with Jesus

by Martin Callaghan



Martin Callaghan, Burt, Co Donegal.

I look forward to Lent because it is a time for me to reflect on my personal relationship with Jesus through one of the seven sacraments, Confession.

I need to wrestle with my conscience before I confess. To

help, I have chosen the Gospel passage, 'The lamp of the body is the eye. It follows if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. But if your eye is diseased your whole body will be in the darkness, what darkness that will be'. (Mt 6:19-23)

To stay close to the light of Christ, I am reading the book, 'Consecration to St Joseph', by Fr Donald Calloway, MIC. It is a 33-Day Consecration Prayer to St Joseph, which I began on February 15 and will finish on the Solemnity of St Joseph, March 19. My hope is that this book will open my mind and heart to be more dedicated and fulfilled, and give me a yearning for Easter Sunday.

Like the movie, 'The Searchers', by John Ford, the niece of Ethan Edwards is kidnapped by Comanches and Ethan feels the

hurt and loss of the family unit. The separation hurts deep to the core. Likewise, when I separate from Jesus due to my sins, there is an ache in my heart and I feel like I have lost all hope because I have been weak in my love for Jesus.

Not everyone has an Uncle Ethan, but I do have someone mightier to come to my rescue, Our Lord, Jesus Christ, by shattering the shackles of temptation and sin.

"He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption in forgiveness of sin". (Col 1:12-20)

So, scriptures, sacraments, tradition and Christian family give me hope, and this hope flourishes on St Patrick's Day when I see the gathering of families waving and singing 'In Erin's Green Valleys'.

It is important to stop at times throughout the year and take stock *by Anne Friel*



Anne Friel, Waterside.

LENT is a time to take a step back and examine how I am living my life. It is a time to prepare for Easter. It is important to stop at times and seasons throughout the year and take stock - otherwise I

become caught up with work, time passes and I devote less time to prayer.

I try to put a bit more order in my days during Lent. To start with, this means going to Mass each day. When we were not in COVID-lockdown, I would go to early morning Mass. This started my day by listening to the Word of God and celebrating Eucharist with my parish family, and feeling that closeness as we journeyed through Lent together. I miss seeing those people this Lent. Praying together, especially during Lent, brings a parish closer together.

The readings at Mass during Lent are very familiar, yet each year I seem to hear something different in them. I take the example of the readings of the Second Sunday of Lent, when we heard two of my favourite readings - that from

Genesis where God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son, and the Gospel of the Transfiguration where Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain where they could be alone by themselves. There is a contrast for me in these readings - the great sorrow and angst in the pit of his stomach that Abraham must have felt as he was about to sacrifice Isaac, and the excitement of Peter who wanted to stay on top of the mountain.

I try to be more diligent in praying morning, evening and night prayer. After Mass, I usually sit on to say Morning Prayer. I love the sense of sitting in the still, early morning air of the chapel where I was baptised, just aware of the outside noise of the start of a new day.

Lent is a time when I try to be more thoughtful of what I eat

and drink. It makes me conscious of saying no to buying a bar of chocolate or a bottle of wine. Lent also is a time to give to those who are not as fortunate as me - either through Trocaire or St Vincent de Paul.

Initially, Lent seems to go very slowly and then, all of a sudden, I find myself in Holy Week with its rich liturgy and music. My father was the organist in our church for 40 years. He wrote music to all the Psalms of Holy Week and Easter and these, when I sing or hear them, bring me back to previous years. The Psalm of Good Friday (Psalm 30) sung without accompaniment reflects vulnerability and a yearning to trust in God. I always hope that I have grown more to trust in God by the time Good Friday comes.

At the beginning and the end

of Lent, I try to go to Confession. I do not go as often as I believe I should and, again, Lent itself focuses me on doing so. My grandmother always talked about examining your conscience and I do this in three areas - my home life, my work life and my spiritual life. Breaking it down this way also helps me to remember what I want to say.

The sacrament gives me strength to continue on my journey through Lent to Easter and beyond. It is a further opportunity to become closer to God, not to be judged but to experience God's mercy and love. It is also an opportunity to get closer to parish and Church as a member of the body of Christ. The priest in Confession is a representative of all the people of God and by talking through my sins, saying I am sorry and being

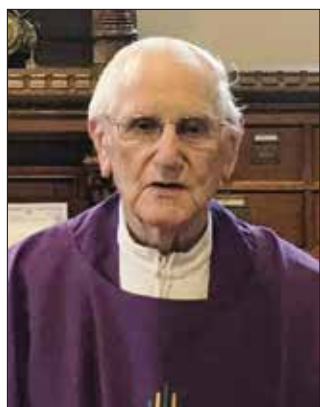
absolved, I am removing barriers to how we live together in parish.

These days, each week during Lent, Tony Brennan, the Diocesan Pastoral Co-ordinator, and members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council are meeting with parishes across the Diocese. We are listening to what they are doing, how they have been supporting each other during the pandemic and what new things they have started to do as we move forward.

These are the first of a series of meetings. It is important that we each continue to build and grow our parish community, to be welcoming and inclusive, to grow in faith together and to make Jesus known and loved. I believe that we do these things - all part of the Derry Diocesan Plan - particularly during Lent and through the Sacrament of Confession.

Fr Donal Bennett reflects on his vocation, and that of his late brother, Fr Terry, as a Columban Father...

We had done what we had set out to do - build up the local church and gracefully retire



Fr Donal Bennett.



The late Fr Terry Bennett.

THE Bennett family in Omagh have been a great support over the years to the ministry of the Missionary Society of Columban, and so the work of the Lord, with Fr Donal and the late Fr Terry, serving 40 and 50 years respectively in the Philippines.

The brothers had been due to celebrate their 60th (Fr Donal) and 70th (Fr Terry) anniversaries of their priesthood last December, but sadly Fr Terry died just five weeks before the occasion, aged 94, at St Columban's Retirement Home, Dalgan, on November 12.

They had concelebrated Mass to mark their Golden and Diamond Jubilees 10 years before, in St Mary's Church, Killyclogher, and a similar celebration had been hoped for to mark this next milestone in their priesthood.

Instead, Fr Donal concelebrated Mass with Fr Ignacy Saniuta, CC Drumragh, in Sacred Heart Church, Omagh, where he had celebrated his first Mass 60 years previously.

Residing in his home town since his retirement, 88-year-old Fr Donal reflected on their faith journey and priesthood, which he recalled came like a bolt out of the blue for both of them.

In a family of four boys and two girls born to Nicholas and Molly (nee McGovern) Bennett, of Market Street, about 200 yards from Sacred Heart Church, Terry was the oldest of the siblings while Donal was the youngest of the boys.

"My parents were married in Monaghan Cathedral in February 1925 by my mother's first cousin, Tommy McGovern," recalled Fr Donal, adding: "He had been ordained in December 1925 and three months later he celebrated the wedding of my parents in 1926. The following December, 1926, Terry was born".

He explained that Fr McGovern had been one of the early members of Maynooth Mission to China - now the Columban Fathers... starting a family tradition.

"He joined the Missions, but unfortunately after he was diagnosed with arteriosclerosis, so he never made it to the Missions. He prayed that his first cousin would have a son who would go to the Missions as a priest. So, I blame him for Terry being called to the Missions and then later me, with his prayers. He was a great holy person and a great influence on us on the occasions he visited," said Fr Donal.

He continued: "The call to priesthood hit Terry like a tonne of bricks when he was 17 years old, and, in a different way, it hit me like a tonne of bricks as well. There was a general opinion

around Omagh, at the time, that Terry was a brilliant footballer. He played for Omagh Town and he was pretty good at that, so he might have gone on to play professionally".

Ordained in December 1950, Fr Terry's first assignment was the Philippines. Arriving in Manila in November 1951, he moved to Isabela, Negros. He spent three months there before being appointed as chaplain in St Paul's College, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. Three years later, he returned to Negros Occidental and was assigned to several parishes.

Later he was assigned to Student Catholic Action, in Manila, where members met at the weekend in small groups to discuss Scripture passages and help each other grow in their relationship with God. This small group eventually expanded throughout the country.

Memorable

Reassigned later to Negros, it was there that Fr Terry spent most of his time and energy as a priest, and it was there, in Sipalay in 1978, that he had his most difficult and most memorable experience. In their fight against injustice, the people had organised a rally against soldiers who had been violating the rights of the people, and Fr Terry was one of the speakers. As it turned out, the speaker before him had raised emotions amongst those gathered and Fr Terry, concerned that the rally might turn violent, took it upon himself to restore calm. This he managed by singing and dancing before them, and by the time he was finished they were singing with hopeful hearts "The Joy of the Lord is our Strength".

Fr Terry retired to the Dalgan community in 2008, and enjoyed serving as Spiritual Director to the local branches of the Legion of Mary.

Commenting on his own call, Fr Donal said: "I left school around 16 without any qualifications. My father had opened a new business, a men's drapers, so I helped him in the first few weeks with that. I could have returned to school but I opted to stay in the business with my father.

"I saved up £40, and a friend and I went hitch hiking in the summer of 1952 in France. We went to Lourdes and had a great time there, going to all the ceremonies. We also enjoyed dances and having singalongs in the hostel. Then we finished up hitch hiking across Southern France and stayed in a hostel in Cannes.

"In November of that year, my parents had gone to bed early. I was alone in the sitting room and this notion came to me out of the blue and, by morning, I was telling my parents that I was thinking of being a priest.

"So when the tonne of bricks arrived, I had to go back to the Christian Brothers in Omagh to get qualifications. There was no shopping around; automatically I was going on the Maynooth Mission to China. Even if I had wanted to go to Maynooth to study for the diocesan priesthood, I couldn't as I hadn't had my education in St Columban's College".

He entered the Maynooth Mission to China in September 1954, was ordained six years later and assigned to the Philippines in September 1961.

"I hadn't been to England or anywhere, except for France before that," laughed Fr Donal, going on to recall his journey to the Philippines: "I took the boat from Cobh to New York and flew to Chicago, then San Francisco. That was my first time in an aeroplane, at the age of 28. Then we took a ship across the Pacific to the Philippines, where I landed in



November 1961.

"Terry was there at portside to meet me. He said to us on arrival, 'You guys are lucky to be arriving in the cool season'. I was sweating from the minute I got off the boat, and so I said, 'If this is the cool season, I don't want to see the hot season!'

"We were both in the Philippines for all that time. All my assignments were in one diocese; I served several years in several parishes".

He continued: "After Terry finished with the university, he came back and was promoting vocations to the Missions in England. Then he went back to the island of Negros, where he resumed pastoral work. He was in the Philippines 50 years. I was only there 40 years. The purpose of the Columbans was to work ourselves out of a job, to build up the local church in parish and Diocese.

"When the Columbans arrived in the Philippines in 1950 at the invitation of the Archbishop of Manila, they purposely asked to be sent to a parish or diocese where the faith was rejected because of heresy or other reasons, and then gradually local vocations started coming in. By the year 2000 or

before, we all knew that our time was up. We had done what we had set out to do - build up the local church and gracefully retire.

"Now, I am living in retirement here in the Derry Diocese. I help out occasionally here in Omagh, where I am living in a rented house offered by my bosses. I said to Terry that he could stay with me here but he opted to live permanently in Dalgan, when he returned in 2008, and he drove up here once and a while to visit me. I have family living around me here".



'Fr Terry dancing to diffuse a tense situation at a rally while ministering in Negros

The Leaving of Lagos by Fr Peter McCawille, SMA

“Be grateful as your deeds become less and less associated with your name, as your feet ever more lightly tread the earth.” (Dag Hammarskjöld, 1905-1961, second Secretary-General of the United Nations)



Fr Peter McCawille SMA and Fr Jose Florent Kakpo, SMA from the Republic of Benin

ON Monday, October 25, 1976, I set foot on Nigerian soil for the first time. I was in no position to know it then, but it has since turned out to be the start of a wonderfully fulfilling adventure and it hasn't finished yet!

In the 90s, I also had the opportunity to spend 10 years in Ireland on a very rewarding (I visited nearly every county interviewing many of my favourite sport stars!) home appointment as editor of our SMA missionary magazine, 'The African Missionary', while the remaining 35 years of my missionary priesthood have been spent in Nigeria.

Pioneer SMA missionaries
Ninety-two years before I reached Nigeria, the first Irish

SMA missionary, William Connaughton (ordained on December 22, 1883 and died in April, 1887) arrived in Lagos and began an unbroken association between Irish SMA missionaries and the local Church.

Today, there are just seven priests of the SMA Irish Province still active in Nigeria, and three of them are natives of the Diocese of Derry – Mark and Dan Monaghan, from Omagh, and myself, from Dregish.

When I returned to Nigeria after my last home leave in December, 2018, I began reflecting seriously on the reality that we are among a diminishing group whose active links with Nigeria are coming to an end. It also struck me fairly forcibly one day that, before the last Irish SMA finishes his work here, I should commit something

to print for future generations. I then embarked on a project which has finally seen the light of day in a book titled 'Leaving a Legacy in Lagos', which chronicles the varied experiences of SMA priests who collaborated with a wide range of people at parish level – parents, catechists, teachers, church leaders, female and male members of the laity – in breaking new ground in Lagos Archdiocese in times past.

Looking back and forward
'Leaving a Legacy in Lagos' is divided into three parts...

Part 1 looks back at the careers of 125 Irish SMAs who worked in Lagos since 1884 and have since passed on to their eternal rewards. Many died in Nigeria and are buried there;

Part II contains face-to-face interviews with 10 retired senior Lagos priests, all of whose paths to priesthood were greatly influenced in their childhood years by many of the Irish SMAs profiled in Part I;

Part III connects with a new era of SMA development in Nigeria, which began with the first intake of young Nigerian seminarians who, in 1986, spent their first year in residence at Ss. Peter & Paul Major Seminary, Ibadan, before taking up residence in the newly-erected SMA House of Formation, while they continued attending lectures at the Major Seminary. An experience similar to what a group of Irish SMA seminarians did in 1969, when they moved from Dromantine College to take up residence in Maynooth College before moving to the newly-built hostel in 1972, while continuing to attend lectures at the College.

From 1986 onwards in Nigeria, steady progress followed until the first SMA Nigerian deacon was ordained to the priesthood on November 27, 1993. From a small step in 1986 came a giant leap 33 years later in November, 2019, when an autonomous SMA Nigeria Province, which now comprises 60 Nigerian SMAs, was created.

I freely admit that I found reading the profiles of my deceased, illustrious predecessors a most moving experience. Their stories helped me to appreciate that they were men whose hearts and minds were woven into the fabric of the lives of the men, women and children whom they served here for many years, stories that are pulsating with acts of service, heroism, generosity and the inevitable moments of disagreeableness.

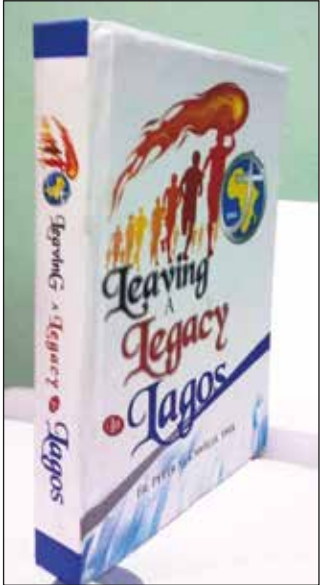
After I finished my stint as editor, I returned to Nigeria in March 2000 to continue my missionary career by promoting what is called the SMA Family Vocations Movement (FVM). My task involved moving around from parish to parish in Lagos, Ibadan, Benin City and Abuja, encouraging the people to assist the SMA Society, prayerfully and financially, in the education and training of our seminarians.

Their appreciation of the

sacrifices made in the past by Italian, French and Irish SMAs is now amply reflected in their readiness to donate generously to help their own Nigerian sons and daughters build on the pioneering work of those SMA predecessors. They are acutely aware that those who have been evangelised in the past must now help those who want to become evangelisers in the future.

I conclude by paraphrasing the words of Dag Hammarskjöld, which I quoted at the beginning of this article, and I leave the last word to St Luke... "So when you have done all you have been told to do, say, 'We have done no more than our duty.'" (Luke 17:10)

Copies of the book are available from Fr Jarlath Walsh, SMA African Missions, Blackrock Road, Cork City, Rep of Ireland.



Fr Peter's book, Leaving a Legacy in Lagos.



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 Irwin (March 1st)
- Fr Charles Keaney (2nd)
- All Priests (3rd)
- Fr Patrick Lagan (4th)
- Fr Michael Keaveny (5th)
- Fr Seamus Kelly (6th)
- Fr Edward Kilpatrick (7th)
- All priests (8th)
- Fr Charlie Logue (9th)
- Fr Paul McCafferty (10th)
- Mgsr Bryan McCanny (11th)
- Fr Michael McCaughey (12th)
- Fr Andrew McCloskey (13th)
- Fr Frank Lynch (14th)
- Fr Peter Madden (15th)
- Fr Noel McDermott (16th)
- Fr Eamon McDevitt (17th)
- Fr John McDevitt (18th)
- Fr Anthony Mailey (19th)
- Fr Kevin McElhennon (20th)
- Fr Daniel McFaul (21st)
- Fr Dermot McGirr (22nd)
- Fr Micheal McGavigan (23rd)
- Fr Brian McGoldrick (24th)
- Fr Neil McGoldrick (25th)
- All priests (26th)
- Fr James McGonagle (27th)
- Dr James McGrory (28th)
- All Priests (29th)
- Fr Edward McGuinness (30th)
- Bishop Donal McKeown (31st)

Pope's monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during March for:

Sacrament of Reconciliation:
Let us pray that we may experience the sacrament of reconciliation with renewed depth, to taste the infinite mercy of God.

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

Online Lenten workshops with Trocaire



DURING Lent, Trocaire is running a series of online workshops on various themes, with the next on Tues, March 16.

This workshop will focus on Peace and Justice in South Sudan,

and will run from 2-3 pm.

The following one take place on Tuesday, March 30, at the same time, with the theme being Never Waste a Crisis.

The workshops are open to everyone and the link to register is below.

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdsitZjQ6LENkWcgfhJng9VHUFFtxTTSq4jelHAZRpCgzqLWQ/viewform>

The following are links to Trocaire's parish and development education resources, which explore issues of peace and justice, conflict, solidarity, and kindness through the charity's work in

South Sudan, which is the focus of this year's Lenten Campaign.

Parish Resources: <https://www.trocaire.org/our-work/working-in-ireland/parishes/resources/>

Education Resources: <https://www.trocaire.org/our-work/educate/peaceandjustice/>

St Teresa of Avila teaches the Devotion to St Joseph

by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD

DEVOTION to St Joseph is comparatively a new thing, certainly in terms of the Church's long history. The first devotions and liturgical feast days date from the Papal Bull of Pope Sixtus IV in 1480. The Church seemed for almost 1500 years of its history to have had a strange form of collective amnesia in regard to the role played by Joseph in the plan of Salvation.

Maybe, on second thoughts, that is a statement in the actual success of Joseph's mission; like any good father, even if he was an adopted father, it was not himself that he sought to draw attention to but to his wife, Mary and his son and Lord, Jesus Christ. His role was simply to share the Son that he had been given charge of and then to disappear. In this mission, he seems to have been singularly successful.

It took the Church that he had fostered into existence 1500 years to give him any notice at all. As 'successful' as that mission may have been, the Church's amnesia had had its own negative effect; an access point for Christ's grace had been closed down for too long, and a particular avenue to the heart of Jesus was by-passed.

It seems like such a simple point to make that the head of the Holy Family had to have had a special place in the affections of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and yet, somehow, the Church forgot to exploit and turn to that filial relationship in its own prayers.

It is an interesting accident of history and, with the benefit of hindsight, it was maybe not such an accident in God's time, that only 35 years after the first Papal Bull, the Foundress of the Discalced Carmelite Order, who was destined to play a large role in the evangelisation of the devotion to St Joseph, was born in Avila, Spain, in 1515.

St Teresa was one of the first to exploit this new 'hotline' that the Church had so recently opened up. St Teresa's devotion to the patriarch of the Holy Family began in the first years of her religious life as a nun of the unreformed Carmelite monastery of the Incarnation in Avila. Not long after her solemn profession, the young budding nun was struck down by a strange and seemingly constant illness. She suffered major heart palpitations followed by long fainting spells. She became so debilitated by the ongoing problem that her father and family took her out of the Convent.

They took her out in order that she might be able to attend a quack doctor in Becedas, whom they had heard was a reputed herbalist and healer. The herbal treatment proved worse than the actual malady. It sent Teresa into a catatonic state, a coma-like existence that the medicine of

her day believed was death. She only escaped the fate of being buried alive because her father could not bear to part with his favourite daughter, and refused to let the undertakers put her body in the coffin and so proceed with a funeral.

On the fourth day, she finally

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Teresa resolved to seek a cure so that she could return to the religious life of the convent. In need of a miraculous intervention from the Divine Physician, Teresa wrote, “I took for my advocate and Lord the glorious St Joseph...And I found that my father delivered me.”

woke out of her coma to the consternation of all who witnessed the sight. Even though, she came out of her coma, she awoke in a pathetic state. She was completely paralysed; she could not move her limbs at all. The experts who had been wrong about her being dead, now diagnosed that this paralysis was permanent and there was no hope of recovery.

Teresa resolved to seek a cure so that she could return to the religious life of the convent. In need of a miraculous intervention from the Divine Physician, Teresa wrote, “I took for my advocate and Lord the glorious St Joseph...And I found that my father delivered me.”

She judged that when Joseph brought some prayer or need to his earthly Son, now that that Son was in His heavenly glory, there would be nothing that He would not do for this father figure. Teresa put all her great heart into praying to her adopted father, Joseph for a miraculous healing. For four solid months, her family and her community of sisters waited on her hand and foot, caring for this poor paralytic, while all the time

she prayed to the holy patriarch.

Then, one morning, she was miraculously found making her way across her room on all fours, under her own steam. The healing Teresa put down to her glorious patron and she worked ever after to share the power of her devotion to St Joseph, “I wish I could persuade everyone to be devoted to this glorious saint, for I have great experience of the blessings which he can obtain from God.”

There you have the first aspect of St Teresa's devotion to St Joseph. He was an advocate to whom people could turn for gracious assistance, whose very intimacy with the Son of God promised the possibility of a hearty and generous response, even to the point of miracles. Teresa, however, did not want to leave her devotion to the adopted father of the Lord to an intermittent plea for help, or to some last chance saloon for prayer. She wanted more than that from the head of the Holy Family, she wanted him to play a real role in her day-to-day living of her Christian discipleship and to have an effect upon her relationship with Jesus.

Openness

Teresa looked closely into Joseph's life and she realised that just as Mary conceived the eternal Word in her womb by the power of the Holy Spirit, so Joseph received that same Word, the only Son, through generous spiritual openness. How else could anyone explain his response to the dream and the mission that the angel shared with him? Why did he not rise the next morning and just say to himself, “Well that was a lovely dream” and then get on with the business of ridding himself of the troubling situation?

How else can we explain his response other than that, in his soul, he heard the Word that was addressed to him and accepted it for what it really was, a Word from God and not some figment of an overactive imagination. He could have only been able to hear that Word and recognise it because he had spent hours and hours in prayer previous to this experience. Prayer not in the sense that we use it today, with the rattle of beads and a multitude of words, but prayer that had a profound sense of God's intimate presence and that paid careful attention to discovering the whereabouts of that presence.

He was able to respond to what the Lord asked of him because in fact he had been watching and waiting in prayer for exactly this moment. Even when the Word was finally born in Bethlehem, his practice of prayer was to continue. Prayer is the interaction of the human soul with God and with His saints. If this is true, then that means that every moment of

the home life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph was about prayer.

In that house of Nazareth, Joseph learnt a unique manner of living in intimacy with Mary and Jesus. Those years of prayer had turned Joseph into a master of the spiritual life and so he could teach his insights to those who sought out his counsel. Teresa sat at his feet and learnt this art of true prayer. From him, she learnt that prayer was not a matter of thinking or saying a lot of things but rather was about relating in a real way to Christ and learning to love him more and more.

It could have only been from Joseph that she learnt the best advice that she would later share with the nuns in her community, “prayer is an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time to be alone with Him we know loves us.”

Joseph led Teresa to the art of real interior prayer through silent listening and turning the eyes and ears of the soul to the One who wants to speak to us; a more fundamental art to living even than a miraculously restored body.

There is another gift that the glorious St Joseph can give and that is the art of living. In the living of his marriage with Mary and in raising Jesus to be an obedient and loving child, Joseph showed that the art of living is in a real loving relationship. Love is the sole ingredient that makes life worth living. Pope John Paul II, in his first encyclical to the Church, made the outstanding observation that “humanity cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own. If he does not participate intimately in it.”

In the commitment of two spouses to each other, in their joint efforts to nurture their children, in the children endeavouring to be formed and to be disciplined, and in their engagement with one another as a family, they form the fundamental cell of life, a communion of life and love that teaches every person in it, self-giving love; the meaning of human existence.

When any person hears the word communion, it speaks of one ultimate reality - the life of the Blessed Trinity in heaven. A Father, ever turned towards his Son, taking out all that is most precious and sharing it with this Son, the Son's eye ever fixed on his Father, offering all within Him of any value He has back to the Father, and the Spirit, the whole of their expression of their love for each other.

The Three are a communion of eternal love and the love that



St Teresa and Our Lady and St Joseph.

is shared between those Three Persons is perennially modelled for real life and human existence by the three members of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. They show poor ordinary mortals that the Love

“
There is another gift that the glorious St Joseph can give and that is the art of living. In the living of his marriage with Mary and in raising Jesus to be an obedient and loving child, Joseph showed that the art of living is in a real loving relationship.”

of God is not infinitely distant from us, but that it can dwell in a simple carpenter's home far more intimately than humanity could have dreamed.

Even Teresa, in her vocation to be a contemplative nun, went

to Joseph to learn this art of living and loving. In 1562, Teresa decided to set up a reformed Discalced Carmelite life. She envisaged a whole new idea of monastic life. Teresa wanted all her communities to be small in number; 12 nuns with a prioress, a number evocative of the very first Christian community in history, Jesus and the 12 disciples. Teresa was not happy with just numbers; she wanted the entire community to live quite consciously in the company of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and for them all to live together as an extension of that family.

Star

She writes of the life that she wants in this monastic community - “One day after communion His Majesty earnestly commanded me to strive for this new monastery with all my powers, and He made great promises that it would be founded and that He would be highly served in it. He said it should be called St Joseph, that this saint would keep watch over us at one door and Our Lady at the other, that Christ would remain with us, and that it would be a star shining with great splendour.”

Not that bricks and mortar could become a star shining, you understand, but people who live with the divine example of the

In his second reflection on God's Mercy during our Lenten journey, Bishop Donal writes about the proclaiming of mercy in our time.

Every generation is a time of hurt



IN Jesus' time, there was much illness and little medicine. There was political strife and no apparent hope. People were harassed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). They came in droves to the house where He was (Mk 1:32-33). On occasions, there were so many that some people made

a hole in the roof to let down a paralysed man (Mk 2:1-12). On another occasion there were so many people flocking around Jesus looking for healing that His relatives set out to take charge of Him, convinced He was out of His mind (Mk 3:20-21).

Mercy is needed in every generation.

We know how, despite a huge health service, many people are tortured in mind and body. Lots of people find it hard to forgive others or to forgive themselves. Blame is dumped on many people and groups – the young, addicts, parents. When something goes wrong, somebody has to accept the guilt. That was how the Pharisees loved to act – seeing the guilt in somebody else.

Jesus has come to be "the face of the Father's mercy. These words might sum the mystery of the Christian faith". (Pope Francis, 'Misericordiae vultus', MV 2015, para 1). He came to help us, not to condemn things out there but

to start by accepting responsibility for ourselves.

Mercy, not condemnation, brings healing. Jesus comes as the One who takes on His own back the sins of the world. He is announced as the sacrificial Lamb of God. He fulfils Isaiah's prophecy of a Suffering Servant. He is tempted to take an easier route – but He resists that diabolical voice. Sin will be conquered only by Him proclaiming the Father's mercy in word and deed – and then being sacrificed to take away that sin.

There is a temptation for Church in 2021 to get angry at our loss of power. There are those who cry out that evil powers are out to crush the Church. The Devil and the religious establishment were out to crush Jesus. But He proclaimed mercy.

Angry Christians will do little to reveal the Father's mercy. Frightened people are not able to bring mercy and healing. Blessed are the peacemakers – not the battle winners. That is why the



most common phrase in the scriptures is "Do not be afraid."

The Church in 2021 is called to spread mercy. But how do we learn to do that. We begin by recognising our own sin and unworthiness before God. There we receive divine mercy. We cannot offer what we do not know. Pope Francis wrote: "At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective



sign of the Father's action in our lives". (MV 3)

Lent is a time to gaze on God's mercy. Twenty years ago, Pope John Paul II wrote about contemplating the face of Jesus. ('Novo Millenni Ineunte', para 16-28). We do that in the mystery of the Eucharist, where we celebrate the sacrificial victory over sin on Calvary – and in Adoration, where we adore the sacrament of that mystery. And we contemplate

the mysteries of Christ's life and work in the Rosary.

In Lent, we are invited to

- Pray that we may know God's mercy in our own lives;
- Do penance as our response to those areas where we need mercy;
- Give alms to help those most in need of God's mercy.

And then we will better know what we are celebrating on Divine Mercy Sunday.

continued from page 26

Holy Family, who from Jesus, Mary, and Joseph have learnt living and loving.

St Teresa's devotion to her glorious St Joseph exposes a mysterious face to the Church; a face that had been lost in the mists of centuries. She puts features on a face that only a few decades before, Pope Sixtus IV told the Church to rediscover. What she found in that face was nothing but a true father! A father who was so involved in fathering that he forgot himself and was so involved in giving that even his children forgot him and his testimony. Yet all the time, he was there for the Church and he wanted to give to those who turned to him what was truly good, namely his son, Jesus. In his hands he holds gifts, gifts that he gained from his own life, struggles, and his own experience. In his left hand there is family, and, in his right, there is prayer, these are his chief means of sharing his Son with those who come to him.

Five hundred years separate these modern times from St Teresa, so it is incumbent to find a way of making the lessons learnt by her available to the people of this generation. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis has taken up the challenge of helping modern people to come to this prospective father. His mission to step into the shoes of the fishermen was inaugurated on the Solemn Feast of Joseph on March 19, 2013. With such an auspicious beginning, the new pope put the Church into the protective hands

of Joseph. In his 2015 visit to the Philippines, Pope Francis spoke at length of his particular devotion to the 'Sleeping St Joseph'. He said: "I have great love for St Joseph because he is a man of silence and strength. On my table, I have an image of St Joseph sleeping. Even when he is asleep, he is taking care of the Church".

“Five hundred years separate these modern times from St Teresa, so it is incumbent to find a way of making the lessons learnt by her available to the people of this generation.”

The Pope noted that God continued to speak to St Joseph in a particular fashion. When Joseph was most silent, when he was wrapped in the silence of sleep, God spoke to him about taking Mary to his home as his wife, to flee the wrath of Herod into Egypt, and to return to Nazareth at the appropriate time. The Pope believed that there was a message in that for the whole Church, "Joseph's rest revealed God's will to him. In this moment of rest in the Lord, as we pause from our daily obligations and activities,

God is also speaking to us...But like St Joseph, once we have heard God's voice, we must rise from our slumber; we must get up and act."

Based on this reflection on the sleeping St Joseph, we have two lessons. The first is that God seldom speaks in a direct and dramatic sentence but rather speaks in profound silence, both in exterior and interior worlds. The second lesson is that after Joseph's three dreams, he immediately got up each time God spoke in the silence; Joseph heard him and acted upon it down to the last detail. There is a fundamental relationship between the two; the whispers of God to our hearts must be translated into real life and action.

Pope Francis also explains another way of praying with St Joseph every day, "When I have a problem, a difficulty, I write a little note and I put it underneath St Joseph, so that he can dream about it! In other words, I tell him: to pray for this problem."

Pope Francis said that he can sleep peacefully at the end of the day. After doing all that he can do, he then entrusts the things that he is helpless to do anything about to St Joseph. He once told a conference of religious superiors that St Joseph "sleeps on a mattress" of his prayers. What an attractive and straightforward devotion to the patriarch of the Holy Family? Who can prevent us from putting our deepest prayers for love and a true praying relationship with God under the pillow of the sleeping St Joseph?



Novena to Sleeping St Joseph

THE Carmelite Fathers, at the Iona Retreat Centre, Termonbacca, in Derry, are leading a Novena to Sleeping St Joseph from March 10 until the Saint's Feast Day on March 19.

Mass will be celebrated each evening in Termonbacca, at 7.30

pm, with the Devotions to St Joseph afterwards.

With no public worship during the current Covid-19 lockdown, people are invited to join in the Novena Mass and Devotions via the Termonbacca Derry YouTube channel.

Petitions are welcome and can be submitted via the Termonbacca Facebook page, from which they will be printed out and placed under the statue of the Sleeping St Joseph at the front of the altar.

GRANDPARENTS' FAITH CAFÉ


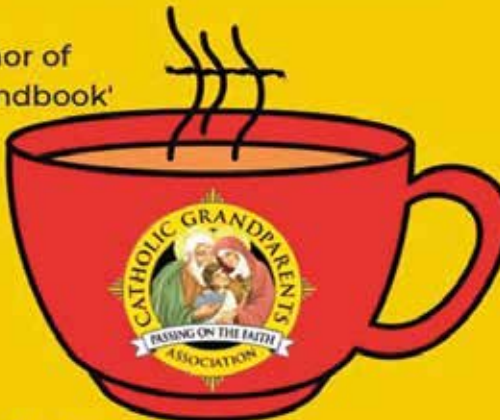
An online social and spiritual space for grandparents

TUESDAY 9 MARCH 2021 AT 7.30PM V/A ZOOM

THEME: FAITH HEROES

Register by email: info@catholicgrandparentsassociation.com

With special guest
Lorene Hanley Duquin, Author of
'The Catholic Grandparents Handbook'

An initiative of the Catholic Grandparents Association -
www.catholicgrandparentsassociation.com

The 'Patrick on a hill' *by Vera McFadden*



Photograph courtesy of St Patrick's Missionary Society, Kiltegan.

A programme was being prepared. The theme was 'Patrick on a hill'. We had been asked to jot down any ideas. I was babysitting when I did this. My little granddaughter had her time of activity and then I put her into her seat, and told her, "Granny is going to write now." She looked back at me placidly, wondering.

"Patrick on a hill", I wrote on the notebook page. Then I thought, what hill? He had been on so many of them. I began to write down all their names. I realised that each of these had a special significance of its own, as there were different circumstances at each time. It was like the Scripture passage about "a time for every season under Heaven."

So, I wrote the symbolisms beside the name for each hill. As I wrote, I chatted to my granddaughter, referring to myself in the third person - granny - and using the inclusive "we". As she was not yet walking or talking, I do not know how much she understood, but she listened and watched attentively.

It did not take long to make that list. I realised that only a part of it could be used, as the programme could only last for several hours. They decided to use my ideas and someone told me that this kind of symbolism usually worked very well.

The first hill on the list was, of course Slemish, in Co Antrim.

The symbolism was turning to God. It was at Slemish that Patrick worked as a shepherd. His recent experiences had been unbelievable - he had not been able to escape from the Raiders and so he had been brought to this strange country, where he had been sold to the local chieftain, Milchu, who ordered him to take care of the flock of animals on this hill. His family did not know where he was, or even if he was still alive, and he had no way of letting them know. He felt so fragile and isolated here, away from everything.

Then he began to realise that he was certainly not on his own, for God was with him. He began to pray many times during the day and during the night, and endured his captivity for a long time, until the angel, Victorius told him that it was time to escape and that a boat was there.

The second hill was Saul and its symbolism was 'A Beginning'. Patrick had been sent by the Pope to evangelise, but of course some others had already been teaching the good news in some parts of the country. When St Patrick came, the ship was brought into Strangford Lough. The local chief, Dichu, welcomed him, became a Christian and gave him a barn, a shelter for his prayers and celebrations. That was the saint's first church in Ireland.

Saul was where he began his ministry in Ireland, and later it

was where he finished his work here, for it was here that he died after he received Holy Viaticum from Assicus. During his wake, the people heard beautiful angelic music.

One Saturday, my children and I went on a bus from Belfast to Downpatrick. When we arrived there, we went to look around the old church and graveyard, and saw the big rock with the word 'Patric' sculpted on it. Some believe that this marks Patrick's grave.

After seeing the church, we had lunch and then began our uphill walk to Saul. There we saw the present-day church which is on the site of the barn which had been given to St Patrick. After that, we went on the pilgrim walk up the mountain, stopping to pray at each station. Our path was much steeper at the top. When we arrived there, we were standing beside a massive statue of the saint and listening to the whistle of the wind around it. Below, there was a lovely view of sea and coastline. I do not know if the saint ever climbed this hill, but I have a strong feeling that he did. We were back in Downpatrick in time for another light meal and the bus home.

The third hill was Slane and its symbolism was 'Making a Statement'. I have never walked there, but every time I have driven on the road nearby, I have thought that it was very steep. So, Patrick was incredibly good at climbing up hills.

Remember the chorus of the song from 'The Sound of Music'?... "Climb every mountain, ford every stream, follow every rainbow, till you find your dream."

Well, St Patrick did not climb every mountain, but he went up a lot of them, forded many streams and journeyed along many valleys. He already knew his dream and in it he had heard the Irish calling, "Come back and walk among us". He knew that this was his vocation - to convert the Irish to Christianity and he had a plan. Climbing Slane was part of it.

Fire

It was festival time and fires would soon be lit all over the country. Patrick had gathered plenty of sticks, enough for a huge fire. He knew that no one could light a fire before the High King lit his at Tara. Of course, the One that Patrick was following was the High King of the universe. Also, St Patrick was not lighting this fire to celebrate a pagan festival, but to celebrate Easter and to establish the Light of Christ. So, he set it alight and it blazed. Easter and the pagan festival were at the same time that year.

They saw it from Tara. Someone had broken the rule and men were sent to bring the culprit to be questioned. That was what Patrick had wanted, for he had already decided to obtain permission

from the High King and the local chiefs to preach the Word of God in their areas. When he arrived at Tara, the druids who would have been officiating at the ceremonies were there too. They resented Patrick greatly. Their own magic was powerful, but Patrick's prayer to the true God was answered by greater signs.

King Laoghaire listened to the prisoner and realised that he was not an Irish native. What he wanted seemed to be no threat and he was looking for permission. So, Laoghaire gave his consent to the evangelising of the Irish, though at this point he personally did not become a Christian.

Several years ago, while staying in the area, I was taken on a visit to Tara. We could see Slane very clearly from the Royal Hill, and so understood the direction in which they had been looking when they saw Patrick's fire so long ago.

There was a statue of the saint near the present-day church and quite near the Rath of the Synod. This is now damaged, having been excavated by some Jews who thought that the Arc of the Covenant was buried there.

The fourth Hill on the list was Croagh Patrick and its symbolism was 'A Time Apart'. Patrick had been working extremely hard. He had been disillusioned by the criticism of some contemporaries. He needed a break to pray and contemplate. Jesus spent 40 days in the desert and went to remote places to pray and be alone with God His Father. So, Patrick went up this high mountain for a 40-day retreat. When it came to an end, he saw a great flock of big white birds and heard their beautiful music. This unusual event gave him great joy. There are stories about these great white birds in the lives of some other early saints.

Of course, Croagh Patrick has become a place of pilgrimage. Many people, Irish and visitors, climb it. The last Sunday in July is the final day for the Turas, and on that day a great number make the ascent.

One time we went on a pilgrimage around the shrines of Ireland with a group from Letterkenny. Croagh Patrick was one of the places we visited. I have no head for heights, but I was able to go up the little path and steps to the statue of the saint. There I was rewarded by the lovely view of Clew Bay below. Only three people were climbing to the very top of the conical peak. The rest of us went down to look around and have a snack and we all met up for our evening meal later.

These were the four hills that were used. I do not know what format the team prepared, for I was not involved in that part of it. I know that the young people enjoyed the experience and, of course, got the blessings of the Rosary, the sacraments and Mass



as well.

Everybody has times of change during life. There are the times of pain and bewilderment, when we hopefully learn how God will support us through it all. There are the times when we embark on a new location or lifestyle and have decided, "This is what I'm going to do", and tell others. There are the times when we need a break or a time of quiet to gather strength. And of course, the most important time is right now, where we are at now.

As Padre Pio said, "My past, oh Lord, to Your Mercy, my Future to your Providence, my Present to your Love."

That is the way St. Patrick lived. He worked hard for God, and he practised poverty, giving away unnecessary personal gifts that he received. When he was given land on which to build a church, or something to be used for the church, of course he accepted these. Churches founded by him were given the name "Domhnach", the Irish word for Sunday. He converted many more people in Ireland than the other missionaries and, of course, climbed many more hills - among those in our district are familiar places like Elaghmore, Grianan, LeitirSeanDomhnaigh and Cooley, or 'Domhnach Bile. Each of these has its own story.



Photograph courtesy of St Patrick's Missionary Society, Kiltegan.

With the words “You will have to change” ringing in her ears from an Ash Wednesday homily after receiving the devastating news that she was to cease being a Sister of Adoration, Martina Purdy writes about the amazing journey that led to the creation of...

St Patrick's Way – Come visit and be amazed!

IT was the eve of Ash Wednesday, 2019, when I was given the news: you must leave the convent in six months' time, and cease to be a Sister of Adoration.

Having spent five joyful years on the Falls Road as Sr Martina of the Blessed Sacrament, it was a shock. I knew our congregation had grown fragile and that there were strenuous efforts being made to resolve the issue. But I never believed that I, along with three other sisters in temporary vows, would not be allowed to complete our nine-year formation.

We all sought solace in prayer, immediately entering our chapel for an hour of silence. As I knelt before Jesus, I was perplexed. Later, another sister, who had become a close friend, shared an experience she had while pondering our situation and praying before Jesus' real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. Sr Elaine of the Heart of Jesus said she had received two words from the Lord in the silence of her own heart. “Be amazed!”

“Be amazed?!” I retorted. I was feeling more dazed than amazed.

At Mass on Ash Wednesday, our chaplain, who knew nothing of our news, gave a very direct homily, fitting for Ash Wednesday and our circumstances.

“You will all have to change,” he told Mass-goers. In fact, he said it three times.

Lent is a time for renewal. Those words: “You will have to change,” echoed more forcibly than “Be amazed.”

Being told that you have to leave the convent in six months because of Canon Law and

governance issues was a bit like a death sentence. Sr Martina of the Blessed Sacrament would cease to exist and I would be laicized on the anniversary of my vows, September 23, the Feast of Padre Pio.

I felt I was dying. I knew there would be new life but I didn't know where or how. I could not go back to my old life as a BBC political correspondent any more than St Peter could go back to fishing. Throughout those months, Elaine and I pondered the meaning of, “Be amazed.”

At times, it seemed that there may be some hope of staying in the convent, and then it would be dashed. I kept telling Elaine – and the Lord – that I was not amazed, though I knew in my heart, riding a rollercoaster of emotions, that Jesus would not abandon me. I would have to face the cross, setting my face like flint, and trust in the power of the resurrection.

As Elaine, a former barrister and I had taken our vows together in St Peter's Cathedral, we would be leaving at the same time. Knowing the Lord sent his disciples out two by two, we discerned that we had a mission together.

A week before we were due to leave, a friend of the congregation, who had been inspired by Elaine's story, heard our news. She was very upset. And, like Lydia in the Acts of the Apostles, immediately offered hospitality. “I have a place,” she said, a house that had just become vacant. And so Elaine and I found ourselves in Downpatrick, County Down. “We landed on holy ground!” we would declare.

When we arrived at the house in Downpatrick, having travelled abroad for two months, everything was prepared: food in the cupboards, furniture, fresh linen and even fresh paint. There was no question: I was amazed.

After Christmas 2019, I felt it was time to find a purpose. What would I do? I needed to make a living but I also wanted a meaningful Christian role. I began to pray to St Patrick for help. We were, after all, in the parish of St Patrick: the place he began his mission in Ireland, the place he founded his first church, the place he died and the place he is buried, along with St Colmcille and St Brigid.

“St Patrick,” I prayed, “help me find my place.”

One Saturday morning after Mass, in late February, I went to St Patrick's parish shop and purchased 10 St Patrick's prayer cards. I was still holding the tiny purchase on my way to adoration, when a parishioner approached me. He wondered if I would be interested in doing some writing and public relations work for the Saint Patrick Centre in the town. I was amazed.

Since then, my relationship with the Saint Patrick Centre, the only permanent exhibition to the saint in the world, has flourished. I started to read St Patrick's Confession (it's online); a personal account of his life. I was familiar with his description of being found by God, like a stone in the mire, before being lifted up and put on a high wall. But the next words jumped off the page: “So be

amazed all you

People...”

I was amazed. Really amazed. I shouted to Elaine: “Come quickly! St Patrick used your words...”

On my first day of work, I was shown to my new office in the centre; it was the old BBC studio. I was amazed – and amused. Covid soon hit, however, and it was during the lockdown that Elaine and I found some new life exploring, in Downpatrick, the beautiful sites associated with Ireland's patron saint: Inch Abbey, an ancient ruin on the banks of the Quoile River, where the monk Jocelyn wrote that St Patrick had banished the snakes; Saul Church, built on the site where St Patrick founded his first church; Slieve Patrick, where the world's largest monument to St Patrick towers over the landscape; St Patrick's Wells at Struell, a well-preserved pre-Christian site where St Patrick bathed and sang psalms in the well, a centuries old place of pilgrimage.

I began writing a Pilgrim Passport, which would allow pilgrims to walk up to 17 miles to all the sites. With the help of Elaine and Dr Tim Campbell, Centre director, we mapped out a scenic route. And, since then, hundreds of pilgrims have come and we have a beautiful new coastal Way to St Patrick's Well near Ardglass, walking amidst some of the most stunning beauty you will encounter in Ireland.

That's how St Patrick's Way, Downpatrick, was born. The motto for the walk is: “Be Amazed!”

Why not come and be amazed?



Martina Purdy and Elaine Kelly as Adoration Sisters.



St Patrick's Way



Martina and Elaine as pilgrim guides at Inch Abbey.

A Pilgrim's Perspective by Bernie Doody



Bernie Doody, Omagh

HAVING had my plans to continue the French Camino in Spain brought to a halt in 2020, I was pleased when a local walking group sent me an e-mail about the new St Patrick's Pilgrimage in Downpatrick. I knew immediately this was for me.

As I was travelling from Omagh, I decided to follow what was suggested to me, to complete the 16-mile pilgrimage over two

days, with a stopover at Denvir's Coaching House in Downpatrick. This meant that I joined the morning group at lunch-time and would complete the morning section of the pilgrimage the following day with a new group.

Elaine Kelly, former Adoration Sister, was our pilgrim guide for the 10-mile afternoon trip. She kept the pace brisk in order that we had more time to spend at the different religious sites and that we finished our day at 6.30 pm.

We were blessed with beautiful weather, and when another pilgrim asked me if this was like walking the Camino in Spain, I could only answer “Yes”.

There were eight pilgrims in the afternoon and, as what quickly happens on a shared journey, we quickly bonded and became a little team.

As I don't hike regularly, it wasn't long before my established

place was at the back of the group!

The following morning, Martina Purdy was our pilgrim guide and, as we had only six miles, this was at an easier pace, but just as informative and interesting as the day before.

In the course of the two days, I discovered not Patrick the great patron saint, but Patrick the man – a humble man who wanted to answer God's call to bring the faith to the poor people of Ireland, despite criticism from his own people of ever wanting to return to that wild savage land.

Before departing Downpatrick, I returned to the St Patrick's Centre's gift shop to purchase a book on Patrick's Confessions as I felt I was only beginning to discover St Patrick.

I felt uplifted after my two days and I would recommend this pilgrimage to anyone with two good legs.



Season of Lent... Freedom to Love by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR

WE could, with a lot of justification, say that we have been in Lent for the past 12 months! Because of Covid-19 our lives have been greatly restricted in almost every way. Our world has shrunk to the size of our own homes; our contacts are almost entirely just our own families and our bubble. And yet, it is very important that we begin again to face the implications of Lent and make a fresh start in our journey of faith in Jesus Christ.

The season of Lent

The Season of Lent is a very special time when we are invited to travel the road to Jerusalem with Jesus as He faces His death for the salvation of the world. The stages of this journey are signposted for us by the week-by-week Sunday liturgy.

Week 1: February 21st – 27th

We hear Christ's teaching calling us to "repent and to believe the Good News". To repent means to let go of the ways of living that limit our freedom to love God with our whole heart and to love one another fully, so that we can live the Good News of love ever more fully in marriage and family life and in our faith community.

Week 2: February 27th – March 6th

We see Christ's glory in the Transfiguration, and we are able to say with Peter: "Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here". We should reach for that sense of wonder and gladness in our knowledge of Christ and our love for Him. And we have the responsibility of bringing that same sense of joy to those close to us in marriage and family, and in our faith community.

Week 3: March 7th – 13th

We are let into an experience of Christ's anger and frustration with those who have turned religion into a business type ritual: "Stop turning my Father's house into a market". It is amazing how we human beings can miss the point of even the things we treasure most. For the Jewish people, the Temple was the most sacred of places. Yet it became a market for money-making! We call marriage a sacrament, yet we can have little care for the couple relationship except when it is in trouble. We call the family a 'Domestic Church' and can so easily treat our homes as if Christ did not live there among us. We talk about us being

a community of faith but do little to build community. We can so easily allow ritual to become more important than the people of our homes and communities.

Week 4: March 14th – 20th

We are anointed with the knowledge of God's extreme love for us. "God sent His Son so that through Him the world might be saved". We think of faith as meaning our belief in God. Our Christian faith is much more about God's intense belief in us and in our goodness and beauty. He wants us to come to a knowledge of His crazy love for us. We come to know that reality mainly through our love for one another, in marriage, in family and in our life as a faith community that is open to the world around us.

Week 5: March 21st – 27th

And we are given the absolute assurance that Christ's death and resurrection will transform the world. "Anyone who loves her/his life loses it. Anyone who hates her/his life in this world will keep it for the eternal life". If our priorities are all about the here and now and our own gratification, we will lose everything. If we set our sights on what God wants for us we will gain

far more than we ever imagined possible.

Marriage and family life are the two great schools for learning self-giving. It is there that we grow in our knowledge of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Following Christ is an exciting journey, a difficult journey, an essential journey. Yet it is possible that we may not travel it because of our reluctance to leave where we are right now in our faith and in our lives.

Blocks and helps

Some people can be blocked from following Christ fully because of the arrogance of their lives. They are alright the way they are, and they stand in judgement on everyone else. People like this can settle for fulfilling the duties of religion but without it ever touching their hearts.

Lent is a time of penance for us when we are like this, penance like fasting, denying ourselves much of our ordinary comforts in order to realise that there is so much more to gain in life than what we have surrounded ourselves with. This more is to be found in following Jesus.

Other people get blocked by their sins. They see themselves as

no good, as hopeless. Or they settle for a way of life that they know is unworthy of the Lord.

Prayer is so vital at this time of Lent to free us from our guilt and to give us the courage to make decisions that will set us on the road with Christ. A very important part of our prayer at this time is the Sacrament of Reconciliation, in which we are set free from the crippling effect of our sins.

Many other people are just too busy to travel the road with Jesus. They might do the minimum in terms of religious practice, but other things tie them down. It is a full-time job making a living these days. There is so much work to be done on the house. It is so important to get the proper holidays and breaks. Where could you get the time to take Christ too seriously?

During this time of Lent, almsgiving is proposed to us as very important so that, by letting go of some of our money and possessions to those in real need, we can get in touch with how well off we already are and get the freedom to readjust our priorities.

Week 6: March 28th – April 3rd.

Holy Week

By far the biggest block to

following Christ is the fear of how much it will cost us. In order to face that fear, in Holy Week we take on board how much it cost Christ to be our saviour – in how the people turned against Him; in His suffering and death; in the betrayal by His closest friends; in His utter loneliness and desolation. The cost to any of us will never come even close to what He has done for us.

Conclusion

Lent can seem a burden for many of us. It is possible to use this time to discover what the real burdens are and to let Christ lift these off us, so that we can come to the joy of the Resurrection.



Fr Johnny Doherty

Valparaiso and Dublin...

Memories through the Stations of the Cross

by Fr John McLaughlin SSC

LOOKING through my photos recently, I came across some of the Stations of the Cross that I thought had been consumed by a pen-drive virus. From the hills in Las Palmas, in Valparaiso, they represented a very participative celebration out on the roadway every Good Friday afternoon for a couple of hours.

Later, out in Puente Alto in Santiago, amongst the poorer folk around the chapel of San Columbano, and La Lecheria, with married deacon, John Pacheco and team, we had something similar in and around the departamentos, with the dogs and cats and the musical equipos often at full volumes. Some of the women intoned along the way 'decimas' from the deep south and Chiloe, where missionaries generations had put to a plain chant the stories of the Passion and the Gospels.

Starting there, in upper Valparaiso, Cerro Las Palmas, on the higher part of the quebrada, or gully, the little group wended its way along the roadway and down the hill, protected by a volunteer from the local police precinct and accompanied by songs and chants and little tableaux of the 'Falls of

Jesus', etc, and what our own falls might be.

At the 'Carrying of the Cross by Simon of Cyrene', people read out from little placards the names or titles of those who help 'carry the Cross of Jesus today', clubs and youth groups, ecological groupings, senior citizens and tenants associations, etc.

At the 'Crucifixion', nails were hammered into the wooden cross representing our own complicities in the social sins that brought about the death of Jesus. When we came to 'Jesus Meets the Women of Jerusalem', I usually went directly into dialogue with the women in the cortege... "for what are the women of Las Palmas (La Lecheria) weeping today?" The answers came quickly from all corners of the bystanders: drugs and their sales, family violence, machismo, drunkenness, alienation from their spouses, low pay for the cleaning jobs, poor schools, long queues at the clinic. It had a big emotional pull on me, just to hear it come pouring out like that!

We often stopped outside the Departamento of a sick person and invited the family to join in some of the reading of the Bible

texts, or the reflection offered and the prayer, which was followed by a Hymn. Between standing and kneeling, or holding hands in other expressive ways to accompany the Station, everyone came away from that two hours feeling involved and participative in the mystery of the Cross for today!

There were moments when my mind would flash back to my own favorite story of my early years in the Dublin Diocese. Fr Ned O'Brien was then a senior figure, warm and humorous from his Tipperary days. He told a group of us, from his early memories of the Diocese, about the practice in one of the north county parishes, where a certain Fr Moriarity PP would halt during a moment of deep silence at the same Station every year, that of 'Jesus Speaks to the Women of Jerusalem'. Then, after announcing the title, and with a deep deep sigh, came forth his great lament: "They have crucified you Lord, and now they are crucifying me"

This used to resonate with me in my days as parish priest! Somehow, since coming to retire in Merville, there seems to be no call for such a lament! Maybe it is only for parish priests!



Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

Hello children. Welcome to the month of March. This month is dedicated to Saint Joseph, the spouse of Mary and foster father of Jesus.



In Saint Matthew's Gospel, Joseph is described as a just man. This means that he was a true and faithful person, filled with justice and virtue. Joseph was given a very important task by God; he had to protect Mary and Jesus, to work hard to provide for them, to teach Jesus and lovingly watch over Mother and Child. St Joseph fulfilled this family mission beautifully. As a result, he has been loved and celebrated down the centuries. St Joseph, pray for us!

Saints of the Month

- March 4 – St Casimir
- March 9 – St Francis of Rome
- March 17 – St Patrick
- March 19 – St Joseph



Saint Patrick

St Patrick is the Patron of Ireland, but he was born in Britain. When he was 16 years old, he was captured and taken to Ireland as a slave, where for six years he took care of sheep and pigs.

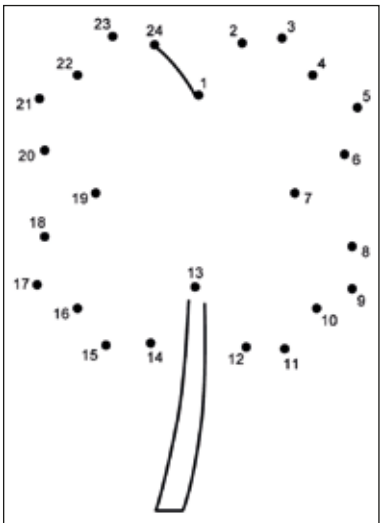
The young Patrick was very lonely and prayed to God all the time. Eventually, he escaped from his captives and returned to Britain. He studied to become a priest and teacher. His studies may have been in France. In 432AD, he returned to Ireland as a bishop to teach the love of the true God.

Bishop Patrick used the shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity. A shamrock has one stem and three leaves. There is only one God but God is three Persons; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Patrick worked many miracles as he preached and converted people all over Ireland. He baptized and confirmed thousands and ordained many priests. As a result, many kingdoms within Ireland converted to Christianity. He lived in poverty and did constant penance, especially

in places such as Lough Derg and Croagh Patrick. After a life of prayer and many sufferings, St Patrick died on March 17, 461AD. He is buried in Downpatrick, the little town that bears his name.

Instructions:
Connect the dots to make this St Patrick's Day picture.



The Annunciation of the Lord – March 25 (CCC 494)

On the feast of the Annunciation of the Lord (CCC 494), March 25, we celebrate that the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary of Nazareth with a special message. The Angel Gabriel announced to Her that She was full of grace and the Lord was with Her. God had chosen Her to conceive through the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel said he must be called Jesus. The baby would be unique. He would be the Saviour of the world, the Son of God (Luke 1:26-33).

Mary, trusting in God, replied “Yes” to what the Angel Gabriel had told her. She was meek and obedient to God's will. We can learn from Mary how to live humble Christian lives and to be always ready to say ‘yes’ to God as She did.



True or False?

Today's Gospel Reading" The Angel Visits Mary

How well do you know the story of the Annunciation? See if you know which are true and which are false.

1. God sent the Angel Michael to bring his message to Our Lady. True or False?
2. When Mary saw the Angel, she covered her eyes. True or False?
3. The angel told Mary, “Do not be afraid.” True or False?
4. The angel told Our Lady that she would have a Son that she would name 'Jesus'. True or False?
5. Mary just said okay and the angel left right away. True or False?
6. When Mary said she didn't understand, Gabriel told her that the baby would be the Son of God. True or False?



7. Before he left, the angel told Mary that her old cousin Elizabeth, was going to have a baby too. True or False?

1. false, 2. false, 3. true, 4. true, 5. false, 6. true, 7. true



Palm Sunday
Palm Sunday (CCC 560) is the first day of Holy Week. On this day, Christians remember how Jesus

travelled into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. It is called Palm Sunday because on this day people were so happy to see Jesus, and knew how important He was, that they took palm branches from the trees and waved them. The people shouted 'Hosanna', which means 'God saves' in Hebrew, as Jesus passed by. Palm Sunday is also known as Passion Sunday, as Holy Week reminds us of Jesus' passion and death. We celebrate Palm Sunday this year on March 28.



Use every second letter to fill in the blanks

T A H B I C S D I E S F M G Y H B I L J
O K O L D M O N F O T P H Q E R N S
E T W U C W O X V Y E Z N A A B N C T
D W E H F I G C H H I W J I K L L L M
B N E O S P H Q E R D S F T O U R V
M W A X N Y Y Z



Answer: This is my blood of the new covenant which will be shed for many

Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. What is the longest river in Scotland?
2. Which female artist reached Number 1 in the UK charts in 1990 with 'Tears on my Pillow'?
3. Who famously wore the Number 23 shirt for the Chicago Bulls?
4. In which US city would you find the Bunker Hill monument?
5. What TV programme is currently hosted by Holly Willoughby and Emma Willis?
6. Which European country has no upper speed limit on its major motorway network?
7. Which actor voiced the part of 'Mufasa' in the Lion King movie?
8. What is the last book of the New Testament?
9. What is the capital city of Turkey?
10. In which city would you find the world's only current 10-star Hotel?
11. Which English football club plays its home games at 'Deepdale'?
12. Which American actor played the role of Coach Gary Gaines in the 2004 movie 'Friday Night Lights'?
13. Ireland's Slaney River flows through which town?

14. Who plays Phil Mitchell in Eastenders?
15. Which planet in the solar system is closest in distance to the sun?
16. Which city will host the 2024 summer Olympics?
17. What role do 'cruets' marked A and V serve during the celebration of Mass?
18. The world famous painting by Johannes Vermeer is called the girl with what?
19. Jeff Lynne, Tom Petty and Bob Dylan were all part of what musical 'supergroup'?
20. Name the three US states that start with the letter 'O'?
21. Which biblical event is said to have taken place on the site of 'the fruitful garden of Tabgha' on the Sea of Galilee?
22. What television programme has been hosted by Stephen Mulhern since 2013?
23. What body of water separates South West England from South Wales?
24. The Buenos Aires 'Superclasico' football match features River Plate and which other team?
25. Which multi-national franchise will this year (2021) celebrate the 30th anniversary of their first outlet opening in Northern Ireland?

Quiz Answers: 1, River Tay. 2, Kylie Minogue. 3, Michael Jordan. 4, Boston. 5, The Voice UK. 6, Germany. 7, James Earl Jones. 8, Book of Revelation. 9, Ankara. 10, Dubai. 11, Preston North End. 12, Billy Bob Thornton. 13, Wexford. 14, Steve McFadden. 15, Mercury. 16, Paris. 17, They hold water (A) and wine (V). 18, A pearl earring. 19, The Travelling Wilburys. 20, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon. 21, The miracle of the loaves and fishes. 22, Catchphrase. 23, The Bristol Channel. 24, Boca Juniors. 25, McDonalds.

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

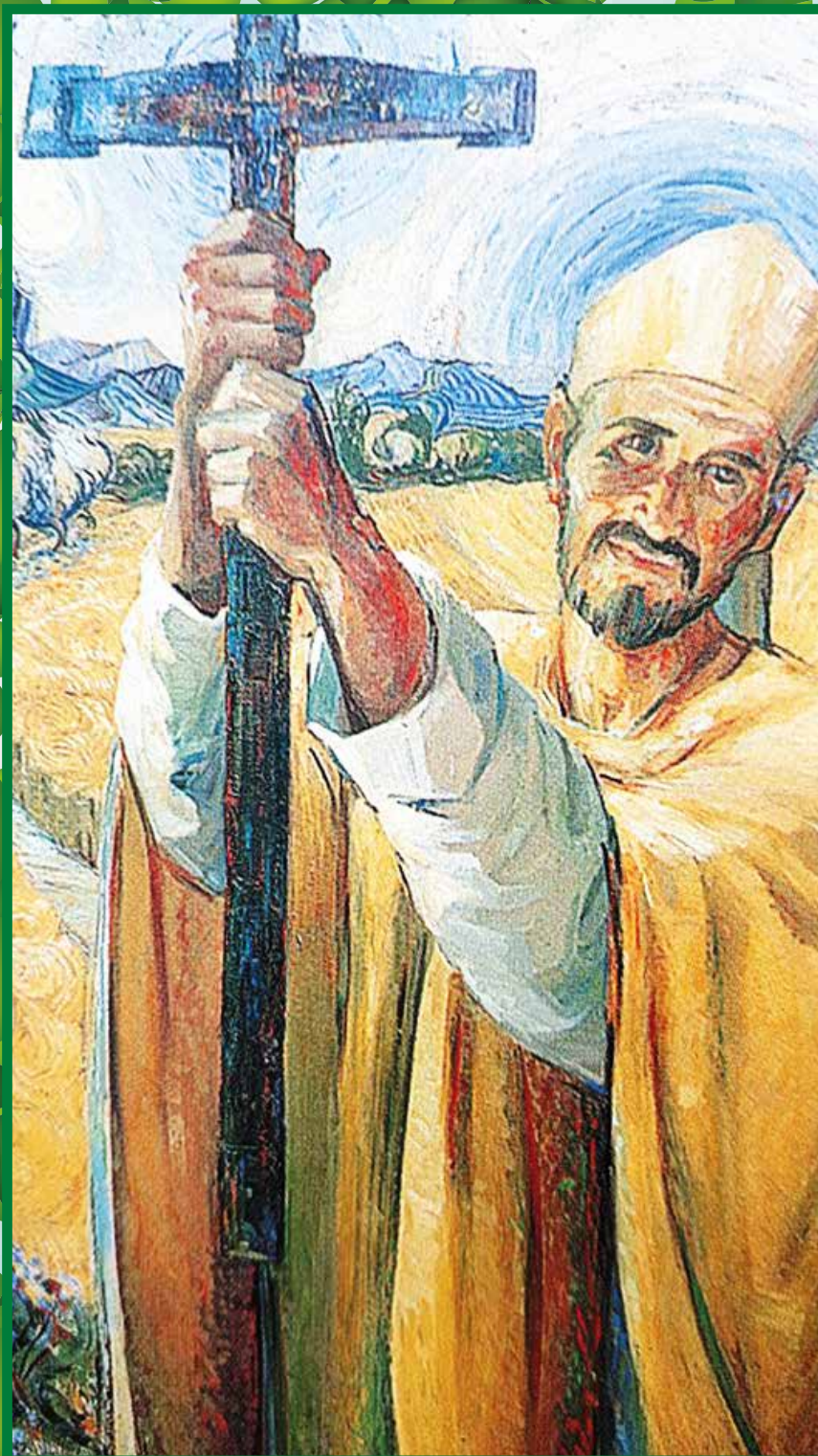
Let Your Light Shine!

Christ
within me.

Christ
before me.

Christ
behind me.

Christ
in me.



Christ
beneath me.

Christ
above me.

Christ
on my right.

Christ
on my left.

Photograph of St Patrick painting by Sr Aloysius McVeigh,
courtesy of St Patrick's Missionary Society, Kiltegan.

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, Donnyloop, Drumquin, Dunamagagh, Dungiven, Fahan, Faughanvale, Garvagh, Gortin, Greencastle,