



The NET

Sharing fruits of faith in Derry Diocese

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See inside...



Honouring Our Lady - Castlefin



Sr Clare Retreat - Long Tower



Columba Community 40th





First Saturday Devotions - Claudy



Centenary Celebrations - Legion of Mary




Divine Mercy Sunday - Creggan




Keeping Connected - Culmore & Steelstown


People in focus




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Ruairi McClafferty – Creggan



Sr Clare – Servant Sister



Anthony Hogan – Culmore



Veronica & Danny Dolan – Aghyaran

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Bishop Donal reflects on Pope Francis' prayer intention for the month of May - "Let us pray that those in charge of finance will work with governments to regulate the financial sphere and protect citizens from its dangers"...

Dedicated prayer is one part of our contribution to creating a financial system that treats people with dignity

ONE thing is certain. The pandemic has shown yet again that powerful people are best able to take advantage of any crisis to increase their power. We have seen how wealth and opportunity have flowed in for powerful individuals and corporations. And the poorer parts of the populations have suffered most.

During the financial crisis of 2008, we saw how amoral and immoral much of the world of high finance was. Then, the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic has given rise to many theories and fears that powerful people were conspiring to exercise more control over the world's population.

That is the world into which Pope Francis addressed his Encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti' (FT) (October 2020). He wrote about instances in many places of "short-sighted, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism". (FT11) He refers to a "kind of globalism (that) strengthens the identity of the more powerful who can protect themselves". (FT12)

Like everything that we

touch, all our structures are tainted by Original Sin. And when vast sums of money and access to power are involved, the temptations become very strong.

Relative poverty

Some will point out that, over the last few decades, wealth has increased and that many millions have been taken out of absolute poverty. But 'poverty' cannot be measured merely in financial terms.

The experience of powerlessness is a profound poverty that damages human dignity and self-respect. Relative poverty means that many people have all the basic necessities - but they feel left out of the decision-making processes.

There is enough evidence to show that societies thrive best where there is a relatively small gap between the haves and the have-nots. Societies with larger gaps have higher levels of crime, physical and mental illness, social unrest and addictions.

A better kind of politics

Pope Francis asks us to pray that we can develop a better

kind of politics. Such a political leadership would "strive to organize and structure society so that one's neighbour will not find themselves in poverty" (FT186).

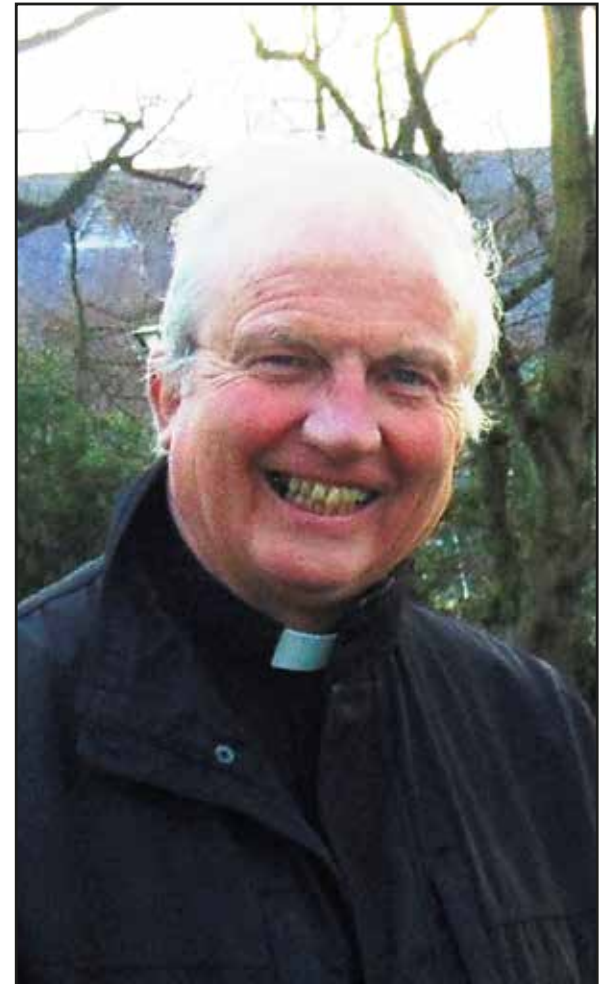
He insists that "Government leaders should be the first to make the sacrifices that foster encounter." (FT190) That is not the sort of political leadership that we find in many countries!

Pray

Pope Francis asks us to pray that politicians regulate the economy so that they serve human flourishing and not just individual or corporate egos.

Those who benefit from a system will often fight to defend a society that suits them - even if others are paying the price. The assumption is that what suits me should really suit everybody!

We are a people of faith and we believe that prayer can change hearts and resolve distressing issues. Dedicated prayer is one part of our contribution to creating a financial system that treats people with dignity.



Bishop Donal

Environmental Strategy for the Diocese launched by Diocesan 'Laudato Si' group... Caring for our Common Home - An invitation to respond by Patricia McCormack



THE Derry Diocese has launched a consultative plan about climate change and the environment and is inviting everyone within the Diocese to read, engage and respond to it. It is available at: <https://www.derrydiocese.org/diocesan-environmental-strategy>

This is a draft plan and all feedback and suggestions are welcome. The plan provides an outline strategy of how each parish in our Diocese could begin to examine how we use land, food, energy, water,

waste, transport and buildings. It proposes actions that can be implemented at a parish and individual level. It asks us to look, to reflect and to make changes where we can and where we should.

It is an invitation to talk to others about the issue; about what is already being done and what more could be done by the Diocese, the parish and parishioners.

The entire parish may be involved at various levels, but it is likely that a co-ordinating committee or group would need to be set up and each parish would develop the plan in its own particular way. The Diocesan Laudato Si' Group can offer support, information, facilitate workshops and provide training days.

We are becoming increasingly aware of terms such as climate change, climate emergency, greenhouse gases, global

warming, loss of biodiversity, and mass extinction. Many of us have felt overwhelmed and confused.

Pope Francis encourages us to have hope, but he asks that we act now to bring about change in our world... "Today, not tomorrow, we have to take care of Creation responsibly".

With this strategy, the Diocese acknowledges its responsibility to participate in the global challenge to mitigate environmental degradation and climate change.

In 2015, Pope Francis wrote a papal letter, an encyclical, which he addressed to the whole world. It was called 'Laudato Si', which means 'Praise be to You', with a secondary title of 'Care of our

Common Home'.

The Holy Father looks at our present world and fears for it because multiple environmental and ecological disasters threaten to destroy it. He urges us to hear 'the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor'. He tells us that it is our Christian duty to take care of God's Creation for the benefit of everyone and future generations... "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience."

He reminds us, very powerfully, that God's love is the fundamental moving force not just in us but in all created things... "God saw all that he

had made, and behold, it was very good".

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken many things from us, but it has also revealed things to us. We see more clearly our interconnectedness to one another and we recognise more clearly the worth of our natural world.

As Pope Francis said: "Human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely entwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with the earth itself."

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
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Please submit your comments, questions and suggestions by May 31, 2021, to Patricia McCormack via... Email: laudatosiderry@gmail.com Tele/Text: 077 1190 0420 | Facebook: Laudatosiderry

Brought powerfully back to his faith following an unsettling experience in his home, Derry resident, Anthony Hogan is beyond amazed since at how...

St Benedict and Miraculous medals and prayers are leading to many conversions



Anthony Hogan

WHEN 34-year-old Anthony Hogan was sitting having a socially distanced chat and a beer with a friend in the garage of his Derry home around this time last year, he didn't know how much his life was about to change following a strange incident that unsettled him greatly.

Sharing his story with 'The Net', he recalled: "As we were chatting, stuff started happening, such as books suddenly falling off a shelf at the back of the garage. It was a frightening experience. I felt that there was something in my house, which my wife and I had bought three-and-a-half years ago.

"When I was chatting to some of my wife's friends on a different occasion, I mentioned what had happened and one of them told me that she knew a holy man who might be able to help. While I had received the sacraments as a child, I hadn't been practising my faith for most of my life. I believed that there was a higher power and would have found myself praying when I needed help, but I certainly was not a practising Catholic and only went to Mass when I was forced.

"However, what happened at our home was something I sensed I needed help with, so I took the advice and later arranged for the man to come to my house. He arrived with another gentleman and, during our conversation, told

me a few things and gave me a St Benedict medal. He explained about the medals and the power of protection banishing anything bad that may be around. He also told me to get the house blessed by a priest, which I did, and since then there has not been any more strange occurrences in our home."

"It so happened that it was the Feast of St Benedict, July 11," said Anthony, adding: "Just one week later after receiving the St Benedict medal, I found myself at Mass in front of Eucharist and receiving Holy Communion. At that Mass, a great feeling of peace and calm came over me, which was something I had not felt in years; the industry I work in is very fast paced and high pressure. I found myself being drawn more and more to St Benedict and prayer, asking for his intercession and guidance.

"As I prayed the Rosary and the Divine Mercy Chaplet every day, my faith became stronger and stronger. I started to see massive changes in my life for the better. I felt different. I wasn't as stressed, but a lot happier, more calm, and kinder to my family and others. It was a happiness and calmness that I didn't know I needed.

"I started to try and spread the kindness just by just saying 'hello' to everyone I passed in the street. I wanted others to feel the way I was feeling, spreading

God's mercy to others. After having such a positive experience through prayer and spending time in front of the Eucharist and receiving the sacraments, I could see that through the St Benedict and Miraculous medals I had been renewed in my faith, which I so desperately needed. I went 34 years without my faith and I thank God every day that I have it back through the intercession of St Benedict and Our Lady."

From that experience, Anthony started giving St Benedict and Miraculous medals out to people that he knew, after getting them blessed by a priest, in the hope they too would be led back to the faith and a better life. One of those he gave the medal to was a gentleman he had met through a friend, who was going through a similar experience with something going on in his house. Anthony had not known the man before meeting him to deliver the medal, but he noticed a vast change in him the next time they met.

He recalled: "When we first meet, he came across as fearful and guarded, a man who needed help but didn't know who to ask. He is a very different man now, just like me. This man was a real tough guy, but he was at his wits' end being tortured in his own home. He told me that he thought there was something very bad in his home and, though he came across as having a tough exterior, he looked like he had been through a lot.

"I gave him my own St Benedict medal as I felt that I didn't need it as much as he did at that particular time, and told him to say the Rosary, along with prayers to St Benedict and St Michael the Archangel, and to get a priest to bless his house. The same process I had went through for my own home.

"He later told me that when he went home, he prayed the Rosary and asked a priest to bless the house. That man had a big experience that night that gave him the belief that he hadn't got before, that God exists.

Peaceful

"Within two weeks of receiving the medal, and praying and receiving the sacraments, he was a completely different man from the one I had first met, and his home has been very peaceful since the blessing by the priest. I had never seen a conversion like it. The look on his face was completely different. He is full of love and at peace now, and has a very strong faith."

Anthony continued: "Our lives have changed completely. I would hardly have said a 'Hail Mary' before this, now I go to Eucharistic Adoration nearly every day during my lunch, and I go to Mass and read the Bible most days. I have also found a new fondness to help people because, after this, other men and women started coming looking for help too. The scripture, 'love thy neighbour' just kept popping into my head, from reading the Bible.

"These people were going through anxiety, depression, addictions etc, and there was stuff happening in their lives like what had been happening to us. After receiving the blessed medals and prayers, people have said that they have not relapsed, that any depression and anxieties had subsided or went away, and that they were also being drawn to faith and prayer.

"These are men and women who were not into praying and now their faith is strong and they are going to Adoration and Mass. Since last July, when I first received the St Benedict and Miraculous medals, I'd say a large number of men and women of all ages have been helped. I recently gave a medal and prayers to a lady in her 70s, and have had teenagers and young people in their 20s asking for them too. To date, we have given out over a thousand medals and prayers, resulting in helping others find their faith."

Sharing that his mission is to distribute as many St Benedict and Miraculous medals and associated prayers as possible, far and wide, Anthony, who works in the construction industry and runs a consultancy along with his wife, said: "When people started telling me how their lives had been changed so quickly, especially people you wouldn't expect to be converted like this, I realised the power of these medals as sacramentals.

"I was hearing about one person after another and felt that we needed to get these medals and prayers out to more people. It is truly a miracle seeing Divine power, through these medals, bringing people to prayer and back to receiving the sacraments. In these difficult times, this has given people hope, healing, protection, life, happiness and faith again. Every day we get lovely messages from people, saying how grateful they are for getting their lives back."

He added: "I put up a post on Facebook and asked a gentleman, who has a high following, to put

up a post on his page too, and it just went completely mad. I couldn't keep up with all the messages from people looking for the medals and prayers. I was praying over the medals before I distributed them, and then I was out delivering them, so I prayed for help and people just came out of the woodwork to offer their help.

"I also prayed and prayed that I would get funding to buy the medals, as I was financing them myself. I started asking for donations and we raised enough money to buy over 2,200, and now there is a team of 10 people willing to help distribute them. These are men and women, aged between 30-50, from different parts of the City, who had some kind of positive experience after receiving one of the medals and prayers and now want to help get them out to other people.

"It is unbelievable what is happening. The intercessions

of the saints associated with these medals are leading to people having hope again and bringing them to faith. The whole experience has completely changed my life.

"So, the mission is to get them out everywhere, to schools, universities, chapels, and any public place where people will listen, throughout Ireland and beyond. At the minute, I am getting the medals from a supplier in China but it takes three weeks for them to get here, so it would be good to be able to manufacture them locally."

Anthony has started a Facebook group for the medals - Saint Benedict and Miraculous Medals - and the group is in the process of trying to get registered as a charity.

"If you would like to help this mission, join, like and share the Facebook page," he said, "or leave a message if you would like to make a donation and receive your own blessed medals".

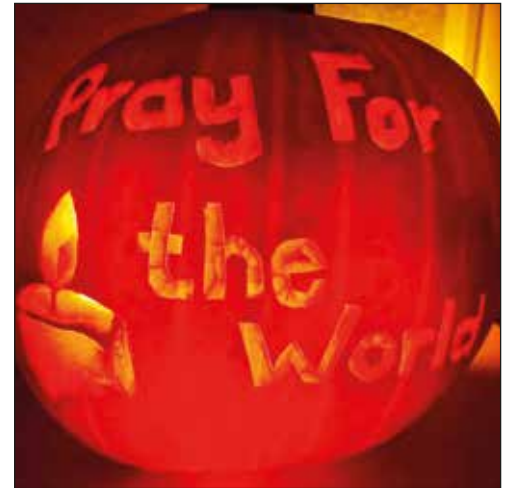


What are sacramentals...

THE Catholic Church has many sacramentals - which are not sacraments. Sacramentals, like medals, scapulars, relics, point us to the grace of God. But they are not merely 'holy magic' independent of faith in Christ. It is essential that they are used with faith - just as Jesus often told people that their faith had healed them.

Thus, they are concrete, visible signs of God's grace and mercy. For many people they have opened the door to faith and healing. And when they are blessed with prayer, they can bear God's power to banish evil and its effects.

Through the intercession of Mary and the saints in the Mystical Body of Christ, God continues to pour out His Divine Grace upon those most in need of His mercy.



Active lay people in the parishes of Culmore and Steelstown, in the Derry City Deanery, share some of the wonderful faith related activities parishioners have appreciated during the past year...

Creating moments of connection at a time when many were feeling isolated

AS we dare to look forward to a slow cautious return to worshipping in our chapels together, we, in the parishes of Steelstown and Culmore, are looking back at some of the ways we have tried to overcome the challenges of this past year; the ways in which we have grown in fellowship during this time and what we have learnt as we move forward.

With support from parishioners, our shared Faith Formation Coordinator, Julz Fitzgerald, and our clergy, Fr Colum Clerkin, PP Culmore, and Fr John McDevitt, PP Steelstown, we had a clear sense that we wanted to create moments of connection at a time when many were feeling isolated and, over the year, this has been developed through various groups and initiatives.

Here are some of the ways we created connection:

Parish Social media

Both chapels have very active and engaging social media platforms that, in the early days, allowed us to broadcast Masses

and share information, as well as create opportunities to share news and connect, particularly during Holy Week and other moments.

We've shared images of palms and sacred spaces set up in homes, images of parishioners enjoying the snow, doing pumpkin carvings on the theme of light of the world, and a parish family bingo night. This has helped to keep us connected as a community.

Rosary and Divine Mercy

Since the start of the first pandemic, a group of lay parishioners have faithfully gone LIVE on Facebook every night to lead others in praying the Rosary for the intentions of the community. This practise continues each night on the Thornhill Chapel page at 8 pm. It has created a moment of connection with people from within the parish and outside of it, and has encouraged others to offer their gifts so that now we also have the Divine Mercy led LIVE by a parishioner each evening at 6.30 pm.

Online Lectio

Our Lectio group meets every Monday from 11.30 am-12.30 pm. Before the pandemic, we met in person but since the pandemic began we have been challenged to learn new technologies and now use ZOOM.

All are welcome as we gather together to read and reflect on the upcoming Sunday Gospel.

We read the Scripture passage very slowly, pause and spend sacred time pondering its message for us today. Some sharing may follow, but no one is expected to speak. It is ok to listen and let God's Word speak for itself in the context of our lives, both personal and communal. We learn to contemplate and pray together in a way that is gentle and supportive. What an excellent way to help one "put on the mind of Christ" in a world of so many differing voices!

For many of those who attend, it has become an important part of their rhythm of prayer, and when we are allowed to meet in person, once again, we will probably move to a blended Lectio, with some happening online and some



happening in person.

Joining us is very simple just go to 7milesaway.org/online-lectio and follow the simple instructions. All are welcome to join us...come as you are...no previous study is required.

Parish Eco Group

After the Season of Creation, we launched our joint parish eco group. With members from both Catholic parishes and the Church of Ireland, in Culmore, we meet monthly to look at ways the parish can engage with the Pope's letter, 'Laudato Si', which calls us all to care for the earth.

Currently our focus is around Trocaire's Lenten campaign and Fair Trade, and buying less but buying fairer. Last month we focussed on birds, and our children and parish responded by creating amazing bird feeders. It has been another great way to create and have moments of



continued from page 4

connectedness and we are hugely grateful for the part our schools, parishioners and young people have played in its success.

Children's Online Liturgy

Online Mass was a new experience for most of us, and for our families, in particular, we identified a need to support and engage with our children. Our ZOOM liturgy is designed for the whole family and happens once a month, with over 90 families now registered. With help from our parents and the John Paul II Award parishioners, we have a moment of faith, fun and friendship once a month. We play and then we pray, taking time to listen to the Word of God and what the challenge might be for us all.

John Paul II Award

At the beginning of this year's Award, we knew we needed to look at how we might create opportunities for our young people to not only gain hours for their Award, but gain meaningful experiences. We set about looking at opportunities we could create in case we were unable to be in our chapels.

As a joint parish initiative, we created a three-part programme that included a physical liturgical aspect, an online prayer aspect and then a parish service group aspect.

Since October 2020, many of our young people have been unable to be in our chapels. However, they have been involved with the Diocesan online youth programme. They have joined and been a part of the online Youth Alpha and the Christus Vivit online book club. They have joined the parish Eco Group and supported the Children's Liturgy.

Some are involved in looking at creating a Parish Youth Council and a group has been responsible for this year's Trocaire Lenten Appeal. They have created focal points in the chapel, led us in Stations of the Cross, and organised some fundraising for the parishes; encouraging parishioners and our local schools to walk and pledge money for miles.

Georgia shares a little about what they have been doing and the link for anyone who would like to support their efforts: "During Lent, we aimed to walk the distance from Dublin to South Sudan's

capital, Juba. Approximately 5,700 miles. On Saturday, March 13, myself and a group of Pope John Paul II students embarked on a walk across the two bridges to help us reach our goal. We met at Sainsburys and began our walk at 1 pm. The weather was lovely at the start...but not for long! As we approached the Craigavon Bridge, the heavens opened! We decided to take shelter under the bridge for 10 minutes. Luckily, the rain calmed down and we began to walk again.

The walk allowed us time to reflect on why we were walking. We thought of the bravery of Ajak and Awut, who are the focus of this year's Lenten appeal. To flee conflict in South Sudan, the women gathered their families and ran for their lives. By the time they reached safety, they had lost nearly everything. Together, the two mothers forged a friendship and continue to work tirelessly to make sure their families aren't completely lost.

We were inspired by these resilient women and continued to walk until we had reached our goal! We are so grateful to all those who have supported us so far with their donations. You can sponsor us and give to Trocaire by using our link <https://www.justgiving.com/fundr.../jpiiculmoreandsteelstown>. Remember, this year each pound, up to two million, will be match funded by the UK government."

This year has given us the opportunity to walk with our JPPII parishioners in a new way, and in a way we will build on and grow. We have had the opportunity to get to know them and walk with them in and outside the liturgical life of the parish.

In all we that we have undertaken in Culmore and Steelstown, we have tried to make sure to be open to new ideas and to staying responsive as a community. Churches have the stereotype of thinking: "We've never done it like that before". This pandemic has taught us the importance of thinking outside the box and being open to new ways to engage people.

As we all return to our buildings in different ways, over the next few weeks and months, it's going to be exciting to see how we take the lessons we have learnt and move forward with them outside of the restrictions.



Derry Youth Ministry update by Lizzie Rea

THE Derry Youth Ministry online programme will continue throughout May, with the addition of a Youth Alpha programme starting on May 3.

Derry Youth has partnered up with Mary's Meals Ireland and they will help deliver a seven-week programme, starting on May 8.

We will be having a virtual Pope John Paul II Award ceremony on May 26, at 8.30 pm, for the participants who enrolled in 2019/2020.

The award ceremony will be streamed from St Eugene's Cathedral webcam.

Mary's Meals Programme with Derry Diocese.

- 7 Week programme
- Starts 6th May 7pm on Zoom
- Gain JPPII Award hours
- Learn about the amazing work of Mary's Meals
- Sign up by messaging @derryyouth social media or email lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org

mary's meals

Instagram Facebook

Derry Youth Ministry

YOUTH ALPHA ON ZOOM

- Join other young people around the diocese as we ask the big questions!
- Do I have a purpose?
- Is there more to life than this?
- Build new friendships
- Plan for the future

Alpha

7:30PM-8:30PM EVERY MONDAY FOR 7 WEEKS STARTING MAY 3RD

Email lizzie.rea@derrydiocese.org or message our social media pages @derryyouth to get a registration form



THIS month, Hollie, Peter, Oisin, Gemma, Zara and John, 'The Net' youth contributors from the Co Tyrone, Inishowen, Co Derry and Derry City Deaneries, reflect on a variety of subjects that have interested them, with John, Zara and Peter welcoming the launch of the Diocesan Environmental Strategy.

Zara and Oisin found reading the story of St Teresa of Ávila inspiring, and welcomed Pope Francis writing that she highlighted the importance of women in the Church and society, as he marked the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of her as a Doctor of the Church.

Hollie writes about vocations, referring to Pope Francis' annual World Day of Vocations message, which focused on St Joseph: The Dream of Vocation, and this theme comes up too in Hollie's report on the online 'Christus Vivit' Book Club she set up and led for her peers, as her Papal Award project.

Gemma painted a beautiful image of Our Lady to honour her in this month of May, and shared some of her thoughts on reading about Mary's apparitions in Fatima, while Oisin shared his thoughts on Pope Francis' encouragement to young people to respond to the call of God and his own prayer experience



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.

John writes about the Environment and Catholicism...

Taking care of the Earth we are entrusted to, we can combat climate change

"THE earth is the LORD's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it", begins David in the 24th Psalm.

As Christians, through the liturgy and our devotions, we are constantly reminded of the reality that we, and everything that surrounds us here, is by the grace and will of God and that we are to be thankful to Him.

This gratitude is to be expressed through all our actions and deeds. Even though we have received this great and difficult calling, we have seen time and time again how we humans have failed to live up to that task. It is in fulfilling this task that one thing comes to mind, and that is to take care of the Earth that we are entrusted to.

From the 60s onwards, many in the modern world came to see the consequence of the so-called 'industrial revolution'. This is called Climate Change. What is Climate Change? For the sake of brevity, it is the result of an increase in gases like Carbon Dioxide and Methane present in the atmosphere.

Why is this change significant? This change is significant as the increase of the aforementioned gases has led to an increase in the average global temperature. That is, the world is getting warmer and this is causing polar ice caps to melt, which causes sea levels to rise and coastlines to go back, etc.

This is a gross oversimplification, and it does not do justice to what

is happening in our world – but to get straight to the point, we are behind that change in the gases present, and that change does not hold anything good for us.

Nevertheless, the reason why we should take care of the environment and take steps to preserve, and conserve, should not only be due to Climate Change. Our reason should be ultimately to praise and glorify God through the preservation of His creation.

In 'Rerum Novarum' (1891), Leo XIII wrote that "God gave the earth to 'mankind in common'" (Catholic Answers). This does not negate the right to private property, but he asserts that "the goods of nature and the gifts of divine grace belong in common and without distinction to all humankind".

In other words, we are not to use the Earth for our selfish needs but for the good of all. By doing this we are serving God as was pointed out in the Gospels, "When you cared for one of the least important of these my little ones, my true brothers and sisters, you demonstrated love for me". (Matthew 25:40)

It is obvious that these words were not heeded when they were proclaimed all those years ago. Humans kept, and still keep, on exploiting the environment for short term gains. This shortsightedness has led to many things, such as an increase in



An Icon of St Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of Animals and Ecology. (Source: <https://christianity.redzambala.com/st-francis-of-assisi/life-of-st-francis-of-assisi-st-bonaventure.html>)

droughts and countless other side effects.

This should come as no surprise to many, but these things happened because we failed to acknowledge the purpose of why this earth was entrusted to us, and that is why I believe that we are in this abominable situation.

What solutions can be provided to this crisis and what can we do to help, one may ask. The answer is not as simple as many politicians may want to believe, nor is it as

complex as the pessimistic may say.

The solution is not just simply more renewable energy or less waste. The first action that should be taken is to realise that this Earth is a gift to us from God. The second is a realisation that the purpose of our lives is to be in union with Jesus. And the third should follow from that – changing our life to put God, not mammon, in the first place.

With this intent to serve God, we can combat climate change.

Diocesan Environmental Strategy gives me hope for the future by Zara

THE Environmental Strategy by our Diocesan 'Laudato Si' group is a wonderful plan. For the first time, we can actually be hopeful. While reading the draft, I felt a sense of pride for what our Diocese is planning to achieve. If conquered accordingly, then our carbon emissions should drastically decrease, and honestly, that gives me hope for the future.

The strategy outlines its aims across six major themes, with an additional three cross-cutting themes. These include: land; food; energy; design; construction and management of buildings; water and waste; transport; theology and liturgy; communication and education; and a measuring progress initiative.

'Laudato Si' Derry then expanded on their objectives by expressing the measures that will be put in place to combat the effects of Climate Change. They plan on conducting audits on energy, heating and lighting within each parish, increasing the level of biodiversity and

even investigating the feasibility of fitting solar/photovoltaic panels and wind turbines. These proposals should change the face of the climate emergency and allow people to realise the urgency that comes along with it.

I am overjoyed to see that the hunger for change has been recognised and addressed. However, through climate activism, I have grown slightly sceptical of 'plans' and have developed the belief that actions speak louder than words. Yet, this strategy has the potential for action, but only if we all contribute to its message. I hope that what has been promised can be delivered and that we can enter into a new environmental age.

That being said, the church's climate initiative aligns perfectly with Jesus' teaching on protecting the world in which we live. In my opinion, we have been doing the opposite lately. The whole world has been focusing on materialistic and personal gain, rather than sustaining and caring for "our

common home".

However, the work by our Diocese combats this idea and acts as a stepping stone to complete devotion. How can we ask God for intentions, when we abolish the most precious gift that was given to us? So, as we enter into this new environmental age, let us follow Jesus' example and adjust our outlook, because if we want to change our actions, then we must first change our mindset.

I encourage you all to read and share the draft for the Diocese of Derry Environmental Strategy, which can be found on the Derry Diocese website, and submit comments, questions and suggestions to Laudato Si Derry, who are doing an amazing job in leading our Diocese towards climate justice.



Welcoming the work of the Diocesan 'Laudato Si' group, Peter supports efforts to...

Respect the great gift of our common home

POPE Francis has always highlighted how important it is for us Christians to look after the Earth or, in his words, "our common home," that God had created. He published his Encyclical, 'Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home' in 2015 to tackle this issue and how the whole world must come together to protect it.

This letter sparked the idea for people to come together and respond to the affects of global warming and care for our planet, that God had created, and to restore it for the many generations to come.

On such group, 'Laudato Si' has been set up here, in our own Diocese of Derry, and the members do marvellous work in promoting the message of Pope Francis, to hear "the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor."

This group also teaches us that

true discipleship is the key part in caring for our beloved Common Home, and that we, as parishes and as a diocese, must work together to achieve these goals in protecting our home for the future.

Groups like 'Laudato Si', and many others, encourage everyone around the globe to look after our planet. They mainly consist of young people who stand up and make their voices heard in protecting what God has created for us for the future. The older generation has to listen and take action too, in sustaining God's creation for the future and protecting the animals and creatures that God placed on our planet as well.

World Earth Day was celebrated in April, and this year's theme was to "Restore our Earth." In my opinion, that theme links in with the Catholic Church and is a role

for young people to be involved in, in our parishes and diocese.

So, like what our Diocesan 'Laudato Si' tells us, discipleship is a key trait that everyone has and using it for the good can create a light at the end of the tunnel during the dark age of Global Warming.

Some good to come out of the Covid-19 pandemic was the reduction in greenhouse gasses and helping us acknowledge how grateful we are to receive this wonderful gift from God; having life on Earth along with many other creatures too





St Teresa of Ávila – The importance of women by Oisin

JUST recently, Pope Francis marked the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of St Teresa of Ávila as a Doctor of the Church. The way in which he did this was stressing her importance even in the modern day, especially in the case of highlighting the role of women in the church and society as a whole.

He described how her being the first woman given this title was recognition of the “precious teaching that God has transmitted to us through her writings and the testimony of her life”.

He also wrote that even now, nearly a half a millennium after her death, that her flame lit when she was alive still burned, always in need of a courageous witness, capable of breaking down many types of walls.

Pope Francis further mentioned her intelligence and tenacity, stating she was an extraordinary example of woman's role in the church.

He mentioned, too, that through her writings she still speaks to people today, and that she can act as an example for those who feel the call of religious life, while also acting as an example for those who wish to progress on the purification from all their worldly

vices, to unite with God. And, he remarked how having her as a companion confers to us a sense of security and tranquillity.

Overall, after reading through the Pope's thoughts on St Teresa, I cannot help but completely agree with him. There are many important women within the church and St Teresa is one that I and my family have great devotion to. Her teachings have helped me and my family through many trials and tribulations, while also acting, as Pope Francis said, as a companion, giving us security and a sense of tranquillity when we pray to her.

Furthermore, on a personal level, I believe she is a role model for both men and women, and her teachings can show both genders how to act properly and in line with God's teachings. Expanding upon this, the flame that the Pope mentioned has allowed her to be a guiding factor for many, as they break down different barriers in the world today.

St Teresa and her influence cannot be understated and we should make an effort to use her teachings in order to improve ourselves and start a spark of change in the world today.

Our Lady...Queen of the May by Gemma

I always associate Our Lady with beauty and grace, so I chose a soft beautiful art to represent Mary in this art piece.

I wanted to do this painting in honour of Our Lady in this beautiful month of May, when we tend to show our love and praise for the Queen of Heaven the most.

Doing this art piece was a wonderful experience, as I have a great relationship with Mary, and pray to her every morning and night, asking for her intercession.



Reading the story of St Teresa of Ávila, Zara was inspired by her teaching that...

Love should be at the core of prayer so to guide our actions and lead to wonderful work

ST Teresa of Ávila was born in 1515 and died in 1582. Marking the 50th anniversary of the proclamation of her as a Doctor of the Church, Pope Francis has written about St Teresa, saying, “the flame that Jesus lit in Teresa continues to shine in this world, always in need of courageous witnesses, capable of breaking down any wall, whether physical, existential or cultural”.

He also cited her intelligence and tenacity, and said that she was an example of the “extraordinary role that women have played throughout history in the Church and in society”.

I agree with Pope Francis' words. St Teresa was an extremely important person, who was eventually declared a Doctor of the Church; a title given by the Catholic Church to saints who have made a significant contribution to theology or doctrine through their research, study or writing. Her work should be an inspiration to us all. In addition to this, her life story makes her so much more relatable.

She grew up with strict parents and said that she was always afraid that, no matter what she did, she was going to do everything wrong. As a teenager, she cared only about clothes, flirting, and rebelling. So, when she was 16, her father decided she was out of control and sent her to a convent. At first, she hated it but eventually she began to accept it and like it.

However, when the time came for her to choose between marriage and religious life, the decision proved difficult for her. She had watched a difficult marriage ruin her mother but, on the other hand, being a nun didn't seem like much fun. When she eventually chose religious life, she did so because she thought that it was the only safe place for a ‘sinner’ like her.

Once installed at the Carmelite convent, she started to learn and practice mental prayer, about which she said, “I tried as hard as I could to keep Jesus Christ present within me....My imagination is so dull that I had no talent for imagining or coming up with great theological thoughts”. She continued to pray like this for years and never changed, partly because the convent was not the place she thought it would be.

Many women would go to the convent whether they had vocations or not, and were encouraged to stay away from the convents for long periods of time to cut down on expenses. Nuns would arrange their veils attractively and wear jewellery. There were always visitors in the parlour and extravagant parties. Another problem was that Teresa was said to be too charming,

everyone liked her, and she liked to be liked. She found it too easy to slip into a worldly life and ignore God. She eventually became more interested in flattery, vanity and gossip, as opposed to spiritual guidance.

Then she fell ill with malaria and, after a seizure, was assumed dead. Afterwards, she was paralyzed for three years and was never completely well. Yet, instead of bringing her closer to God, her sickness became an excuse to stop her prayer completely. Later she would say, “Prayer is an act of love, words are not needed. Even if sickness distracts from thoughts, all that is needed is the will to love”.

When she was 41, she was convinced to go back to her prayer, but she still found it difficult. Teresa sympathises with those who have a difficult time in prayer: “All the trials we endure cannot be compared to these interior battles... The important thing is not to think much but to love much and so do that which best stirs you to love. Love is not great delight but desire to please God in everything”.

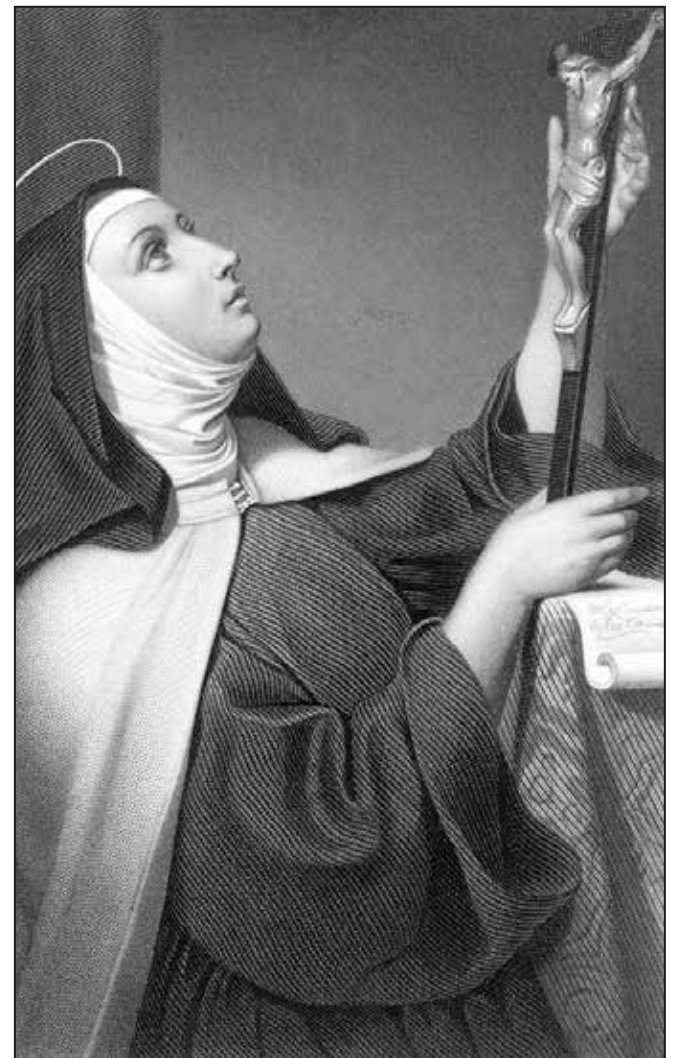
As she started to pray again, she experienced strange occurrences. Sometimes her whole body was raised from the ground. If she felt God was going to levitate her, she stretched out on the floor and called the nuns to sit on her and hold her down. She begged God not to give her any more favours in public, as she feared it would draw unwanted attention to her.

Mystical

In her books, she analyses and dissects mystical experiences the way a scientist would, trying to find meaning behind them. News of these happenings eventually spread and people were concerned that her experiences were a result of the devil's work. Everyone then began to make fun of her. In her autobiography she would say, “I am more afraid of those who are terrified of the devil than I am of the devil himself”.

At the age of 43, she became determined to reform the Carmelite order. She founded a new convent that went back to the basics of a contemplative order: simple life of poverty devoted to prayer. However, when her plans were released, she was told by her sisters she should raise money for the convent she was already in and the town started legal proceedings against her; all because she wanted to try a simple life of prayer.

Despite this, Teresa believed that the most powerful and acceptable prayer was the prayer that leads to action. She eventually opened St Joseph's Convent. Here, she spent most of her time documenting her life.



At 51, she felt it was time to spread her reform movement and set out to found more convents. However, she received no help from her fellow brothers and sisters. She was called “a restless disobedient gadabout who has gone about teaching as though she were a professor”. She was opposed wherever she went and often had to enter a town secretly in the middle of the night to avoid causing a riot. No one in religious orders or in the world wanted Teresa reminding them of the way God said they should live.

Despite this, she looked on these difficulties as good publicity. Soon, she had people begging to get into her new convents, as many people thought about what she said and wanted to learn from her. Soon her ideas about prayer swept not only through Spain but all over Europe. She spent the rest of her life establishing new convents and devoting her time to her writings and research. In 1970, she was declared a Doctor of the Church for her writing and teaching on prayer, one of two women to be honoured in this way.

After researching about St Teresa, I realised how strong her influence was on the progression of the Catholic Church. She was said to have been against St Paul's order that women should not teach, and she was an important figure in the

revolution of equality, overall, not just within the church. Her success was rightly earned and deserved, whilst she paved the way for many women, wishing to follow in her footsteps. In my opinion, she is such an important role model that we can all relate to and aspire to be like.

She understood prayer entirely and fought to ensure that it could be accessible and meaningful to all. Granted, many people are fulfilled with the recitation of prayer, but many are unable to always find that connection with God, through this method. Teresa's honesty about her own prayer life helped so many people come to terms with their own spiritual relationship with God. Her teachings promoted the acceptance of natural and instinctive prayer, rather than external and structured prayer. Her idea was that prayer should always be an integral part of our everyday life.

Teresa was also an advocate for simple and modest living, as she truly grasped the concept of Jesus' humility.

We can learn a lot from St Teresa, especially her idea that love that should be at the core of prayer. By doing this, our spiritual prayers will guide our actions and we can complete wonderful work, just like St Teresa of Ávila.

Hollie writes about her Youth Ministry Lenten Book Club on the Apostolic Exhortation ‘Christus Vivit’...

Young people are not only the future of the Church but also the present

THE first time I read Pope Francis’ post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, ‘Christus Vivit’, was on Lough Derg, in June 2019. My first impression of the document was that it was easy to read and to understand, whilst I was impressed with the Holy Father’s grasp of understanding, from the 2018 Synod, of Young people’s realities.

Later, in October 2020, at the book launch of ‘Exploring Christus Vivit’, I got the idea to host a book club on Pope Francis’ youth document as my Papal Cross Award project. My primary intention was for the new programme to be a fruitful project, which would consist of rich conversation around interesting and sensitive topics - especially tackling the awkward questions!

On February 18, the day after Ash Wednesday, I hosted and led the first ever Derry Youth Ministry Book Club, with the assistance of the Derry Youth Ministry leaders. We arranged a guest speaker each week for six weeks, including Bishop Donal McKeown, Gerard Gallagher, Fr Paul Farren, Lizzie Rea and Julia Fitzgerald, and Fr Chris Ferguson.

Each week, we focused on a chapter from ‘Christus Vivit’, beginning with Chapter Two: ‘Jesus, ever Young’. When asking the book club members, “What is the Church’s mission and

where do young people fit in?” I was interested in the response one person gave me, which was that a common challenge young people face is gaining the courage to practice faith in front of their peers.

Young people are expected to peer-to-peer minister, although, this isn’t necessarily easy or exact. The concept of ‘synodality’ requires the ‘walking together’ of the young and old. Our elders need to show a good example and to encourage young people, whilst at the same time, young people must listen to their elders who have experience.

Pope Francis said: “If the young had the knowledge and the old strength, there would be nothing they could not accomplish.”

In addition to this, on week four of the book club, we explored further the importance of intergenerational relationships, by focusing on Chapter Six: ‘Young People with Roots’. The first question I asked my peers was “Why is it important for us to stay connected to our roots?”

Again, with an excellent response, they showed their understanding by recognising that our elders have experience, therefore, they can give advice and share their wisdom. Also, by looking back on history, it is very important not to repeat the mistakes of the past, and that we

cannot go forward unless we heal the wounds of the past. As St. Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians, “If one part suffers, all parts suffer with it”, therefore, we cannot move forward unless we acknowledge our past and wrongdoings.

Throughout our six-week Lenten book club, we reflected on the lives of outstanding young people of faith, like Blessed Carlo Acutis, when exploring Chapter 3: ‘You are the Now of God’. Also, we reflected on Jesus and Mary’s youth on week one, with Chapter 2.

My intention was to help my peers realise that young people are recognised and heard in the Church, and also to give them the chance to take something from these outstanding youthful figures of faith.

Finally, in the sixth week, a few weeks prior to Vocations Week, we explored Chapter 8, on ‘Vocation’. Vocation can be understood in three parts: First, our ‘shared’ vocation through the Sacrament of Baptism; second, our call to service or occupation, and thirdly, our call to a state of life, eg marriage, celibacy, etc.

When asking the young people “What is Vocation?” they simply responded that “it is a calling from God.” We also highlighted that a vocation can be anything, not just the priesthood or the religious life, which many people can mistaken. Everyone has a vocation. When I asked my peers, “Why do you think vocations are not as popular anymore? Or less talked about?” Interestingly, each

group came back with one thing in common, and that was the feeling that vocation has been very male-dominated, although this is changing.

Additionally, I asked “How can we address or ‘promote’ vocations, particularly to the priesthood and the religious life?” The popular response to this question was that school is the best environment to address vocations alongside careers.

To conclude, the book club was very successful and we had such rich and fruitful conversations based on the various chapters and themes of ‘Christus Vivit’. There has been great feedback and I hope that sometime this programme will be hosted again.

‘Christus Vivit’ is a fantastic

document, which also highlights the importance of youth ministry in Chapter 7, which we explored on week five.

I could not have completed this project without the encouragement, assistance, and leadership of the Derry Youth Ministry leaders. I appreciate the commitment and time given to the programme from both the leaders and the guest speakers.

I thank all those who participated and would like to remind everyone of the three great truths that Pope Francis highlights in Chapter 4, ‘A Great Message for all Young People’ which we explored on week three: “God loves you, Christ saves you and He is alive!”

Reflecting on Pope Francis’ encouragement to young people to respond to the call of God, who never ceases to search for us, Oisín concluded...

God is always waiting for us...we just need to call on Him

CARDINAL Raniero Cantalamessa, the Preacher of the Papal Household, recently authored a new book called ‘Francesco il guillare di Dio’ (loosely translated as ‘Francis, God’s jester’) and, in the introduction of this book, Pope Francis penned a few words encouraging young people to respond to the call of God, who never ceases to search for us.

The book, itself, tells the story of Brother Pacificus, a follower of St Francis of Assisi, but the Pope tells us, in his writing, that the book is written for young, searching people as a gift filled with the esteem and trust he places in all young people.

Furthermore, the Holy Father mentions that many people have

read and questioned Jesus’ words in the Gospel, and have questioned whether they can be trusted or not. However, he posits that if we listen to another part of the Gospel where Jesus tells us “You will seek me and you will find me”, we can move past this issue and, as he put it, be shown God if we search for Him with our full heart.

I personally relate to this statement as there have been some times in my life where I have tried to not only request of God but also seek Him out, and have struggled as I was not putting my entire being into looking for him. I was doing it half-heartedly rather than with my full being. However, in contrast, when I searched for Him with my full heart, after perhaps

requesting Him to help me with a really important issue, my requests were always heeded and my prayers answered.

The Pope further elaborates this very point by writing examples in which promises were fulfilled by Jesus when He encountered certain people, some examples of these being the faith of the centurion at the crucifixion, the many lepers that wished to be healed and so on. Pope Francis notes that these issues, for which people were finding an answer, had become essential to them so they were searching with their whole hearts to get it, which is why they were answered.

In addition, the Pope details how God never stops calling us and that

He never tires of meeting us as well.

The Holy Father finally also notes that if we remove other distractions and instead focus clearly on God, He will hear us loud and clear, and he ends the address by detailing how God is always waiting and that we need only go to Him courageously.

Personally, this resonates deeply with me as sometimes I find myself lacking the courage to respond to God’s calling, especially in times of stress and anxiety. So, reading these words from the Pope was very relieving for me, as I then understood that I must build up that courage and when I do, God will be waiting for me to call to Him and He will answer.

Encouraged by Our Lady of Fatima apparition story, Gemma writes...

Keep believing obstacles can be overcome

THERE were lots of miracles in Fatima when Our Lady appeared there to three little shepherd children each month, from May 13 to October 13, 1917.

I love the image I get from the description of Our Lady given by Lucia Santos and her cousins, Jacinta and Francisco Marto; that she was “a lady all dressed in white, shining brighter than the sun, giving out rays of clear and intense light”.

Mary told the children three secrets, known as The Fatima Secrets, and because not many believed the children about the

apparitions, she told Lucia: “In October...I will perform a miracle all shall see so that they may believe”.

And so it happened, and a crowd of believers came to witness what became known as “The Miracle of the Sun”. The witnesses explained that they had seen the sun tremble in the sky and spin for 10 minutes.

This miracle stands out for me as encouragement to always stay close to Mary and to keep praying and trusting that no matter what obstacle I experience in my life, it will be overcome.



The children of Fatima - Jacinta, Lucia and Francisco

Hollie reflects on Pope Francis’ message for World Day of Vocations 2021 - ‘St Joseph protector of Vocations’...

“What is God’s dream for you?”

ON April 25, Pope Francis published his annual message for the 58th World Day of Vocations, which focused on ‘St Joseph: The Dream of Vocation.’ In particular, as we celebrate the ‘Year of Saint Joseph’, we learn of his significant contribution to the life of the Church, of how he answered God’s call and responded wholeheartedly by taking his place in God’s plan and mission.

Pope Francis states in his message: “St Joseph suggests to us three key words for each individual’s vocation” - dream, service and fidelity.

St Joseph is often forgotten about and is referred to as the ‘quiet saint’. The Bible does not have a record of any spoken words of St Joseph, although what he did for God speaks volumes.

As we know, God commanded St Joseph through dreams, such as to protect the Holy Family from Herod’s decree by escaping from Bethlehem to Egypt. Then, in another dream, after King Herod’s death, God commanded Joseph to take his family to the land of Israel, although in fear of King Herod’s successor, his son Archelaus, as the new ruler over Judea, Joseph was warned in another dream and withdrew to the region of Galilee, where the Holy family settled in a place called Nazareth.

St Joseph demonstrates fidelity in putting his trust in God the Father, and by sacrificing his home and life for the Son of God and His Mother. He shows courage.

In our Church, we have reflected on the meaning of dreams and have identified in many cases how

God intervened and commanded a number of well-known, outstanding figures and examples of faith. For example, St Joseph, and even more close to home, St Patrick. Both of these saints have encountered God in their dreams, and in St Joseph’s case, he was called to serve the Son of God and His Blessed Mother, whilst centuries later, St Patrick was called to serve the Irish people.

What I learn from this is that when we discern our own vocation, we must listen in silence, like Sts Joseph and Patrick, to the echo of God’s call from the very depths of our hearts.

The word ‘vocation’ comes from the Latin translation, ‘Vocare’, which simply means ‘to be called’. Vocation can be understood in three different aspects: one being the ‘shared vocation’ that we inherit through the Sacrament of Baptism; second is the ‘call’ to service or occupation; and third is the ‘call’ to a state of life. St Joseph demonstrated all three of these aspects in his life.

St Joseph welcomed and loved Jesus like his own son and protected Him and His Mother. His state of life was marital, although virginal with his wife Mary.

Lastly, we associate St Joseph as the Patron Saint of Workers. He was a carpenter, and “From him, Jesus learned the value, the dignity and the joy of what it means to eat bread that is the fruit of one’s own labour” (Apostolic Letter Patris Corde). Work gives us a sense of purpose, and provides a platform for us to grow and develop our skills, talents and abilities, which we can put to the service of others.

At the beginning of Matthew’s Gospel, Matthew tells us that an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said “don’t be afraid”. I love those words, and I believe that God sends each and every one of us that same message when He calls us and invites us to take our place in His plan. This encourages us to respond humbly without hesitation, and to ask for courage, like Mary, Joseph and Patrick, to say ‘yes’ to God’s mission and love.

Reflecting on the great success of the first Sr Clare Retreat on the fifth anniversary of her death, Fr Stephen Quinn OCD hopes the message came across that...

Holiness is real and can apply to real people

VOCATIONS Week in the Diocese was a powerful time of prayer and talks, with the Diocesan vocations team, led by Fr Chris Ferguson, and the Diocesan pastoral coordinator, Tony Brennan, along with the Youth Ministry team, putting together an abundance of prayer resources and an inspiring programme of conversations through which people shared the story of their vocation in life.

And, running alongside this



was a week-long retreat, with a series of talks in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, reflecting on the amazing conversion and vocation story of Derry-born Home of the Mother Servant Sister, Clare Crockett...a story that has captured the attention of an ever-growing number of devotees worldwide, who are praying for her cause for canonisation to be considered by the Church.

Each day of the retreat, which attracted around 4,000 online viewers daily, began with the celebration of Mass, during which thought-provoking homilies were delivered by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, Fr Aidan Mullan, Adm Long Tower, Fr Joe Gormley, PP Creggan, Fr Patrick Lagan, St Eugene's, Fr Michael McGoldrick OCD, Fr Gerard Mongan, Three Patrons, Fr Colm Power, Home of the Mother, and Bishop Donal McKeown, while talks by Sr Clare's sister, Shauna, friend, Sharon Doran, St Cecilia's drama teacher, Greta McTague, and Sr Kelai, Servant Sister, gave further insight into her 33 years of life.

Speaking to 'The Net' afterwards, Fr Stephen said that the retreat had offered a great opportunity to understand Sr Clare's story at a human level: "It helped us to understand how every person can relate to God; you can't have that relationship with God without knowing your

own humanity.

"This girl did not come of a picture-perfect Catholic setting. For many years, she was alienated from the faith yet she was still able to make this extraordinary journey that brought the reality of her life into context with the reality of who Jesus is, and that is the most genuine path to holiness that I know of.

"It is a liberating thing when you have any engagement with the truth and, for me, you see the truth with Sr Clare. You see the truth of what Christ can do with ordinary people. She had flesh and blood like the rest of us and that is what I was hoping would come out during the retreat; that people would see holiness is real and can apply to real people."

Commenting on the structure of the week of talks, Fr Stephen noted: "The speakers earlier in the week brought home the reality about who Sr Clare was, and then Fr Colm and Sr Kelai showed the step beyond that, with the transition that was going on.

"I think the depth of her story surprises people. I feel people don't really appreciate how extraordinary this story is, or have grasped the power that is in this; what God is doing in the midst of it. For example, the gasp from the congregation when I said that 26,000 of the Sr Clare candles had been sold...such demand even



startled me too, as I had been thinking it would be too much to expect a 1,000 of them to sell.

"You just can't help but recognise when it is in front of you, the depth of what is being brought up in Sr Clare's story. And that is down to God alone. The depth of

prayer and devotion to Sr Clare and what God is making out of it is amazing, and surprising us all.

"When I started the monthly Sr Clare Mass three years ago, I never dreamt we would be having a retreat in the Long Tower Church, and no-one was planning for that

to happen, which tells me that the Spirit of God is behind it."

It is hoped that the Sr Clare Retreat will become an annual week of prayer and reflection, which more and more people can benefit from.

Sr Clare still touching lives...

"The first time I heard of Sr Clare was through social media and seeing the film on her life on YouTube. I thought it was a brilliant story and would now pray to her, for her intercession."

Lisa Devine, Derry.

"Clare was in my class at St Cecilia's and I just think it's unbelievable how her life turned out, when I think of the madness and the craic we had. But, I see that parts of personality still came out. The way she changed her whole lifestyle has made me think."

Aine Fawcett, Strabane, Co Tyrone.

"It is such an inspirational story. I loved her motto, 'All or Nothing'. The Holy Spirit must have been so powerfully working in her when she felt that she had to give all up and do this for God. She was such a normal teenager, with all the ideas of fame that young people have. The Holy Spirit took her over and that can happen all of us, if we are open to it."

Majella McKinney, Derry.

"I just feel that if Sr Clare was able to change her life, so can I. My life would reflect hers in many ways."

Katrina White, Derry.

"Sr Clare is our local hero. I worked in the Long Tower Youth Club when Clare attended with her sisters, and she was a member of COR when my boys were in it. It was my guitar that was used in the procession of gifts on the day of Sr Clare's funeral."

Anne Fisher, Derry.

"What I like so much about Sr Clare is her ordinariness, and how she knew that she was nothing special but sinful. She is definitely a saint for these times. We tend to think of holy people being a way up there, but she has shown us that we are all the same and that we are all called by God."

Rhonda McColgan, Iskaheen, Co Donegal.

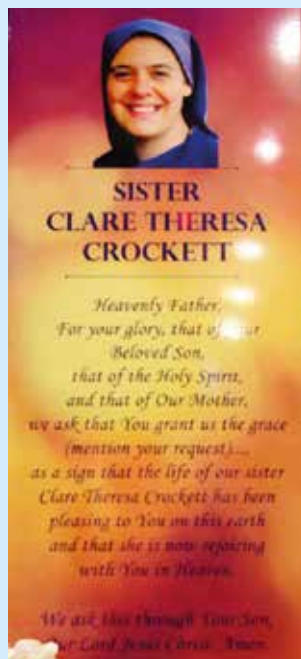
"I ran around with Clare at school. She was so full of life and lived life to the full. I hope that

she gets canonized."

Jennifer Kearney, Derry.

"Her story is amazing. We haven't seen the film on Sr Clare's life, but what we have heard during this retreat has really made us want to see it now."

Eileen Breen & Martina Hamilton, Derry.



Retreat photographs taken by Ivor Doherty, Gerry Temple and The Net'



Sr Kelai, Servant Sister of the Home of The Mother.



Fr Colum Power, Servant Father of the Home of the Mother.



Fr Patrick Lagan celebrating Mass during the Sr Clare retreat.

Sharing his faith story, Creggan youth and Sr Clare retreat steward, Ruairi McClafferty highlights his amazement at how mad the future nun was at school, remarking...

Sr Clare's story gives hope that you can rise above anything



Ruairi McClafferty.

AMONGST the band of volunteers stewarding at the Sr Clare Retreat in St Columba's Church, Long Tower was 19-year-old Creggan parishioner, Ruairi McClafferty. Amazed at the thousands of people who joined in the Covid-restricted week of prayer and talks online, the young COR leader shared his own faith story with 'The Net', including his reaction on discovering that the now famous nun had once been a member of this same youth group.

The youngest of Gary and Debbie McClafferty's family of four, being born two minutes after his twin sister, Mia, recalled having to toe the line with regards going to Mass with his parents and siblings when he was younger, but then discovering as he got older that he was actually happy to be present at the celebration of the Eucharist.

"I don't know what it was but I found that I enjoyed going to Mass, so I just kept going when I got older," said Ruairi, who later found his interest in his faith grow stronger during visits to the Carmelite Monastery at Termonbacca, where he enjoyed chats with Fr Jerry Fitzpatrick and Fr John McNamara.

He explained: "My father works in Termonbacca as an assistant caretaker, so from I was about 14 years old I started spending a lot of time there, and the more often I went the more comfortable I felt and my casual chats with Fr Jerry and Fr John gradually moved on to conversations about faith.

"They told me about Cor, the youth group that met there on Sunday evenings, but I wasn't

old enough at that stage to join it. My 16th birthday was a week after my COR weekend in 2016, which has played a big part in the development of my faith since."

"Even though I didn't know anyone else on my Cor weekend," he added, "I really enjoyed it, especially listening to other young people's testimonies, spending time in Eucharistic Adoration and the opportunity to go to Confession. It is difficult for a 16-year-old to stay silent during a period of Adoration, but for me it was so relaxing. It was a time during which I thought more deeply about my faith and asked myself questions. I got a lot of good answers and that is part of the reason why I still practice my faith.

"My father had been talking to me about considering the priesthood and I was asking myself if I really wanted to become a priest and if I had what it took. I felt that I could be a priest but in there was the sacrificing everything to give to God. Giving up the possibility of marriage and family life is a big sacrifice.

"It's not passed me, from time to time it comes up and I still think about the priesthood. But, at this stage, I feel that I would rather be a lay person helping out as much as I can. When I was younger, I went to Mass in St Mary's Church in my parish, but since Fr Stephen has come to Termonbacca, I have been going to Mass and Confession more and more there.

"Fr Stephen gave a lot of time to COR before Covid and I just knew I had a connection with him. I could spend hours chatting to him

about anything. Fr Stephen plays a big part in my life. He has a good vibe with him and is very good about asking how you are."

Looking forward to the time when COR can start back at Termonbacca, Ruairi said: "Before Covid, I had just been announced as a young leader. I got to coordinate a weekend and it was a brilliant experience. It was one of those things that I would do again. I really enjoyed it."

Reflecting on the positive impact COR has had on his life, the former Holy Child PS and St Joseph's Boys' School pupil said: "Before I joined COR, although I went to Mass, I would have thought of myself as a bad egg. I used to steal and fight with anyone who gave me a bad look. I went around with the wrong crowd at school.

COR

"So COR was a whole new experience. I liked the support network there, as I was going through some mental health problems and one of the team leaders gave me a lot of good advice. COR is more than a youth group – it is more of a second family. I have never seen as many young people embracing the faith. They go up for a laugh too, but when there are times of study about Gospel stories, like the death and resurrection of Jesus, they listen and take it in. It is not all about prayer but it is incredible the number of young people who connect with God again through COR, and I have met some really good people who will be friends for life."

Commenting on discovering Sr Clare's connection with COR, Ruairi recalled his mum sending him a text to say that Sr Clare was dead: "I didn't know who Sr Clare was! About a month after she died, I started reading up on her. It was tremendous to see what one Derry girl could do. She could have been an actress but she gave it all up for God.

"After I joined COR, there was a lot of talk about Sr Clare and I was shocked when I heard that this nun that I had read about had been in COR. I found it extraordinary that someone had come up through the ranks of Cor and gone on to become a nun. That alone is amazing to me...that I have been through a Cor weekend that Sr

Clare went through, someone who has touched so many lives.

"I know from being up at Termonbacca, the many people who want her book, prayer cards, candles and calendars. It is an extraordinary response to her story. When the Sr Clare Masses started up in Termonbacca, about 50 people came for the first one, and the next week there was over 100 people and, as the months went on, the numbers of people attending the Mass kept on going up and up. I would say the whole City of Derry knows about Sr Clare now.

He added: "The response to the retreat was great too. The number allowed into the chapel was restricted because of the Covid restrictions, but thousands watched it on the webcam. It is great to see the response and the devotion that there is to Sr Clare. I ask her to help me. Last year, when I was going through mental health problems, I asked her to intercede for me and I soon felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders. So, I continue to ask her to pray for me.

"With me helping out at Termonbacca, I was asked to help steward at the retreat, which was a great privilege. It was amazing listening to the stories told by people who had known her, especially her drama teacher. Sr Clare was full of life. I would have been full of life too when I was at school, but not as mad as her, so it was extraordinary to hear how mad she was at school and where she ended up...as a nun. So, no matter if you are mad at school, you are still going to get an education and get on in life. Her story gives you hope that you can rise above anything."

During the retreat, Ruairi got talking to a 23-year-old brother of the Home of the Mother, from Tipperary, who is training to be a priest in the order.

"We have exchanged email addresses and I'm looking forward to getting to know more about his life as a brother," said Ruairi, recalling that the first time he had heard of the Home of the Mother was when he watched the film on Sr Clare.

"I thought it was interesting," he remarked, "to see that they were willing to take on young people and show them the way."



Fr Gerard Mongan celebrating Mass.

Reflecting on the sacraments...

THE sacraments were central to the theme of the Sr Clare Retreat, with the celebrants of the week-day Masses inviting those listening to their homilies to reflect on these gifts, through which God communicates His grace.

Commenting on the love Jesus must have felt wash over him during his baptism by John the Baptist, when He heard the words, "This is My beloved Son, My favour rests on Him", Fr Aidan Mullan, Adm Long Tower, highlighted the need to be alert to the effect of our own baptism.

"Our baptism is a call to holiness," he said, adding: "When we talk about holiness we are talking about the light of God. Our homes have to be holy places where the light of God is evident."

Fr Aidan spoke about the need for renewed commitment to our baptismal call and reflection on the state of life we have been called to, explaining that the four specific vocations in the Catholic Church – Marriage, Priesthood, Consecrated Life and Single Life – were all based on the foundation

stone of baptism.

He concluded: "Each of us has to reflect and discern what God is calling us to through our Baptismal Promise."

Fr Joe Gormley, PP Creggan, speaking about the Eucharist as "the greatest gift that God gave us", remarked: "Like Sr Clare, we discover in Christ someone who can satisfy all our hungers and thirst...We see happiness in Sr Clare's life because she became a living Eucharist...Eventually, she was not Clare Crockett, but Christ in Clare Crockett. She was slowly transformed and became that living Eucharist...the living presence of Christ in the world."

He added: "Clare had thought that her hunger and thirst would be satisfied in her desire to be famous. Yet, when she tried to satisfy that deep hunger, it literally made her sick. In that moment, when she was being sick, the Lord kissed her with His love and called her to a greater dignity."

"The Lord wants us to have the same joy that Sr Clare had," continued Fr Joe, "by listening to



Highlighting at close of Sr Clare Retreat on Good Shepherd Sunday that “if generous young hearts do not hear the call or are discouraged from taking it seriously, we are not the Church of Christ”, Bishop Donal went on to remark...

Sr Clare showed that joy comes from following the divine dream, wherever it may lead

THE main celebrant for the Mass closing the week-long retreat in St Columba's Church, Long Tower, in memory of Sr Clare was Bishop Donal, who remarked that it was “wonderful that people in the city and much further afield” had been able to share in this “festival of faith”.

“All of this celebration of God's grace in a local girl, concluding on Vocations Sunday,” he added, “calls us to model the generosity of the Good Shepherd who says that He is prepared to lay down His life for His flock, each one of which He knows by name”.

Referring to Pope Francis' message for the 58th World Day of Prayer for Vocations 2021, in this year of St Joseph, Bishop Donal spoke on the three themes which the Holy Father had suggested could apply to holiness in every generation – dream, service and fidelity, saying that they could be seen in the life of Sr Clare.

He remarked: “We live in a one-dimensional world which thinks it is self-contained and self-sufficient. We are encouraged to think that my decisions should be all about me, my pain and my plans. Faith calls us to believe in

God's outrageous dreams for each of us and for all of us together as a Church.

“Sr Clare showed us that joy comes, not from obeying our thirst or superficially feeling good but from following the divine dream, wherever it may lead us”.

Quoting what Pope Francis had written about St Joseph, Patron of the Universal Church – “May he help everyone, especially young people who are discerning, to make God's dreams for them come true. May he inspire in them the courage to say ‘yes’ to the Lord who always surprises and never disappoints”, Bishop Donal commented: “That is why holy people know how to be at peace, to smile and to share their joy with others. God is in charge. We give what we have, and he does great things with us if we are open to accept the divine dream for each of us. With a smile and a twinkle in her eye, Sr Clare would remind us of that”.

With regards to ‘service’, and the presence of that in Joseph's acceptance of his vocation, Bishop Donal again referred to Pope Francis' message, quoting: “What a beautiful example of Christian

life we give when we refuse to pursue our ambitions or indulge in our illusions, but instead care for what the Lord has entrusted to us through the Church! God then pours out His Spirit and creativity upon us; He works wonders in us, as He did in Joseph”.

“Sr Clare,” noted Bishop Donal, “gave her all in service. I can see nodding and smiling again”.

Going on to comment on the third characteristic of every Christian calling, suggested in the life of St Joseph – fidelity, Bishop Donal said: “Don't be afraid to trust the faithfulness of God to us. Our stuttering fidelity to the call of God means facing many fears and doubts with trust that the Good Shepherd will not abandon you. For so many saints – famous and unknown – that trust and fidelity has been nourished by the sacramental gifts of Confessions and the Eucharist.

“Jesus is faithful to us, even when we fall and feel far from Him. Jesus gives us Himself in the Eucharist as we share in His sacrifice. After all, the Mass is the sacrament of Calvary, of His all-giving death on the Cross.”

He added: “Sr Clare was quietly

overwhelmed when she kissed the feet of Jesus on the Cross on Good Friday 21 years ago. She put it simply – ‘I had to do something for Him who had given His life for me’.

“Vocations come from encountering the suffering Jesus who loved the world to the end. The faithful loving generosity of God in Jesus lies at the heart of every vocation. Sr Clare would remind us that she tried to be faithful to those in her charge right up till her last breath”.

“This springtime, we celebrate the fact that God is always life-giving,” he continued: “We are a springtime people. Our job is to pull up the weeds, prepare the ground, sow the seeds and put in the fertiliser. We do that in trust. Many of us may not see the harvest. But if we are not a Springtime people now, the harvest will be delayed. If generous young hearts do not hear the call or are discouraged from taking it seriously, we are not the Church of Christ.

“We learn from St Joseph and from Sr Clare that every vocation means being open to God's dream, having hearts ready to



give all in service and staying faithful to the God who is always faithful to us.”

Bishop Donal concluded with Pope Francis' message for all those discerning a vocation to the priesthood or consecrated life: “I pray that you will experience... joy, dear brothers and sisters who have generously made

God the dream of your lives, serving him in your brothers and sisters through a fidelity that is a powerful testimony in an age of ephemeral choices and emotions that bring no lasting joy. May Saint Joseph, protector of vocations, accompany you with his fatherly heart!”

Reflecting on the sacraments... continued from page 10

His Word and receiving His Body in the Eucharist”.

Reflecting on the Sacrament of Confirmation, Fr Patrick Lagan, St Eugene's, said: “Each of us is sent out by God...each given a certain task”.

“Sr Clare's act of self-giving to Christ is, without doubt, an inspiration,” he added, pointing out that each person is made for greatness and that it is the Sacrament of Confirmation that reminds us of that.

“With Confirmation, we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on us for whatever role we have...Our old self has gone and we now have a sacred task and mission. When the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles, they didn't stay in the upper room, they went out on mission”.

Fr Patrick went on to recall Pope Benedict saying that when the hands of the bishop are outstretched during the ceremony of Confirmation, the Holy Spirit comes upon us to protect us, adding: “He calls us into a friendship with Him, and He will never leave us”.

Healing

Leading a Healing Service during the retreat, Fr Michael McGoldrick OCD reflected on the Sacrament of Reconciliation, noting, from reading the book, ‘Alone, With Christ Alone’, that

it was a sacrament Sr Clare had availed of regularly.

He said: “To appreciate the role of Confession in her life, one has to see it in the context of her love for Jesus. She fell madly in love for Him when she had her conversion. When she realised that she had offended Jesus in some way, she wanted to be reconciled with Him. “She became aware of her sinfulness and that is characteristic of holy people; they become deeply aware of the distance between God and themselves. Her failures never discouraged her. When she did fall, she turned immediately to Jesus.”

Speaking about Vocation, Fr Gerard Mongan, CC Three Patrons, recalled going into a chapel during his time of discerning what to do after finishing his studies, and asking God: “What do you want me to do?” He added: “I just heard in my heart, ‘Your peace in life will be as a priest.’”

“What unites us all,” continued Fr Gerard, “is the vocation given to us at our baptism, when we receive the call to be saints.”

He went on to point out: “The vast majority of us are not called to a convent or monastery, but to witness where we are – in our homes, schools, workplaces – in the daily dying to self, in putting others first as an act of love. We can fill our day with holy moments such as trying to control our

temper, instead of lashing out, trying to stay in a state of grace and as close to God as we can.”

Saying that saints are not sad, but joyful and happy, Fr Gerard noted that Sr Clare's joy in her vocation was summed up in her own words: “I was so, so happy and even days when things are difficult it is worth giving my life to God”.

Celebrating Mass in memory of all those who had died in the earthquake in Ecuador, Fr Colm Power, of the Home of the Mother, shared some of his memories of Sr Clare's faith life after joining the Servant Sisters: “She took off like a rocket! I think it is funny how her surname rhymes with rocket – The Crockett Rockett!”

Highlighting the privilege for the people of Derry and Ireland in having Sr Clare's body in their midst, Fr Colm urged: “You must listen to her and follow her...and in order to follow her you need four non-negotiable foundations in your lives – Mass, Adoration, the Rosary and Confession.

“The closer you get to God, the more He will perfect you and capacitate you so that you, like Sr Clare, can be salt for the earth and light for the world. There is rampant despair and suicide. It is into that world that we are sent forth and, in order to be what we are meant to be, we need the Eucharist, the Rosary and Confession”.

Family and friends reminisce to offer deeper insight into life of Sr Clare

DEVOTEES of Sr Clare whose lives have been touched by the story of the fun-filled young nun from the Brandywell, as relayed in the film, ‘All or Nothing’, and book, ‘Alone, With Christ Alone’, welcomed the opportunity during the week-long retreat to get a deeper insight into her life and conversion from worldly desires to desiring only to love and serve others through giving her life to God.

Finding it strange to be sharing ‘Clare’ with the world, the Servant Sister's sibling, Shauna Gill reflected on an ordinary childhood, with its fun and fights, laughter and tears, and how, while they had been “brought up in a faith filled family”, there had been “certainly no evidence of a religious life in the carry on that we got up to as children, the carry on that Clare often put in motion”

“It just goes to show how little we really know about what goes on in other people's hearts and minds, even those that are closest to us,” remarked Shauna, “We know little about the relationship others have with God, and less about their secret longings or spiritual needs.”

She recalled their reaction at her sister's announcement that she was

“going away to be a nun”, as the same as that when she announced she had a Saturday job washing dishes in a local restaurant...“It was hard to believe”.

Shauna added: “As a family we are still learning about Clare's life as a nun, about her great happiness in God and in doing God's work. And we have learned that even in her darkest days she never gave up, she never despaired, but always got on with devoting her life wholly to God and to those in need of her love.

“It's clear to us that God always had bigger plans for our Clare and has even bigger plans after her death, she is still helping others. Her infectious smile is still lighting up rooms, shop windows, people's lives. Even though she has us, her family, worked to the bone in her cause, we are unbelievably proud of her beautiful life. We are in awe of her achievements, of the boundless love and care she gave to those in need. Our Clare taught us, and the world, the wonder of God's ways”.

Sr Clare's friend, Sharon Doran spoke of her love to perform and the many opportunities she found to do so in school and out of it, and not necessarily on a stage. Such was



Sr Clare's friend, Sharon Doran

Clare's talent that she often had her peers transfixed by her impromptu performances, whether it be in character, singing, or reciting her hilarious poetry.

She recalled them joining the youth faith group, COR, together and it was through this that Sharon had received the opportunity to go to Spain, but passed it on to Clare when she took ill with her appendix. Not the trip to the sun that she had thought it would be, Clare instead had the life-changing experience during that Holy Week



pilgrimage that led to her spending the rest of her life under the warmth of the gaze of God's Son.

While initially worried about her friend's happiness, Sharon said that when they met again a few years later, after Clare had taken her vows, "she looked radiant".

"Sadly, that was the last time I saw her, but she reassured me

that she was happy and that she would always be with me. And, she remains with me to this day".

Rascal

Greta McTague, Sr Clare's drama teacher at St Cecilia's College, in Derry, declared: "Clare Crockett was a rascal and don't let anyone tell you otherwise", before going

on to share her admiration of her "effortless" talent.

She added: "Her imagination gave her a pass, to move beyond the borders that other people may have built around themselves. It was like breathing to Clare".

Recalling how Clare "had people in the palm of her hand but she treated them with love, respect and compassion", Mrs McTague remarked: "Clare was the kind of rascal who sat beside the girl in the sixth form study, who appeared to be alone, just to see how she was, to casually ask how she was getting on and stay for a while...long enough to leave the other girl happier in her skin, feeling acknowledged and restored by Clare's act of reaching out to her. Clare made me smile every day that I taught her. And I think we could all do with more rascals like that".

Fr Colm Power, of the Home of the Mother, spoke of Sr Clare's generosity of spirit and incredible courage, and her sense for the

authentic. Noting that her witness had attracted over four million YouTube views of the film on her life, he remarked: "I think God is only beginning with this".

Having concelebrated at her funeral in the Long Tower Church, Fr Colm recalled Bishop McKeown telling those gathered: "Give thanks for Sr Clare but let's not lose sight of what she gave her life for – the Defence of the Eucharist, the Defence of the Honour of Our Mother, especially in the privilege of her Virginity, and the Conquest of the Youth for Jesus Christ".

Fr Colm added: "She is still conquering youth for Christ. God knows what He is doing. Sr Clare gave Him her 'yes' and I think she is encouraging us to do the same".

The final talk was given by Sr Kelai, of the Home of the Mother, who spoke about the love of Jesus that Sr Clare experienced in her life, and how it changed her, pointing out that He is looking to do the same for each of us.

"What can you do when Love comes and asks, Will you love me back? Sr Clare said 'yes' and that is why we see her smile so joyful and transmitting so much," said Sr

Kelai, adding: "We are all made of the same stuff. It is God who wants to make us into something great. Hopefully we can all respond with as much generosity as Sr Clare".



Our faith serves us up rich fare! We are a blessed people! – Bishop Donal



REFLECTING on the great week of prayer and talks that took place in April to celebrate Vocations Week in the Diocese, Bishop Donal comments on the wonderful example of the life of Sr Clare Crockett and the impressive interest in the week-long retreat to mark the fifth anniversary of her death, aged 33.

He also highlights the beginning of the Irish Church's journey of discernment as it prepares for a National Synod within the next five years, and expresses his hopes for the Vatican Symposium on the Theology of Priesthood early next year.

Paying tribute to the Diocesan 'Laudato Si' group, Bishop Donal encourages parishes and schools to engage with its Environmental Strategy, which can be accessed on the Diocesan website.

Delighted that parishes in the Donegal section of the Diocese will now be able to welcome people in for public worship, he also addresses the situation for northern parishes regarding the celebration of First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

And, looking at the many Feasts to be celebrated during the month of May, Bishop Donal gives thanks that we are such a blessed people.

Impressive Sr Clare Retreat.

The retreat to celebrate the fifth anniversary of Sr Clare Crockett's death was impressive.

The organisers had put together a programme that combined prayer,

testimonies and catechesis. And the grace which inspired the week of prayer was reflected in both the local enthusiasm and the wide on-line participation.

This young woman's life story is so close to the experience of the local community. She gave her life to the service of Christ and of others, and her self-giving has been life-giving for many.

I am delighted that there are plans to make this an annual event. There is a hunger for authentic young witnesses to faith. I pray that this festival of faith will inspire a new wave of prayerful young evangelisers.

God calls each person to be part of the Church's mission.

Good Shepherd Sunday is always a divine opportunity to reflect on who we are as Church in the image of Christ, and what ministries are needed if we are to be a Christ-centred Church. Thus, Vocations Sunday is both a chance to reflect on who we are as Church, and on the belief that God calls each person to be part of the Church's mission.

Our materials for the days leading up to Vocations Sunday wanted to encourage parishes to be aware of the need for ministries, and of the need to be a community that helps individuals discern the divine call to holiness.

Fr Chris Ferguson and his colleagues put a lot of work into preparing reflections and prayers. The Catechetical Centre sent out reflections for school use. Youth Ministry took Vocation as its theme for the week. And, the Vocations Team organised five Vocations Conversations from the Cathedral Hall.

These conversations focussed on how people discerned their call to holiness – as a married couple, as a priest, to 40 years of working with young people and to studying theology.

The specific call to ordained ministry and religious life remains

challenging. The culture emphasis is on 'me' and 'now'. The idea of being called by God to a life-long commitment seems strange to many. However, especially in difficult times, God still calls individuals to dedicate their lives to His service.

The call to heroism rather than to hedonism will still touch a chord in some hearts – as long as they can hear the voice of Jesus in prayer and in their community.

Symposium on Theology of Priesthood.

One of the great emphases of the Second Vatican Council was St Peter's teaching about us all being "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9).

Ordained ministry is then situated within the People of God. St Augustine taught this clearly. "Where I'm terrified by what I am for you, I am given comfort by what I am with you. With you I am a Christian, for you I am a bishop." (Sermon 340)

I hope that the Vatican symposium on the theology of priesthood, exploring the relationship between the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of all the baptised, from February 17-19, 2022, will enable us to understand more clearly everyone's call to holiness – and everyone's role in making the Church vibrant with the holy priesthood of Jesus, the eternal High Priest.

Irish Church beginning journey of discernment.

At their March 2021 meeting, the Irish Bishops decided to initiate a process in the Irish Church, leading to a Synodal Assembly in perhaps five years.

The Bishops' Conference plans the next two years as a period of prayer, listening and discernment, involving a nationwide consultative conversation on this theme. Following this, there will be a three-year preparation leading towards a National Synodal

Assembly.

Before embarking on the Synodal Pathway consultation, bishops are inviting submissions to reflect on what methods/models to adopt in these coming two years of conversations.

Individual and groups are invited to submit ideas as to...

- how the national conversation might best be conducted,
- what hard-to-reach groups need to be involved.

For further information on making a submission go to www.catholicbishops.ie/synod.

Please note that submissions are sought by May 23, 2021, and can be made directly online through that website.

This is the beginning of a journey as we discern what God is calling us to become in the 21st century under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We do not need to know where God is leading us. God knows. Prayerful hearts will be open to deciding the way forward.

Diocesan Environmental Strategy welcomed.

I am very grateful to the Diocesan 'Laudato Si' group for putting a huge amount of work into developing a Diocesan Environmental Strategy.

The diocese has a large number of buildings – churches, houses and community facilities. We use a vast amount of fuel to heat these buildings. The focus is on how we can best be environmentally conscious as to how we control our fuel emissions.

Our young people have a strong sense of justice when it comes to the environment. A polluted world is most damaging for the weak and the sick.

Pope Francis is clear that an emphasis on the environment is not some sort of worship of an Earth Goddess! He calls for a world where the power of the strong does not abuse the fragility of the weak and underprivileged. A greedy

world damages the future for all.

I hope that our parishes and schools can engage with the strategy, so that we can play our part in maintaining a beautiful world where praise can be given to our Father in Heaven.

Welcoming the People of God back into Church for Mass.

I am delighted that our parishes in Donegal will be able to welcome the People of God back into Church for Mass. It has been a very long and exhausting time for many people since the beginning of the year.

Church is not Church without public worship of the Lord and without the community gathered together. Clergy and laity need each other!

However, experience in the North has been very encouraging, with very positive numbers of people wanting to be back at Mass. I hope and pray that this can be the case in the Republic as well.

Celebrating Sacraments of Initiation.

The Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and First Holy Communion – are important events in the life of any parish. And they can also be significant social events. Families and children love the opportunity to celebrate a special event.

The pandemic has challenged us to see how we can best celebrate these key sacraments, not just now but into the future.

How do we ensure that First Holy Communion is not also the Last Holy Communion – at least until Confirmation? How do we try to make Confirmation a deeper initiation into a community of faith rather than a rite of passage away from any real connection with parish?

This year, I have asked our parishes in Northern Ireland to consider when the appropriate time is to celebrate Confirmation and First Holy Communion.

That will involve consideration of whether the children have had a chance to be prepared, and what number of ceremonies would be needed to ensure that numbers in Church are not dangerously large.

Some parents will be disappointed for all sorts of reasons. But our emphasis has always to be on the integrity of Christ's sacraments and the safety of God's people.

Great emphasis in May on the Holy Family.

Our Liturgical Year is rich with great Feasts that celebrate how God's grace has been at work in so many people. The emphasis is never on what we do for God. It is always on what the psalmist says – "what wonders the Lord worked for us, indeed we were glad". (Ps 126:3)

There is a great emphasis in May on the Holy Family. We begin with the Feast of St Joseph. In Mary's month of May, Pope Francis has asked us to pray the Rosary for an end to the pandemic. And during the month of May, we celebrate Our Lady of Fatima, May 13, Mary Mother of the Church, May 24, and the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, May 31.

This year, on the eve of Our Lady's Birthday, September 7, the Legion of Mary celebrates 100 years since its foundation in Dublin. This year is a great opportunity to rediscover the missionary zeal of Frank Duff. He and his colleagues went out onto the streets and sought to reach those who were far from the faith, beginning with women who had been forced into prostitution.

This centenary is also an invitation to rediscover the Lay Apostolate, where lay organisations in the Church take on a key role in bringing the Gospel to those on the margins.

Of course, this time of the year is also endowed with the celebration of the Ascension, May 16, Pentecost, May 23, and the Feast of the Holy Trinity, May 30.

Our faith serves us up rich fare! We are a blessed people.

Sr Clare's Face *by Fr Stephen Quinn OCD*

WHEN you see a footballer like Diego Maradona running with the football at his feet and English defenders helpless to do anything about him, all those deft touches, agile nimble feet, and the strength to run through men, you just have to sit and wonder, is that ball magnetised to his boots, or is it just that he can make that ball do just about anything, even that great goal of Mexico 1986?

It was the same with other great sportsmen and women. Just have a look at Tiger Woods, at one stage in his career you would have thought that he could make those golf clubs sing! Tiger Woods could get himself stuck directly behind a tree, in an apparently insurmountable trap, and somehow, he was able to bend that ball around that obstacle like a banana and still manage to get it to land on the green! All of us ordinary mortals can just utter the unsatisfactory response, "Wow!"

There is a similarity when you open some literature. Take any classic novel written by Charles Dickens, on first perusal it just seems like a book, but as soon as a person starts to read it a whole world seems to come off the pages, the reader is thrust into a series of terrific adventures, encounters with strangely named characters, and yet all the time you remain stuck to your chair at home. You cannot help yourself but be awed by the fact that all this came out of an imagination of one man!

Then there are artists like Caravaggio and Rembrandt who begin with a blank canvas and then with a few strokes of a brush, a daub there, a dot there, a shape, a dash of colour, and slowly, painstakingly, a masterpiece starts to reveal itself. As you watch these people at their arts, without so much as a word being uttered in explanation, you instantaneously recognise what you are seeing; talent, someone special, a genius!

I cannot speak for anyone else but the first time I watched Sr Clare Crockett's movie I recognised immediately what I was seeing in front of me on a screen. It was so manifest that it just did not need words; you could see a talent, someone special, a genius in her own right. A genius not in terms of such prosaic things as footballs, golf clubs, books, and paints but in the business of living a human life. Those ancient words of St Irenaeus of Lyons come firmly to mind, "the glory of God is a man or a woman fully alive."

How many books are there to be read about Christ, about prayer, and about Christian discipleship? They seem to grow on trees, they are so commonplace, and their message is so facile that they could be two to a penny. In this young woman you could see something so much more than empty sentiments. You can identify that a flesh and blood mortal came into contact with the mysterious and

supernatural reality of Christ and the mixture of the two was and remains a potent concoction.

Devotions

Let me share with you one of my many hobby horses; the damage that is being done by our popular devotions to our encounter with and understanding of the saints. Those very devotions run the risk of reducing the saints to little more than pious irrelevance. Our statues and devotions boil our saints down to their lowest common denominators. Just look at many of the statues that modern church iconography dishes up and you will see nothing but repetition and uniformity; you will find their hands neatly folded, they have big baby eyes, those eyes remain fixed permanently turned upward imploring heavenly favours, each has a bright innocent face and their mouths seemed to be locked in permanent prayer. It is the same hackneyed design no matter which saint you care to mention.

They almost seem to be little better than pious dolls for children to play with, and what earthly or even heavenly use is a doll to any real person? Catholic faith is not interested in spiritual escapism from the real consequences of living, it is fascinated and always on the lookout for real people, living real lives, in the reality of Jesus.

Look at the photograph published with this article, and I ask you is that the face of a doll? We have used the same image for Sr Clare's prayer cards, her calendars, and the mural in the Brandywell.

To first appearances it is just the same old Clare, the pretty face of a budding actress and presenter, the bright intelligent eyes of a girl who thought the rules did not apply to her, that cheeky grin and sparkle that drew the attention of others, and that seemed to draw every camera in the room to her with magnetic effect. Yet, do you notice in equal measure that the face is also streaked with new substance? It is no longer the happy go lucky girl who spent so much of her life flying by the seat of her pants; a new, more enduring happiness is spreading across her face. We cannot chalk this change down to simply putting on the habit and veil of a Servant Sister. Real joy can never be arrived at simply because a person has changed their outward vesture!

Rather, it is the discovery of

a happiness that does not come from outside of ourselves but that bubbles up from within, from that deepest place within a person, where the Almighty fastened it from the beginning. It is a happiness that can never be accessed by jealously guarding what is our own or by striving to fill ourselves to the brim with all kinds of 'stuff'.

Happiness

The joy that we are talking about comes to us in precisely the opposite direction. The spreading smile of Sr Clare informs us that she has come to this wisdom, her happiness is that of a young woman who is not seeking her own glory but the glory of Him who had 'kissed' her so profoundly on Good Friday. It is a happiness not based on the philosophies of the world of saving away for a rainy day, but is spendthrift with itself. A happiness that begins each day with a commitment to how much she is prepared to give. A happiness not of percentages, but that has only one measurement, that being one hundred percent, further that it knew that the next day would call out a little more, and the day after that still a little more.

Clare could not have been clearer. Her happiness is the happiness of one who had written to Christ a blank cheque, so that His happiness would become hers; "the happiness of one who had come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Her greatest happiness came from giving her all to the duties and responsibilities that her vocation placed upon her, in teaching the children to revere the Blessed Sacrament for their First Communion in Jacksonville. It came in searching out the lost soul who had not frequented the Church for decades in Valencia, and in volunteering for the class that struggled the most with their academics in Playa Prieta.

The photograph is so beautiful because it is not just her own beauty that appears, Christ's joy and beauty fills in her own, as the Word becomes flesh and lives in Sr Clare.

Just as the earthquake five years ago did not wipe the smile from Sr Clare nor dull the power of her life and witness, even if the Church acknowledges her as sharing in the life of heaven, that will not exhaust the significance of her life. As so many saints have said they will still have a mission to carry out in Heaven, Sr Clare's mission, I think, will be to go on speaking to a youth that has forgotten its own dignity and integrity and to the people of Derry.

There is a real tendency in Irish Catholics to remain aloof and to always go for the back pews of the Church, to believe that they are there only under sufferance, and



Sr Clare as a novice.

to fall for the temptation that the Lord never really meant for them to be there, or that he had called their name every bit as much as Clare Crockett, Paul, Peter, Andrew, James and John.

Saints

From her place in Heaven, Sr Clare addresses herself to them. From the back pews, the wisdom of the Early Church seems like foolishness. St Paul, when he wrote to those earliest communities, had his own particular manner of addressing them, "saints of the church of Rome", "saints of the church of Corinth", "saints of the Church in Ephesus". Paul was never one for engaging in fits of sentimentality or massaging the egos of his audience, he was always a straight shooter and, obviously, when he addressed those Christians in this manner, he meant what he said.

Paul was profoundly keyed in on what a saint genuinely was. A saint was a real person who, not for any merit of their own, nor because of any fault that they had demonstrated, had been gifted the life of God as a sheer generous gift from the open hands of the

Heavenly Father, who wanted to give it to them. Paul knew that there was only one necessary ingredient that any new saint needed to add to the mix.

They, like the Blessed Mother of God, had to give their assent; they had to will it, they had to want it and they had to want it more than anything else in this world. Paul comprehended that with this type of wanting, all things become possible for the one who has received such a gift. The greatest sinner could become one of God's holy ones. He knew this better than we know it, for where had he come from and what had he become? To the people in the back pews, in the front pews, in fact in all pews, this same title is addressed to each.

Sr Clare, from her smiling photograph, addresses it to each, just as Paul does. Imagine her saying to you, "saint of the church of Derry!" I well imagine your first reaction being to turn around to see who was behind you and that a "Who me?" would slip from your lips. That reaction speaks so deeply of the sense of alienation and disenfranchisement that people have become trapped into,

far away from the reality of the offer God makes to them.

We, in the Church, speak about the evangelisation of the laity, the formation of the laity, the empowerment of the laity, but this seems like mere jargon when people do not know something so central to the faith and have not moved into some kind of comfortableness with the offer. It is maybe only when they see it for themselves in the real life of a flesh and blood mortal, will they come to know its beauty and truth, and realise that they must do something themselves about the offer.

The face on the blue and green image smiles out at everyone who will look at her. Here is one who grew up amongst ordinary people of Derry city, who knew from the insides all the temptations of the world as we know it now, who had to make a choice and made it with all her heart.

She challenges us from that stationary position on the photo... "If I can do it, then anyone can do it." Just choose it for yourself and go after it with all your heart.

Fr Paddy McIntyre reflects on six decades of priesthood

NOW in his 85th year, Derry-born Fr Paddy McIntyre still enjoys helping out with the celebration of Mass and hearing Confessions in St Eugene's Cathedral, in the parish where he grew up and then returned to live following his retirement seven years ago, after giving 30 years of his priesthood to the Missions.

Sharing his story with 'The Net' during the nine-days of Vocations prayer in the Diocese, Fr Paddy recalled a journey spanning over six decades that his working class childhood in 1930s' Derry and Donegal heritage had prepared him well for.

One of nine children born to Anne (nee Doherty) and Charlie McIntyre, he spoke of having four sisters and one brother, with his mother losing three children "because of the poverty of the people" at the time.

While he was born and bred in Derry, where his father was reared, Fr Paddy's roots are firmly planted in Inishowen, with his mother having come from Buncrana and his father's parents both born on Inch Island.

"I was baptised the day I was born," he noted, remarking: "The maximum you would have waited back then was three days, and you could get baptised any day of the week".

Crediting his parents with being the most influential in the nurturing of his faith, Fr Paddy also spoke of the impact of the administrator of St Eugene's in his youth, Fr Hugh Browne, saying: "He was tall and a very fine bearing man, who was very much in charge of the Women's Confraternity for years. There was something special about him. There would have been an aura of awe about him, but that really would have been the case for all the priests at that time".

Describing himself as growing up in "a very ordinary Derry family", he recalled: "My parents would have gone to Mass every Sunday without fail and we had the practice of saying the Rosary every night in the family home".

The first religious vocation in his family, Fr Paddy was about 16 years old when he felt an early call to the priesthood, and he recalled hearing priests speak about vocations during his final years at St Columb's College, where he was struck by the example of Fr Kelly, whom he described as "a good, gentle, holy man".

He added: "We also read the weekly Catholic paper, 'The Universe', which included information about the different religious orders, and reading the Far East and the Africa magazines as well gave me the idea of priesthood and mission".

"At that time, when you decided you wanted to be a priest, the practice was that you did a Bishop's Exam. There were about 18 of us and eight, including John Hume and Joe Coulter,

were chosen for the Diocese. If you were not going to Maynooth for the Derry Diocese, then you went looking for a seminary where you would be accepted and I was accepted in the Kilkenny seminary.

"So, after finishing at St Columb's, I went to St Kieran's College, the diocesan seminary in Kilkenny. A lot of priests from the Derry Diocese went there in following years. Priests normally didn't come into a diocese unless they had attended the seminary in Maynooth or Rome, but later they were allowed to go to Kilkenny".

Describing his six years in the seminary as being very formative, he continued: "It was strict and challenging. I was never allowed into Kilkenny City unless when I was going home on holidays. We had our values at home too, we were brought up to be honest and truthful and respectful".

Amongst the 35 others who were ordained at the same time as Fr Paddy were Tom Burke, Danny Canning, Malachy McKinney, and Jim McAleney, who all went through St Columb's together.

Ordained in St Mary's Cathedral, Kilkenny, on June 5, 1960, by Bishop Patrick Dunne, who was the Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin and Titular Bishop of Nara, Fr Paddy explained: "The Bishop of Salford had adopted me during my training in the seminary, as was the practice, so after I was ordained I went to minister in the Salford Diocese, in Greater Manchester, in July 1960.

"Salford took in all the mill factory areas – Bolton, Blackburn, Rochdale, Oldham and many others besides. I was appointed to St Mary's Heaton Norris Parish in Stockport, which was small compared to St Eugene's. The parish priest was Fr Jim Murphy, from Redcastle, Co Donegal. The people were very kind and welcoming and I was there for eight quite happy years. I was sad when I left it.

Welcoming

"Stockport was a satellite city of Manchester. The streets were pebbled and at that time many homes had no electricity. We had the lamplight. It was a very working class area and there was quite a lot of poverty there."

He added: "I moved from there to Patricroft, to the Holy Cross Parish, which was very much working class as well. I was there 16 years, from September 14, 1968, until September 1984, during which time I became the parish priest. Again, the people were very warm and welcoming.

"I remember receiving a letter out of the blue to say that I was to be chaplain to St Patrick's Secondary School, which I wasn't too happy about as I didn't think I was the right person for it. But, I grew into the role during the first year and got to love it. It became a

very important part of my life and I had a great relationship with the teachers and pupils, and some of them, both teachers and pupils, are my friends still to this day. I had very happy years there.

"The classroom is always a challenge when dealing with a mixed school, but it turned out to be a very fulfilling role. It opened up opportunities for sport, such as table tennis, tennis and badminton. I was never much of a soccer player but I took part in their games. I was involved at all levels of the school and got on very well with the young people".

Fr Paddy's priestly journey took a different path in 1984, when the new bishop of Salford, Bishop Patrick Kelly, who was from Southport but whose family came from Donegal, sent out a letter asking if anyone wanted to go to the Missions.

"I volunteered to go to South America," he said, adding: "I was about 47 years old at the time. My mother had died that year, and my father had died previously, and when a priest's parents die he is like an orphan. I also felt that it was time to move on from the parish I was in. I had done what I had to do, and when I responded to the Bishop's letter, I got permission to go to South America.

"It was meant to be for five years and then you went back to your Diocese, but I was there for 30 years through the St James Society, which was founded over 60 years ago by the Cardinal Archbishop of Boston, Richard Cushing. I had friends who had gone there, so I decided to go".

Founded in 1958, The Missionary Society of St James the Apostle is an international organisation of diocesan missionary priests who volunteer for a minimum of five years to minister in Peru, and previously in Ecuador and Bolivia.

Fr Paddy recalled: "I went to Bolivia for a six-month language course to learn Spanish, and at the end of that the director asked me where I would like to go – Ecuador, Bolivia or Peru. I said Bolivia, because I knew Fr Phil McKenna and Sr Maureen Coyle, who were both from St Eugene's Parish like me, were already working in Bolivia and I had met them during my time there. However, he then told me that I was going to Ecuador, which is the one I didn't want to go to because of the heat.

"So, I was sent from language school to Ecuador. It was very hot on the coast, where I stayed for a couple of weeks before I was sent to the Andes, to a height of 10,000 feet, where it was cool and spring-like all year round and the area was surrounded by snow-clad mountains."

He went on to speak of the struggle of that first year: "It was very difficult, but I had a very good Bishop. At that time,

there was no heat, no water, no sewerage, no church, no house for me to live in, and the roads were desperate. That didn't matter so much to me as my mother's people had come from a rural area where there were no toilets. It wasn't the poverty, it was the culture and the language that was tough. Our Society's motto was to seek out the poorest of the poor.

"I rented a couple of rooms when I first arrived, which didn't have a bed or a lock on the door. I later discovered that it was a dangerous place to be staying in. I had an old jeep that I could use, so I had wheels to go into the big city, which was less than an hour's drive from where I lived, but the roads were very dangerous to drive on. I remember one priest who came to visit me being terrified after the drive".

He continued: "Initially, I was sent to work with another priest, who was from Scotland and his first language was Gallic. After three years, I moved across to the other side of the mountain to La Santa Cruz...another Holy Cross Parish. You could say that all my priestly life I sheltered under the Holy Cross".

"I had a CB radio to communicate with," said Fr Paddy, "and had arranged to contact my Scottish priest friend at 8 am every morning and again at 8 pm in the evening, but he was never there when I called, morning or night!

"I was the only priest in La Santa Cruz, which served around 30,000 people, and I had to begin the whole build up of a parish. Before I arrived, a priest would have come every few months to visit or say a Mass there. There were Catholics and the nucleus of a parish was there, but there was no ecclesiastical parish set-up. I would have been the first parish priest.

Poverty

"There were well established parishes side-by-side to the poverty where I lived, which were run by the Salesians, Dominicans and Franciscans, etc. I started a building plan from the day I arrived there and, within the first two years, I had a house and a church, and eventually built about six other smaller chapels in other parts of the mountain".

Learning very quickly that there were groups that would help Missionaries to do the things they needed to do, he said: "The money came in different ways. I applied to two German Catholic organisations and they would have been the mainstay of the financial aspect. Funds also came from people in my former parishes in the Salford Diocese, and from my home parish of St Eugene's, here in Derry. The Germans really did give the bulk of the financial help, but I also got assistance from organisations like The Little Way Society, CAFOD



Fr Paddy McIntyre, St Eugene's Parish, reflects on 61 years of priesthood during the Week of Prayer for Vocations.



Bishop Donal with Frs Paddy McIntyre, Tom Burke and Frank McLaughlin, following the celebration of Mass in St Eugene's Cathedral last year to mark their Diamond Ordination Jubilees.



and Trocaire.

“You just began your begging to get money for the building of the house, chapel, school, college, nursery etc. The people in the parish could see what I was doing and were open to helping, but they had no money. They were living in very difficult situations. I got in contact with engineers in the capital city, Quito, to help with the development, and there was a Jesuit priest from Spain who was a wonderful help to me”.

“For the first two years,” he continued, “we said Mass outside, with the mid-day sun beaming down on us. It was a very colourful existence. We lived at 10,000 feet and rising, higher and higher into the Andes, and two or three times a year I went up the mountain; it was quite a climb! Thousands of people came in from everywhere and were squatting on the land of the rich.

“When I built a parish church, it became the centre and so the people came there. There were weddings every week and I had baptisms every Saturday of the year. On Holy Saturday, there could have been 40-50 baptisms, but on average there were about six baptisms every week.

“The mortality rate was very high. I will never forget one particular occasion. I wasn’t there too long when one night,

while celebrating Mass, a family arrived out of nowhere with a cardboard box and inside was a new-born baby that had died. I was burying a lot of children that did not survive, but that would have been the case for many families in Ireland at that time as well; that was a reality of life then”.

With Religious Education not allowed to be taught in schools, Fr Paddy went about getting a programme of catechesis set up, with the help of the Sisters of Divine Providence and Immaculate Conception, who had arrived in the parish about a couple of weeks before him.

He remarked: “We had another very important group of sisters too, the Franciscan Missionaries of St Joseph. This Order was founded in the Diocese of Salford, in Manchester, where it still has a very strong presence. They are known locally as the Patricroft Sisters as that is where they had their home for poor children. Some of them ended up coming to Ecuador, like me, and I got them set up working in the parish that I was in. They are still in Ecuador working with priest friends of mine, though no longer in La Santa Cruz.

“We were very blessed with the Sisters. They were such an important part of the whole set up

and still are. Every Saturday and Sunday, we had hundreds and hundreds of children coming for the catechism programme, and then for First Holy Communion and Confirmation preparation.

“We were really building practically from nothing. There was a skeleton presence of a religion. The people had been baptised and knew that they were Catholics, but that was about it. Their children went to school, but extremely few were going to university. However, it was a growing experience. Everything was changing from day-to-day; the water came, then the electricity, and then the roads began to improve”.

Aged 77, Fr Paddy retired in October 2013 and returned to live in his childhood home in Derry. During his 30 years in his parish up in the Andes, he came home every two years for a couple of months. And, as part of the mission with the Society, to help raise funds, he had to go to Boston and give talks in parishes about the Society of St James and the mission work he was doing.

Commenting on his experience, Fr Paddy said: “All my priesthood was complemented. I gave the Salford Diocese 24 years and South America 30 years, and it was a very joyful and challenging time. I am delighted that I had

the English experience and the experience of South America was more like a rebirth in every way. I couldn’t even speak the language at the start.

“There was a lot of humour and fun along the way and I was sad to leave, but I realised that I was old, living in a young continent and was not one of their own. We needed someone to come in who was one of their own and that has happened”.

Keeping in contact with the friends he made in Ecuador, Fr Paddy has been back there to visit twice since his retirement, and during one of those visits the earthquake occurred that killed Sr Clare Crockett.

“I was in Quito at the time”, he recalled, “and we were frightened out of our lives, although the earthquake was on the West Coast, where Sr Clare was, and I was up in the mountains. In the course of the following days, we learnt what had happened. I hadn’t known that there was a young Derry nun living down on the coast”.

Highly recommending the missionary life, Fr Paddy had this to say to anyone considering it: “If you feel that God is calling you to be a missionary, answer the call”.

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.

A letter from Sebastiano....

A letter from former Derry Youth Community member, Sebastiano Pellizzari, as he celebrates his conferment to the Ministry of the Lectorate in his home Diocese of Vicenza, in Italy...

Dear friends,

It has already been almost two years since I left the Derry Youth Community (DYC) and the City of Derry, and returned to my seminary in the Diocese of Vicenza, in Italy. I join with you through this letter to tell you how my vocation and life journey is progressing.

On Sunday, April 11, I was conferred to the Ministry of the Lectorate, along with five other companions, by my Bishop, Monsignor Beniamino Pizziol. The Lectorate, which occurs in Italy at the end of the third year of Theology, is a lay ministry and in the path of the seminary has an educational value for life and faith, and represents a little but significant step towards the priesthood.

This ministry is given to me in order to proclaim the Readings to the liturgical assembly, to take care of and educate the faithful in the understanding of the Word of God. However, before all this, we have to commit ourselves to welcome, meditate, know and proclaim with one’s life the Word of God, because if one is not able to dialogue with God one will never be able to speak of God with the people.

The ministry of Lectorate, in the words of the Rector of my Seminary, Don Aldo Martin, “is an exuberant gift, exceeding the capacity that each one has” and it’s given to me and to us freely. It is a gift a gift that the Lord gives us,

not starting from our capacities but which springs from Baptism and, therefore, from the Grace of God. It is a gift which is the fruit of God’s love for us.

I have lived, and am living this gift, with joy and thanksgiving to God, but I cannot hide a little fear because this is a gift that I have received not only for myself, because I am only an instrument of God where, like a channel of water, I allow God to reach the parishes and the people I meet on my way.

I wanted to write these few words to share with you my vocation journey because I feel very close to all of you. The two years I spent in Derry, specifically in the DYC, were so intense and beautiful, especially the many people I met,

that I cannot forget this amazing experience.

This step towards the Ministry of Lectorate is also thanks to the DYC experience, because it helped me to mature as a man and a Christian, and it gave me more strength and consciousness to walk towards the priesthood.

I ask you to pray for my vocation journey and for the many young people who are searching for God, and also for those who think they have lost God. May they be able to see in the people who are at their side a motherly and fatherly presence of God.

Remembering you in prayer, I greet you.

CIAO...God bless all of you, Sebastiano



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:

- All Priests (1st May)
- All Priests (2nd)
- Fr Michael Porter (3rd)
- All Priests (4th)
- Fr Ignacy Saniuta (5th)
- Fr John Ryder (6th)
- Fr Gerard Sweeney (7th)
- Fr Joseph Varghese (8th)
- Fr John Walsh (9th)
- Fr Alex Anderson (10th)
- Fr Patrick Arkinson (11th)
- Fr Patrick Baker (12th)
- Fr Declan Boland (13th)
- Fr Eugene Boland (14th)
- Fr Francis Bradley (15th)
- Fr Manus Bradley (16th)
- All Priests (17th)
- Fr Brian Brady (18th)
- All Priests (19th)
- Fr Thomas Canning (20th)
- Fr Michael Canny (21st)
- Fr John Cargan (22nd)
- Fr Neal Carlin (23rd)
- All Priests (24th)
- Fr Colum Clerkin (25th)
- Fr Roland Colhoun (26th)
- Fr Michael Collins (27th)
- Fr Oliver Crilly (28th)
- Fr Patrick Crilly (29th)
- Fr Brendan Crowley (30th)
- All Priests (31st)

Pope’s monthly intention

The Holy Father has asked for prayer during May for:

The world of finance:
Let us pray that those in charge of finance will work with governments to regulate the financial sphere and protect citizens from its dangers.

Prayer for Priests

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

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

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



Sebastiano with his parish priest.



Sebastiano with his parents and Bishop.

After 40 years as sacristans, Aghyaran couple happy to continue in this rewarding ministry

AGHYARAN couple, Veronica and Danny Dolan are set to break their parish's record for the longest-serving sacristans at the end of this year, after one of the strangest periods they have experienced in over 40 years in this ministry.

Having such close contact with their priest and fellow parishioners in their role as sacristans in St Patrick's Church, the couple found the whole experience of no congregation being present during the celebration of Mass, when public worship was not permitted due to Covid-19 restrictions, a very surreal and sad one, particularly for the Easter ceremonies.

"Everyone I talk to just wants things to get back to normal so that we can all come out to Mass together again, because at the minute, attendance at Mass is by townlands. It is so strange to be watching Mass being celebrated on a webcam," remarked Veronica, adding that every effort is made to ensure the safety of those who come into the chapel, with daily fogging carried out, as well as a more intense monthly clean, hand sanitisers provided and masks worn.

While Veronica, who is originally from Fermanagh, does the bulk of the work as sacristan now, it was her husband who carried out the majority of the duties for the first

30 years. Recently celebrating his 67th birthday, Danny recalled being only 27 years of age when he first took on the role.

He said: "Veronica and I got married in 1979 and the year after we were approached by parishioner, Johnny Owens about the sacristan job, which came with a house. The sacristan at the time, Paddy McGlinchey, was retiring and Fr McKeague, the parish priest here then, was looking for a young husband and wife to take over the sacristan duties. He wanted someone who was going to stay in the post a while, so Johnny told me to go and see him."

"I had thought it wasn't the right job for me when Johnny asked me," added Danny, "but I went up to talk to Fr McKeague and he just told me to start on Monday morning, and so, on January 1, 1981, I started work as the sacristan."

At first, the young couple lived in a mobile home on the site of the sacristan's house, until it was fixed up, and then nine years later they built a new home for their family a short distance from the chapel.

Recalling those early days as sacristan, when there were two priests in the parish and daily Mass, Danny said: "I had to get the key from the Parochial House every morning to open the chapel and leave it ready for Mass, and then leave the key back in the

Parochial House and return in the evening to lock the chapel for the night. After a while, I was told to keep the key.

"I was driving a lorry at that stage for parishioner, Michael Dolan, as well, but if there was a wedding, funeral, First Holy Communion, Confirmation, or a Mission, etc, I had to be there, and I would have 'hoovered' and cleaned the chapel beforehand.

"I was run off my feet, so I decided to start up locally as an undertaker, which I did for five years but had to stop following an accident which left me in bad health and unable to do the embalming."

"I was doing most of the work as sacristan at that time," he recalled, "although if I was late back, Veronica would have locked the chapel, and she also washed and ironed the linens during all those years.

Shared

"Then, about 15 years ago, I had to go away to work as a long distance lorry driver, so Veronica took on most of the sacristan duties. It's a job for a young family, so that the work can be shared, because it takes the two of us to do it."

While it is a seven-day week job, which makes it hard to get away on holidays, for Danny and Veronica it is a labour of love.

"I wouldn't give it up for the world! I love it!" remarked Danny, adding: "I think more about the chapel than I do about home and I do things at the chapel that I wouldn't do at home. The chapel is priority in our house and looking after it is no bother to us.

"I feel happy when I am in the chapel, where I was baptised and received all my sacraments, and I like to tend to the graves for people. I haven't been able to do as much in the last seven years because of my health, but I try to help Veronica out."

Looking back over the years, Veronica said: "There were lots of sorrowful and joyful occasions, and it was very busy, especially when we were bringing up a young family as well.

"In 1986, we had a mission and at that time I gave birth to twin boys, so that was a very busy time. Then, we had the 150th anniversary of the Church in 1990, which was a big occasion, as was getting the Church restored and rededicated in 2013.

"It has also been wonderful to be involved with teachers and children from the local primary school during First Holy Communion and Confirmation ceremonies."

She added: "There have been some big changes over the years too, like the introduction of altar girls in 2002, women taking a



more active role in liturgies, and getting an electric bell donated, which made life easier as I had to pull a rope for the funeral bell toll up to that. It was also a wonderful change to have an Altar Society and chapel cleaners, which has been a great help as we had been doing that ourselves."

As well as having enjoyed serving as sacristans over the years to six Diocesan priests, Fr McKeague, Fr O'Connor, Fr McGarrigle, Fr Logue, Fr Gilmore and now, Fr Frazer, and Aghyaran native priest, Fr Willie Sproule, who returned home after retiring from his ministry in Scotland and would have helped out with ceremonies, Veronica and Danny also feel privileged to have met and attended to four bishops – Bishop Edward Daly, Bishop

Francis Lagan, Bishop Seamus Hegarty and now, Bishop Donal McKeown, during Confirmation ceremonies in the parish.

While the couple's four children are now grown up and living nearby, they are still kept busy with their eight grandchildren... and another due to arrive in June. However, despite over 40 years of washing and ironing countless linens, Veronica agrees with Danny that it is both a blessing and a privilege to be able to continue to serve their parish community as sacristans.

"I thank God that I have been granted the health to do it," said Veronica, adding: "Every day is a good day when you can get up, and we find being sacristans very rewarding, mentally and spiritually."

May brings joy of Little Way Novena

THE annual Little Way Novena in honour of St Thérèse of Lisieux is currently on in St Eugene's Cathedral, May 9-16) and, much to the delight of devotees of the saint, additional times have been offered for this year's programme of ticket-only services to try and safely accommodate as many as possible hoping to attend in person.

The Novena offers an opportunity to pray for a special intention through the powerful intercession of St Thérèse, and is a time when many people experience great joy and healing.

This year's theme is - 'Holiness consists simply in doing God's will, and being just what God wants us to be'.

"I know of no other means to reach perfection than by love. To love: how perfectly our hearts are made for this! Sometimes I look for another word to use, but, in this land of exile, no other word so well expresses the vibrations of our soul. Hence we must keep to that one word: love". (St Thérèse, extract from 'Story of a Soul')

Due to current restrictions

tickets are required for entry to the Novena, which can also be viewed online via the Cathedral webcam.

Officially opened by Bishop Donal, the week of prayer includes morning Mass at 6.30 am, 7.15 am and 10 am, and evening services at 6 pm and 7.30 pm, Monday to Friday, with talks by Marie Lindsay, Jim Deeds, Fr Michael McGoldrick, OCD, Yvonne Rooney and Rev Robert Millar.

Mass for those who have died will be celebrated at 8.30 am and 10 am on Saturday, May 15, and the Novena closing ceremonies will be celebrated at 3 pm and 4.30 pm on Sunday, May 16.

St Thérèse candles will be on sale.



'Blessed Is She' lead introduction to Carmelite spirituality by Aoife O'Neill



THE first Sunday in May saw the return of the ladies ministry group, 'Blessed Is She' to Termonbacca Retreat Centre in Derry.

The group began a new seven-week programme exploring the theme of Carmelite Spirituality and how it can be applied to our lives today.

Fr Stephen Quinn gave the first talk, which was an overview of Carmelite Spirituality. The next six weeks will continue with a focus on a particular Carmelite female saint and how she can relate to us as women today.

The talks will be delivered by the ladies involved in the running of the group, along with the Carmelite Fathers at Termonbacca, Fr Michael McGoldrick and Fr Stephen Quinn.

The programme includes: Introduction to Carmelite

Spirituality, Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, May 2; St Teresa of Avila, Amanda Young, May 9; St Therese of Lisieux, Michelle McDaid, May 16; St Elizabeth of the Trinity, Sinead Doyle, May 23; St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Aoife O'Neill, May 30; Saints Louis and Zelig Martin, Fr Michael McGoldrick OCD, June 6; and St Teresa of the Andes, Fr Stephen Quinn OCD, June 13.

Each talk will begin at 8 pm, with the exception of weeks two and seven, which will begin at 8.15 pm due to the Sr Clare Mass on those evenings, and can be viewed online at <https://youtube.com/c/TermonbaccaDerry>

The talks can be watched live or after the event they will remain on the YouTube channel for viewing.

If anyone wishes to find out more please feel free to contact bleddisshederry@gmail.com

Termonbacca 48 hours' Adoration for end of Covid

THE Carmelite Fathers in Termonbacca are hosting 48 hours of Eucharistic Adoration in the Iona Retreat Centre from May 24-26.

Beginning on the Feast of Our Lady, Mother of the Church, the period of devotion has been organised in response to Pope Francis' call for prayer during May for the end of Covid.

The devotions will get underway at 7 pm on Monday, May 24 and end at 12 noon on Wednesday, May 26.

The prior, Fr Stephen Quinn is hoping to have two people present for each of the 48 hours, including throughout the night. Anyone who would like to do an hour, or more, is asked to contact Termonbacca on 028 71 262512.



Eangach

Ár nDúchas

Féile Chorp Chríost

Is in aeráid éigin eile
a ceapadh an pharáid seo
Chorp Chríost a thabhairt ar mhórshiúl;

samhlaím é ag baile
ag siúl anuas sráid chúng mheánmharach
teas na gréine á mhuirniú nóiméad
ag cúinní cearnóg.

Nó Críost an turasóir anaithnid
ach a phas stampáilte go fuarchúiseach
ag fir chustaim gléasta mar ba chóir.

Ach an pharáid stracaithe seo
coiscéimeanna as tiúin, stadach,
báisteach ag bagairt,
deineann sé de gach teach
ag gabháil thairis altóir.

Is na tráthnóintí brúite óige
lag le teas, greamaithe de shuíochán i gcúl
cairr
is guth as láthair sagairt i mbeola tannoy,

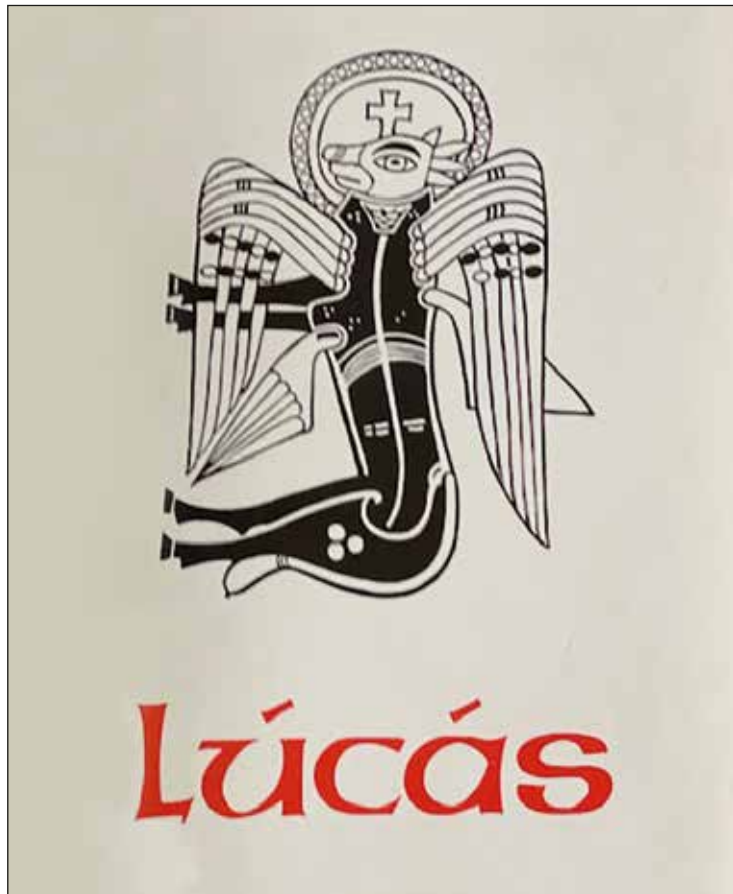
an rabhadar ar fad in aisce
nó an leor gur mhair i dtaisce
mothúcháin measctha le creideamh
is cuimhne míchompoid?

Thugamar droim láimhe fadó riamh
nuair a dhúisigh an corp
dá spioradáltacht stálaithe díphutógach,

Ach féach anois gur dhúisigh
Corp Chríost nocht á iompar
go tuathalach
míshuaimhneas arís ionat.

(Liam Ó Muirthile.
Buíochas le Cois Life.)

An Bíobla Naofa



Soiscéal 1964

Tá sé daichead bliain ó foilsíodh An Bíobla Naofa in 1981. Tá eagrán nua idir lámha i mbliana — ceiliúradh cuí ar shaothar suntasach Bhíobla Mhá Nuad. Ach is eagrán stairiúil é seo. Ritheann scéal aistriúchán an Bhíobla ina dhá shruth ó thaobh na Gaeilge de: aistriúcháin Phrotastúnacha agus aistriúcháin Chaitliceacha. Ach anois don chéad uair beidh comheagrán ann — comheagrán idir-eaglasta. Beidh Eaglais na hÉireann agus an Eaglais Chaitliceach ag obair

as lámh a chéile, le cabhair ó Bible Society of Ireland, agus beidh an



Tuam uncial/Jarlath

tionscnámh oscailte d'Eaglais ar bith eile atá sásta páirt a ghlacadh ann. Tá bunús na hoibre pleanáilte d'fhómhair agus do gheimhreadh 2021.

Bíobla Mhá Nuad

Is i gColáiste Phádraig, Maigh Nuad, a rinneadh mór-chuid den aistriúchán agus den riarachán a bhí taobh thiar de An Bíobla Naofa. Bhí foireann scoláirí Gaeilge sa Choláiste ag an am, agus fuinneamh iontu ó thaobh na Gaeilge agus an Scrioptúir de. Chomh maith leis sin, bhí comhoibriú ag gach aistritheoir a raibh eolas acadúil ar an Scrioptúr acu, agus eolas cruinn ar theangacha na Gréigise agus na hEabhraise acu, le cruinneas an aistriúcháin a dhearbhu.

Tharla, de dheonú Dé, go raibh ar an aon láthair san aon am le chéile baicle scoláirí Gaeilge den scoth, a chuir borradh faoi Chumann na Sagart, faoi scoláireacht na Gaeilge, agus faoi aistriú an Bhíobla. Ina measc bhí Donnchadh Ó Floinn, Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, Breandán Ó

Doibhlin, Colmán Ó hUallacháin agus Tomás Ó Fiaich.

Dara Comhairle na Vatacáine a chuir práinn le haistriúchán an Bhíobla. Roimhe sin bhí léachtaí an Aifrinn i Laidin. Ach socraíodh go mbeadh na léachtaí i dteanga an phobail feasta. Agus méadaíodh go mór ar scóp na léachtaí: as seo amach bheadh Leicseanair toirtiúil ag teastáil, ina mbeadh mór-chuid den Bhíobla, roinnte de réir bliana agus séasúir. Bhí aistriúchán iomlán den Bhíobla uilig de dhíth, agus de dhíth láithreach. Is iontach go raibh foireann éifeachtach ar láimh leis an obair a chur igcrích.

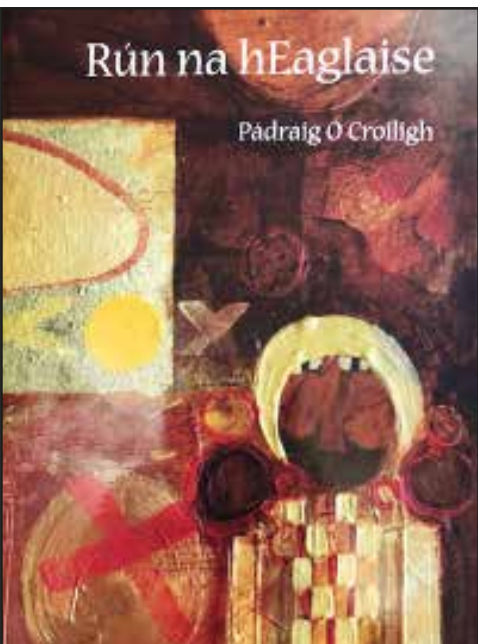
B'é An tAthair Donnchadh Ó Floinn a chuir tús leis an obair. Thosaigh sé leis na Soiscéil. Foilsíodh Lúcas in 1964, agus Matha in 1966. D'fhoilsigh M.H. Gill iad i leabhráin ar leith, agus siombail an tSoiscéalaí as Leabhar Cheanannais ar an chlúdach. Tá obair mhór ar siúl faoi láthair ar dheardh an eagrán nua, agus ar rogha an chló do dheardh an chlúdaigh.



Cló Giotto



Cló Irish Penny



An Lón Síoraí

Más glaoch práinne (glaoch ola) atá faighte ag an sagart, ní bheidh mórán ama aige ullmhúchán ar bith a dhéanamh roimh-ré do shacraimint na nEaslán. Más féidir é tabhairt fógra don teaghlach, á rá leo go dtiocfaidh an sagart ar ais lá éigin nuair a bheas na holaí faoi láimh aige, agus go gcuideoidh Sacraimint na nEaslán leo. Ach ní i gcónaí a tharlaíonn sé go mbíonn an t-am agat chuige sin. Uaireanta bheadh fonn ar an othar dul chun faoistine, agus is maith sin más mian leo é, ach cuimhnigh go maitheann Sacraimint na

nEaslán na peacaí chomh maith, fiú gan iad a insint.

Más féidir é, tabharfaidh an sagart an Eocairist don othar ag an am chéanna, ach tarlaíonn sé go minic nach mbeidh an t-othar ábalta abhlann a ghlacadh. Thig leis i gcónaí triail a bhaint as píosa beag den abhlann ar spúnóg uisce. I mo tháithí féin, murar féidir leis an duine tinn píosa den abhlann a ghlacadh is beag an seans go mbeidh siad in ann deoch ón chailís a ghlacadh ach a oiread, de bhrí go dtig leis a bheith trom ar an scornach le neart an

fhíona. Cuimhnigh gurb í an Eocairist an tsacraimint dóibh sin atá i mbéal báis. Tugaimid an Lón Síoraí, nó Viaticum, uirthi sa chás sin.

Más fíor go bhfuil an laige sin le Sacraimint na nEaslán, gur beag an t-ullmhúchán is féidir a dhéanamh, is fíor fosta go bhfuil buntáiste iontach leis an tsacraimint seo, go bhfeictear an toradh go soiléir agus uaireanta go tobann. Inseoidh sagart ar bith duit, go háirithe iad siúd a d'oibrigh in otharlanna, faoi amanna nuair a chuir siad ola

ar chlár éadáin an duine tinn agus d'oscail sé a shúile ag amharc thart agus a rá: "cad é tharla dom?" Is iontach an spreagadh creidimh é nuair a tharlaíonn sé seo, do na daoine atá i láthair chomh maith leis an othar féin. I gceantar amháin ar a laghad i dTír Chonaill tugadh Ola an Bhisigh ar Shacraimint na nEaslán. Léiríonn sé sin go raibh an tuiscint sin i dtraidisiún s'againn féin i bhfad siar agus go maith roimh aimsir Dara Comhairle na Vatacáine.

(Buíochas le *Foilseacháin Ábhair Spioradálta.*)



Thoughts from across the Diocese on a synodal Church...

POPE Francis has called for a 'synodal' Church, that is, one that has laity, bishops, priests and religious praying, listening and discerning together to discover the way the Holy Spirit is leading the Church in mission today. Here, a number of people from across the Diocese, including some members of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, have shared their thoughts and hopes regarding this, as the Irish Bishops announce plans for a National Synod within the next five years and encourage people to have their say.

What does God want from the Church in Ireland at this time?



AS the Catholic Church in Ireland prepares to set out on a journey of discovery led by the Holy Spirit, in an effort to discern the pathway God desires it to take at this time, its bishops are encouraging widespread participation in the conversations to be had over the next two years, in the lead up to a National Synodal Assembly within the next five years.

In order to determine the consultation methods preferred by people to enable these conversations during the first two years of the journey, such as parish hall meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, deep-listening sessions, written submissions, family-focused gatherings, summary of diocesan assemblies, and/or conferences, the bishops are hoping that many will take the opportunity to submit their suggestions on the Bishops' Conference website by Pentecost Sunday, May 23.

The Irish Bishops decided to set out on this synodal pathway in response to the outcome of the 2018 Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops of Rome, hosted by Pope Francis, which focused on the theme of 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment'.

Over the next two years of consultative conversation on the theme, 'For a synodal Church:

communion, participation and mission', it is hoped that individuals and parishes, religious orders and associations, as well as groups, movements and organisations, both within the Church and throughout society, will embrace this opportunity to walk together during this period of prayer, listening and discernment.

There will also be discussion and debate via related information sessions and educational programmes on the meaning and processes of synodality, and best practice in listening and synodal processes and assemblies at home and around the world will also be researched.

This initial phase of the Irish synodal pathway coincides with preparation for the 2022 Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops in Rome entitled, 'For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission'.

At their Summer General Meeting next June, the Irish Bishops plan to set up a task group to plan and oversee the first steps along the synodal pathway, and this will consist of lay women and men, including young people, religious, priests and bishops.

To make submissions regarding preferred options for engagement in a conversation process about the Synod, visit the new Synodal Pathway webpage before May 23 - www.catholicbishops.ie/synod.

The Synodal Way

by Fr John McLaughlin SSC

BACK in the days when I played golf with some seriousness in the Arklow Club, we had a kind of a fraternity for the weekend competitions. In the winter conditions, it was permitted to remove and replace a plugged golf ball within six inches of the drop. So, there were interpretations as to how and where the ball should be placed as to improve the lie. Maybe we tried to sit it up on a little weed or sod of grass rather than drop it into another hole. The Man of the Moment, the player's Man, would be consulted if he were around or thought to be observing the process. Paddy Lippset had the one eternal pronouncement, which became a byword for all initiatives and decision in the Club... "Make your own arrangements".

In the years that have passed, I have applied the phrase to many circumstances. And today, I would whisper it to express how I see people living out their Baptism, or their version of the life of a Catholic Christian. It is very much on the level of the Latin American phrase - being a Catholic - a *mi manera* ...or whatever you are having yourself, maybe 'Where is the challenge in that?'

The late Fr Noel Connolly, Columban and member of the Australian Pastoral Program preparation, remarked early into the Zoom Masses, etc, in which he had participated, that there is a much wider base needed to grow faithfully as a Catholic in this modern world. And, I felt I knew what he meant. The modern Chilean Jesuit Saint, Albert Hurtado, once wrote an article 'Chile, a Catholic country?' He died in the 1950s and a later Jesuit wrote, "Chile, an equitable Society? What would we be saying here in Ireland, today?"

Shortly after returning in retirement to my native Moville, I felt what Patrick O'Donovan had written in the 'Sunday Observer' many years ago about his native Skibbereen, "I'm a stranger there myself".

I had been invited to accompany a local praesidium of the Legion of Mary. For the available opportunity given under the term 'The Allocutio', I found myself driven to just broaden a little what it might mean to be Catholic in this Ireland and with my Chilean pastoral background. So I introduced a few exercises in *Lectio Divina* over a couple of months. One member said, "Fr John, it changes the way now that I listen to the Sunday Gospel", and that was more than reassuring.

There was also the opportunity to have a look over some key texts of saints like Augustine, in the Confessions and 'Late have I loved thee...', and St Theresa of Avila, 'Let nothing disturb you... only God suffices' and some of her poems, St Ignatius, Contemplating in Time and Place, and the Magis,

and St Patrick and Francis. There were photo copies of texts from the Pastoral Letters of Pope Francis, 'Laudato Si', and also a user-friendly copy of 'Evangelii Gaudium', which some have since opened and meditated upon.

There were also occasional pieces from the Fathers that were easily available from the Office of the Church, like 'The Letter from Diognetus', even the 'Te Deum' and a copy for each. I would surely be handing them, if it were not for the Lockdown, a copy of the 'Testimony of Justin Martyr' from the Office of Readings. 'On the First Day of the Week' as a wonderful and simple testimony of The Eucharist at the very beginnings and the life of the young Christian Communities. It is, for me, a challenge to our own often stale appreciation of such moments!

In the Latin American Church I came to know in the early 80s, we treated as a sort of a bible 'The Documents of Puebla', from CELAM (the Latin American Bishops' Conference) and later others, though with less enthusiasm, Santo Domingo 'Aparecida', in which the Cardinals Bergoglio of Buenos Aires and Errazuriz of Santiago were the leading lights in many ways. This one was different because of the way the Assembly of the South American Churches had drawn up the texts and the material for discussion. It was held on Latin American soil and not in Rome, and the process was from 'The Bottom Up', and not 'The Top Down', as it were.

The 'See - Judge - Act' process was the firm project of the Cardinals and others with influence in Rome. And it is in the mould of this latest buzzword, 'The Synodal Way'. The Santo Domingo conference, by the way, was held in Rome, and was from 'The Top Down'; a document handed down for discussion and amendments, to put it broadly.

Few people of my generation will carry even a phrase from this Document in their memory! We all - parishes and pastoral councils, deaneries, zones and dioceses - had an input into the Document of 'Aparecida'. There are echoes of it in many of the addresses and pastoral letters of Pope Francis. It has in its structured and unstructured content, three different Lists of the Poor, from which we could all learn. Surely there must be an English version available on the Vatican website! The subtitle of that Document, by the way, is 'Christians, Disciples and Missionaries', and that is what our Baptisms should really mean for today!

Model

Back to the reality that we all know, in some way, The Parish. It is a lot more than a 'Service Station for the Sacraments', as



Fr John McLaughlin SSC

we learned to appreciate over the years. There were and are many models of parish, of course, and those of us in pastoral leadership all play a part in that, priests and lay members. My own model, no doubt a little outdated, but handy in Parish Councils and Basic Christian Communities, has five feet:

- Communion of all the different elements and age groups, and promotion of that communion in councils and pastoral decisions.
- Celebration and all the instances, the Liturgy and Sacramental, retreats, and healing instances for all the age groups.
- Formation and renewal for all the community, being courses and workshops, whether at parish, or deanery or zonal levels.
- Solidarity, in all its forms, food kitchens or helps, AA programs, campaigns and outreach programs, free legal aid.
- The Missionary dimensions, whether at local or national or international levels. Whether local house-to-house visitations, or the Children's Missionary grouping in Valparaiso for example, and from a Columban promotion on the Ad Gentes vision.

With Seven Chapels, each with their local pastoral council, there was always a full program at the monthly Parish Council meeting, whether on Evaluations, for example, on the Holy Week Celebrations, or proposing further initiatives.

Occasionally, there could be explosions of energy and even anger in a muted form. Presiding over such a monthly meeting was for me a great privilege and, often enough, not an easy run. One of my pastoral leaders, who is happily still very active even after being recently being robbed of her teacher's salary after withdrawing it from the local bank, Gladys Vera, remarked on the Columban way of leadership, as being 'propositivo', of proposing actions and projects, as against another congregation who had the parish for some years, and more in the 'programativo' style, being a program handed down to the leaders and catechists. It was a boost to hear that and maybe a

little too complementary!

In all our pastoral activities there was tremendous help available and resources offered: from the Pastoral Initiative Orientations that were renewed every three years at national level and then analyses, and adopted at Zonal and Deanery and Parish and community levels. There were Summer Schools with a two-week opportunity for catechists, animators, youth leaders and senior citizens - all offered a huge variety of courses and workshop experiences.

So, at my level, the challenge was to promote participation to renewal and prevent staleness in the lives of the communities and the parish. Never a dull moment! I recall, after an early baptism in that, coming home to Dublin and working in the Bray Deanery where one priest retorted, almost "John, if the people are going to be doing all that, what is left for us to be doing?" It was from a much wider pastoral stage that I was emerging, even then!

Among my list of life quotations is one from Woody Allen. It was in a film called, I think, 'Lord Love a Duck', which the first take is - 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing!' Then the second take is - 'Get a little knowledge!' And the third is - 'Live dangerously!'

In my very early years in the Dublin Diocese, some of us were into reading things like, 'The Dutch Catechism and Herder Correspondence, and the Furrow, of course! One of my classmates, not at all into this, said, "John, do you not think that maybe you could lose your faith reading things like that?" He is still alive, thank God, and he has his faith, as I have mine!

Recently, after listening to 'The Dubliners' version, I have been intoning, "Don't give up till it's over, Don't quit if you can...the weight upon your shoulder will make you a better man".

I would like to think and, indeed, hope that the emerging new and active Catholics would have some of this vision, thrust, indignation and passion as they walk on 'The Synodal Way'.

Synodal Church should produce new sense of mission and purpose *by Fr Francis Bradley*

POPE Francis has decided that the next world Synod of Bishops at the Vatican in October 2022 will have the theme: 'For a synodal church: Communion, participation and mission.'

Even a casual look at the readings from the Acts of the Apostles these days will help us understand what Pope Francis means when he talks about a synodal Church.

It is about all the baptised, men and women, laity and clergy, discerning God's will and listening to the Holy Spirit in the same way as the disciples did in the early Church.

This will be demanding, especially in Ireland where we have all become too passive in our participation in faith matters.

It is a change of culture. It must not mean each of us going into ourselves – the litmus test for



Fr Francis Bradley, PP Buncrana & Fahan, Inch & Burt.

checking if it is working will be whether it produces a new sense of mission and purpose, driving us outwards again, to the peripheries.

Towards a Synod for Ireland

by Fr Pat O'Hagan



Fr Pat O'Hagan PP, Moville.

I have just finished reading 'Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future' by Pope Francis. While there is much in it about environmental issues and care for our poorest and most vulnerable brothers and sisters, there is also much there that we could use as inspirational as we prepare for a Synod of the Church here in Ireland.

As preparations begin, it could be good to follow the structure of this little book. It is divided into three sections: A time to see...to choose...to act. It is a book for the right here, right now, as the Pope refers often to the current pandemic, which is still a huge problem in many parts of our world, and to a host of other global issues, particularly poverty and the distribution of wealth; issues which the Irish Church has to address, as well as other issues closer to home.

Having laid out his 'path' for

the future of humanity, the Pope asks, 'and now what must I do?' He tells us that a crisis forces us to move, but reminds us that it is possible to move without really going anywhere at all – like taking a short walk just to get out of the house, or going to the shops, or visiting a scenic spot, but then returning home totally unmoved or unchanged by the outing.

The Pope wants us to be pilgrims who open ourselves to new horizons and who return home no longer the same person we were when we set out.

We are told repeatedly that synodality is about walking together. Pilgrims don't walk ahead of each other, but side by side. They talk with one another. They share their thoughts and ideas, their hopes and dreams. They go home renewed and revitalised, re-energised for whatever lies ahead.

I believe that two of the most important and necessary qualities in preparing for a synod are honesty and openness/listening. We need to say whatever is in our hearts without fear of what anyone else might say, or how they might react, and we need to know that whoever hears us is open to hearing whatever we say, and is able to listen to us without feeling the need to respond or react immediately. Whoever hears us should go away and think about what has been said, and pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their own process of discernment.

Listening to the Holy Spirit – really listening – is a vital element

The Spirit is the source of all authentic renewal in the Church and the world, beginning in the heart of every man and woman *by Fr Francesco Gavazzi, CFR*

HAVE we considered the consequences of the coming of the Spirit? We say 'Come', but do we consider what His coming means for our lives?

The manifestation of the Spirit in the life of Christ in His public mission led ultimately to His passion, crucifixion and death.

The coming of the Spirit at Pentecost in power upon the disciples gathered in the Upper Room led to imprisonment, beatings, stonings, hardships and even death.

The angel would not even let them stay sitting in the prison cell: "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life." (Acts 5:20)

We say 'Come', but do we understand what we are asking for?

To say 'Come' truly is to anticipate the shaking of the tree of all that cannot last and bears no fruit – of its dried and withered branches.

To say 'Come' truly is to expect a manifestation of the power and love of God that will make us alive in the Spirit but may cost us the death of our flesh. Only to have it rise again.

To say 'Come' truly is to be willing to have our pride broken and humbled, no longer seeking our own glory but the glorification of Christ Jesus, no matter the cost.

It is to seek not our own will but the will of the Father and the destiny of our neighbour – their eternal salvation – even at the cost of our earthly lives.

in these pre-synod preparation times also.

If this Synod is to have any relevance to Ireland and the Church in Ireland today, and over the next 25 years or so, we have to try to engage with everybody. There are people who will, of course, want to take part in the preparations and in the Synod itself, but there are many others, too many others, who have already decided that our Church is not for them, that it is not a place where they feel welcome, or a place where their voice can be heard.

I refer in particular to women, who are the backbone of every parish in the country, and to our many LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters, as well as those who find themselves, often through no fault of their own, in what we refer to as 'irregular unions'. There are many others who have just drifted away from the Church and from the regular practice of the faith, and for whom the Church and everything to do with it is simply an irrelevance in their own busy lives.

If the Church in Ireland is to

be the Church of the people, we absolutely have to engage with those people in this time of preparation, hear their voices and their opinions, and assure them that they will be heard.

It is to desire the "more excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31). It is to love in truth and proclaim the truth in love. It means death and resurrection – not only His, but ours too.

St Francis of Assisi tells us that "the Spirit of God and His holy operation" is to be desired above all else. Why? The Spirit is the source of all authentic renewal in the Church and the world, beginning in the heart of every man and woman.

But acquiring more of this most desirable Gift means making room and letting Him in the room. How? By renouncing everything that hurts us and offends God – Satan and sin – and everything that is too small for us – the world.

Yet that loss is really gain as, little by little, we become everything we have been created for both now, to be Spirit-filled disciples of Jesus Christ, and forever, eternal life together in the Kingdom of God our Father.

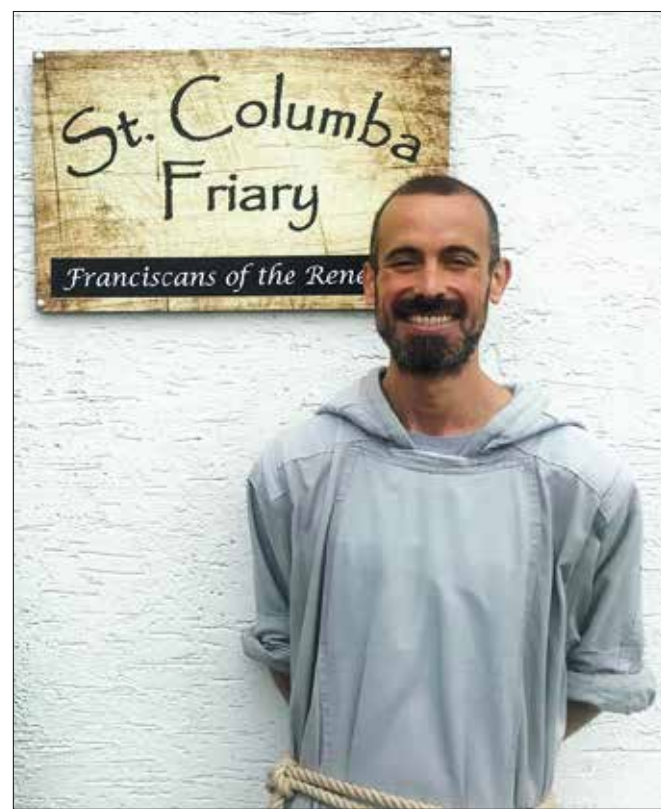
Bishops, priests and lay faithful, what do we really want this Pentecost?

If it truly is the Spirit of God and His holy operation, then I – 'I' first and only then 'we' – must respond to St Francis' exhortation at the end of his life: "Begin again."

"What should I do?" comes before "What should we do?"

But both questions are vital and the answer to both is essentially the same: Repent, believe, and be filled.

The stakes are as high as they come: "For what does it profit a



Fr Francesco Gavazzi, Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Galliagh.

man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?" (Mar 8:36)

The apostles and disciples gathered together with Our Lady in the days that preceded the first Pentecost. "With one accord they devoted themselves to prayer." (Acts 1:14)

Could it not be so in the days that precede a new Pentecost?

Bishops, disciples – clerical and lay – with Our Lady, devoted to prayer for a new coming of the Holy Spirit – not to bless our plans but to be empowered to fulfill

God's plans, whatever they are and wherever they may lead us.

"...And now, Lord, look upon their threats, grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy holy servant, Jesus'. And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:29-31)

Foundations laid for a more synodal Church *by Rory McGilligan*



Rory McGilligan, Dungiven.

I believe the church in Ireland and Derry has been evolving in the past number of years to become a more Synodal Church.

Lots of our parishes pre-Covid have had groups of vibrant lay people who were and are members of Baptism teams, HOPE youth groups and Bethany Groups; a mixture of meeting people where they are at and helping people draw closer to God.

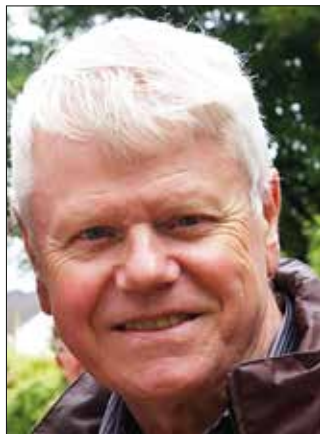
Over the coming years, I envisage more outreach teams developing, probably helped by more training and faith development.

I also believe that more support in administering the sacraments and supporting the clergy will be important, as clerical numbers are reducing.

How this support is carried out much depends on diocese and parishes working closely together for the needs of each parish.

The foundations have been laid for a Synodal Church; however, we must be Christ-led to develop further.

Walking together as foreigners *by Martin Harran*



Martin Harran, Urney & Castlefin.

THERE is a temptation to see the need for change in our church as primarily the elimination of clericalism by the transfer power from clergy to laity but, as Bishop McKeown reminded us last month, Pope Francis does not want synodality to be perceived just as power blocs squaring up to win votes or force through changes that particular groups have on their agenda; it means clergy and laity genuinely walking together in unison to discern the church that Christ wants us to have here in Ireland and what we can do to bring it about.

This will, indeed, require new thinking in the traditional concept of the role of the clergy, but it will

also require new thinking and approaches from us laity.

Here, in Ireland, we have been used to a church where the clergy have essentially been service providers and we, the laity, have generally been mainly passive consumers. Mgr George Talbot, 160 years ago, expressed the view that the role of the laity is to “pray up, pay up and shut up!” That view may, in some ways, have reflected clericalism at its worst but, if we are to be honest, I think it is a concept that suited most of us sitting in the pews, it meant that our Catholic lives required very little intellectual challenge and we could leave the difficult stuff to the priests.

Things are clearly different nowadays. One of the challenges identified by the Irish bishops for the launch of the synodal pathway is the secularisation of society. There is a temptation, perhaps, to think of that secularisation purely in terms of the radical change in attitudes towards our church that has pervaded society in recent times, ranging from ambivalence to outright determination to drive religion completely out of the public arena.

The challenge, however, is much greater than that. Somehow, in the midst of the opposition to religious belief, we have to find the best way

of spreading the Good News in a society where people are exposed to a wide range of influences, far more pervasive than at any time in the history of mankind, and where people are no longer prepared to accept things as being right simply because they have been laid down by a higher authority.

In particular, we have to deal with modern methods of communication. In an era where communication is dominated by online interaction, especially social media, relying almost exclusively on the priest’s Sunday homily, occasionally backed up by complex documents issued from the Vatican, is a sure-fire route to failure.

We have just come through the season of Easter and our daily Gospel and other readings have reminded us of the far greater opposition and outright persecution that our forefathers faced in the very earliest days of the church. They overcame that and became the dominant social force in Western Europe. They achieved that not by directly fighting back against their opponents but by demonstrating the value of the lives that they led. We get a hint of this approach from the second century Christian writer of the Epistle to Diognetus,

who observed that...

“...the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity... As citizens, they share in all things with others, and yet endure all things as if foreigners... They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives... those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred.”

Special

I think that what we need to achieve is a modern-day version of the distinctiveness identified by that writer. We must move on from bemoaning the changes in life around us and the constant attacks on our faith and on our church. We have a very special gift - the Good News - and the best way we can counteract the negative influences, which seem to dominate society nowadays, is to show people how that special gift really does make our lives special. We must do that in ways that are not perceived as simply preaching to other people, yet somehow has the effect that, perhaps without

even understanding why, they can see that specialness in our lives.

Achieving that will require a far more active and committed Catholic life than many of us have led in the past. A first step is a deeper personal understanding of our faith and how we can live it out on a daily basis. We have a wealth of talent to help us achieve that. We have many dedicated people working very hard within parishes in all sorts of areas. At diocesan level, we have various dedicated groups doing tremendous work in various catechetical areas, like working in schools, working with young people and developing baptismal teams within parishes.

I think one thing we need to do is look at how the abundance of excellent materials they have, ranging from printed booklets to PowerPoint presentations to videos, can be made more available within parishes, both to individuals and to groups such as pastoral councils. Again, existing groups like Thornhill Ministries have skills and experience that could play a significant role in achieving this.

The big challenge will be motivating our laity to avail of these opportunities but there are ways we can tackle that. Whilst modern technology and its impact on communication has many negative aspects, it also has many positive ones and creates

opportunities for us to both deepen our own understanding of our faith and also open it up to people who are curious about our special lives.

One positive aspect of the Covid pandemic has been the widespread adoption of applications like Zoom and WhatsApp by people who little more than a year ago could never have imagined themselves using those. Alongside that, our educational institutions have developed very effective methods of delivering material to students in their own homes. Using similar methods to deliver religious development materials is likely to be a lot more attractive to individuals and groups than, perhaps, travelling up to an hour on a cold winter’s night to a workshop or seminar at a central location.

I think that an important part of the preparation for the synodal pathway is that we examine how we can use these modern techniques to, once again, demonstrate that difference identified in the Epistle to Diognetus; that we, once again, become people who are seen to be living in the real world but, in some ways, seem like foreigners to it. We need to find ways of showing that we truly are part of something very special, something that is more than the best that secularism has to offer.

It was and is always the Lord’s desire to not only walk with us... but to lead us as well *by Rhonda McColgan*



Rhonda McColgan, Iskaheen & Upper Merville

THE gift of the new Pentecost was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised to the Apostles and, therefore, the new church was born.

“Believe me, it is better for you that I go away, because as long as I do not go away the Helper will not come to you. But if I go away I will send Him to you and when He comes He will vindicate the truth before a sinful world; and He will vindicate the paths of righteousness and justice.” (John 16:7)

My goodness, I always try to picture the scene at Pentecost. I imagine how the Apostles were gathered together in the upper room...

“And suddenly, out of the sky, came a sound like a strong rushing wind; and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. There appeared tongues as if of fire, which parted and came to rest upon each one of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak”. (Acts 2:2-4)

As I pondered upon this passage, I recalled how God made man, as told in the Book of Genesis...

“Then Yahweh God formed man, dust drawn from the clay, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and man became alive with breath”. (Gen 2:7)

This last line here, “Man became alive with breath” really does sum up this day of Pentecost for me. The Apostles became alive with this outpouring of the Holy Spirit and began to boldly claim the truth about the Messiah and bear witness to Jesus.

All fear had left them and I get a great sense of courage as I read on in Acts chapter 2. It is also told how they would speak in other languages, so as all could hear the message of Christ. They were filled with a new joy, so much so that the people even thought that they were drunk!

Well it comes, therefore, as no surprise that Pope Francis has expressed a desire to create a more synodal church. This is one

that has laity, bishops and priests praying, listening and discerning together to discover the way that the Holy Spirit wants to guide the church in mission.

This form of praying is something that I have experienced many times within my Bible study group run by the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. Once a month, the Friars organise a healing night in Derry. A few days before the healing night, a group of us would get together, along with a Friar, to ask the Holy Spirit what He wanted for the evening.

The priest would usually begin with a prayer. We would then spend time in praise and worship followed by a period of silence. As people began to receive a word, they would share it. Some received a picture in their imaginations and others were drawn to a particular passage in the bible. One person would take notes and, at the end of the evening, we usually noticed a theme emerging. The next thing was to keep it all in prayer and trust in the Lord.

Our minds were then open to recognising the signs that the Lord was leading in a certain way and, therefore, being careful not to block His plans.

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, my ways are not your ways, says Yahweh”. (Isaiah 55: 8-9)

Being the month of Mary, it would be remiss of me not to

mention how Our Lady, of all people, knew how to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit. I recall a talk I heard by an American Catholic evangelist regarding the Magnificat. She mentioned how Blessed Anne Catherine Emmerich, a Catholic mystic had an interesting revelation on this. Blessed Anne Catherine stated that Mary was in her chambers praying for the Messiah when God answered her prayer, with her!

Moreover, Mary knew the scriptures very well and we know that she pondered all things and all events in her life. This enabled her to recognise the will of the Holy Spirit.

Pope Francis’ message, I believe, is one of encouragement and light to our feet as we move forward in this ever changing wilderness. After all, it was and is always the Lord’s desire to not only walk with us, but to lead us as well. This was evident, too, in the Old Testament, when we are told in the Book of Numbers that the setting up of the camp was so that the tabernacle was at the centre of everything.

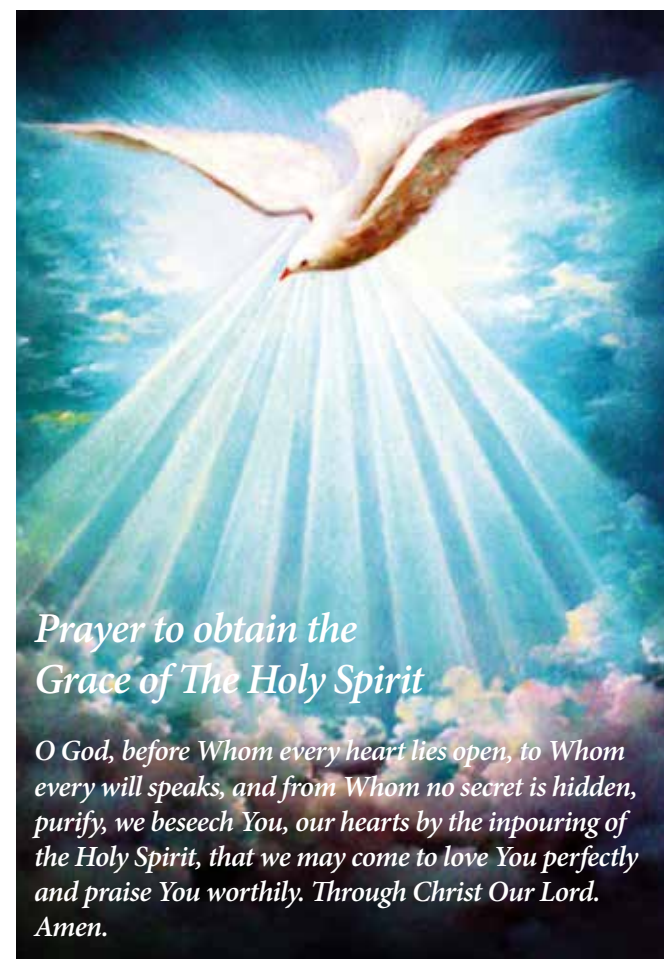
“Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said, “The Israelites are to camp, every man by his own banner, under the flag of his tribe. They are to camp all around the Holy Tent of the Testimony, but at some distance from it”. (Numbers 2: 1-2)

So, like this camp, it is true for

us too, to place God in the centre of our being, at the very heart of ourselves.

We, too, can ask the Lord to help us discern the will of the Holy Spirit in our own parishes. Perhaps this can be done by using the same

method expressed by Pope Francis of praying and discerning together as a group. We may be in the midst of a pandemic, but the Holy Spirit always makes a way and Zoom works!



Prayer to obtain the Grace of The Holy Spirit

O God, before Whom every heart lies open, to Whom every will speaks, and from Whom no secret is hidden, purify, we beseech You, our hearts by the inpouring of the Holy Spirit, that we may come to love You perfectly and praise You worthily. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.

Synodality – A problem and a challenge *by Noel Bradley*

THE problem with the word synodality is that people, in general, do not know what it is about. It literally means walking together (syn = together) on a journey. But that does not get you very far. Pope Francis has called a Synod for 2022, 'For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission'. Sr Nathalie Becquart, Under-Secretary to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, has said that bishops need to have an experience of synodality before they come to a synod, and that is a problem not only for the Synod but for the local church as well. We have little or no experience of synodality.

Pope Francis, as a Jesuit, comes from a tradition of 'communal discernment' (the way the Jesuits were founded) which is the key element in synodality, but that has not been the background of many of the bishops. He has mentioned 'communal discernment' 20 times in his 'Joy of the Gospel', insisting that it is the way forward for the pilgrim People of God if they are to respond well to the challenges of our world.

He encouraged the Cardinals and bishops at the Synod on the Family to be honest and courageous in their discussion. But he also has expressed frustration in his closing address on the Synod, referring to "closed hearts" which hide behind the Church's teachings, sit on the chair of Moses and pass judgement on others. The next day, in his homily, he criticised the attitude which does not want to be bothered by the problem of others. "We do not think like Him (Jesus)...Our hearts are not open...

We live far from His heart...We already have our schedule...Every problem is a bother".

When he was told afterwards that some of the Cardinals were afraid to speak up and express their honest views, he was disappointed. Part of the difficulty is that before Pope Francis, all the synods have been advisory, debate was limited and the final documents were written by successive Popes. Pope Francis' style is different, radically different. He wants the key dynamic of 'communal discernment'/synodality to be the way forward for all levels of the Church. Synodality is a way of proceeding.

In the 'Joy of the Gospel', he says: "Discernment will entail allowing ourselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and, instead, letting the Spirit enlighten, guide and direct us" (228). Lovely words! The problem is that the required dispositions are often lacking in the participants. The new wine needs fresh skins (Mark 2:22). So there is a problem: bishops, priests and laity have little experience of synodality or the dynamic of communal discernment. The challenge is to give them and all of us that experience.

My limited experience of any of this would be from facilitating workshops (Training for Transformation) over many years in Nigeria and Ireland, using a 'psycho-social-method' (Paulo Freire), from accompanying people on a 'directed retreat' and spiritual accompaniment (Ignatian style), and facilitating

a coaching process called 'The Transformation Game'. All of these gave me an experience in one way or another of all the elements in synodality and discernment.

Let me try to describe some of these elements. In group work, facilitation is very important. It is not lectures or sermons, but trying to facilitate listening, openness, dialogue, trust, honesty and courage, sharing in small groups and large group, working for consensus, sitting in a circle. All this fosters participation, communion, and encounter. All are elements of synodality and necessary for discernment. People enjoy when they are engaged instead of just sitting there passively. The energy is coming from the bottom up rather than from the top down and is circulating around the group. Those who never have a voice have a better chance of being heard and finding their voice.

In a 'psycho-social' approach, the psyche is important. This is the area of our feelings and emotions. "People will act on the issues they have strong feelings about", according to Paulo Freire. It is only when our feelings are touched and moved that we get moving. The 'social' bit is to do with our relationships with each other ('Fratelli Tutti') and the wider world and now, of course, the environment. If we don't have a real experience of communion with each other and with the earth, where is the Church? Or what is the Church?

Ignatian

When it comes to my experience of Ignatian discernment some of

the important elements that stand out are the feelings, emotions or movements within us as we experience life. Although they are often confusing, they are the key to finding our way. But they have to be 'sifted out' and discerned. When am I feeling enthused (literally, 'en theos' in Greek), lifted up in courage or with a lighter heart, or experience an increase in love, or desire to be with God? When am I feeling discouraged, feeling life a drag, no joy in my heart? Which way is God attracting me?

Spiritual Consolation is the key. I say spiritual because you might feel very consoled by eating a whole packet of chocolate biscuits or drinking a few glasses of wine or beer, but that probably won't do it for you. So, feelings matter and being attentive to them in oneself and others is very important. I am attracted or repelled by what I see and hear. Do I follow everything by which I am attracted? Do I flee everything I dislike? If we do so, we are no longer free, and thus we are losing the most precious gift of God: God's grace, our liberty. Ignatius' experience is helpful here.

When he was injured and in bed reading books, he noticed a difference in his thoughts. Some left him delighted and happy, others dry and discontented, and then he says "his eyes were opened a little". He began to marvel at this difference in kind and to reflect on it...little by little coming to know the difference in the kind of spirits that were stirring: one from the devil, and the other from God' (Autobiography, n 8).

To be able to notice the difference in our feelings and reflect on it is a

most important step. A spiritual director or soul friend can be a great help in deciphering how we are being directed by the Holy Spirit. So, we have to reflect on our feelings, pray and decide on which way is God attracting us. Then act on the decision. We should be responding from a place of affective love rather than duty. This comes from contemplating the life of Christ in the Gospels, from "a felt experience of God's love", as one Ignatian authority puts it.

Ignatius says: "We should desire and choose only what helps us more towards the end for which we are created" The end is to 'praise, reverence and serve God'. We need 'indifference', freedom from 'inordinate attachment' in order to choose and to act. This is why our disposition is so important and is often missing.

In summary, we can say that it is demanding to learn to discover God's action in our lives, but God gives us some clear signs of it to each of us, when we feel joy or, more precisely, when we experience any 'increase of hope, faith and charity'. We can help people to discover how their lives are orientated by consolation.

I have been writing about individual discernment, but the same principles apply to group or communal discernment. The only difference is that after people pray over the pros and cons of a proposed choice that needs to be made by the group, for example, building a new Church, they share their feelings after praying for a solid time with the Lord about the issue. What went on in that prayer? What does the Holy Spirit



Noel Bradley, Buncrana

seem to be saying to me? "Don't tell us what you were thinking about, but what God seemed to be whispering to you about the issue?" as Brian Grogan SJ said one time. God is explicitly brought into the choosing. It is not just a democratic vote after talking among ourselves. Pope Francis is very strong on this.

I have touched on many key concepts in a very short and oversimplified way. Ideally, the group should be able to say in the end: "It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28), as they did at the first Council of Jerusalem.

There is more to learn. I will end with St Paul's prayer to God for the gift of discernment for the Philippians: "And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless". (Phil 1:9-10)

Iskaheen Parish youth aspire to meet the challenge of Pope Francis' synodal church *by Helen Grant*



Helen Grant, Iskaheen & Upper Merville.

A Synodal Church must begin within our parish family, by inviting our parishioners to express how they see the Church moving forward in the 21st Century, and all done in a spirit of prayer to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

In this process, people's questions about the past have to be answered as honestly as possible and their desires for the future listened to, understood and realised and acted upon if possible. All areas, parts and people from every walk of life

in the parish must be included, young, old and middle aged, those who practise their faith regularly and those who don't – everyone must feel included and welcome, and no one feel excluded in any way for whatever reason.

The doctrines and laws of the Church cannot be changed, and this must be plainly explained, and questions arising about these doctrines and laws listened to and answered. Transparency is vital going forward in this process, where everyone's voice is heard and everyone feels a respected part of the parish family, where they can freely express their ideas and play a part in achieving them. This process has to be two-way, where everyone is listened to but also everyone must use their talents to achieve what has been discussed in an active way.

We have so many people who work so hard in our parishes in different organisations, groups and as individuals, all helping each other as the need arises. There are

many more out there that we can reach out to with so many skills, talents and ideas. Many find it difficult to volunteer or maybe feel they are intruding, or it is 'someone else's job'...there should be no names on jobs in our Church. We need to be a welcoming Church and parish, where we openly welcome new people with new ideas and they are easily integrated into the parish.

We are very blessed in our parish of Iskaheen & Upper Merville to have wonderful priests – Fr John Farren and Fr Anthony Mailey. Fr Farren is a very parishioner and people orientated parish priest, with an open mind to new ideas and ways to nurture and build the faith in the parish.

This past year, the pandemic has forced us to progress our faith and church is a very different way, in trying to reach out to everyone through online technology. The youth in our parish have been leading lights in online technology, giving many hours of their time in

organising online activities for not only for our parish community, but the many people worldwide who interact with our parish Facebook and Instagram Pages.

I have had the great honour and privilege to work with young people in the parish over the past number of years. They have deepened and strengthened my faith, and given me great hope, inspiring me to do all that I can for the church now and in the future. We might not have huge numbers, but those we have are dedicated, charismatic, forward seeing, inclusive and aspire to meet the challenge of Pope Francis' synodal church.

The youth, through their own Covid isolation, have had a great understanding and connection with those having to isolate and not being able to interact with family, friends and neighbours, and decided to organise and deliver the Christmas, Lenten and May prayers and reflections, and the St Joseph Novena. They

What the Catechism teaches about the Holy Spirit...

"No one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God." Now God's Spirit, who reveals God, makes known to us Christ, his Word, his living Utterance, but the Spirit does not speak of himself. The Spirit who "has spoken through the prophets" makes us hear the Father's Word, but we do not hear the Spirit himself. We know him only in the movement by which he reveals the Word to us and disposes us to welcome him in faith. The Spirit of truth who "unveils" Christ to us "will not speak on his own." Such properly divine self-effacement explains why "the world cannot receive [him], because it neither sees him nor knows him," while those who believe in Christ know the Spirit because he dwells with them. (CCC 687)

The Church, a communion living in the faith of the apostles which she transmits, is the place where we know the Holy Spirit:

- in the Scriptures he inspired;
- in the Tradition, to which the Church Fathers are always timely witnesses;
- in the Church's Magisterium, which he assists;
- in the sacramental liturgy, through its words and symbols, in which the Holy Spirit puts us into communion with Christ;
- in prayer, wherein he intercedes for us;
- in the charisms and ministries by which the Church is built up;
- in the signs of apostolic and missionary life;
- in the witness of saints through whom he manifests his holiness and continues the work of salvation. (CCC 688)



Journey towards a Synod in the Irish Catholic Church

by Gráinne Doherty

AS Lockdown restrictions begin to be eased on both sides of the border, many are justifiably wondering when they will be able to attend church again. While we and the media focus on this question, another item that has happened in the Irish Church in the past few weeks has passed most of us by – the announcement by the Irish Bishops that a National Synodal Assembly will be held within the next five years.

This is exciting news. But what exactly does it mean?

The word 'synod' has been part of the Church's history almost since its beginning, 2,000 years ago, but

is being given a whole new lease of life and understanding under Pope Francis. Since becoming Pope in 2013, Francis has called four synods. These are large gatherings – not only of bishops as has often been the case – but of increasing numbers of laity as well. All work together to look at what is happening in the Church at the moment and discern ways to move forward.

'Synod' comes from a Greek word and means 'along the path', and has grown to mean the path along which the whole Church – lay and ordained – walks together, sharing their concerns and hopes

of what the Church is being called to become.

In their statement announcing the synod, the bishops encourage us that the Church and its future are always open to the work of the Holy Spirit. They quote Pope Francis' words when he was in Dublin in 2018, reminding us that the Holy Spirit "constantly breathes new life into our world, into our hearts, into our families, into our homes and parishes."

After centuries, when the role of the laity was often to "pray, pay, and obey", Pope Francis calls on the whole Church to remember that as the Holy Spirit works in each person equally, then each person should be invited to join this synodal process.

Francis, himself, has worked hard to put this into practice throughout his papacy, and his doing so has shown us how slow we can be to accept change. Before the last couple of synods, part of the planning process was to consult via questionnaire as many people as possible about today's Church - its limitations as well as its strengths. While many parishes around the world endeavoured to make the questionnaire available and facilitated a lot of discussion at parish level, for the most part, the response was still relatively small, with very many not even being aware that such a process was taking place, and demonstrated that neither clergy nor laity were really ready for an invitation for such lay participation and involvement.

Responsibility

Everyone was used to leaving the responsibility of the Church to the

clergy, rather than believing that such a responsibility comes from the sacrament of baptism more so than the sacrament of ordination.

While announcing that the synod will take place in approximately five years' time, the Irish bishops stated that the first stage of the journey towards it will be one of information and of being widely consultative: "We envisage the next two years as a period of prayer, listening, and discernment, involving a nationwide consultative conversation...This will allow individuals and parishes...and organizations both within the Church and in Irish society at large, to share their insights into the Church in Ireland."

This is such a vital time for the Church that one can only hope that people respond to this invitation to take ownership and responsibility for the future of the Irish Church. The bishops have already opened up the very first stage of this consultation by asking people to let them know what type of consultation process people would prefer – for example, through questionnaires, deep-listening sessions, small-group gatherings etc. (You can read further and respond on the website of the Irish bishops - www.catholicbishops.ie)

Pope Francis has already demonstrated the nature of how the consultation and the rest of the process is to take place, by calling for two key things to happen: first of all, everyone should speak with what he calls 'parrhesia', and says that this means speaking with honesty and courage – and not saying something just because that's what is expected/wanted by those in power; and secondly,



Gráinne Doherty, Merville.

everyone must listen with humility – open to newness, and the possibility of changing their opinions.

The whole process demands being fully open to the work of the Holy Spirit which, as the Scriptures remind us, cannot be controlled: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes." (Jn 3:8)

As we head towards Pentecost and celebrate the birth of the Church, we are conscious of the wonderful possibilities that can lie ahead for the Church if we let go of our own, often unconscious, need to control and give the Holy Spirit space to "blow where it chooses."

The Easter Story encourages us to roll away the stones of whatever keeps us as a Church in darkness: Fear of change? Apathy? Disillusionment? Clericalism? etc, and allow the light of the incarnational, resurrected Christ to break through and create something new.

And so, as we begin our very first steps on to the Synodal path that will hopefully lead us to becoming more deeply the Church God wants us to be, we hear God's words to us: "For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you...and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". (Jer 29:11)

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also opened these reflections out to other parish organisations and parishioners to participate in. They discussed their ideas with their peers and brought it to Diocesan level at virtual meetings and articles in 'The Net'.

The Lenten interviews carried out by the youth let us see how people in our parish, politicians, priests, bishops and archbishops have all had to adapt their lives during the pandemic, and, very importantly, the youth asked everyone how their faith has helped them through this difficult time.

To all those who were interviewed, we owe gratitude for their inspiration to keep going through Covid. One person who was interviewed said that, in all their years, no one had ever asked them about their faith and that it challenged them to think deeper than they had ever done about

what their faith really meant to them.

Our youth are a perfect example, to me, of what Pope Francis is asking us to do - to listen and hear what others are saying in an open and transparent way, do what we can to implement it at parish level in a prayerful and inclusive way, reaching out to everyone, answering the questions that are asked if we can, and if we can't, signposting them to someone who can, then taking what we have learned, both successful and unsuccessful, to Diocesan level.

All this work in our parish would not be possible without Fr John Farren, who inspires us all by his faith, prayerful example, openness to ideas and inclusiveness. He is the heart that pumps the life-giving, oxygenated blood into our parish arteries that refreshes and renews the blood in our parish veins.

May the Holy Spirit breathe new life into our hearts... families...and communities as we journey in faith together

by Geraldine Conwell



Geraldine Conwell, Dunamanagh.

THERE are many challenges facing the Church today but also many possibilities to devise new models of co-responsibility and leadership involving lay people.

The National Synod and Assembly in Ireland will mark a pivotal moment in the life of the Church. It is one answer to the challenges facing the Church and invites all of us to re-think the

Church's role in contemporary society. It will, undoubtedly, chart a particular path into the future for the Church in this country.

It is an exciting time, inviting us to journey together in discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church in Ireland at this time.

The Synod will be a suitable instrument which will give a voice to the entire people of God, bringing people, priests and bishops together to make decisions about the future of the Church. The involvement of lay people is central in the life of the Church and, as baptised 'children of God', we are called to be active participants in fulfilling Christ's mission of proclaiming to the world God's love. More lay people will be called to participate in the governance of the Church, using their gifts and talents to help renew and build it up.

This process will invite us all to walk together on our pilgrim

way of faith, guided by the Holy Spirit in renewing the Church's mission. Open dialogue and communication will be central to the consultation process, which will enable the laity to participate and actively debate the issues facing the Church.

Listening intently to all members of the Church will be extremely important. We need to hear the voices of those who have left the Church or feel excluded or forgotten. The Church of the future must be a welcoming Church, a place where everyone feels they belong and can make a valuable contribution.

During the consultation process, it is important to use all resources and structures within the Church and society to give everyone the opportunity to share thoughts and ideas for the way ahead. Public meetings, questionnaires and opportunities to participate online are some methods which could be

used to engage with everyone.

The voice of the young will be very important in this journey. Their enthusiasm for life, their energy and gifts will assist in the renewal of the faith in our communities.

Consultation must be followed by discernment, reflection and prayer to try and discover what God wants of the Church in Ireland at this time.

I hope that this synodal journey will be a prayerful, spiritual experience, a time of renewal and new hope for the people in Ireland, and a great gift for the Church.

Pope Francis affirms "this path of synodality", where ongoing dialogue and critical engagement will be the way forward for the Church.

May the Holy Spirit breathe new life into our hearts, our homes, our families, parishes and communities as we journey in faith together.

Prayer to The Holy Spirit

O Holy Spirit, Divine Spirit of light and love, I consecrate to You my understanding, my heart and my will, my whole being, for time and for eternity. May my understanding be always submissive to Your heavenly inspirations and to the teaching of the Catholic Church, of which You are the Infallible Guide; may my heart be ever inflamed with love of God and my neighbour; may my will be ever conformed to the Divine Will, and may my whole life be a faithful imitation of the life and virtues of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom, with the Father and You, be honour and glory forever. Amen.



Now is the time! The Synodal Pathway *by Sr Margaret McConalogue*



Sr Margaret McConalogue.

THE vaccination roll-out for Covid-19 has lifted many hearts and we feel a lot safer, even if we still need to observe the usual precautions! What has been your experience of Covid-19 in relation to your faith? Did you miss going to Mass and receiving the Sacraments, and if so, what was that like for you? What effect did the relaxing of the obligation to physically attend Church have on your relationship with God, and with the other members of your parish community? These are questions worth thinking about as we cautiously emerge from our long retreat!

For myself, in this Resurrection time between Easter and Pentecost, I am very conscious that the Risen Lord is Lord of all creation and for all time. The Readings at Mass these days remind me of the encouragement and the power Jesus bestowed on his down-hearted apostles in the upper room, and elsewhere during his post-Resurrection appearances. This encouragement helped to strengthen the apostles in the challenges of faith and mission that would come their way...and

that would cost some of them their lives too, as we know.

“Do not be afraid” was His repeated message, and His final assurance is “I am with you always, yes to the end of time”.

As He walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, He explained the Scriptures and showed them how His death was the fulfilment of God’s plan. We are His Easter people today, and He speaks the same words of encouragement to us – in our frailty, fear, weakness, hopes and disappointments...whatever our need!

Just think of Thomas and his need for confirmation that Jesus had really risen, after all that had happened. Far from judging him, Jesus understands Thomas’ questioning and doubts, and graciously gives Thomas that extra help he needed to believe in the miracle of the Resurrection, so that Thomas was able to proclaim, “My Lord and My God”!

And so it is for each one of us! God gives us the particular grace we need to know Him more deeply and to trust in His ways. His Spirit is with us as we discern how to be church in our times!

“They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit gave them power to express themselves”. (Acts 2:4)

Many people would say that our church today has changed as a result of Covid-19, and I’m inclined to agree. But we are an Easter people and, while we might struggle, like Thomas, to come to terms with our new reality, Jesus’ assurance is always there for us. He understands our questioning and

evolution in every age! He is with us now, yes, ‘til the end of time.

Can we personally and collectively trust His Spirit and His Word, as the Apostles did on that first Pentecost Day? We do this with the help of Jesus’ Holy Spirit and His gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, holiness and awe in the face of God! We just need to activate these gifts in our lives and believe in them!

We, in our time, have more than 2,000 years of lived experience as disciples, and of belonging to Christian community, to learn from; centuries of great saints and sinners, outstanding faith as well as turbulence, scandals and Councils...the most recent Council of our time being Vatican II, over 60 years ago.

In addition, there have been synods and many teaching documents issued as well. What can we learn from our lived history? Two things: (1) We are a community of saints and sinners; (2) The risen Jesus is Lord of all history, of creation and of the universe. His Lordship encompasses all of our weaknesses and failures. He is with us always as we struggle to evolve from age to age, despite our failures. He sees our goodness and our good intentions. All He wants is our hearts and our willingness to make His kingdom come on earth.

“Simon Peter, do you love me? Do you love me more than these others? Then feed my sheep”! Love is the essential qualification for any of us to be His disciple and to belong to His community.

In our time, Pope Francis, our

Shepherd, has expressed a desire to create a more synodal church; one with laity, bishops, priests and religious all praying, listening and discerning together to discover the way the Holy Spirit is leading our church in mission today.

Called

Each one of us is called to be part of this discernment. Each one has her/his gift and is invited to offer it. If you are part of an already-formed group such as Cursillio, a prayer group such as Lectio Divina, a study group, a liturgy group or a parish council member, or any other parish group that is involved with the community of believers, you have some special insights to contribute.

Pope Francis also wants to hear from those who have fallen away from Church practice, as well as those who are searching for faith. Obviously, and most importantly, participants need to understand that the Synod is a gathering of God’s people who have prayed and reflected on the meaning and purpose of God’s church in the world today, that is, its mission, and are open to communal discernment, under the guidance of God’s Holy Spirit, as was the case in the early Church (eg Acts 6:2).

Now is the time to prepare personally and communally for such an important event. Both Vatican II documents, ‘The Constitution on the Church’ (Lumen Gentium) and ‘The Church in the Modern World’, highlight the important role of the laity in giving shape to the church.

How do we prepare? Personal reading, conversation with others,

listening, praying, reflecting on current practice in church and on recent church documents, eg The Joy of the Gospel, The Joy of Love (on the family), Laudati Si (on care of the earth), Fratelli tutti (on fraternity and social friendship) etc, as well as on the social and political circumstances of our times.

We might pray and reflect on such questions as: What is God saying in all of this? What is the Holy Spirit asking of us in this time? How can we manifest God’s action in our community? How can we best live out the mission given to us by Jesus at our Baptism? What helps can we offer our youth to explore and express their faith and mission? What are the big issues of our time? How do we include all sections of society in the mission of the church? How can lay people be helped to feel more involved? How can we promote more lay leadership in our church? How can we promote the unity for which Jesus yearned? What is my (our) response to our own Diocesan plan?

These kinds of questions can help us get started and orientate our minds. At all times, our focus needs to be on the mission of the church, otherwise the synod risks becoming a “talking shop”, as Bishop Donal recently pointed out. “We need to remember that a synod does not mean a ‘parliamentary approach’ where power-blocks square up to each other, to win votes and promote their human agendas or the popular ideas in secular society.

“Unless synodality is focussed on re-energising the mercy mission of Jesus through the church, it risks

becoming a curious talking shop that is going nowhere”, said Bishop Donal.

The initial stage has begun! At a practical level, the Irish Bishops have announced the initial submission phase of the upcoming synod, which was announced March 10, 2021. Commenting on this development, Bishop Brendan Leahy of Limerick said the bishops were inviting submissions “to reflect on what methods/models to adopt” in the coming two years of conversations.

He gives as examples, “parish hall meetings, focus groups, questionnaires, deep listening sessions, written submissions, family-focused gatherings, summary of findings of assemblies that have already taken place across dioceses, and/or conferences”.

Feedback, which should be no more than 300 words and submitted by Pentecost Sunday, May 23, ought to focus on the nature of the process for the consultation, that is, how we can best go about this initial phase of establishing the conversation.

Bishop Leahy stressed that this is not about the prospective themes or topics as these will be addressed in the next phase. The responses will be considered by a task group put in place by the bishops this summer, 2021, to plan and oversee the first steps along the synodal pathway.

The journey is already under way! If you have ideas or suggestions regarding the process of consultation that might be followed, now is the time to send them in.

Vision for a Synodal Church *by Fr Oliver Crilly*



Fr Oliver Crilly, Castlefinn.

WE could assume that the vision is already in place and do nothing. But if we recognise that it has to be transformative, that things have to change, we need to change structures, as Pope Benedict said at the Pastoral Convention in Rome in 2009: “It is necessary to improve pastoral structures in such a way that the co-responsibility of all the members of the people of God in their entirety is gradually promoted”.

It’s not just about ‘helping the priest’. It’s about sharing in

leadership - facilitative leadership, where each facilitates the others. “Facilitation is the unleashing of the energy of the Holy Spirit within me and within us”.

In ‘Novo Millennio Ineunte’, in 2001, Pope John Paul II quoted St Paulinus of Nola: “Let us listen to what all the faithful say, because in every one of them the Spirit of God breathes”.

We have a lot to unlearn. We associate leadership with power, with being in charge. We need models of listening and collaboration. We need humility: “If serving is below you, leadership is beyond you”.

We have to learn the process of discernment: to listen, not to confront and argue our case, as we see in the adversarial model we are used to in the law courts, in business and in politics: “When you cease discerning and start advocating, you have lost your way”.

Management theory and the human sciences support the value of a collaborative approach: “Enduring enthusiasm can be gained only by participation” (Ivor Kenny, IMI, ‘Can you Manage?’)

Carl Rogers spoke of the quality of Unconditional Positive Regard for successful counselling (and leadership). The person you’re working with doesn’t have to earn your trust, and you cannot withdraw it as a punishment. Genuine collaboration cannot be switched on and off at will.

Brother Loughlan Sofield points out that: “Collaboration only comes about when there are places where people can talk to and listen to one another”. Structures again!

The Code of Canon Law uses the term ‘pastoral council’ for the kind of pastoral structure Pope Benedict referred to in 2009 (diocesan pastoral councils and parish pastoral councils). We should go with that terminology. By now, we should have given up on approximations. We should have outgrown the ‘pastoral council or its equivalent’ kind of language. We need an integrated structure across the diocese, fully supported with training and resources. Please God, the Covid restrictions will not last forever.

The parish pastoral council doesn’t feel like something superimposed on the local Church.

It reflects very naturally the Church we read about in the Acts of the Apostles, read continuously during the Easter Season: the disciples gathered in prayer and led by the Spirit, and the facilitative leadership of Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, who sees the potential in people, including Paul, and involves them in the life and mission of the Church.

The pastoral council is not a threat to the role of the parish priest. The role of president of the parish pastoral council is an active role: it structures the ultimate responsibility of the parish priest. One of his roles in the parish pastoral council is in fact to be guardian of the whole process.

None of this is easy. Blessed Charles de Foucauld loved to quote St John of the Cross: “We should not match the work we do to our weakness, but match our efforts to the work that must be done”.

The Irish cyclist, Sam Bennett said the same thing in an interview he gave after winning the Green Jersey in the Tour de France. He said: “Everything you want is outside your comfort zone”.

A church resembling more closely that in Acts of Apostles to be welcomed *by Brian McKee*



Brian McKee, Melmount.

THIS suggestion that we develop a more synodal Church, a church that would resemble more closely the one described in the Acts of

the Apostles, is revolutionary in capital letters.

And if the Pope’s suggestion gains traction, and is seen to be taken up and put into practice, then it can only result in a church where the Kingdom of God grows, where divisions begin to dissolve, and we all begin to discover how amazing and lovable everyone is.

Whilst it will not solve the problems of poverty, prejudice, and all the things that are damaging our earth, it might begin to create a world in which weapons and arms are no longer needed, in which care for one another becomes the norm, and bring us to a place where we actually realise that Our God is a God of Love, that we are precious, and that this life is a journey to that place where we will be able to spend eternity in a state of total peace, in one of the mansions in The Father’s House.

We need to understand importance of God in our own lives and relevance of parish life to each of us *by Anne Friel*

CREATING and living as a more synodal church is the right thing to do. It may be many things - enriching, life-giving, exhausting and possibly frightening. We can be afraid of losing what we already have.

The disciples were afraid when Jesus appeared to them after the Resurrection saying, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you". (John 20:21). 'Peace be with you' may be a form of general greeting, but points towards the need to start from being grounded in peace and in prayer.

Prayer is key. It is important that we continue to work on how we pray individually and together. We need to help each other to travel along this path. At every stage of this process, we need to ensure that there is support for each of us, priest and lay person - support in prayer, spiritual direction, developing different ways of praying and small prayer groups in our parishes across the Diocese.

We can be quite an introverted Church. Although we may see dwindling numbers attending Mass, we draw comfort from the universality of the Church and believe that all will be well. It can be uncomfortable and challenging

to think about walking together in a parish, as well as going out to others - 'that is not my job'. Most people try to live good lives, helping each other, so why do they need God or parish?

We are all called to mission through baptism. Our priests are ordained and called in a very special way. We need to respect the position and responsibilities of our priests but this does not mean that we should sit back and let them do all the work and all the thinking. We should not live as recipients of but in the knowledge of being actively involved in the Mass, in sacraments, in prayer, in the liturgy of the Word and also in mission.

What does that mean in a parish? We have examples right across the Diocese of priests and people walking together. The ways we interact may differ. We need to start a conversation about what we would want our parish to be like with a small (or larger) group of people who can listen, respect each other's contribution, who pray. To do that, we need to understand the importance of God in our own lives and the relevance of parish life to each of us.

Praying, listening, discerning involves taking time and space. It involves understanding what

discernment is and how we truly use this process. Early on, there may be benefit in learning about Ignatian Spirituality and how to discern together. Parish Pastoral Councils/Leadership Teams need to grow in working in this way, trusting each other and being able to have adult conversations. This way of working does not just happen - it needs to be named, spoken about and worked on, as we would do in any relationship.

Strengthening how we work together, support and challenge each other should be as important as the work of any group and this can be uncomfortable. We will need help. We are not used to working in this way in any walk-of-life. Can you imagine having meetings at work where we move forward through discernment and active listening?

There are leadership tools to look at how effective teams work and listen, but what Pope Francis is asking us to do is so much more. We must learn and practice how to live in this way so that these conversations become part of everyday life and can be sustained. We will tell people about what Pope Francis and the Irish Bishops are asking us all to do. We can start to have conversations in our parishes but we need to go out as well, to

where people are at and listen.

Part of this will be having conversations with the people we know, whether they go to church, are Catholic or not, and grow from there. We will learn from this and grow in confidence. We will need to go out to where people meet and work - to our hospitals, to Councils, to schools, to running groups, to social groups. We need to go to people who have been hurt, who do not feel welcome, who have been disenfranchised and we should learn how to be present and to listen. It is important also that we let people know that they are welcome in our churches.

If we are doing this at parish level, we will need support and focus. My experience is that we can have initial interesting and exciting conversations but we need to discuss and pray about what the next steps will be. Sustaining this process is important and we must talk through how to do this.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit appeared as a strong wind and tongues of fire. However, Elijah encountered God in the gentle breeze, not in the wind or the earthquake (1 Kings: 19). He was afraid and was fed by God on his journey into the wilderness. He then called Elisha.

There are different ways of



having these conversations, but conversations, being present, we should not discount the power listening and then walking of continuing one-to-one gentle forward together.



Myra McLaughlin

The May altar...a special family tradition *by Myra McLaughlin*

THE month of May, when we honoured Our Blessed Lady, bring so many special memories to mind. My parents and granny's homes always had a May altar and I have carried on this tradition in my own home. Usually granny put in flowers she had grown in the garden. Bluebells lit up the room and there was a beautiful smell.

Traditionally, we prayed the Rosary as a family, and I remember prayers and devotions for the full month of May. Like our earthly mother, our Mother in Heaven helps us with all our worries and fears. No problem is too little or

too big to resolve. Our daily Rosary is like Our Lady taking our hands.

I can visualise our Blessed Mother asking her son, Jesus, who never refuses His Mother, to do a favour for her.

Our children have now grown up and flown the nest to different parts of the world. I ask Our Lady each morning to place their hearts into hers and to intercede that no harm or danger will befall them.

May Mary shower you and your families with much joy, peace and happiness today and each day along life's journey.

I remember vividly May devotions to Our Lady

by Marian Murphy, Dungiven

THE month of May is devoted to Our Lady. It brings many thoughts to mind, including birthdays and anniversaries, but the most meaningful is from my younger days where the emphasis was on Our Lady, both at home and in school. Our May altars in school were adorned with jam jars of bluebells and pictures of Our Lady.

Like many families of my generation, the Rosary was prayed daily at home, but during May everyone seemed to descend on the church to honour Mary. I remember these Rosaries vividly; the public praying made it more 'alive', the altar decorated with candles and flowers, the choir and the congregation singing some of the most beautiful lyrics to address Our Lady.

These were the occasions where I learnt the words of the hymns and to this day remember them perfectly, even though I couldn't sing them perfectly!

Mary has appeared across the world to many people, to the children of Fatima and here in Ireland, at Knock, as well as many other countries, and her petition is always the same, prayer and penance.

She prayed for her son, Jesus, and encourages us to pray, especially in challenging times. Mary suffered when her son was missing, when

Simeon prophesied that a sword would pierce her heart, and she prayed during the passion of Jesus. Mary's example of prayer is a reminder to us to pray when we have struggles and hardships, and we are comforted in the knowledge that she is interceding for us.

Mary has many titles, as we learn from Our Lady's Litany... Our Lady of Lourdes, Queen of Peace, Immaculate Heart of Mary, etc, and these short prayers can be repeated often throughout the day and especially in circumstances where we find saying regular prayers difficult.

I have been fortunate to have travelled to Lourdes and to Medjugorje, and I would encourage anyone thinking of visiting either Apparition site, not to hesitate. I hope you will get as much from the experience as I got!



Marian Murphy, Dungiven.



Fr David O'Kane, PP Claudy, and the team of parishioners who helped to lead the First Saturday prayers in St Patrick's Church.

First Saturday devotions in Claudy *by Annie Mullan*

THE Parish of Claudy and Craigbane was privileged to take part, with the blessing of Fr David O'Kane, in the five First Saturday devotions requested by Archbishop Eamon Martin.

This included three hours of Eucharistic Adoration in St Patrick's Church, Claudy, and the recitation of three Rosaries for the intentions of the protection of Family and Youth, Vocations to the Priesthood and Religious Life, and the Conversion of Sinners.

The feast of Our Lady of Fatima is celebrated on May 13. We are encouraged to establish devotion to Her Immaculate Heart on first Saturdays and to pray the Rosary every day in honour of our Lady of the Rosary, to obtain peace for the World.

Mary, Our Mother, in Her apparitions to the children of Fatima pleaded with them not to offend Our Lord no more, for He is already much offended.

Jesus gifted us, in his Mercy, with our spiritual Mother. She encourages her children to listen to Jesus. She is a good Mother who wants to see us safely home. She wants us to be serious about our spiritual life, to imitate Her Son, and live a life of faith, hope and charity, and turn away from sin. Mary reflects God's Mercy. She is looking out for us always,

Mary, turn your eyes of Mercy towards us, prepare us for Heaven, where we will give glory to God with you, St Joseph and all the Angels and Saints for all eternity.

Our Lady of Fatima, pray for us.

Recalling Pope John Paul II's call for the church "to put out into the deep", Bishop Donal's Divine Mercy Sunday message highlighted that this remains the call to parishes...

A call to let Jesus in to reshape our ministry – and a call to let His mercy flow out over our hurting society

A beautiful celebration of the Feast of Divine Mercy took place in St Mary's Church, in the Creggan, Derry, when Bishop Donal blessed statues of two saints closely associated with the promotion of the Mercy message, St Faustina and Pope St John Paul II.

Unlike last year, when Bishop Donal, Fr Joe Gormley, Creggan PP, and curate, Fr Daniel McFaul were lone figures viewed over the church webcam celebrating this special Feast in the little Divine Mercy side chapel, a socially-distanced congregation was thankful to be present for this year's celebration.

As well as blessing the new statues, Bishop Donal blessed the Divine Mercy image and spoke about the Divine Mercy message, as Jesus had asked through Sr Faustina, on the Sunday following Easter Sunday.

Highlighting that sin and mercy are "at the heart of Jesus' ministry", and so it was not surprising that "the first mission of Jesus to His apostles on Easter evening was to forgive sins", Bishop Donal said: "Divine Mercy is not a new idea. Sr Faustina simply pointed to the fact that mercy is at the heart of the Gospel mission. Pope Francis simply re-echoed a core truth when he described Jesus as the face of the Father's mercy".

Acknowledging "a desperate

modern need for the message of divine mercy", he added: "Like the rest of the world, Ireland is full of hurting people. We have come through centuries of poverty and oppression, abuse of power and abuse of people on the margins of power. Understandably, there are so many calls for inquiries and compensation in order to deal with the pain of loss. Truth and cash may help many people to feel vindicated. But Jesus is clear that healing ultimately comes from finding peace with the full truth of our story, no matter how painful that past may have been".

Noting that Jesus' focus is ever on "the world's need to be healed", Bishop Donal continued: "Just as the spirit of God is described as hovering over the waters at Creation, so now the world can be recreated by the forgiving power of the Spirit. Just as Jesus still bears the wounds of His crucifixion and death, we are all scarred by the hurts that we have suffered.

"But, through the power of the Resurrection, those wounds are no longer raw, bleeding sores that will not go away. The scars of the past are part of Jesus' story – but they do not define who He is and who we can become in Him.

"In a world marked by so much merciless conflict and bitter words, there is a need for divine mercy. Despite the nightmares

of past sins, can we help hurting people to know mercy? If not, we are failing Jesus in His first words after Resurrection".

Bishop Donal went on to state that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is a key part of that mission of forgiveness, saying: "For recovering addicts, one of the elements of healing is hearing about the hurt that they have caused to those closest to them. That is terribly difficult but ultimately liberating. The truth alone sets you free (Jn 8:32).

"Our society is torn between the dogma that nobody can tell me what to do, and the deep suppressed awareness that I have done wrong. That culture ends up seeing evil in others but unable to accept responsibility for my own sins. The reality of others' sins is not an excuse for self-serving blindness to one's own sin".

"Any rediscovery of the Sacrament of Reconciliation," he pointed out, "entails not just a childish repetition of life-long faults but a profound engagement with the roots and effects of my sin.

"Forgiveness and divine mercy are an invitation to be adults rather than playing childish games with ourselves and others. Unless divine mercy leads to a growth in missionary faith, it is not the liberating Spirit-filled encounter that the apostles had

with Jesus on Easter night and eight days later".

Noting that the Scripture readings in the weeks ahead would follow the history of the early Church as it "sought to let the Holy Spirit guide it in all its uncertainty", Bishop Donal remarked: "As we come out of lockdowns, much of society is waiting to come back to life. The challenge for Church is never to be frightened and locked in our upper room.

"At his first homily as Pope in 1978, St John Paul II cried out "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ". In 2001, he called the church "to put out into the deep". That remains the call to all our parishes. It is a call to both let Jesus in, so that he can reshape our ministry – and a call to let Jesus and his mercy flow out over our hurting society.

"A church dominated by fear of society and fear of the future is not anointed with the Holy Spirit. A navel-gazing church preoccupied with itself is not the Church of Jesus. A church dreaming of divine retribution rather than of divine mercy is on the road to nowhere.

"Divine Mercy Sunday stands at the start of our mission and identity as Church. Are we brave enough to start out again on that mission of mercy?"



Beautiful day of grace in Claudy Parish on Feast of Divine Mercy by Annie Mullan

JESUS, through St Faustina whom He called His secretary, has asked that the first Sunday after Easter be the Feast of Mercy. On this day we are reminded that our destiny is in the hands of a Merciful God. Jesus said "by means of my image I will grant many graces to souls".

In St Patrick's Church, Claudy, on Divine Mercy Sunday, our parish priest, Fr David O'Kane blessed the Divine Mercy image and gave a Eucharistic blessing; the Lord was with us, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity.

Regardless of our many sins, God wants us to come back to Him. Our Merciful Saviour desires that we trust Him more deeply.

Jesus has forgiven us and demonstrated His unconditional love for us by dying on the Cross.

In the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, we pray directly to God; we

get to beg our Eternal Father's forgiveness for us and the whole world.

By acknowledging what Jesus went through, God will, for the sake of His Son's sorrowful passion, have Mercy on His children.

The fact that the Chaplet asks us to pray for the forgiveness of the sins of the whole world, tells us that being human is to be in communion with one another, each of us make up the mystical Body of Christ.

We pray through the intercession of Mary, our Mother of Mercy, of Saint Faustina and all the Saints that God's Divine Mercy will continue to transform us, and so help us to enter into the joy of Christ's Resurrection.

Our ceremony came to a close with the praying of the Act of Consecration of The Family to The Divine Mercy.



"Gazing on Divine Mercy image brings about repentance" – Fr Colhoun

THE quaint St Eugene's Church in Glenock, Co Tyrone, was the setting for the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday in the parish of Newtownstewart.

Following the celebration of Mass, Fr Roland Colhoun, CC, heard Confessions during a period of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and finished by leading a Holy Hour with Divine Mercy Devotions.

Speaking about Divine Mercy, Fr Roland said: "When we repent, we open a channel for God's Grace to enter".

Commenting on the Divine Mercy image, he explained that the two rays (the blood and water that flowed from the side of Jesus on the Cross on Calvary) emanating from Jesus' heart represented two of the sacraments – Baptism and the Eucharist.

"By gazing on the Divine Mercy image we are overwhelmed by His Mercy and that brings about repentance in us", said Fr Roland, adding: "We need God's Mercy, so we need to surrender, to open ourselves to His Mercy".





Worldwide Rosary prayer marathon coincides with Legion of Mary Centenary

IN response to the wish of Pope Francis, people all over the world are united in praying the Rosary during this month of May, for the end of the Covid-19 pandemic and resumption of social and work activities.

The Holy Father has invited Marian Shrines around the world, including the International Sanctuary of Special Eucharistic and Marian Devotion at Knock, in Co Mayo, to guide the faithful in this time of prayer, and parishes in the Diocese are encouraging parishioners to add their voices to the world wide call, in prayer, for Our Lady's intercession.

The daily Rosary is accompanied by a prayer intention for those most affected, such as the deceased, those who have not been able to say goodbye to their loved ones, health care workers, the poor, those homeless, and those experiencing economic hardship.

Opening the prayer marathon, Pope Francis blessed 30 special Rosaries which were then sent to the 30 Shrines taking part around the world.

The promotion of the Rosary as a powerful prayer is one of the main practices of The Legion of Mary, which was founded 100 years ago in Dublin by Servant of God, Frank Duff, and some members of the Legion have shared here their experience as legionaries in the Diocese to mark this Centenary year. Other devotees of Our Lady and the Rosary have also taken up the opportunity to share their love of Mary and this special prayer.



Legion of Mary Masses to celebrate significant dates in lead up to Centenary



LEGION OF MARY
FOUNDED 7 SEPTEMBER 1921

THE Legion of Mary celebrates the 100th anniversary this year of its founding in Ireland by Servant of God, Frank Duff, and legionaries throughout the Derry Diocese are marking the occasion with a series of Masses on significant dates celebrated by their spiritual director, Fr Thomas Canning.

A lay apostolic association founded on September 7, 1921, in Dublin, the Legion sees the spiritual and social welfare of each person as its priority, and is now a worldwide organisation with millions of members.

The first Mass celebrated by Fr Canning to mark the Centenary

took place in St Theresa's Church, Sion Mills, on March 25, the Feast of the Annunciation of The Lord, which is the traditional date of The Acies; the ceremony during which legionaries renew their promises.

The second was celebrated on April 28, the Feast of St Louis Mary de Montfort, who had a major influence on the life of Frank Duff, and the next Mass will be celebrated on May 12, the anniversary of the death of the Ven Edel Quinn, the first Legion of Mary Envoy.

The birthday of Frank Duff will be marked with the celebration of Mass on June 7, and a Mass on June 23 will mark the birth of Servant of God, Alfie Lambe, the second Legion of Mary Envoy, who was born on the Feast of St John the Baptist, June 24, 1932.

Another Mass to mark the founding of the Legion is being planned for September, by which time the hope is that more legionaries will be able to gather together to mark the Centenary.

At this stage, the Masses will be streamed via the church webcam, as continued Covid restrictions limit the numbers able to gather for the public celebration of Mass.



May altar display for Legion of Mary Mass in St Teresa's Church, Sion Mills.



Some of the Legionaries who attended Mass on the Feast of St Louis Mary de Montfort in St Teresa's Church, Sion Mills, celebrated by Fr Thomas

The Legion has drawn me closer to Jesus, Mary and Joseph - Joan Harte, Eskra, Omagh

GROWING up in a Rosary family and becoming a Child of Mary in her final years at the Loreto Convent School in Omagh, back in the 60s, the president of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Praesidium in Omagh town, Joan Harte, feels blessed to have journeyed through life under the protection of Our Lady's mantle and to have been able to show her appreciation through her involvement with the Legion of Mary.

Thankful for her Catholic faith, she recalled: "I was raised in a family of 12 children and the Rosary was very much at the centre of our family, which was such a privilege. I went to the Loreto Convent School in Omagh and, being a Catholic school, Religion and Faith permeated every aspect of the curriculum.

"In sixth year, we were asked if we would like to become a Child of Mary. I just thought it was such a natural thing to do, so I joined a group of girls in doing that and we wore a blue ribbon over our uniform, with a Miraculous Medal attached to it."

"So, I suppose that set me very much on the path to the Legion of Mary," said Joan, "though I didn't know at the time that becoming a Child of Mary was a prelude to becoming a Legionary."

After school, she left for England to train as a teacher and found herself living in an area in which the Legion of Mary was active, and got to see the work done by some of its legionaries. When she later returned home, started teaching and got married, an opportunity arose to join a new Legion of Mary branch in Omagh, where she lived with her husband, Brendan.

She recalled: "It was during a Mission that the parish priest at the time, Mgr Rooney called for a new Praesidium to be set up in the parish. He had a great devotion to Our Lady and was dedicated to the Legion of Mary. It was a particularly busy time in my life as I had taken secondment from my teaching post to work with the Education Board. So, I didn't think I could fit in involvement with the Legion of Mary, but the seed was planted and I couldn't ignore it and went down to St Vincent's Hall, in Omagh, to a meeting with others. That was in 1984.

"I remember two Legionaries from Castlederg travelling to Omagh every week to initiate us in the works of the Legion and help set up the new Praesidium. Three months later we took our promise and I stayed for eight or nine years."

"In the meantime," she explained, "my husband, Brendan,

had also joined the Legion and we had two children by that stage. I found that I was going out at night for meetings during the week for work and the Legion, and so was Brendan, and we just thought this wasn't fair to our young children. So, we sat down and chatted about it and I decided to stay at home, while Brendan was to continue. It turned out to be the best decision as Brendan has been a solid Legionary right up until the present day.

"I had always hoped and said that if I was well enough when I retired from school that I would re-join and that is what I did. I rejoined in 2012 and really enjoy being back in the Legion. I can devote more time to it now as I am retired and our children, two girls and a boy are, of recent, all married.

Blessed with four grandchildren and, please God, a new addition in July, Joan said: "It is a privilege and a pleasure to have the time now to help out with our grandchildren; being busy parents you don't have the same time for your own children as your grandchildren."

Blessed

Joan also feels blessed that both she and Brendan are Legionaries, though members of different

Praesidia in Omagh, with Brendan a member of Mary, Mother of The Church Praesidium.

She went on to explain: "Looking to the future, Mgr Rooney, who has long since died, envisaged a second Praesidium, with a view to encouraging young people to join. His thinking was to let the first one come to a natural end through old age, and by then the new one would be strong and the transition seamless, and so it was. Now, we are the oldies!"

"There is quite a lot of interaction between the two praesidia; we plan all the annual events together and go as a mix of men and women on certain projects."

Commenting on their ministry and the effects of lockdown, Joan said: "For some parts of the past year we haven't been able to meet or do our work, which includes visitations with the Rosary statue, visiting nursing homes and the hospital, and school visits during the months of May and October, to promote the Rosary and the Legion.

"However, the men's praesidium came up with the great idea of meeting socially distanced to pray the Rosary in housing developments around Omagh. We named it 'Rosary in the park'. We go to a different park every Thursday night, set up a little altar

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and pray the Rosary. We offer the Rosary for the intentions of the residents and consecrate the area to the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus”.

“As well, in our praesidium, we promote the message of Fatima, which includes daily Rosary and First Friday/First Saturday devotion. To bring this message to others, we meet with our male Legionaries to recite a public Rosary in Omagh’s Market Street. This is done on the 13th of each month between May and October, at midday”.

With regards to dwindling membership, Joan remarked: “The Legion of Mary does not have great numbers, but I am reminded of what Mgr Rooney said to us, back in the 80s and 90s, when he would praise our efforts and good work and we would say if only we could get more members. He told us not to worry about the quantity, that it’s the quality that counts.

“There are a lot of different organisations that appeal to different people, and the times we meet might not suit some people, so for lots of reasons we do not have many members but those we have are strong in quality”.

With Brendan coming from a strong Rosary family as well, the couple remained devoted to the tradition within their own family.

Having great faith in the power of prayer, Joan said: “We really believe that everything good comes from being close to God and His Mother Mary. We have been so blessed in life and it is no doubt because we depend on Jesus and Mary for everything. We give them all the praise and acknowledgement that we can in life. We share with people that when you have a strong faith you can cope with anything. We have had our crosses but we have been given the strength to keep going and keep positive.

“As a member of the Legion of Mary, you keep developing your knowledge of the Catholic faith and strengthening your personal faith. You just keep getting drawn closer to Jesus, Mary and St Joseph. Thank God for the recognition St Joseph is getting this year particularly, as he is so important to the life of the Church.

“When preparing for meetings, I look up various aspects of our Faith to share with the others, such as information on Saints, and so you learn more and more. I find this very enjoyable and relaxing. Prayer alone gives great comfort and strength but, for me, it is a great privilege to be part of a Faith organisation like the Legion of Mary”.

Our Lady Queen of the May and Queen of our Hearts – Mary McMenemy, Castlefin



DURING the month of May we honour Mary, the Mother of Jesus. We pray especially to her during this month and it is a time for a moving tribute of faith and love to the Queen of Heaven.

Through the prayers of the Rosary and the veneration of Our Lady’s statue in our home, we have a wonderful opportunity to draw closer to our Heavenly Mother. The Rosary is a powerful way to honour Our Lady and this is what she asked of us in Fatima, in the year 1917. The messages Our Lady gave at Fatima are as important and relevant today as they were over 100 years ago.

The prayer specified by Our Lady as especially dear to her was ‘The Rosary’. Each time she appeared, from May until October 1917, she appealed for the Rosary and, in October, she said, “I am the Lady of the Rosary; continue to say the

Rosary everyday”.

Ven Fr Patrick Peyton, also known as ‘The Rosary Priest’, encouraged the family Rosary and travelled all over the world telling families how Mary desired to help them. He became one of the greatest promoters of the Rosary in the history of the Church. He had a famous slogan which has always stuck in my mind, “The family that prays together stays together”.

When my husband and I got married and came to live in the parish of Urney & Castlefin, Fr William Rafferty was the parish priest here. He had a tender devotion to Our Lady and talked about her with such great love. He had a branch of the Legion of Mary in the parish and was the first person I had ever heard talking about ‘The True Devotion to Mary’, by St Louis de Montfort.

We are hoping for new blood after reflection time during lockdown - Marie McColgan, Creggan

CREGGAN legionary, Marie McColgan, has been the president of the Derry Legion of Mary Comitium for almost three years, though there has not been much to do in the past year because of the Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns.

Marie took over the presidency from Teresa Browne, with whom she shares the work of the Creggan Praesidium, and in this role liaises with the Curia officers in County Derry, representing praesidia in the city, as well as in Limavady, Dungiven, Tamnaherin, Bellaghy and Maghera, and Inishowen.

Enjoying her involvement with the Legion, Marie expressed some concern at the lack of new members and at how the Covid situation has not helped that, as well as hindering the work of legionaries, but her faith gives her hope for the future.

“I always had a love for Our Lady and the Sacred Heart,” she remarked, adding: “When I was younger I thought I wanted to be a nun. I did consider the Medical Missionaries of Mary in Drogheda, who were doctors and nurses working on the foreign missions. The Mother House was in Drogheda and I used to correspond with them, but then you meet people and things change.

“I grew up in a family where the faith was strong. My father went to Mass and received Holy Communion every day. My mother was too busy looking after nine of us so she couldn’t go to Mass every day, but she had a strong faith. They made sure that we went to Mass every week and regularly to Confession, and we were in every night for the Rosary at 6 pm.

“So prayer and the sacraments were a big part of life for most families at that time. People seem to have lost that. My own family don’t go to Mass now and that really vexes me. All I can do is be an example for them; I just hope that that will be enough to draw them back some day. If they need prayers they always ask me to pray and light a candle for them, as do people I work with, who know

I remember listening to him speak with great love and conviction.

“The True Devotion to Mary’, in short, is a total consecration of ourselves to Jesus through Mary. It consists in giving oneself entirely to Mary, and to Jesus through Mary, “and to do all our actions by Mary, with Mary, in Mary, and for Mary; so that we may do them all the more perfectly by Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus, and for Jesus”.

The Servant of God, Frank Duff read the “True Devotion to Mary” and it changed his life. He became the founder of the Legion of Mary and this year marks the centenary of the first Legion of

that my religion and prayer life is important to me.

“It is not something that people promote these days, but my faith is not hidden. I think that is a grace I get from Our Lady and Christ. The Rosary would be one my favourite prayers. As you get older you are more aware of your own mortality, so I say like to say the 15 prayers given to St Brigid of Sweden, for a happy death”.

Diagnosed six years ago with aplastic anemia, a serious condition affecting the blood, where the bone marrow and stem cells do not produce enough blood cells, Marie explained: “It compromises my immunity and I have to get my blood checked regularly. I have prayed a lot about this, that I may not be a burden and that I will have time to put everything in place before I die.

“The ideal treatment is stem cell donation if all else fails, but over the age of 50 this doesn’t really work and I was 56 when I was diagnosed, so it’s not an option for me. Blood transfusions would be the only treatment available to me if my blood platelets get too low.”

She added: “There are a lot of things in my life that I can’t explain except that it is down to the power of prayer and God’s Grace. That is the test of the strength of your faith - when your back is against the wall and there is nowhere else to turn, you turn to God and you get a peace from that. I am at peace with the thought of dying, but maybe not so at peace with any pain that might go with it, however, praying the Rosary and asking Our Lady to intercede for my family or myself, helps me a lot”.

Enrich

Recalling how her faith had led to her joining the Legion, the mother of six said: “As I got older and my family left home, I had a bit more time on my hands and felt that I wanted to do some voluntary work. Although I was going to Mass at the weekend and sometimes during the week when not working, I wanted to make more of an effort to enrich my prayer life. I always had an affinity with Our Lady as I was christened

Mary meeting, which was held on September 7, 1921.

I was first invited to join the Legion by a member of ‘The Queen of the Universe’ Praesidium in Doneyloop in the early 90s, when Fr Rafferty was the spiritual director. I really loved the weekly meetings, which consist of the Rosary, reading from the handbook, a talk and assigned work reports and work assignment. I was with that Praesidium for a few years, then a branch was set up in Castlefin, in 2006, called ‘Our Lady of Guadalupe’, and I have been a member of this Praesidium since.

Mary Elizabeth.

“I knew Teresa Browne and that she was in the Legion. I got talking to her on the bus one day, and said that I was thinking of joining, so she invited me to go to a meeting and I did...and the rest is history”.

She added: “I enjoyed the meetings and liked the work involved, but I did question what the point is to this, as most people do. Legionaries don’t get any recognition for what they do, which is why many leave to join St Vincent de Paul, as they see the fruits of what they do through them. They collect money and help people that need it, financially and materially.

“The Legion is not like that. You are giving your time to people who are maybe a bit lonely or disconnected from society, maybe doing a hospital or residential home visit. Before Covid, Teresa and I went around houses in Creggan, our parish, and gave people a Rosary leaflet on how to pray the Rosary and a Miraculous Medal, trying to promote prayer. We also went to our local primary schools to say a decade of the Rosary with the children and talk to them, explaining the Mysteries of the Rosary.

“You don’t know what that prayer leaflet or medal is going to do for somebody. You are handing it over and letting Our Lady do the work. That is the way the Legion works. You don’t look to find out the outcome of your action. Our Lady is the worker; we just set the ball in motion. Sometimes you feel you want to do more but that is the way it is. Young people especially like to see the results of their efforts, or get some personal satisfaction from what they have done, and it is not like that in the Legion”.

“We also find it very hard to recruit because the Legion has very strict rules and regulations, which have not changed over the last 100 years,” continued Marie: “The lifestyle of young people these days does not always meet these requirements. We have had young people approach us but when they hear that they have to be practicing Catholics, receiving

Throughout this past year, we have held our weekly meetings online. At the moment, we have four members in our Praesidium and are always open to welcoming new members. You can also become an auxiliary member of the Legion, which consists of praying the Rosary and reciting all the prayers on the Legion Tesserat every day.

I have always loved the thought of being part of Our Lady’s army. The Legion of Mary has been and continues to be a great benefit to me on my journey of faith. In the handbook, ‘Legio Mariae’, the object of the Legion of Mary



the Sacraments and not living with a partner outside of marriage, a lot of them find that hard.

“The Legion was founded by Frank Duff a long time ago and I don’t think anybody has the authority to change what was set-up by him then, and for many it appears to be so outdated. But we can’t change the rules. A lot of young people have come to our meetings but left after a few months, asking why we can’t embrace people who are living with partners outside marriage. That is a rule we have to adhere to”.

Pointing out that the Legion House is at 5 Clarendon Street, in Derry, and that Fr Thomas Canning is their spiritual director, Marie expressed her appreciation of his support: “During lockdown, Fr Canning has been very good at keeping us all connected. There are a few Praesidia a bit savvier with technology than others and they do Zoom meetings, but a lot of our members are elderly, so it has been lovely to be able to join Fr Canning, via the Sion Mills chapel webcam, on Monday nights at 7.30 pm, when he prays the Rosary and the Legion prayers”.

Explaining that the Legion is self-funded, Marie said: “We have a secret bag and everybody puts in what they can. This is how we keep our Legion House running, with regards to heating and lighting, etc. We rely on the generosity of members to keep things going, so it is a bit concerning that there are so few new members. We are hoping for new blood with all the reflection time we have had during lockdown”.

Anyone interested in joining the Legion can find out through their parish office or the Diocesan office where their nearest praesidium is

“is the glory of God through the holiness of its members developed by prayer and active co-operation, under ecclesiastical guidance, in Mary’s and the Church’s work of crushing the head of the serpent and advancing the reign of Christ”.

(*Mary is the president of the Mater Dei Curia*)

Our Lady is our Mother, she is close to us and she will never abandon her children. She wants us to ask her for all the graces we need. Let us turn to Our Lady in prayer.

‘O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to thee’.

Those Tunnels *by Vera McFadden*

WHEN I heard Mark Patterson mention a tunnel in Bishop Street, in Derry City, I recalled that my brother, Seamus had told me about one that was there years ago. Later I saw an illustration in ‘Derry Columbkille’ (1898). The picture showed the martyrdom of the Dominican Friars in the basement of the town hall, at the Diamond, and I wondered if the tunnel had been near that.

I began to think of some other tunnels. According to tradition, an underground passage connects Castleross and Greenhill, both of which are in the parish of Desertegney. The former Castle was the home of Eamon ODoherty, a grandson of Conor an Einach. I had read that only the foundations remained. It was easy to get permission to investigate, as the site was on my brother’s farm, and my son and I found part of them under some whin bushes.

Nearby, I discovered tiny stalagmites coming up through the grass. This is limestone country, and the architect who designed the nearby Star of the Sea Church decided that St Egney’s Hermitage could have been a limestone cave and so he planned the interior to look like a big one.

On the shore, near the castle site, there is a little beach and nearby a cave with a square entrance. It is said that a man who was playing a fiddle went in there and never came out again.

The story is also told about a cave in Fanad, across the lough, and other places. Is the tunnel a limestone cave? They can extend a long way. More likely it was constructed, but exactly where it is and its period are unknown. It leads to Greenhill (Cre an Chill – the soil of the church). The church here was built after the attacks on the one at Dunree. After the Celtic period, the Augustinians were in charge, and then the established church used it. After that, it was returned to the Catholics and its walls were rebuilt.

Not far from the Greenhill site there is a souterrain. A flagstone covers its entrance and inside it is necessary to move in a stooped manner. It has a flagged roof and floor and stone- built corbelled walls. There are three rooms which are also corbelled and are

beehive-shaped – the first one is several yards from the entrance, the second is at the other end of the passage, and it leads into the third smaller similarly shaped space. It is possible to stand upright at the end of the passage

This underground passage is ancient. It may have been used for storage or for hiding during a raid. Its proximity to the church at Greenhill may suggest a connection but, indeed, it could be more ancient. It could also be connected in some way to the long tunnel between Castleross and Greenhill.

A tunnel was discovered during work near Dunree but, because of respect for ancient structures, it was closed up again without investigation.

We are told that there is a tunnel connecting Northburg Castle, on the bank of Lough Foyle, with the remains of the little church in a roadside field around the corner. Northburg was built by Richard De Burgh in 1305. I do not know when the church was built, but if there is a tunnel it must begin on ground near the Castle as that is built on rock. There is a considerable distance between the two places, so it would be necessary for the tunnel to be high enough and safe enough, as it would not be possible to walk in a crouched position for such a distance. The air quality would need to be good.

Once on a Donegal Historical Society outing, we were told the following story at

Cloncha...long ago, monks used a tunnel to journey from the monastic site at Carrowmore to the other at Cloncha. If a monk had forgotten his book, he was able to send a message by telling the monk behind him and it was passed on down the line. Our guide thought this was only a made up story to indicate that there were many monks in the two monasteries. However last year, bog oak artist, Mary Doherty who had grown up in the area told me that her father had always told them that story. When the Bernician Studies Group investigated the area, they found that tunnel.

I was told that there is a tunnel connecting an early monastic site and a fort site in Co Derry. And, of course, there are probably

many more. It certainly seems that there are at least several in Derry. When I asked my friends if they had ever heard of any, I found that between folk memory and discovery through the years some sites could be pinpointed.

Derry Walls

One friend had heard of a tunnel which started inside the Derry Walls and led to the “big house at the park”. Was this the former Gwynn’s Institute? Or was it the former Rosemount Cottage beside Warke’s Lane?

It is interesting that Rosemount cottage was on a site which was much higher than the streets around it and it is the highest point in the Rosemount area. Years ago, Seamus pointed this out to me as he thought that it could have been an important site in ancient times.

Most of the Derry tunnel sites that I have heard about are near St Columb’s Cathedral, which is on an ancient site at the highest point in Derry City. This site has been used since ancient times.

From the Celtic period on, there have been churches in Derry, and during the Plantation era there were some monasteries which had been in place for centuries. Then came the Reformation, when monks and religious who remained faithful to their beliefs were persecuted and martyred. Some of the tunnels may have been used as escape routes from their monasteries or abbeys. Unfortunately many were captured. Their buildings were destroyed and many of the fine cut stones were used in the building of Derry Walls.

Of course, escape was one of the uses for tunnels. Years ago, I read a book by Brian Bonnar, in which he pointed out a way that Cahair O’ Doherty could have escaped from the city. Not very far from where he lived there was a cellar door, which opened into an underground passage and this, in turn, emerged near a pilgrimage route which had several branches. When I heard about the tunnel to the house at Brooke Park, I thought surely this is it.

When I was a child, Warke’s Lane, which was short, led to Park Avenue and Rosemount factory. There was a route near the factory that led to Priest’s Lane. The

historian suggested that Cahir could easily have used this way, for one of its branches leads to Coshquin and then he would be near his home at Burt. Perhaps...

When archaeologist, Professor Cormac McSparron examined the best-preserved part of Priest’s Lane, he told us that it was ancient, perhaps even 1,500 years old. Was the tunnel as old as that?

One of my friends told me that when an old Georgian house collapsed, a tunnel was found but investigation was not permitted. This was near the traditional ‘Franciscan Gort’ and Francis Street.

Historian, Father Pat Quinlan, OFM, found no evidence of a Franciscan Monastery in the city, but said that there had been a Franciscan house in it. The Georgian house may have been built on that site.

Local tradition holds that St Eugene’s Cathedral is built on part of the Franciscan gort. The Georgian house was almost facing the Model School, the back of which is at the park so the tunnel may have branched from the longer one.

I would like to discover more about the tunnels, but I would not like to go into them. I have only been in two underground passages in my life. One was the souterrain at Greenhill and the other was one of the catacombs in Rome. The entrance was low and the first part of the passage was steep, then the gradient decreased and at the last part of the catacomb we were on level ground. We felt a great sense of awe as we passed along; the memory of these early Christian Martyrs, who had given their lives because of their true belief in Jesus and living as He had taught. Some of them were buried in little coffins in the walls of the Catacombs. After we turned a corner in the level part, we saw the tombs of others behind wire mesh. Of course, the whole corridor had lighting.

At different periods throughout the centuries, Christians have been tortured and martyred for their faith. The hidden Christians in Japan were hunted and executed for the same few hundred years as the Irish and British were during the Reformation.

There were other kinds of tunnels – the coal mines, like the



one at Arigna...I recall visiting the Arigna Museum on my way home from Drumshambo one time...and the Silver mines, like the one near Gortahork - there had been exploratory shafts near my brother-in-law’s home at Keeldrum, and his sister fell into one, but was rescued unharmed. There were also the gold mines, like the one at Glentogher that we passed on the way from Quigley’s Point to Carndonagh.

There were tunnels as well by which prisoners escaped or tried to escape from custody. And then there are the little stories about

underground spaces where the chiefs and their warriors were sleeping until the time came for them to awake and protect their territory once more. These legends may suggest that in their actual lifetime, they did have underground shelters into which they could hide from their enemies when there was too much danger. I wonder if geophysics will ever detect one of these places.

We will never know the complete stories of mankind’s activity in the tunnels and underground spaces, but we do know that they are many.



Some May memories... *by Vera McFadden*

THE month of May holds many beautiful memories for me...

- ...The bunch of flowers tied to the top of a post in the garden fence - a remnant from an ancient festival?
- ...My First Communion.
- ...Picking beautifully scented May flowers before the lawnmower destroyed them.

- ...My daughter’s birth in the Mater Hospital, Belfast.
- ...My children’s First Communions.
- ...The church in the Cova at Fatima.
- ...The Rosary decade and hymns in the school hall during the month of May.
- ...The candlelight procession at Fatima.

- ...The May altar in my daughter’s bedroom every year.
- ...My five-year-old son singing a hasty “The young May moon is beaming, love” at St Paul’s feis in Belfast; he was far too young but so badly wanted to perform.
- ...Rosary Processions.
- ...The Statue of Our Lady of the Rosary at the Cova in Fatima.
- ...The Stations of the Cross

- through the wood in Fatima.
- ...Visiting the tombs of Jacinta and Francesco.
- ...The increased awe at the beauty of nature – the skies, the wood the trees, the shrubs and hedges, the flowers, the birdsong and flights and the rest in May during lock down.

Golden Rose - Our Lady of Knock *by Fr Joseph Varghese*

“Golden Rose, Queen of Ireland, all my cares and troubles cease, as we kneel with love before you, Lady of Knock, my Queen of Peace...”

I have been greatly impressed by the beautiful reverential hymn, ‘Lady of Knock’, or ‘Golden Rose’. It is often sung on special occasions such as weddings, funerals or as the final hymn after the liturgical celebrations, especially in Ireland. It was written and recorded by a famous Derry singer called Dana, who is Rosemary Scallon (nee Brown).

We are all aware of the great Marian Shrines throughout the world, including Lourdes, Fatima and Medjugorje, but Ireland has her own Marian Shrine in the small village of Knock, in Co Mayo, in the West of Ireland. Of course, I knew little about Knock when I was training for the priesthood in my native Kerala, in India. However, since coming to Ireland to minister to the Syro-Malabar faithful in Ireland and to work in St Eugene’s Cathedral, St Columba’s Long Tower, Waterside parishes and St Patrick’s Dungiven, in the Derry Diocese, I have found out a lot about ‘Knock’ and its importance in the minds of the faithful here.

It is a fascinating story of a Marian apparition almost 142 years ago, on August 21, 1879, in a village in Co Mayo. It was a wet and dismal evening, about seven o’clock, when some inhabitants saw a light shining on the gable wall of the local chapel and when they endeavoured to find out what was happening, they discovered three adults, reputed to be Blessed Mary, St Joseph, her husband, and John, the Evangelist, and there was a lamb standing on an altar.

Several people, male and female,

ranging in age from five to 74, saw the event, while 15 gave testimony to what they had witnessed. These included Mary O’Connell and Patrick Byrne, who again gave evidence to a further enquiry in 1936. One of the visionaries, Bridget Trench, told those enquiring that she was so taken with the Blessed Virgin that she paid little attention to the others in the apparition.

At the centre of the gable of the church, the witnesses saw an altar and on it a Lamb, sized as it was about months old. The Lamb was facing in the direction of Our Lady, John the Evangelist and St Joseph. Behind the Lamb was a large Cross on the altar. There was universal agreement that Blessed Mother didn’t speak during the time but stood about two feet above the ground with her head turned towards heaven in prayer. She wore a beautiful golden crown, and her dress was sparkling white. A bearded Joseph was standing to Mary’s left and raised about a foot above ground, while John the Evangelist stood to her right, holding a book as if teaching and about the same height above ground level as St Joseph.

At the time, the people of Knock had suffered greatly from political and religious oppression, and had endured the devastating famine which had claimed many lives, so times were pretty difficult. In some ways, it could be compared to the present time and the problems caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic. There is a fear and uncertainty in the air and many people have turned back to prayer in the belief that the Holy Family will help us through.

It is thought that the Lamb seen on the table represents Jesus, the

Lamb of God, who sacrificed his own life so we might be saved. It may be that the apparition was a reward for how steadfast the people had been in prayer, despite the heartache they had suffered. Ireland is renowned for its devotion to the Blessed Virgin, and St Joseph and John the Evangelist found great favour too, so it could be that they appeared in a supportive role.

Irish people are most grateful that both Pope John Paul II and Pope Francis visited Knock in 1979 and 2018 respectively. Just last month, on March 19, Pope Francis formally elevated Knock Shrine from a national to an International sanctuary in what he referred to as “an important moment in its history.” From now on the shrine will be titled “The International Sanctuary of Special Eucharistic and Marian Devotion’.

Unique

The apparition at Knock was unique in many ways. The Blessed Virgin did not speak. She was accompanied by St Joseph, John the Evangelist and, of course, the Lamb. Surrounding the altar, there were moving angels. It has been pointed out that the lamb was on the altar at the place on the wall that was directly opposite the tabernacle in the old church. Mary wore a crown indicating her queenship, a title that is honoured in the fifth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary.

St John, who was wearing the mitre of a bishop, was holding what looked like the book of the Gospels. Some think that this indicates that he was reading from and preaching about the opening of his own gospel account, the famous “In the beginning was

the Word” passage, the great theological prologue to the Good News of the Gospels. Others think it is the Book of Revelation and that John is reminding people of the end times.

However we interpret the apparition, it was a unique manifestation of the Holy Family, the original family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus, and later with the protection of St John. It is also a powerful depiction of the Eucharist through the presence of the Lamb of God. So, while Mary did not speak, the apparition itself spoke volumes about the faith – the centrality of the Eucharist, the queenship of the Blessed Mother, the patronage of St Joseph, and the preaching of the Good News. The hymn, ‘Our Lady of Knock’, tries to reflect some of these meanings.

There are many reasons why the month of May is set aside to honour Mary, Mother of God. Like many traditions from pre-Christian times, there was almost a seamless transition to a current Christian practice. May had been a month dedicated to an Ancient Greek goddess, Artemis, while the Romans later chose to honour Flora, the goddess of flowers and blossoms in the same month. It would appear that May would be a really appropriate month to be dedicated to Mary as, for us, it is the month when the earth springs into bloom and we see the beauty of nature emerging from the bleakness of winter. New growth, longer days and the heat of the sun bring a positive attitude to our way of thinking.

This wonderful practice of honouring Mary during May has for many decades been openly encouraged and recommended by successive Popes. Pope Pius XII referred to it often in his encyclical



Fr Joseph with his friend, Mary Dolan, at Knock

‘Mediator Dei’, highlighting it as a practice of particular importance and dignity. The fact that Mary is the Mother of the Church makes her the perfect guide, inspiration and example to all who wish to serve God and man while tuning in to the power of the Holy Spirit. Pope Leo XIII referred to the Holy Spirit as the soul of the Church and believed that all of the work of the Church and the involvement of the Blessed Mother are brought to life by the Holy Spirit.

This year, to mark the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, Pope Francis has given us a message to reflect on where he links the vocation of every Christian to the unique vocation of St Joseph, patron of the Church. In his apostolic letter, ‘Patris Corde’ (‘With a Father’s Heart’), the Holy Father encourages us to be inspired by the example of St Joseph in this year dedicated to his honour. As promised, Jesus sent

the Holy Spirit to us at Pentecost to be our guide, our comforter and advocate, following His return to the Father.

The May Altar is especially popular in Ireland, where many homes and schools create a small space to display a statue of our Blessed Mother Mary, surrounded by pretty flowers, with primroses featuring prominently along with local wildflowers, lovingly picked by excited children. In that way, children are actively involved in creating their own little shrine to venerate our Blessed Mother.

Let ‘Golden Rose - Queen of Ireland’ inspire us, and “the Lamb will conquer, and the woman clothed in the sun will shine Her light on everyone.” These are sentiments that should strengthen us in faith, hope and love at a time when we need such affirmation, just like our forebears in Knock in 1879.

Columba Community celebrates 40 years of ministry *by Jacklyn Roberts*

ANNIVERSARIES are times of looking back and looking forward. What hope and excitement there was when Columba House was opened and blessed at an ecumenical gathering on June 9, 1981.

It is important to record that the Community was blessed by a word of life shared from the Spirit...

“Listen to the prayer and treaty of your servant, Yahweh my God; listen to the cry and to the prayer your servant makes to you. Day and night watch over this house, over this place in which you have promised to make a home for your name...May your eyes be open and your ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.” (2 Chronicles 6)

We can testify that God has honoured this word, listened to our prayers and we have been privileged to see His hand at work in the ordinary and extraordinary events of our Community life.

As founder of the Community, Fr Neal Carlin has kept us faithful to

the original vision and call to build Basic Christian Community and to be people committed to prayer, reconciliation and evangelisation.

Over the years, these pillars have been the banner statements we have lived by and developed in all our centres – St Anthony’s Retreat Centre, White Oaks Rehabilitation Centre and the Iosas Centre and Celtic Prayer Garden.

God has lavishly provided for us in the people He has sent to us, in the places He has given to us and, most importantly, in how He has revealed the depth of His love and graciousness to us.

How privileged we are to have been invited to serve and to be part of His great plan for building the Kingdom of love, peace and justice where the poor and those on the margins are welcomed and experience the warmth of His embrace through their brothers and sisters.

In serving the prisoners, living reconciliation at the height of the Troubles, serving those in the grip

and darkness of addiction, we have been accompanied by generous people who have given their time, talents, finance and, most importantly, prayer.

In our ministry, the people we have been privileged to support, have challenged and encouraged us to return to prayer, the source from which anything good comes.

The Lord has taught us about depending on Him, listening in prayer for the prompting of the Holy Spirit, being fed by the Eucharist, breaking the Word and reading the signs of the times. We have been blessed by the Baptism in the Spirit experience and have grown in the use of the gifts, freely given by the Spirit, to build up the Body of Christ.

We have learned that the prophetic road is often lonely, misunderstood and sometimes harshly judged by others. In our life as Community, these were the times when we experienced the Lord’s hand powerfully upon us. His hand is above all the hands

that would try to shape our lives and He will never be outdone in generosity when, in sincerity, we seek to do His will.

He has taught us that when we fail, His mercy is always available and that the “deep interior joy” and trust in Him, as the Rule of Columba states, will lead us into the freedom of the children of God as promised in scripture.

We have always been a Community of about 20 people, with an Auxiliary Community of about 100, and a larger, friends of the Community group. We take our prayer of commitment on Holy Thursday, promising to pray daily with the scriptures, offer our time in service of others and we tithe to support the works of the Community. Over the years, people have come and gone as their circumstances have changed. We have been enriched and learned from every person the Lord has sent to us.

As a Community of 40 years, we look to our patron Saint,



Columba Community founder, Fr Neal Carlin, in the Community’s Celtic Prayer Garden.

Columba, as we celebrate the 1500th anniversary of his birth. The last words he was reputed to have written were from Psalm 34: “Those who seek the Lord shall want for no manner of good thing.” What confidence this gives us for the future!

We pray with expectant faith that in the next stage of our development, as we continue to

seek the Lord, He will open up new pathways that will allow us to serve in His name. We pray that He will use us to assist new and emerging communities, fired by the Spirit, bringing renewal and healing in our land.

Father we believe, Jesus we believe, Spirit we believe in you. Amen.

I am with you always, yes to the end of time *by Fr Johnny Doherty, CSsR*

ON May 30, the last Sunday of this month, we celebrate the Feast of the Most Holy Trinity. We have been preparing ourselves for this great feast for over six months – ever since the First Sunday in Advent, on November 29, 2020.

As followers of Christ, we do not just believe that there is a God. We believe that the true God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And we believe that on the word of Jesus Christ. This is a total act of faith because our reason cannot reach anywhere near this truth. All we can do is submit ourselves in awe to this God who, though totally complete, is weak with love for us.

We have simply to let this knowledge take us over and let ourselves be pursued by this wonderful lover and find ourselves taken out of our tiny little worlds into the vast world of God's love.

Five Sundays of May – Four Stepping Stones

The first four Sundays of May are like the final stepping stones for us to take as we embrace the God of Jesus Christ as our God and let our God embrace us as God's holy people, living in faith, hope and love.

Week 1 (May 2–8) - Christ, the true vine

Jesus said to His disciples: "It is to the glory of My Father that you should bear much fruit."

When we think of faith, we generally think of our faith in God. Jesus reveals God's faith in us, and the trust He puts in us to show His love to the world in which we live. We "bear much fruit" for God by the way we love one another, first of all in our homes and then in our community.

Each of us has the responsibility to constantly practice all the qualities of love – kindness, gentleness, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, encouragement, praise, thanksgiving, and so on. Our homes and our faith communities should be places where everyone can be glad to be and can know God's love and praise God's name.

Week 2 (May 9–15) - The Spirit of God's love

Jesus said to his disciples: "You did not choose me; no, I chose you."

Anybody who is involved in a team sport will know the tension there is in wondering if they will be picked for the team, and then the delight when they are picked or the utter disappointment when they are not.

Jesus has picked each of us for

His team of disciples because the task of transforming the world is so vast, and because each of us has our own unique gifts and opportunities for the task.

Our responsibility is to say yes to His call and take our part in His mission. As always, this begins in our homes with the most intimate relationships of human life, to make those the best they can possibly be. This week we can refresh our enthusiasm and joy in being chosen for our families, our community and for the world we live in.

Week 3 (May 16–22) - The Ascension of Christ into Heaven

Jesus said to His disciples: "Go out into the whole world; proclaim the Good News to all creation."

Because of all that has been happening in the Church in recent years, we can feel despondent about the future. Today's feast of joy and gladness is a call to us to look up with confidence and know the power of Christ for the world in which we live. In spite of the sinfulness of His people, Christ is at work and can – and will – overcome.

Our task is to let the world know His love and salvation, not just by word, but especially by the way we live in marriage and family

life with joy and hope and love. This sense of joy extends out from the Church of the home to the community of the parish, so that the world may believe that Jesus is the Son of God.

Week 4 (May 23–29) - Come, Holy Spirit

Jesus said to His disciples: "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so am I sending you." Then He breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

As we celebrate Pentecost in our homes and faith communities, there are two qualities we need to develop – peace and energy.

Peace is Christ's desire for us as we journey with Him and with one another. But peace is not a passive thing. Rather it is a dynamic way of life. We are to be His witnesses in the world, and so He gives us His Holy Spirit, so that we can have the energy we need in order to witness through love. Our love is developed and practiced in marriage and family life and extended to the life of the faith community.

Week 5 (May 30–June 5) - Most Holy Trinity

Jesus said to His disciples: "Know that I am with you always; yes to the end of time."

What a wonderful consolation

and strength this promise of Jesus is for us as His followers. He is with us in so many ways – in the Sacraments, in the Eucharist, in our prayers. But Jesus is with us especially in our love relationships of marriage and family life. He is also with us in our faith community of the parish. In fact, that is the meaning of being a parish – a people among whom Jesus lives.

And the wonderful thing is that Jesus is always present to our world through us. We have a serious responsibility to build our homes and our parishes into real living communities of faith, hope and love, so that Jesus can bring salvation to our world and so that our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, may be praised and glorified.

Conclusion: Jesus' five commands

In the Gospel passage for the Feast of The Most Holy Trinity, Jesus gives His disciples His five Commandments for their journey of faith:

- Go – go forward even though we might want to remain as we are, or we might want to go back to certain securities
- Make disciples of all nations – be attractive to everyone so that they will want to come to know

God's love for them

• Baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit – flood the world with the presence and the love of God

• Teach them to observe all the commands I gave you – it is so important to remember that Jesus summarised all the commandments into: love of God with our whole hearts and love as one another

• Know that I am with you always, yes to the end of time – it is from this promise that we gain our hope and confidence and the strength to love all of humanity.



Fr Johnny Doherty

Act of Consecration of The Family to The Divine Mercy

O Jesus, you showed us Your infinite compassionate love by exhausting the very last drop of blood and water from Your body.

From this day forward, with full confidence, we entrust our families to Your Divine Mercy.

We abandon our past, our present and our future.

We place into your wounds all of our wounds which are caused by lack of love, understanding and trust.

Jesus, expel Satan and all evil from our families, free us from the consequence of sin and protect us from further harm.

Heal our wounds.

May our families learn to venerate Your Divine Image that they will never perish but experience Your loving mercy.

Amen.



Jesus, I trust in You!

ACCORD recruiting for couples counselling training programme

ACCORD, the voluntary Catholic marriage care organisation in Northern Ireland, is currently recruiting for the Certificate in Counselling (Marriage & Relationship) training programme.

Providing marriage and relationship counselling to couples or individuals in a couple relationship, ACCORD NI Counsellors are professionally trained in Couples Counselling, and the organisation is now offering a unique opportunity to train to Level 6 (UK)/Level 8 (RoI) as a specialist Couples

Counsellor, qualified to practice in-person and online.

ACCORD is recruiting experienced practitioners to train in the specialism of Couples and Relationships Counselling. Successful applicants will have an opportunity to follow a 16 day Level 6 / Level 8 Certificate programme in Couples Counselling (in-person/blended learning), and a further 105 hours training in online and telephone counselling with individuals and couples, with an external provider commissioned by Accord.

Do you have:

- Minimum Level 5 (UK)/Level 7 (RoI) qualification in Counselling/Psychotherapy?

- Substantial experience of working in the Person-Centred style?

- Minimum 100 counselling hours post-graduation?

- A current supervised caseload?
- If you can answer yes to all four questions above, please contact ACCORD for further information about this unique Couples Counselling training package – www.accordni.com.

The final date for receipt of applications is June 7.



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Final date for receipt of applications 07/06/2021

www.accordni.com

Children's Catechism Club - C3

by Veronica Harley

Hello children. Welcome to the month of May. This month is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. We offer up special prayers and devotion to Mary who always leads us to Jesus



There are traditional customs which show our love for Mary. One is the making of a May Altar. A statue of Our Lady is placed on a table and surrounded by fresh flowers. Another custom is the Crowning of Mary as the Queen of Heaven, by placing flowers on a statue of Our Lady.

We also honour Mary on two beautiful feast days during May. On May 13, we celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Fatima. It is the anniversary of the Blessed Virgin's appearances to three little shepherds in Fatima. During six apparitions in 1917, Our Lady asked the children for prayer and penance to bring about conversion in the world. The Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is on May 31. On this day, we remember how Mary, while carrying her Son Jesus within Her, went to visit Her cousin, Elizabeth, to offer charitable assistance and to tell of God's great mercy.

We continue to celebrate the Easter season and, with Spring upon us blossoming forth new life, we wait eagerly for the marvellous feast of Pentecost; the descent of the Holy Spirit and the beginning of the Church. During this month, we will also celebrate the Ascension of Jesus into Heaven and Trinity Sunday. The month of May is bursting with Christian joy.

The Ascension of Jesus (CCC 659)

"Then He took them out as far as the outskirts of Bethany and, raising His hands He blessed them. Now as He blessed them, He withdrew from them and was carried up to heaven" (Lk 29:50). The Ascension of Jesus is a mystery of faith. It always falls 40 days after Easter, which is a Thursday, but most parishes now celebrate this important feast on the following Sunday. The word 'Ascension' means to go up, and on this day we remember how the earthly body of Jesus went up into Heaven. Jesus was with his disciples on the Mount of Olives outside Jerusalem. He told

them that soon they would receive the power of the Holy Spirit and to go to preach the Good News of His Resurrection to the whole world. After Jesus ascended, an angel appeared and promised that one day Jesus would return.



The Ascension

How well do you know the story of the Ascension?

See if you know which are true and which are false.

1. Jesus appeared to His disciples for forty days after He rose from the dead.
2. When Jesus was with His disciples after He rose from the dead, they could only see Him but they could not touch Him.
3. Jesus did not tell His friends that He was going to leave them.
4. Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit.
5. No one saw Jesus rise into the sky and disappear into a cloud.
6. Two men appeared to the disciples and said, "Men of Galilee why are you looking at the sky?"

Answers:

1. True, 2. False, 3. False, 4. True, 5. False, 6. True

Our Lady of Fatima

The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, appeared six times to three shepherd children, Lucia, Francisco and Jacinta. Between May 13 and October 13, 1917, She came to the little village of Fatima, in Portugal. Our Lady brought a special message from God for everyone to hear. She promised that the world would be at peace and many souls would go to heaven if people listened to Her requests and obeyed them. Her three requests were penance, prayer and devotion to Her Immaculate heart.

Our Lady told the three children that a great sign from heaven would happen so that everyone would believe. This miracle took place in Fatima on October 13, 1917, and



was witnessed by 70,000 people. It is called The Miracle of the Sun. Everyone could stare perfectly at the sun without blinking or hurting their eyes. The sun rotated in the sky, became large and small, drew close to the people and then far away from them. Everyone who saw this said that the sun was dancing. It was an extraordinary event that even made unbelievers fall to their knees and beg God for forgiveness.

The message Our Lady brought to Fatima still applies today. She asked that everyone should pray the Rosary every day to overcome evil in the world. Centuries earlier, Our Blessed Mother Mary had given us the Rosary, a very powerful weapon, to keep us safe from harm in this world. The Rosary is like the sling-shot of King David that killed the mighty enemy, because the power of God was behind it. When we pray the Rosary, we have the power of God in our hands, which protects and guards us and leads us to God.

*O my Jesus,
forgive us our sins,*

*save us from the fires of hell,
lead all souls to heaven,
especially those in most need of Thy
mercy.*

(Our Lady at Fatima, 13th July 1917)

Saints of the month

St James & St Philip, Apostles – May 3

St Matthias – May 14

St Philip Neri – May 26

St Augustine of Canterbury – May 27



The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

"My soul proclaims the greatest of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, because he has looked upon the lowliness of his servant, yes from now onwards all generations will call me blessed". (Luke 1:46-48).

The Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary is May 31. Visitation means 'to visit'. The Angel Gabriel told Mary that Her cousin, Elizabeth was going to have a baby boy, so Mary set off at once to visit Elizabeth.

Mary, too, was expecting a baby, Baby Jesus. When She arrived at Elizabeth's house, the Holy Spirit revealed to Elizabeth that Mary was going to become the Mother of God. Elizabeth greeted Mary with the words "Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the

fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42; CCC 2676). While Elizabeth and Mary greeted each other, the baby boy in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy. He would later be called John the Baptist.

Elizabeth asked Mary, "Why should I be honoured with a visit from the Mother of my Lord?" Mary responded in humility and spoke of how God had blessed Her so richly. "Holy is His name", Mary exclaimed.

During Her visit, the Blessed Virgin Mary brought many graces to Her cousin Elizabeth's house. St John the Baptist, while still hidden in his mother's womb was cleansed of original sin. His father, Zechariah, who had lost his voice, got his speech back after John was born. Saint Elizabeth was filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Mary remained at Elizabeth's house for three months before returning to Nazareth.

Pentecost

Pentecost is celebrated 50 days, or the seventh Sunday after the Resurrection of Jesus on Easter, and concludes the Easter season. The word 'Pentecost' means fifty and marks the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles. For this reason it is often called 'the birthday of the Church' (CCC 1076).

At Pentecost, Mary, accompanied by a couple of other women, and the disciples were in an upper room in a house in Jerusalem. While they prayed together, a strong wind came up with a loud noise and flames of fire came to rest above the heads of the apostles. Immediately, they were inspired and filled with courage and strength to go and spread the Word of God. On that first Pentecost Sunday, over 3,000 people were converted and baptised.

Quiz Time with Lawrence

1. Which country is the world's largest producer of Olive Oil?
2. By what name is the fictional character, Patrick Clifton better known?
3. What colour are the seats in the House of Commons?
4. Which actress plays the lead role in the new comedy thriller series 'Flight Attendant'?
5. In what year were Leeds United last English football champions?
6. The national flag of Belgium features three colours - red, yellow and which other?
7. Which band had two UK Number 1 singles in 2005 with 'All about you' and 'I'll be ok'?
8. Which TV presenter recently released the debut novel, 'The Thursday Murder Club'?
9. In which country was Derry nun, Sister Clare Crockett killed in a 2016 earthquake?
10. Who played Hyacinth Bucket in the TV series 'Keeping Up Appearances'?
11. What is the highest individual mountain in Ireland?
12. Based at the famous 'Lord's' ground in London, what does MCC stand for?

13. Which singer recorded the 2016 album, 'Stranger to Stranger' at the age of 75?
14. What is the largest city in the English county of Somerset?
15. Which author's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens?
16. Name the 2015 winner of Great British Bake Off, who has gone on to become a published author and have her own national TV cookery show?
17. The ferry from Rosslare docks in which French port city?
18. According to legend, how many warriors hid inside the Wooden Horse of Troy?
19. How many time zones are there in India?
20. 2021 is the Chinese year of what animal?
21. Which Charles Dickens book begins with the line, 'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...?'?
22. Which snooker player was the subject of the TV show 'This is Your Life', despite being just 21 years of age?
23. Approximately, how many metres are there in a mile?
24. What is the highest value hand in a game of 3-card Brag?
25. Molasses are derived from the refinement process of which root plant?

Quiz Answers: 1, Spain. 2, Postman Pat. 3, Green. 4, Kaley Cuoco. 5, 1992. 6, Black. 7, McFly. 8, Richard Osman. 9, Ecuador. 10, Patricia Routledge. 11, Carrauntoohil. 12, Marylebone Cricket Club. 13, Paul Simon. 14, Bath. 15, Mark Twain. 16, Nadia Hussain. 17, Cherbourg. 18, Forty. 19, Just one (IST). 20, The Ox. 21, A Tale of Two Cities. 22, Stephen Hendry. 23, 1600 (1609 exact). 24, Three 3's. 25, Sugar cane.

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

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

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



“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.”

~Matt 16:25



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