

# The Irish Catholic

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Thursday, April 6, 2023

€2.50 (Stg £2.20)

The-Irish-Catholic-Newspaper

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## Irish parishes urged to support embattled Holy Land Christians

Chai Brady

Irish parishioners have been urged to show greater support for Christians in the Holy Land as they mark the holiest week in the year in Jerusalem.

It comes as Church leaders in the Holy Land have warned of increased fears that Christians are being marginalised after a series of attacks on Christian holy sites in recent months and what many see as the indifference of the Israeli government.

An Irish-based Franciscan, who previously worked in the Holy Land, told *The Irish Catholic* that many local Christians are frustrated. The Franciscan Order has been entrusted with looking after the holy places in the Holy Land for more than 800 years.

Kerry-based former provincial of the Franciscans, Fr Caoimhín O'Laoide OFM told *The Irish Catholic* that the "trust in the capacity of the Israeli state to maintain a good sense of neutrality and even-handedness has been eroded".

Most recently, two Jewish extremists tried to vandalise the Tomb of the Blessed Virgin Mary at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It comes after another Jewish extremist attacked a church at the beginning of the traditional Way of the Cross, the *Via Dolorosa* (Way of Sorrow).

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**'Take up your cross...'**



Cistercian College students carry crosses in Mount St Joseph Abbey, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary, which were put in place and blessed by Fr Malachy Thompson as a new Stations of the Cross on April 3.

Church can't 'water down' teaching – Bishop Dempsey

Staff Reporter

The Church must not be afraid of speaking up on controversial teachings in a bid to appear more palatable to secular culture, Bishop of Achonry Paul Dempsey has said.

Bishop Dempsey also insisted that the synodal process currently underway in the Church requires patience. It comes after *The Irish Catholic* revealed research which showed just 9% of Mass-goers have participated in the synodal process so far.

"We should work slowly but surely without being obsessed with immediate results."

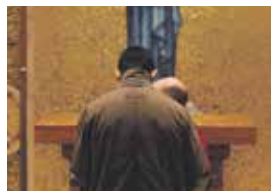
"The synodal journey will take time to involve more people, it is not something instant," he says writing in *The Irish Catholic* this week.

Calling for greater humility from the Church, Bishop Dempsey insists: "we should not attempt to 'water down' the Gospel message to make it more attractive today, rather we should live the message unapologetically".

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Annual Subscription Rates: Ireland €165. Airmail €250. Six months €85.

ISSN 1393 - 6832 - Published by The Irish Catholic,

Unit 3b, Bracken Business Park, Bracken Road, Sandyford,

Dublin 18, D18 K277.

Printed by Webprint, Cork.

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## Irish parishes urged to support embattled Holy Land Christians

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The leader of the Church in the Holy Land Archbishop Pierbatista Pizzaballa OFM warned during Palm Sunday Mass in Jerusalem at the weekend that the “balance between the different communities – Jews, Muslims, Christians – is not respected anymore”.

“That aspect is problematic for me, that they consider Christians as guests. We are not guests. We are part of the identity of the city,” the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem said.

Echoing Archbishop Pizzaballa's concerns, Fr O'Laoid said that members of the Christian community should not be treated as “guests”, but are integral to the area.

“The Christians are not guests, the Christians are Palestinians and other nationalities as well, and that cannot possibly be construed as people who are just living there on sufferance, they are people with a

right to be there,” he insisted.

Fr O'Laoid implored Irish Catholics to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, saying “I would encourage anybody to go there...We saw during Covid, when you don't have a footfall of people then the [Christian] shops and everything go to the wall.”

“The same if you don't have Christian tourists and pilgrims,” he said.

Since the formation of returned prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hardline nationalist-religious government, attacks against Christian sites have increased.

Mr Netanyahu's shaky coalition is dependent on a small group of extremist political parties, including one led by a parliamentarian who once proposed the deportation of the Arab population from the Holy Land, including Christians.

# Holy Land Christians and holy sites need more protection

Jerusalem is the only city that exists twice: in both heaven and on earth. It has been described as a ‘city of longing’ and it is to this holy city that our hearts and minds turn as we reflect on the drama of Holy Week and Easter.

If you've ever visited Jerusalem, and I hope if you haven't you'll consider joining one of our Christian Solidarity Pilgrimages (see page 23), you'll see that it is an intoxicating mix of spirituality, faith and culture.

The city is sacred to all three monotheistic religions: Is it sacred to the Jewish people because it is here where King David ruled the Kingdom of Israel from and here that his son Solomon built the Temple.

It is sacred to Muslims because, according to Islamic tradition, Mohammed travelled miraculously from Mecca to Jerusalem and then upwards through the seven heavens, culminating in a direct conversation with, and a vision of God.

Of course, for Christians Jerusalem is the place where Jesus preached, ate the Last Supper with his disciples before his death, where he was arrested, put on trial, condemned to death, crucified, and died, a man mocked and tortured by the occupying Romans. Above all, it is where his tomb was found empty and he rose from the dead.

### Deep sorrow

For the Christian, Jerusalem is a place of deep sorrow, utter desolation but also of hope and redemption. It is the sacred heart of the Christian story and hundreds of Christians make the Way of the Cross along the *Via Dolorosa* in the Old City every day retracing Christ's steps.

As we ponder those ancient stones this Holy Week and Easter, Church leaders in the Holy Land are appealing for us to turn our hearts and minds also to the ‘living stones’ of the Holy Land – the approximately 2% of residents who are Christians.

The Christians of the Holy Land, many of them the direct descendants of those who were the first to hear the words of Jesus 80 generations ago, live a precarious existence. They struggle to hold firm and given their small numbers, often find themselves falling between two stools in the wider Arab-Israeli conflict.

The latest threat to the Christian community, and in particular the Christian



The damaged face of a statue of Christ is seen on the ground at the Church of the Flagellation in Jerusalem. Photo: Filippo De Grazia

character of Jerusalem, is the rise of Jewish extremism in the holy city. In recent weeks, Jerusalem has witnessed attacks on both the Chapel of the Flagellation and the Tomb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In both circumstances, Jewish extremists were arrested.

**“Church leaders also noted that ancient liturgies, such as the Palm Sunday procession and the Orthodox Holy Fire Ceremony, have been closed off to pilgrims”**

The Patriarch of the Armenian Apostolic Church His Beatitude Nourhan Manougian was also recently verbally assaulted and spat upon as he led a procession with a 17th Century cross through the Old City. A teenage yeshiva student was detained and later apologised to Archbishop Manougian but said his parents and teachers has told him the procession was idol worship.

Unfortunately, the incidents seem to be a wider pattern of more radicalisation amongst Jewish extremists and particularly settlers. The current Israeli government seems to have little interest in preserving the unique character of Jerusalem and is instead pursuing a policy of Judaisation of the holy city with no regard to the rights of the other communities who call Jerusalem home.

In their Easter message, the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches put it starkly: “As we have all seen in recent

months, escalating violence has engulfed the Holy Land,” they write. “Local Christians in particular have increasingly suffered adversities similar to the ones about which St. Peter wrote.”

The Patriarchs and Church leaders noted in their statement that over the past year some churches, funeral processions and other Christian places of public gathering have become targets of attacks, and some holy sites and cemeteries have been desecrated.

### Liturgies

Church leaders also noted that ancient liturgies, such as the Palm Sunday procession and the Orthodox Holy Fire Ceremony, have been closed off to pilgrims. The Holy Fire ceremony takes place on Orthodox Holy Saturday when thousands of local Orthodox Christians and Orthodox pilgrims celebrate the proposed miracle of fire at the Tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and which Israeli police see as a fire hazard because there is only one entrance into the church.

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## Editor's Comment Michael Kelly



“This is in spite of our agreements to cooperate with the governing authorities, and to accommodate any reasonable requests that they might present,” the Patriarchs and Church leaders said in their statement.

“While we will persevere in these good-faith efforts, we ask the overseeing officials to work cooperatively and collaboratively with us, even as we call upon international community and local residents of goodwill to advocate on our behalf, in order to help secure the safety, access, and religious freedom of the resident Christian community and the millions of Christian pilgrims annually visiting the Holy Land,” they say.

It is clear that the Israeli government must do more to protect the lives, security and holy places of the tiny Christian community in the Holy Land. As Christians in Ireland we too must do more – we must continue to pressurise our politicians to speak up on behalf of struggling Christian minorities like those in the Holy Land.

Another concrete way of showing solidarity and support for the Holy Land Christians, the living stones, is to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Many readers of *The Irish Catholic* have already joined our Christian Solidarity Pilgrimages which go every October and February. If you would like more information, please do feel free to email me on [michael@irishcatholic.ie](mailto:michael@irishcatholic.ie)

Happy Easter!



# Hopes body of Columba McVeigh will be found for Christian burial

Chai Brady

The sister of a teenager killed during the Troubles has said she wants to give her brother a Christian burial after it was announced there will be another search for his body.

Digging restarted on Monday for Columba McVeigh, who was killed aged 19 by the IRA in 1975, at Bragan Bog in Co. Monaghan.

Speaking on RTE's *Morning Ireland* this week, his sister Dymphna Kerr said she was "happy there's another search starting".

"I just wish there was a word in the English language I could use to describe how I feel. I feel butterflies in my stomach," she said. "I'm so grateful we're getting another search but I'm hoping to God this is the one that takes us to where we want to be, that we get Columba, take him to Donaghmore [Co. Tyrone], give him a Christian burial and put him up in a grave beside our mum and dad – that's all I want."

Mr McVeigh is one of the 'Disappeared', who was killed during the

Troubles and whose body still has not been found.

Jon Hill, the lead investigator for the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains (ICLVR), said he believes Mr McVeigh's remains are in the area in which they are searching.

Ms Kerr, who now lives in England, said that her mother "left Rosary beads that are to go on Columba when he's found. They are there and we'll do what she would have done if she was here".

She said: "Of course we hope that this time Columba will be found but those hopes have been dashed so many times before that there still is that gnawing feeling in the pit of my stomach... It's 25 years since the Good Friday Agreement, that was to bring in a new beginning, a new dawn of hope and for many – including us – it did. But there is still a dark, thick cloud that hasn't lifted for our family and the other families who are still waiting to bring him home."

# I have a wonderful personal relationship with faith – Bublé

Ruadhán Jones

World famous singer-songwriter Michael Bublé has a "wonderful and personal relationship with my faith", the star said in an interview at the weekend.

Mr Bublé, who used to sleep with a Bible in his bed, also revealed in *The Guardian* that his love for his fans is inspired by their prayers.

Speaking to his son Noah after a concert, the Canadian singer said he doesn't call those who attend his concerts "fans" as it's short for fanatical, and "not a good word".

"They're not fans. Those people are the reason we have everything we have," Mr Bublé told his son.

"They're the reason we're travelling in this beautiful van together, coming from that incredible night.

"They're why we pray every night, they're who prayed for us when we've gone through our very worst moments. It may seem to you that these are strangers in the dark, but they're an extension of our family and our friends."

At one stage, Mr Bublé and his wife Luisana asked for people's

prayers as they put their careers on hold while Noah was undergoing treatment for cancer.

"We have a long journey in front of us and hope that with

the support of family, friends and fans around the world, we will win this battle, God willing," Mr Bublé wrote on Facebook in 2016.



Michael Bublé

The Irish Catholic

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# Two more families claim baby aborted after wrongful diagnosis

**Ruadhán Jones**

Two families are suing the State after they aborted their babies based on alleged wrongful diagnoses, the Minister for Health has admitted.

These are the second and third such claims made against the State, after a settlement was made in 2021 with a family whose baby boy was aborted after a wrongful diagnosis.

"These were late-term abortions on healthy babies and healthy mothers and yet no one is being held to account for them at all," said Aontú leader Peadar Tóibín.

The Meath TD also expressed his dismay at the "extremely high" number of adverse incidents related to abortions taking place in Ireland.

There were 133 adverse incidents in the past five years, Minister Stephen Donnelly revealed in response to a parliamentary question from Mr Tóibín, meaning the women suffered direct harm from the procedure.

Mr Tóibín noted that there is no indication that the adverse incidents will be dealt with in the review of the legislation, which has been completed.

He criticised the review as reports suggest it questions whether "doctors who object to

participate in abortions on humanitarian grounds can be censured".

"The Government must not try to deliver abortions by forcing and pressurising medics to break their commitment to be compassionate and humane," the Aontú leader warned.

Up to 90% of doctors in Ireland refuse to carry out abortions, according to reports on the review, which has not been released publicly.

Pro-life organisations have described the review as "one-sided", with efforts to remove the three-day waiting period and to "erode freedom of conscience".

"Freedom of conscience was a key prom-

ise of the 2018 referendum and must be respected," said Eilis Mulroy of the Pro Life Campaign. "If anything, freedom of conscience protections should be strengthened."

The Life Institute warned that scrapping the 3-day waiting period before a woman undergoes an abortion could lead to an additional 1,000 abortions every year.

Reacting to news that the abortion review looked likely to be called for the period of reflection to be scrapped, spokeswoman Megan Ní Scealláin, said that the projected rise in abortions would be a "travesty". She added that the move would deny women "crucially important" time to think before an abortion.

## Ireland has embraced eugenics without debate warns Iona Institute

**Staff reporter**

Ireland has already embraced eugenics, a new paper from the Iona Institute says, warning that we could be facing an "Ireland without Down Syndrome".

The paper comes after the former

Master of the Rotunda revealed that 90% of patients at the hospital opt for abortion once they are told the baby they are expecting has Down Syndrome. This compares to 56% before abortion was legalised in Ireland.

"This should worry even those who are pro-choice," said David

Quinn of the Iona Institute.

"It indicates that the condition is being too negatively portrayed. We need to debate what is taking place before we have an Ireland without Down Syndrome."

In the paper, 'How Eugenics Has Taken Hold In Ireland', Mr Quinn laments that "the progressive

elimination of children with Down Syndrome and other genetic abnormalities from society has caused no national soul-searching to date".

This has taken place despite the fact that abortion for reason of non-fatal genetic abnormalities are not legal in Ireland.

In the past, the paper explains,

eugenics found its way into law and "led to tens of thousands of people in places like the United States, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and, of course, Germany, being sterilised if they were judged 'unfit' to have children".

*Eugenics*

## Education minister defends school divestment pilot scheme

**Staff reporter**

The Minister for Education has defended a divestment pilot scheme conducted jointly with the Irish bishops, which involves 63 schools.

"The pilot covers 63 different schools and there is no doubt that it has reaped

benefits in some areas," Minister Norma Foley said in the Dáil.

"The basis of the pilot is that everybody is consulted, and a facilitator is accommodating that, and everybody gets an opportunity to express their view."

Her comments came after TD Aodhán O'Riordáin complained that

the process was flawed and "patently not fair".

Speaking about the consultation that took place in Raheny, North Dublin city, Mr O'Riordáin said the process "has led to incredible division and an uncomfortable feeling around the whole discussion".

"No one on either side of the debate

feels their views were heard. There is a huge amount of confusion around it."

Minister Foley promised that there will be a full and comprehensive review of how the process has worked once it is complete. So far, of the 63 school communities canvassed, just three have indicated interest in divestment.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Book of Kells competition winners announced

The winners of An Post stamps featuring the Book of Kells have been announced following a randomised draw.

An Post issued two new stamps featuring illustrations from the Book of Kells. The brightly coloured stamps show the profile of the lion, a reoccurring image in the manuscript, symbolising Christ and the resurrection.

The *Irish Catholic* invited readers to enter the draw by answering the following question: where is the Book of Kells housed in Ireland? The answer: Trinity College Dublin.

The four winners of the first day edition and sheet of stamps are: Máire Blair, Dublin; Betty Keogh, Kildare; Mary Murphy, Carlow; Ann O'Grady, Sligo.

### The write idea...



Fr Vasyl Kornitsky, chaplain to the Ukrainian Catholic community in Ireland, is pictured with participants of the children's writing workshop that took place in the chaplaincy in Donnycarney, Dublin, after Divine Liturgy, on April 2. Fr Kornitsky gave out bunnies and chocolates to the children.

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# Robots won't replace our souls...

**W**e cannot predict the future of humankind, but nevertheless, experts in various fields continue to do so. In recent weeks, the experts at the investment banking empire Goldman Sachs have been telling us that Artificial Intelligence – the rise and rise of robots engineered by computerised science – will erase about 300 million jobs in the near future. A quarter of the workforce in Europe and the US could be replaced by the onward march of AI.

The jobs that are thought likely to shrink or even disappear include some of the most respected trades and professions, traditionally regarded as safe and stable – such as accountants, lawyers, and those in the financial services. Banks, once the cornerstone of reliability in every small town, are closing everywhere as AI takes over the functions of bank employees.

Graphic artists, market researchers, anything to do with 'number crunching' will, it is said, be made redundant by AI. In the media world, AI is regrettably predicted to replace report-



**Mary Kenny**



Tesla Motors CEO Elon Musk is seen in Hawthorne, Calif., in 2015. Photo: CNS/Patrick T. Fallon, Reuters

ers, advertising copywriters, publishing and sub-editors, and many skills related to text. Science and medicine have already been infiltrated by AI – robots perform surgical operations – as has manufacturing and precision engineering.

The onward march of AI is such that the business magnate and space engineer Elon Musk and the technology entrepreneur Steve Wozniak have called for a 'pause' in the technology's development, lest it pose a "profound risk to society and humanity".

If we are taken over by

machines, shall we lose our souls?

Yet, here, in my humble opinion, is a counter-prediction. AI may indeed replace humans in many technical and professional spheres: but it will also demonstrate that there are some jobs that only human persons can do.

These include anything caring or pastoral – a robot's hand on your fevered brow could never replace a dedicated nurse, nor could a machine console you through the dark watches of the night. Anything that needs intuition,

imagination, an emotional or spiritual dimension can never be replaced by a computer. Faith, hope and charity require the channel of human agency. 'Alexa' may provide factual information, but she cannot provide love, care, nor spiritual connection.

The dominance of AI can make us value human contact more. Most of us have had the experience of hanging onto a phone 'helpline', staffed by robots, just desperate to speak to a human: and deeply appreciative when we reach one.

Some jobs may be lost to AI; but others will be created. And some existing vocations will be more valued, including, I believe, the irreplaceable role of a good priest, sacramental, pastoral and communitarian.

● Friday April 7 – which happens to be Good Friday – marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Dr John Charles McQuaid, legendary Archbishop of Dublin, and a man of multiple contradictions. Many are critical of his legacy – often with reason – but one of his admirable achievements was to launch a welfare structure for Irish emigrants, who had previously been so ignored by the State. The social researcher Brian Harvey has done excellent research on John Charles' assistance to the Irish diaspora, which he speaks about in a podcast organised by *History Ireland*, (to which I have also contributed). Available from April 7 on [www.historyireland.com](http://www.historyireland.com)

## (Non)sense and sensibility

**S**peaking to *The Sunday Telegraph* in London last weekend, the Irish author John Banville called the Catholic Church "an evil institution. It should be abolished." He added that he would now be prepared "for the Catholic equivalent of a fatwa."

I suggest that he can make this sweeping and hostile statement precisely because there is no 'Catholic fatwa'. No one will sentence him to death or make him a target. There will be no negative consequences. Indeed, he'll probably be congratulated by his literary peers for being 'brave', as if he had faced a similar peril to Salman Rushdie, on whom a *fatwa* actually was pronounced, and attempted to be carried out.

Mr Banville's books, notably in his rather slow-moving detective stories, contain many allusions to his detestation of Catholicism, so his opinion is hardly a surprise.

However, I'd like to quote another Irish writer, John McGahern, who wrote rather differently about being brought up in the Catholic faith: "I have nothing but gratitude for the spiritual remnants of that upbringing, the sense of our origins beyond the bounds of sense, an awareness of mystery and wonderment, grace and sacraments and the absolute equality of all women and men underneath the sun of heaven."

McGahern wrote that his sense of religious belief had receded, and yet he retained to the end a shimmering sensibility of the sacred, and the transcendence beyond our grasp of the material. He also chose a Catholic funeral. He was a writer of infinitely greater sensitivity, understanding and awareness of the human condition, I think, than Mr Banville.



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# Ireland very lenient on paedophiles says Irish missionary fighting trafficking

Ruadhán Jones

The Irish judicial system is “very lenient” on convicted paedophiles and needs to take a stronger line, according to an Irish missionary who fights human trafficking.

Too often convicted paedophiles in Ireland get a “slap on the wrist and community service”, Fr Shay Cullen SSC told *The Irish Catholic*, calling it “ridiculous”.

Fr Cullen is the founder of Preda,

an organisation that fights the trafficking and abuse of children in the Philippines.

Preda “are fighting these paedophiles, we are seeing children as young as three to 16, we know just how terrible and damaging it is,” Fr Cullen said.

But “I’ve noticed in Ireland that the judicial system is very lenient on paedophiles and people selling children”, he continued.

“A stronger line needs to be taken

in the justice system... when you look at what’s going on Ireland, it’s ridiculous, two years in children for raping a child.” The sentences don’t recognise the “damage it does to children”.

Ireland needs a “strong campaign” to fight against the “evil” crime of child abuse and trafficking, Fr Cullen said.

“Every person in Ireland needs to get involved, it’s a terrible crime against children.”

His comments come after the Irish bishops’ conference criticised Ireland’s failure to ratify a UN protocol promoting the rights of child victims of trafficking, child prostitution, pornography and child labour.

In a statement, the bishops said the ratification is “long overdue”, adding that it is “imperative that this lengthy process be completed speedily” to improve protections and comply with Ireland’s international obligations.

Ireland is one of just seven nations that signed the Second Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (relating to the sale of children, child pornography and child prostitution, among other areas) not to have ratified it.

The bishops acknowledged that ratification has progressed, but the state is yet put to in place legislation outlawing crimes such as the sale of children’s organs or forced adoptions.

## 38 children monitored by State die by suicide

Chai Brady

Nearly 200 children who were either known to child protection services or in State care have died over the past decade, 38 of whom died by suicide, according to statistics released to Aontú.

Aontú spokesperson on Children and Equality, Luke Silke, said: “These are shocking figures. Nearly 200 children who were either in State care or known to child protection services have died over the past decade or so.

“We have a serious prob-

lem in this country when 38 children under the care of the State are dying by suicide with more children also dying by homicide and drug overdoses. Obviously when we have a situation where a child is murdered while known to child protection

services there are very serious questions for the State to answer,” he said.

Speaking of reports produced by the national review panel, Mr Silke said they “made for absolutely harrowing reading. These very detailed reports – in which all

children and ascribed pseudonyms – identify a number of flaws in the current system with many of the children falling through the cracks”.

He added: “The ‘Hugh’ report, for example, which was published on February 7, 2018 highlights how he was

referred to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) but was left without treatment for ADHD due to a CAMHS policy whereby young people who are using drugs are not eligible for service. Hugh died aged sixteen from a drug overdose.”

## Meath priest new Ardagh bishop

Staff Reporter

Pope Francis has appointed a key expert on Catholic education as the new Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise.

Meath priest Fr Paul Connell is currently executive secretary for educa-

tion for the bishops’ conference based in Maynooth.

He has served on the staff of St Finian’s College since 1982, and was appointed president and principal there in 1998.

He has extensive experience at a national level on education having

served as president of the Catholic management body for secondary schools, the AMCSS/JMB.

The appointment was announced yesterday (Wednesday), and Bishop-elect Connell will replace Archbishop Francis Duffy who was transferred to the Archdiocese of Tuam.



### ‘Glory in the highest heavens!’



Fr Severino Pinheiro leads the Brazilian Catholic community on their procession in Dublin city for Palm Sunday, April 2, before celebrating Mass in Church Street.

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### Pope declares new Irish venerable

Pope Francis has declared a nun born to Irish parents venerable, putting her one step closer to canonisation.

Mother Maria Caterina Flanagan, born in London, was one of three religious sisters, two laywoman and a priest declared venerable by the Pope in March.

Venerable Flanagan served as a religious sister for the Order of the Most Holy Saviour, also known as the Bridgettines.

She served in Stockholm, Sweden, where she was engaged in dialogue with the Lutheran community and worked with St Elizabeth Hasselblad.

The nun led a life “characterised by her total availability and sincere fidelity to God’s providence,” according to the Order of St Bridget.

#### Unchecked sectarianism between Christians a ‘grave scandal’

Churches must reflect “openly and honestly” on how their relationships have been scarred as a result of conflict in the North, and continue to “drive in a sinister way much of the sectarianism that we see today”, the Primate of All Ireland has warned.

Speaking at the ‘Living the Agreement – Legacy Matters’ conference at Queen’s University Belfast on Saturday, Archbishop Eamon Martin said: “To leave unchecked sectarianism, bigotry, hatred and violence between Christians, is a grave scandal.”

Speaking of reconciliation and truth recovery, Archbishop Martin said: “If a truth recovery process is to lead to genuine reconciliation it will include an authentic and honest critique of the past which recognises the immense pain and life-changing trauma which actions or inactions have caused to a fellow human being.”



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**Breda O'Brien**  
The View



# Developing a supernatural focus that changes lives

**T**hings we do every year are familiar, comforting and sometimes, numbing. Lent, Holy Week and Easter are supposed to remind us of the central, astonishing truth of Christianity – God loved us so much that he died for us. Even more astonishing, he then ended the dominion of death by rising.

This ought to be mind-blowing, transformative and revolutionary. Instead, we can tune out during the long readings on Palm Sunday or begin wondering about our dinner during a long homily on Easter Sunday.

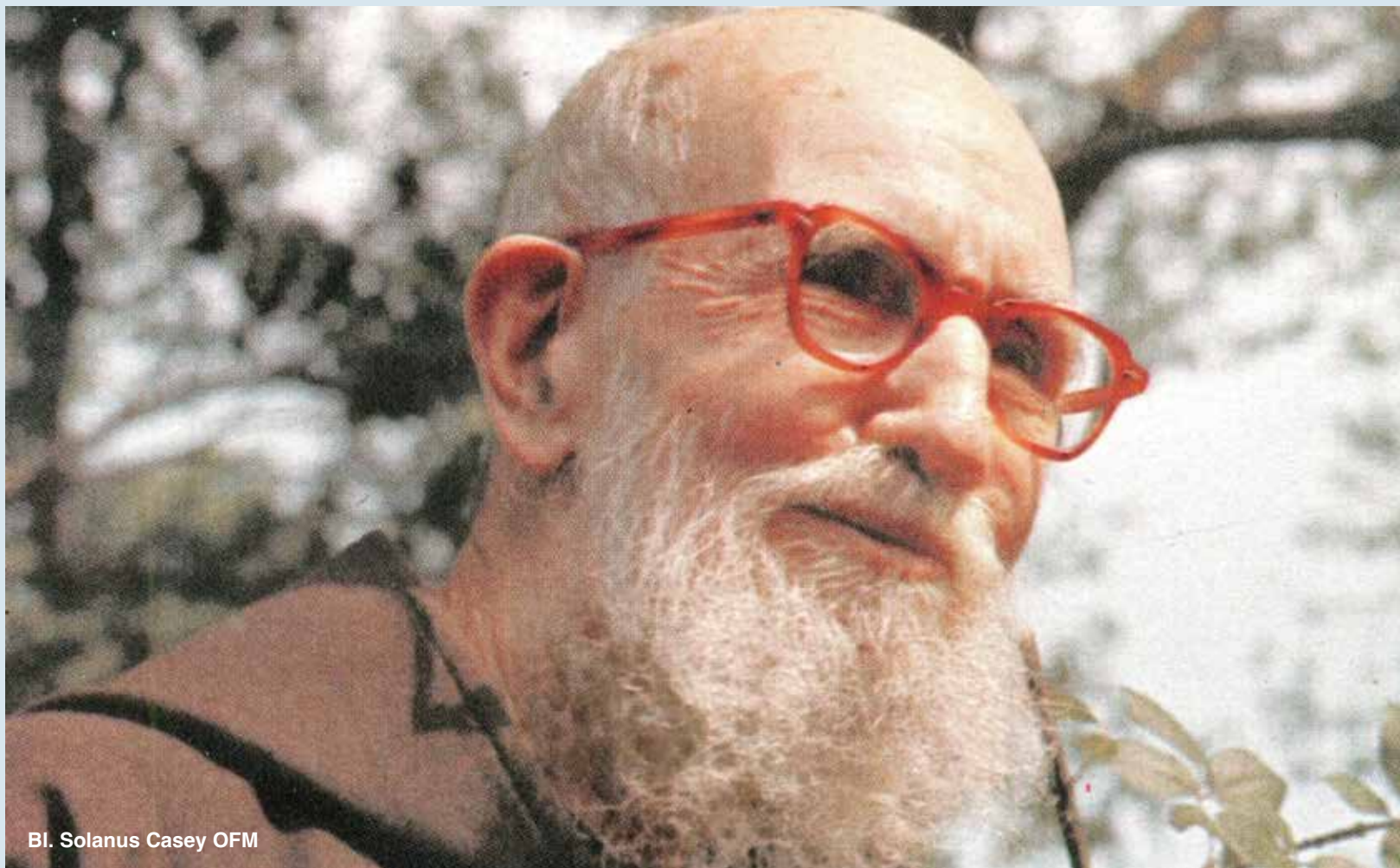
## Attention deficit

It often seems as if human beings are terminally shallow, unable to sustain focus on even the essential for very long. Our culture does not encourage focus. There is a well-known writer, Dr Edward Hallowell, who is an expert on attention deficit disorder and even has the condition himself. He has written often about attention deficit trait (ADT). Attention deficit is a neurological disorder that has a genetic component and can be aggravated by environmental and physical factors but attention deficit trait is completely caused by our environment.

**“Is the key difference between a saint and the rest of us that they saturate themselves so much in the grace of God that they eventually develop a supernatural focus that changes every aspect of their lives?”**

They share some characteristics such as distractibility, procrastination, failure to live up to potential and impulsivity but one is hardwired and the other comes from living in a crazy world.

In fact, Hallowell wrote in



Bl. Solanus Casey OFM

the Harvard Business Review nearly 20 years ago that modern culture all but requires many of us to develop ADT. When Dr Hallowell wrote that article for Harvard Business Review, smartphones were in their infancy and artificial intelligence tools like ChatGPT were the stuff of science fiction. Goodness knows what he would say now.

Our distractibility reaches into every area of our lives, including our ability to listen, read, or study.

Is the key difference between a saint and the rest of us that they saturate themselves so much in the grace of God that they eventually develop a supernatural focus that changes every aspect of their lives?

## River of grace

Recently, I came across a blessed I had never heard of – Fr Solanus Casey OFM, whom Pope Francis declared blessed in 2017.

Reckoning he had to have Irish connections. I did a

quick Google. The internet is a prime source of our inability to focus but sometimes it sends us down, not a rabbit hole, but a river of grace.

**“This extraordinary ministry was fuelled by constant prayer, long hours before the blessed sacrament, including an idiosyncratic habit of playing his violin for the Lord”**

Solanus Casey did indeed have Irish connections. He was the sixth child in a family of ten boys and six girls born to immigrant parents who went to the US after the Great Famine. His father was from Monaghan and his mother was from Armagh.

He was baptised Bernard and like his father,

was known as Barney. His father was hardworking and devout, earning his living as a shoemaker and then a farmer in Wisconsin but the family was poor and survival a hardscrabble. Fr Solanus worked first as a logger, then as a hospital orderly, prison guard and street car operator.

He initially began studying in a diocesan seminary, which required major financial sacrifices to attend but he eventually transferred to a Capuchin monastery in Detroit.

## The ‘Holy Priest’

For some reason, presumably related to the fact that he struggled with his studies, he was ordained as a priest simplex – he could celebrate Mass but not preach and not hear confessions. This limitation was never lifted. Fr Solanus worked as a porter in Capuchin friaries, first in Detroit and then in New York, which meant answering the door and meeting visitors, not usually work for a priest.

He quickly became known simply as the ‘Holy Priest’, and local people came to the friary seeking intercession for everything from toothache to cancer. Stories of miracles due to his intercession began to abound.

**“So much has been written about the positive power of gratitude but this is grace-enhanced gratitude – gratitude for God’s will”**

This extraordinary ministry was fuelled by constant prayer, long hours before the blessed sacrament, including an idiosyncratic habit of playing his violin for the Lord, despite being far from an accomplished musician.

Fr Solanus had a predictable approach when asked for prayer. He would ask the

person to do something positive – enrol in the Seraphic Mass Association (which to this day supports Capuchin ministries), pray, do good works, or read. Then he would advise the person to “Thank God in advance”. This was not trying to bend God to our will but thanking God in advance regardless of the outcome.

So much has been written about the positive power of gratitude but this is grace-enhanced gratitude – gratitude for God’s will.

Fr Solanus was simple but not simplistic. He always diverted attention from himself and attributed the miracles to the action of God mediated through whatever sacramental he used, or membership of the Seraphic Mass Association. When he died in 1957, 20,000 people attended his funeral but the police stewards had an easy time. The crowd was calm, focused and praying – just like Fr Solanus had spent his life. Blessed Solanus, give us the grace to do likewise.





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# The synodal journey will take time to involve more people



We should not attempt to water down the Gospel message to make it more attractive today, rather we should live the message unapologetically, writes **Bishop Paul Dempsey**

Pope Francis greets Bro. Alois, prior of the ecumenical Taizé Community, during an audience at the Vatican on March 15 with Catholic and Protestant representatives planning the ecumenical prayer vigil that will take place on September 30 in St Peter's Square to precede the assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Photo: Vatican Media



**T**he results of a poll outlining the current support for our political parties was published recently. The sample of the population polled was 1,102 people (out of a population of about 5 million – approximately 0.2%). From this, experts were able to determine the position of the parties within a margin of error of plus or minus three percent. It is extraordinary how such accurate information can be harvested from such a small number of people. Last week another piece of research was published showing that 9% of Mass-goers contributed to the synodal listening process. This was reported as being a poor turnout, however, as modern research illustrates, it happens to be quite a significant number and we have garnered a lot of important information that is very helpful as we engage with synodality.

## Not instant

Pope Francis has emphasised how time is greater than space, or put another way, we should work slowly but surely without being obsessed with immediate results. The world in which we live is very much preoccupied with the immediate, we want everything now! The synodal journey will take time to involve more people, it is not something instant. The point has been made many times that this is a process, a way of being Church, a way of discerning the Spirit, it is not 'an event' that will come to a conclusion. The synod is on 'synodality', it is to help us as a community of disciples to reflect on how we can journey together in communion with one another and

how we can further the mission of the Church in the light of the Spirit. I understand that there are genuine fears with this journey. These fears were summed up at the recent continental stage of the synod where it was stated: "There are those who are hoping there might be change and those who fear there will be." My hope is that these legitimate fears and tensions would not become polarisations.

**“There is a sense that Ireland has ‘grown up’ and moved away from an oppressive past to a newfound freedom”**

In looking back over the history of the Church, especially going back to its very beginnings, the disciples discovered at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-11) and on the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), being in an uncomfortable place is sometimes the most fruitful condition if we are open to the mysterious workings of God's grace. One might argue that we are in an uncomfortable place now, but this has always been at the heart of a healthy Church. It is when the Church became comfortable that a lot of problems manifested themselves. We need to engage with the new questions of today and not fear them. There is little doubt that 'Cullen's Catholicism' is at its end, however, the Church is not at its end, far from it! The questions emerging today are far more nuanced and complex as religious

faith has not gone away and is still very important to a great number of people.

## Newfound freedom

There is a sense that Ireland has 'grown up' and moved away from an oppressive past to a newfound freedom. However, this new sense of liberation has not brought with it the sense of fulfilment that was anticipated in the process. If anything, evidence of a deeper alienation has emerged in the statistics that show a steady rise in substance abuse, a fragmenting of relationships, an increase in different forms of addiction, more violent crime, and a high rate of death by suicide. Perhaps these indicate that all is not well in a society that is promoting an exaggerated preoccupation with self-gratification and individualism?

## Way forward

How are we to trace a way forward and tackle this existential void? Some would like to go back to what they consider a 'golden age' when religious practice was high and seemed to be the answer to all our ills. However, as we have seen, the former age was perhaps not so golden, many dark secrets were deeply buried, hidden from the light of truth. Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa reminded officials of the Roman Curia last week that they should not be "overly nostalgic" of the era after World War II when "seminaries had abundant vocations. If those seminaries were filled with holy pastors...we wouldn't have to mourn so many scandals today".

In order to engage with the new questions, we need to revisit

the very roots of our faith and the vision of Jesus Christ. This is the true renewal needed if the Church is to chart the choppy waters of the present age. This is at the heart of synodality, which is inviting us to walk the path of conversion that will help us return to the roots of our Christian faith. The result will be living the Christian message which is far from 'comfortable' in a society where the imprint of Christianity is weakening. Old pastoral assumptions may have to be 'set aside' to create new ways of sharing the Gospel in tune with the sensibilities of today. At World Youth Day in Cologne in 2005, which I happened to be at, Pope Benedict said: "we must go beyond the negative stereotype of what it means to be Catholic and describe ourselves not by what we are against, but what we are for." Faith is something positive, it brings a sense of meaning, hope and freedom. If faith is missing, then our sense of meaning and purpose is diminished.

## From within

This reality offers a challenge and an opportunity for the Church, in how it gives witness to the Gospel, to attract and awaken a desire for the truth. Bishop Ken Good, the retired Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry and Raphoe, sees the challenge for the Church not so much from outside forces but from within, he says: "The main challenge to the Christian Church today, in this country, is not from any external threat, be it secularism, materialism, consumerism, or postmodernism. The main challenge is the internal one of ensuring

that the integrity, the reality, and the relevance of the Church's life and worship, its teaching and communication, must strike a meaningful chord in a society that still has an appetite for spiritual reality."

**“In order to engage with the new questions, we need to revisit the very roots of our faith and the vision of Jesus Christ”**

Here lies the heart of the matter, we should not attempt to 'water down' the Gospel message to make it more attractive today, rather we should live the message unapologetically. This is not an arrogant approach, on the contrary, it requires the Church to have a genuine humility where it will earn the right to be listened to rather than demanding or expecting it. What has declined in recent decades is a set of ecclesial priorities that suited another moment in time. We have crossed the threshold into a new era with new questions and possibilities. Charles Taylor, the Canadian Sociologist, in his book *A Secular Age* believes this era is "the beginning of a new age of religious searching, whose outcome no one can as yet foresee".

Synodality invites us into the heart of this search and wishes to engage with it and the potential it offers. We must be patient on this journey as we discern the promptings of the Spirit, something that takes time and "whose outcome no one can as yet foresee".



# UN has blind spot about religion



There are many sources of meaning and purpose, but without doubt religion is the pre-eminent one, writes **David Quinn**

A new report from the United Nations (UN) reckons that people living in Ireland are the 14th happiest on the planet. The Finns are ranked at number one. The results are to be found in the 'World Happiness Report 2023'.

Each country receives marks out of 10. Finland gets 7.8 and we get 6.9. You may or may not be glad to hear that we are one place ahead of the United States, and five places ahead of the UK, although the differences are tiny. For example, whereas we score 6.9, the UK gets a 6.796, so the margins are fine in the upper reaches of the happiness charts.

The unhappiest country is Afghanistan which scores only 1.8, while the second most unhappy is Lebanon, which scores 2.4. This is not very surprising, as both countries are torn apart by violence and civil strife and have been for several generations.

It is also not such a surprise to find that the reportedly least happy nations are often the poorest ones, and a disproportionate number are in Africa. The happiest are all rich. They say money can't buy you love, but maybe it can buy happiness.

## Surprise

Some results did surprise me. For example, the happiness rating for Saudi Arabia is 6.46 placing it at number 30 out of 137 countries. This is despite the fact that Saudi Arabia is not a democracy and women have little freedom (although this is improving).

A key question is how they measure something as subjective as 'happiness'. The report uses the following measures: GDP per capita; social support; healthy life expectancy at birth; freedom

to make life choices; generosity; and perceptions of corruption.

All of these are mainly self-explanatory, except maybe 'generosity'. In this context it measures whether or not a person has donated to a charity in the last month.

But does this really capture it? If you live in a very poor country, you might have little or no money to give to charity, but you might also be very generous to those around you, both in terms of time, and giving to others some of the little you have. But this is not measured because it is not formal charitable giving.

A poor society might, in fact, have a lot more generous people than a rich one.

The social support measure seems fair enough. It asks people: "If you were in trouble, do you have relatives or friends you can count on to help you whenever you need them, or not?"

At the same time, this might not measure the depth of social support available to you. In a city where many people hardly know their neighbours, the social support might be a lot less deep than in poorer countries

where communities will often be far more close-knit and families larger and closer to hand.

## No attention

What receives almost no attention in the report is religion, a typical blind-spot for the UN, even though most of the world remains religious and certainly far more so than the West. Perhaps the UN might argue that religion is captured by 'social support', but this seems inadequate.

For example, it leaves out the sense of meaning and purpose religion gives to people. There are other sources of meaning and purpose, but without doubt religion is the preeminent one.

Religion at its best also promotes forgiveness, it prompts us to mend our ways when we go wrong, it helps us to cope with suffering, it promotes charity and a sense of community, it gives us a transcendent reference point in our lives, namely God. The importance of these things can hardly be underestimated.

A person might live in a rich country where they have



a high life expectancy, but they might also lack many or all the things religion provides and that is likely to make them unhappy, unless they can find substitutes, which will never be as good as the real thing.

Conversely, a person in a poor country where life expectancy is low, may find more peace of mind because of their religion than their irreligious counterpart in a rich country.

It was because of this effect that Karl Marx called religion the "opium of the people". This is not quite as cynical as it sounds. In its own way, it acknowledges the comfort religion can provide to people. He also said: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the

soul of soulless conditions."

Of course, Marx believed religion would wither away as the promised communist utopia approached, and the UN might well feel the same because its basic outlook is also materialistic, that is, the more prosperous we become, the less we will need religion.

But numerous studies confirm that even in rich countries, religious people are happier on average than their secular counterparts. They are also healthier, on average, belong to a bigger network of social support, and are less likely to fall into crime, drug use, or other forms of anti-social behaviour. So, it is not good enough for the UN to give religion such short shrift.

## Mental health

Indeed, what must also be explained is the continued rise of mental health problems among many young people in the West, especially anxiety and depression. This does not sit well with the idea that we are, essentially, happier, and becoming more so as we get richer. There

has also been a rise in anti-social behaviour. Bus and trains drivers in Ireland report more violence as they go about their work. So do nurses and doctors working in A&E departments, as do shop workers.

Interestingly, the Finns themselves seem a bit mystified to find themselves ranked the happiest people in the world. An article in *The New York Times* reported that Finns do praise their country for its strong welfare state, but at the same time describe their fellow Finns as "quite gloomy," "a little moody" or not given to unnecessary smiling.

They also talked about guilt, anxiety and loneliness.

This, alone, should tell us something is askew about that UN report, something is missing. Despite all the expertise at its disposal, it is not quite getting things right. I think a big part of the problem is that it overlooks religion almost entirely, and the sense of meaning and purpose countless numbers of people derive from that.

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# Eco parishes call on others to ‘get going with enthusiasm’



Some parishes across Ireland are far ahead of the curve in sustainable practices, **Chai Brady** writes

**T**he recommendation by the Irish bishops in their spring statement that parishes should consider giving 30% of land back to nature by 2030 was met with enthusiasm by parishes who have been working hard to increase biodiversity for several years.

Across Ireland parishes have been engaging with like-minded groups in their community or with Church initiatives aimed at giving information and rewards for parishes who have gone above and beyond.

## Shankill

Shankill parish in Dublin became European environment champions last summer after winning the European Churches Environmental Award. They received the Roman Juriga award for the best Christian environmental project across the entire continent. ECEN (European Christian Environmental Network) consists of hundreds of churches with millions of members from Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox traditions, and the Roman Juriga award is presented at the assembly every two years.

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic*, parishioner and former director of Trócaire Justin Kilcullen said they set up their eco group, Shankill Action for a Green Earth (SAGE), in 2016.

The aim is to promote the teachings of Pope Francis in his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si'* both within the parish and within the wider community in Shankill. This began seven years ago, and they started by joining Eco-



Tree planting by Dublin World Youth Day pilgrims in Raheny parish, helped by the parish's eco group and the local Tidy Towns, March 25.

Congregation Ireland, who encourage churches of all denominations to take an 'eco approach' to worship, lifestyle, property and finance management, community outreach and contact with the developing world. They offer resources and support to help churches take practical 'eco action' in the context of their Christian faith. They also give out awards. Shankill was one of the first parishes to win a gold award from the group after two years of tackling various projects to make the parish more sustainable.

## Eco-conservation

Mr Kilcullen explained: "In the first instance we focused on energy conservation. We were in touch with the SEAI (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland) who offer very generous grants for community groups, so we upgraded the lighting and heating in the church. We made it LED lighting and we replaced our boiler."

The parish also received a grant from the SEAI to get fans which blow heat back down

into the body of the church.

"The gallery is very warm and people are still frozen down below," Mr Kilcullen said about the fans. "These are things that have been brought in, they use them in warehouses, anywhere there's a big space, so it's very simple – blowing the hot air back down."

Introducing the measures, he said, "was a good way of demonstrating to the parishioners that we can do this in our parish, and we can also do it at home."

**“The parish also received a grant from the SEAI to get fans which blow heat back down into the body of the church”**

"We've done a lot of other things, at Lent we put out tips about energy conservation, our prayer for the Earth, about being careful how you travel, what you spend money on, how you dispose of your waste," he said.

"One of the things Pope Francis talks about is the need for an eco-conversion. He also talks about new habits and turning them into life-time habits, that's one of the slogans that we use. Maybe to ensure that your thermostat is set at 20 degrees and no higher – get used to it and make it a lifetime habit," Mr Kilcullen advised.

## Pollinators

Last month the Irish Bishops' Conference received a report on the wide range of work being undertaken by its *Laudato Si'* Working Group and other initiatives being undertaken at parish level across the country.

In response to the impending loss of nature to the world, the call of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, and the agreements made at the recent UN Conference on Biodiversity (COP15), the bishops asked parishes, through their parish pastoral councils and diocesan trusts, as a first step, to identify and care for 30% of parish grounds as a "haven for pollinators and biodiversity, in order that it



Part of Killorglin parish's biodiversity garden at St James's church.



Part of the 40-metre long pollinator friendly plot in Shankill parish. It is one of the SAGE biodiversity and sustainability projects.

can be enjoyed in perpetuity by the whole community".

The bishops said, "In embracing this initiative we encourage parishes to expand their circles of solidarity, to protect and care for biodiversity and recommend that, by 2030, 30% of church grounds be returned to nature."

**“Mr Kilcullen said Shankill has already been working towards creating spaces for wildlife, creating a ‘pollinator friendly plot’ in the grounds two years ago”**

Mr Kilcullen said Shankill has already been working towards creating spaces for wildlife, creating a "pollinator friendly plot" in the grounds two years ago. While it cost €1,000 they secured €400 from the council and made the balance after taking a collection at Mass. It's 40 metres

long and one metre wide and they received advice regarding what to plant.

He added: "There is a challenge to get people to think about this kind of thing. It's getting people to change their mindset a bit, it's not all easy. It's slow and steady, rather than everyone's on board all the time and we're all working like dynamos."

## Earthworms

Declan Crowley of Killorglin parish in Kerry said they are blessed to have lots of land and good soil in his part of the world. The parish has a five-year biodiversity project underway that has been ongoing for two years. There are six parishioners involved who live locally.

Mr Crowley said: "We're fortunate that around our parish church there's quite extensive grounds, it must be well-over one and a half hectares, with mature oak trees, chestnut, common ash, whitethorn, and the soil is undisturbed. We're lucky in our parish grounds, we have remarkable things like earthworms, you can't turn a sod





Left: Blessing of trees planted by Dublin World Youth Day pilgrims by Fr Paul Dunne of Raheny parish, Dublin.

Below: Tree planting in Raheny parish, Dublin.



without finding these big, huge worms.

"It's a small town, Killorglin, and literally within a stone's throw you're immediately out into the countryside where, just like all over the country, economic demands and pressures have changed hedgerows, have changed how we relate to the ground. Balance sheets and profits and losses are the order of the day," he warned.

Under Ireland's Wildlife Act, there is currently a ban on cutting hedgerows until August 31, aimed at giving birds and animals the best chance to breed successfully. However, there are exemptions to the ban including trimming hedges "in the ordinary course of gardening" and cutting roadside hedges to prevent obstruction to motorists.

Mr Crowley mentioned the pastoral reflection on climate change delivered by the bishops in 2014, called 'The Cry of the Earth: A Call to Action for Climate Justice'.

"This is a local voice speaking to us, this is not a global voice, if we cannot listen to the local voice – my God we're lost," he said.

#### Advice

"We're lucky, we have a wonderful priest Fr Kevin Sullivan, our parish priest, and he is on message. The time is now, we have to act now we can't put this biodiversity initiative off until tomorrow or next year, we have to literally grab the

shovel and treat the soil with care. If we look after the soil the soil will look after us," Mr Crowley said.

"Christ's own message was he has come to bring us life to the full, that's exactly the message of the soil, the ground we're walking on – treat me with care and your future is sustainable, but abuse me, abuse the rivers, mountains, oceans, our time will be short. Jump at this with enthusiasm, get going."

Linda Spellman, parish secretary in Raheny, Dublin, said they are involved in a number of projects, and have closely linked in with their Tidy Towns group over the last three years.

**“This year for World Youth Day there is a Global Tree Planting Initiative (GTI) encouraging all pilgrims to plant a tree before they travel”**

Most recently on Saturday March 25, the Dublin World Youth Day pilgrims, who will take part in World Youth Day this August in Lisbon, planted 10 trees on the grounds of Raheny parish accompanied by the parish eco group and the Tidy Towns group.

This year for World Youth Day there is a Global Tree

Planting Initiative (GTI) encouraging all pilgrims to plant a tree before they travel. The Pope confirmed in late January 400,000 pilgrims had registered.

#### Back to nature

Asked about returning 30% of parish lands back to nature, Ms Spellman says she believes they already have, although it's hard to gauge completely accurately.


"We do have sections of the grounds that we let grow wild in the summer. What we did last year, we let pieces of it just grow. We were lucky that we had pyramidal orchids in the ground, and they grew, and in the second year they were even better," she explained.

"We let two large sections of the area just grow wild and then we have wildflower areas. It is managed, you're supposed to cut it once a year and then remove the grass because this gives the wildflowers a chance to grow."


#### Just do it

Ms Spellman's advice to other parishes is "just do it, the easiest part is just letting it grow, you don't really have to do anything, it's easy enough".

"It does take a bit of watching and minding," she added "We have a local group of ecology students who have done a survey where we let it grow wild, apparently they found loads of plants that support biodiversity. Allocate a space and just let it grow."



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# Bishops have to urgently engage their priests on synodal process



The Pope's idea of co-responsibility for the Church is the mustard seed that may one day grow into a large tree and give shelter to all, writes **Garry O'Sullivan**

**N**umbers don't lie, yet we all know the phrase "Lies, damned lies, and statistics" a phrase that is described as "the persuasive power of statistics to bolster a weak argument".

"Just 9% of Mass-goers joined the synod process" we are told (*The Irish Catholic*, March 30, 2023) but "41% of the faithful haven't returned to Mass". We're also told that 54% have a favourable view of Pope Francis, but the same number haven't even heard of his synodality project. Clearly Mass-goers, if the statistics are representative, are split on Pope Francis, split on physically going to Mass and not that interested in listening to one another in focus groups.

The statistics do prove something we already knew in the Church, and it was Cardinal Newman who said it, "Great things take time". The push for a more synodal Church is, Pope Francis says, "what the Lord expects from his Church in the third millennium" and it may well take a long time. Synodality is a working out of Vatican II, 60 years already. We're just getting started.

## Mustard seed

Synodality is the mustard seed in Gospel terms that may one day grow into a large tree and give shelter to all. Yet the name is clumsy, and it is difficult for people to understand. Others are reminded of synods in other denominations and the problems that have been encountered there.

Many didn't hear about the synodal listening process; some were afraid of it; others afraid of groups gatherings after Covid-19; for some it's too late, their spirit and hunger for renewal and reform has burnt out; some are disillusioned; more are weary, and some are



Pope Francis listens to a question while responding to journalists aboard his flight from Tallinn, Estonia, to Rome in this September 25, 2018, file photo. Photo: CNS photo/Paul Haring

excited and willing to respond to Pope Francis' call to exploring a new way of being Church.

And even then, the process was limited by time and resources. Parishes in the main were unable to reach out beyond themselves to the so-called 'peripheries', something the Pope had wished for but largely didn't happen, here or anywhere else.

**“There's a weariness among parishioners that synodality is yet just another Church listening fad which will pass”**

One of the main fears expressed in the listening process throughout the country was that it might be all futile and nothing would change – there's a weariness among parishioners that synodality is yet just another Church listening fad which will pass.

Priests also share that weariness; while some were very enthusiastic others were apathetic, or confused or even downright hostile to it. So if the local priest decided he wasn't on board

with synodality, for whatever reason, then people didn't hear about it or participate in it.

Bishops too reflected the priests. Several bishops have been privately hostile to the synodal process while others have performed their public utterances in favour of it but are known not to be 'synodal men'. Some bishops have really pushed it and have worked hard to try and educate parishioners in their dioceses and others have begun to implement some of the changes and reforms called for in their diocesan listening.

## Bishops' conference

And yet the bishops' conference itself is described by some of those who participate in it as dysfunctional and not synodal at all. There is a lack of listening and too much commentary on contributions making it feel more like a classroom than a meeting of equals.

If the bishops want to build a synodal Church, they have two urgent concerns:

- How do we as bishops engender greater loyalty and cooperation from our priests?

- How can priests be liberated to allow their parishioners to take a more active and responsible role for the life of the parish?

**“In December we heard from the papal nuncio that Rome was pushing the amalgamation of Irish dioceses, with little enthusiasm from the bishops”**

There's no other path, it's not like before synodality a vision for the future was being put before us by bishops now clearly opposed to it. Before we engaged on a synodal path in 2020, what was going on in the Church here? Looking back at summer 2019 gives an interesting snapshot of how some bishops were thinking. Bishop Larry Duffy, speaking at an ordination, said boosting lay leaders would be one of the roles of new priests as they come to terms with vocation shortages. The new Bishop of Cork and Ross Fintan Gavin was ordained and faced huge challenges with declining clergy, rationalising Masses, a shortage of resources for ministries

and so on. New Bishop Michael Duignan spoke of priests, religious and laity all working together. In July that year, Armagh's new auxiliary bishop Michael Router said the role of female laity must be enhanced so that they are brought into the decision-making process of the Church. Laity needed to be prepared, he said, saying you can't run a parish without them. In December we heard from the papal nuncio that Rome was pushing the amalgamation of Irish dioceses, with little enthusiasm from the bishops. That's just a six-month snapshot. It was grim reading and yet there was a sense among those new bishops that things had to change, and they were prepared to change.

## Process

So in March 2020, Pope Francis announced the two-year global consultation process leading to the 2023 synod on synodality with a call to "look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say."

Some have listened, some have not. When we look at statistics on synodality, we should like St Francis of Assisi – a layman – who was tasked with rebuilding the Church by Jesus himself, dust ourselves down and say "Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." The statistics will take care of themselves.

**•** Garry O'Sullivan is editor of The Synodal Times [www.synodaltimes.com](http://www.synodaltimes.com)

**“Several bishops have been privately hostile to the synodal process while others have performed their public utterances in favour of it but are known not to be ‘synodal men’”**



# Synodality is not itself a solution to the overt focus on hierarchy



A danger in any synodal pathway is that the process can be dominated by a vocal minority, writes **Rev. Stephen Neill**

**L**ike many of my colleagues I have been watching with some interest the evolution of the 'synodal pathway' in the Catholic Church in Ireland and indeed worldwide. It was thus disappointing to see reported in last week's edition of *The Irish Catholic* that the level of engagement with the process towards synodality by Mass-going Irish Catholics has been so low.

As a member of the Church of Ireland the synodical system is a given, as it is throughout the Anglican Communion. I have been a member of general synod for most of my ministry, only losing my seat in the last session and it was a largely positive experience throughout. It is however not perfect, and perhaps in reflecting on my experience of the general synod of the Church of Ireland I can shed some light on issues that may lie behind the less than enthusiastic response to the current process in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

## Relative minority

From my earliest days as a young curate I observed that general synod, while a very large and apparently representative body of over 600 clergy and laity, was dominated by a relative minority who were the regular visitors to the podium to express their views on a variety of issues being debated (I was, incidentally, one of those regular speakers). While everyone in theory had a voice and a vote, I think it is fair to say that a vocal minority swayed and continues to sway the path of general synod. This is not peculiar to the synod. In any large gathering or assembly

there will be the more vocal contributors and those whose involvement is less overt and engaged. The best one can hope for is that the synodical process gives everyone the opportunity to contribute and engage with it. I think this may well be a factor in some of the perceived apathy in responding to the synodal pathway process in the Catholic Church. It will inevitably be seen by many as a 'talking shop' and indeed the same view is expressed within my own Church very frequently when attempts are made to recruit laity and clergy to stand for election to synod.

You may have noticed that I described the general synod as 'apparently representative' and that is because I think most members of synod have become increasingly aware of factors that have undermined the representative nature of our general synod.

**“Like so many churches the issue that has dominated our synods in recent years has been that of human sexuality”**

Chief among these is the economic barrier. It costs a lot of money to attend general synod. Traditionally general synod ran from a Tuesday to a Thursday which meant taking three days off work, paying for two if not three hotel nights (depending on the distance of the venue from the member's home) and paying for all meals. There are no expenses provided to attend general synod unlike other meetings of the Church of Ireland.

Inevitably this has limited the potential participation of a whole swathe of members of my Church who could neither afford the time or the cost involved in attending. Younger members especially have found this challenging with family and work commitments while those who are retired find it less challenging and this is reflected in the age demographic of synod membership.

This year the synod meets in Wexford and in an attempt to address these issues it will be held on a Friday/Saturday, thus requiring only one or two nights hotel accommodation and if business is not completed meeting via Zoom for a third day the following week. There is no doubt that while there is still an economic cost

to synod attendance this is a positive development and hopefully it will over time make our synod more accessible to those who wish to become involved at this level.

## Outsider

As an outsider looking in to the current synodal pathway process in the Catholic Church it seems to me that it is partially motivated by an attempt to broaden the administration and focus of the Church beyond the traditional hierarchy. Ironically, although in the Church of Ireland we have long embraced the model of synodality, the way we have done it actually serves to more explicitly emphasise the hierarchy within our Church! The synod is made up of two houses: The House of Bishops and The House of Representatives (laity and clergy). The House of Bishops usually sit above or physically apart from the rest of synod and has a power of veto and though it has not to my knowledge been used, it is a significant power accorded to the bishops. Within the House of Representatives there are occasions when voting is required by orders and in this case clergy and laity votes are counted separately and a majority of each order is required for a vote to pass. And so, in my experience the adoption of a synodical process is not of itself a solution to the overt focus on hierarchy in any Church.

Like so many Churches the issue that has dominated our synods in recent years has been that of human sexuality. While I would always be in favour of open debate on such vital and challenging issues these debates have very often generated more heat than light and actually served to deepen divisions within the Church of Ireland to the point that many have spoken of the possibility of a split within the Church on



Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby attends the General Synod 2023 in London in February. Photo: OSV News.

a north/south, conservative/liberal basis. I hope and pray that this does not happen, but if our synod is to be effective in maintaining unity we must find a less adversarial way of talking to and truly listening to each other. To those within the Catholic Church and engaged in the synodal pathway, I would urge great attention to the practice of good listening and non-confrontational engagement.

In all of what I have said I hope I have conveyed a balanced view of synodality. I believe while not perfect it is the best we can do at this point in time. There are many things to recommend it, but it is not a silver bullet and will not on its own solve the challenges that all Churches face in trying to engage more effectively and lovingly with our sisters and brothers in Christ.

**Rev Stephen Neill is rector of Celbridge and Straffan with Newcastle-Lyons, Diocese of Dublin Glendalough.**

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# Out&About

## In the footsteps of a saint...



**CAVAN:** Students from St Patrick's College Cavan were presented with their John Paul II award this morning by bishop of Kildare Martin Hayes, along with Ann Kavanagh and Fr Andrew Tully on March 24.



**ARMAGH:** Mary's meals Armagh and Benburb gathered on the Feast of the Annunciation, in St Patrick's Cathedral to celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving. Fr Barry Matthews spoke to the group about the impact their work makes with those in need and congratulated them.



**KILDARE:** Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin Denis Nulty is pictured with families of some of the 23 children from Rathcoffey NS confirmed on the Feast of the Annunciation, March 25.

## IN SHORT

### Charity seeing 'new cohort' of homeless as figures rise

A housing charity says it is seeing a "new cohort" of people who have never been homeless before but now find themselves without accommodation.

The news comes as the number of people using emergency accommodation rose to 11,742 for the month of February.

The figures "do not reflect the scale of homelessness expected in the next few weeks and months as the eviction ban lifts," a spokesperson for Depaul said on March 31.

"Many vulnerable groups in the community have, at present, the back up of wrap-around health supports and we need to clarify how this will transfer to homeless services or temporary accommodation if they are at risk of eviction," the spokesperson continued.

"What we are seeing now is a cohort of people who

have never been homeless before."

Specific vulnerabilities have been identified by the charity's prevention teams and "stories have begun to emerge in the last number of weeks of more 50-60-year-old single men who have been served their notices to quit and have nowhere to go."

### Irish nun dies in US after 65 years' service

Irish-born Sr Jacinta Marie Brazil OSF (82) died in Assisi House on Tuesday, March 21, after 65 years a professed member of the Sisters of St Francis of Philadelphia.

Sr Jacinta (Brigid Philomena) was born in Corrmore, Co. Offaly. She entered the congregation in 1955, professing her first vows in 1958.

The Irish-born sister earned a BA in education from Marlyhurst College and a master's in education from the University of Portland. She ministered primarily in education and spiritual ministry.

She began her ministry in the diocese of Portland on the US's west coast, before returning to her hometown in Ireland where she served for 23 years as both a caregiver and pastoral associate for Leamonaghan Parish in Westmeath.

Beginning in 2011, Sr Jacinta served in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In 2022 she moved to Assisi House, the congregation's retirement residence in Aston, where she served in prayer and hospitality ministry until her death.

### Belfast prayer group receives 1st class relic

A Belfast prayer group had its prayers answered with the presentation of a first class relic of St Faustina.

The Divine Mercy Prayer Group, Sacred Heart Church, North Belfast, received the piece of the saint's bone after "praying for a while to receive a relic", a member of the group said.

A Divine Mercy alcove has been established and will now house the relic in an upper room of the church.





**MONAGHAN:** Fr Colm Mannion OP, vocations director of the Dominican order in Ireland, stops off at St Patrick's Church, Bawn, to say a prayer.



**KILDARE:** Following the celebration of Mass in the Columba Centre of St Patrick's College Maynooth, Msgr Joe McGuinness wishes his colleague Pauline Devaney all the best on her last day as a staff member of the Bishops' Conference secretariat on March 30.



**MAYO:** March 27 was a historic day at Knock airport as it welcomed the inaugural flights with Aer Lingus to and from Heathrow Airport. Pictured are some of the crew.



**CORK:** Fr Dermot Lynch OFM Cap. and his grandnephew Sean Lynch are pictured with Bishop of Cloyne William Creen at the Confirmation ceremony in the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Blarney.



**BELFAST:** Sr Norberta presents Thomas Stewart and Stephen McCloskey with a first class relic of Sr Faustina on behalf of the Divine Mercy Prayer Group, Sacred Heart Church, North Belfast.



**ARMAGH:** Mark McMahon and Geraldine Turley from Trócaire are joined by members of the Syrian Community and Kathy Donnelly from Armagh Parish Council, as a cheque is presented to help support the recent Turkey/Syria Appeal.



**CORK:** The Peter McVerry Trust welcomed Micheál Martin to Charleville, March 25 to launch the charity's latest regeneration project, repurposing a former Christian Brothers School into nine social housing homes.



**LIMERICK:** Boys from Doon CBS Primary School who received the Sacrament of First Penance recently pictured with Fr Jimmy Donnelly PP and Ms Elizabeth Doherty, class teacher.



Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
Ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie



Events deadline is a week in advance of publication



**KENYA:** Senator Pippa Hackett is pictured with Irish Sr Mary Kileen after opening the 'Calery Hall', a new multi-purpose dining hall at the Mukuru Promotion Centre in Nairobi, which Sr Kileen runs.



**CAVAN:** Bishop Tom Deenihan is pictured with Majella Rooney Kelly, Kate Duffy, Mary Smith and Mary Duffy at the Church of the Immaculate Conception, Kingscourt, following the sacrament of Confirmation.



**LOUTH:** The community of the Monastery of St Catherine of Siena, Drogheda, is pictured with Fr Fernando Garcia Fernandez OP – promoter for Dominican Nuns, Rome, who visited the community recently.

## ANTRIM

Fr Stephen Langridge will lead a time of discernment for men considering a call to Priesthood at Drumalis Retreat and Conference Centre, Lame, Friday April 21 at 6pm to Sunday 23 at 3pm. Visit Eventbrite.ie for more information.

Lectio Divina takes place each Friday in St Joseph's church after 7pm Mass and on Monday in St Comgall's church after 10am Mass in Antrim parish.

## ARMAGH

Armagh parish is hosting a way of the cross on Good Friday beginning 11am from the grounds of the Sacred Heart Convent, Convent rd, ending at the calvary grotto St Malachy's Church.

## CARLOW

Graiguelcullen parish's solemn novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help begins on Monday April 17 and will run for nine consecutive Monday nights. First speaker will be Fr Peter McVerry.

## CAVAN

Christian Meditation takes place every Thursday evening at 7pm in the Conference Room at the back of Cavan Cathedral.

## CORK

Way of the Cross takes place on Fridays during Lent at 7pm in St Peter and Paul's Church in Cork City.

Cobh Cathedral's Adoration Chapel is open each week, on Wednesdays from 11am until 9pm, and on Thursdays and Fridays from 11am until 6pm

A Medjugorje prayer meeting takes place every Wednesday night at 8pm in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament in the Third Order chapel, Holy Trinity Church, Fr Matthew Quay.

## DONEGAL

St Columba's Church, Massmount, Fanad, to celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday on April 16. With confessions, the chaplet of Divine Mercy, Mass and veneration of a relic of St Faustina.

## DUBLIN

Ecumenical walk with the cross begins with a

moment of prayer in St Mary's Pro-Cathedral at 7.15pm after which the two archbishops of Dublin will quietly walk through the city carrying the cross to Christ Church Cathedral concluding with prayers led by the archbishops.

The Feast of the Divine Mercy will be celebrated on Sunday, April 16, in Corpus Christi Church, Drumcondra, with Holy Hour at 3pm followed by Mass at 4pm.

## GALWAY

A weekly gathering for young adults (18-35 years) takes place on Wednesdays at 7.30pm in the Cathedral. An opportunity for adoration, silence, prayer, music, Scripture and reflection, followed by refreshments. Contact youth@galwaycathedral.ie for more information.

## KERRY

Anam Cara Kerry, the organisation that supports bereaved parents, is holding its monthly parent evening for bereaved parents on Tuesday April 11 at 7.15pm in the Meadowlands Hotel, Tralee.

Castleisland Parish are celebrating a dawn Mass at 6am on Easter Sunday Morning, April 9, in Tobar na bhFionn Cemetery, Cordal.

## KILDARE

The Novena of the Chaplet of Divine Mercy in Naas parish will commence on Good Friday, April 7 before the Easter Ceremonies, culminating with the celebration of Divine Mercy Sunday, April 16.

## LAOIS

The rosary will be prayed for Lent Monday to Saturday at 6.30pm and at 3pm on Sunday in the Church of the Assumption, the Heath, Portlaoise parish.

## LIMERICK

Adoration will be held every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday during Lent in the Adoration Chapel, Abbeyfeale from 10am-8pm.

## LOUTH

A Novena to St Gerard takes place every Wednesday at 9.30am and 7.30pm in St

Joseph's Redemptorist Church, Dundalk.

## MAYO

Castlebar Easter programme for secondary school students presented by the Legion of Mary April 11-14, 10am-1.30pm. Meet 10am for Mass in the Church of the Holy Rosary, Castlebar. To register contact legionofmarycastlebar@gmail.com or 087 9216572 on WhatsApp.

A Youth 2000 prayer meeting takes place in Knock Shrine every Thursday at 8pm in The Hub, St Joseph's Chapel, for prayer, adoration, Lectio Divina, friendship and a cup of tea.

## TIPPERARY

Morning prayer takes place after 10am Mass in St Mary's church, Clonmel parish. For the duration of Lent, an evening Mass is on at 7pm, Monday-Friday, excluding Tuesday when a Station of the Cross takes place at 7pm.

## TYRONE

The Seven Joys of Our Lady fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order meets each second Tuesday of the month in St Brigid's chapel, Brocagh, Clonoe Parish, at 7pm followed by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament from 8-9pm.

## WATERFORD

The Foyer of Charity, Dunmore East, to host a talk on 'The Secret of Mary', St Louis Marie de Montfort, on Saturday April 8 from 11am-12.30pm. To register contact hellywilliams@gmail.com.

## WESTMEATH

Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament takes place in the Cathedral of Christ the King, Mullingar, Monday to Friday from 2-7pm.

## WEXFORD

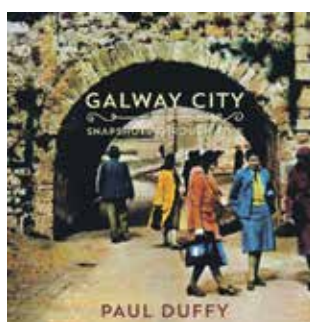
Divine Mercy devotions take place the first Tuesday of the month at 7pm in Wexford Friary, including blessing with the relic of St Faustina.

Rosary and devotions at the shrine at Rocklands Wexford take place on Tuesdays at 2.30pm.





**Native Irish Dogs**  
Shane McCoy & Colin White



**Galway City**  
Paul Duffy



**Clare's Wild Atlantic Way**  
Patrick G. Ryan



**Dublin - A Photographic Essay**  
Eddie Mallin



**The Bee's Knees**  
James Morrissey



**A Robin's Tale**  
Noelle Rock



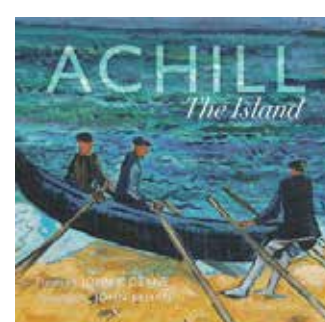
**The Liberties**  
Maurice Curtis



**Best Loved Poems - West of Ireland**  
Thomas F. Walsh & Liam Lyons



**Best Loved Poems - South of Ireland**  
Gabriel Fitzmaurice & John Reid



**Achill The Island**



**What Have The Irish Ever Done For Us?**  
David Forsythe



**Banshee Rising**  
Riley Cain



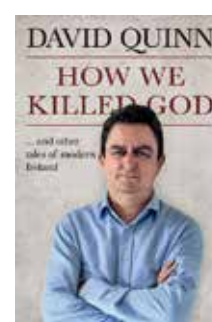
**All the Risings**  
Kevin Kenna



**The Flight of the Earls**  
Liam Swords



**Fears, Phobias & Fantasies**  
Prof. Patricia Casey



**How We Killed God**  
David Quinn

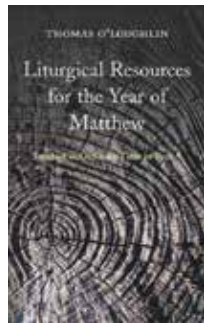


**Once Upon A Reader**  
Lorraine Levis





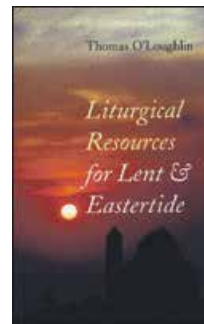
**A Treasury of Prayers**  
Dinah Proctor



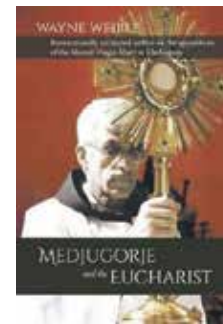
**Liturgical Resources for the Year of Matthew**  
Thomas O'Loughlin



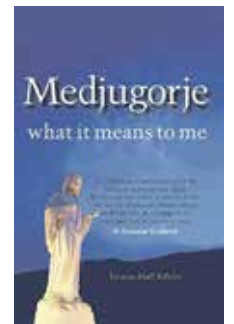
**The Good News of Matthew's Year**  
Silvester O'Flynn OFM Cap



**Liturgical Resources for Lent & Eastertide Year A**  
Thomas O'Loughlin



**Medjugorje and the Eucharist**  
Wayne Weible



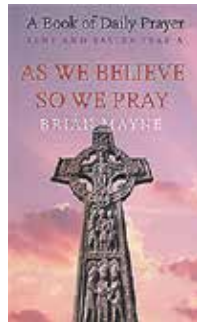
**Medjugorje: what it means to me**  
Louise Hall



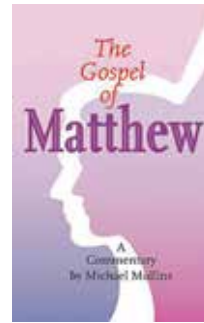
**Meeting with Our Lady of Medjugorje**  
Finbar O'Leary



**Heroic Leadership**  
Chris Lowney



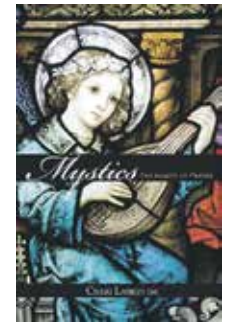
**As We Believe So We Pray**  
Brian Mayne



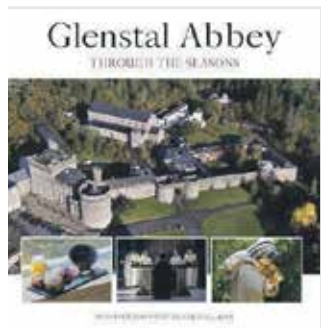
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Michael Mullins



**Trinity – A story of deep delight**  
Anne Marie Mongoven O.P.



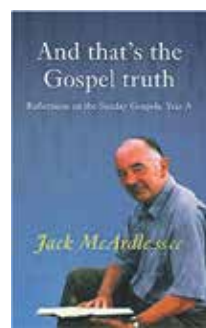
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Craig Larkin SM



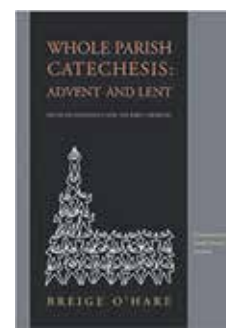
**Glenstal Abbey – Through the Seasons**  
Valerie O'Sullivan



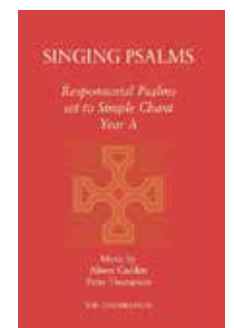
**A Year in the Life – Glencairn Abbey**  
Valerie O'Sullivan



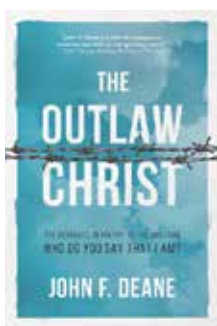
**And that's the Gospel truth Year A**  
Jack McArdle



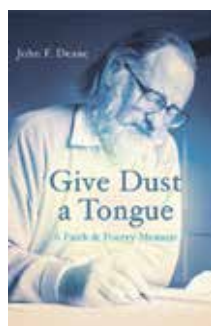
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Breige O'Hare



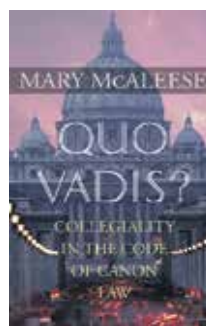
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Alison Caden & Peter Thompson



**The Outlaw Christ**  
John F. Deane



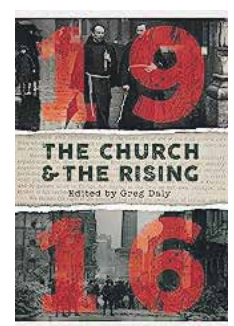
**Give Dust A Tongue**  
John F. Deane



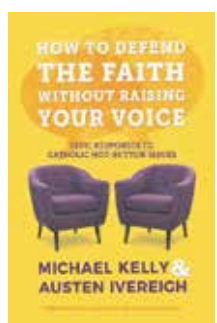
**Quo Vadis?**  
Mary McAleese



**Christendom in Dublin**  
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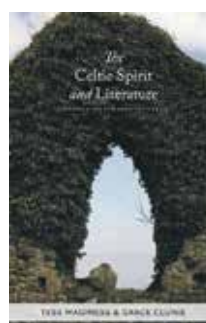
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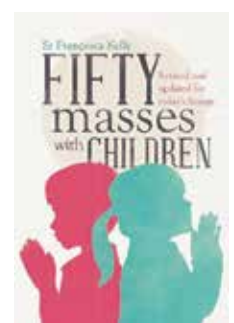
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**Pope Francis in Ireland**

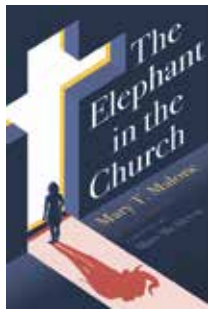


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Sr Francesca Kelly

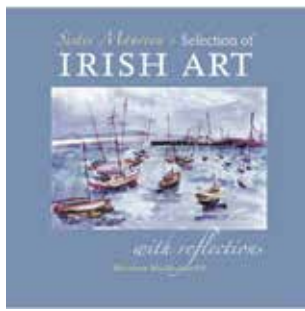




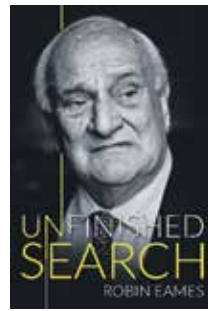
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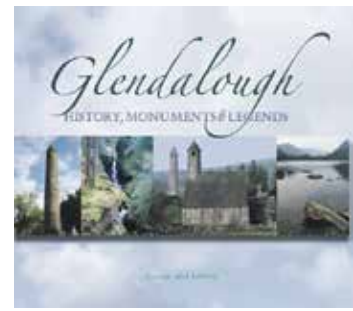
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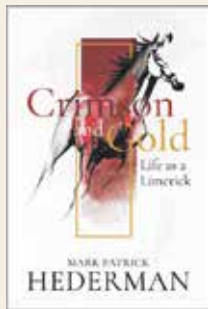


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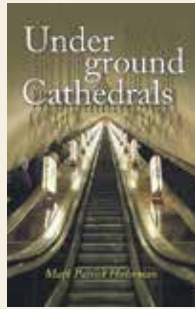


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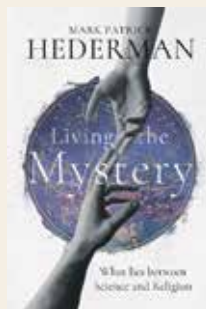
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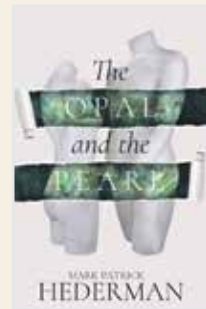
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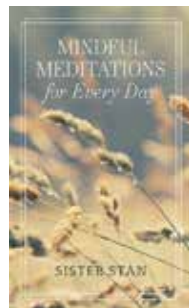


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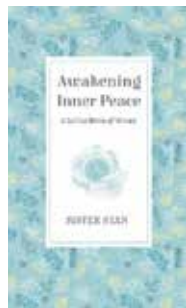
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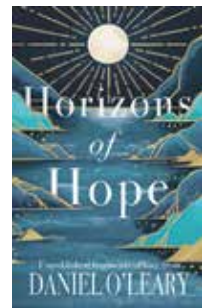
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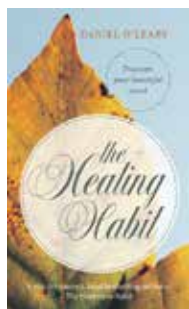
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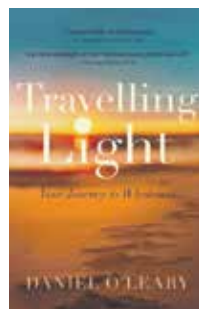


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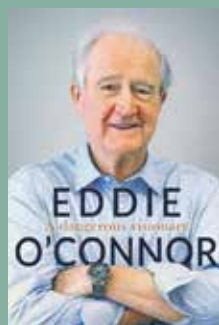
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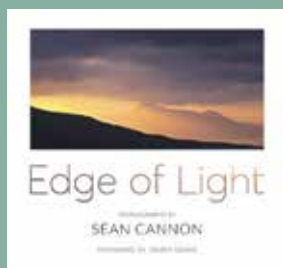
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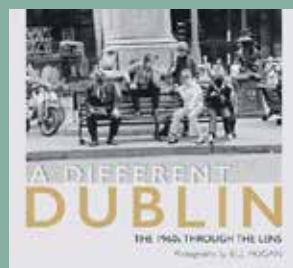
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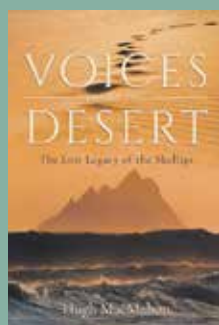
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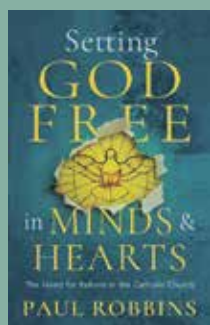
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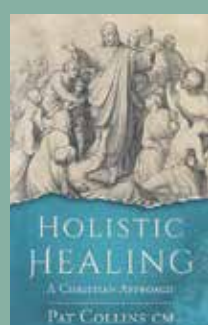
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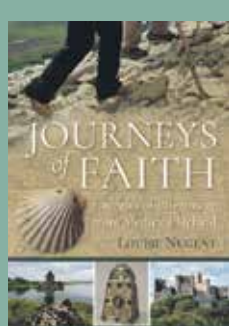
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# Experiencing change in the Holy Land...



Through our relationship with Jesus, we too can make a difference in our world, our community and our homes, writes **Fr Barry Matthews**

**W**hen we think of the Holy Land many of us have a romantic and somewhat nostalgic notion about the stories that we know so well from the Bible. On our recent pilgrimage I was apprehensive about the trip itself due to the recent upsurge of civil unrest in the area and I imagine this thought also struck the minds of many of my fellow pilgrims.

**“Each day of our pilgrimage gave a glimpse of a new and more interesting side of the Jesus story”**

Our journey began in Nazareth from where we were to see many of the formative sites associated with the life of Jesus. Rather than get the feeling that I was in some far-off land surrounded by unrest I actually got the feeling I was at home, a familiar place which I have heard about since my childhood. Every sight that we travelled to reminded me not only of the stories and parables of the bible but also of how these stories relate to my own life down the years.

As we continued to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, our group began to journey closer to one another. As stories were told and tears and laughter flowed, we began to realise more and more that we were part of the one body of Christ - we were the hands and feet of Jesus on the journey.

Each day of our pilgrimage gave a glimpse of a new and more interesting side of the Jesus story. Each day was a new encounter with the

Jesus of scripture but also with the risen Lord whose word is ever alive and active through the faith community.

The Biblical sights that we are all so familiar with act as an incredible insight into the life of Jesus however this pilgrimage was also an opportunity to see the personal side of Jesus - it was also an opportunity to thank God for the gift of faith handed down through the generations. It is truly by the gift of faith that these sites come alive.

As we prayed on the Sea of Galilee and were blessed to renew our baptismal promises at the River Jordan - as couples renewed their marriage vows in Cana our real-life experience began to flourish in faith. The emotion of the moments was capped by the joy of knowing that God had brought us to these sacred spaces to honour and worship Him. By the time we arrived at the Mount of the Transfiguration something special happened - I felt truly transformed and renewed in faith.

## Amazing sites

Moving to Bethlehem, we continued to experience many amazing sites - some of the most historically important sites in the Bible and yet again they felt familiar. From Bethlehem the short bus journey into Jerusalem was an instant reminder of the close geographical nature of the New Testament. One of the most moving moments for me was possibly the journey on foot through the streets of Jerusalem, carrying our 'Group Cross' and praying the Stations of the Cross, the hustle and bustle, the ancient streets, the shoving of locals going about their daily business - a reminder that things haven't changed so much over the two millennia since Jesus - indeed the social and political unrest also acted as a reminder that nothing much changes. Praying at the Tomb of Jesus in the Holy Sepulchre was the light bulb moment for me on the trip - nothing will change if we don't change!

I was reminded that as a community following the footsteps of Jesus, we need to change our attitudes - we need to change how we look at our planet, change how we look at and value each other, change how we look at other faiths. The them and us attitude is contrary to a message of unity that the Gospel delivers. The call to care for our sisters and brothers and the world we live in must be taken seriously and the command of Jesus to



Fr Barry Matthews of the Archdiocese of Armagh preaches in the Church of the Transfiguration on Mount Tabor in the Holy Land.

love - love God and love our neighbours is real. In many ways we are duty bound to peel back the effects of the last 2,000 years on our church and relive the message of the Gospel - a message of faith, hope and love.

**“The pilgrimage to the Holy Land has brought a new insight into my relationship with Jesus not only through my journey to the Holy Land but also through my reflection on his journey”**

If the Holy Land has thought me anything it has acted as a reminder that Jesus walked our path, experienced the darkness and division that exists in the world and overcame it. Through our relationship with Jesus, we too can make a difference in our world, our community and our homes. Change happens when people trust, trust God and trust each other. Sometimes it takes a new perspective to see clearly. The pilgrimage to the Holy Land has brought a new insight into my relationship with Jesus not only through my journey to the Holy Land but also through my reflection on his journey.

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# World Report

## IN BRIEF

### Spanish bishops hand over info on sex abuse

● The president of the Spanish Bishops' Conference (CEE), Cardinal Juan José Omella, has handed over to the people's ombudsman, Ángel Gabilondo, a total of six volumes of data on cases of sexual abuse of minors.

In Spain, the role of the ombudsman is to defend the fundamental rights and public liberties of citizens by watching over the activities of local and national governments as well as the administration of justice.

Speaking to Radio Nacional de España, Cardinal Omella explained that all the data on cases collected by the Spanish dioceses has been turned in.

In total, the ombudsman has received "six volumes of reflection with all the data that we have up to now".

He stressed the Spanish prelates commitment to "put in place all means to eradicate" the abuse of minors.

### Crimes against Catholics increase 260% in Canada

● In 2021, Canadian police services received 3,360 statements related to hate crimes, a 27% increase compared to 2020 statistics, with a 260% growth in such crimes against Catholics, according to a new study by Statistics Canada.

In 2020, 2,646 hate crimes had been reported to police. According to the federal agency, this spike in hate crimes is largely due

to more incidents "targeting religion, sexual orientation, and race or ethnicity".

The number of hate crimes aimed at religion or the faithful of a given religious group reached an all-time high in 2021, after decreasing for a few years.

Statistics Canada's report doesn't specify what 2021 events were considered to be motivated by hate aimed at religion.

### Tabernacle stolen from murdered bishop's residence

● An empty tabernacle that was bolted to the wall has been stolen from the residence of the late Los Angeles Auxiliary Bishop David O'Connell, who was murdered in his Hacienda Heights, California, home in February.

First reported by *LifeSiteNews*, the burglary occurred sometime over the past weekend, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles told *CNA* in a statement.

The archdiocese said that the tabernacle was located in Bishop O'Connell's personal chapel. The theft was reported to law enforcement and "security has been enhanced," the archdiocese's statement said.

Lt Michael Modica, a homicide detective with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department who has been in the late bishop's residence, told *CNA* that he remembered seeing the tabernacle "bolted to the wall".

### Pope accepts German bishop's resignation

● The vice president of the German bishops' conference, Bishop Franz-Josef Bode, has become the first Catholic bishop in Germany to resign in connection with the abuse scandal.

The Vatican announced March 25 the Pope had accepted his resignation. Bishop Bode resigned over "errors made in the handling of clergy sexual abuse cases", *KNA* agency reported.

The move by the bishop of the northern German Diocese of Osnabrueck, regarded as progressive, was met both with respect and regret by fellow bishops.

To date, the Pope has rejected the resignations of other German bishops, including Cardinal Reinhard Marx of Munich and Archbishop Stefan Hesse of Hamburg. The Pope has yet to decide on the resignation offer submitted by Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne.

## Vatican's liturgy czar rejects Church in Germany's plans

The Vatican's liturgy czar has intervened against the implementation of resolutions of the German 'Synodal Way' that demand laypeople should be able to regularly baptise and preach the homily at Mass in churches across Germany.

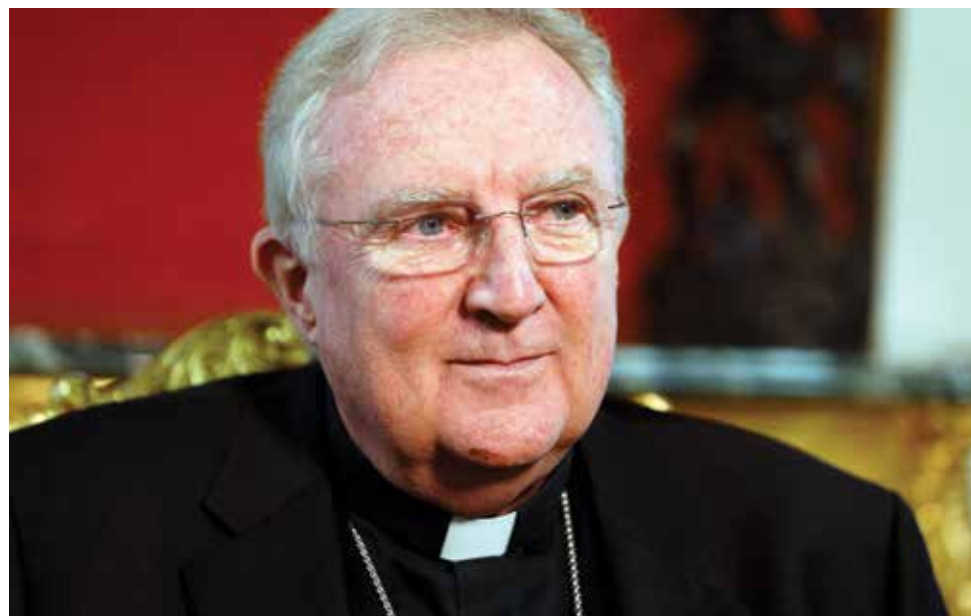
In a letter to the German Bishops' Conference president dated March 29, Cardinal Arthur Roche said neither was possible – despite at least one German diocese already announcing both practices.

The written intervention by the Vatican's prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments was addressed to Bishop Georg Bätzing of Limburg, reported *CNA Deutsch*, which has obtained a copy of the document.

Apart from covering the question of homilies and baptisms by laypeople, the seven-page letter also reminded the German bishops that liturgical translations must be confirmed and approved by the Vatican.

On the issue of homilies, Cardinal Roche wrote that the reason why laypeople cannot regularly preach at Mass is not due to their need for "better theological preparation or better communication skills". Nor is the intent to create "inequalities among the baptised".

Instead, the cardinal pointed to "distinctions made by the Spirit, who produces different charisms that are



Cardinal Arthur Roche, prefect of the Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, has spoken out against German Synodal Way proposals. Photo: CNS.

distinct and complementary".

Cardinal Roche wrote that well-formed laypeople should contribute, for instance, as catechists or by conducting conversations about sacred Scripture.

However, he added that laypeople could not give the homily at Mass since only someone ordained "sacramentally represents Christ by virtue of the *sacra potestas* [sacred power] conferred on him at ordination".

Explaining that the issue of preaching at Mass was, in other words, a sacramental rather than an educational matter, Cardinal Roche

warned of "misunderstandings" about the figure and identity of the priest, who is the only one who can act *in persona Christi capitis* [in the person of Christ, the head of the Church] by virtue of the sacrament.

The cardinal also rejected the introduction of laypeople regularly administering baptisms, something already in practice in some German dioceses. He wrote that justifying this with a lack of priests, for example, was not possible under canon law.

Laypeople could only validly perform baptisms in exceptional circumstances,

such as in danger of death or "in painful situations of persecution, but also in mission areas and in other cases of special need," the cardinal explained.

Cardinal Roche reminded the German bishops of Pope Francis' 2019 letter regarding the direction of the Synodal Way process. "The universal Church lives in and from the particular Churches, just as the particular Churches live and flourish in and from the universal Church; if they were separated from the universal Church, they would weaken, decay, and die," the Pope wrote at the time.

### Cardinal Hollerich: 'Space to expand' teaching on all-male priesthood

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, SJ, the archbishop of Luxembourg and a key leader of the Synod on Synodality, said the Catholic Church's teaching on a male-only priesthood is not infallible and a future pope could allow women priests.

The cardinal, 64, addressed the topic of the ordination of women, homosexuality, women in the Church, obedience to the pope, and the German 'Synodal Way' in an interview with *Glas Koncila*, a Croatian Catholic weekly, published March 27.

"Pope Francis does not want the ordination of women, and I am completely obedient to that. But people continue to discuss it," Cardinal Hollerich said.

The cardinal questioned the infallibility of papal documents such as St John Paul II's *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, which affirmed the Church's perennial teaching that only men may be ordained to Holy Orders.

"It is the Holy Father who has to decide" whether women can be priests, Cardinal Hollerich said.

The cardinal added that "with time" a pope could go against what John Paul II wrote in *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, saying he is "not sure you could call it" infallible.

"It surely is a true teaching for its time, and we cannot just push it aside. But I think that there might be some space to expand the teaching – to see which of the arguments of Pope John Paul II could be developed," he said.

"But for the moment, if Pope Francis tells me it is not an option, it is not an option."

### Additional charges filed in Vatican finance trial

The Vatican's prosecuting attorney has levelled additional charges against four of the defendants who have been on trial since July 2021 for their alleged roles in the Vatican's failed investment in a property in London.

Alessandro Diddi, the prosecutor, announced the

new charges March 30 at the end of the trial's 54th session.

Raffaele Mincione, Gianluigi Torzi and Enrico Crasso were charged with bribery in addition to the original charges that included embezzlement, fraud and money laundering.

A money-laundering charge also was made against Fabrizio Tirabassi, a former official in the Vatican Secretariat of State, who had been accused of corruption, extortion, embezzlement, fraud and abuse of office.

Mr Diddi said the new charges resulted from testi-

mony given at the trial and from new information that arose as the investigations into the 10 defendants continued.

A key issue in the trial is the role the defendants played in a deal that eventually cost the Vatican more than \$200 million.





Edited by Ruadhán Jones  
ruadhan@irishcatholic.ie

## Preparing for Holy Week...



People light candles in the Marian shrine of Fatima in central Portugal March 30, ahead of Holy Week celebrations. Photo: OSV News/Pedro Nunes, Reuters.

## ‘Cynical’ interview with imprisoned Nicaraguan bishop released

The auxiliary bishop of Managua, Silvio Báez, who lives in exile in the United States, called the Daniel Ortega dictatorship's staging of a prison interview with Bishop Rolando Álvarez “repugnant and cynical”.

Bishop Álvarez was sentenced to 26 years and four months in prison on February 10 as a “traitor to the homeland”.

*El 19 Digital*, a news outlet supportive of the dictatorship, released over the weekend photos and a video of Álvarez, the bishop of Matagalpa, who was

visited by a brother and sister on March 25 in the prison known as La Modelo.

In the images, the bishop is wearing his blue prisoner uniform in a clean room surrounded by white curtains and is seen eating with his siblings Vilma and Manuel Antonio at a round table.

In the room there are also three blue armchairs with a coffee table and several potted plants.

“I was very happy to see the photos of my brother, Bishop Rolando. I thank God he's alive! The scenography of the dictatorship was

repugnant and cynical and does not expunge its crime,” Bishop Báez tweeted.

“The power of the prayer of the people and international pressure have been revealed. Release him now!” the prelate added.

In October 2022, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights published a report that cited a number of human rights violations committed in that prison, such as overcrowding of prisoners, lack of medical care, prison staff assaulting inmates, detention of visiting relatives, and food

mixed with detergent.

Martha Patricia Molina, a Nicaraguan lawyer and researcher, told ACI Prensa that “the regime yielded to social pressure, and obviously everything was staged to put on a show and say that the bishop is not imprisoned but in a vacation spot.”

“Bishop Rolando José is a bishop of peace and good. We have observed a humble bishop, strengthened, serene, and joyful but mistreated in his physical aspect,” said the author of the report *Nicaragua, A Persecuted Church?*

## Mexico Jesuits lament killing of alleged priest murderer

Forensic experts have identified a body found shot to death March 22 in Sinaloa state, Mexico, as that of José Noriel Portillo, alias “El Chuco”, who allegedly murdered two Jesuit priests and laymen last year.

Fr Luis Gerardo Moro Madrid, superior of the Society of Jesus in Mexico, pointed out that the alleged murder of Portillo, is not a reason to celebrate, because it does not represent an act of justice but of barbarism and the failure of

institutions.

“The Society of Jesus refuses to celebrate the murder of the perpetrator of this act. On the contrary, we believe that it is a lamentable moment, as it shows that we are facing more barbarism and the failure of our institutions,” the priest said in a video posted on Twitter on March 26.

On June 22, 2022, in the Sierra Tarahumara, in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, two laymen and Jesuit

priests Javier Campos Morales and Joaquín César Mora Salazar were murdered in a church in the town of Cerocahui.

“Given the scientific confirmation of the execution of the person responsible for the murders of our Jesuit brothers Javier and Joaquín, we reiterate that this occurrence does not represent the justice so longed for by the Society of Jesus,” Fr Moro said.

## Vatican roundup

### Lasting peace only possible without weapons, Pope says

● A culture of nonviolence will become more widespread when countries and citizens resort less and less to the use of weapons, Pope Francis said.

“Living, speaking and acting without violence is not surrendering, losing or giving up anything, but aspiring to everything,” the Pope said in a video message released March 30 by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network.

At the start of each month, the network posts a short video of the Pope offering his specific prayer intention. For the month of April, the Pope dedicated his prayer intention for a nonviolent culture.

In his video message, the Pope said, “war is madness. It's beyond reason”.

Any kind of war or armed confrontation, he said, “always ends in defeat for all”.

“Let us develop a culture of peace,” he said.

“Even in cases of self-defence, peace is the ultimate goal,” he said, emphasising that “a lasting peace can exist only without weapons”.

“Let us make nonviolence a guide for our actions, both in daily life and in international relations,” he said, and “let us pray for a more widespread culture of nonviolence, that will progress when countries and citizens alike resort less and less to the use of arms”.

### Fraternity is a pro-life issue, says Vatican academy

● If “liberty, equality and fraternity” are essential for human thriving, as has been generally accepted in the West since the Enlightenment, then the last element needs as much attention as the first two, including in Catholic theology, said leaders of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

The academy has launched a process of theological inquiry and cross-disciplinary discussion on fraternity and, in late March, published a book of

theological essays in Italian under the title, *Beginning with the Many. Horizons of Fraternal Thought*.

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the academy, said at the book launch March 27 that the academy has no intention of moving away from its traditional focus on bioethical issues, but also has been called by Pope Francis to engage scientists, theologians and ethicists in looking at “life understood in a very broad way”.

### Satellite to launch Pope's words into space

● Pope Francis' message of hope for humanity will be shot into earth's orbit as a “nanobook” embedded inside a small satellite and his words will also be transmitted back to earth each day for ham radio reception.

The new space mission, called Spei Satelles, is being promoted by the Dicastery for Communication and coordinated by the Italian Space Agency (ASI).

The project was unveiled at the Vatican March 27, the anniversary of Pope Francis' prayer service he led in an empty St Peter's Square at the Vatican in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Msrgr Lucio Adrián Ruiz, secretary of the Dicastery for Communication, said at the Vatican news conference that they have found many ways to spread the Pope's words and images from that historic evening three years ago: first as a global livestream, then a book *Why Are You Afraid? Have You No Faith?* which gathers together Pope Francis' most significant speeches and comments during the pandemic.

Now the book has been turned into a “nanobook” that will be housed in a low earth orbit satellite as a symbolic gesture of extending the Pope's loving embrace even farther. The satellite is scheduled to be launched from Vandenberg Base (VSFB) in California June 10.





# Letter from Rome



John L. Allen Jr

## Defection from anti-abuse panel raises questions of principle, turf wars

**O**n any other day, the dominant Vatican headline on March 29 would have belonged to German Jesuit Fr Hans Zollner, whose unexpected resignation from the Pope's chief advisory body on combating sexual abuse left the broader state of Francis's reform campaign an open question.

It wasn't just the fact that Fr Zollner resigned which raised eyebrows, but how.

Just moments after Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, had released a statement thanking Fr Zollner for his service and benignly attributing his departure to a new assignment with the Diocese of Rome, Fr Zollner put out his own communique blasting the group for alleged shortcomings in "responsibility, compliance, accountability and transparency".

Those failures, the 56-year-old Fr Zollner said, "have made it impossible for me to continue further" – indirectly creating the impression that Cardinal O'Malley and his team were trying to sweep the reality of the situation under the rug.

(In an updated statement released Thursday, Cardinal O'Malley said he was "surprised, disappointed and strongly disagree with his [Fr Zollner's] publicly-issued assertions challenging the commission's effectiveness.")

**“In his version of events yesterday, Fr Zollner said he felt compelled to abandon the commission because of mounting frustrations over several issues”**

In the end, the Fr Zollner news was largely overshadowed by the Pontiff's surprise hospitalisation for what the Vatican described as a respiratory infection. Yet whenever the Pontiff eventually gets back to work, the fate of his depleted Commission for the Protection of Minors will be waiting near the top of his to-do list.

### Leading expert

Widely regarded as perhaps the Catholic Church's leading expert on anti-abuse efforts, Fr Zollner has been a member of the pontifical commission since its inception by Pope Francis in 2014.

A licensed psychotherapist, Fr Zollner founded the Centre for Child Protection in Munich in 2012, engineered its transition to Rome's Jes-

uit-run Gregorian University in 2015, and oversaw its transformation into the new Institute of Anthropology: Interdisciplinary Studies on Human Dignity and Care in 2021.

### Driving force

Fr Zollner was the driving force behind an unprecedented 2019 summit of the presidents of bishops' conferences from around the world to discuss the abuse scandals. In recent years, no one has logged more frequent flyer miles traveling the world to present workshops, talks and symposia on best practices in the fight against sexual abuse for groups of bishops, religious, and lay leaders.

**“One way of reading Fr Zollner's exit, therefore, is as another nail in the coffin for the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors”**

Thus when Fr Zollner speaks on clerical sexual abuse, people listen.

In his version of events yesterday, Fr Zollner said he felt compelled to abandon the commission because of mounting frustrations over several issues:

“A lack of clarity regarding the selection process of members and staff and their respective roles and responsibilities.”

“Financial accountability, which I believe is inadequate.”

“Transparency on how decisions are taken in the commission. Too often, there was insufficient information and vague communication with members on how particular decisions were taken.”

“Regulations that govern the relationship between the commission and the Dicastery for the Doctrine of Faith.” (Last June, Pope Francis placed the commission within the doctrinal office, raising questions about its independence.)

“The protection of children and vulnerable persons must be at the heart of the Catholic Church's mission,” Fr Zollner said. “Over the last years, I have grown increasingly concerned with how the commission, in my perception, has gone about achieving that goal.”

### Other defections

Fr Zollner's exit is not the first high-profile defection. In 2016, abuse survivor Peter Saunders was placed on leave from the pontifical commission because of friction with other members and never returned; in 2017, the only other survivor on the panel, Irish laywoman Marie Collins,



Jesuit Fr Hans Zollner, who resigned then publicly criticised the Pontifical Commission for Minors on March 29. Photo: OSV News

stepped down, citing recalcitrance in other Vatican offices to cooperate with the commission's recommendations.

In March 2021, American Msgr Robert Oliver was abruptly replaced as the secretary of the commission, learning of the move only after a Vatican news bulletin announcing reappointments to the body omitted his name.

One way of reading Fr Zollner's exit, therefore, is as another nail in the coffin for the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors. Billed when it was launched in 2014 as the tip of the spear for the Pope's reform effort, it would be revealed as a paper tiger – capable only of giving advice, and that more often ignored than acted upon.

### Turf wars

Yet there's another optic for viewing Fr Zollner's exit, one which would place the focus not only on principle but also on bureaucratic turf wars.

According to this way of reading the situation, Fr Zollner's understandable, and entirely laudable, hope is to build his new institute at the Gregorian University into a leading centre in Catholicism for anti-abuse resources and programming, with budgets and staffing commen-

surate with such aims.

To some extent, the idea would be that the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors would act as a general contractor, designing and approving projects but often relying on sub-contractors, including Fr Zollner's institute, to deliver some of the nuts-and-bolts programmes and services.

**“None of this should suggest that Fr Zollner's decision to leave the commission was merely strategic...”**

That vision would seem slightly at odds with the language of O'Malley's statement yesterday, in which he described the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors as “the centre for safeguarding throughout the Church” – not a general contractor, in other words, but a comprehensive construction company in itself.

In that context, the loss of a respected founding member of the commission may bolster the stock of other entities in the Church looking

to play a part in the anti-abuse effort, including in the ever-challenging quest for funding and personnel.

None of this should suggest that Fr Zollner's decision to leave the commission was merely strategic – on the contrary, the concerns he cited in his statement are widely shared among abuse survivors, reformers and even current and former members of the commission itself. Yet equally, when institutional interests are at stake, one can't ignore their possible influence either.

### Challenge

Going forward, the challenge for Pope Francis and his advisers would seem to be to convince people that the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors isn't simply smoke and mirrors, which will include clarifying its relationship with other centres of thought and energy in the Church devoted to recovery from the abuse scandals.

In his statement, Fr Zollner said, “I remain open to discuss safeguarding with the commission.” It will be fascinating, not to mention critical for the Pope's own legacy, to track where that conversation goes.

John L. Allen Jr. is editor of *Crux*.



# Responding to indigenous, Vatican disavows 'doctrine of discovery'



Cindy Wooden

**T**he Catholic Church formally “repudiates those concepts that fail to recognise the inherent human rights of indigenous peoples, including what has become known as the legal and political ‘doctrine of discovery,’” a Vatican statement said.

Issued March 30 by the dicasteries for Culture and Education and for Promoting Integral Human Development, the statement said papal texts that seemed to support the idea that Christian colonisers could claim the land of non-Christian indigenous people “have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith”.

“At the same time, the Church acknowledges that these papal bulls did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of indigenous peoples,” the statement said.

## Ongoing process

Canadian Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, said the document responds to the repeated requests of indigenous people in Canada and the United States to disavow the so-called doctrine, but it does not claim the discussion has ended or should end.

**“The ‘doctrine of discovery’ has become shorthand to refer to a collection of papal texts, beginning in the 14th century, that appeared to bless the efforts of explorers to colonise and claim the lands of any people who were not Christian”**

“It acknowledges that dealing with such a painful heritage is an ongoing process,” he told reporters. “It acknowledges still more importantly that the real issue is not the history but contemporary reality.”

And, the cardinal said, it is a call “to discover, identify, analyse and try to overcome what we can only call the enduring effects of colonialism today”.

Archbishop Paul S. Coakley of Oklahoma City, secretary of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, welcomed the Vatican statement, saying it is “yet another step in expressing concern and pastoral solicitude for



Pope Francis participates in the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage and Liturgy of the Word in Lac Ste. Anne, Alberta, July 26, 2022. Photo: CNS.

native and indigenous peoples who have experienced tremendous suffering because of the legacy of a colonising mentality.”

As the US and Canadian bishops jointly look at ways to continue discussions of the issue and its impact, the archbishop prayed that God would “bless with healing all those who continue to suffer the legacy of colonialism and may we all offer true aid and support. By God’s grace, may we never return to the way of colonisation, but rather walk together in the way of peace.”

## Manipulation

The Vatican statement said that the content of several papal bulls “were manipulated for political purposes by competing colonial powers in order to justify immoral acts against indigenous peoples that were carried out, at times, without opposition from ecclesiastical authorities”.

The “doctrine of discovery” has become shorthand to refer to a collection of papal texts, beginning in the 14th Century, that appeared to bless the efforts of explorers to colonise and claim the lands of any people who were not Christian, placing both the land and the people under the sovereignty of European Christian rulers.

Cardinal Czerny noted, however, that the phrase “doctrine of discovery” was coined by the US Supreme Court in 1823.

“The unfortunate thing here is that a very strongly Church-related word is used by the US Supreme Court to name an idea that was

part of a historical process” but was never Church teaching, he said. The papal bulls usually cited as supporting the idea were not “magisterial or doctrinal documents”, but were attempts by the popes who wrote them to avoid war between Spain and Portugal as they made competing claims to land in the Americas.

In a series of meetings at the Vatican in March and April 2022, representatives of Canada’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities asked Pope Francis specifically for a formal repudiation of the “doctrine of discovery”.

**“Cardinal Czerny noted, however, that the phrase ‘doctrine of discovery’ was coined by the US Supreme Court in 1823”**

And, at a Mass in Quebec in late July when he visited the communities in Canada, indigenous women unfurled a banner that said, “Rescind the Doctrine”.

## Vigilance

The loss of the land, language, culture and spirituality of the indigenous peoples of Canada and the foundation of the residential school system all can be traced to the doctrine, indigenous leaders told reporters after their meetings with the Pope.

Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the Dicastery

for Culture and Education, said in a separate statement, that while “the ‘doctrine of discovery’ was not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church,” the “tragic history” of how it was used “reminds us of the need to be ever more vigilant in our defence of the dignity of all people and the need to grow in knowledge and appreciation of their cultures”.

## Process of listening

The statement from the two dicasteries, he said, is the result of a process of listening to indigenous people and trying to grow “in mutual understanding. In that sense, the insights that inform this note are themselves the fruit of a renewed dialogue between the Church and indigenous peoples”.

A reporter asked Pope Francis about the doctrine during his news conference flying back to Rome from Canada. He said it always has been a temptation for colonisers to think they were superior to the people whose land they were colonising. In fact, he said, there even was “a theologian, who was a bit crazy,” who questioned whether the indigenous of the Americas had souls.

“This is the problem of every colonialism, even today,” he said, pointing to modern forms of “ideological colonialism,” which use requests for foreign assistance to force poorer countries to adopt policies that go against the values their people hold dear.

“This doctrine of colonialism truly is evil, it’s unjust,” the Pope said.

The Vatican dicasteries’ statement acknowledged that “certain scholars have argued that the basis of the aforementioned ‘doctrine’ is to be found in several papal documents, such as the Bulls *Dum Diversas* (1452), *Romanus Pontifex* (1455) and *Inter Caetera* (1493).”

**“[Pope Francis] said it always has been a temptation for colonisers to think they were superior to the people whose land they were colonising”**

But, the statement said, “the ‘doctrine of discovery’ is not part of the teaching of the Catholic Church,” and, it added, “historical research clearly demonstrates that the papal documents in question, written in a specific historical period and linked to political questions, have never been considered expressions of the Catholic faith”.

“At the same time, the Church acknowledges that these papal bulls did not adequately reflect the equal dignity and rights of indigenous peoples,” it said. “It is only just to recognise these errors, acknowledge the terrible effects of the assimilation policies and the pain experienced by indigenous peoples, and ask for pardon.”

**Cindy Wooden is Rome Bureau Chief for CNS.**



# Letters

## Letter of the week

### Catholic well-educated TDs bashing Catholic schools is comical

**Dear Editor,** The Taoiseach's defence of Catholic schools in the Dáil was a surprising and welcome occurrence [*The Irish Catholic* – March 23, 2023]. What's rare is wonderful and when the leader of the Fine Gael, a party that has not exactly been kind to Catholic schools, says something like that, that's something to note.

He said: "In my constituency, where there is a proposal to remove some schools from the patronage of the archdiocese, the parents and teachers do not want that... We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater."

Now, while the intervention is welcome, the pressure on Catholic schools to get rid of their ethos and to divest patron-

age makes what he said a bit rich. It is, after all, his Government that are trying to increase the number of secular schools. The criticism of Catholic schools seem to be coming from a small number of influential people, as the reason most schools aren't changing is because the majority of people are clearly happy with the quality of education their child is receiving and do not want that to change. It is always comical to witness highly educated people in Government bash Catholic schools when they have a Catholic school to thank for their education. This level of short-sightedness is astounding. They would rather experiment with secular State-run schools than rely on the tried

and tested Catholic schools which have and continue to do an excellent job.

The influence of the Catholic ethos, while reduced in most schools, is still a guiding light in how pupils are taught and this will help them into their later years and hopefully give them a grounding in the Faith.

Never trust calls to introduce non-values-based education, values can't be stripped out of education, it will either be Christian values or State values, I know which one I would choose.

Yours etc.,

**Emma Ryan**

Templeogue, Dublin 6

## More should have travelled the synodal path

**Dear Editor,** It was disappointing to see the small number of people who said they got involved in the synod [*The Irish Catholic* – March 30]. The synod was an opportunity for people to have their voices heard in the Church, to talk about their fears and hopes, and to discern a path forward. How can we make sure the Church is fit for purpose in the next 10, 20, 30 years for future generations if there is no planning involved? Sure, the Church has existed for thousands of years, but this was not because Christians sat back and said 'why bother, the Church has been around for ages and will look after itself'. The Church has grown around the world because of the blood of martyrs and good Christians who weren't afraid to spread the Gospel. How can this be done if the Church doesn't know how to do that into the future? Ireland is changing rapidly and religion is quickly being left behind so a bit of forward



thinking is necessary now more than ever.

Using the synod to take the temperature of the Faith in Ireland, to see where people are at and to walk together on a journey of discernment was a huge opportunity that was wasted by many. There is nothing wrong with people expressing their concerns around the

treatment of LGBTQ people and that there were calls for women priests and deacons, perhaps these voices were given too much prominence by the media – but it doesn't make them any less legitimate. We should not silence voices we do not want to hear. Church teaching is concrete on certain issues, perhaps there were some misunder-

standings about the synod's ability to implement change and that should have been addressed earlier on, but to reiterate: all voices should be heard. That is what the synod was about and more should have used their opportunity to travel the synodal path.

Yours etc.,

**Declan Murphy**  
Tallaght, Dublin 24

## People gung-ho about synod should ask why so few engaged

**Dear Editor,** The statistics on your front page about synod participation comes as no surprise [*The Irish Catholic* – March 30, 2023]. The process was framed around who could shout the loudest and there was a huge focus on issues which don't affect the majority of Mass-goers. This is reflected in the fact 88% of Mass-goers said they had not participated.

It could be argued that despite the lack of engagement, the final synthesis document is still instructive

on the views of the faithful in Ireland. However, are those that did engage in the process really expressing the strongly held beliefs of the majority? Or perhaps it was those who are unhappy, disgruntled with elements of Church teaching and who were seeking change, which is something the synod process was not about – this crucial piece of information was not highlighted enough. This has led to disappointment and worse, possible schism in Germany. They have continued ahead with

their dubious 'Synodal Path' despite major concerns and even disobeyed Vatican directives in a vote on blessing same-sex unions.

In the same research, cited by *The Irish Catholic*, 40% of Mass-goers said they were aware of the synod, but were not asked why they decided not to engage – which would have been very interesting. This points to a large number of people knowing about the synod but having no interest.

Another point to note: The synod was very well

publicised, strange then, that such a low number said they had not even heard it was taking place.

There is a lot to chew on in the statistics and people who are gung-ho about the synod should ask themselves why so few are engaging and what this means when looking at what Irish Catholics feel strongly about.

Yours etc.,

**Tom O'Donnell**  
Waterford City, Waterford

## facebook community

Each week we publish a selection of comments from *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

### Catholic parents needs reassurance over schools – Archbishop Farrell

Make no mistake, this Government is out to remove every trace of Christian values. – **Ron Crawford**

### Parents and teachers want to keep local Catholic schools

It is true that the loudest voices are those of the minority simply because the majority voice thinks it will naturally be heard. But things do not always work out that way. Voters support Catholic schools but their voices must be heard if they are to be listened to. – **Brendan Kennedy**  
Problem for Church is the schools are a management headache and what majority of parents want is a Diet Coke version of Catholicism. There's an old joke about Nicole Kidman and Tom Cruise. He wanted the kids to be Scientologists and she wanted them brought up as lapsed Catholics. The patron needs to be more proactive I think. Either find ways to make the schools more Catholic, or give up a bunch of them and make the remaining ones properly Catholic. – **Christopher Mc Camley**

What do you think? Join in the conversation on *The Irish Catholic* Facebook page

## Irish people have always been generous

**Dear Editor,** Don Harte Barry's letter [*The Irish Catholic* – March 16] says he is scandalised by the Church's lack of charity as there was no collection for the victims of the Turkish earthquake. There is an old saying 'charity begins at home'. Has he noticed the thousands of homeless people at home and is he aware of the thousands more who are about to be made homeless?

The Irish have always been generous. Organisations who deal with that kind of situation have been well funded over the years, by the Irish taxpayer. Even if we gave more money, it would take years to rebuild those houses.

Yours etc.,

**David Kelly**  
Crumlin, Dublin 12

## Church must tackle assault rifles

**Dear Editor,** It's about time the US Catholic Church came down against assault rifles as a start to prove their pro-life credentials in this matter. If anyone has relatives in the US one could ask them to mention this in Catholic circles over there.

Yours etc.,

**Colm O'Connor**  
Kilmacud, Dublin 14

## Letters to the Editor

All letters should include the writer's full name, postal address and telephone numbers (day and evening). Letter writers may receive a subsequent telephone call from *The Irish Catholic* as part of our authentication process which does not amount to a commitment to publish.

We regret that we cannot give prior notice of a letter's publication date, acknowledge unpublished letters or discuss the

merits of letters. We do not publish pseudonyms or other formulae to conceal the writer's identity, such as "name and address with editor". We do not print letters addressed to someone else, open letters, or verse. Letters to the Editor should only be sent to *The Irish Catholic*, and not other publications. Letters should not exceed 300 words and may be shortened for space requirements.



# Your Faith

The Irish Catholic, April 6, 2023

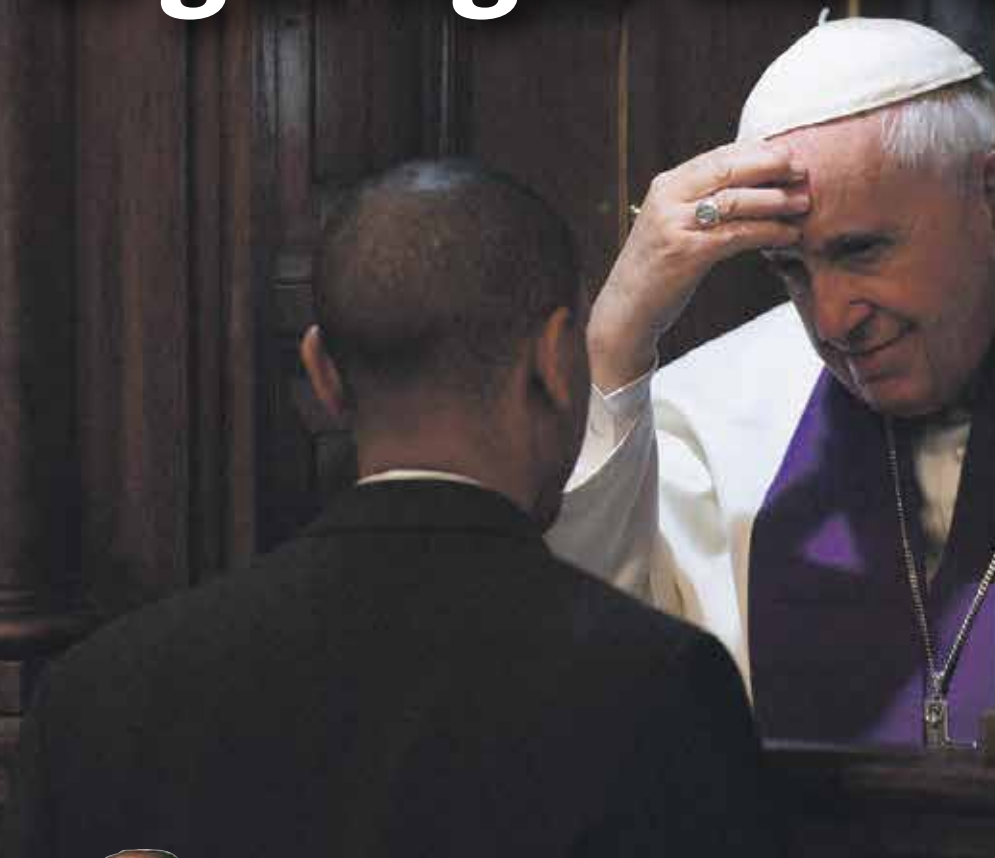
Fully  
entering into  
the Triduum

Bishop Donald  
J. Hying

Page 32



## Confession: a great opportunity to get right with God



**W**hen Dr Bernard Nathanson died of cancer in February 2011, the obituary writers dutifully recorded that he'd become a Catholic back in 1996. Some even recalled the reason he gave for taking that step.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Dr Nathanson, a New York obstetrician, had been a national leader in the campaign to legalise abortion. Then he saw the light, turned against abortion, and became a pro-life crusader. Joining the Catholic Church was another stage in his conversion process.

But why become a Catholic? Because, Dr Nathanson explained, the Catholic Church has the best developed system for seeking and receiving God's



**The Sacrament of Penance  
is an opportunity rather  
than just an obligation,  
writes Russell Shaw**

forgiveness. And as someone who'd performed 5,000 abortions himself and shared responsibility for many thousands more, he had much need to be forgiven. It's a moving story. But most of us aren't sinners on that scale and so, we may reason, perhaps we don't have as much cause as Dr Nathanson to worry about sin and forgiveness.

Tempting as it may sometimes be to think like that, it clashes

head-on with the first epistle of St John: "If we say, 'We have no sin,' we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he [God] is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say, 'We have not sinned,' we make him a liar, and his word is not in us" (1 John 1:8-10).

Today powerful forces in the surrounding culture encourage

people to ignore or downplay their sins and, if they're Catholics, to skip the Sacrament of Penance. Confused ideas about conscience often have much to do with that. "I do what my conscience tells me," people say, "and that's good enough."

People said the same thing in St John Henry Newman's time. But the distinguished English convert sharply criticised the idea of conscience that implied. Calling it a "counterfeit" of genuine conscience, Cardinal Newman wrote in 1875: "When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the creator nor the duty to him...They demand what they think is an Englishman's prerogative, for each to be his own master in all things and to profess

what he pleases, asking no one's leave and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer unutterably impertinent who dare to say a word against his going to perdition...in his own way."

Risky business, you might think. Especially in view of a point made by another British convert-author, Msgr Robert Hugh Benson, concerning serious sins we may culpably ignore: "We need...the pardon that descends when we are unaware that we must have it or die...Only God, who knows all things, can forgive us effectively."

Some years ago, a much-discussed book by the social critic Christopher Lasch argued that our society is dominated by a "culture of narcissism." The label seemed to fit. Narcissists, though



notorious for self-absorption, steer clear of self-examination in any meaningful sense. This makes narcissism the deadly enemy of contrition and confession, considered as elements of a virtuous life.

Whether you accept or reject Mr Lasch's social analysis, the numbers leave no doubt that a serious problem does exist these days where penance is concerned. To such an extent, in fact, that it's often said to be a sacrament in crisis.

There is a crisis here all right, but it isn't really with the sacrament — it's with the people who need it but ignore it.

**“About 89% of American Catholics now say that contraception is not morally wrong, despite the Church's teaching that it is wrong”**

In one recent survey, only about 40% of those identifying themselves as Catholics said they received penance — went to confession — at least once a year. Nearly 30% said they never go.

The problem isn't new. Sacramental confession has been in steep decline for years.

In the 1950s and 1960s, about 80% of America's Catholics went to confession at least once a year. A study in the early 1960s found that 70% had been to confession in the previous month. But by 1986, confession in the previous month had fallen to 23%. Among Catholics aged 18-30, it was 14%.

Down and down. By 2005, fewer than half the Catholics reported confessing their sins as often as once a year.

What accounts for the dramatic falling-off? One highly credible theory holds that it's related to the rise of contraception among Catholics. I sometimes call this the 'elephant in the living room' explanation — everybody knows it's there, but few care to acknowledge the fact.

About 89% of American Catholics now say that contraception is not morally wrong, despite the Church's teaching that it is wrong. Believing — or saying they believe — that contraception is all right, these people resist confessing it. But knowing the Church says differently, they don't want to go to confession and not confess it. For many, it appears, the non-solution to their dilemma is to stay away from the sacrament entirely.

Often, though, a sense of guilt remains. And then? Then things get peculiar. Rationalisation and denial set in. There may be other false moves. In the 2000s, somebody launched an internet confession site (I don't know if it's still there). Web surfers could 'confess' their sins by typing them in, then make them disappear — 'lost' in cyberspace, I guess — by clicking the mouse.

Perhaps that made a few people feel better, but I doubt it helped many. Like rationalising sin, clicking sins away is a lazy and ineffectual way of evading truth. Whereas honestly confessing sins to a priest in the Sacrament of Penance requires facing up to their reality, feeling honest sorrow, and resolving not to commit them again.



Even so, people often insist that confessing sins isn't necessary. God can forgive sins without that, and if you're sorry in your heart, that's enough.

It's true that God can and does forgive sins apart from the Sacrament of Penance. But the case for the sacrament rests upon the simple fact that Jesus Christ instituted it as the normal, natural means for his followers to use in seeking forgiveness for sin. And if that's what Jesus intended, no Catholic with even a superficial education in the Faith is entitled to turn his or her back on penance.

### Confessing

Quite possibly, though, the best way of selling the idea of confessing sins and being forgiven to people who have abandoned the sacrament is to present this as an opportunity rather than just an obligation. Indeed, a great and glorious opportunity it most surely is.

Consider first of all what any sacrament fundamentally is — in the words of the Baltimore Catechism, it is an “outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace.” Yes, God could, and sometimes does, deal with human beings in other ways, meeting them on a purely spiritual level. In the sacraments, however, God generously chooses to deal with us just as we are — human persons, composed of body and soul, who live in community with others in a concrete, tangible world. A kind of divine realism can be seen at work in the sacramental system.

As far as penance is concerned, all that is true — and something more besides. Along with the Eucharist, this is one of the sacraments in which the priest acts *in persona Christi* — in the person of

Christ. What the priest does is secondary; the primary action is the action of Christ, which the priest performs on Christ's behalf as his proxy. It is Christ above all who is present and acting in penance, and Christ who tells repentant sinners, “I absolve you.”

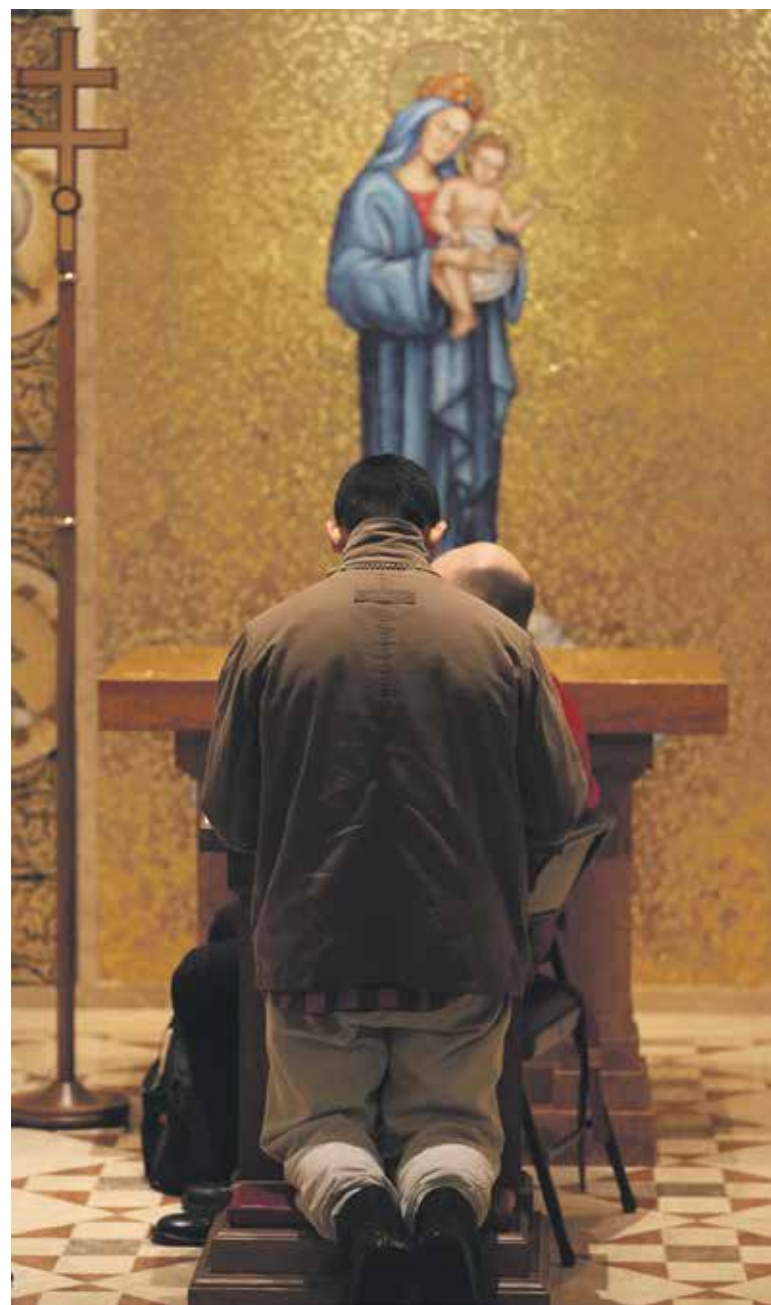
**“The Catechism of the Catholic Church says this sacrament of reconciliation with God ‘brings about a true ‘spiritual resurrection’”**

Obviously, though, Jesus isn't physically present, saying “I absolve you” in his own voice. Instead, we have the sacrament — Jesus present and acting through the priest. It's no great stretch to call this another kind of ‘real presence’ of Christ, different from his presence in the Eucharist, yet also astonishingly real.

Considered this way, the opportunity to confess sins to a priest in penance and have them forgiven by Christ is an extraordinary privilege. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says this sacrament of reconciliation with God “brings about a true ‘spiritual resurrection’” (No. 1468).

If more Catholics understood that, we might again start seeing penitents lined up outside confessionals waiting to take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity to receive God's merciful pardon.

*i Russell Shaw is the author of American Church, The Life of Jesus Christ, and other books. Bottom of Form.*





# The triumph of the cross: The hope of Holy Week

## Faith in art



Jem Sullivan

In his passion, Jesus' sufferings were unequalled. For the Son of God offered himself as a sacrifice for all. No one, not even the saintliest person, can take on the sins of all people in every time and place. Only God can, and did.

It is this gift of faith, at the heart of our Lenten journeys, that Matthias Grunewald, master German painter, brings to life in a vivid painting titled *The Small Crucifixion*. We are invited to reflect not only on the historical event of the Lord's crucifixion, but the redemptive meaning of Jesus' suffering love, poured out for all humanity and for each of us.

MGrunewald's image is particularly poignant as we walk the *via crucis*, the path of Jesus' paschal journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday.

Grunewald's best-known masterpiece, the *Isenheim Altarpiece*, was commissioned for the high altar of the church of the Monastery of St Anthony in Alsace. There, patients suffering from the plague were treated.

In that large altarpiece, Grunewald depicts a crucified Christ whose body is scourged with plague-type sores. Patients bearing the pain of their

physical afflictions found spiritual comfort as they gazed on the crucified Jesus and found consolation in the mystery of his suffering.

*The Small Crucifixion* was, most likely, a personal devotional image, intended either for a domestic setting or a private chapel. Here we are drawn into the reality of Jesus' passion. Colour, line, form and composition convey, with remarkable expressive power, the depths of Jesus' abandonment and the extreme physical suffering of a crucifixion.

His gaunt body is racked with scars of torture. His emaciated face and bowed head evoke his unbearable agony. Under a piercing crown of thorns, the scarred face of Jesus bleeds. His tattered loin-cloth gives evidence of the depravity of his tormentors. Few artists have conveyed the scene of the crucifixion with the intense realism that Grunewald brings to his composition.

### Evoking

Jesus' crucifixion is set in a bare landscape painted in an unusual greenish blue colour, evoking the Gospel detail that, at the hour of his passing, the sun darkened and creation itself groaned.

Visitors who stand in front of this painting in its museum setting cannot help but notice that the small panel bends outward into the viewers' space. Grunewald leaves no room for one to remain a passive bystander or objective onlooker in the face of Jesus' sufferings.

From the centre radiates the Lord's outstretched arms with twisted hands and contorted feet stretched over the cross. His hands and feet

convey the divine anguish over human alienation from God. Obedient even to death on a cross, Jesus' self-offering rises as a perfect oblation through his gnarled fingers that strain upward to the heavens.

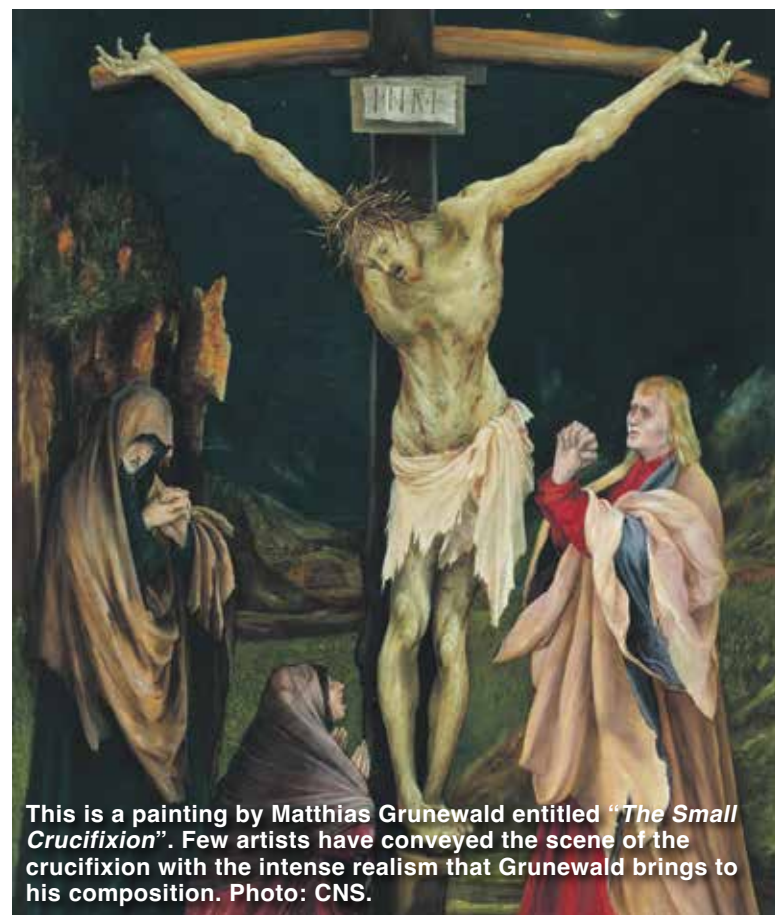
His ankles, twisting beneath the brute force of the nail that pierces his feet, evoke the chains of human alienation. The crossbeam strains downward not only under the mass of his wounded body but from the full weight of divine mercy that takes the form of crucified love.

**“Grunewald's vision allows us to glimpse the relentless mercy of God as it takes the form of suffering love on the cross”**

On either side of the cross are Mary, the mother of Jesus, and the beloved disciple, St John the Evangelist. Mary's robed head is bowed with her hands clasped in prayer, as she shares uniquely in her son's suffering. John conveys the agony of this faithful disciple. Kneeling in anguished meditation at the foot of the cross is St Mary Magdalene.

Their perspective is meant to be ours as we contemplate Jesus' passion. Grunewald's vision allows us to glimpse the relentless mercy of God as it takes the form of suffering love on the cross. We are invited to receive the gift of divine crucified love poured out on the world and on each one of us.

Good Friday is good news in that death no longer has the final word on the human condition. As



This is a painting by Matthias Grunewald entitled *"The Small Crucifixion"*. Few artists have conveyed the scene of the crucifixion with the intense realism that Grunewald brings to his composition. Photo: CNS.

we enter into the mystery of Jesus' passion and death on the cross, we are filled with hope in the victorious power of God who will raise him from the dead.

And as we journey from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, Grunewald's image evokes our vocation to live the new life of the risen Christ.

We know and believe in faith that the horror of Jesus' crucifixion will most certainly give way to the

radiant glory of his, and our own, resurrection. And so we pray, "We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world."

**i** Jem Sullivan, educator and author, contributes a scripture column to Catholic News Service and is the author of *Believe, Celebrate, Live, Pray: A Weekly Retreat with the Catechism*.

## Saint — of the — week



St Juliana of Mont Cornillon

## St Juliana of Mont Cornillon – saint of Corpus Christi

St Juliana of Mont Cornillon was born in 1193 at Retines near Liège in Belgium. Orphaned at an early age, she was educated by the Norbertine Canonesses Regular of Mont Cornillon. She made her profession in this order and eventually became superioress.

The canonry seems to have been established on the model of a double monastery, with both canons and canonesses, each living in their own wing of the monastery. The two girls were initially placed on a small farm next to the canonry. Juliana, after entering the order at the age of 13, worked for many years in its leprosarium. Agnes seems to have died young, as there is no further mention of her in the archives.

St Juliana, from childhood, had great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. God inspired in her, by a vision, the desire to ask her bishop to authorise the celebration of a feast, Corpus Christi, which a bishop then could do locally even before the feast was granted universally by the Pope.

When Juliana was 16 she had her first vision which recurred subsequently several times. Her vision presented the moon in its full splendour, crossed diametrically by a dark stripe. In time she came to understand that the moon symbolised the life of the Church on earth, the opaque line, on the other hand, represented the absence of a liturgical feast in honour of Christ's Body and Blood. Not having

any way to bring about such a feast, she kept her thoughts to herself, except for sharing them with an anchoress, Eve of Liège, who lived in a cell adjacent to the Basilica of St Martin, and a few other trusted sisters in her monastery. Her vision is illustrated on the historiated initial letter of her vita as it appears in Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

### Prioress

Around 1225, she was elected prioress of the double canonry and told her visions to her confessor, Canon John of Lausanne (a secular canon of the collegiate chapter at St Martin Basilica). Canon John had many contacts among the distinguished French theologians and Dominican professors who had gathered in Liège. These included Robert de Thorete, the Bishop of Liège, Hugh of Saint-Cher, the Dominican Prior Provincial for France, and Jacques Pantaléon of Troyes, Archdeacon of Liège, who later became bishop of the Diocese of Verdun, then Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, and later Pope, ruling under the name Pope Urban IV. Canon John reportedly relayed Juliana's vision to these distinguished religious leaders. These theologians agreed unanimously that there was nothing in the devotion of the feast contrary to the Catholic faith and endorsed instituting it.

Upon receiving approbation from local religious authorities, Juliana set to work with Canon John, who was still a young man, and together they

composed the initial version of the office, *Animarum cibis*.

She suffered much (even exile) from intrigues from one general superior of the order who opposed her, but won the support of Robert de Thorete, who outranked her antagonist as Bishop of Liège. She also received the encouragement of a Dominican theologian, Hugh, who later became Pope Urban IV. Bishop Robert called a synod in 1246 and one of its issuances was to establish the celebration of Corpus Christi.

The first such celebration was in 1247 in Liège, just after the death of Bishop Robert. In 1264, Pope Urban IV extended the feast for the whole Church with his papal bull, *Transiturus*. It was to be held on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday. The Pope commissioned St Thomas Aquinas to write the office for the feast. The Angelic Doctor also composed an exquisite Sequence for the feast, *Lauda Sion Salvatorem* (Zion, Lift Up your Voice and Sing).

### Processions

Later, processions with the Blessed Sacrament began to be held universally on this great day, the spontaneity of which was blessed by Pope St Martin V and Pope Eugene IV.

Juliana's life was filled with tumult, largely as a consequence of the religious and political controversies rampant in Liège: an emerging urban middle class demanding new rights, political rivalries between the Guelphs and

the Ghibellines, and internecine quarrels among the lower nobility in Flanders. These conflicts created a context ripe for this type of movement. When Juliana became prioress of the canonry, she re-instated strict Augustinian rules. In 1240, the canonry and adjacent leprosarium came under the supervision of a man named Roger, a vicious man who had gained the position through simony and intrigue. He immediately disliked both Juliana and her reproaches, and incited the citizenry against her, accusing her of diverting and stealing the hospital's funds. She fled to the anchorhold of her friend, Dame Eve, and was then received into Canon John's house, adjacent to the basilica. With the help of Robert of Thourotte, the Bishop of Liège, Juliana was vindicated and restored to her former position in the canonry. Roger was deposed. In 1247, however, upon the death of Bishop Robert, Roger once again regained control of Mont Cornillon under the new bishop, Henry de Gueldre, and Juliana was again driven out. These events in Juliana's biography, to a certain extent, point to the larger historical backdrop of rivalry over the vacated bishopric, amplified by the excommunication of Frederick II by Pope Innocent IV.

St Juliana of Liège died on April 5, 1258, at the House of the Cistercian nuns at Fosses, in Belgium, and was buried at Villiers.



# Fully entering into the Triduum



**Bishop Donald J. Hying**

**D**uring the Sacred Triduum — the days of Holy Thursday through to Easter Sunday — the strangest thing will occur. Millions of Christians throughout the world will gather to honour the humiliation, torture and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In a global culture that usually celebrates power, strength and beauty, this public veneration of something so horrible is always a little shocking. Could it be that what people find so absolutely compelling about the Passion narrative is the vulnerability of God?

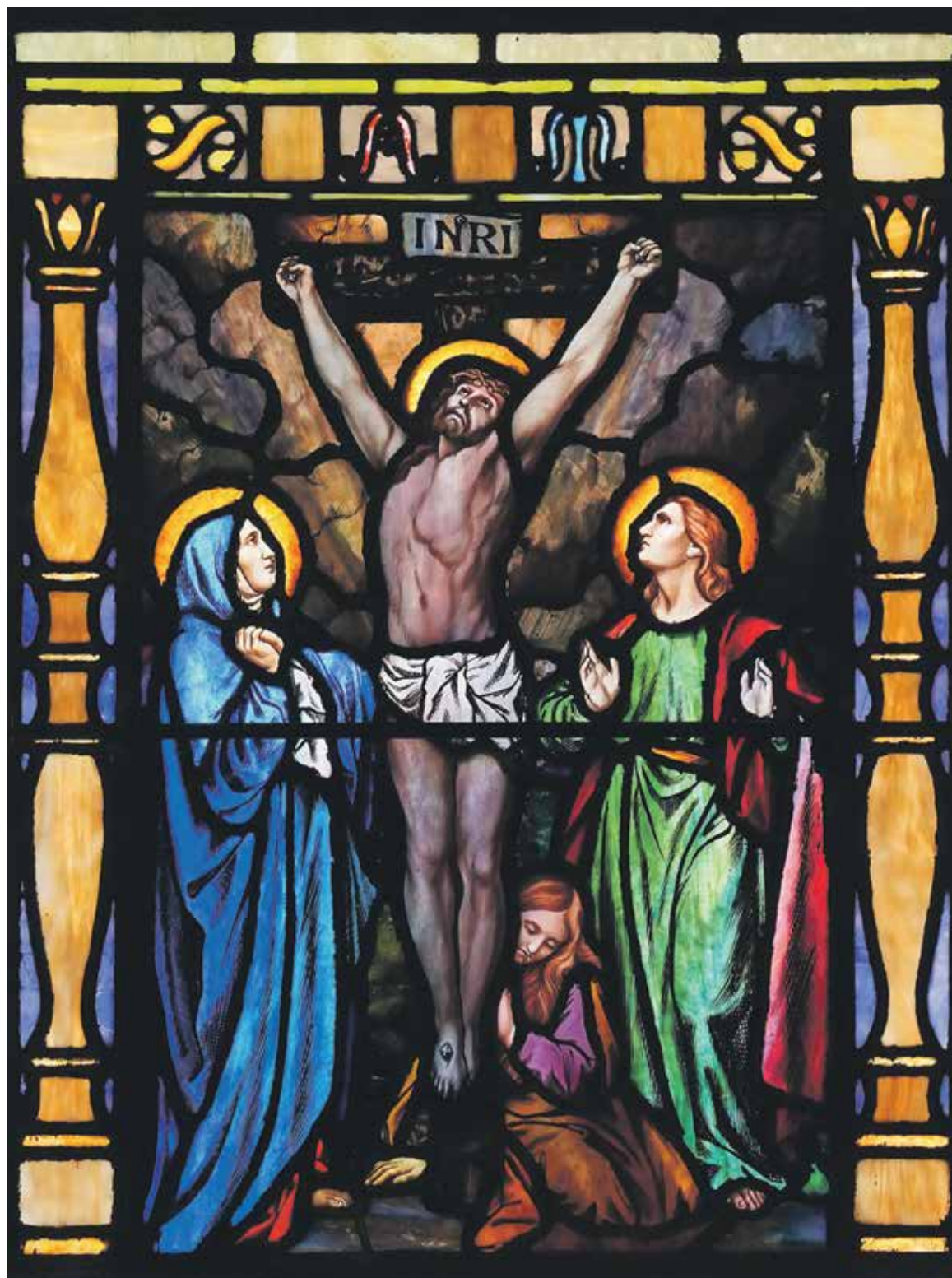
## Human condition

In the Christ event, God leaves the safety and glory of heaven, in a certain sense, and embraces the limitations of our human condition, coming to know in the flesh both the glory and tragedy of our nature without ever having sinned. In the last week of his life, Jesus completely hands himself over to us. In the foot washing and the Eucharist, in the scourging and the crucifixion, the Son of God loves us completely without restrictions, conditions or limits. Whether we accept, reject or ignore this Divine Love, Jesus never changes his fundamental stance toward us.

**“The Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening is an opportunity to taste the surprising grace of the Eucharist and surrender to the consolation of the foot washing”**

In Roman and Greek mythology, the gods are always conspiring to manipulate humanity to serve their often-selfish ends and egotistical schemes. In Christ, we encounter the surprising subversion of this oppressive game. God serves us! In absolute humility, availability, vulnerability and mercy, God has come to love, pardon and save us.

The weakness of the cross, the simplicity of the Eucharist, the tenderness of the foot washing, the love that seeks to embrace a traitor, a thief and a coward is so beyond the grasp of power



Christ’s crucifixion is depicted in a stained-glass window at St Mary of the Isle Church in Long Beach, NY. Obedience means to hear the word of God and act on it. Photo: CNS photo/Gregory A. Shemitz

politics, the swirl of social hubris and the world of earthly grasping that it takes our breath away. No wonder that kings would stand speechless in the presence of the Suffering Servant, as Isaiah proclaims.

## Self-importance

If God could become that poor, humble and vulnerable to love me, how can I ever stand on my own self-importance? This week,

we celebrate the strangest things: weakness becomes strength, love conquers fear, miserable despair transforms into resurrected hope and perpetual death gives way to eternal life, and it’s all because a naked criminal was thrown down on a cross 2,000 years ago, and he embraced it as if it were his marriage bed.

We should let the Lord love us during Holy Week. The palm we held on Palm Sunday should be a

symbol of our praise, reverence and love for the humble Master who has saved and set us free. The Mass of the Lord’s Supper on Holy Thursday evening is an opportunity to taste the surprising grace of the Eucharist and surrender to the consolation of the foot washing. Listening to the Passion and venerating the cross on Good Friday gives us the opportunity to embrace the cross in our own lives, no matter what form it may

take. Know that the mystery of suffering in our lives is the sacred ladder by which we will ascend to the beauty of the Kingdom of heaven.

## Rest and silence

Holy Saturday is a sacred time of rest and silence, as the Lord sleeps in the tomb and all of creation awaits a salvation it does not yet understand. A beautiful ancient text from the early Church pictures Jesus roaming the abode of the dead on this day, unchaining Adam and Eve and all of the other souls who had been waiting for redemption since the foundation of the world. Ask the Lord to set you free from the fear, sin and self-seeking that keeps you bound.

**“The shocking, strange and powerful events of Holy Week should lead us to tears and laughter, gratitude and praise, humble awareness of our weakness and joyful acclamation of God’s victory”**

Gathering around the Easter fire at the Vigil, we call to mind how we began the Lenten journey marked with the ashes of sin, failure and defeat, but now you have become filled with fire — the mighty force of the risen Christ and the courageous strength of the Holy Spirit. As we proclaim the resurrection of Christ as the beautiful truth and transformative meaning of human history, know that the Lord walks with you, loves you and is leading you to the fullness of joy and peace.

The shocking, strange and powerful events of Holy Week should lead us to tears and laughter, gratitude and praise, humble awareness of our weakness and joyful acclamation of God’s victory. The Triduum is a time for God to break open our hearts, so that the gracious torrent of Divine Mercy that flows from the side of the crucified Christ will wash us clean, forgive our sins and fashion us ever more deeply in the new creation of the Lord’s saving death and resurrection.

**“The palm we held on Palm Sunday should be a symbol of our praise, reverence and love for the humble Master who has saved and set us free”**

*Bishop Donald J. Hying is bishop of the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin.*



# Easter light after Good Friday's darkness

**T**he Earth was dark twice. Once at the original creation before God first created light. But later there was an even deeper darkness, on Good Friday, between the sixth and ninth hour, when we were crucifying God, and as Jesus dying on the cross cried out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!". Utter darkness. In response to that, God created the most staggering light of all – the resurrection.

It is interesting to look at how scripture describes the creation of original light. The Bible opens with these words: "In the beginning God created Heaven and Earth. Now the earth was a formless void and God breathed over the waters. God said, 'Let there be light' and there was light."

A combination of God's breath and God's word produced the first light. The ancients identified God's presence very much with light. For them, God was the antithesis of all darkness and, indeed, the symbol of God's fidelity was the rainbow, namely, refracted light, light broken open to reveal its spectacular inner beauty.

But it got dark a second time! The Gospels tell us that as Jesus hung on the cross, though it was midday, darkness beset the whole land for three hours. We don't know exactly what occurred here historically. Was the entire earth plunged into darkness? Perhaps. After all, the earth was crucifying God, and God is light!

Irrespective of how literally or not we take this, what happened



**Fr Rolheiser**

[www.ronrolheiser.com](http://www.ronrolheiser.com)

on Good Friday triggered a different kind of darkness, a moral one – the darkness of godlessness, hatred, paranoia, fear, misguided religion, cruelty, idolatry, ideology, and violence. This is the most blinding darkness of all.

## Response

What was God's response? God's response to the darkness of Good Friday was to say a second time, Let there be light! The resurrection of Jesus is that new light, one which at the end of the day eclipses all other lights.

It is interesting to compare how scripture describes God creating the new light of the resurrection with how God created the original light at the origins of creation. The Gospel of John has a wonderfully revealing passage that describes Jesus' first appearance to the whole community after his resurrection.

It tells us that on the evening of Easter Sunday the disciples (representing here the Church) were gathered in a room with the doors locked because of fear. Jesus comes to them, passing right through their locked doors, and stands in the middle of their huddled fearful circle and says to them, "Peace be with you!" And after saying this, he breathes on them and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Note the parallels to the original creation story. For the writer of John's Gospel, this huddling in fear behind locked doors is the darkness of Good Friday, a moral "formless void". And Jesus brings light to that darkness in the same way light was brought to the original creation, through God's word and God's breath.

Jesus' words, "Peace be with you!" are the resurrected Jesus' way of saying, "Let there be light!"

Then, just as at the original creation God's breath begins to order the physical chaos, Jesus' breath, the Holy Spirit, begins to order the moral chaos, continually turning darkness into light – hatred into love, bitterness into graciousness, fear into trust, false religion into true worship, ideology into truth, and vengeance into forgiveness.

**“God created light a second time, a light that cannot be extinguished even if we crucify God – and we have never really stopped doing that!”**

The staggering new light that Jesus brings into our world in the resurrection is also one of the things that our Christian creed refers to in its stunning phrase that, in the darkness of Good Friday, Jesus “descended into hell.” What's meant by this? Into what hell did he descend?

Simply put, the new light of the resurrection (unlike natural

light that can be blocked out) can go through every locked door, every blocked entrance, every impenetrable cell, every circle of hatred, every suicidal depression, every paralysing anger, every kind of darkness of the soul, and even through sin itself, and breathe out peace. This light can penetrate into hell itself.

Good Friday was bad long before it was good. We crucified God and plunged the world into darkness at midday. But God created light a second time, a light that cannot be extinguished even if we crucify God – and we have never really stopped doing that!

## Hope

Good Friday still happens every day. But, beyond wishful thinking and natural optimism, we live in hope because we now know God's response to any moral darkness, God can generate, resurrection, the creation of new light, life beyond death.

The renowned mystic Julian of Norwich coined the famous phrase: In the end, all will be well, and all will be well, and every manner of being will be well. To which Oscar Wilde added, And if it isn't well, then it is still not the end. The resurrection of Jesus has brought a new light into the world, one that proclaims against all counter claims that light still triumphs over darkness, love over hatred, order over chaos, and heaven over hell.

**“Jesus brings light to that darkness in the same way light was brought to the original creation, through God's word and God's breath”**



# Christ is risen, Alleluia! He is truly risen!



JEM SULLIVAN

**April 9, 2023**

The Mass of Easter Day  
Acts 10:34a, 37-43  
Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17,  
22-23  
Colossians 3:1-4  
I Corinthians 5:6b-8  
(alternative)  
John 20: 1-9

**T**he discovery of the empty tomb is the biblical record of the historical event: Jesus' bodily resurrection. No witnesses saw Jesus as he arose from the dead. But what they did see was Jesus' passion, crucifixion, and the empty tomb.

So, how did the disciples come to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead? And how is an artist to depict this central mystery of Christian faith?

In a 19th Century masterpiece titled, *Two Disciples at the Tomb*, Henry Ossawa Tanner captures the dramatic moment described in the Gospel proclaimed on Easter Sunday morning. The remarkable painting invites us to enter into the Easter mystery with the same joy, hope, and faith of Mary of Magdala, Peter and John – the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

We are told that Peter and John “ran” to Jesus' tomb. Before them, Mary of Magdala had run to Peter and John to announce what she had found there. We might wonder why these Gospel figures are running – why they are in such haste at this pivotal

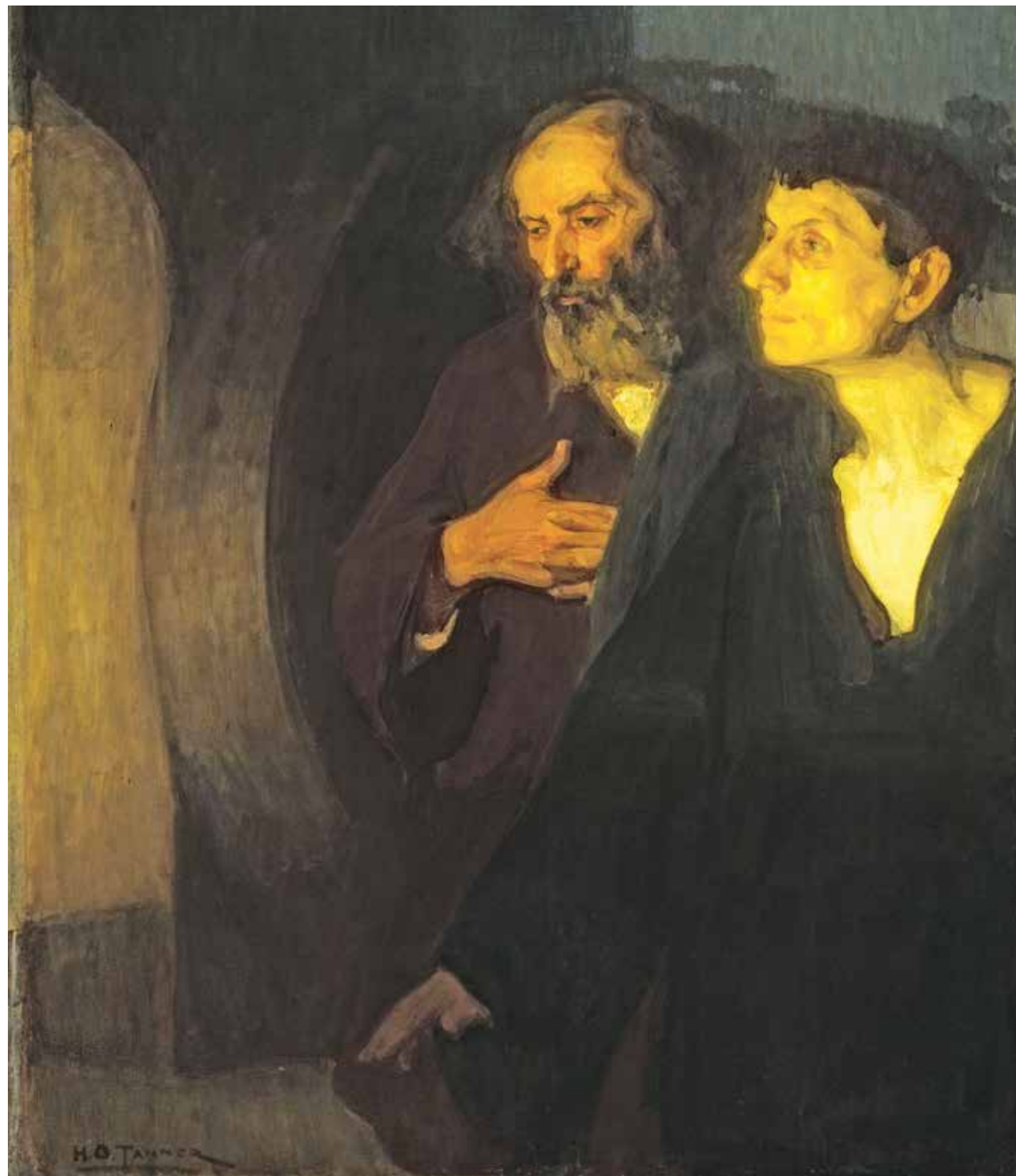
moment on which the history of the world turns. Their eagerness evokes the deep longing of humanity for freedom from sin and despair. After Jesus' crucifixion the disciples recoiled in fear and abandonment.

Mary's witness offers a first glimmer of hope. She – called the “apostle to the apostles” by St Thomas Aquinas – is a fearless messenger of hope to the disciples, who will in turn bear their witness to Jesus' resurrection to the known world.

**“Human beings can forgive and receive forgiveness from each other. Only God can forgive the sins of all humanity, in every time and place”**

Tanner captures the moment when Peter and John stand before the empty tomb as they come to see and believe in Jesus' resurrection. A warm golden light radiates from the dark tomb onto their astonished yet thoughtful faces. Just as they are bathed in the divine light of God's power, so are we on this Easter day. The disciples' gaze at the empty tomb is like our awe-filled contemplation of the mystery of Jesus' resurrection. God's desire that we share in the divine life is the miracle of Easter morning. In the light of this supreme grace we become courageous witnesses, like St Peter in the first reading.

Human beings can forgive and receive forgiveness from each other. Only God can forgive the sins of all humanity, in every time and place. This is the good news of Easter. Bathed in the radiant light of Jesus' resurrection, we receive nothing less than divine life



*Two Disciples at the Tomb*, Henry Ossawa Tanner.

itself. Sin no longer has the last word on human existence.

## Feast of feasts

Easter is the ‘feast of feasts,’ when we join our voices to the church's joyful celebration of Jesus' victory over

sin and death. Jesus' resurrection is the pattern of the newness of divine life we are invited to live in every day. As the joyful hope of Easter echoes within us, we become loving witnesses of the risen Jesus to a wounded world, as we pray with Easter faith, “speak to me, Lord”.

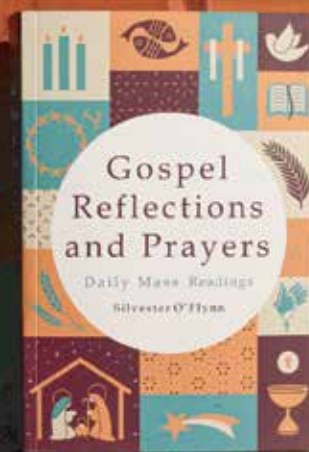
Question: How are you called to witness to the resurrection of Jesus?

**i** Jem Sullivan holds a doctorate in religious education and is an associate professor of Catechetics in the School of Theology and Religious Studies at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

**“The remarkable painting invites us to enter into the Easter mystery with the same joy, hope, and faith of Mary of Magdala, Peter and John – the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection”**

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# TVRadio

Brendan O'Regan



## Embracing the rollercoaster of Holy Week

Palm Sunday is a strange kind of day – celebrating the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, but with the cloud of impending events looming over. It's the emotional rollercoaster of Holy Week, but with the sure knowledge and hope of the Resurrection.

On the **Mass for Palm Sunday** (RTÉ One) I liked the homily of Fr Paul Dunne, short because of the long Gospel. Describing the ending of the Passion as "not pretty, but pretty real", he urged us not to let the secular world rob us of the graces of Holy Week. "Give the week to God," he said. The Mass came from the RTÉ studios with a congregation from Our Lady, Mother of Divine Grace Church, Raheny, with music from the Raheny Folk Group – they were marking their 50th anniversary and their long experience showed as they provided excellent music, even tackling some pieces more complex than the typical folk repertoire. I was struck by the opening hymn 'Open the Gates O Jerusalem', one I hadn't heard before, while 'Into Your Hands' was beautiful and familiar. Deirde Ní Chaomhánaigh was particularly good on piano – she and guitarist/singer Derek McKeever were credited with many of the arrangements. The Sunday Masses are available on the RTÉ Player, and most of the programmes I reference from Irish channels are available for playback on



Jonathan Roumie who plans Jesus in 'The Last Days'. Photo: OSV News

the various players – the TG4 Player is a huge and comprehensive resource and one many are, unfortunately, unfamiliar with.

**The Last Days** (EWTN, Sunday) was a filmed version of a staged passion play set in a church. It packed an emotional and spiritual impact as those events always do. It was noteworthy for the fact that Jesus was played by Jonathan Roumie, who also plays that role in *The Chosen*, the hit mini-series on the life of Jesus. He was also involved in the writing and producing for G.K. Chesterton Entertainment. I thought he came across as a warmer Jesus in *The Chosen*, but then

the Holy Week events are deadly serious. The filming was adequate – best when a hand-held camera was used for closeups, especially during the dramatic Way of the Cross down the aisle of the church where the work was staged. Some of the fixed-camera zooms were a tad awkward and amateurish.

The script was mostly scriptural, but was fleshed out respectfully. I can understand why some dramatisations stick strictly to scripture, and they have their role, but can come across rather stilted on film. I loved the soliloquy of Mary as she held the body of Jesus. It was emotional, so very human and personal as

she reflected on her life with Jesus, right from the Annunciation – "It started with the wind". The scourging at the pillar was unnerving – so realistically portrayed. Passion plays always have a dilemma – whether to include the Resurrection, and if so how to portray it. In many of the plays I've seen it tends to be included, but obliquely or briefly. In the traditional Stations of the Cross it does not form part of the fourteen. It was hinted at here, with an unusual scene that I felt didn't quite work, where a female character, perhaps Mary Magdalen, visits the tomb, delivers a reflection over the body, and then the body mysteri-

### PICK OF THE WEEK

#### THE LEAP OF FAITH

RTÉ Radio One, Good Friday April 7, 10.30pm

Siobhán Garrigan returns with a panel of expert guests discuss whether Easter can be fully understood without a grasp of its Jewish context.

#### TENEBRAE: BACH TO MACMILLAN

BBC Four, Easter Sunday April 9, 10pm

British choir Tenebrae perform a specially created programme combining Bach's motets with a newly commissioned work by celebrated Scottish composer Sir James MacMillan.

#### THE SECRET PEACEMAKER

RTÉ One Easter Sunday April 9, 10.35pm and BBC One Monday April 10, 11pm

Drama-documentary about the secret role played by the visionary Redemptorist priest, Fr Alec Reid, in the peace plan that brought an end to violence, 25 years ago, in the North.

ously disappears as she and Joseph or Arimathea cover it in the shroud.

I didn't like the generic 'foreign accent' used by most actors, including Jonathan Roumie – I prefer either the original language or the normal English of the actor. For that reason, I was impressed most by those playing Peter, Pilate's wife, and Mary.

Also on the drama front there was another Mary, but this one felt God was walking away from her. This was Mary from **Young Sheldon** (RTÉ One, Friday), back for a sixth season. Mary is Sheldon's mother and while always the most religious character she has felt rejected by her fel-

low Baptists because her son Georgie and his pregnant girlfriend Mandy aren't getting married – he wants to, she doesn't, yet. I've always felt, and still do, that the show, while always funny and often moving, is jaundiced towards religion. However, Mary's current crisis has biblical resonance – at one stage she asks "God if he is trying to make her into a 'Mrs Job'". And it has echoes of that famous phrase of Jesus My god why have you forsaken me", which brings us right back to Holy Week.

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@boreganmedia (Twitter)

# Film

Aubrey Malone



## Leonard Cohen 'Hallelujah' theme of new film

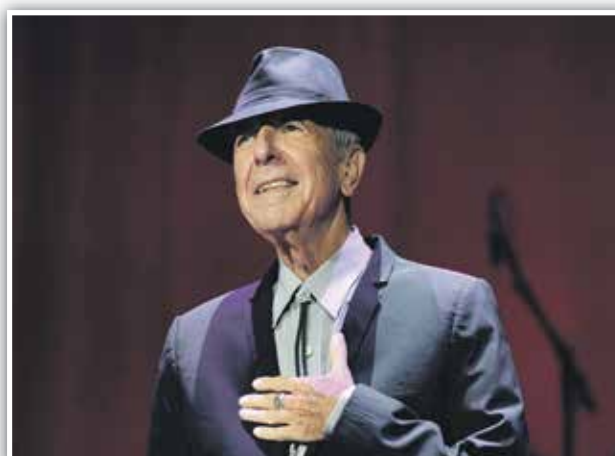
When I listened to Leonard Cohen's song 'Hallelujah' on his 1984 album *Various Positions* I didn't pay any special attention to it. Interviewing him four years later when he was promoting 'I'm Your Man' I didn't even mention it to him.

Bob Dylan played it at a concert later that year. The head of steam created by this led to many more singers recording it, including our own Bono. Now a film has been made about it.

*Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, A Song, A Journey* is available to buy online. Exploring his life through the prism of this anthemic song, it was a project approved by Cohen himself on his 80th birthday in 2014.

It's a fascinating film. Apart from the uplifting music it has rare interviews with Cohen and his colleagues, and even a glimpse into notebooks where he jotted down revealing thoughts and ideas for songs.

He eventually became embarrassed by the attention 'Hallelujah' was receiving in the music industry. Going from a position of being ignored when he first floated it to record companies, it went on to spawn over 500 cover versions. Cohen felt "a mild sense of revenge" at this after its initial rejection but the number of covers grew so large he finally felt constrained to issue a



Leonard Cohen.

moratorium on them.

As well as being the story of a song, *Hallelujah* doubles as a biography of someone who, on his own admission,

was a marginal figure in the music industry for 30 years. Posterity, he felt, wouldn't even accord him a footnote. How wrong he was.

He was on a spiritual journey for most of his life, be it through his Jewish faith, Kabbalah, or the Zen Buddhism he practiced with such devotion atop Mount Baldy in Los Angeles.

One of the artists who covered the song said he felt he was in a church when he sang it. Cohen said he first experienced the magic of words when he attended synagogues with his parents as a child. His grandfather could quote the Torah almost verbatim from memory.

He became bankrupt in 2005 when his manager defrauded him of most of the money he'd earned since he became famous. He went back on the road to avoid

economic destruction.

His loss was our gain. It meant we could experience a renaissance of his career where he performed hauntingly plaintive songs in new arrangements.

Cohen didn't only have "the gift of a golden voice". He made you feel like you were the only person in the world when he talked to you. He told me the only reason he became a singer was because he didn't think anyone else would bother recording his songs otherwise.

Many of them are like secular prayers. As Glen Hansard says at one point of the film: "He made the word 'Hallelujah' hip."



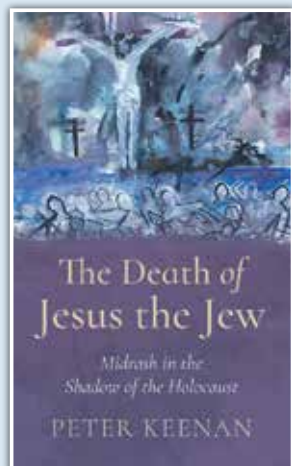


# BookReviews

Peter Costello



## Conflicting views on the Death of Jesus



**The Death of Jesus: Midrash in the Shadow of the Holocaust,** by Peter Keenan (Columba Books, €12.99/£12.99)

This book is a continuation of the researches that Peter Keenan began to issue through the same publisher in 2021. In a review in these pages back then I felt that despite the deployment of much new information and unusual viewpoints the book did not come close to the historical reality.

I feel the same about this new title. Despite many scholarly references it is essentially misleading. History, indeed any critical enquiry, requires evidence. When, as in these books, evidence can be shaped, even created to one's own specification, it makes all such work a great deal easier to do. But alas historians have to make use of evidence that they cannot shape in quite such a useful way.

Essentially the technique of Midrash, which Keenan calls upon, belongs to a much later period than the creation of the first apostolic documents. Though these were, in their original oral and primitive written forms (which remain perplexing as they do not survive), the Gospels are not Hebrew documents, but documents in common Greek. Accounts in Hebrew would have had a limited circulation. Documents in Greek, then the universal language of scholarship and culture across the Mediterranean world, would have had wide circulation.

The manner in which early Christians focused on Rome and built associations within the Empire, speak towards the emergence of the institutional structure that became the Church. There were developments in the Middle East and later other parts of

Asia and Africa that moved in other directions.

The key matter about the death of Jesus is why Jesus died. The Jews legally, as a Roman vassal people were unable to execute anyone. Jesus could only be put to death by the power of the governor, Pontius Pilate.

Keenan sees Jesus being put to death as a criminal; but *the titulus* pinned at the head of the Cross stated clearly that his crime was a claim to be "King of the Jews". This was a political crime in the eyes of the Romans; though it connects with the genealogy which the authors of Matthew give Jesus (Matthew, 1; 1-14; Luke: 4-5).

The theme of Jesus' royal decent is put aside by Peter Keenan. While many scholars have puzzled over this matter, to simply ignore the question provides a useful strategy for a writer.

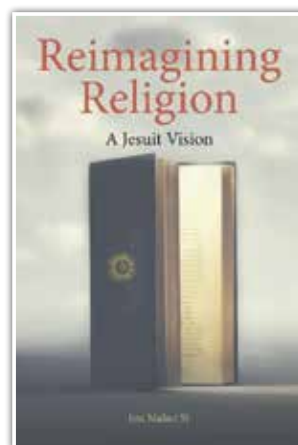
But Keenan's main aim is to cast all the real emphasis of his book on the theme of anti-Semitism and its consequences, as developed later by the National Socialist Workers Party of Germany led by Hitler, so that the horrors of the Shoa will never be forgotten.

But the campaign of Hitler began back in 20s with his book *My Struggle*. This book sold immense number of copies in its English language edition alone, so that by the time Hitler came to power no-one in these islands at least could be in any doubt of his intention to cleanse Germany, and indeed Europe, from all taint of "degeneration", mental, physical, social, artistic, religious. There were degenerates everywhere in his eyes. Indeed, the Irish by not being truly Aryan were to be numbered among the degenerates.

None of this should ever be forgotten. On that matter Peter Keenan's campaign is important and should be admired. But his books nevertheless reduce Jesus the Jew to a victim who was executed as a criminal and cast into a common grave, his remains ever after unverifiable, impossible of resurrection. He generally pushes aside the largest part of what Christians claim to believe.

By all means read *The Death of Jesus the Jew*, but with a lively critical spirit.

# Bringing religion to life at Easter



**Reimagining Religion: A Jesuit Vision,** by Jim Maher SJ (Messenger Publications, €19.95/£18.95)

Peter Costello

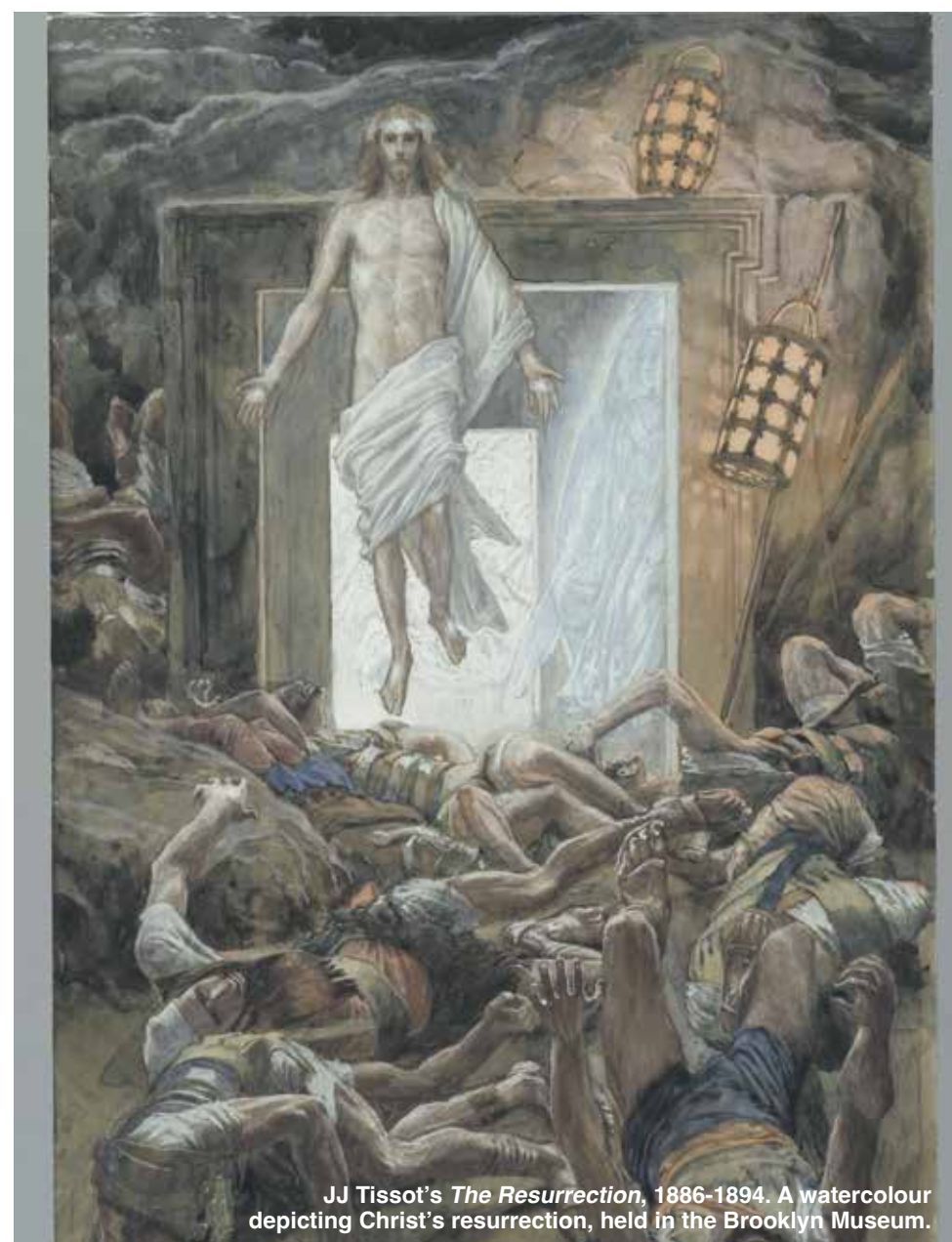
**E**aster is the great festival of Christianity, whether celebrated this Sunday, or on April 16, the Orthodox date for celebration according to the Old Calendar of the Church.

Along with Christmas, Easter is when the traditions of the churches, developed over the centuries appear at their most solemn and most joyful. Those great traditions are later developments, not part of the essence of the Christian message as revealed in the Gospels. They should be seen as the real heart of Christianity. But this book may help to develop new outlooks that will not so much redirect the stream of faith, as refocus it.

### Pastoral

Jim Maher is a Limerick-born Jesuit, and it is in the same city that he has passed most of his life as a priest. This was largely on the staff of Crescent College Comprehensive, where he managed the fifth year social outreach programme, and led the sixth years on pilgrimages. He still continues to work as a pastoral support for the college.

This is his first book. That background in pastoral work, rather than theological or historical study, has greatly affected the ideas he brings before his readers at this Eastertide. He says the Eucharist and Mass should not be "abandoned", even though that seems unlikely, even today; but that at the same time we need to engage with climate change, social injustice, economic injustice



JJ Tissot's *The Resurrection*, 1886-1894. A watercolour depicting Christ's resurrection, held in the Brooklyn Museum.

between North and South, and the prevailing disease of war.

He begins with a theme that emerges naturally enough from working with young people today. Where aging prelates, like the late Cardinal Pell, were sceptical of the campaigns relating to positive actions in relation to climate change, Maher sees the climate crisis may force a reshaping of our economy and our everyday life.

Surely it is not a coincidence, he thinks, that the decline of religion – though that might be better phrased as the decline of Western Christianity, for other religions, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism still seem to thrive – coincides with a period of crisis in the West.

Somehow the response of

the western Churches has not been always and everywhere true to the Gospels, but members have thought only of the institution, not the people. Hence the emergence of a culture of individual spirituality rather than a general scheme of life. Yet, Maher argues, not only are spirituality and religion (the social aspect of spirituality perhaps) of importance, they complement each other giving purpose and meaning to the daily round.

### Individualism

He poses the premise that to be human is to be in relationships. But with the rise of individualism social problems have increased, the troubles on our local streets are in turn writ larger in wars and military

conflicts that our political structures seem to generate. "Blessed be the peace makers", is a theme lost sight of around the globe.

The phrase comes from the Gospels, and it is one of four "apostolic preferences" that are highlighted by Maher as ways forward. This book's world of reference is the pastoral world in which the author has worked for so long.

If you want to read a book in the post-Easter period of celebration of a New Covenant and New Testament – albeit ones that are 2,000 years old – this might well be the text to choose. Across the spectrum of ages and viewpoints it will help to bring a sense of togetherness and community.



Readers should note that *The Irish Catholic* circulates throughout the island of Ireland and the book prices listed are the retail price recommended by the Irish or British publishers, in either euros or sterling, as a general indication of what purchasers may expect to pay.

# The satires of Ronald Knox that took a strange direction

Peter Costello

**M**sgr Ronald Knox, who will be recalled for his legendary modern translation of the Bible which came out in the 1950s, was an active Catholic publicist and controversialist, but of a genial and polished kind.

From boyhood he and his equally talented brothers were devoted to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.

More than that, they began to investigate the strange errors and discrepancies in the tales. Ronald invented the happy hobby of pretending Holmes was in fact a real person, whose biography could be established by diligent research into hints hidden in the texts with the aid of real historical documents.

## Essays in satire

This seemed to many then to be a pleasant academic pastime, but the pieces he collected into the pages of *Essays in Satire* more than a decade later served another, more serious purpose. What he wrote was intended as a satirical undermining of the manner in which the Higher

Critics treated the Bible, and especially the life of Jesus.

**“His aim was to demonstrate in a genial way that the work of all those Germans, such as Strauss, were also bogus and fraudulent in his opinion”**

He showed that a carefully argued piece of research, seemingly supported by hard nuggets of evidence, could in fact be, at least in the case of Sherlock Holmes, quite bogus. His aim was to demonstrate in a genial way that the work of all those Germans, such as Strauss, were also bogus and fraudulent in his opinion.

A reading of his satiric essays would be quite enough to persuade readers that great caution is needed in accepting some of what is written about the New Testament. But it is a lesson many find hard to accept.

I am all for speculative investigations myself, but as a biographer of Conan Doyle, I would prefer to see the energy devoted to Sherlockian studies applied to the life

of Arthur Conan Doyle himself. But no: two vast annotated editions of the stories in two volumes have been published albeit decades apart in a sham game of “let’s pretend”, while large tracts of his creator’s life still remain an unexplored shadowland.

## Dazed

Having been over the course of my career over exposed to the strange ideas that flourish in writings about religion, it has left me a little dazed. I have come to suspect, rightly I think, that academic scholars are very often quite unaware of what one member of my family calls “crank books” which flourish in the lower ranges of the best seller lists – or nowadays the outer edges of video documentaries on television and the internet.

One such book is *The Jesus Family Tomb* (New York, 2007), by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino, with a preface by the director of *Titanic* James Cameron, claims that some 25 years ago the remains of Jesus had been discovered and the news suppressed. This was supported by a documentary film which had appeared in December 2006.

Certainly an ossuary containing bones had been



A young Ronald Knox

discovered inscribed with the names of Joseph, Mary, Miriam, Jesus and Judas. The thesis of the book was that these were the remains of Jesus and his family, that he had been married to the Magdalene, and that Judas was his son.

What was not made clear to the international audi-

ence for the book and film was that these names were among the commonest in the Israel of the day and their conjunction proved nothing at all about the Jesus of the New Testament. The thesis was, of course, supported by “supportive facts”, but is no truer than the notion that Sherlock Holmes

was a real person.

An idea can be made to look strikingly insightful, but still be bogus. It is a thought to bear in mind when readers are presented with another tranche of “revolutionary scholarship”. But don’t believe me. Read Ronald Knox’s *Essays in Satire* for yourself.

# On truly being a Christian

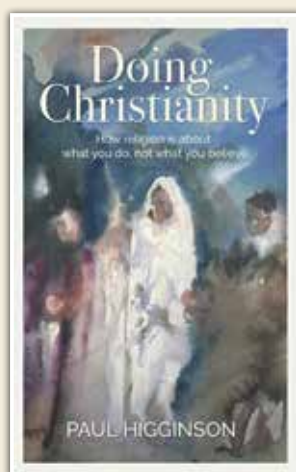
**Doing Christianity: How religion is about what you do, not what you believe,** by Paul Higginson (Columba Press, €12.99 / £10.99)

Peter Costello

As a book for Eastertide, or indeed any time of the year, Paul Higginson’s book is much more interesting. It seems to me to derive more certainly from the precepts and actions of Jesus in the Gospels than many of the later ecclesiastical interpretations.

The Beatitudes, the parables and the passing observations of Jesus (“He who lives by the sword shall die by the sword...”), these all speak clearly and simply enough to later readers.

This book comes as a refreshing breeze on a hot day, and will come as such to many to whom religious and scholarly controversy



seems arid and beside the point. This indeed is not my view alone: it is also the view of Peter Keenan who is quoted on the cover that: “This book will change the way you think about the gospel of Jesus.” It will indeed; but in a more effective way than Keenan’s own books.

Higginson puts forward nine simple steps, by which people can explore the

nature of being a Christian in the modern age. The brief account of his own life pattern explains a lot about this book. Paul Higginson taught religious education and politics for over 35 years, becoming assistant principal in St Dominic’s Sixth Form College in Harrow, near London. But before all those years in teaching he worked in a half way house for people with bi-polar conditions. Later he also spent time working with St Mother Teresa’s nuns out in India.

He is now involved in the Catholic School inspectorate and active in charity funding rising.

One can see here just how rooted in his own daily life the ideas in this book really are. It might be said that he practises what he preaches, except that it is not preaching but teaching which his forte.



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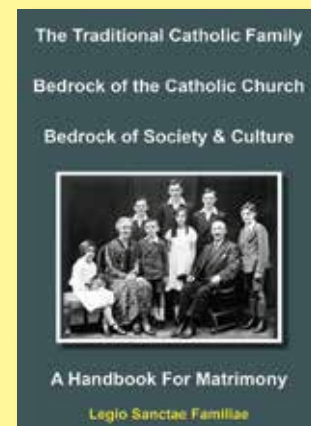
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**"THEY HAVE NO MORE WINE"** Young man in Sweden seeks a wife, spiritual companion and partner in healing-work in service to Jesus & Maria. (I dreamt she is Irish.) Holistic and esoteric interests. Contact: [nordlys7.blogspot.com](mailto:nordlys7.blogspot.com)

## HEAVEN MESSAGE

**BISHOP JUAN GUEVARRA** approved their divine revelations to Luz de Maria at <https://revelaciones-marianas.com/> an important message given on 17th March 2023. Do read footnote no.1.



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# Trócaire

# Leisure time

## Crossword Junior

Gordius 477

1		2		3		4		5		6
								7		
8										
				9	10					
11			12							
		13		14		15			16	
17										
18				19						
20										
21						22				

- Across**

1 A high-up teacher in university (9)

7 The first woman in the Bible (3)

8 Part of a cooker, or a way to cook (5)

9 In cowboy movies, this lawman wears a star (7)

11 Sketched (4)

13 Take a break; do nothing for a while (4)

15 Green part of a plant (4)

17 It holds up a flower (4)

19 Make something better (7)

20 Court case (5)

21 School subject with numbers (5)

22 A lady on her wedding day (5)
- Down**

1 Temple of the far East (6)

2 In a book by Charles Dickens, he asked for more (6,5)

3 These fish look a bit like snakes (4)

4 You wear it on your foot (4)

5 Write this down to show how to cook or bake something (6)

6 Meat we get from cows (4)

10 More than just warm (3)

12 Tiny (3)

14 Grins (6)

15 Bigger (6)

16 Very, very weak (6)

18 In science, a tiny particle of something (4)

## SOLUTIONS, MARCH 30

GORDIUS NO. 604

**Across** – 1 Arm 3 Herculeum 8 Larynx 9 Previous 10 Agony 11 Louth 13 Joked 15 Haddock 16 I See His Blood Upon the Rose 21 Trick 23 Och-re 24 Graceful 25 Unwrap 27 Our

**Down** – 1 A clean sheet 2 Marooned 3 Honey 4 Cupcake 5 Anvil 6 Exodus 7 Mrs 12 Housekeeper 13 Jacob 14 Dosed 17 Hitherto 18 Toddler 19 Mikado 22 Knelt 23 Ounce 24 Gnu

**CHILDREN'S No. 476**

**Across** – Weather 7 Under 8 Dates 9 Sandals 12 Large 13 Student 15 Log 16 Zoo 17 One hundred 21 Asses 22 Lemon

**Down** – Waddle 2 Afternoon 3 Hisses 4 Ruin 5 Idea 6 Arms 10 Dodged 11 Lens 14 Trout 15 Looks 18 Eye 19 Ram 20 Den

## Crossword

Gordius 605

1		2		3		4		5		6		7
8						9						
10								11				12
						13		14				
15								16			17	
								18				
			19			20						
21				22						23		
24								25				
26											27	

- Across**

1 Tart or pastry (3)

3 Predating written accounts (11)

8 White fur (6)

9 Memorial structure (8)

10 Had possession of (5)

11 Reject outright (5)

13 Held on desperately (5)

15 Centigrade temperature scale (7)

16 Pirate (7)

20 Executes by rope (5)

21 Jumped, breaking a plate (5)

23 Collision (5)

24 Coming from the Land of the Rising Sun (8)

25 Relating to cattle (6)

26 Hymn of courage and trust (2,3,6)

27 Encountered (3)

**Down**

1 Winged dinosaur (11)

2 Such cheese might make me lament (8)

3 Yearned (5)

4 The best hit you can achieve
- in Baseball (4,3)

5 Surname of Liz, British PM for less than two months in 2022 (5)

6 Sorry, filled with regret (6)

7 Feline creature (3)

12 Hunts merino like this for the goodness of food (11)

13 Sofa (5)

14 Twelve dozen (5)

17 Fish tank (8)

18 Ambiguous, difficult to understand (7)

19 Occur (6)

22 Doctrine (5)

23 Harmonious combination of simultaneously played notes (5)

24 Sharp punch; injection (3)

## Sudoku Corner

477

### Easy

	2	1		3				
8				4		9		
		3	9	7		8	6	
1			8	5		6		7
		2		9		1		
3	8						5	
	3					4	1	
2		8						
	4			7	9			

### Hard

6			7	1				9
		8		5				
		5	9			7	2	
						9		6
1	7						8	5
4		6						
	6	3			5	1		
				2		6		
8				9	7			2

### Last week's Easy 476

2	6	5	3	9	8	4	7	1
9	8	1	4	7	5	3	6	2
7	4	3	2	1	6	9	8	5
1	2	8	9	4	3	6	5	7
6	3	9	7	5	1	2	4	8
5	7	4	6	8	2	1	9	3
4	9	2	5	3	7	8	1	6
8	5	6	1	2	9	7	3	4
3	1	7	8	6	4	5	2	9

### Last week's Hard 476

1	6	2	9	3	7	4	5	8
4	3	7	8	5	1	6	2	9
5	8	9	2	6	4	7	1	3
7	9	3	6	1	5	8	4	2
8	2	5	7	4	9	1	3	6
6	1	4	3	8	2	9	7	5
3	4	1	5	9	8	2	6	7
9	7	6	4	2	3	5	8	1
2	5	8	1	7	6	3	9	4



# Nothing I have ever seen at Sunday Mass

**I asked you for your prayers** when last I wrote on this page. And you prayed for me. The result was remarkable. Thank you.

You may remember the reason for my request — my way of coping with an invitation to preach a Lenten mission in a parish on the southwest side of Chicago. I reckoned this was above my pay-grade, and is certainly something I will not easily do again.

I headed to Chicago full of trepidation. Would I have something useful to offer to the people there? The pastor saw me as a help to local efforts to unify two parishes, both with ancestral links to Ireland and the Irish. But would I speak the language of the people gathered to hear me, people whose experiences of life were so different from mine? My request for your prayers was genuine. And your help made all the difference.

## Chicago

I landed in Chicago before St Patrick's Day, when the city was experiencing its first serious winter freeze. One day the temperature did not rise above minus seven degrees. Snow fell



intermittently. The pastor was anxious that this might keep people at home. He need not have worried, the prayers coming from Ireland warmed the temperatures and paused the snow. In the event, the mission experience was quite remarkable.

**“It took a Polish priest to bring an Irishman to say Mass for us on Paddy's Day”**

I celebrated an afternoon Mass on St Patrick's Day. All praise went to the young pastor, “It took a Polish priest to bring an Irishman to say Mass for us on Paddy's Day”, they told him.

That weekend, the work began in earnest, with homilies to give at six Masses in two venues, three of which started at the same time. (It meant preaching at homily time in one church, then driving ten minutes to the other church to give a homily after Communion — praying all the while not to be held up by one of the trains that halt traffic as they crisscross that side of Chicago.)

## Three days

Over the following three days, a homily was given each morning at the 8.30am Mass, and each evening at a service; a penitential service with Confession one evening, a healing service with anointing another evening, then a closing Eucharist on the final night. And then I was homeward bound, for

Masses in my home parishes that weekend.

The experience was remarkable, and intense. I have never prepared and given eight different homilies over five days. Nor have I preached to such a receptive audience, where I could not only see people listening, but also nodding their heads when a point struck home. This must be a unique feature of missions; it's certainly not anything I have ever seen at Sunday Mass!

The key to success won't surprise *Irish Catholic* readers: prayer, more prayer, rest, nice food, then more prayer. And when I had prayed as much as I could, it was up to God to touch hearts. And God did (Thank you again for your part in making the enterprise fruitful).

## No baptisms in Lent

The Easter Vigil may be the highpoint of the Church's life, but making sure it features the baptism of a live baby often proves too much for priests in many Irish parishes. Pastors in Chicago have no such difficulty. The parish newsletter where I preached the Lenten Mission stated the local rule baldly: “No baptisms in Lent.”

Many priests there won't celebrate weddings in Lent either. It's a penitential season after all, as the Polish pastor reminded me — though few Irish priests would be brave enough to insist. Plenty of applicants for Easter vigil baptisms is one pleasant side-effect however...

## A small world

A memorable attraction at Disney World features the song 'It's a Small World'. As guests trundle between scenes representing the various nations and cultures, 'It's a Small World' plays on a continuous loop, making it impossible for patrons to get the song out of their heads. It became my theme song after my Chicago mission. A parishioner there introduced himself as a Kanturk, Co. Cork, native, with connections in Union Hall, in my south coast parish. The result was that Union Hall heard all about the mission long before I returned home there. It is indeed a small world!





## YOUR EASTER GIFT TO OUR RISEN SAVIOUR

Help train a young man for the Little Way Missionary Priesthood in Myanmar

The Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese, of whom there are now 25, minister in many dioceses in Myanmar. Four are now serving in Papua New Guinea, in tribal areas. Six have recently celebrated the fifth anniversaries of their priestly ordination and there are many seminarians hoping, after several years' training, to join the Congregation as priests. Our Association has funded the Little Way Priests since their inception, especially with the costs involved in training and maintaining them as seminarians, paying for food, medical aid, housing and other needs, and similarly when they become priests. Archbishop Nicholas Mang Thang, founder of The Little Way Missionary Priests, now retired, continues to work with agricultural and self-sustaining food projects and supervises the Little Way Priests from his base in central Myanmar. He asks you, our faithful supporters, for any donation you can send this Eastertide for the heavy costs involved in the training and upkeep of the Little Way Seminarians.

**Archbishop Nicholas and our Little Way Missionary Priests of St Therese remember you every day in their prayers and Masses. On their behalf, we appeal to you wholeheartedly this Easter for ANY gift you can send us, large or small, in honour of St Therese of Lisieux, to whom the Congregation is consecrated. They will be forever grateful to you.**



**We wish all our friends and benefactors a very happy and blessed Easter.**

### A NOVENA OF MASSES FOR YOUR INTENTIONS

We are arranging for a Novena of Masses to be offered for your intentions during Easter as a mark of gratitude for your kindness and support throughout the year.

**May Our Risen Saviour bring you His richest blessings, peace and happiness.**

### MISSIONARIES NEED YOUR MASS OFFERINGS

In these fraught times, missionary priests rely more than ever on stipends for their daily subsistence and for helping the poorest of their congregations. The Little Way Association will convey your stipends and your intentions to the clergy overseas.

**We like to send a minimum of €6 or more for each Mass.**

Crossed POs and cheques should be sent and made payable to:

**THE LITTLE WAY ASSOCIATION**  
Sacred Heart House, 119 Cedars Rd, Clapham Common, London SW4 0PR  
(Registered Charity No. 235703) Tel 0044 20 76 22 0466  
[www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

I enclose €..... to be allocated to:

€..... **TRAINING LITTLE WAY MISSIONARY PRIESTS OF ST THERESE**

€..... **TURKEY-SYRIA EARTHQUAKE APPEAL**

€..... **UKRAINE APPEAL**

€..... **MASS OFFERINGS**  
(Please state no. of Masses \_\_\_\_\_)

€..... **LITTLE WAY ADMIN EXPENSES**

☐ Please tick if you would like an acknowledgement

Name (Rev. Mr. Mrs. Miss) \_\_\_\_\_ (Block letters please)

Address \_\_\_\_\_

To donate online go to [www.littlewayassociation.com](http://www.littlewayassociation.com)

**DONATIONS FOR THE MISSIONS ARE SENT WITHOUT DEDUCTION FOR ANY EXPENSES.**

IC/04/06