



*Stolta*

2019

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Catering staff from Pugin Hall

# A WORD FROM THE RECTOR

This year's publication of the seminary magazine *Síolta* has taken as its theme *Green Shoots* and I am delighted to convey a word of welcome to you as a friend, supporter or member of the community of faith, education and formation that is St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. This year's *Síolta* bears witness to the strong tradition of excellence that is a hallmark of St. Patrick's College. On this splendid campus, we pray, work and journey together as pilgrims in faith, united in a lively sense of confidence and hope in the current and future mission of the Pontifical University and the National Seminary. Challenges exist and opportunities abound in and through which seminarians, students, staff and supporters both plant and steward seeds of the Gospel in ordinary and sometimes extraordinary ways.



Since taking up my appointment as Rector on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018, St. Patrick's College has embarked on a new path because for the first time in its almost 225-year history, the roles of President and Rector have been made autonomous. This means that both offices are given enhanced freedom to give focused attention to the work of fulfilling the mandate of this college going forward. That is, to draw from the rich well of Scripture and Tradition the resources needed to educate and form a new generation of Catholic Leaders (both priests and lay leaders) for the Church in Ireland and further afield.

Next year will see this college celebrate the 225<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation. Since 1795, over 11,000 men have been prepared for ordination to the priesthood and thousands of lay students have gone forth from here to work as Religious Educators, Catechists, Pastoral Assistants, Philosophers and Theologians, making an invaluable and lasting contribution to the work of evangelisation and planting seeds of hope everywhere they have gone.

Green shoots abound: strong collaboration between the Pontifical University and the National Seminary; a fruitful working relationship with Maynooth University; enhanced communication with stakeholders; the strong support of the Trustees and wider Episcopal Conference and its offices, commissions and councils; the presence of Trócaire, the National Centre for Liturgy and the National Office for Safeguarding Children; the annual Carol Service and College Chapel Concerts; the live televised broadcast of the celebration of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday and the Easter Vigil by RTÉ and Kairos Communications. These are just some of the constitutive elements which make SPCM a safe and stable environment for the formation of future priests and Catholic lay leaders within a dynamic hub of Catholic education and formation which concretely, imaginatively and energetically serves the mission of the Church on this island after the example of Patrick, Brigid, Colmcille and thousands of Irish men and women who have enabled the light of Christianity to shine in times of darkness and doubt.

St. Patrick's College will continue to be at the forefront of the evangelisation adventure and at its heart is a faith-filled, prayerful, hard-working and purposeful seminary community which arises each day in the name of the Risen Lord to pray, study, recreate and bear witness to the joy that comes from being a disciple of Jesus Christ, called to configure one's life to his, thus becoming an icon of that self-emptying love and creativity which is the Holy Trinity.

I warmly commend and congratulate all who have made this year's edition of *Síolta* possible. May green shoots produce a bountiful harvest to the glory of God and the honour of St. Patrick.

Fr. Tomás Surlis  
Rector

# INTRODUCING *SÍOLTA* 2019

## 'Green Shoots'

*Síolta* is an annual publication of the seminary community at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. The editorial committee is happy to have chosen 'green shoots' for our theme this year. In the Bible there are many instances which mention trees, gardens, and vineyards. Often they have been taken to be a symbol of the Church, whose seeds were lovingly sown by Christ. Through the Gospel message of love throughout the millennia, this vineyard has grown and, despite its challenges, has sprouted many beautiful branches with green and lively shoots. Christ's vineyard, the Church, has produced and is producing many green shoots and good fruits which *Síolta* 2019 celebrates.

The editorial committee would like to thank all those who contributed to this year's *Síolta*, especially all of our extremely capable article writers. We also wish to extend genuine thanks to the Rector, Fr. Tomás Surlis who directed our work and gave us much encouragement. Many thanks also to our Director of Formation, Fr. Michael Collins who gave us similar support. Our gratitude also goes to our Spiritual Director, Fr. Seán Farrell, CM who is responsible for much of the high quality photography in this year's magazine. We are

appreciative too of the editorial advice given to us by one of the editors of last year's *Síolta*, Anthony Hartnett. Special thanks must also be given to all of our very generous financial patrons. Without all of these combined contributions, this year's *Síolta* magazine would not have turned out to be the wonderful and exciting production it is.

It has been both an honour and a pleasure to work on *Síolta*. The editorial committee genuinely hopes that this year's magazine will enrich your faith, give you food for thought, and help us all to recognise and celebrate the green shoots that come from the Church. On behalf of the seminary community, we present to you *Síolta* 2019.

*Beannachtaí Dé oraibh go léir!*

### **Editorial Committee**

Mark O'Farrell – General editor

Jordan Mac Gabhann – General editor

Michael McCaul – Treasurer

Neal Smith – Secretary

Matthew Roche – Secretary



# Quotes of Hope

‘For thus said the Lord God,  
the Holy One of Israel:  
In returning and rest you shall be saved;  
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.’  
*Isaiah 30:15*

‘But those who wait for the Lord shall renew their  
strength,  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
they shall run and not be weary,  
they shall walk and not faint.’  
*Isaiah 40:31*

‘For surely I know the plans I have for you, says  
the Lord,  
plans for your welfare and not for harm,  
to give you a future with hope.’  
*Jeremiah 29:11*

‘For in hope we were saved.  
Now hope that is seen is not hope.  
For who hopes for what is seen?’  
*Romans 8:24*

‘Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering,  
persevere in prayer.’  
*Romans 12:12*

‘May the God of hope fill you with all joy and  
peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope by the power of  
the Holy Spirit.’  
*Romans 15:13*

‘ So that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. 19 We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’  
*Hebrews 6:18-20*

“Seek grace in the smallest things, and you will also find grace to accomplish,  
to believe in, and to hope for the greatest things.”  
*Bl. Peter Favre, SJ, one of the first Jesuits*

“Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams. Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential. Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in, but with what it is still possible for you to do.”  
*St. Pope John XXIII*

“Every day I need you, Lord, but today especially,  
I need some extra strength to face whatever is to come.  
This day, more than any other day,  
I need to feel you near me to strengthen my courage  
and to overcome any fear.  
By myself I cannot meet the challenge of the hour.  
We are frail human creatures and we need a Higher Power  
to sustain us in all that life may bring.  
And so, dear Lord, hold my trembling hand.  
Be with me, Lord, this day  
and stretch out your powerful arm to help me.  
May your love be upon me as I place all my hope in you.  
Amen.”  
*St. Pope John XXIII.*

# Selection of *Siolta* Prayers

## *Post Communion Prayer.*

“God of Mercy may this Holy Eucharist  
bring us Your Divine Help,  
free us from our sins,  
and prepare us for the coming of  
Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”  
Amen.

## *Prayer For Trust*

“Dear Jesus,  
I put my trust in Thee.  
Help me to rely on Your Goodness and Love.  
Take away any anxiety and stress I now feel.  
I know that You can do all things  
and that You care for me.  
Welcome me into Your peace  
where there is no need to be afraid of anything.  
You have said “Come to Me and I will give you rest.”  
I come to You and ask You to lift  
from me this burden of worry.  
Replace it with your assurance that,  
You hold me close and all things will be well.”  
Amen.

## *Prayer of Fr. Michael Judge, “Saint of 9/11”*

“Lord, take me where You want me to go,  
Let me meet who You want me to meet,  
Tell me what You want me to say,  
And keep me out of Your way.”  
Amen.

## *God’s Promise.*

Almighty God, You Promised us redemption  
and salvation as the children of Abraham.  
You revealed the hidden mystery  
of Your Promise in the Body and Blood  
of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Grant us, we pray, the saving help of  
Your Promise that we might wear worthily  
Your Robe woven of Peace, Perseverance, and Love.  
Gifts so fitting for our pilgrim journey  
back home to You, from where we came.  
Grant that every seeker of Your Face  
and Truth may have the heartfelt joy of finding You.  
And grant us through Your Holy Spirit  
and the Immaculate Heart of Mary that the God  
of whom we speak and love may be the same God  
who dwells in our hearts.  
Amen.

## *Some Marian Prayers.*

“Oh, sweetest of Mothers, bless and  
protect us as we look to you for help.”

“Oh, Virgin Mary defend us,  
all pure and sweetness.”  
“Oh, Virgin Mary, defend me,  
all pure and sweetness.”

“Immaculate Mary, I beg of you obtain pardon  
for me, and through your Immaculate Heart  
save us all from sin and lead us all home to heaven.”

*Amen.*

“I trust O Heavenly Father and offer Thee  
the United Hearts of Jesus and Mary.  
The triumphant Bleeding Wounds of Jesus and  
the Tears of Our Loving Heavenly Mother Mary.  
Lord, Thy Will be done. “

*Amen.*

# Trócaire

By Colm Hogan



*Evelyn and her family in Uganda (credit Gary Moore)*

Trócaire was established by the Catholic Church in Ireland to respond to poverty and injustice in the developing world. As the overseas development agency of the Catholic Church, Trócaire is supported by parishes across Ireland – and it belongs to you.

We work in over 20 different countries around the world. Donations to our Lenten Appeal are used across all 20 countries where the funds and support are needed most. There are massive injustices and huge levels of poverty in the communities where we work. Today, many of our brothers and sisters are denied their most basic rights. They face injustice, violence, a lack of education and basic health care.

Our faith calls us to stand in solidarity with these people.

Trócaire's founding document, from 1973, says: 'Never let us grow accustomed to the injustice and inequality that exists in this world or grow weary in the work of setting it right.' I know that sometimes it is overwhelming when we see the huge scale of problems in our world. So many of us think "what can I do?". Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed parishioners and groups of people can change lives.

Your generosity helped Trócaire to support 2.8 million people in 2018. That impact is thanks to you.

Together we can create a just world. There are many ways to show your support for Trócaire in their work with people affected by poverty and injustice.

**Lent Campaign:** Each year Trócaire runs a major campaign to raise awareness and funds to combat poverty and injustice in the developing world

**Fundraise:** Inspiring people all over Ireland are doing incredible things to raise funds for Trócaire. Join them!

**Volunteer:** Are you passionate about global justice and human rights? Become a volunteer with Trócaire in Ireland and join the fight for justice!

**Become a campaigner:** Get updates on Trócaire's latest advocacy campaigns and find out how you can get involved. Moreover, information on upcoming events - film screenings, festivals and more.

**Poetry Competition:** Trócaire's annual poetry competition, in association with Poetry Ireland, uses the arts to raise awareness about the leading global justice issues of our time.

**Education:** We provide support for educators in the formal and informal sectors, run school workshops, and produce a range of resources on justice and human rights issues.

On all of the above, we have much more information on the following page on our website; <https://www.trocaire.org/getinvolved>

Finally, remember Trócaire cannot do any of its work, without YOU and YOUR support, we will be delighted to hear from you, and our door is always open and THANK YOU.

# Seminary Soccer Trip to Gozo

By Mark O' Farrell

Maynooth Seminary Rector, Fr. Tomás Surlis organised our "soccer trip" to Malta and Gozo, which was planned meticulously in collaboration with the Gozetan Rector, Fr. Richard Farrugia. Fr. Tom was unable to make the trip, but Spiritual Director, Fr. Sean Farrell, CM, deputised commendably. We flew from Dublin to Malta, and arrived late in the evening. We were collected at the airport by the priests of the Maltese seminary. We were shown our rooms in the beautiful, and historic Archbishop's Seminary, which has an impressive vantage point above the city of Rabat. There was food left out for us, which was much appreciated after the long day. St. Paul exhorted 'extend hospitality to strangers,' (Romans 12:13), and the Maltese certainly vivified this teaching. We visited St. Paul's grotto on St. Patrick's Day, and had the privilege of attending Mass at this holy site. One couldn't visit Malta or Gozo without going into the churches, and for such small islands it was incredible to see so many beautiful churches. The highlight for me was visiting the opulent baroque Co-Cathedral of St. Paul in Mdina, Malta, which was built on the site where St. Paul met the Roman governor, Publius (Acts 28:7).

Interestingly, the Maltese celebrate the feast of St. Joseph for five days. There was a reading for Evening Prayer on the St. Joseph's Day which read; 'Whatever your work is, put your heart into it as if it were for the Lord and not for men.' The Gozetan seminarians certainly took this teaching to heart, as they did everything wholeheartedly. The first morning of our visit, they collected us from the Maltese seminary, and they accompanied us for a meal, and a tour of the city, the ferry trip to Gozo, and back to their seminary which they had cleaned themselves, including the windows, before our arrival. Each day was packed with a full itinerary too numerous to mention all, but it was a

privilege to visit the unique "Citadel" and "fortifications" in Mdina, where most of the extant building was built by the Order of St. John. We also visited the spectacular Dingli Cliffs.

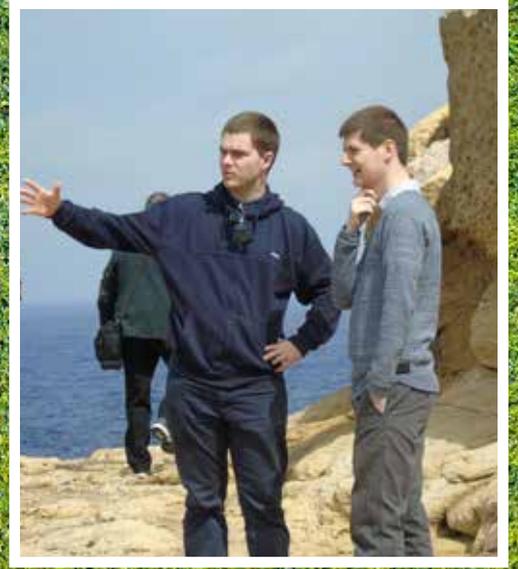
Unfortunately, the Irish seminarians lost the football match 5-3. The Gozetans had been in training with a coach. On the penultimate day we visited the Shrine to Our Lady called "Ta Pinu." We prayed the Stations of the Cross, which were placed in strategic positions on the side of the mountain. It was a moving experience to pray these Stations, especially since the wind was gale force. Matthew Roche, an Irish seminarian who is never outdone in a pun, said in our review of the visit with the Gozetans; "We were blown away." Gozetan Rector, Fr. Richard alluded to the rich symbolic meaning of the presence of the wind in the Catholic tradition.

After Holy Communion at the Shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary at Ta Pinu, our four-strong choir, 'stole the show.' They sang a Maynooth original hymn, "Jerusalem", which we normally only hear in Advent, in the middle of the night. It was breath-taking to hear their haunting harmonious rendition, and it certainly made a visible impression on the Bishop of Gozo, and the Gozetan Rector. When we had a meeting reviewing the trip, the Rector, Fr. Richard complimented the amazing choir from Maynooth! Fr. Sean and I immediately interjected with the comment that we have an excellent coach! His Grace, Bishop Mario Grech ended his homily with these wise words: "I appreciate this exchange between both seminaries; yet excellent formators are not enough to make a good priest; priestly formation also depends on the docility, and personal commitment of each and every seminarian."



Gozetan, Maltese and Irish Seminarians

# Additional "Seminary Soccer Trip" Photos



# Looking Back at the Good That Came From the World Meeting of Families

By Matthew Roche



The World Meeting of Families, 2018 was one of the highlights of last summer, where we celebrated God's gift of the family, which is an icon of the Blessed Trinity. There was great excitement in the seminary and among friends in the building up to the World Meeting of Families. This was mainly

due to the visit of Pope Francis himself.

I had the privilege of staying up here in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth to assist as a sacristan to set up for Mass in the College Chapel for the various groups from different countries. Some of us volunteered in the RDS for the few days. It was a grace-filled few days travelling to the RDS to visit the stalls, and meet with friends, especially as it showcased the richness and diversity of what the Church has to offer today, including the Episcopal Conference, Dioceses, Religious Orders, Youth 2000, Holy Family Mission, Trócaire, Veritas Publishers and Radio Maria. Those were the days building up to August 25<sup>th</sup>, the day the Pope arrived! There was such a build up for this day, and rightly so! We had Mass in the College Chapel offered for the Pope, which was at the same time as his flight to Dublin was landing. I went to Dublin on the train, and met with Jordan, my fellow-seminarian in O'Connell Street, and we then met with some friends in Supermac's, before going to see the Pope go past on the pope-mobile. Papal flags were being waved everywhere. We waited a while for the Pope to go past, and a number of times others such as the Gardaí going past led to a quick

excitement with many thinking it was the Pope! He got to us eventually though! Then we walked to Croke Park where there was an electric atmosphere, and which was the highlight of the event, in my opinion. We got to hear beautiful traditional Irish music, and see Irish dancing performances, and even Nathan Carter!

And the Pope's encouraging words in Croke Park cannot be left out! The next day was the Papal Mass in Phoenix Park. I found it a great privilege to say that I was at a historical Papal Visit in 2018. As Pope Francis said in his opening words in Croke Park: "It is good to celebrate, for celebration makes us more human, and more Christian."



*Matthew and Jordan waiting for Pope Francis on O'Connell St. (credit Luke Silke)*



# “The American Dream”



By Mark Quinn

There is a beautiful yet somewhat unassuming bronze statue of Our Lady, Queen of Angels just a stone's throw from the seminary building, heading north toward the library. The base inscription reads as follows: 'A gift from the people of Los Angeles to the seminaries of Ireland in gratitude for the thousands of Irish priests who ministered to the city of the angels over the past two centuries.' Poignantly standing in the shadow of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, it is a testament not only to those who served in California, but of course, all across the US. The contribution of Irish men and women to the Church in America is still felt deeply on both sides of the Atlantic. Such were the days that those "surplus to requirement" in this country were more than happy to accept the litany of offers from dioceses across the globe, particularly in the States. It seems a world away now, a time which can

only be afforded reminisce at best and sophistry at the least. Yet in the midst of a changing paradigm an unusual pattern is beginning to emerge. We are beginning to see this evangelisation as a 'return to sender' so to speak. Admittedly, this trend is not the thousands of which the inscription speaks, but it is significant nonetheless. If you haven't already noticed, the current of which I refer to is the small but undeniable presence of Americans in the Church here in Ireland in the last decade or so! Many dioceses around the country are home to Americans both religious and laity; dynamic and idiosyncratic in nature. So how has this trend emerged and what are the thoughts of some of those in who have made Ireland their home?

We asked some of those involved.....

- Emily Gibbons
- Fr. Shane Sullivan
- Emily Kelly
- Julie Cosden



## Emily Gibbons

**American Home State/City:**  
Malverne, New York.

**Current Role/Status/Position:**  
Masters Student in Liturgical Music.

### How did God call you to Ireland?

After graduating college with a degree in music performance, I worked for 3 years at St. Anthony's Church in Oceanside, New York as their full-time cantor. With prayers, spiritual direction, and support from family and friends I decided it was time to further my education. I discovered the Postgrad Program in Liturgical Music at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. After being accepted into the program, I had a subtle nudging of the spirit that grew stronger and stronger to continue my education here.

### What was your initial perception of the Irish Church compared with the US?

I initially felt as if more care and attention could be brought to the music within the liturgy. But after my time spent here in Ireland since September, I have come to find out that much work is going on unnoticed to educate and promote a high standard of liturgical music.

### What do you see for the future of the Church in Ireland?

I am unsure of the future of the Church in Ireland but have met many who care about its future. With the guidance and formation that I have experienced at St. Patrick's, there is hope that the Church will be left in the caring hands of those who love and know the importance of it.



## **Emily Kelly**

**American Home State/City:**  
Marshfield, Wisconsin.

**Current Role/Status/Position:**  
Counsellor/Youth Worker at *An Tubber Nua*, Galway and Mom!

### **How did God call you to Ireland?**

Funnily enough, I always felt a draw to Ireland. When I was 10, we had to pick a country to do a report on for a school project. I picked Ireland. Having always wanted to visit, I came over on a study abroad trip for 6 weeks before my last year in college. Strangely, I felt completely at home here. When I left after the 6 weeks, I kept feeling the desire to come back, like a homesickness for a place that wasn't even my home. So, I finished college and applied for a one-year Working Holiday Visa – which was coincidentally delivered to me on St. Patrick's Day, 2012. I didn't know at the time that I would end up working in a Christian Ministry and running retreats for the next 6 out of 7 years of my life. But clearly God had told St. Patrick (haha). I moved to Ireland in May of 2012 without any family, job offers, or a place to live – which is a miracle in and of itself because I always have to have a plan. God spent the next year of my life growing me, in my faith, and in who He wanted me to be, and He drew me closer to Himself than I had ever been. He placed the perfect people strategically around me, and I finally made the decision to put Him first. One year later I began working in full-time ministry in Galway City.

### **What was your initial perception of the Church in Ireland compared with the US?**

Honestly, I was so devastated by what appeared to be a lack of life. I would sometimes go to Mass in the city and would be the only young person surrounded by people aged 50 and upwards. Mass was so short that it seemed like a race, and I actually overheard people once complaining that a priest kept them "for the whole hour." Very often, there was little to no music, and when there was, no one sang along. It felt so empty. I was used to Mass always being an hour, full of songs where everyone sang along, a constant youth group and lots of parish activities. Now, that being said, I have met some great people who were really on-fire for their faith, but sadly they were usually very few.

**What do you see for the future of the Church in Ireland?** Although only God knows, I think it's possible that we'll see less and less people in the Church, but at the same time, the ones that remain

will be stronger and stronger. We will really have to know our faith and be able to attest to it, especially during a time that society is moving farther and farther from it.



## **Fr. Shane Sullivan**

**American Home State/City:** Chicago, Illinois.

**Current Role/Status/Position:** Priest, Curate in Castlebar, Co. Mayo.

### **How did God call you to Ireland?**

Initially it was through reading about the devastating effects of the sex abuse crisis and the vocations shortage that I first began to think about the possibility of serving as a priest in Ireland. I explored the situation more by reading what I could before coming to Ireland in the summer of 2008 to look more seriously and discern moving here. I felt confident that there was something more than my own interests in the call and so I moved here in the autumn of 2008.

### **What was your initial perception of the Irish Church compared with the US?**

It took some time to get a good sense of the culture of the Church here. But my first impression was that here the past was a source of pain and bitterness, something being rejected and reacted against within the Church particularly and also within wider society. That was very different from the US in both the culture and Church, where there is no tendency to cut ties with past eras. Some here would derisively see that as nothing more than sentimentalism or nostalgia. But there's more to it than that. History gives to each new generation the gift of an education, which if they are inclined to pay attention, can teach them not only how *not* to do things, but also what is of lasting value.

### **What do you see for the future of the Church in Ireland?:**

A crossroads. From this low and humble place in which we find ourselves, will we finally embrace what has proven to bring new life to the Church where vibrancy is found? Or will we continue with business as usual? To get more specific, because that is open to misinterpretation: will we look at the religious orders, dioceses and movements in the post-Christian West which are generating faith, experiencing growth in their numbers and whose lives reflect evangelical joy? Or will we tweak this or that, make adjustments to this institution or that practice, all within the strict confines of what we can change while still remaining ourselves comfortable?



## Julie Cosden

**American Home State/City:** West Chester, Pennsylvania.

**Current Role/Status/Position:** Director @ Emmaus Retreat Centre, Swords.

**How did God call you to Ireland?** There's a line in a song I love that says "I have been homesick for you since we met." That was my exact sentiment when I first set foot in Ireland in 2012. To be honest, it was completely unexpected. Despite the fact that three of my four grandparents were Irish descendants, I never thought of myself as Irish nor did I have any overwhelming desire to visit Ireland. "I'll get there someday," I always thought but it wasn't until my older brother was stationed at the American Embassy in Dublin 7 years ago that I first made plans to visit Dublin. It was during that Christmas trip of 2012 that I first felt the stirrings in my heart for Ireland. It was cold, wet, and dark and yet I loved every minute of it, and more than loving Ireland like so many tourists do, I felt as though I belonged here. I remember thinking then as I stood at Mass one morning, "I think I'm going to live here someday" and feeling the Lord's gentle nod of affirmation. That desire and call to Ireland continued to grow with each subsequent trip and every time I would leave Ireland to return to the States after a trip to visit my brother, I felt a homesickness for Ireland, like I was leaving my home rather than going home. It was a strange sensation. After discerning this possible move for four years, I shared with my boss that I was considering a move to Ireland. I had no job offers or prospects and at the time, I was working as a Vice President at Ave Maria University in Florida, in a job I loved and surrounded by a vibrant faith community. My boss, a holy and prayerful man, offered me the opportunity to take a 2 month sabbatical to really explore that call. I knew this was a gift not to be refused. With my brother's assignment having been inexplicably extended for another year, I was able to come and live with him for 2 months as I discerned what the Lord wanted. I began applying for jobs and said "Ok, Lord, if you want me here then make it happen!" By the time I returned to Florida 2 months later, I was being considered for the role of Director at a retreat centre in Dublin. I was offered the job on the feast day of St. Mary Magdalen, a saint to whom I have a particular devotion, and knew the Lord had made things happen and much quicker than I had fathomed. I moved over in October of 2016 to become the Director of the Emmaus Centre

in Swords and continue to be confirmed that this is where God wants me.

### What was your initial perception of the Irish Church compared with the US?

To be honest, I found it depressing. I would go to Mass and think "Where are the young people? Where are the families? Why is nobody singing? Why is everyone saying all the Mass parts that belong to the priest? Why is the priest racing through the Mass like he's got some place better to be? Where is the JOY?" Sadly, my initial perception has proved more true than not, although I've met so many faith-filled Irish people, many of whom probably share my opinions. But it was also this perception that really placed a desire on my heart to come to Ireland and maybe try to bring some of that joy and American exuberance to the Church here.

### What do you see for the future of the Church in Ireland?

I see a time of great renewal ahead for the Church. This is clearly a time of purification and humiliation for the Irish Church, and absolutely necessary. I have no interest in looking backwards and romanticizing the time when everyone was Catholic. The reality is that we must go deeper and create opportunities for real and personal encounters with the Risen Lord and that must give life to the Church. In the future, I see small communities where faith and culture can flourish. I see the importance of the laity and the vocation we have to help build the Church as being vital to this renewal. And it must be a Church filled with peace, joy, love...all the gifts of the Spirit...if we are going to win people over for Christ.

\* \* \* \*

*No one can dispute the growing number of Americans and other global nationalities coming here now to do the very work that thousands of Irish did for centuries around the world. The story has come two-fold. Jesus himself said; 'Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.' (John 12:24). Maybe we are seeing these fruits ripen today, just at the very time we need them most. Some might call it a dream but it's possible that 100 years from now in a quiet corner of spring-kissed garden in the US or beyond, a memorial standing tall will read; 'Thank you for your missionaries, both lay and religious.....from the eternally grateful people of Ireland.'*

# *My Experience of the Church in Ireland*

By Phillip Neumann

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*Phillip is a seminarian from Germany who is living, and studying for one year in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.*

“Why do you guys, when you enter a parish or a church, always have to talk about what you would change?” said a priest from Brazil several years ago to a group of fellow seminarians including me. This experience struck me and indeed changed my attitude.

When the Erasmus program gave me the opportunity to take part in an exchange between Germany and Ireland to study Theology for one year, the people around me started to talk a lot about Ireland and especially the Church, and the relationship between both. And there is no denying that the newspapers were reporting a lot about it in recent years. I heard personal experiences as well, some from just a few years ago, others twenty, and in one case nearly fifty years ago. All this, combined with the general image one has from his European neighbours, can equip you with a nice heavy bag full of prejudices.

So, I decided to leave that bag, if possible, at home and to have a look for myself. That's what I did for the last nearly eight months. When I was asked to write if I would have seen green shoots in the Church or in Ireland in general, I thought: “Wow, that's a tough one.” And I know that it can be easy to make a rash judgement. Rather than just comparing it with experiences from other spaces and times. It's more like going into a garden. You see carnation, lily, rose. And you stop, and take a look at the roses' blossom. Maybe the blossom will amaze

you. Her scent, the softness of her petals, and her vibrant colour. How a bee is attracted to it. There is beauty. “Ah, but it's such a shame, that there is only that one blossom. And it will fade anyway.”

In the first weeks in Maynooth, I went to the Mass in the parish, not only to learn what to say during Mass, but to see what I might see. One thing that caught my eye immediately was: on a Tuesday morning in Ordinary Time – and it was not a Feast day – at eight o'clock, there are people. And more than ten. And they are young – I mean: way below fifty. Amazing! In the parish there are people who are active in organising events, and there is even a group that meets to read Church documents. The Rosary is prayed regularly; and they don't even need a priest for that. Later after the lectures at St. Patrick's College started, I met young, vivacious and interested Theology students, as well as the seminarians, which are as diverse as they are pious.

Sometimes, one is so focused on that one beautiful rose' blossom, that you don't see that there are two lilies right next to it. Like the father that comes with his two children to Mass on Sundays. We wall in the garden, because we care for it and we want to protect it. However, the storm will blow over that wall and the old oak might not be strong enough to withstand. Our garden changes every year. That rose whose blossom we admire one year won't become less beautiful just because the twigs have been growing in different directions over the last year. Yes, we take care of it, but nonetheless will it be different every time we step in. It doesn't get better or worse and the shamrock will certainly sprout again in the next year. It will just be different.



# A Reflection from Outside In

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**By Méabh Ní Lochlainn & Mícheál Mac Seoin**

Upon being invited to contribute to Síolta, 2019, our immediate reaction centred around how privileged we are to know the students, and staff of our National Seminary. As residents of Maynooth, we have been heartily welcomed into the historic campus of St. Patrick's College and Maynooth University. Along with many other parishioners, our primary focus is attendance during term time, at either the 12.05pm daily Mass or the concelebrated Sunday 9.30am Liturgy. What has attracted our interest? On every occasion without exception, there is an infectious air of inclusion and positivity, with any obstacles there to be overcome. Every homily, layered with scholarly excellence, provokes thought, discussion and hopefully action while our experience of liturgical music has truly been an inspiration. The collegiality and sense of a united shared purpose provides spiritual nourishment that sustains and strengthens our faith. However, this is not all that's on offer!

Industrious catering staff in Pugin Hall provide for our every need at lunch time in a most

sociable facility. Camaraderie and friendship are naturally developed in a relaxed atmosphere where we gain further insight into local, national or international issues as debate flourishes and stories or jokes are exchanged while we meet students and staff from all over the world. Year in, year out, with the passing of each season, we marvel at the beauty of the expansive grounds, particularly of the South Campus. Similarly, the rhythm of the academic year highlights the opportunities and pleasures, not to mention the challenges, as beavering ways of individuals are woven into a rich diverse tapestry. It is intriguing to witness the growth of interpersonal skills as reticent first-years, undertaking study in a wide range of faculties, are nurtured and blossom into confident graduates, many of whom we hope to have the pleasure of meeting in the future.

We look forward to continuing our sojourns with you, knowing that our lives are blessed and enriched by all whom we encounter.

*Go mbeannaí Dia sinn uile.*



*Pugin Hall, St. Patrick's College, Maynooth*

# Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Ballyhaunis: Challenges Posed by Integration

*Fr. Stephen Farragher is interviewed by Mark O' Farrell*

*Fr. Farragher who is the Parish priest of Ballyhaunis, Co. Mayo and a former formator at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth celebrated Mass for our seminary community recently. He mentioned that Ballyhaunis has the highest rate of Irish non-nationals of any town in the country. I was intrigued to hear this, and I got the sense that Ballyhaunis is a good example of a town that has engaged in some of the challenges posed by integration.*

## **Can you describe Ballyhaunis as it was before the arrival of the immigrants?**

Up until the 1970s Ballyhaunis was a small market town in the west of Ireland, marked by largescale emigration. People emigrated mainly to England and the USA. In the 1930s, 40s and 50s many of the men worked as seasonal farm labourers in England to supplement the income derived from small farms. Those who emigrated for good worked mainly on construction sites. Businesses in the town depended on the rural economy, people coming in from the neighbouring countryside to sell their livestock, sheep and cattle at the fairs and to purchase their food, hardware etc. It was always a deeply Catholic parish with hardly any representatives of other Christian denominations or other religions. The Augustinian Friars had a presence here from the 14<sup>th</sup> century up until their departure in 2001. The parish clergy were diocesan clergy for the Archdiocese of Tuam.

## **When did the immigration begin?**

A big change came about when in the 1960s when a Pakistani businessman called Mr. Rafique purchased an abattoir from a local businessman, Michael Webb. Mr. Webb had a license to slaughter cattle and sheep. Rafique developed this into Halal meats, buying sheep and cattle at local marts and slaughtering them according to the Halal method and exporting the meat. He gave good prices for the livestock and

provided a lot of employment. He brought a lot of his relatives and friends from Pakistan to work in the factory and also built the first custom-built Mosque in Ireland, close to the factory on the Claremorris Rd. Not long after this, some Syrian families came to develop an associated industry called "Casing". All of these families were/are Muslim.

Initially the numbers of immigrants were small and there was a greater need to integrate, to learn the language and the customs of the locals. In more recent years the numbers of immigrants from Pakistan and Syria have increased which resulted in there being less pressure to integrate. However, the children all attend the local Catholic primary school and the Ballyhaunis community school for their secondary education. BCS was formed in 1977 with the amalgamation of the St. Patrick's College boys secondary school, the Convent of Mercy girls secondary school, and the local vocational school.

## **Can you describe how Ballyhaunis is now as a town with a considerable number of immigrants?**

The younger generations, especially those who are born here, are better integrated than their parents, many of whom don't speak English as their first language. 60% of the kids in Scoil Íosa primary school do not speak English when they go home from school. Apart from our Muslim brethren we have many Eastern Europeans,



*Fr. Stephen Farragher with members of the local Muslim Community*

mainly from Poland and Lithuania, and more recently, Croatia. The former Mercy Convent is now a direct provision centre with most of the residents there coming from Africa. It is difficult to assess the degree to which many of the adults in particular have integrated. Apart from the schools, many of the sporting clubs and voluntary organisations have made a genuine effort to welcome non-Irish nationals as members of their clubs and organisations. Just like the Irish who emigrated to UK and USA and who moved mainly in Irish cultural circles, playing Irish games, learning Irish music and dancing, so the same is true here, some people make no effort to move outside their immediate family or ethnic circle. Others become involved in sport and voluntary organisations. However it mostly in the schools that the work of integration goes on quietly each day. From the moment pupils enter the schools they are treated with the utmost respect regardless of creed or nationality.

#### **Are the immigrants well integrated?**

The work of integration is an ongoing project. There is a need for an intercultural forum with representatives from each ethnic and religious grouping where matters of common concern and

community issues can be discussed. At present we have to work through the schools when trying to organise intercultural events. Each year we have a street festival on the June bank holiday weekend. It's organised by the local Chamber of Commerce and is a wonderful showpiece of the cultural diversity of our town and community.

#### **What do the locals think about their “new” (new over the last 50 years) neighbours?**

The reaction of the locals has been overwhelmingly positive and it is a major tribute to their genuine hospitality and Christianity that such a huge number of immigrants have put down their roots here. Occasionally and understandably one hears people, mainly of an older generation, lament the passing of the monolithic cultural environment in which they grew up.

#### **Do the Muslim immigrants participate in the local sports?**

The male Muslim immigrants participate in a variety of sports. Girls participate in primary

school but not so much in secondary schools. The Pakistani males have a good cricket team and some of them participate in a variety of team sports: hurling, Gaelic football, soccer etc.

### **How do the Muslim children get on in the schools?**

By and large the Muslim children get on well and mingle well in both primary and secondary school. Any prejudices that surface from time to time are generally learned at home and perhaps also in the mosque where the message they receive with regard to non-Muslims may not always be ecumenical. This is part of a larger debate which needs to take place in Ireland and elsewhere, i.e. the extent to which we as a Catholic Church have been part of a painful journey with regard to the whole issue of religious freedom that is expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council which recognise that while the Catholic Church regards itself as containing the fullness of truth, other religions contain elements of the truth. (cf. Pope Francis and Grand Imam, Ahmed el-Tayeb sign historic declaration of Peace, Freedom, women's rights on Mon 4th Feb 2019, at Abu Dhabi).

### **What have you learned from this experience of having the highest amount of immigrants of any town in Ireland?**

I have learned that human beings; their needs, hopes and longings are identical regardless of race, creed or culture. We have much to learn from Islam with regard to the use/abuse of alcohol. We have more in common that divides us, e.g. commitment to family, spiritual values, importance of faith etc. Also, I now understand that prejudice is something that is learned. Children, by nature are colour blind and free of prejudice. Racism and religious intolerance is something that is learned.

### **Is there a good relationship between the Catholic priests, and the Muslim imams?**

I am the only priest here in the town. I have a fairly cordial relationship with the imam. However, whenever I go to visit and pray with the Muslim community in the mosque on the important celebrations of Islam e.g. Eid (which marks the end of Ramadan), it is usually at the invitation of some of the Syrian families that know me and who often invite me to their homes; not from the imam himself. I don't know how good is the imam's command of English.

### **Can you describe the main employment for the Muslim community, and any other way that they contribute to the wellbeing of the community?**

Most of the Muslim men work in the local meat processing plants: 'Dawn Meats' (formerly 'Halal Meats') and 'Iman Casing'. The woman's role in Islam is very traditional i.e. the homemaker. Few of the women work outside the home, apart from some of them acting as interpreters etc.

### **Other than the Muslim community, what other significant immigrant populations are there in Ballyhaunis?**

We have a large Eastern European community here; Polish, Lithuanians, Czechs, Slovaks, Croatians. We also have a growing Brazilian community, many of whom are good Catholics. Our recently employed sacristan, Irene, is from Brazil. In the direct provision centre (formerly the Mercy Convent) we have a wide variety of nationalities, mainly from Africa.

### **How do you see the town of Ballyhaunis developing going into the future?**

### **What signs of hope do you have for a continued peaceful integration of the Christian and Muslim communities?**

The work of integration and appreciation of the richness of the diversity in our community will continue into the future. I have asked the principal, chaplain and religion teachers in our Community School to encourage the students from Catholic and Muslim backgrounds to study and discuss together the document on 'Human Fraternity' signed by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam in Abu Dhabi last February. Up until now Muslims have requested and been granted permission to opt out of religion class. I think this is a pity and a great opportunity has been lost to develop an appreciation of each other's faith.

There is a need for the government to provide better facilities here in our community. At present the town doesn't have a hotel, or a community centre, something which is badly needed. The parish hall is used by many groups, but is inadequate for all the demands that are made on it by the various groups.

# My First Year in Maynooth

— By Anthony Moffett —



It is an honor to represent the Dromore Diocese here at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and I am the first seminarian from the diocese to enter in many years. I am a native of the small town of Dromore. I am happy to be a new member of the Maynooth seminary community, which is part of the larger faith community. Dromore Diocese was blessed with the ordination of Fr. Brian Fitzpatrick in 2014 and it is a privilege to follow in his footsteps. Like so many other dioceses, there have been few entering seminary from Dromore.

Studying at Maynooth is a wonderful experience and would not be possible without the support of so many people. The St. Joseph's Young Priests Society has been remarkable in this and I was fortunate enough to meet with many in the Society from all over Ireland at the annual meeting in Dublin during my first semester. Having lived in Maynooth for almost a year now, I have made many new friends, enjoyed lessons in Philosophy and many other formation

practices that take place on a regular basis. I have really enjoyed and learned so much from the amazing speech etiquette classes with Kathryn Smyth.

The feeling of being part of a large family of faith was not only felt entering St. Patrick's but also during a visit to Malta. It was there that I met with other seminarians who, like myself, were on their journey through seminary. Their stories were familiar and encouraging. There are many seminaries around the world who are facilitating the growth and development of seminarians into priests. It is the priests' example and encouragement that guides us through the challenges of seminary life as we learn new skills and develop the habits to be effective priests in today's parishes. I am learning through the formation team about the call to priesthood and understanding it as a vocation. Being at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth is part of an invitation by Christ to come and see. To follow him in a way unlike any other.

# Transition from St. Malachy's, Belfast to St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

By Stephen Ward



*‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old’ (Mat. 13:52).*

Prior to beginning Theology and the Configuration stage of formation, I previously spent two years studying Philosophy (through Maryvale Institute) and Latin at St. Malachy's Seminary in Belfast (otherwise known as “The Wing”). I knew that I was finishing the Discipleship stage of the formation journey there and that I would be moving onto “pastures new.” Although I certainly overlooked, to an extent, how instrumental the time I would spend in the Wing would impact upon my time here in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

Firstly, I was informed prior to coming here that the community would be substantially lower in number than in previous years. On one level this is obviously true, but on another it allows us to see the picture only partially. However, the wisdom I brought with me was developed and blossomed out of and within a community that was certainly much smaller. In my first year in Belfast there were eight seminarians in the house and last year we had three. Now although the smaller numbers may seem daunting in terms of community living, it is through these smaller communities that I learned to live effectively in community. With these much smaller numbers it required a greater intentionality in terms of the means

and methods of engaging with community members. It also meant that we genuinely formed each other due to greater periods of time we spent in community.

Secondly, in terms of the liturgy we were more accustomed to a “noble simplicity” in terms of how they were celebrated. Any liturgical music was delivered unaccompanied for the most part. This didn't prepare me much in terms of transitioning into the way liturgy is celebrated here. But with that came a much-needed freshness and opportunity to enhance one's ability and talent in terms of utilising sacred music. And, personally speaking, meaning realising a talent for singing that perhaps was overlooked and underdeveloped!

Thirdly, coming into a new community meant a need to both climatize and become accustomed to new community members. And this has taken time particularly as the size of the community is much greater than that I have experienced, as I mentioned earlier. However, I have come to find my home in this community. Instead of encountering difficulty, I have encountered opportunity. Opportunity for growth.

# CONGRATULATIONS TO THOSE WHO RECEIVED:

## Ministry of Lector

(conferred by Most Rev. Raymond Field, Auxiliary Bishop of Dublin)



Back Row L-R: Fr Michael Collins, Neal Smith, Michael McCaul,  
David Acksenczuk, Matthew Roche, Stephen Ward  
Front Row L-R: Rev. Anthony Briody, Bishop Raymond Field, Fr Tomás Surlis

## Ministry of Acolyte

(conferred by Most Rev. Thomas Deenihan, Bishop of Meath)



Back Row: Rev. Anthony Briody, Fr Michael Collins  
Front Row: Stephen Ward, Bishop Thomas Deenihan, Fr Tomás Surlis

## ST. JOSEPH YOUNG PRIESTS SOCIETY.

# Encouraging and Supporting Vocations to the Priesthood

*By Dominic Dowling, editor of The Sheaf*



Mass was celebrated in St. Andrew's Church, Westland Row in thanksgiving for the gift of the priesthood on the feast of Christ the King, 25th November 2018.



St. Joseph's Young Priests Society, a lay organisation participating in parish life around Ireland, has helped many hundreds of men to the priesthood. And those hundreds of priests make it possible for thousands and thousands of people to come to know Jesus Christ. Writing this during Holy Week, we are conscious that priesthood is about the mystery of

Good Friday and Easter Sunday – celebrating it in the sacraments, contemplating its implications for our lives, bringing the Good News to the world.

The work for which the Society is best known is that of supporting young men through their seminary training. While not wishing to diminish the dignity and ministry of all God's lay priestly people, we can't deny this welcome lay development in the Church is often portrayed in the media especially, by a declining esteem for the divine origin of ordained priesthood.

But the challenges of our time and the role of the Society go deeper than that. The new situation calls for focus again on the primary role of St. Joseph's Young Priests Society as expressed in its Constitution:

‘to extend the kingdom of God by promoting the vocation of the priesthood.’

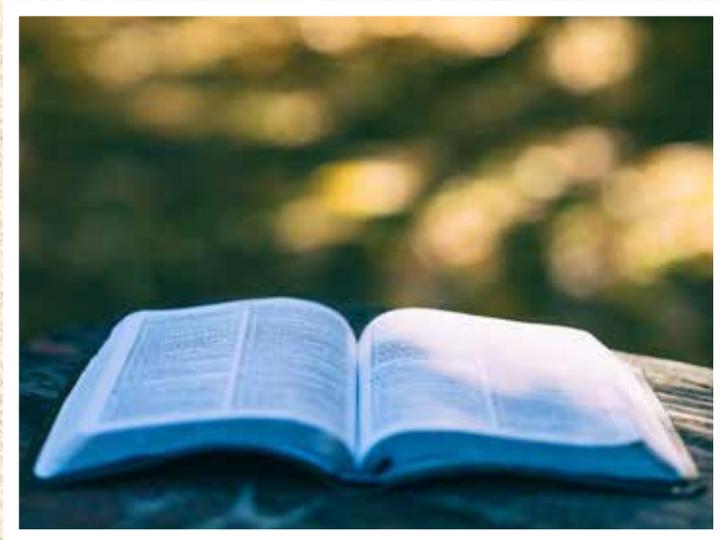
No doubt there is in our country a great deal of generosity, a great deal of concern for justice, a great deal of kindness. The preaching of the Good News, the encouragement of the gifts of the community, the celebration of the mystery of the Eucharist is the ministry of the priest. Valuing that priestly vocation, praying for priestly vocations, and encouraging men to be ready to hear God's call to priestly ministry is as urgent, and necessary now as it has ever been.

As our members see it, a very important part of the task of promoting the priestly vocation is to be unashamed, and open in letting young people see how thoroughly worthwhile we know this vocation to be. Forty years ago a young lad could have been in no doubt that the vast majority of the people around him saw the priesthood as a most marvelous calling. If young people today do not receive that kind of message, especially from those who believe in Christ and live Christian lives, why should we wonder if many of them do not consider the priesthood as a vocation that attracts and inspires them? But we are here to celebrate the truth that it was Jesus, helpless and weak on the cross, who changed the world.

We invite you, dear reader, to assist us in our efforts, especially by your prayer.

# A Female Perspective on the Role of Educating Seminarians

By Dr. Denise Ryan



*Dr. Denise Ryan is an Occasional Lecturer in Philosophy in the Faculty of Philosophy, St Patrick's College, Maynooth.*

I began teaching philosophy in the seminary at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth in 2007. When I was asked to write about my experience as a woman teaching in the seminary, I was reminded of how nervous I felt the first time I stood in front of an all-male class of very enthusiastic first year seminarians. To say I was nervous in those few first weeks is an understatement; but as the weeks went by, I felt very much at home and among friends. They wanted to learn and I was there to assist them in their learning. My own experience of returning to education as a mature student in 1999 stood me in good stead as I could empathise with the challenges they faced as they embarked on their two-year study of philosophy as preparation for their studies in theology.

The first course I taught in the seminary was a reading course on the text of Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio*. On and off over the years I have continued to teach this module, and, on a personal note, on each occasion I have found it to be a very positive experience as the students and I share our thoughts and reflections on the text. The encyclical is also an ideal introduction to understanding the relationship between philosophy and theology, even

if it must be concluded that there will always be a tension but no competition, as Pope St. John Paul II argues in the encyclical, between faith and reason. I have taught other modules which students likewise have found very challenging at times. For example, in *Philosophy of Religion* students sometimes feel challenged to think about their own faith, but the challenge is to think about religion philosophically. It would be naive to believe that students would not find some philosophical arguments about the relation of faith to reason challenging but this is part of their education in philosophy. Indeed some students, when studying *Logic*, express wonder about the relevance of studying this for the priesthood, but I am always very impressed by the reaction of fellow students, after a few weeks, as they defend the value of logic and logical reasoning for helping them think better about the relation of faith to reason and reason to faith. There is, then, I am very happy to say, much evidence, in many different ways, of this year's magazine's theme of 'green shoots, new hope, good things happening in the Church' lived out in the study of philosophy by the seminarians.

# 'Green Shoots'

## in St. Patricks College Maynooth

By Dr. Andrew Meszaros

*'Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands on the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither' (Ps. 1:1–3).*



Cynicism is an easy retreat for one who is confronted with some of the obvious challenges the Church faces today. If the scandal du jour, the blogospheric vitriol, or the greying congregations are the sole measures by which one assesses things, one can easily despair of the Church and the success of her mission.

The first psalm, however, invites us to reflect on the causes of success. Consider a tree that yields its fruit in due season, a tree that is healthy, a tree whose leaves do not wither. What accounts for such a tree? Answer: it is 'planted by streams of water.' It is being fed.

If I look around, I see many trees today who are bearing fruit, and the only explanation for this is that they are being fed. I'm thinking, for example, of some of our highly committed

lay students and seminarians. In the future, they will be Catholic parents and they will be priests. Many of them are very involved at St. Catherine's Society and in various Christian groups, living out the faith with positive enthusiasm. Some of the lay students talk about Jesus to my kids when they babysit, and many of the seminarians give my boys an encouraging high-five after Mass. In these interactions, one gets a glimpse of two younger generations who are bearing fruit. If Psalm 1 is anything to go by, these Christians avoid the counsel of the wicked and delight in the law of the Lord. They are yielding fruit by their commitment to Christ and his Church. And if they're doing this, it is because the people of God has nurtured them.

# True Faith Enriching Friendship Found in Maynooth

*By Lucy Herth*



*Lucy and friends at St. Catherine's centre, NUIM.*

I am from Indiana in the United States of America. In the spring of 2018, I had a truly wonderful semester studying abroad in Maynooth. This semester changed my life as I was set on fire for Our Lord. I made beautiful friendships that were grounded in Christ and experienced the importance of hope. I experienced the beauty of our Catholic faith within the Church in Ireland, and will be forever grateful.

During my first month in Ireland, I did not see many young people at Mass. I felt alone in my faith and began to become discouraged. Before I left America, my Grandma was dying and she gave me her rosary. During this first month, I began praying the rosary every day and began my devotion to Mary. I prayed that she would intercede in my life, that I would find friends who shared the faith, and who I could go to Mass with on Sundays. Much to my delight, my prayers were answered even more than I had hoped. Thanks be to God, I made friends, friends who even went to daily Mass! As I look back on the interactions I had with people and how I came to meet my friends, I can see that it was truly God's work. Through many people who truly loved Jesus, I came to find St. Catherine's Society, Maynooth. It was there that I met several amazing young ladies, the Salesians, and some of the seminarians. The relationships I developed here allowed me to learn what true, authentic friendship

is. They were not just welcoming to me, but they invited me to grow in my relationship with Christ, with them - to go along with them in their journey. We would go to Mass together, play games, share meals, and take trips together. I truly found hope in Ireland that I had lost during the earlier weeks. With the grace of God and through these relationships I was able to grow more into the best version of myself – the person God wants me to be!

I grew in faith, and came to believe that God really does have a plan for every one of our lives. Though we experience trials and tribulations, we are able to learn so much from them. I am so thankful for the opportunity that God gave me in Ireland because I was able to see God's plan for my life unfolding and how it had purpose. I want to share with others the love and the joy that Christ gives me. I long to be a truly authentic friend for others, just like my friends in Ireland were to me, so that others will also form a relationship with Christ. My time in Ireland has helped me to see how important it is to maintain the hope that God will reveal His plan for us. I believe that we all long for the love that only God can give, and Ireland helped me to know this. I am eternally grateful and I pray that the young people of Ireland continue to set people on fire for Our Lord, just like I was!

# *The Legion of Mary*

By John Leonard



Legion of Mary Praesidium at Maynooth University.

In a recent conversation with a fellow seminarian, I was told that during his visit to St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Archbishop Jorge Carlos Patrón Wong, Secretary for Seminaries of the Congregation for the Clergy, remarked that one of the blessings that the seminary has is its neighbouring college, the National University of Ireland, Maynooth.

Being part of a seminary community, and a larger university campus has been a real blessing in the opportunity that it has given me to become involved in the university's societies. One of these societies is the Legion of Mary. It is a real joy to see students come together in the Legion of Mary to develop a deep relationship with Our Lord and Our Lady through prayer, spiritual reading and through contact work with students on campus.

Our contact work in the Legion of Mary mainly consists of promoting Masses, church talks, prayer gatherings and other faith related events that are happening on campus. It is always a real blessing when we meet students who are interested in and excited about the work that we in the Legion are doing and who subsequently come to any events that we are hosting or promoting.

It is a blessing to have the Legion of Mary on campus and it is a great network for evangelisation. I pray that through the intercession of Our Lady, that the members of the Legion of Mary will be brought into closer union with Christ and that they continue to be an effective witness of Christ's teaching to those who they meet on campus.

# Inculturation

By Matthew Roche



*A group of Maynooth seminarians at the Skyline tour of Croke Park.*

Inculturation has become an important term in the life of the Church moving forward in today's world, especially since Vatican II. The Spanish Jesuit Fr. Pedro Arrupe (1907-1991) once described inculturation as 'the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it so as to bring about a new creation' (*On Inculturation: to the Whole Society*, §1).

To be able to immerse oneself in another culture and speak in their language is not just something that sprung out of Vatican II. It has existed from the time of the early Church when the Holy Spirit gave the Apostles the ability to go forth and speak to each person in his or her own language at Pentecost. There is more to this than simply speaking a spoken language; it also includes meeting people where they're at. It goes way back. St. Thomas Aquinas used the writings of Aristotle as a means of communicating the message of the Gospel in his time, when Aristotle's texts were becoming widely used. In our own Irish culture we have imagery of Christ and the four evangelists with Celtic designs such as in the Book of Kells. Sport is also big

when we look back at how the Church had strong links with the GAA in Ireland looking back. And I cannot forget to mention the privilege I find in getting opportunities to proclaim the Word of God at Mass on a Friday in our own national language; *Is leatsa í!*

Vatican II has provided a solid understanding of human culture in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (Latin: "Joy and Hope"). It focused on the universality of the Church's mission of proclaiming the Good News, and underlines that the Church, while being faithful to her Tradition, is not bound exclusively to any race or nation (§58). It encouraged a living exchange between the Church and diverse cultures of people (§44). In the seminary community this experience is evident with some of us being in the English and Scots Colleges in Spain to begin our formation or on soccer trips to Malta this year and Hungary last year. It was great to dive into those other cultures and experience the life of the Church in those countries. As Pope Francis said; 'The immense importance of a culture marked by faith cannot be overlooked' (*Evangelii Gaudium*, §69).

# CLASS PHOTOGRAPHS



**Discipleship stage**, L-R: Neal Smith (Tuam), Michael McCaul (Derry), John Leonard (Down & Connor), Matthew Roche (Elphin), Jordan Mac Gabhann (Kilmore), Mark O'Farrell (Waterford & Lismore), Anthony Hartnett (Raphoe), Seán Murphy (Kerry), Anthony Moffett (Dromore), David Aksenczuk (Down & Connor), Mark Quinn (Tuam), Chris Garrett (Elphin).



**Configuration stage**, L-R: Shane Costello (Tuam), Stephen Ward (Derry), Rev. Ricky O'Connor (Ferns), Mykola Diachuk (Ukraine), Tom Small (Kilmore).

# CLASS PHOTOGRAPHS



**Pastoral year group, L-R: Stephen Wilson (Armagh), John Gerard Acton (Galway), Mark Moriarty (Kerry), Antun Pasalic (Killaloe).**



**Seminary pilgrimage to Church Island, Ballintubber**

# Bealtaine, Mí an Ghealltanais

le Bn. John Henry Newman

*I decided to translate something from Bl. John Henry Newman's writings to celebrate the announcement of his canonisation. Keeping in mind the theme for this year's publication, I took this particular passage which is a reflection on the month of May or, as he calls it, the month of promise ('gealltanais'). Many thanks to my previous bishop, Rev. Philip Boyce, who provided the text (among many others) in his collection of Newman's writings on Mary; also, to my Irish tutor, An tOllamh Fionntán de Brún, who helped me with this translation. – Anthony Hartnett.*



Cén fáth a roghnaítear Bealtaine mar an mhí ina ndéanaimid gníomh cráifeachta ar leith don Mhaighdean Bheannaithe?

Ar an chéad dul síos, is í an uair a chuireann an ithir a duilliúr agus a féar glas amach i ndiaidh sioc agus sneachta crua an gheimhridh, agus glasaimsir agus gaoth agus báisteach fhiáin an earraigh luaithe. Is amhlaidh atá sé mar bíonn na crainn faoi bhláth agus na bláthanna go léir sna gairdíní; bíonn na laethanta ag éirí níos faide, agus éiríonn an ghrian go luath agus téann faoi go mall. Mar is cuí an oiread sin lúcháire agus áthais a bheith orainn as an Nádúr seachtrach chun freastal ar ár ndeabhóid don té arbh í an Rós Rúndiamhair agus Teach an Óir.

D'fhéadfadh duine éigin a rá, "Cinnté, ach san aeráid seo bíonn Bealtaine gruama in amantaí le drochaimsir ag baint léi." Ní féidir linn a shéanadh gurb amhlaidh atá; ach fós, is amhlaidh atá sé gurb í an mhí a bhfuil gealltanais agus dóchas inti ar a laghad. Cé go bhféadfadh an aimsir a bheith go dona, is comhartha í an mhí seo go bhfuil *tús* an tsamhraidh ann. Tá a fhios againne, in ainneoin an méid nach mbeadh deas ann, go bhfuil aimsir bhreá ag teacht, luath nó mall. 'Tá an fhís ag tnúthán', i bhfocail an fáidh, 'lena comhlíonadh agus ní dhéanfaidh sí bréag. Go fiú má bhíonn

sí mall ag teacht, fan léi; mar tiocfaidh sí i gcrích go cinnte; ní theipfidh uirthi choíche' (Hb. 2:3).

Dá bharr sin, murab í mí an chomhlíonta í, is í mí an *ghealltanais* í mí Bealtaine ar a laghad; agus nach é seo an réimse féin a bhaineann leis an Mhaighdean Bheannaithe, Naomh Muire, go hoiriúnach, cé uirthi a gcuimhnímid uirthi sa mhí seo?

Deir an fáidh, 'Tá bachlóg ag eascairt as bun chrann Jesse, agus tá gas ag teacht óna fhréamh' (Is. 11:1). Cé hé an bhláth seo ach ár dTiarna Beannaithe? Cé hé an bhachlóg, an chos, an fréamh nó an planda álainn a dtagann an bláth as, ach Muire, Máthair ár dTiarna; Muire, Máthair Dé?

Tuaradh go dtiocfadh Dia ar an talamh. Nuair a bhí an t-am tagtha, conas a fógraíodh é? Fógraíodh é nuair a tháinig an tAingeal chuig Mhuire. 'Sé do bheatha, atá lán de ghrásta', arsa Gabriel, 'tá an Tiarna leat; is beannaithe thú idir mná.' (Lc 1:28) Ise, mar sin, *gealltanais* cinnte an tSlánaitheora a bhí ag teacht, agus is léi mí na Bealtaine de réir teideal ar leith dá bharr sin.

- ó 'Machnaimh ar Liodán Loreto do mhí na Bealtaine'

# LIGHTFEVER

By Mark O' Farrell



Most Holy Trinity Cathedral, Waterford during Lightfever

## What is Lightfever?

Lightfever is a variation of Nightfever, and it is conducted during the day, whereas Nightfever is held at night. Every weekend around the world, many people invite passers-by to experience God's love and mercy in front of the Blessed Sacrament, by lighting a candle, reading some scripture, saying a prayer, or just sitting quietly in the Lord's presence.

## Why is Lightfever so popular?

Nothing is as exciting as bringing people to the Lord. Lightfever has to be one of the best ways to encourage people to visit the Blessed Sacrament, and say a prayer. Many of the visits admittedly are short, but it is always surprising to see that each time Lightfever is staged, that there are people who have a significant encounter with the Lord, and are very grateful for the opportunity.

It really has to be seen in action to be believed. When people are invited into the chapel to pray they often wonder what is the catch? However, the beauty of Lightfever is that there is "no catch"; just a simple gratuitous invite to spend time with the Lord. It is said of missionary work that the fruits are not easily seen, but with Lightfever the fruits are tangible; although the challenge is to encourage participants to develop a long term personal relationship with the Lord, which is only possible with His help. In Lightfever the Lord is in 'centre stage', and in control, and the silence and meditative music, and prayerful atmosphere, as well as scripture, provide all participants with the opportunity of having a meaningful encounter with Him. Participants often enquire when the next Lightfever is on, which is a good sign.

## How to conduct a Lightfever?

The key to the success of Lightfever is having the support of the local bishop, a host of volunteers, as well as at least one person to be responsible for the event. Volunteers usually wear a high-visibility jacket, and sometimes carry lanterns. This creates an awareness in the vicinity of the chapel that there is an event taking place. The Church is lit with candlelight, and reflective music is played. There is an opportunity for confession, and this occasionally results in people returning opportunistically to the sacrament after a long lacuna.

## Who participates in Lightfever?

Lightfever and Nightfever comprises of many volunteers. Some volunteers stay in the chapel and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament, while others go out in pairs to invite passers-by to light a candle, or say a prayer in the chapel. The music ministry is a vital component of Lightfever, and a rota of volunteer musicians is useful to help cover the length of the session.

## Where and When is Lightfever on?

Lightfever and Nightfever takes place in various places around the country including Cork, Dublin, Galway, Waterford, and Kerry. Lightfever will be held in the Most Holy Trinity Cathedral in Waterford on the following days this year: 1st June, 10th August, 23rd November, 21st December, 28th December.

# The Camino Provides

By Christopher Garrett



Throughout your pilgrimage journey on the camino you hear the expression a lot: “the camino provides.” No matter what difficulties you face along the way, the local people, who treasure the camino as their national heritage, find a way to sort it out for you. It is like having a whole country as your personal support group. It is like nothing you have ever experienced before. Locals shout “¡buen camino!” from cars and honk their horns or dip their lights; passersby ask if you need anything. Whilst on the camino, sadly a 40 year-old died of heat stroke in Extramedura during a heatwave; strangers passed me water bottles unprompted with the advice to be careful, “*hace mucho calor.*” Strangers who are your fellow travelers also support and mentor you; the albergues are a nexus of shared wisdom and camaraderie.

Unknown to each other, two first-year seminarians undertook the camino prior to starting in seminary at St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth in September 2018; one took the Spanish Way (myself, *the Vía de la Plata*), the other the Portuguese Way (Anthony Moffett, the *Camino Portugues*). Although their paths would not cross until they reached seminary, they shared the same experience of those who walk the camino; the beauty of the countryside, the quiet time to reflect, and the life-changing goal of reaching Santiago de Compostela, and praying at St. James the Great’s tomb. Few experiences

in my life will compare with the euphoria tinged with exhaustion, and blistered feet after the 1,004 kilometre walk, and watching the giant *botafumeiro* swing high over my head.

One thing “*perigrinos*” have in common is their enthusiasm for wanting other people to share their experience. Camino Society Ireland is an organization that supports and encourages future pilgrims. In order to receive a certificate (*compostella*) to document you walked the camino you have to complete at least 100 kilometres of the famous route. However, since 2017 anyone who does an Irish camino of at least 25km, can get a Celtic Camino to prove it, and this combined with 75km of the traditional camino walk will allow you to receive a *compostella*. This June myself and Matthew Roche, my co-diocesan, will undertake a camino with our bishop (+Kevin Doran) and 21 young adults from the diocese of Elphin. The pilgrimage will start on the Celtic Camino of St. Kevin’s Way (Glendalough) followed by a camino from A Coruña to Santiago.

Please pray for the safety of all those on pilgrimage as I do daily. If you have any interest in undertaking a camino one can contact the Camino Society of Ireland. I would highly encourage it, and let me wish you a “¡Buen Camino!”

# Children of the Eucharist

**‘Let the children come to me’ (Mat. 19:14)**

Many fabulous initiatives are happening in the Church in Ireland today as a direct response to the challenging times we face. In this interview Mark Quinn Speaks to the Founder of *Children of the Eucharist*, Antoinette Moynihan.

It's late evening on a dark Lenten Tuesday, and Antoinette Moynihan is on the road again. You might expect this busy mother and wife to be picking kids up from sports or grabbing some extra groceries for the morning, but that's not the case for the founder of this unique apostolate. To borrow a commercial phrase it's 'business as usual,' and she is heading for a meeting with another school attracted by what's on offer. She's not selling anything or touting any new products though. What this rep has to offer is Jesus. Alive, real, and present in the Blessed Sacrament.

Well over 300 Schools to date have experienced the ministry of COTE (Children Of The Eucharist) and it is in high demand. So how did this former interior designer go from adorning rooms to adoring hearts?

It all began back in 2012 at the International Eucharistic Conference in Dublin. A powerful spiritual experience had led her from a lukewarm faith back to the Church, and helping out as a volunteer here and there. Together with her husband, Peadar, they had been stationed to help out at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, Merrion Road that week, encouraging young and old to attend an adoration service which was being run during the Congress.

Ironically, what may have seemed to be a small and simple role at the time, would provide the very basis for what Christ was about to call Antoinette to do in a much broader spectrum. "A lot of children were coming out of it [Adoration]

that day and they were asking lots of questions" she explains. "But what really struck me is when they asked if they could come back next year. They really wanted to return and I can't explain it but something stirred in my heart". What stirred Antoinette that day would be far from fleeting and she continued to pray and ponder about what it was exactly that the Lord was calling her to do. "I had no theology or biblical study so I really just felt unworthy and ill-equipped for what the Lord was calling me to do. I had so many doubts, I was frightened" admits the mother of two. "I didn't know where to start, so I just took it to prayer."

It was during this period of discernment that she took a pilgrimage to Knock Shrine. Deep in prayer and asking the Lord what she was to do. It was then that she got her answer. "I just heard him saying 'tell them it's me'" she recalls. "Knock" she says "was the springboard for going forward."

She began initially with two locals schools, introducing them to adoration by bringing biblical stories alive and explaining to the children the beauty of the Sacraments. The response she says was amazing. "The children just took to it so well and what was even more surprising was the reaction of the teachers" she beams.

The ministry blossomed, and invitations began to flow in from her native Meath and then from all over the country. It was something she could never have envisaged. As the apostolate began to grow, Antoinette knew she needed help. In 2015 she was able to employ a full time apostle in Dublin, Aoife Martin, thanks solely to donations and a generous benefactor who witnessed the fruits of this profound mission. Antoinette herself still maintains a completely voluntary



role within the apostolate as do another 250 lay-ministers throughout the country. “A lot of this is down to the lay ministers on the ground” she admits. “We have ministers now covering North, South, East and West of the country, and we are in England and Scotland at present.” Another key figure is Helen Hand who fills the role of Core Leader within the project. Joining COTE in 2012, Antoinette describes Helen and Aoife as not only central ministers, but also as great personal friends.

The role of each lay-minister is to follow up on the ground work that Antoinette, Aoife and Helen carry out. This means that they can work with the children every 3-4 weeks after the initial visit for Adoration and prayer so that there is always a continuity. So what does working with the children entail? “It’s usually Communion or Confirmation classes, but we work with all classes. It involves a PowerPoint presentation and lots of visuals. We talk about Baptism for example and Jesus in the Jordan. We bring the stories of Jesus’ life to them.”

But what is the response of the kids and what do they make of it considering that we are living in a more secularised society today? “It’s so authentic and so simple. They love God, they Love Jesus and they want to know him. Many of these kids are so thirsty for God. They have so many good questions. They might ask you, for example, where our sins go. To this we would show them the Sacred Heart and explain that our sins are burned in the fire of the Sacred Heart. It’s important to use metaphors that children can understand” she explains.

Each session with the children lasts approximately one hour and includes music, explanation of the monstrance, biblical stories, reflections and of course quite prayer time.

They take the children to the church whenever possible. It is at this quiet time that some truly spine-tingling experiences have emerged. “I tell them (the children) to listen for Jesus and watch for him. What they come back with afterwards is truly amazing. Even the teachers are in shock with what the kids say” she recalls with a joyful chuckle.

What is equally striking is that Children Of The Eucharist has never needed any advertisement or commercial clout. It is all simply word of mouth, and of course the team’s own time spent in adoration is “a key to its success” she says. And a success it clearly is. Antoinette is soon to fly out to Malta to introduce COTE there and will appear on EWTN’s *At Home With Jim & Joy*. Such is the reach of this mission. No mission like this would survive either without deep personal reflection and guidance. Antoinette and her team are blessed to have Fr. Lawrence Joseph Schroedel, CFR on board. Fr. Lawrence will be familiar to many as one of the Franciscans Friars of The Renewal based in Moyross, Co. Limerick. He was immediately drawn to the charism of COTE and was delighted to become part of it.

Children Of The Eucharist is a true positive example of a lay-run initiative which, rooted in adoration, will be a key component in the mission the Church has ahead in this country. It’s simple, it’s impressive, it’s inspiring, it works, and it has one mission.....“Tell them it is me.”

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# A Reflection from the 2018 Christmas Carol Service

On the night the Titanic sank, it had received several signals from passing ships warning that it was sailing straight into an ice field. In fact, there were so many warnings, the radio officer curtly replied to a passing ship to stop jamming the signals. The rest, as they say, is history.

We too have been receiving the signals and warnings. As recently as a fortnight ago David Attenborough, in stark apocalyptic terms, stated the following: *“Right now, we are facing a man-made disaster of global scale. Our greatest threat in thousands of years. Climate Change. If we don’t take action the collapse of our civilizations and the extinction of much of the natural world is on the horizon. ... Time is running out.”* Attenborough echoed what people such as Al Gore, Mary Robinson, our own John Sweeny (MU) and Lorna Gold (Trócaire) have been warning us for some time now, the ‘inconvenient truths’ about the effects of our behaviour on our beautiful world. Friends, we need to heed the modern-day prophets of climate change if we are to be reconciled with creation!

Kyoto, Rio, Paris and more recently Katowice warn us that, unless we have what Pope Francis calls an “ecological conversion” much of the earth will be uninhabitable for humans in 100 years or at best a painful place to live.

The facts speak for themselves. Already sixty percent of plant and animal species that evolved over billions of years have been wiped out in the last fifty years. For example this week we heard the reindeer population has halved in the last twenty years due to the rise in temperature melting ice, changing migration routes,

causing longer summers, wildfires and mosquito carrying malaria. And, if every family in the world consumed the same as an average Irish family consumes today we would need 3.3 planets to supply our needs and this is simply not sustainable. We must not continue to live as if the world’s resources were infinite! Yet, despite the signals, for many of us our effect on the planet is not a priority.

The quality of life, our world, the planet, the tomorrow of our children is shaped by what we do today. We have about 12 years to cut our carbon emissions in half before we begin to lose control of the situation. As we wonder what to gift our children, let us reflect on what kind of world we want to leave to the next generation. This planet is on loan to every generation, a precious gift we must hand on.

Science, technology and politics all play important roles in tackling the complex ecological and climatic crisis for creating a world habitable for our children. But the question what kind of world to we want our children to inherit has also to address deeper questions: What is the purpose of our life in this world? What are the values to live by, our sense of justice for the earth, what does it mean to uphold the dignity of the human person? What is our place in relation to creation? Isaiah provoked this kind of reflection in his day. He spoke the inconvenient truth to the political and economic elites of his time. He challenged their numbed indifference to the greed and exploitation of the poor and vulnerable. Unbridled greed and gratification by the privileged had overridden justice and solidarity. They had forgotten their covenant with God and the holiness that sets limits on human



*Uachtarán na h-Eireann, Michael D. Higgins with the President of St. Patrick's College, Rev. Prof. Michael Mullaney, and the President of Maynooth University, Prof. Phillip Nolan together with members of the Schola Gregoriana on the occasion of the Annual Carol Service, 19th December 2018.*

choices that violate God's purposes only at a great cost. Human exploitation leads to environmental devastation. For at the heart of the ecological crisis is a flawed anthropology (Francis in *Laudato Si*); for the external deserts in the world grow when the internal deserts become so vast (Benedict XVI in his Inaugural Address). Isaiah speaks of a landscape withered and wasted; an earth that shrivels and dries up and can no longer sustain creation.

Again tonight, Isaiah's inconvenient truths reach down to us from the heavens and challenge a rapacious developed world and its exploitation of the developing world! His words span the great chronological and cultural distance to reach our ears in Maynooth 2018. With the benefit of scientific knowledge, we know his truths are still valid: when our human choices are not good, neither is the future of creation. A mysterious holiness sets limits to human freedom and predatory greed.

A beautiful antiphon echoes in Advent: *Pour down you heavens from above. Let the clouds rain forth the Just One*; and the Advent prayer is answered in the Gospel tonight: the Word made flesh.

Christmas celebrates the Creator who enters creation as 'Word made flesh.' In this Godly action, all cosmic and biological evolution since the Big Bang has its nucleus in tender and vulnerable body of a child. The genetic history of the Child of Bethlehem, the 'Word made

flesh', reaches back to our single-celled ancestors that emerged from water to evolve into plants, creatures and humans. 'Word made Flesh' rearranges the landscape of our imagination to know that our human connection to nature is deep. In this divine action, God enters in solidarity with all humanity and with every living creature, all creation! God hears not only the cry of the poor but also the cry of the earth. To paraphrase the angels' announcement: **Glory to God in the highest heavens and peace to God's people and peace to God's earth.**

Friends, the Word becomes flesh anew when our relationship with each other and all living creatures are in peace and harmony, just and gentle. When we think this way about it, we can dare to hope still in the flourishing of human life and creation.

Then the poetic words of Isaiah that will grace our ears and fill our hearts tonight may also become flesh in our time: *Let the dry lands exult, let the wastelands rejoice, let it bring forth flower like the jonquil. .... I will make the rivers well up on the barren heights. In the wilderness, I will plant cedar trees, myrtles, olives. ... The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard lies down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.*

**Rev. Prof. Michael Mullaney,  
President of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.**

# Signs of Hope

## Rolling out *Laudato Sí* in the Irish Church

By Lorna Gold

Ever since the publication of *Laudato Sí: On Care for our Common Home* in May 2015, in Ireland there has been a strong sense that we must do something significant to ensure that this letter does not remain mere words on paper. *Laudato Sí* is widely regarded outside the Church as one of the most important statements from a public figure on the global ecological and social crisis, and puts forward a clear vision of how this needs to be addressed. The 'Lines of Approach and Action' range from proposals of policy change and ecological education, to a radical shift in how we pray as the people of God and addressing practical sustainability issues in our churches. It offers both a cogent analysis and a sign of hope for the world today.

The task of bringing *Laudato Sí* to life within the Church in Ireland initially seemed very daunting. The Irish Church has not been without its challenges in recent times: Church attendance is declining (albeit from a very high level in Ireland), clergy are aging and severely over stretched, and the role of religion in public life is shifting. Moreover, despite the ancient roots of Irish Christianity in Celtic understanding of the cosmos and nature, the connection to nature in the prayer life and liturgy of the Church is striking in its absence. *Laudato Sí*, it seemed, risked being seen as an irrelevance to the vast majority of Catholics.

Against this backdrop, those involved in justice, peace and creation care in the Church felt a major step was required if *Laudato Sí* was to be brought to life. A group met to discuss our concerns shortly after the launch of *Laudato Sí* and proposed setting up a working group on the encyclical. In September 2016, a group was established under the Council for Catechetics and represents the rich diversity of the Church in Ireland. Amongst those involved are scholars and experts in the areas of theology, climatology, international development, pastoral work and education. Almost all of the members were lay people who gave their time voluntarily.

Over the past two and a half years the group has gone from strength to strength, awakening the urgent call to action in *Laudato Sí* across the Church. A key approach of the group has been to provide materials for reflection and in-service trainings to clergy and staff of the Church – starting with the bishops. The entire Bishops Conference received a



Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle preaching to pilgrims at the World Meeting of Families 2018 about *Laudato Sí*.

one-day training in February 2018, as part of their preparation for Pope Francis' visit to Ireland. This in-service has been critical in plugging gaps that exists in theological formation – which is a big obstacle in moving *Laudato Sí* forward. With this foundation set, many other very significant initiatives then followed. These initiatives ranged from incorporation of in the World Meeting of Families to the adoption of the annual Season of Creation across the whole Church.

One decision that stands out is the bishops' conference commitment to divest their financial resources from fossil fuels. Having understood the message of *Laudato Sí* and its call to 'shift away from fossil fuels without delay' (§165), the *Laudato Sí* group, supported by the expertise of Trócaire which has led a national divestment campaign, proposed to the Finance and General Purposes Council that it would be opportune for the bishops to make a statement on fossil fuels. The motion was passed without objection and received the backing of the full Bishops Conference in June 2018. The announcement was made in Christchurch Cathedral on the eve of Pope Francis visit to Ireland.

Since then, the movement to bring *Laudato Sí* to life has continued to grow. In April 2019, the first in a series of regional meetings was held in Dromantine to explore how the ecological message of *Laudato Sí* can be brought into parish and diocesan life. The day had the spirit of a synodal type process, where parishioners gathered with bishops and clergy to explore how to integrate the message of ecology with our parish life, and bring much needed hope in tackling the threat of ecological collapse. Four more such regional meetings are planned for the coming year.

# Rector's Homily for Patron's Day Evening Prayer

St Mary's Oratory  
Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## **The Deer's Cry**

I arise today through the strength of heaven  
Light of sun, radiance of moon  
Splendor of fire, speed of lightning  
Swiftness of wind, depth of the sea  
Stability of earth, firmness of rock

I arise today through God's strength to pilot me  
God's eye to look before me  
God's wisdom to guide me  
God's way to lie before me  
God's shield to protect me

From all who shall wish me ill  
Afar and a-near  
Alone and in a multitude  
Against every cruel, merciless power  
That may oppose my body and soul

**Lyrics from Shaun Davey's *The Pilgrim***

We are lucky enough to have two pieces of writing from Patrick's Hand 1550 years after his death: his *Confessions* and his *Letter to Coroticus*. Among the most famous of the words he penned, the ones I've just quoted, perhaps more than any other words of St Patrick, give us an insight into the measure of the man. Quite simply, St Patrick was a mystical genius, so much so that less than one hundred years after his death, Ireland had become Christian and – unique among the nations of the world – without bloodshed. Somehow, Patrick tapped into the soul of the Gael and he recognised there a touch of the divine – a spark of truth that could be fanned into a flame that has continued to burn bright for one and a half millennia.

In the sacred oak groves and high places of sacrifice, around the holy wells, in the celebrations

of equinox and solstice, in the worship of the sun, Patrick recognised that the pagan Irish had a profound sense of the presence of the divine all around them but they were full of fear. What they were lacking was faith in a personal God, who knew each of them by name and who wanted to make His home, not in rocks, rivers and woods but in the hearts of those to whom He had sent His Son as Teacher, Healer and Saviour.

And so, Patrick did not do what missionaries were so often wont to do: he did not destroy the rituals and the holy places of the Irish people. Rather, he brought the light of Christ's message, filled with truth and beauty: he literally en-lightened the Irish and their holy places and their holy habits. He told them that he had come to tell them about a King who was born in a cave and who lived, not



in a lofty palace but in the midst of His people – just like the Celtic Kings did. He told them that they worshipped the sun which would one day fade away and die but that he worshipped the Bright Sun of Heaven who would never die: the Son of God. And he traced a cross through their symbol for the sun – the circle – and thus was born the Celtic Cross. He baptised them at their holy wells and gave Christian meaning to their major feasts: the fire of the druids became the Paschal Fire of Easter; Lughnasa became the patterns and pilgrimages to holy places and Samhain – a time of terror and fear for the Celts – became the feast of All Souls and All Saints.

Having lived among the Irish for so long in his youth, Patrick had come to know their ways and to love their culture and it was this love that had the power to change hearts, purify habits and convince people of the truth of the Gospel message he preached. We have much to learn from Patrick in the Church in Ireland today. Before ever we convince others by our words, we must first witness to the love of God by our actions. As Pope Paul VI famously said: “The modern person listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if s/he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.” Patrick was both teacher

and witness. He lived the words he spoke. He loved the people he walked amongst and he spent his life sharing with them from the rich treasury of grace that is the Catholic faith and the sacramental life of the Church. We too are called to witness, as Patrick did, to the beauty of the faith of our ancestors, not by bemoaning how things have changed, nor by wishing for a future that may never be ours. Our task is the same as that of St. Patrick and the thousands of saints and scholars who followed after him: to love those whom God has placed as our companions on the path of life; to show by our prayer-filled actions the truth of the words we speak and to equip ourselves with the skills necessary to do God’s work wherever we are, whenever we can and however we are able. To immerse ourselves in the two-fold mission of this College that of Catholic Education and Priestly Formation and to involve ourselves in the life of the Church and of the community at local level is a very good place to begin. Each us can, like St. Patrick did, greet each day by asking Christ to be with us in every moment and in every aspect of our lives and to help us to recognise His presence within us and all around us. This is the best possible way in which to honour our patron. With him we pray:

Christ with me, Christ before me  
Christ behind me, Christ in me  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down  
Christ when I arise, Christ to shield me

Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me  
Christ in the mouth of everyone who speaks of me

**Fr Tomás Surlis, Rector**

# Psalmus Invitatorius

By Neal Smith



This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Maynooth Choral Society, and to mark this happy occasion, Maynooth Music Professor Martin O’Leary was commissioned to write a special piece for the Society’s spring concert. The text chosen for this composition was Psalm 94, the invitatory psalm prayed by thousands of priests, religious, and laity around the world as the first psalm that passes their lips every morning. The music that Dr. O’Leary created for this text, which sought to bring forth the powerful emotions present therein, incorporated four brilliant soloists, a small orchestra, Schola Gregoriana Maynooth, and the Maynooth Chamber Choir, as well as the Choral Society itself.

Throughout the piece, these very different groups of musicians continuously build on each other as they are drawn together into a compelling tapestry of verbal and musical expression that captures the central themes of the text. This includes the strong sense of praise and worship for God that opens and closes the piece, and recurs throughout as well. Specific sections

demonstrate the immanence and creative power of the Lord, He Who holds all the heavens and the Earth in His hands. The soloists especially project the anger and exasperation of God at the hard hearts of Israel at Meribah and Massah, though this strand does not assert itself over the rest of the piece.

It was a privilege and joy for the Choral Society and the other musicians who took part to present the world premiere of this magnificent work of music, which reflects the strong musical tradition long present in Maynooth. The piece was debuted alongside Mozart’s Requiem in the College Chapel, and was accompanied by a flood of exuberance as the emotion of the piece and the emotion of the moment combined when Dr. O’Leary expressed his gratitude to the many musicians who brought his many months of composition finally to life before his eyes. Though not a liturgical piece, *Psalmus Invitatorius* truly brought the invitatory psalm itself to life, and it is a composition that will not be soon forgotten.

# ‘PRAISE HIM WITH TIMBREL AND DANCE; PRAISE HIM WITH STRINGS AND PIPES’

(Ps. 150:6)

By Jordan Mac Gabhann



*Bishop Campbell*  
(credit Kilmore Pastoral Centre)



*Br. Gildas* (credit NPU)

When the Bible mentions ‘pipes’ it is most probably speaking of some sort of simple perforated wind instrument, played at Hebrew banquets and funerals. Some say that it could even be referring to an ancient ancestor to the pipe organ. Like the Hebrews and most other cultures, we Irish have our own national pipes; namely the uilleann pipes. Assuming their modern form in the early-19<sup>th</sup> century, the uilleann pipes were recognised by UNESCO in 2017 as an important and unique cultural symbol of Irish heritage. What separates the uilleann pipes from its primitive cousins is its complexity and sophistication. Characteristically, the uilleann pipes’ air supply is not conditioned by human lungs like other bagpipes, but rather by bellows strapped around the piper’s waist and right elbow (Gaeilge: “uilleann”). Because the mouth is free, some pipers can sing or even converse while playing. Air is pumped from the bellows into the bag which is squeezed by the piper’s left arm, and causes the reeds inside the instrument to vibrate and make sound. This sound is manipulated and the melody is created by the main pipe, the chanter when the piper opens or closes the holes with his fingers. The chanter is played on the knee, but must be lifted off the knee to play the lowest note. Three other pipes known

as drones make one note each, and accompany the melody with a continuous humming noise. Three additional pipes known as regulators allow the piper to harmonise his tune by pressing down on keys with his right wrist. The regulators made it possible for some clergymen to use the uilleann pipes as a substitute for a harmonium, or church organ. Because of this, and the wealth of sound they have at their disposal, the uilleann pipes are sometimes called the “Irish organ.”

“There’s something different about the uilleann pipes” says Mick O’Brien, one of Ireland’s most beloved pipers. “When you listen to its sound, it enters your heart. The sound goes right through your entire body.” It is a beautiful, and almost mystical instrument that captures the soul of the Irish musical tradition like no other; and it is one that many priests have contributed greatly to. One remarkable character is Rev. Dr. Andrew Campbell (1711-1769), Bishop of Kilmore. During his bishopric, Catholicism was outlawed by the Penal Laws and priest-catchers scoured the countryside. However, Bishop Campbell availed of his skills as a piper and disguised himself as a wandering minstrel, while actually ministering to the spiritual needs of his flock. Nonetheless, one

source remarks of Bishop Campbell; ‘Was not this priest a true minstrel, think ye? For he did not counterfeit the minstrel, but was one indeed.’ His portrait still adorns the walls inside his successors’ residence.

An article about contributors to the uilleann piping tradition would be incomplete without mentioning the Anglican, Canon James Goodman (1828-1896). A native of Dingle, Co. Kerry, he was Professor of Irish at Trinity College, Dublin. Canon Goodman was an accomplished, self-taught uilleann piper who’s house was a bit of a musical Mecca for poor and perplexed uilleann pipers of all religions looking to have their instruments put in order. He is responsible for compiling a manuscript of over 2,000 tunes from Munster pipers. Canon Goodman requested his beloved uilleann pipes to be buried with him when he died, but it was thought a pity that such a set of pipes would lie in a grave. So just days after the Canon’s burial, his pipes came “back from the grave” if you will, for another generation of pipers to play.

Another piping priest was the Irish-American Fr. John A. Hemlock. Born in an emigrant settlement near Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1855 to Kinsale parents, he was a native Irish-speaker. However, he also spoke German so correctly that his Irishness was not expected by many of his parishioners in St. Bridget’s Church, Chicago. Clerical isolation and exclusiveness of the time did not influence this multi-instrumentalist priest’s love for Irish music and the uilleann pipes. Musicologist, Francis O’Neill says; ‘An ideal sagart though he be – cheerful, kindly, and sympathetic – it seems little short of sinful and calamitous to maroon in an obscure American town a man of Fr. Hemlock’s exceptional artistic endowments.’ Fr. Hemlock did not come to his flock as an authoritative ruler, but rather as a fellow musician, ready to serve with his talents.

Perhaps one of the most fascinating piping clerics is Br. Gildas O’Shea, FSC (1882-1960). Born in Ballinskelligs, Co. Kerry, he is generally more associated with Belfast where he taught at the De La Salle School. Br. Gildas is remembered for his eccentric piping style, whereby he would come to a pleasant note in the tune (“C” was his favourite), and he would dwell on it long enough for him to make the sign of the cross; probably to the disdain of many dancers. Br. Gildas was a regular visitor to umpteen Catholic and Protestant

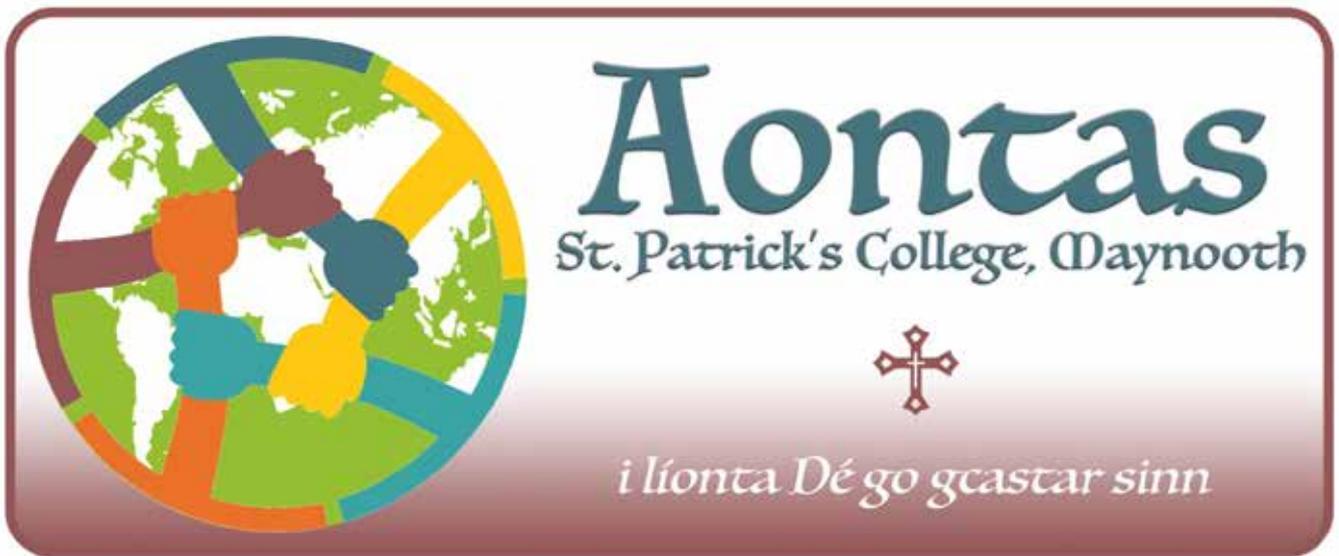


Fr. Darragh Connolly

homes in which a fellow-piper lived. The spectacle of a De La Salle Brother staying in Protestant houses in early-20<sup>th</sup> century Northern Ireland must have raised eyebrows. However, his attitude is remembered by one host; “He liked the person, he was interested only in the person, he wasn’t interested in anything else. He was that type of man.” Music was, for Br. Gildas, a unifying gift from God. There was many a Belfast child that fell asleep to the sound of Br. Gildas’ southern brogue and evening piping sessions.

Fr. Darragh Connolly of the Kilmore Diocese is perhaps the only priest keeping the tradition of piping clerics alive today. A native of Killeshandra, Co. Cavan, Fr. Darragh was taught uilleann pipes by the great Belturbet piper, PJ Flood after whom the annual PJ Flood Festival is named. During his formation in St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, Fr. Darragh filled the beautiful College Chapel with equally beautiful music from his uilleann pipes during the liturgies, helping his fellow seminarians to praise God. Not only is Fr. Darragh a skilled uilleann piper but he is also an accomplished tenor, utilising both his pipes and voice in his 2018 album, *I Hear You Calling Me*. For more information on Fr. Darragh’s many musical endeavours, visit [darraghconnolly.com](http://darraghconnolly.com)

These are just some of the men of the cloth who have contributed greatly to the uilleann piping tradition. To relate it back to the magazine’s theme; perhaps it could also be argued that the uilleann piping tradition has been a “green shoot” for the Church through these holy men who used their talents to praise God and serve their fellow man. As Pope St. John Paul II noted; “The highest music is what comes from our hearts.” Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the piper can enkindle joy in our hearts with reels and jigs, but the mellifluous sound of a slow air on the uilleann pipes does have the potential to encourage ecstatic and glowing prayer.



*By Shane Costello*

*Aontas* is a Maynooth Seminary charitable association aimed at forging links with seminarians in developing countries through spiritual and financial support.

*Aontas* (meaning “union” in Irish) was founded in 1989 and since then has raised thousands of euro which have contributed towards the formation of priests all over the world.

Fundraising initiatives enable us as a committee to promote the work of the association. These include a weekly Bonus Ball lotto, raffles, Christmas card sales and much more.

Over the years *Aontas* has supported various seminaries in countries like China, Zimbabwe,

Nigeria, Zambia, India, Peru and Burma. In 2018 the association donated €600.00 to a seminary in Cameroon and this year €1,500 was raised for the major seminary in Adigrat, Ethiopia for the purchase of computers.

Our spiritual support is enhanced through praying the *Aontas Prayer for Seminarians* written by Cardinal Tomás Ó Fiaich. We also have an annual Evening Prayer service.

The association would like to thank all those who have supported our work this year. Please God, *Aontas* will continue to make a valuable contribution to the Universal Church in the years ahead.

**Aontas Prayer for Seminarians**

Father,  
 You have chosen men throughout the world to be shepherds of your people.  
 Ease their burdens and make their faith strong, that they may have confidence in your gentle care.  
 Enhance their human dignity and enable them to face difficulties with courage.  
 Through them may the compassion of Your Son, Jesus Christ, heal the wounds of sin and division.  
 Amen.

+*Tomás Ó Fiaich*  
 Collegium Sancti Patrici apud Maynooth  
 XVI.IV.MCMLXXXIX

# The Sacred Triduum

St Patrick's College Chapel

18<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> April 2019

The entire college community once again experienced the great blessing of celebrating the Sacred Triduum in the magnificent College Chapel and was delighted to welcome family members and friends of the college who joined the worshipping community for the Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday; the celebration

of the Lord's Passion on Good Friday and the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday. We are grateful to Fr Michael Collins (Director of Formation), Fr Tomás Surlis (Rector) and Fr Michael Mullaney (President) for permission to publish the homilies delivered during the Triduum.

## Homily at Holy Thursday Mass of the Lord's Supper

18<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Before heading off on his expedition to the Antarctica, Ernest Shackleton in an effort to recruit a crew is reported to have placed an advertisement in the London Times. The ad supposedly ran:

*"Crew wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success."*

I think we would all agree not the most likely job description to attract a multitude of applicants. Not the kind of job description one is likely to read on LinkedIn or be issued by a recruitment agency nowadays.

But maybe there is wisdom in Shackleton's newspaper ad. Only a particular type of person would be attracted or inspired by such a job spec. Only people of a particular disposition would even consider applying for such a role. Only people with the "why" of adventure would be enthused by such a prospect. And signs on, despite their failure and the horrors they had to endure as a crew, nobody died on this expedition, everybody made it home. Shackleton found people who believed, or grew to believe, what he believed in and that made all the difference.

While we gather to celebrate the "Mass of the Lord's Supper" ironically the Gospel contains no description of the meal itself. There is no

account of Jesus taking of bread and wine, breaking, pouring and sharing with his disciples.

Maybe with some distance, John when writing his Gospel saw that initially it was easy to attract people to Christianity of the “outer garment” or the vestment. But does such a presentation of our faith enthuse?

A Christianity of the “outer garment” holds the potential to hide the Body of Christ. It may attract, but will it ever bestow meaning? It may give a sense of “what” we are about, but it may hide the profound “why” that guides us. And so, we read in the Gospel of John, Jesus took “off his outer garment” so as to serve.

Everything about this evening’s liturgy asks us to look again. It is an invitation to change our perspective. It is a call to look differently in the hope of seeing something new. What Jesus does in John’s account of this meal turns everything upside-down and inside out. And in doing so reveals a profound understanding of Eucharist. It gives meaning to the breaking of the bread. It moves us beyond “what” happened to “why” Jesus did what he did. It moves us beyond mere ceremony to a life changing ritual.

We are moved out of role, and into servanthood and solidarity; key components of any Christian life. Unfortunately, like Shackleton’s add, on initial reading of Jesus’ description of what it is to be a follower of his is not an instant sell. Servanthood and solidarity don’t sit easily. Suddenly a weekly commitment to breaking bread and pouring wine is much more doable. And so it is. But Eucharist not fed with service and solidarity soon loses meaning and quickly loses the ability to truly nourish.

I wonder why the “Washing of Feet” was never made a sacrament?

This act of service by Jesus recalibrates everything. It begins to recalibrate a vision of Jesus, and of God’s plan that will ultimately be shattered on Calvary.

If Peter and the disciples believed they were being gifted authority, now they are told, I am gifting you the opportunity to serve. If they believed that being a disciple meant putting oneself in the inner circle; by the washing of feet Jesus gifts them the key and the pathway to leave the inner circle and stand with the marginalised. In fact, by what Jesus does he shows us how “in memory

of me” we ought to stand with the slave.

If Peter felt he was finally gaining control of his life, Jesus by washing his feet brings him to that very vulnerable place where he is exposed to the undeserved and unearned love of another. That place in our relationships where worthiness and our efforts, have no traction. Where we are totally reliant on being gifted a second chance, gifted love when we least deserved it. If you have experienced such love you know why Peter initially pulled back. It is hard to accept. You know you have received this priceless gift when you can gift the same yourself!! It is “do this in memory of me” in another light.

And just when we think we have enough of Jesus redrawing the parameters of what it is to be a follower, from the corner of our eye we catch sight of Judas. Remember, Jesus washed his feet too!! This brings turning the other cheek to a whole new level. And guess what we too are invited to “do this in memory of me”

Keep an eye out for the different feet that walk with you, the feet that have left a footprint in your life but are no more; the feet that danced, that ran and that stood with you. Those feet that tippy toe or trod their way through your life. The feet you long to meet and stand toe to toe with. Even the feet that kick every now and again.

Maybe there is an invitation for us all to take off our “outer garment”, that which isolates us from service and solidarity. To remove that “outer garment” so as to reveal that vulnerable space where we both gift and receive love in a Christlike way. The kind of love prompts us to “do everything in memory of Jesus”.

This will happen when we believe, or when we grow to believe in the “why” of Christ’s life. And when we do it will make all the difference.

Shackleton on his return from his Endurance Expedition in 1917 wrote the following which is not a bad summary of the journey we are about to begin in these sacred days: “*We had pierced the veneer of outside things. We had “suffered, starved, and triumphed, grovelled down yet grasped at glory, grown bigger in the bigness of the whole” We had seen God in his splendours, heard the text that Nature renders. We had reached the naked soul of man*”.

*Fr. Michael Collins, Director of Formation,*

# Homily at Good Friday Celebration of the Lord's Passion

*RTÉ Live Broadcast from the College Chapel*

19<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Modern psychology and Christian Tradition agree that suffering is an experience that touches all of us at one time or another. Some experience it as loss, others as a broken heart; some, as illness, others as a shattered dream.

2000 years ago, to eyes, blinded by fear and ignorance, the figure of a naked man hanging on a cross was that of a dangerous criminal, a fomenter of rebellion, someone who had to die so that a nation could be saved.

To the eyes of faith, He is the scourge of injustice, the true breaker of chains, the healer of wounds who freely gives His life so that the whole world might be saved. Made manifest unexpectedly, Jesus is the hidden beauty of God who bridges the ancient gulf between heaven and earth.

Joseph Mary Plunkett (1887-1916) expresses it beautifully in his mystical poem, *I See His Blood Upon The Rose*:

I See his blood upon the rose  
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,  
His body gleams amid eternal snows,  
His tears fall from the skies.

I see his face in every flower;  
The thunder and the singing of the birds  
Are but his voice—and carven by his power  
His tears fall from the skies.

All pathways by his feet are worn,  
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,  
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,  
His cross is every tree,<sup>1</sup>

Plunkett's insight is born of Gaelic Christian spirituality which saw signs of God's presence everywhere. So much so that the Fuschia bush is known as Deoirí Dé – the blood-stained tears of God. Our ancestors knew that God is with us in every moment of our pilgrim journey through the fog of loneliness and doubt into the bright clear light of Truth where our 'Why?' finds an answer and our longing a home.

Our Christian forebears knew that, far from being distant and unconcerned about our struggle and our pain, in Jesus God takes human fear and our battle with sin upon Himself and in what one writer calls a "divine alchemy" he transforms the base metal of our human longings into the gleaming gold of the divine dignity that can be ours when we unite ourselves to Jesus on the Cross.

United with all those ar shlí na firinne who have placed their trust in the Cross of Christ, we pray this day that God will gift us with faith to be able to recognise His presence in the face of suffering.

When the spectre of meaninglessness threatens to smother hope and the dull ache of pain drowns out the song of joy, recall us to your great act of trust, Lord Jesus, so that we too might commit our spirit into the Father's hands and join with you at journey's end in celebrating the triumph of the Cross in a peace that knows no end. Amen.

*Fr Tomás Surlis, Rector*

1. See, Nicholson & Lee, eds. *The Oxford Book of English Mystical Verse* (1917), no.342.

# Easter Vigil Homily

*RTÉ Live Broadcast from the College Chapel*

20<sup>th</sup> April 2019

“Christ is alive!” The core truth of this night is that God does not lose! God ultimately wins! The power of death in all its forms is smashed; it has lost its strangling grip. “Christ is alive!” And he is on the loose! Everywhere you look and everything you hear tonight proclaims this: a fragile and flickering flame defies the darkness; the Easter Exsultet trumpets the victory of life over death!

God makes a way out of dead ends! In each of the readings tonight, God makes a way out of no way! In Genesis, God creates life out of chaos; light out of darkness; in God’s incomprehensible ask of Abraham to sacrifice his only child Isaac - his purpose unfolds beyond our comprehension; in Exodus, The cries of the brutalized and enslaved Israelites, he hears and delivers!

God never fails to deliver from death or darkness or despair. New life is possible wherever God’s power is at work: an irresistible and irrepressible power that dazzles our reasoning and astonishes our imaginations.

“Christ is Alive!” proclaims the recent letter from Pope Francis calling the young to renew the Church and the world. The young see pathways where others only see walls; potential where others see only problems; a future where others believe there is no possibility.

The power of the resurrection enables us all to be young again, to be born again. Why are you growing older and older in an alien land? The prophet Baruch, tonight, asks the exiled Israelites who: feel abandoned and forgotten by God; begun to lose heart in their faith; were losing hope in the future. They are growing old.

Years or age don’t make us old. We grow old when our hearts are: hardened by indifference; coarsened by cynicism; disheartened by the world; when we can no longer see joy in the future. Hearts grow old long before their time by disillusionment, grief, hurt. We doubt the promise of Easter and fear that evil,

corruption, violence, darkness are always winning.

The promise of Easter is a fresh heart, as the Lord promises in Ezekiel; the gift of a new spirit, belief in the power to become young again through love. The promise of Easter is the power that makes new life possible: puts a fresh heart into all the places where we have grown tired and old; a heart of flesh to replace the heart of stone in those relationships where we have grown hardened and bitter.

The resurrection is a divine generosity that outruns our hopes and human expectations and enables: new possibilities in all our failed places; forgiveness to get beyond old disagreements and disabling quarrels; cowardly handwashing to become humble washing of feet; courage that dares us to be different.

The power of the resurrection aspires for values beyond this world; strives to witnesses to the beauty of service, generosity, justice, gentleness, solidarity.

The point of Easter is not whether we can get our minds around the resurrection, because we cannot. Rather can allow the gift of Easter’s healing, new surging possibility of life transform our hearts and through us our worlds? Everything turns on our answer. Because if we can, then we have no reason to fear, and we have every reason to hope; we can risk everything, venture anything.

Tonight with the women and Peter we go to the empty tomb; the stone is rolled away. Bend down! Look in and like Peter! Be amazed! Amazed Christ is not here, he is risen! He is on the loose, restless, irrepressible, unsettling and invincible!

Friends, Christus Vivit! “Christ is alive!”

*Rev. Prof. Michael Mullaney*

President

St. Patricks College, Maynooth

