

NOVATE
VOBIS
NOVALE

The FURROW

A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Kevin Egan
Understanding
Forgiveness

Maria Moran
Empty Pews

David Austin
The Eucharist in the
Catholic School

Brendan Devlin
'Sursum Corda'

Enda McDonagh
The Wind of the Word

Tom Deenihan
On the One Road

Fintan Monahan
The Joy of Service

Paschal Scallon
Jubilee Blessings

July/August 2016
€3.50 (inc. VAT)

National Religious Education Congress

at

St. Patrick's College, Maynooth

on

1 October 2016

Contact Patricia O'Sullivan, Conference Secretary

Tel. 01 8147556

patricia.o'sullivan@veritas.ie

THE FURROW (1950-2015)

Another full set of *The Furrow*
has become available and is for sale
c/o The Furrow office,
St. Patrick's College, Maynooth,
Co. Kildare.

Tel: 01-7083741.

Email: furrow.office@may.ie

Articles

Kevin Egan	Understanding Forgiveness	387
Maria Moran	Empty Pews – <i>A Personal Story of One Vacant Space</i>	396
David Austin, OSA	The Eucharist in the Catholic School	403
Brendan Devlin	‘Sursum Corda’	412
Michael Duignan	Homilies for August (C)	413
Ultan McGoohan	Homilies for September (C)	420

Chronicle

Enda McDonagh	The Wind of the Word – <i>Creation, Compassion and Contemplation</i>	426
Tom Deenihan	On the One Road	432
Fintan Monahan	The Joy of Service	437
Paschal Scallon, CM	Jubilee Blessings	442

New Books

Albert McDonnell	Annulment	445
Ambrose Macaulay	Violence, Politics and Catholicism in Ireland	446
Joe McDonald	Joyfully Sharing the Gospel	447

Shorter Notice

The Furrow

A pastoral monthly founded 1950.

The motif on the cover of *The Furrow* is from Jeremiah 4:3, which reads in the Vulgate:

*Novate vobis novale
Et nolite serere super spinas.
Yours to drive a new furrow,
Nor sow any longer among the briers.*

Editor: Ronan Drury, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, to whom editorial correspondence should be addressed.

Rates: Single copy €3.21 (plus VAT 29c and postage €1.20). Annual Subscription: Republic of Ireland €60.00. Northern Ireland and Great Britain: Stg£54.00/€60.00. Foreign: €75.00/\$106.00/Stg£68.00. Student rate €35.00/\$50.00/£31.50.

Subscriptions are payable in advance to the Secretary, The Furrow, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Telephone (01) 7083741; Fax (01) 7083908 (Codes: National 01; International +353-1). E-mail: furrow.office@may.ie Website: www.thefurrow.ie. Subscriptions can be paid online through The Furrow website.

Back numbers and advertising rates available from the Secretary.

The Furrow's bank is the Allied Irish Bank, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Bank Giro Code No. 93-32-01.

Back issues of *The Furrow* are available on microfilm from: ProQuest Information & Learning Co., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, U.S.A.

The Furrow is published by The Furrow Trust and edited at St Patrick's College, Maynooth. The views expressed in its pages are in no way attributable to the College authorities. *The Furrow* is printed in the Republic of Ireland at Naas Printing Ltd., Naas, Co. Kildare.

July/August 2016

Understanding Forgiveness

Kevin Egan

My intention in writing this article is not to suggest that forgiveness is easy nor is it to put pressure on people who are struggling to forgive. My goal is to open up a space where the subject can be explored in some depth leading to an increased understanding of what is involved in forgiveness as a human enactment. Forgiveness, like grief, is a process. I am convinced that a greater understanding of what is involved in this process can enrich the ministry of those who preach about forgiveness and who extend pastoral care to others.

WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?

I posed this question at a recent workshop and the answer I got back was that forgiveness is 'letting-go.' My follow-up question was 'letting go of what?' and the answer I got back was 'letting-go of resentment or hurt.' Most people have an intuitive understanding of what forgiveness is. Misunderstandings arise when it comes to describing how the letting-go process works. Some expect it to be instantaneous; some imagine it should involve forgetting the hurt caused and some think it is necessary to communicate with others if forgiveness is to take place. They can't all be right. I hope to address the misunderstanding that exists surrounding forgiveness. C. S. Lewis once humorously remarked: 'Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something to forgive.'

Forgiveness is also a subject about which theologians, philosophers and psychologists tend to differ. Theologians and preachers urge the faithful to practise the virtue of forgiveness. Psychologists who pay attention to the human condition show an appreciation of the struggle involved in forgiveness and question whether it is appropriate in every relationship. I read with interest Pope Francis's letter *Misericordiae Vultus* announcing the Jubilee Year of Mercy. As one would expect from such a document, he lauds the virtues of mercy and forgiveness but only once does he

Kevin Egan has lectured in All Hallows, Dublin in psychology and pastoral theology for many years. He has a private practice as a physiotherapist. His address is: Carrick Rd., Boyle, Co. Roscommon.

THE FURROW

make reference to how hard it is to forgive.¹ I should give him credit for at least acknowledging the struggle side of forgiveness as it is most often overlooked. I would have liked him to devote a whole chapter to the topic. The theological view of forgiveness will be more credible and cause less harm if it gives due attention to the reality of the human condition and how difficult it can be for humans to forgive. Forgiveness is not a problem for God but it is for us. Whoever has been harmed or betrayed knows that forgiveness is not going to be simple or easy.

I hope the theologians reading this article will bear with me if I take as my starting point a psychological definition of forgiveness. Robert Enright is a psychologist at the University of Wisconsin. He gave a lecture at the Eucharistic Congress in Dublin: 'Learning Forgiveness: A Pathway to Thrive'. Drawing on the work of the philosopher Joanna North he defines forgiveness as:

A willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment and indifferent behaviour toward one who unjustly injured us, while fostering the undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love toward him/her.²

When I present this definition at workshops participants react positively to the acknowledgment that they have a right to resentment. I find I am more likely to acknowledge my resentments once I accept that I have a right to them. Enright's definition of forgiveness differs from the one offered in much of the self-help literature. He includes a positive dimension along with the negative one of 'letting-go' of resentments. He refers to replacing resentment with the 'undeserved qualities of compassion, generosity and even love.' This positive dimension of forgiveness is often overlooked. It fits well with the Christian understanding. His use of the word *undeserved* highlights the gift element in forgiveness. The term *for-give-ness* 'hides within itself the word and idea of gift.'³ It is a gift which the transgressor does not deserve to receive.

James K Voiss in his excellent book, *Rethinking Christian Forgiveness* notes that a 'definitional drift' has crept into our understanding of forgiveness.⁴ Psychologists must take some of the responsibility for this. Philosophers limit their use of the term to situations involving moral agency where someone can be held accountable for *harm* caused. Psychologists on the other

1 Pope Francis. *Misericordiae Vultus*. Dublin: Veritas 2015, n 8.

2 Enright, Robert D & Joanna North (eds). *Exploring Forgiveness*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press 1998, 47.

3 Stephen Cherry op.cit. 2012, 68.

4 James K. Voiss. *Rethinking Christian Forgiveness: Theological, Philosophical and Theological Explorations*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press 2015, 19).

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

hand extend the definitional boundaries to include experiences of *hurt* in situations where there is no obvious moral fault. Such situations might include the death of a baby in the absence of medical negligence, where parents may feel life has dealt them a harsh blow. Pastorally, the caring response may be to acknowledge their feelings of anger and resentment and address the question of forgiveness if that is what they want to do. In this and similar contexts the question is often posed as to whether God needs our forgiveness. Theologians rightly point to the absence of moral fault, in that God is all good and can't be held responsible for intentionally causing harm. However I may have a need to forgive God in the sense that my anger could be blocking my relationship with God and leading me to distance myself.

BLOCKS

When I meet people struggling with forgiveness I try to get a sense of what may be blocking them. Often it has got to do with some misunderstanding around what forgiveness involves. People readily accept the need for forgiveness in a relationship context but will question the validity of forgiveness in situations where the person is dead or there is no possibility of communicating directly with the offender. I must confess that the instances where I have told someone directly 'I forgive you' are seldom and few. On the other hand, I can recall frequent occasions when I have engaged in what is called *silent forgiveness*. These are occasions when one forgives in the silence of one's heart. This form of forgiveness is just as real and effective as interpersonal forgiveness or reconciliation. Many people fail to acknowledge this and limit the use of the term forgiveness to situations involving the restoration of a relationship. The term *reconciliation* is best used to describe such a situation. People often confuse the two terms. Whereas forgiveness can be an *intrapersonal* or silent process, reconciliation is an *interpersonal* or overt process. Reconciliation is best reserved for situations where forgiveness is directly communicated and a new relationship is entered into. Many people who silently forgive, mistakenly believe that they have failed to forgive because their relationship with the wrongdoer has not been fully restored in this way. They need to be reminded that silent forgiveness covers the criteria mentioned in our definition, namely the letting go of resentment and the extension of positive regard.

A distinction is often made between self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others. James K Voiss defines it as 'the process of stabilizing our sense of self in the face of self-reproach.'⁵ Recognition of harm caused on the part of the offender will often

5 James K. Voiss op. cit. 2015, 391.

THE FURROW

lead to self-reproach. Forgiveness will involve the letting go of anger or resentment towards the self, and extending to the self the gift of generosity and compassion mentioned in our definition. Pastorally it is frequently the case that offenders find they can more readily accept the forgiveness of God than the forgiveness of self. In many cases an experience of the forgiveness of God precedes the forgiveness of self and over time may facilitate the latter. On occasion an instance of interpersonal forgiveness may involve the need to address also the forgiveness of self. Desmond Tutu gives a memorable example of this in *The Book of Forgiving*, co-authored with his daughter Mpho. He describes how as a young boy there were many occasions where he had to watch helplessly as his father abused his mother: 'Cowering in fear as a young boy, I had not been able to stand up to my father or protect my mother. So many years later, I realise that I not only have to forgive my father, I have to forgive myself.'⁶ I find it interesting that the need for self-forgiveness only dawned on him 'many years later.' This is often the case, we may only partially deal with a major incident in our lives and find that we need to revisit it many years later.

FORGIVENESS TAKES TIME

The experience of Desmond Tutu illustrates a frequently overlooked aspect of forgiveness. It is a process and so it takes time; it may take months and possibly years or a lifetime to achieve. Robert Enright describes it as a complex step-by-step process involving four phases: uncovering phase; decision phase; work phase and deepening phase.⁷ Understanding what is involved in forgiveness comes down to understanding what is happening at each of these phases. The first step in the forgiveness journey is to acknowledge to oneself that harm or injustice has been caused. Often it is the presence of angry feelings that alerts one to the fact that a wrong has been done or a value infringed. When I notice that I am angry with someone, especially if it's anger I have been carrying for some time, I ask myself have I considered forgiving them? Forgiveness is one of the recommended treatments for anger.

The second stage in the forgiveness process is the decision stage. For many people the forgiveness process gets blocked at this stage because they mistakenly think that once they have decided to forgive, the matter is done and dusted. In situations of domestic abuse the offender often encourages such a belief. The fact that one makes a decision to forgive does not imply that the process is complete. For this reason I have reservations about using the

6 Desmond Tutu & Mpho Tutu. *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*. London: HarperCollins 2014, 194.

7 Robert D. Enright op. cit. 1998, 53.ed

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

phrase, *I forgive you*. I am more comfortable acknowledging my limitations and saying: *In so far as I am able, I forgive you*. At the decision stage forgiveness is very much a work in progress. I would go so far as to say that we can never be certain that we have forgiven because the process needs time to become embedded in our soul / psyche. If we are to be true to our human condition we should be prepared to acknowledge that there is no such thing as *perfect forgiveness*. 'Forgiveness of one person by another is always partial and vulnerable, even when it seems complete.'⁸ We need to remind ourselves that it is unrealistic to expect that when we forgive someone the relationship can return to where it was prior to the offence. This does not reflect the human condition. Forgiveness is for imperfect people. It is unrealistic and unhelpful to expect perfect forgiveness. This does not mean that it doesn't happen. Sadly the faithful are frequently being instructed to expect perfect forgiveness. After all God our Father forgives perfectly and so should we! If ever there was an admonition that needed to be deleted, that is it.

IS THERE AN OBLIGATION ON CHRISTIANS TO FORGIVE?

Seeing that forgiveness is such a struggle for us we should hesitate to impose any additional burdens on Christians by claiming that they have a duty to forgive, come what may. As Christians we are fortunate to have such a rich source of wisdom in the Old and New Testament with regard to forgiveness. This teaching is clothed in the garb of the culture and historical circumstances surrounding a group of people who lived at a particular time and place. *Misericordiae Vultus* is a wonderful compendium of texts that speak of God's mercy and forgiveness. I don't doubt that these texts are a source of inspiration for us struggling human beings but there is also a danger that they can be used to suggest that we must forgive in the same way as God forgives. 'Forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven, you must forgive.'⁹ The good news is that forgiveness is no problem for God and we celebrate this. However, for us limited human beings forgiveness is a problem. God forgives instantly. For us it is a process that takes time. From a psychological and spiritual point of view I have no problem in proclaiming the benefits of forgiveness. However, making forgiveness a moral obligation does not reflect the wisdom of our tradition. It imposes on the victims of harm and injustice another burden where they become victims of the myth of forgiveness.

In the past Christian preachers have alluded to the example of Jesus on the Cross forgiving his executioners. A close reading of the

⁸ Stephen Cherry op. cit. 2012, 187.

⁹ Col 3:15.

THE FURROW

text (Lk 23:34) shows that while Jesus prayed for his executioners, he never addressed them and said 'I forgive you.' If Christians are to follow the example of Jesus they should call in prayer to God the Father who alone is able to forgive rather than rely on their own power to forgive.¹⁰ Ministers of the word would more truthfully reflect the wisdom of the tradition by urging Christians to pray for the grace of forgiveness rather than telling them they have a moral obligation to forgive. We need to admit to ourselves and God that we are powerless to forgive our enemies and then ask God in trust to help us.

PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

We need to acknowledge that there is a gap in pastoral theology and practice between how Christians are instructed to live out the ethics of forgiveness and their experience of forgiveness as part of the human condition. Forgiveness is a grace. For this reason we should not make it a moral obligation. The grace dimension of forgiveness is reflected in the experience of Christians who frequently describe it as something that surprises them, emerging into consciousness long after the event. They would seem to be its recipients rather than its instigators. There is much wisdom in the words of the pastoral theologian John Patton who advises that we should forgive 'by not trying to.'¹¹

In working with people who struggle to forgive I adopt an approach which can best be described as 'lowering the bar as low as possible.' I take this approach in response to feelings of frustration and helplessness on the part of the forgiver. It consists in lowering the bar to the level of letting go of resentment or the urge for revenge and asking if they can commit to doing or wishing no harm to the person who wronged them. More often than not they will report that they have arrived at that place. I then point out that they have already taken their first step on the road of forgiveness without knowing it. They often express surprise and relief to discover that this is so. If the person wronged is a believer I will ask if they are willing to pray for the person who wronged them. This is a clear sign that they have moved away from unforgiveness or wishing revenge or harm. Another helpful question to ask those struggling to forgive is to estimate how much they've forgiven the wrongdoer at this point. If the answer is: 'I have partially forgiven them,' it indicates that the work of forgiveness has already begun.

A question often asked in relation to forgiveness is *How do you know if you've forgiven?* According to Desmond Tutu you'll know

10 Joan Muller. 'Is Forgiveness Possible?' Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press 1998, 39.

11 John Patton. 'Is Human Forgiveness Possible?' Nashville: Abingdon Press 2003, 174.

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

you have forgiven when you have begun to wish the other person well. He also mentions a growing sense of inner freedom, as if a weight has been lifted and a feeling of inner peace.¹² Drawing on my own experience I know I have forgiven when I have started to change the way I tell the story of how I've been wronged. A point is reached when I can say that I am choosing to tell the story in a different way. How does this come about? Consulting my own experience, I would say it has something to do with a breakthrough in understanding of what was going on in the life of the wrongdoer at the time of the offence. This new understanding leads to empathy which in turn changes the way we tell the story of what happened.

The question is often raised as to whether forgiveness is possible in the absence of repentance? Philosophers will respond negatively, pointing out that repentance on the part of the offender is a prerequisite for granting forgiveness. This view that forgiveness can only follow repentance would seem to be integral to the way most Protestants think about it in Northern Ireland.

In the Northern Ireland Protestant mindset, justice (and therefore forgiveness) is seen more in legalistic and punitive terms than, perhaps, in the Catholic scheme of things. Thereby many Protestants have real difficulty in offering anything that might be construed as letting the criminal off scot-free.¹³

In this context it is worth noting that contrary to popular opinion the Prodigal Son did not repent before he decided to return to his father's home. The text simply states that he 'came to his senses' (Lk 15: 17). In the words of James K. Voiss, he 'has not repented of anything except his hunger.'¹⁴ From God's perspective we can safely say that forgiveness does not depend on repentance. It may turn out to be a different matter when it comes to us human beings.

MOTIVATION TO FORGIVE

In this reflection I have endeavoured to approach forgiveness as a human enactment. From this perspective forgiveness is valued because it can help to heal us of our resentments. In *Misericordiae Vultus* Pope Francis outlines the theological motivation for forgiveness. 'We are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us.'¹⁵ For Christians the experience of God's mercy is a powerful motivating factor in their lives. However, this does

12 Desmond Tute & Mpho Tutu 2014, 128.

13 Kinahan, T. in Spencer G. (ed) *Forgiving and Remembering in Northern Ireland*. London: Continuum 2011, 80 quoted in Stephen Cherry op.cit. 2012, 99.

14 James K. Voiss op. cit. 2015, 355.

15 Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*. Dublin: Veritas 2015, n 9.

THE FURROW

not mean that it has to be the sole or even the primary motivating factor. Due acknowledgement is made of the broad range of possible motivations that come into play and where God's prior forgiveness does not always have to hold priority of place.¹⁶ The principle attributed to Saint Thomas Aquinas that grace builds on nature would seem to support this approach. The desire to be free of the burden of resentments might be 'the human experience that God uses to draw us into relationship and thereby to help us grow in forgiving others.'¹⁷ The Christian narrative and one's personal experience of being a loved sinner can be powerful motivating factors in leading to forgiveness but this does not have to be, nor is it, the experience of all Christians. One should not assume that a Christian's motivation for forgiveness is always theological. Asking the recipient of pastoral care, 'What motivates you to forgive?' is a wise practice.

A FORGIVING COMMUNITY

Recently I discussed pastoral issues concerning forgiveness with a group of priests. They described how pressured they feel when presiding at a funeral of someone who has had more than one family and where the first spouse bears ill will to the second spouse. Do they collude with the wishes of the first and make no reference to the second spouse? What place has Christian forgiveness in such a situation? We agreed that this is not the time for preaching about forgiveness to either spouse. The task of the presider is not to take sides but to stay faithful to his role of leadership in a community aspiring to forgiveness. We agreed that he should invite the community to pray for all those grieving the deceased and if he is going to mention names that should include both spouses. I have met with 'second' spouses where this did not happen and further hurt was caused.

While the funeral Mass may not be the place to preach about forgiveness we know that no family can stay together without forgiveness. In families forgiveness is intergenerational. For example the forgiveness of parents by children and of children by parents. Forgiveness can be said to bring healing to families across the generations. It helps to prevent the passing on of resentments from one generation to the next. I have come to regard forgiveness as key to the resolution of grief. It arises towards the end of the grieving process rather than the beginning. Grief leaves us with regrets and forgiveness is the way we deal with our regrets and our resentments.

16 James K. Voiss 2015, 292.

17 James K. Voiss 2015, 293.

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS AND THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

Since this is *The Jubilee Year of Mercy*, let us not confuse the words mercy with forgiveness, they don't mean the same thing. I see mercy as much broader in scope than forgiveness. It extends to all God's creatures whereas forgiveness is narrower in scope and applies to situations where there is moral fault and harm has been caused. Forgiveness can be considered 'a specialized form of mercy, which is a more general concept reflecting kindness, compassion and leniency.'¹⁸ Both have cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions. The stance of mercy can contribute to the process of forgiveness in that it encourages an attitude of graciousness or generosity towards the offender. On the other hand, forgiveness is a complex process and takes a much longer time scale to take root. We struggle more with forgiveness. Words encouraging people to be forgiving should take cognizance of this fact. Finally, both mercy and forgiveness are highly personal and yet have a community dimension. This dimension is reflected in the closing words of the Our Father: Forgive *us* our trespasses as *we* forgive those who trespass against us.

I have endeavoured to show that an acceptable theology of forgiveness needs to take as its starting point the careful study of forgiveness as a human enactment. We need first to have an understanding of forgiveness 'from below' and then move to bring it into conversation with forgiveness 'from above.' It is my hope that the resulting dialogue will enhance both pastoral practice and the credibility of the Christian message.

18 Christopher Peterson & Martin E. P. Seligman. *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association 2004, 446.

Empty Pews

– *A Personal Story of One Vacant Space*

Maria Moran

I made it official on 24 April, 2016.

Census of the population of Ireland 2016: Question 12: What is your religion?

I did not respond by marking 'Roman Catholic' as I have done all my life up to now; instead I marked 'Other' and wrote 'Christian'. A sense of freedom and joy mixed with feelings of sadness and fear moved through me. I want the fact that I came to a decision to vacate my seat at parish level be known by the generations to come. This decision was not a response fuelled by anger but by a deep sense of sadness and loss and a need to acknowledge the reality of where I find myself vis-à-vis the institutional Church. I know I do not stand alone in how I feel but somehow that knowledge does not give me much consolation. I will give a short account of how I came to this decision in the hope that, through telling my story, I will be free to move on.

My decision was not a knee-jerk reaction but a long process of discernment over many years. My wish to speak openly is to record what I believe to be the reality for so many good people who are spiritually tired of feeling compromised and find themselves pushed over the edge of tolerance. To remain compliant any longer for me would be to seriously question my integrity as a Christian. I have no concept of where I will be led from here. I do not know what will be asked of me as I attempt to forge a new path as a follower of Christ.

MY STORY AS A ROMAN CATHOLIC

As was normal in the 1950s, I was baptised into the Roman Catholic Church a couple of days after my birth. I was whisked from the nursing home in which I was born by my godparents and brought to the nearby University Church in St. Stephen's Green, Dublin to be baptised before being returned to my mother in the nursing home. My religious up-bringing was standard with regular Sunday

Maria Moran, psychotherapist, lives at Cooleycall Lodge, Baldwinstown, Bridgetown, Co. Wexford.

Mass attended by all members of my family, a convent education where religious instruction, including preparation for the reception of the sacraments, was provided. As a teenager I attended parish sodality for my age group each month and was a member of the parish youth team. I was in my final years of secondary school when the fruits of the Second Vatican Council filtered down into the schools. I remember so well the thrill of being handed my first bible with a word of caution from the reverend sister, ‘Girls, it might be wise not to read the Old Testament or St John’s Gospel as you might get confused’! Naturally, being a curious teenager, I immediately leafed through my new treasure until I found St John’s Gospel. It still confuses me today as it did back then but how I love it! My husband and I married in my parish church and as the years went by our four children were baptised within the first few months of their lives. They in turn attended Catholic schools. And so the cycle continues Or does it?

IGNORANCE IS BLISS?

Things changed for me at the turn of the century; our children now young adults were more independent and so I decided to engage in some serious study and began my search for a suitable focus. The fruits of this search led me to undertaking a programme leading to an honours degree in Theology and Anthropology. I followed that up with a Masters by Research in Theology focused on the process of ancestral healing from a Christian perspective. I enjoyed these years of study and felt nurtured and challenged as I began to understand my faith at a deeper level. I remember one lecturer, in the first few weeks of my first semester, explaining how theology is a subject that cannot be studied but must be lived. In hindsight, perhaps ignorance was bliss but there was no going back as my faith matured and my eyes were opened to the responsibility that brought to bear. This, in a way, was my downfall!

Reading the texts of Vatican II for the first time was a revelation to me and as the seeds of new ways started to germinate, I began to appreciate the potential of what was contained within these pages. I felt compelled to take up my own baptismal calling in a more active way in my local church. During these years we moved house twice for various reasons necessitating a move from one parish to another. The lay people involved were, by and large, people of deep faith, very fine people who committed themselves to the work at hand in a spirit of good humour and Christian love. These people will always be my friends (despite my leaving their ranks) and my life is richer for meeting them. Subtle resistance to new ideas by the priests involved was a constant background noise. Change was seen as being disruptive to ‘the way we have always done

THE FURROW

things here'! Discussions involving planning for a future Church with very few priests was met with agreement on a surface level but, in general, no desire or energy to bring the ideas to fruition was evident. Projects that were planned and engaged with, more often than not, turned out to be a diluted version of the original group idea, destroying, or at best limiting, the potential to bring life or hope to a failing community. So year after year we sat and planned and planned and sat! The penny began to drop for me as I recognised the different versions of the same apathy emerging over the years, emanating from the priests under whose guidance we were expected to work.

ACCEPTING THE REALITY

As time went on and my initial anger subsided, I began to see these weary priests as men who were burnt out and tired in spirit; perhaps even unconscious of the effect their dysfunctional behaviour was having on those they claimed to serve. Any offer of support to these fatigued men was treated as an affront to their authority. Thomas Merton puts it succinctly when he says:

He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas. There is nothing more tragic in the modern world than the misuse of power and action.¹

It seems to me that there is simply very little awareness of, or interest in the importance of proper self-care and self-development for many priests in our Church today. These men speak of being overworked (while often holding the reins of authority and control far too tightly) but seem blind to the need to nurture their own spirits on an on-going basis. Proper self-care is not an optional extra for professional carers but an essential element of a 'duty of care' to those we serve. As time went on I began to feel the impact on my own spirit of meeting this brick wall of an outdated hierarchical system that no longer worked. A bishop whom I contacted seemed to be as burnt out as those in his care. In no way was my contact with this man pastoral. I would like to make the point here that while this seems to be a prevalent attitude, it is not in line with the teaching of the same institution.

1 Thomas Merton, ed. Lawrence Cunningham, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master: Essential Writings* (Paulist Press: 1992), 375.

Pope Francis in his Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (*Evangelii Gaudium*) when addressing bishops, says:

The bishop must always foster this missionary communion in his diocesan Church, following the ideal of the first Christian communities, in which the believers were of one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32). To do so, he will sometimes go before the people, pointing the way and keeping their hope vibrant. At other times, he will simply be in their midst with his unassuming and merciful presence. At yet other times, he will have to walk after them, helping those who lag behind and – above all – allowing the flock to strike out on new paths. In his mission of fostering a dynamic, open and missionary communion, he will have to encourage and develop the means of participation proposed in the Code of Canon Law and other forms of pastoral dialogue, out of a desire to listen to everyone and not simply to those who would tell him what he would like to hear. Yet the principal aim of these participatory processes should not be ecclesiastical organisation but rather the missionary aspiration of reaching everyone.²

I admire Pope Francis and how he has broken ranks in many ways, not just in words but through his actions. Perhaps I have become cynical but I fear that the rigid system that has been the driving power of hierarchy will not be shaken in Pope Francis's reign. I imagine it will be business as usual after his demise. I hope I am wrong.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR ME

About three years ago I decided to 'give up' going to Mass for Lent and to return only on Palm Sunday that year. (Where this idea came from I have no idea....it seemed bizarre even to me at the time!). However, I found, during these weeks of absence, that I felt lighter in spirit and recovered some of the energy that had been sucked out of me. On my return to the fold I became even more aware of the spiritual and emotional drain of energy. Month by month I noticed the Sunday congregation dwindling in numbers. I often observed the lack of 'presence' of the presider at Mass and the consequential weakening of meaningful connection between pastor and community. Let me explain what I mean by 'presence' in this context as I believe it is a key factor in the decline of the Irish Catholic Church at parish level.

2 Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (*Evangelii Gaudium*) Ch 1, II, 31.

THE FURROW

A WORD ABOUT 'PRESENCE'

Understanding the concept of the Trinity in terms of a movement of energy can be useful. To enter into the mystery of the Trinity is to explore the flow of divine energy in and through our experience of being human. This idea has implications in how we relate to ourselves, to one another and to God. The ancient term for this flow of energy is *perichoresis*. The literal translation of this word is 'making room for another around oneself'. Understanding the Trinity in this way we may describe God as a 'loving community of equals reaching out not only to one another but to the world.'³ The significance of the doctrine of the Trinity and the *perichoretic* movement therein, is towards deeper understanding of our humanity being made in the image and likeness of God and our relatedness to all of creation. If we fully enter into this mystery there is no contradiction between the one and the many as we are drawn into communion where there is no separation. This is the place from which we can enter into our 'personhood', not as a way of doing but as a way of being. The significance of understanding our faith in this way is important in understanding the role of the priest and people at the celebration of the Eucharist. As president the priest must reside within his personhood to enable him to engage at this level of ministry. When I hear the priest addressing the congregation with the words, 'thank you for coming' (as if we come to see him celebrate Mass and are passive observers rather than people of faith coming together as a worshipping community to celebrate too) or reassuring us that he won't keep us too long (because the weather is too wet or too sunny) I find myself reacting and really wonder what message he is trying to impart. If, at a concert the audience was reassured that 'you won't be kept too long this evening because I'm sure you would like to get back out into the sunshine', or at a match if an announcement was made that 'because of the rain only one half of the match will be played', there would be uproar and rightly so! Why does a priest think this is acceptable behaviour? Is he not undermining the sacredness of the celebration and if so why? To my way of thinking this is not the attitude of a priest who is about to lead the congregation into a place of intimate union with God but a man who is going to 'say' Mass. In celebrating the Eucharist, the presider is not an actor in a drama nor is the congregation an audience in attendance. It is essential that we all, priest and people alike, give ourselves the chance to enter into our personhood as a way of being present to the mystery rather than going through the familiar motions in a distracted way

3 Declan Marmion, 'The revival of Trinitarian Theology', in Declan Marmion and Gesa Thiessen eds. *Trinity and Salvation – Theological, Spiritual and Aesthetic Perspectives* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 9.

in order to ‘do’ our duty! It is the responsibility of the presider to be truly present in this way and to lead the congregation into this place of mystery. Personhood gives us all the ability to enter into a place of transcendence and to be present in the transparent way necessary for Christ to work through us at the depth of our being.

In saying this, it brings me back to my observation of many priests (but not all) to be men who are burnt out and tired in body and in spirit. They seem to be literally only able to go through the motions. I have heard some priests complain that they have too many Masses to say and if this is so, why treat it as an excuse for poor liturgy but as a realisation that things need to change? Why not let the people support them in finding obvious solutions as a way of meeting the reality of where Church is at the present time? These are very practical issues that good pastoral teams, if given the opportunity, could support change in a wholesome and life-giving way for all. The time has gone when the priest may have been one of the very few educated people in the area. Trust needs to be established afresh and on an equal basis between the ordained and the faith community. We are all equal and this does not exclude the place of holding different roles within church.

BACK TO MY OWN STORY

Still we journeyed on ... but I knew that there was something seriously wrong when, instead of feeling renewed after Sunday Mass I needed to take time when I reached home to recover my spirit. At one pastoral team meeting I named what was happening for me and discovered that I was not alone in my feelings. We soldiered on for another couple of years trying to support each other as best we could. About three months ago I made my decision to leave. I felt I was colluding with a dysfunctional system that was doing more harm than good. As a last ditch attempt to address the problem, I spoke once again of my distress and of my sense of spiritual fatigue. A month later I left, not only the pastoral team but also the institutional Church.

CONCLUSION

One last point I would like to make and it is about the likely response that is often heard from within Church circles when people just like me vacate their pew. We are spoken of as those who have ‘voted with their feet’. Secularisation is often blamed and a loss of faith is mooted as the cause. Wrong on all counts for many, many people, including me. My faith, thank God, is strong, so strong that I have forfeited the comfort of being with my worshipping community. The description of secularisation (and indeed the term laity) when used in the context of people’s decision to leave the institutional

THE FURROW

Church is, for me, offensive. Both terms are negative descriptions of what people are: secular is defined as that which is not sacred and laity are those who are not ordained! To label the majority of baptised Catholics with a negative tag is not to see those people in reality. My guess is that by pointing to secularisation of the laity, the blame can be put outside the walls of the church, thus avoiding the need for self-reflection within those walls. Over the years I have asked many people who have left the institution why they had done so and the reason they give is that they have done so because of a sense of feeling diminished over time and unheard in any attempt made by them to articulate their hurt. It is a deep pain that is hard to express. But it is a deep pain that needs to be heard.

I know that my journey ahead is going to be tough. I am still grieving a loss of great depth but have faith in the God who leads me forward on a path, as yet unknown. It is a lonely place and I do not recognise the shape or colour of the manna that will sustain me on my pilgrim way. But of one thing I am certain, that manna will eventually be visible to me when the time is right. In the meantime I will travel lightly, I will celebrate the sacraments when I happen on a place where this is possible and where a welcome awaits the wandering pilgrims.

Celibate love. While deeply appreciative of the messages of goodwill from many other people and their supportive prayers, I believe that at such a time one also needs the loving and more immediate support of one's closest friends. We men and, maybe more, we celibate clergy are often slow about expressing or even mentioning our love for each other. We still have much to learn in this regard, especially from our female friends. Hopefully, even at this late stage of life, I can learn to be less reticent about my appreciation of such loving support.

– Willie Walsh, *No Crusader* (Dublin: Columba Press) p. 138

The Eucharist in the Catholic School

David Austin

This reflection is written against the background of the changing patterns in Catholic practice, particularly in Western countries, which challenge the Church in dealing with those who are ‘un-churched’. The Eucharist is at the centre of Catholic life and so with that conviction I offer some principles that I believe are applicable in a range of pastoral settings and cultures, even where Catholic practice remains relatively strong.

My focus here is on the Catholic school but always acknowledging parents as the first and best teachers of their children and recognising the central role of the worshipping community of the parish. Much of the content will be familiar but I hope this synthesis will be a useful resource for teachers who are charged with the responsibility of supporting parents in the faith formation of children through their commitment to quality Catholic schools. Catechists too may find food for thought in these lines as they reach out to the many children attending public schools and their families.

The place of the Catholic school in relation to the parish will vary from place to place, some as an integral part of the parish community, others serving a particular region or wider community. The role of the priest is crucial and so I include some reflections which I trust will be personally helpful and encourage confidence in those called to preside.

I write with great hope that the charismatic witness and pastoral example of Pope Francis will help reawaken Catholics to the presence of our loving God, even when we may forget that his grace and love continue to accompany us at every moment.

THE EUCHARIST IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

‘The Mass is something to love!’ This statement by former Archbishop of Brisbane, John Bathersby describes very simply what the Eucharist should be for us and what we should wish for our children. Though it is theologically complex, somehow the

David Austin is an Augustinian priest Prior of the Order of Augustinians in Australia. Address: PO Box 7278 Warringa Mall, Brookvale, NSW 2100, Australia.

THE FURROW

Eucharist needs to touch the everyday lives of ordinary Catholics – child, adolescent and adult – for whom the Eucharist is the unique gift of Jesus’ flesh and blood, his very self, and the celebration and expression of our true identity as the Church, the Body of Christ. The Eucharist is Jesus’ gift to the Church and it is the gift of the Church to the faithful, including our children. Indeed it is a matter of our very identity!

Through Baptism, each is called to grow in the knowledge and experience of his/her faith, and this includes participation in the Eucharist. Whatever our age, we are continually ‘becoming’ the Body of Christ, becoming what we ‘see’ and what we ‘receive’. The crushing of wheat to make the one loaf and the crushing of grapes to make the one cup symbolise the profound nature of our personal life and faith journey in which all the different seasons of our human experience help us grow into the Body of Christ.

Many Catholics need a deeper understanding of what is happening at Mass. In my experience, a good place to start is with the basic structure of the Mass, what each part is about, and how we can participate in each – *Gathering Rite, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist* and *Communion/Dismissal Rites*. Appreciation of the *experience* of the Mass can be brought to life through reflection on the rhythm, pace and moods of the liturgy, how the different elements interact with one another – sound and silence, movement and stillness, speech and song, and so on – and how we respond (cf *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* n 25).

Other essential understandings which enhance Eucharistic participation include the various ways in which Christ is present – in the Assembly, the Word, the Eucharistic elements, and the person of the Priest (cf CSL n 7). In the school’s efforts to embody and express a Catholic identity, what could be more powerful than the realisation of the importance of the assembly? This is expressed very clearly in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (n 1141). Christ is present in the assembly and children need to learn to be the assembly. These elements are fundamental aspects of the celebration and a growing appreciation and experience of Eucharist in these areas strengthen our identity as Church.

Far from being a private devotion or prayer, the Eucharist becomes what we do together – gathering in community, listening to the Word, praying for the Church and the world, receiving the Body and Blood of Christ *together* – after which we are sent forth changed to ‘glorify the Lord by our life’ and ‘announce the Gospel of the Lord’.

Thus the Eucharist *forms* us and this formative dimension of liturgical celebration is expressed beautifully in the document *Music in Catholic Worship* published in 1972 but still relevant

THE EUCHARIST IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

today – ‘Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it’ (n 6).

Our understanding of Eucharist is deepened by our reflection on the experiences of our lives and the lives of those around us in union with the humanity of Christ who chose to share our human condition. Jesus seeks to make his home in us and have us make our home in him, and he does this in the most special way through the intimacy of the Eucharist

THE EUCHARIST IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

For many children and their families, Catholic schools provide their primary – and often *only* – experience of Church. Our schools seek to sow the seeds of faith and are in the unique position of being able to teach children the fundamental truths about the Eucharist, prepare them carefully to participate in liturgical celebrations, and extend them in their experience of faith.

Catholic schools are very successful in *building community* and *faith-community* at that, so why not name that reality, and name it again and again? The Eucharist belongs in this setting and its celebration within the school community is an essential element of the experience of formation in the faith which is the Catholic school’s primary task, supporting the role of parents as the first teachers of their children in matters of faith.

Catholic Schools exist within the framework of the Church for the purposes of evangelisation and catechesis of children and their families and, as far as possible, the experience of Catholic schooling must be an experience of Church. Schools must operate out of a ‘clear ecclesiology’ and so every Catholic school must strive to be a *worshipping community*.

This is a major challenge in an age where many Catholics no longer practise their faith as they once did, yet this must not detract from what the Eucharist means and the power of this Sacrament to form us, sometimes in spite of our human weakness. Regular Catholic practice cannot be presumed among all staff and so staff formation becomes a priority, both in personal faith development and in their capacity to form children in faith through leading them in prayer.

The Catholic School has a duty to exhibit and encourage in its community a sense of *Catholic identity*. Through our experience of family life, we grow to understand who we are and what it means to be a member of our particular family. Our ‘experience’ of being Church in turn opens up for us what it means to be Catholic, particularly through the Sacraments and worship. Catholic schools have a special responsibility in this regard and helping children

THE FURROW

develop a sense of Catholic identity is invariably something that our Catholic schools do very well.

The Catholic school should be ‘different’ from a school that is not Catholic, not in an elitist sense but in the sense of being a strong Christian community. This sense of community expresses a faith dimension and the deeper realities of what it means to be ‘Church’ and part of the Body of Christ. Experiences of prayer and worship together form and strengthen the community, particularly through the celebration of the Eucharist.

Liturgy expresses, celebrates and forms us in our faith. Participation of children in school Masses is fundamental to the experience of a Catholic education, preparing them for that ‘*full, conscious and active participation*’ to which the Church calls us (CSL n 14). This is the right and duty of the faithful by reason of their baptism - including children.

In fact, the Church affirms the place of the Eucharist in the life of the school and its programme of formation in faith through the liturgy and makes this clear in the publication of the *Directory for Masses with Children* and the *Children’s Lectionary*, as well as the *Eucharistic Prayers for Masses with Children*. To exclude children from participation in the Eucharist is to exclude them from the heart of the Christian story. Consider the following:

A fully Christian life is unthinkable without participation in the celebration of the Eucharist. Hence the religious initiation of children should have the same object. The Church, which baptises infants and entrusts them with the gifts conferred by this sacrament, should make sure that they grow in communion with Christ and with the Christian community. The sign and pledge of this communion is to share in the Eucharistic table ... (*Directory for Masses with Children* n 8).

Church documents stress the need to consider the special receptivity proper to children’s age and growth. The experience of liturgy needs to be comprehensible to them, both through celebrations of Eucharist and other liturgical rituals which are appropriate to a child’s age and faith development. Liturgical celebrations and prayer in schools also expose children to Catholic ritual and symbolism, liturgical language, different ways of praying, and an appreciation of the ‘sacred’ and of God’s presence in our hearts – extending children in their experience of faith.

Celebration of the Eucharist in schools occurs in the context of the broader ‘*operating model*’ of a Catholic School which reflects a particular model/style of Church – in its ethos, atmosphere, values, sense of community, spirit of welcome, student and staff

THE EUCHARIST IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

management, pastoral care, leadership style, curriculum, quality of teaching, meaning of learning, as well as its view of human nature, success/failure, strength/weakness.

The principles of the Catholic School are grounded in ‘ecclesial principles’ and are influenced by the ‘ecclesiology’ of the local diocese, the school’s patron saint, and the unique charism of the religious congregation that founded the school and/or operates the school. This multi-faceted ‘model’ not only colours how we do liturgy in the school but opens up many opportunities for creativity in teaching children to pray and forming them in faith.

The life of the school consists of a structured timetable of terms, learning cycles, cultural and sporting events – some even being described as ‘seasons’! Liturgy lends itself to being incorporated into the life of the school, particularly through celebrating the Seasons of the Liturgical Year but also particular occasions of celebration and significance – achievements, successes, anniversaries, losses, struggles, crises – the joyful and the tragic. The school community is touched, often very deeply, by every human experience and emotion.

THE CHALLENGES

Changing patterns in Catholic practice continue to impact significantly on the Church and, even among those who describe themselves as ‘Catholic’, the percentage who attend Mass weekly has fallen. Many attend less regularly, while others do not come at all. Families are often ‘time-poor’ and rely more and more on the school to teach ritual and form children in faith. This is a great challenge to the Catholic school as it seeks appropriate policy and practice in relation to school Masses and liturgies.

Existing in the wider social context and being subject to guidelines from education authorities and other regulatory bodies place further pressures on the Catholic school, often through increased demands in subjects and time to teach and assess. Besides being good schools, Catholic schools must maintain their focus on their religious mission and meet the challenges of those whom they serve.

The broader and often negative impact of our secular society on individuals and families affects the values, outlook and expectations of members of the school community, including staff, and presents considerable challenges to the school in its calling to be a Christian community and to the wider Church in meeting people where they are at in their daily lives.

Besides coming to know and grow in a personal relationship with Jesus, being exposed to the explicit mission of the Catholic school, to strong Religious Education and Personal Development

THE FURROW

programmes, to Catholic action through social justice initiatives, and to the communal dimension of prayer and worship can help children grow in a faith which will sustain them in their adult lives. Every one of us needs to discover the living presence of Jesus in our hearts and know his grace that changes us. Coming to faith is in fact a lifetime task.

It is easy to forget that each member of the community is at a different stage in his/her faith journey and this includes children, parents, families and staff. Might we include priests and religious here as well? The fact that each of us is 'unfinished' makes it all the more imperative that the school help children to see the face of Jesus in the community of the Catholic school and in the experiences of liturgy and prayer that are part of the everyday routine.

Is it too bold a statement to suggest that baptised children should enjoy the same rights as baptised adults when it comes to liturgy? At the same time, young people's experiences of liturgy need to be formative and should not be separate from their formation in the faith and the development of their devotional life so that they can learn to pray the liturgy and pray in their personal life.

Children who are not Catholic should be expected to participate to the extent that they are able. While technically this makes attendance at school Masses 'compulsory', these gatherings are an essential part of the school programme and under normal circumstances attendance is a reasonable expectation and not a violation of a child's conscience. In a specific circumstance, a child, either Catholic or non-Catholic, might be excused for a serious reason.

Given the nature of Catholic practice, or lack thereof, children need to be given clear guidelines for receiving Holy Communion or simply approaching the priest or minister for a blessing. While done differently in various parishes and school communities, the blessing has a significant impact when it is done well. As well as being inclusive, this may also be a way of helping students and their families to face up to the 'gaps' in their lives in terms of their faith development and what being a 'practising' Catholic really means.

To make attendance at school Masses 'optional' contradicts the purpose of why the Catholic school exists in the first place. It is even less logical than making Mathematics or English classes optional. All are part of the school's curriculum and the parents' agreement with the school at the time of enrolment. The life of faith can never have the status of being an 'option' among others in the Catholic school.

Parents enrolling children in a Catholic school must agree to support the values of the school and accept that their children

THE EUCHARIST IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

will participate in all aspects of school life, including Religious Education and liturgical celebrations. Sadly on occasion, some parents' desire to have their child attend a Catholic school is not matched by their own openness to being part of a worshipping community and the process of faith development.

A WAY FORWARD

Celebrating the Eucharist in the Catholic school is not a simple issue but we may need to take some risks, while at the same time protecting the Sacrament. Reverence for the Eucharist may be enhanced by having the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the school chapel, prayer room or other 'sacred space' where students can visit and pray.

The basic principles of good liturgical celebration need to be followed so that the emphasis is on *participation* rather than *performance*. This will help priests to preside with dignity and warmth and not feel that they need to do a 'song and dance' routine to keep students' attention. In my experience, children have a genuine openness to being led in prayer, including at Eucharist. When properly prepared, they expect something special to happen and are open to it.

While the school has a special role in integrating the Eucharist into the life of the school community, basic guidelines need to come from those responsible for Catholic Education which reflect the values, rationale and policy of the Diocese. A pastoral and people-friendly approach is preferred here, one that emphasises invitation and participation in liturgy rather than discouraging participation. It is difficult to imagine a Diocese excluding the celebration of the Eucharist from the life of any Catholic school.

Addressing these issues in a positive context of our call to be Church would seem to offer genuine hope. In the final analysis, it is hardly reasonable to expect children to embrace attendance at Mass in their later years if they have been denied the experience of the Eucharist along the way. Simply to learn about the Eucharist in class may prepare the mind but on its own runs the risk of being knowledge divorced from experience when a sincere love of the Mass must come from the heart where we hunger for and experience God.

Of course, a genuine fear is that schools may provide a more attractive experience of liturgy than the local parish. This is a most difficult area to address but it remains a parish responsibility to help all members of the community to feel included. Carefully planned, parish sacramental programmes which are welcoming and involve the wider parish community are crucial. In addition, schools are often in a position actively to promote the importance

THE FURROW

of participation in parish worship, particularly parish primary schools where a close partnership already exists. In secondary schools, there may need to be more dialogue with pastors of feeder parishes.

Celebrating Masses for children is very demanding, yet it is essential for priests to have a positive relationship with students as this will enhance the experience of liturgy. Presiding is not easy and some priests face significant challenges when asked to preside at school liturgies – including that of communicating in a way that is easily understood by children of different ages, keeping the homily simple, feeling comfortable in different settings and with simplified rituals, and perhaps overcoming lack of confidence, self-doubt or feelings of fear (even terror!) at the prospect of facing 1,000 children in a chapel, hall or gymnasium.

Might we consider developing some materials for priests to help them overcome these concerns – even sharing at a Deanery meeting where priests can discuss their joys, successes, anxieties and fears in presiding at school Masses? Might those of us who are priests benefit from having someone help us look closely at, and reflect upon, our presiding style?

Young people need to know that their priests love them and school Masses offer us unique opportunities to demonstrate this. Encouragement and affirmation are essential dimensions of our communication with children, especially in a liturgical setting where we can challenge them to embrace ‘goodness of life’. Speaking of affirmation, our teachers need plenty of this too, especially our RE teachers!

Every one of us, I’m sure, is serious about helping young people find in the liturgy ‘something to love’. The awkwardness of adolescence should not dampen our spirit in offering Eucharist in schools. Growing up is not easy and children need to learn that it’s okay to believe in Jesus, okay to pray, okay to be religious, okay to go to Mass. In fact, those who attend Mass regularly should be encouraged to become ministers – servers, lectors, ministers of communion, welcomers – and be accepted in their home parishes in these roles.

Parents are the primary educators of their children and an integral part of how we respond to this issue. Schools and parishes can support parents through appropriate catechesis. Many parents need to learn that a school Mass or liturgy is not a performance but a prayer that calls for their participation too. Careful catechesis of parents is well within the capacities of our schools, particularly primary schools where parental presence at school celebrations is often strong but not always reflective of participation.

And there is a crucial need of backup in the home – the real

THE EUCHARIST IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

challenge of Religious Education programmes to provide resources for parents, including aids for family prayer. Simply harping on the 'obligation to go to Mass' will not succeed with people today, especially when some celebrations do not 'nourish' their faith or speak to them where they are at in their lives.

How often should schools celebrate Eucharist? Many schools gather for a whole school Mass once per term. Class or unit Masses may be celebrated from time to time, sometimes weekly or as part of a scheduled Parish Mass, depending on availability of a priest.

In the final analysis, our concern is the growth in faith among our children, staff and families, and helping them feel comfortable and at home in this regard. On every occasion, Jesus met people where they were at and faith emerged. The Emmaus story is one such event, '*They recognised Jesus in the breaking of bread*' (Luke 24:31). Perhaps Jesus' response to the disciples of John who asked him, '*Where do you live?*' might be his very response to our young people and to ourselves, '*Come and see!*' (John 1:38f).

Our wish surely is that all the children graduating from our Catholic schools would do so as committed, practising Catholics. However, if that is our criterion for success, then we will be very disappointed. It is hardly realistic in our time but it does not mean that our schools have failed. We can only do the best we can. And lest we feel that our efforts are futile or that it all depends on us, we need to remember that the Eucharist is about who we are – the Body of Christ!

A positive attitude among students towards the Church, indeed a love for the Church, might be the best foundation we can provide. Our Holy Father Pope Francis sets a wonderful example for us here and the late Bishop of Townsville, Michael Putney shares words of hope:

We have to continue to believe that we can inspire a new generation of young people to fall in love with the same Christ, the same Triune God, the same eucharist and the same troubled but beautiful Church which we know so well and sometimes forget how much we love' (*Vatican Council II: Reforming Liturgy* p xxii).

In all this, we are never alone – it is firstly God's work! Faith is not just about our believing in God, it is about God's believing in us - and he does!

‘Sursum Corda’

Seán O Ríordáin (1916-1977), major Gaelic poet of the 20th century, expresses a relentless quest for honesty and authenticity, personal and cultural, here in the objective correlative of a West Kerry seascape. The poem is translated by Brendan Devlin, a priest of the Diocese of Derry, resident in Maynooth College.

It's not all that important, it's the body only:
But if it were in your soul that the ailment lodged
Everything of your making would bear its flaw
For you cannot but defer to the fault far down:
A loss of bearings this, a masquerade,
But you must move on, through the driving rain,
Through the fog, with me to guide you, till distant hills light up,
And light they will not until your own mind is enlightened:
But tend to what is yours, and you will see afar
A seal lording it amid the ocean,
Surveying idly what there is to see
(For the faithful will be praying for your good estate):
Riches will be yours, I promise, if you are of the noble breed,
The ever-rolling ocean, the unyielding hills,
Cast out your baited lines, my old sea-dog,
The catch is bountiful there and health-restoring:
On this the masquerade will fail and you will breathe
Tang of sea-wrack and the tearful surf,
A surf cast up from ocean's depths,
A shining surf and coursed by seabird-flocks;
Let your wits loose and go gladly with the stream,
For you cannot but defer to the tide within you:
All artful rhetoric will melt away at that
And words will surface from your train of thought,
As reefs rise up and break the ocean's skin:
Feast your two eyes then on the sea-girt islands,
Drape about you Beiginis and the Seanduine.
But if that birth-mark of yours is causing your unease,
Be sure between you and me it's the proof of your noble line.

(From the Gaelic: Seán O Ríordáin, Brosna, 1964)

Homilies for August (C)

Michael Duignan

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

7 August

Wis 18:6-9. Ps 32:1, 12, 18-20, 22, R/v 12. Heb 11:1-2, 8-19.

Lk 12:32-48

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover. –Mark Twain

Perhaps, even already, the number of years that I have lived have outnumbered those that I can reasonably hope for in the future. It may be middle age or a general sense that the years are pushing on, but of late, I have been particularly taken by Psalm 89 (90). Reflecting on that age-old question of the brevity of human life, the Psalmist remarks: 'Our span is seventy years or eighty for those who are strong. [...] They pass swiftly and we are gone.' (Ps. 89 (90):10) The psalm continues: 'Make us know the shortness of our life that we may gain wisdom of heart.' (Ps. 89 (90):12) A heightened sense of the swift passing of time and ever shortening of our lives, brings with it a growing awareness of the preciousness of the while we have left and a real urgency to attend to prioritising what is important, to gaining that 'wisdom of heart' and to living life to the full.

Jesus' words in today's Gospel bring with them a similar awareness of the need to break the cycle of simply bobbing along almost aimlessly on the river of life – being taken wherever the current brings us. There comes a time when we need to stop and reflect on what is important in life. A time to ask: What do we value in life? What ultimately do we treasure? 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.' (Lk 12: 34)

We all know that if our heart is not in something – it will be a lacklustre, half-hearted tolerated effort which usually achieves

Michael Duignan is a priest of the Diocese of Elphin. He lectures in Theology and Religious Education at St. Angela's College, Lough Gill, Co. Sligo.

THE FURROW

little. However, if our heart is in something – we become emotionally and enthusiastically involved. We take to a task with a vigour and zeal capable of negotiating almost any obstacle and achieving, even against the odds, spectacular results. Jesus over and over again insists that his followers cannot be half-hearted. Faith in him demands a truly radical commitment that treasures him and his life-directing wisdom above everything else. Faith in him requires an unconditional response here and now. It is not to something put on the long finger or to leave until later. No! If Jesus and his message means anything to me, I need to be ever-ready like the ‘faithful servants’ in the Gospel – always ‘dressed for action’. (Lk.12:35) You need to have your lamps lit. Always on the lookout – ‘like men waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks.’ (Lk.12:35)

Vigorously living out our faith in such a radical manner, more than often requires that we make new and different choices from the ones we have made in the past. We can no longer pray like St Augustine ‘Lord, make me chaste but not yet’ (*Confessions, VIII*). ‘Lord, I am happy to be a Christian but please do not let me take it too seriously.’ We must once and for all let go of our fears, throw caution to the wind, play all our cards. Jesus asks us to get up! To get out! And to get at it! There is a call to be answered, work to be done, a life to be lived, love to be shown, burdens to be lightened and a world to be changed. And not much time left to do it!

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

14 August

Jer 38: 4-6, 8-10/ Ps 39:2-4, 18, R/v 14. Heb 12:1-4. Lk 12:49-53

It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. – J. K. Rowling

The area of Ballsbridge on the southside of Dublin takes its name from a bridge over the river Dodder. The bridge is called after the Ball family who originally installed and operated it. In 1553, Bartholomew Ball was elected Lord Mayor of Dublin and his wife Margaret became the Lady Mayoress. It was a time of fierce religious strife throughout Europe and the situation in Ireland was no exception.

Margaret’s eldest son Walter who became an Anglican was appointed by the Crown, enforcer of the Reformation. Eventually, elected Lord Mayor of Dublin, he had his openly devout Catholic mother, feeble and in her late sixties, arrested and dragged through the streets on a wooden pallet to the dungeons at Dublin Castle

until she took the Oath of Supremacy – recognising the monarch as supreme governor of the Church. In conscience, Margaret refused to do so and after three years of inhumane conditions died a prisoner.

At any time, Margaret could have returned home to her middle class comforts. All she had to do was renounce her beliefs. This was something she refused to do. Instead, she gave up all she had – her wealth, her comforts, life with her family and friends. She endured harsh imprisonment, starvation, disease and finally death itself rather than deny her faith and be untrue to her deepest self.

The Ball Family story brings to life in a very real way the words of today's Gospel: 'For from now on a household of five will be divided: three against two and two against three; the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.' (Lk.12:52-53)

Standing for something often means standing against something else. It means being true to our deepest selves. It means having that fire in our bellies to be brave enough to stand up for what we believe in. It brings with it the risk of being singled out from the crowd, being misunderstood, ridiculed, silenced and even persecuted. At times this is the consequence of being really committed to our faith and the values that flow from it. For in good conscience we cannot remain silent. Jesus calls us to respectfully stand up for what is good and what is right. Gently and with love we must speak out and point out that which is wrong and encourage all that is good and right.

In a world that often tries to convince us that we would be better off without our Christian faith, that Christian values are an old-fashioned heavy burden that a modern liberated pluralistic society can do without, it can be difficult to stand up and be counted for what we believe to be right. It can be even more difficult to do so within our families and with our friends. It requires courage to be the only student in a flat of friends to get up on a Sunday morning to go to Mass.

It is not easy for a father who risks being thought backward by refusing to allow his daughter and her boyfriend to stay over together. You risk being labelled as extreme and even uncaring if you declare your pro-life stance when out with friends. Being true to one's beliefs today may not bring imprisonment and death as it did for Blessed Margaret Ball those many years ago – but it will bring that division Jesus speaks about in today's gospel. It will bring misunderstanding, a loss of popularity, even suffering and perhaps insult and a certain different kind of martyrdom.

THE FURROW

The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary 15 August

Apoc 11:19, 12:1-6, 10. Ps 44:10-12, 16, R/v 10. 1 Cor 15:20-26.

Lk 1:39-56.

What a joy to remember that she is our Mother! Since she loves us and knows our weakness, what have we to fear? – Saint Thérèse of Lisieux,

‘Dinner is ready’ – I cannot count how many times during my childhood that I heard those words from my mother before our family gathered around the table to eat. Looking back recently it began to dawn on me how much time, day in day out, my mother devoted to simply feeding all of us at home. Shopping, preparing the food, cooking the food and then serving it. She was always the last to sit and eat – all were seen to and looked after before she finally sat down to look after herself. It was the living embodiment of a mother putting her family before herself.

The Gospel today tells the story of a similarly generous mother. It tells the story of how Mary, almost disregarding her own good news that she was with child, set out on a long and difficult journey to the hill country of Judah to visit her cousin who had herself recently conceived. Mary rushed, not thinking about her own situation, to help Elizabeth who was advanced in age. Mary’s innate openness and generosity towards God at the Annunciation – ‘Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word’ (Lk 1:38) is matched by an equal openness and generosity towards others at the Visitation. She so naturally and so beautifully embodies those two great pillars of the Christian life – love of God and love of neighbour. Before Jesus’ birth she is already a disciple – the first and most faithful disciple. Mary is there with Jesus in the joyful and the sorrowful mysteries of his life – there in the birthing stable, there at the foot of the cross, there at the empty tomb. She is the first Christian and a Christian *par excellence*.

Mary’s life so powerfully displays how we should not be afraid to take God into our lives and to live under the guidance of his wisdom. Far from taking anything away from us as human beings, life with God means life enhanced, life made better, life fulfilled. Today’s Feast of the Assumption vividly puts before us where this life with God ultimately leads. Today we celebrate the ancient Christian belief that, so intense was Mary’s living out of the Christian way of life that, before anyone else, God brought her body and soul into heaven. Like Christ her grave stands empty. Her intense closeness to God in this life was to end in closeness to him in the next – and there she now dwells – the Mary she

was both spiritually and physically in this life. It is our hope that we too one day, at the end of time, will take the same road Mary has taken before us – not just our souls but also our bodies – our whole existence will be transformed and rise in the glory of the resurrection to be with God forever. Mary generous mother, faithful disciple, holy woman, great example, humanity crowned, queen of heaven – pray that we will have the faith and the courage to follow in your footsteps. Amen

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

21 August

Is 66:18-21. Ps 116, R/. Mk 16:15. Heb 12:5-7, 11-13.

Lk 13: 22-30

Try not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value. – Albert Einstein

In the last few days since the Leaving Certificate results have come out we have all heard those familiar conversations. ‘The points for Arts are up’, ‘Would you believe that the points for Pharmacy are down?’ ‘Mary has the points she needs to do science in Galway, I think she wants to be a teacher.’ ‘Paul has medicine in Dublin.’ ‘Our John got that apprenticeship he was looking for in carpentry.’ Conversations like this show how fascinated we all are with the jobs we hold or the positions in society that we want for ourselves and our families. We want to get on, we want a good job and a good wage. We want to be respected and we want this for our children and our relatives too. This is natural. It is important to be able to make a living and to provide for oneself and one’s family.

In life we often tend to define success in terms of the jobs we have. In these post Leaving Certificate days we tend to define happiness in terms of the degree we get accepted for. It might be an opportune time then to focus on those words of Jesus in today’s Gospel: ‘Yes there are those now last who will be first, and those now first who will be last.’ (Lk 13:30) Jesus turns people’s expectations upside down and perhaps we should do the same today. For what is really important in life? The degree? The job? The position? The salary you have? or the type of person you are – whether you are a helpful person, whether you are a nice person, whether you are a good person?

In a certain sense Jesus inverts the logic of the world. For Jesus sees with God’s eyes – eyes that see right into the heart. It is not so much what we do that matters – being a doctor, or a carpenter, getting into college or not or even being a priest that matters. It is the *kind* of doctor, the *kind* of carpenter, the *kind* of student, the *kind* of priest that I am that counts. It is not what I do, what

THE FURROW

rank or status I hold in society that defines me in God's eyes, but rather what I am. It is the kind of person that I am that determines whether I will be first or last in the Kingdom of God.

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus on many occasions emphasises that we can judge the kind of person we are by our readiness to love, care for and serve others. To be such a person is to rid ourselves of selfishness, of self-preoccupation and self-righteousness, of our attachment to our material possessions, to our reputations, to our positions. Such things hold us back, they are blockages to us passing through that 'narrow door' we hear of in the Gospel which leads to that space of human fulfilment and happiness we all seek out in life.

At this time of year as talk about points, CAO offers and college places swirls about us let us not forget that ultimately it is not the job we have, the position we hold or the salary we earn, but the type of person we are that matters most to God. I suspect it is this that matters most to people too.

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time 28 August
Eccles (Sir) 3: 17-20, 28-29. Ps 67:4-7, 10-11, R/cf. v 11.
Heb 12: 18-19, 22-24. Lk 14:1, 7-14

Only those who humble themselves can go towards the 'things that are above' towards God (cf. Col 3:1-4). The proud look 'down from above;' the humble look 'up from below'. – Pope Francis

I am not sure if there is anything that grates upon us more than someone who thinks that they are always right while you are always wrong or at best not as intelligent, enlightened, skilled or experienced as they are. Self-righteousness in others almost always provokes a negative and sometimes even loathing reaction in ourselves. Some people tackle 'Mr and Ms Always Right' and try to teach them the error of their ways. Others let them babble away and adopt an 'avoid' or 'ignore' strategy. Self-righteousness ruptures relations between people and it isolates and damages the self-righteous person.

The scripture readings this Sunday go straight to the heart of 'the proud man's malady' (Eccles 3:28) and prescribe in no small measure the cultivation of humility as an antidote to such self-righteousness. The writer of the first reading advises that 'the greater you are, the more you should behave humbly [...].' (Eccles 3:18) Jesus himself recoils at the obvious self-righteousness of the guests at the meal in the Pharisee's house and tells the parable of the places at table. In the process he castigates proud and self-righteous thinking and emphasises that 'everyone who exalts

himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.’ (Lk.14:11) In doing so, he firmly places the attitude of humility at the heart of the Christian life.

On many occasions, Pope Francis has drawn attention to this often overlooked aspect of Jesus’ message. He speaks about humility as the ‘style’ or key characteristic of the way God does things. Despite being the eternal, immortal, immutable, and only truly ‘Mr Always Right’, the God of Jesus Christ acts towards us, not in a condescending, condemnatory, self-righteous manner, but rather by means of open, humble, shoulder to shoulder dialogue and invitation. Pope Francis emphasises that ‘Humility is above all, God’s way: God humbles himself to walk with his people’ (*Pope Francis, Palm Sunday, 2015*). Although God, he is not afraid to associate with humankind – and when God does so it is not the rich and wealthy, the powerful and strong, but rather the weakest, the poorest, those most in need that he seeks out. Or as the Gospel states ‘the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind’, those that cannot pay him back. God does so out of a pure love expecting nothing in return, but rather taking delight in the transformation his company brings to those most in need. ‘God acts in humility, in silence, in the little things.’ (*Pope Francis, Morning Meditation, March 9, 2015*)

The true joy of the Christian life is found, first of all, in recognising that we are far from self-sufficient. We owe our very existence to the pure self-giving love of God. Secondly, we are far from self-perfection – we fail and sin – far from being ‘Mr or Ms Always Right’. We get it wrong and we do wrong things, we do not know it all, we are not okay as we are, we are not yet righteous. We need God’s guidance and help to recognise our true situation to keep us truly open to others and truly loving especially to those most in need. We need to be humble. Or as Pope Francis puts it ‘the only true way of life for Christians is humility.’ (*Pope Francis, Palm Sunday, 2015*)

Homilies for September (C)

Ultan McGoochan

Twenty-Third Sunday Ordinary Time

September 4

Wis 9:13-18. Ps 89:3-6,12-14, 17. R/v1. Phm 9-10, 12-17.

Lk 14:25-33

Emmanuel Petit is one of the greatest soccer players of all time. He began his career with AS Monaco and went on to play for Arsenal, Barcelona and Chelsea and he represented France at International level. He gave a very impressive and thoughtful radio interview recently on 'Off the Ball.' Arsène Wenger was Petit's first manager at AS Monaco. The eighteen year-old Emmanuel Petit was working hard to impress Wenger. One day after a game Wenger came to talk to him and gave him the most extraordinary advice. He told Petit that he was trying too hard to impress and that he needed to relax and to open his heart and mind. Wenger told Petit that to become a better player he needed to discover who he was as a human being. Petit did not know how to respond to such unusual advice from a manager, but gradually it sank in and he allowed a little more fun to enter his life. He gave himself space to read and to reflect and Petit believes that Wenger's advice helped him to become the great player he was. During the rest of his distinguished career Petit played well for the managers that had some humanity about them and he played less well for those managers that were solely focused on contracts and results.

There is a touch of both styles of management in the gospel today. We can see the hard manager in the stark words: 'If any man comes to me without hating his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, he cannot be my disciple.' Hard words to hear. The scripture scholars tell us that Jesus does not literally want us to hate the ones we love the most. He is being extreme – exaggerating – to make the point that we should not allow even the most human attachments hinder us from following him.

But the other style of management is there too. The two parables

Ultan McGoochan is a priest of the Diocese of Kilmore. Address: Kilbracken, Carrigallen, Co. Leitrim.

about the builder going out to build and the king going out to war provoke us to think. Following Jesus is not easy. It inevitably comes at a cost and before we set out to follow him, we should consider very carefully whether we are able to pay the price.

Someone once said that there are Christians by conviction and Christians by convention. The Christians by conviction are those that have made a positive choice to follow Jesus whatever the cost. The Christians by convention are probably many of us. We drift along, not thinking about our faith very much, heedless of the real implications of it and quick to make sure that our Christian beliefs don't interfere in the smooth running of our lives.

Emmanuel Petit had more to say in that interview. He spoke movingly of his younger brother who died playing football. Petit said it was a tragedy but that tragedies happen every day. Despite them we need to keep living. He said that life is a fight. Petit said that in the Premier League if you want to win the trophy then you have to be prepared to suffer. There is no easy game in Premier League.

There is no easy way of following Jesus either. Like the young Emmanuel Petit, we need to have the courage to pause and to discover who we are and to consider whether we have the fire in our belly to sincerely follow Christ, even at a price. To follow Christ means accepting some share of his cross. The cross however is balanced by the joy that comes with living a good life, a meaningful life, a life lived for others.

There is no trophy without suffering. We follow Christ not for an old trophy, but to win a greater prize – eternal life.

Twenty-Fourth Sunday Ordinary Time *September 11*
 Ex 32: 7-11, 13-14. Ps 50: 3-4, 12-13, 17, 19. R/Lk 15:19.
 1 Tim 1:12-17. Lk 15:1-32

I love *First Dates*. That is not a personal confession, but rather the name of the hugely popular TV show! The structure of the show is to follow various couples that have been matched up for a First Date, as they meet over a meal in a fancy restaurant. Television cameras and microphones allow the viewer to listen in on what is going on. In the course of the show the viewer comes to learn a little about the background of the individuals taking part. We meet old and young, single and widowed, serial daters and people that have never been on a date. All human life is there.

I remember one participant in particular. John was a tall strong guy in his late twenties. He was very nervous about his date. When she turned up, they were both delighted with each other. John did

THE FURROW

not drink alcohol and that became a talking point with his date over dinner. It emerged that he had struggled with drug and alcohol addiction in the past, but he was sober now for the past two years. When the date was over the couple decided not to go on a second date, because for her own good and genuine reasons, his date felt uneasy about John's past struggle with drugs and alcohol. John took it well but he admitted that he was finding it difficult to meet someone due to his background. He said that his past struggles were no longer an issue for him, but that they continued to be an issue for others in terms of how others perceived him.

We find it very difficult to let the past go – our own and others. We are strong on justice and weak on mercy. The God that we believe in is a merciful God. He forgives us even when we don't deserve it. He does not hold our sins against us. It was to highlight this aspect of God our Father that Pope Francis inaugurated this Jubilee Year of Mercy. Jesus captured the essence of the mercy of God our Father in that inexhaustible parable of the Prodigal Son or as some call it now, the parable of the Merciful Father. The Father watched for his ungrateful son to come home and when he spotted him in the distance he ran to meet him, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. That is what the God of Jesus Christ wants to do to each of us.

God – unlike those that John meets on the dating scene – is not concerned about our past but he is passionately interested in our future. He wants to help us to become the best possible version of ourselves and he wants us to enable those around us to become the best possible version of themselves. To do that we need to set aside our prejudices, our harsh judgements and our cynicism and come to understand that people can change and by the grace of God, all of us are called to be transformed. As Oscar Wilde put it, 'Every saint has a past and every sinner has a future'.

Twenty-Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time *September 18*

Am 8:4-7. Ps 112:102,4-8. R/cf.vv1, 7. 1 Tm 2:1-8. Lk 16:1-13.

Justin Bieber is one of the most successful pop singers on the planet. To anyone under the age of 20 his face is instantly recognisable. Although he is just 22 years old, his wealth is estimated at around two hundred million dollars. It is a lot of money for a young man to handle and understandably he has gone off the rails from time to time. Recently, he announced on Instagram that he was no longer willing to pose for selfies with fans. He wrote: 'If you happen to see me out somewhere know that I'm not gonna take a picture. I'm done taking pictures. It has gotten to the point that people

won't even say hi to me or recognise me as a human. I feel like a zoo animal, and I wanna be able to keep my sanity.' The rich and famous have problems too, even if their problems are very different from ours!

It is a common *clichè* that money does not make people happy. Jesus recognised that, when he said that we cannot be a slave both of God and money. Notice that he did not say money was bad, but rather, allowing money to become our master is bad. We all need money. We all have bills to pay and responsibilities to maintain. As Christians we believe that every human being is entitled to have at the very minimum the basic necessities of life and every person ought to have the ability and the opportunity to earn a decent wage to provide for ourselves and our families. The right to work and to earn a fair wage is necessary for human flourishing.

We all know people that make money their God and they are usually not nice people to be around. Many people today place themselves under enormous pressure to live and to maintain a lifestyle that they cannot easily afford. Putting ourselves under that much stress in order to keep up appearances comes at a price.

One of the basic messages of Christianity is the invitation to live simply. Many of the best things in life are free – love, kindness, laughter, making memories with your children and grandchildren, watching the ducks at the park, going for a walk in the countryside, sitting quietly in a peaceful church.

Justin Bieber made a smart decision to stop the selfies. He said that he felt that he was being treated as an object and not a human being. When we lose an appropriate perspective on money, something similar happens to us. We harm our own humanity. And we cease to appreciate the true riches of life.

Twenty-Sixth Sunday Ordinary Time

September 26

Am 6:1, 4-6. Ps 145: 6-10, R/v2. 1 Tim 6:11-16. Lk 16:19-31

In any survey of the most popular hymns, 'All things bright and beautiful' would surely feature prominently. Most of you here know the tune and with a little encouragement might manage to sing the first verse from memory:

*All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.*

There are a number of verses in the hymn praising God for the beauty of creation. However, there is one verse of that old hymn that is rarely sung today. If you Google the lyrics for 'All things

THE FURROW

bright and beautiful' you will have to search very hard and patiently to discover the original third verse. The original third verse goes like this:

*The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.*

It is easy to see why that verse has been quietly dropped in recent decades. The hymn was first published in England in 1848 and in its third verse it reflects the mind-set of Victorian England, a time when society was stable and each person knew their place in that society. There was an underlying sense that it was God's will that the rich were rich and the poor were poor. As the hymn puts it: *God made them high and lowly/ and ordered their estate.* It was only as the nineteenth century progressed that that view came to be increasingly challenged.

Every generation's interpretation of the scriptures is somewhat influenced by the culture of its time. Today, as Christians, we could not stand over any interpretation of the scriptures that would imply that it is God's will that the rich are rich and the poor are poor.

In the Gospel, the rich man feasted magnificently, while the poor man Lazarus lay at his gate. Was that God's will? Not as far as Jesus was concerned. In the next world Lazarus is honoured, while the rich man is cut-off from God. The problem was not that the rich man was rich. The problem was that he did not use his good fortune to help those less fortunate than himself. He did no direct harm to Lazarus. He simply ignored him. Lazarus did not feature on the rich man's radar. The only thing we know about Lazarus is that he was poor. We are not told why he was poor or how he came to be in that state. Maybe it was his own fault. Maybe he was a gambler, a drinker, or a waster. We are not told. We only know that he was poor and as far as Jesus is concerned that is the most important piece of information we need to have.

Lazarus was vindicated by God in the next life, just as the rich man was punished. But as the psalm reminds us, it is not enough to wait until the next life for justice to be done. Justice begins here and now in this world. We are called upon to challenge the inequalities in our society – to be just to the oppressed, to give bread to the hungry, to attend to the needs of prisoners, to look after the vulnerable, to support those that work for justice and to protect and welcome the stranger.

We are well aware that there is a great deal of inequality in our society. The gap between rich and poor is growing. Drug addiction

is spiralling and what was once a feature of the inner cities has become a plague in every town and village. Homelessness is increasing day after day. Vulnerable children and vulnerable elderly people are not having their needs adequately met. The refugee crisis in Europe is not easing.

What are we doing about all of these great challenges, as individual Christians, and as a community that is pledged to live by the values of Jesus Christ? It is easy to do nothing, to leave it to someone else or, even worse, to turn a blind eye to what is going on at our very gate. But as Pope Francis ceaselessly reminds us by the example not only of his words but also of his actions, ‘In all places and circumstances, Christians with the help of their pastors, are called to hear the cry of the poor ...’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 191) To make one concrete suggestion, as life returns to normal after the summer, perhaps as a parish community, through the medium of the parish pastoral council or an open forum, we might come together in the spirit of the Gospel and ask ourselves, what can we do in this community, to make even a small practical contribution to addressing a social justice issue in our area. What, with God’s help, we decide to do is not nearly as important as the fact that we make a start.

Control. The difficulty ordained people tend to experience with the institutional church is that it puts the procedural before the personal. Yet Jesus Christ, in whose name it officiates, worked on entirely the opposite principle. Some clergy have been badly bruised because of a nervous hierarchical tendency to become legalistic and distanced when problems arise, instead of offering what the Church is supposed to be noted for – relational pastoral care.

– MICHAEL FORD, *Becoming the Presence of God* (Dublin: Columba Press) p. 5.

Chronicle

The Wind of the Word

– Creation, Compassion and Contemplation

Enda McDonagh

At one level of consciousness the Christian believer may recognise that the Holy Spirit is all about him while feeling unable to discern any particular prompting or message of that Spirit. It would be presumptuous to conclude that all this represents anything approaching a mystical darkness, an impending dark night of the soul. On first, second and third hearing it seems merely distraction, mindlessness as opposed to mindfulness, however that condition is currently understood. The Christian is presumably not the only one who experiences this frustrating and seemingly futile state of mind. It may however be more painful for him if it attends his efforts at prayer, mental, oral or ‘scriptural’, with a small ‘s’, that is when s/he is trying to express his would-be spiritual life in prayer. Theology as we know it is at its proper level a search for God in human words voiced or written. In its essence this is a speaking or writing into God and not just about God. So much of a theologian’s life and work may miss the ‘into’, as s/he labours at writing desk or podium to express and communicate with listeners or readers. Yet the description of theology as ‘faith in search of understanding’, or more fully as ‘faith, hope and charity in search of understanding’, demands this ‘into’. Theology always remains a search, a journey, not an arrival. Staging posts *en route* are always provisional even if necessary, at times indicating the direction towards, at other times excluding certain misdirections. They do not in this life or language provide a final resting place. Like a good golfer on the course testing the direction and strength of the wind by throwing some grass into the air, the theologian within the community is testing the wind of the Word, what we may call the prompting of the Spirit. He is at his proper intellectual work in a searching, prayerful spirit.

Enda McDonagh is a priest of the Archdiocese of Tuam. Address: St. Patrick’s College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. This is the text of his address to the members of the Maynooth Union on Union Day, 7 June, 2016.

The Christian theologian focuses on the basics of faith, hope and love engagement with Jesus, the Christ. Word and world, in creation, incarnation and death/resurrection provide the first portals to his search as they are recorded in the primary written sources of the Bible and as they are mediated through the community of believers and meditated on and lived by them over the centuries. In and through these, Scripture and Tradition (past and present), he listens for and to the Wind of the Word, the Breathing of the Spirit. So in this limited attention to that Wind by one listener, an attempt is made to decipher anew the Good News of the Word.

NEWNESS

The fresh newness of the Good News applies to all its crucial elements as listed above, creation, incarnation and resurrection. The newness of the message of each of these is a function of the developing human understanding of Word and World by the Breathing of the Spirit in Word and World. In this brief reflection only a few aspects of that 'newness' will be considered.

In the Judeo-Christian/Biblical tradition the God of Creation is the ultimate mystery, the absolute Other, the mysterious origin and destiny of all that there is. No created mind can comprehend and no human words can properly describe this mystery. We can only and inadequately approximate, remotely approach in our human voicing. The Word of God remains finally beyond the words of man. Yet because we have no other words we are continually compelled to use our human words in speaking of and to God, the God of whom and before whom we should for the most part be silent. For there is another dimension to the God of Creation in God's otherness, the companionate, indeed indwelling God of Israel and still more radically of Jesus the Christ, the long promised Messiah. He is the Word of God, through whom and in whom all things were created as John in his Gospel proclaims. He is the Christ who made all things new, the Head of the New Creation, the 'new Adam' in Paul's language.

He is the Christ who dwells in us and in whom we dwell. The paradox is stretched to its ultimate, the God who is totally other than creation, is more intimate to us human creatures than we are to ourselves. The mystery of Creation reaches for us its cloud-capped apex in the mystery of Incarnation.

In its limping analogy to the originating and transforming creativity of God or 'the God beyond God', in the phrase preferred by some philosophers and theologians in an effort to escape the limitations of the traditional human 'naming', human creativity is still a remarkable gift, available to all human beings in very diverse forms. '*Ex nihilo nihil fit*' obviously rules out for us the radically

THE FURROW

divine type of creation, although the much weaker analogy may be discerned by the very breathing of the spirit as the term 'inspiration' itself suggests. 'Inspiration' in human discourse is usually reserved to certain elitist activities. artistic activities in poetry or painting, sculpture or music. More broadly and richly it could be applied to strictly human activity which involves the loving achievement of something new in the endless forms of human interaction with the world about us, from conversing to singing, from marrying to gardening to hiking. The resulting 'new' may be a product in the narrower sense like a flower or more subjectively in the relational sense, but it will be identifiably different. The world will be changed, however slightly. A fresh otherness beyond the actor will come into play.

However 'other' to that actor the product may be, it will still inhabit and so change the human actor who will continue to inhabit that 'creation' or product as its creator. All this sounds much more complex than it really is, as a commonplace if often unconscious experience.

Its immediate significance is in helping to tease out how truly human activity in its creativity is an act of loving as well as an act of changing the surrounding world by the introduction of something new. In all this it reflects for the Christian believer, however weakly, the creative activity of God. As a loving introduction of the 'new', this is an enriching activity and in a wounded world, such as ours, a healing activity. The further creative/innovative activity of God in the New Creation expresses his love anew in the Incarnation of God's Word by taking on human form and existence. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth the originating, divine act of creation develops its healing and transforming intent. The promised fulfilling of that intent dominates the Hebrew scriptures and for Christians finds its realisation in the New Testament. Love, the best approximate name we have for God, prevails. Such divine love in its continuously creative, healing and transforming presence enables human love, in its limited creative and transforming, if at times fitful, capacity, to reach its final fulfilment.

UNIVERSAL SIGNS

The Wind of the Word in its Pentecostal significance, as the Coming of the Spirit to Preach and Practise the Love of Neighbour manifest in Jesus, summons and enables believers every day and everywhere. The forms of that preaching and practice may vary from time to time, from place to place and even from believer to believer. However there are frequently common causes to which believers may as a universal or regional community be summoned to address at particular times. Reading the signs of these times as

the Wind of the Word is also a gift of the Spirit. Today in union with Pope Francis and so many Church leaders and believers as well as unbelievers at least three such universal signs and calls may be readily discerned. The first and most immediately urgent of these is the Syrian and broader refugee crisis in the Middle East and North Africa. The figures of those on the move in horrendous circumstances, in flight from persecution and torture, war and famine, increase manifold from week to week and from country to country. The biblical backgrounds of the exile of Israel, of the flight into Egypt of Mary and Joseph with the Child Jesus, of the rejection of Jesus by his own people and his torture and death at the hands of the imperial power, illuminate for Christians the continuing human weakness and destructiveness even of those explicitly called to love and serve their neighbours. In counter-balance to the current destructiveness and its consequent temptations to despair, the developing compassionate and practical response of so many people across Europe offers fresh and refreshing Good News and encouraging signs of the effective presence of Word and Spirit, however anonymous.

Before and beyond the current refugee crisis lies the persisting hunger crisis. Again the biblical famine stories, Jesus feeding the five thousand, our own Irish nineteenth century experiences and a host of other human 'hunger' stories, which we may meet on our streets today, speak to us of this endemic threat to human dignity, health and life. The Wind of that Word, 'I was hungry and you gave me to eat' or you did not, must continue to haunt us day by day if we are at all attending to neighbours, near and far. As is so often the case, the people imprisoned in the refugee crisis are also among those suffering seriously from the hunger crisis. As Mary Robinson among others recently observed, the intensity of Syria's current refugee crisis is due in part to the drought-induced failure of its food production and consequent famine. A lethal combination of conflict and hunger is common to many poorer countries. This was true of Ireland in the 1840s for example, with so many seeking to escape in the notorious 'coffin ships'.

CLIMATE CHANGE

The recent Syrian drought signals the third of our contemporary disasters which threatens eventually not just the present poorer and conflict-ridden countries but the whole planet and all its human inhabitants, indeed all planetary life. This is the phenomenon known as 'climate change'. It is increasingly recognised by the relevant scientists as portending the destruction of life on our planet unless urgent and universal action is taken in the near future. How imminent the critical and destructive change is may be

THE FURROW

debated and of course has its persistent deniers because its causes and development are not as discernible to the inexperienced eye as the conflicts, refugees and hunger crises. And the wealthy and the powerful have many selfish reasons for denial and delay, including an increasingly fragile and self-centred trust in the capacity of technology to avert the worst of that change which on the scientific and even immediate evidence they may be increasingly compelled to acknowledge. More sadly, in face of the truism that everything on our planet is connected, including violence, poverty, hunger, loss of human dignity and of freedom, the most vulnerable to the destructive effects of climate change and the least able to combat them are the same deprived people.

If they are to achieve some minimum standard of living, health and security in keeping with their humanity and with the basic equality of all human beings, it becomes morally imperative for the wealthier and more powerful to sacrifice many of their self-indulgent and excessive ways of behaving and living. Only thus will we all begin to recognise and fairly share our 'common home' in the phrase used so effectively by Pope Francis in his recent and widely welcomed encyclical on climate change, *Laudato Si'*. In another telling remark he urged people to listen to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. Despite its widespread welcome within and without the Churches and other religious communities, the encyclical has had its critics and rejecters also, both within and without. These critics have responded by either denying the validity of the science invoked or the authority of the Pope to participate in the debate. Some of the Catholic American rejecters were reported to have adapted words attributed to John F Kennedy, although originally belonging to Daniel O'Connell, 'I take my religion from Rome but not my science'; originally in O'Connell and Kennedy 'but not my politics'.

A hasty reaction to this brief and rather superficial account of a few of the current moral crises facing the comfortable peoples among whom I live is one of painful exhaustion. The temptation presses that 'there is nothing really helpful that I can do. Indeed the challenge is too big for any recognisable group to answer. The world has always been and will always be unfair and unjust. Human poverty and oppression in a variety of destructive forms will always be with us'. Such a reaction if accepted leaves us free to enjoy our comforts without any disturbing guilt feelings. In a fuller attending to the Wind of the Word we are liable to be deeply disturbed and recognise the call to personal and social response, even if we are at a loss to decipher at once the appropriate ways of that response. These ways must first of all be appropriate to the people enduring these privations and secondly to the means available to us in

proclaiming the ‘bad news’ of the actual deprivations, in seeking to persuade others in a position to help and in initiating, ourselves, whatever helpful activity we can. All this requires that further and more sensitive listening to the Wind of the Word which, for some at least, depends on prayerful attention to the presence of the divine, which may in turn result in the renewing, indeed in the transforming experience of contemplation.

CREATIVE AND COMPASSIONATE IMAGINATION

It will be helpful to avoid losing track to return here to the subtitle of this reflection, ‘Creation, Compassion and Contemplation’. It may be more helpful to address them in various combinations beginning with ‘creative compassion’. Compassion, as suffering with the neighbour who is all human kind, demands an imaginative, indeed creative leap which allows the suffering people to inhabit us. This happens in varying degrees according to the kind and intensity of the suffering, the intimacy or distance of the sufferers and the willingness of the observer-participant to open up to the suffering victims. Creative compassion enables one to discern more precisely the sufferings of the other, as poets and artists do in artistic media from poetry to painting. The great masterpieces of the suffering Christ are inspired testament to this as are so many significant poems and above all the music of the Passion of Christ. Beyond this crucial conversion to the suffering other lies the imaginative discovery of creative means of response, personal and communal. Such response will be costly for the respondent in self-surrender to the needs of the victim but will in a deeper sense be enriching for both, In the Gandhi vision of non-violent emancipation of the Indian people the emancipation would be mutual for British coloniser and Indian colonised. This alternative to violent revolution versus violent oppression in the history of empire has had its successors in subsequent twentieth century history but remains a poor also ran in the wake of the persisting war and violence which continues to dominate at the expense of the compassionate and creative imagination. The absence of such creative and compassionate imagination and action in confronting the current challenges of violence, hunger and indeed climate change too easily lead to despair of the human condition or least to passive indifference to the fate of others.

CONTEMPLATION

Such compassionate and creative engagement with the suffering others might seem far removed from the contemplation, originally suggested as interrelated here. As with self and neighbour, with Christian believer and Jesus the Christ, with the human creature

THE FURROW

and divine Creator, there is a mutuality in Christian faith (and love) between planning/action and contemplation. At the heart of this interconnection is the capacity and the need to recognise and respond to the other, both human and divine. This involves an opening up to the other as other and so transcending the self to the point of being inhabited by the other in her/his very otherness without losing the sense of the reality of the self in its now transformed otherness. This experience is related to what we conventionally call falling in love, as that experience, born of desire perhaps, settles into genuine loving in respecting, accepting and being enriched by the other as other and not as possession to satisfy one's own needs. As pointed out earlier this experience is easier to identify when it happens than to define or even describe verbally. Still more difficult, indeed impossible, to describe is the relationship with the ultimate other we call God. In Christian faith God and Father of Jesus Christ is the final terminus of all creaturely others and so the source and terminus of all human loving, explicitly recognised as such or not. For most of us there is a darkness in the process. This darkness is only very partially cleared by integrating the example of Jesus as manifest in the Gospels and recorded in the writings and experiences of the great Christian mystics. These can in prayer renew our sense of neighbourly love and re-energise in the face of compassion fatigue and its more dangerous companion of loss of hope for any effective response to the developing convergence of crises. From loving action to contemplation and from contemplation to action in varying forms at varying times is the story of Christian life and love. These have become in our forlorn world the most effective marks of the true Christians and their true Church.

On the One Road

Tom Deenihan

Having attended these Maynooth Union events fairly regularly in the past, and more regularly since I started working here with

Tom Deenihan is a priest of the Diocese of Cork and Ross. Address: St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. This is the text of his Silver Jubilee toast to the Irish Hierarchy at the Maynooth Union Dinner, 7 June, 2016.

CPSMA, I have witnessed a change, as it were, in the format or content from being a ‘Toast to the Hierarchy’ to a sort of update on what the Silver Jubilee Class have achieved or endured, depending on your perspective, to a reflection on how the times have changed culturally, socially and spiritually since the oil was rubbed on the hands of the jubilee class twenty five years ago.

Like every other class here, we marvel at the speed in which time has elapsed, we fight the tendency to bemoan the change in the social context in which we work and we walk that tight rope between smelling the sheep and smelling *of* the sheep. We acknowledge that the Ireland that we were ordained into is a foreign country to the Ireland of today. That is a statement. It is neither condemnatory nor laudatory because there was much to praise and regret in both. In that blissful summer of 1991, during which we traipsed the country attending each other’s ordinations, memories were made and a corner was turned. It was a coming of age and we moved on! In retrospect, you could say that Church and Society had a similar experience around that time.

My abiding memory of that summer was of being stranded between Carna and Carraroe at 4am on a Monday morning after a Tuam Ordination, travelling with four or five classmates when the car broke down. While one may have expected the faith in Connemara, at the minimum, to match that of West Cork, no passing car stopped for the young men in Roman collars at the side of the road at that unearthly hour. It may also be a reflection on the activities in those parts in the days pre the Downing Street Agreement or a reflection on the guilt of those rushing home at that hour and their surprise at the level of inebriation that caused such an apparition. Still, in the meantime and thankfully, our cars have become somewhat better and more reliable!

There was time too, dare I say it, when we regarded Silver Jubilarians with the reverence and awe that is due to venerable old age. Now, despite our classpiece moving perilously close to the door by Saint Mary’s Oratory and preparing for a Poor Clare type seclusion, our perspective has changed. We are still, you might say unfortunately, the young priests, still to peak, still with time on our hands and not old at all.

Perhaps we are deluding ourselves with what Pope Benedict called, at the Mass *Pro Eligendo Pontifice*, ‘the tyranny of relativism’! But the fact that there are more older than us than younger in every diocese does allow us to revel still in the generic, delusional and, sometimes, unflattering title of ‘young priests’!

In fact, it is almost unfair of the Silver Jubilee Class to be hogging today’s celebration. There are those here who have worked longer and harder in the vineyard, those who worked in harder conditions,

THE FURROW

those who ministered to ourselves and, indeed, who influenced us. One cannot but mention the Golden and Diamond Jubilee classes.

I found myself reminiscing recently on one of the books that we read for Spiritual Reading during our time here. It was, if I remember correctly, in the format of a series of 'letters to a seminarian'. One of the images in one letter was that of the seminary being compared to a bag of stones. As the stones moved in the bag, they rubbed, clashed and grated off each other. In the end, the rough edges were knocked off and they became smooth.

The analogy was slightly inaccurate in that the process for ourselves did not *end* with Ordination. We are still a work in progress, still having our rough edges smoothed, still on the way to what we can or should be. We started that here with each other; subsequently, we experienced the shock and sorrow of some of our number leaving before and after Ordination. We experienced the shame and sorrow when some of our colleagues, be it at a class or diocesan level, committed crimes against children and we realised, to our horror, that ontological change can be trumped by original sin. Our parishioners and the situations that we encountered knocked a few more corners off and made us realise our own vulnerability, our dependence, our lack of faith and our own deficiencies. Pope Francis has used the image of a 'Field Hospital' to describe the Church. He is right though on some occasions with our involvement it has resembled more a scene from MASH!

That encounter with our parishioners was seminal. I remember the musings of a Professor of Sacred Scripture from Kerry here in my time. Professor Quinlan said, amongst other things and on more than one occasion, that 'The Holy Spirit wears country boots and can be found walking any Irish Road'. We have, I think, despite our initial distain, come to agree with that judgement. We have been privileged to witness and experience a vibrant faith, be it during personal conversations, on First Friday calls, at hospital beds or at gravesides. I have often commented that our clerical students should accompany us on those calls to witness theology interacting with faith. The Pastoral Year, an innovation here and developed since our time, recognises that need. We have also witnessed and, in many cases, shared in some way that pain at accidents, suicides and at the same hospitals and gravesides. We have, if you like, all of us, experienced in our priesthood, both Good Friday and Easter Morning.

In many ways, our time here provided the foundations for our dealings with those situations. But no formation can form perfectly and pre-empt every event. The lack of such knowledge was brought home to me in my second parish, by a woman, a bit like the devout Anna in Luke's gospel, who asked me why there was a cure in the

Easter water that was absent from ordinary Holy Water. Conscious that reputations could rise or fall on such, as Patrick Kavanagh would call ‘Ballyrush and Gorteen’ moments, I opined that it was ‘because the Paschal Candle was dipped in it’. Despite the National Director for Liturgy being one of our class too, my answer is still waiting the liturgical *Nihil Obstat!* I might also mention that the same parishioner caused the closure of the church after the Easter Vigil to be delayed one Holy Saturday night as she was completing her Stations of the Cross!

Our own faith and our sense of vocation have been strengthened by those we were privileged to work both with and for. Long may it remain so!

We are a class with a high proportion of Diocesan Secretaries, four last count, Tuam, Ferns, Killaloe and Cork and Ross. We were taught by three members of the hierarchy, Archbishop Neary and Bishop Drennan in Scripture and Bishop McAreavey in Canon Law. A further three bishops overlapped with our time here, Archbishop Eamon Martin, Bishop Denis Nulty and Bishop Phonsie Cullinan. That may have had an influence and changed our perspective too. While the emphasis has been very much on the changing context in which priests work over the past two decades, there has been a parallel and, perhaps, a more dramatic shift in what is expected of bishops and how they are engaged with by parishioners and society as a whole.

When one of the Reports into the Church’s handling of child abuse was published, I was a curate in a parish. It was the week in which I was most supported, most affirmed and a distinction was drawn between what is euphemistically called ‘the institutional Church’ and the local priest who was well known. A while later another report was published. By then, I had left that parish and was working as the Diocesan Advisor for Post-Primary Religious Education. This time, the reaction was different. I represented an institution and had no relationship, history or reputation. I experienced anger and aggression.

Working in a Diocesan Office and from speaking to others who do, I appreciate that our bishops have, despite their efforts, work and commitment, been faced with that institutional anger over the past few years. In addition, while we bemoan extra work due to a decline in numbers – we are, as I said earlier, despite the silver aura, still the young priests – our bishops are filling gaps, plugging holes, dealing with delegations, fulfilling civil and canonical obligations and becoming, by default, mediators, HR experts and counsellors. While the notion of a toast to the hierarchy may no longer be part of this proceeding, we do appreciate the enormity of the expectations that they carry, we do not underestimate their

THE FURROW

task and we hope that we are more part of the solution than of the problem.

While some of us are now more familiar with Maynooth than others for no other reason than our work, we do sense and hear those whispers in the corridors, in the College chapel and even on the Graf, of staff long gone and characters that are no more. We smile and we remember Maynooth affectionately. In many ways, we were lucky! We lived here in a time of larger numbers, we experienced not just formation by the College and the Deans and the formation by theology but that critical formation from each other, common sense, if you like, straight talking, peer pressure or fraternal correction depending on your perspective. We experienced the liturgies and music of this place and we missed the Saturday nights evening prayer, exposition, night prayer and Benediction with the Dom Casey's quavering voice, and the ever present fear that he would drop the monstrance, when we went to our parishes and when we had to make do with the *Late Late Show* and *Saturday Live*, after our Vigil Mass.

We resisted the new psalm tones that the then newly appointed Director of Sacred Music, John O'Keeffe, introduced, being somewhat conservative, and we went apoplectic when the same Director refused a rather triumphant Gloria from Fr. Sean Lavery's *Missa Turbae* and Widor's *Toccata in F* as a recessional to our Diaconate during Lent, on 1 April of all days, 1990. Our Recessional today righted that perceived and treasured ancient wrong!

Twenty two years later, when I returned here, I went to Evening Prayer on Saturday night. The new Psalm tones came back effortlessly, John O'Keeffe was still here and my voice blended in with that of a new generation despite the years. What we fought to retain, I could not remember and at Benediction, I could swear I heard the Dom Casey's voice as I can hear Frankie Cremin coughing before praying the words of Consecration in one breath in the Lady Chapel in the afternoons.

We are what God made us and we are, in many ways, influenced by our experiences. Today, we return to greet and congratulate our chronological seniors and juniors who continue to have an influence on us and who are celebrating jubilees too. We return to congratulate our fellow class mates who also had a significant role in our journey and, above all, we return to Maynooth, our *Alma Mater*, to say thanks, to reminisce and renew friendships and to celebrate twenty five years working as priests in dioceses and parishes throughout the country. It is in Maynooth at times like these that one catches a glimpse of the eternity of Melchizedek and one realises that we are part of that lineage!

Opportunities like today's are times when we can support and

encourage each other, times when we can ignore the negatives and focus on the positives, times when, despite our differences, we can focus on what we have in common. Times when we can remember that we are John's branches of that one vine. In Paragraph 109 of *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis states that 'Challenges exist to be overcome! Let us be realists, but without losing our joy, our boldness and our hope-filled commitment'. Losing our joy, our excitement and zeal is the biggest threat to all ministries.

Pope Benedict, in his homily to the ordinands of Rome in April 2007, prefigured those sentiments when he prayed that 'the certainty that Christ does not abandon us and that no obstacle can prevent the accomplishment of his universal plan of salvation would be a cause of constant consolation and steadfast hope.'

Perhaps we have overlooked that and deprived ourselves of that constant consolation. It was St. Teresa of Avila who said, 'May God save us from gloomy saints'. While we have never claimed to be saints, we have the tendency to be gloomy. The real value of events like today's is that they remind us of our enthusiasm, our joy and our somewhat eroded youthful idealism.

There is a line in the rite of Ordination, 'May God who has begun the good work in you bring it to completion'. Like everyone else, we are still on the road to completion, perfection and fulfilment. May God be with all of us till our silver turns to gold and until 'we see him face to face'.

The Joy of Service

Fintan Monahan

On Friday last, in the Church of the Holy Rosary, Castlebar I was at the funeral of a colleague, a man who had served as priest for 63 years before passing to his eternal reward last week. Coming away from the ceremony, I bumped into another colleague who is

Fintan Monahan is a priest of the Archdiocese of Tuam. Address: Diocesan Secretary, Archbishop's House, Tuam, Co. Galway. This is the text of his Silver Jubilee homily on Union Day, June 7, at St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

THE FURROW

present today, a Golden Jubilarian and we were looking forward to and planning for this occasion. In the course of our conversation and perhaps in tune with the occasion we were just coming from, we wondered if the celebration of birthdays and jubilees are genuinely occasions to be looked forward to or not. Along with the happiness and festivities, such occasions are invariably tinged with nostalgia and a reminder of the advance of old age. There is no doubt that there is a certain element of that in such a gathering today, but overall it is a great opportunity to pause, to meet, to look back, to reminisce, to reflect – individually and collectively – and look forward to the future, energized by the company and presence of each other sharing similar journeys. And of course Christ, the Good Shepherd is very much with us, in our midst, guiding us in doing that. ‘Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labour in vain.’

FICHE BLIAIN AG FÁS

Our Irish teacher in school in *An Cheathrú Rua* in South Connemara in the early 1980s was a great man for words of wisdom and he used to extrapolate the title of the classic book by the Great Blasket Island author, Muiris Ó Súilleabháin *Fiche Bliain ag Fás*. According to our *Múinteoir Gaeilge* the four major categories or epochs of our lives were – *Fiche bliain ag fás, fiche bliain faoi bhláth, fiche bliain ag meath agus fiche bliain is cuma ann nó as thú!* Twenty years a growing, twenty years in your prime, twenty years in decline and finally twenty years not really mattering whether you are in it or not!

Whatever category we are in, silver, ruby, golden, diamond, platinum or just simply an anniversary of ordination, we relish the opportunity to return to the location that was for us the well-spring, the source of our spiritual, philosophical, scientific and theological awakening and early priestly formation after the seed of our vocation was sown in our homes and parishes. We rejoice in being back here today in our *Alma Mater*, St. Patrick’s College for this jubilee time and sharing our memories, our experiences and situations with each other. We remember in prayer those we have lost through death and to various alternative pathways in life. We pray also for the staff here in Maynooth in their important work of priestly formation.

PRESENTATION GRACE

Every year on 21 November I look forward to being with the Presentation Sisters in Tuam as they celebrate their foundation, Presentation Day. They have a tradition of singing the *Grace before Meals* to begin the festivities with the words of St. Paul to the

Philippians, *Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say rejoice*. Today we rejoice with the Lord on this jubilee occasion. We rejoice and thank God for the wonderful gift of priesthood, for the privilege of being able to work in the vineyard of the Lord, for the fact that we have the health and energy and life to do that. We pray during this sacred time of Eucharist and through our interaction with each other for a renewal of the enthusiasm, idealism and energy that we were so full of as young men here x number of years ago.

JUBILEE

There is a beautiful richness to the term Jubilee with all its connotations. According to Moses, every fifty years the land and property are to be in some sense rested and something of that given back to the Lord in celebration of what has been won and lost in the economy. This time of rest and celebration is to be called a Jubilee. The celebration of Jubilee is signalled by a trumpet and this celebration is a joyous occasion of thanksgiving bringing things back to where they ought to be. It's a thankful time of celebration and joy and realising the providence and presence of the Lord, the creator, the giver, the sustainer.

For a priest, religious or lay-person the celebration of a significant jubilee is like that. Jubilees that we so joyfully celebrate today are milestone occasions not only for us ourselves but for everyone associated with us, because we are so much a product of the people we come from and minister to. It is a time to take time-out, to pause at a significant interval, after diligent work and love and life and faith and to rejoice in the Lord for all that has been!

CHANGING TIMES

The landscape in which the priest exists since our class was ordained in 1991 has changed utterly. Most of our class were still primary school children when Saint John Paul came to Ireland in 1979. The various Church scandals, the rise in secularism, the rapid change, the decline in faith practice and a time of upheaval just began to set in and hit the accelerator – almost before the Holy Oil was dry on our hands. At times over the past few years our work as pastors seemed like (to offer you a choice of similes) that of Sisyphus rolling the boulder up the hill, or the lot of Jarlath with the broken chariot wheel or the experience of swimming constantly against a strong tide.

The late Fr. Ollie Hughes, God rest him, President of St. Jarlath's College, trainer of many Hogan Cup winning teams, used to echo again and again the mantra '*Magnanimous in victory, gracious in defeat*'. So often it is in the experience of failure and loss that the greatest lessons are learnt.

THE FURROW

It is in the experience of defeat and suffering and sadness that we often learn most and that we are true to the message of the Cross of Jesus Christ. St. Paul reminds us clearly of this - that it is when we are truly weak that we are in fact at our strongest and most close to our calling to take up the Cross and follow Our Lord. I recall, back in the late 1990s, being at a clergy gathering at the height of the abuse crisis. Morale was very low in the Church at the time because of what had emerged and the terrible handling of the situation. However, Fr. Frank Fahey, former Mayo man of the year and guardian of Ballintubber Abbey, gave a spiritual and consoling perspective and courage to all present. He pointed out that it is perhaps when we are *suspended* on the Cross in solidarity with Jesus Christ, in union with those who are suffering and most affected that we are at our most genuine as priests, even more so than when things are going well for us. *Magnanimous in victory, gracious in defeat!*

THE STORY OF THE BROKEN POT

An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots, each hung on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to her home, the cracked pot arrived only half-full. For two whole years this went on daily, with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course the perfect pot was proud of its own accomplishment. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it could do only half of what it had been made for.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream. 'I am ashamed of myself, because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house'. The old woman smiled.

'Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house.'

THE GRACE OF PERSEVERANCE

Meanwhile, back at the ranch as they say, we are all still here, we are still rolling the boulder up the hill, the chariot wheel may be well dented, we are still swimming against that proverbial tide, our spirits bent and bowed a little, but certainly not broken. *Is gaire*

cabhair Dé ná an doras. The help of God is nearer than the door. Again we retreat to the Great Blaskets, this time to Peig Sayers for wisdom and faith whose exhortation at a time of great personal loss was: *Tá Dia láidir agus máthair maith aige.* God is strong and we know that his blessed mother has special place in her heart for us as priests of Jesus Christ.

THE PROMISE OF ELIJAH

The words of Elijah in today's first reading are like balm to our souls: 'The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.' As we return again and again to the Lord for our daily sustenance in prayer and the Eucharist, the Lord continues to strengthen us with nourishment that we need for the journey.

SUPPORT AND INSPIRATION OF THE FAITHFUL

Apart from the obvious spiritual well-spring and foundation of our lives as priests, I have found the unswerving loyalty, support, dedication, understanding, patience and tolerance of the people we minister to truly inspiring and so encouraging and I am sure this has been the experience of so many here today. *Go dtuga Dia luach saothar dóibh!*

LIGHT OF THE EARTH AND SALT OF THE WORLD

What powerful images for reflection Jesus gives us in today's Gospel, the early section of the Sermon on the Mount, light and salt! We are called to be light to the world, radiating the presence of Christ to those in our pastoral care. We are challenged to be salt of the earth. Jesus encourages us never to lose our edge of being salt of the earth and light to the world.

SURSUM CORDA

There is a retired Christian brother in Tuam, in his 90th year and any time we meet, his greeting is '*Sursum Corda*'. Lift up your hearts. Today we lift up our hearts in joyful thanksgiving for the privilege and gift of our vocations and all we have in life. I leave the final words to the poet, Kahlil Gibran: 'I slept and I dreamed that life is all joy. I woke and I saw that life is all service. I served and I saw that service is joy.'

Jubilee Blessings

Paschal Scallon

It seems odd to come to the celebration of an occasion like this to find that the reading from the Gospel happens to be part of the text that was, as I remember it, the most thoroughly researched passage of scripture in our entire three year divinity course.

The sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7) is, of course, Jesus' magisterial revealing of himself, his person and personality, and in that the mind and heart of the Father, the nature and the character of God.

In the gospel passage on the day of my ordination, the 11th Sunday in Ordinary Time that year, St Mark recalls Jesus asking the question, 'What can we say the kingdom of God is like?' I was so taken by that that I had it printed on my ordination card which was great until one of my Vincentian confrères pointed out, when the thing came back from the printers, that the card read, "What can we say the kingdom of God is like?" ... Paschal Scallon!

In the experience of every baptised person but especially in our experience of the ministry of priesthood, being able to say something about the kingdom of God is a *sine qua non*. One way or another, all we do and at least some of what we can say, ought to reveal in us something of the person and personality of Christ, the mind and heart of the Father, the nature and the character of God.

That may seem a rather obvious thing to say but the thing is, we knew, even at a first thoughtful reading of the Sermon on the Mount and particularly the Beatitudes, that most of it seemed outrageous. The idea that the meek had any chance of inheriting the earth, that one should give someone the shirt off your back, turn the other cheek and pray, indeed, for those who persecute you seemed too idealistic, and perhaps dangerously naïve. This is not the time or place to rehearse all that. The arguments are well documented. We had access to the best commentaries at the time, and we may even have kept up with more recent work since then.

Paschal Scallon is a Vincentian priest. Address: St. Peter's, Phibsborough, Dublin 7. This is the text of his homily, on the occasion of his Silver Jubilee on 6 June in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare.

The Sermon on the Mount and each of the eight blessings expressed in the Beatitudes remain important because we are going to need them in the years ahead of us, to articulate this hope that is in us, that the nature and character of God is, as Jesus reveals, merciful and always blessing. Actually, we have needed to know and rely on this all through our time in ministry.

When we were ordained Ireland was already well on the road to becoming the society people speak of with such astonishment today, as such an assertively secular if not aggressively secular society. The context in which we have ministered has been one of spectacular diminishment. Our presence, our contribution can no longer be what that of our older brothers in the ministry once was. We have been priests among a changing people in a changing culture.

Our response has had to be generous and will have to be more generous still. Every engagement with people in our time throws us back on the Sermon on the Mount which asks us to rely on providence, the will of God emerging and accomplishing all through the limited efforts any of us is capable of.

Our responses to the challenges we have faced in ministry have been and will continue to be shaped either by resentment or patience. We were trained to be active, constructive, leading and energetic. Patience may not always have seemed useful but we are no longer on the verge of thirty and we are in a different culture.

It is not only ourselves who have to trust that the balance has shifted. Something, even in the most faithful of our brothers and sisters, tries to hold on to ways of doing things that may not work now as well as they did in the past. Once, on a parish mission in one of my favourite parts of the country, I was trying to encourage parishioners at a meeting to say what they would like the mission to achieve. There was silence until one woman said to me in some surprise, 'What are you looking at us for, Father; have you no ideas of your own?' I could have felt a little foolish but, actually, it was an absurd and lovely moment.

It is, in some quarters, thought useful to speak of the Apostles as incompetent. It can help, I suppose, to illustrate what Jesus achieves in the lives of ordinary people and it is encouraging to see how St Peter, for example, makes the most of what Christ offers him in spite of his failure. St Peter is never stronger than when Christ says to him at the last supper, knowing the flaws in Peter's character are going to let them both down, 'Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers' (Luke 22:31-32).

I make this point because written in the DNA of our faith, in

THE FURROW

the genetic material, as it were, that connects us to Christ, are the elements of the Sermon on the Mount itself. In us and Christians everywhere, poverty of spirit, gentleness, and sorrow are joined by a hunger and thirst for what is right, by mercy and purity of heart and a desire to see the peace of God shine in the lives of others.

If we ever imagined it a weakness or foolishness to go into the world with only these elements of the character of a Christian, then we might, in middle age, think again and see what possibilities there are for us in the Beatitudes, to express and reveal the person and personality of Christ, the mind and heart of the Father, the nature and the character of God.

Power that wounds. The most insidious, divisive, and wounding power is the power used in the service of God. An unfriendly word by a minister or priest, a critical remark in church about a certain lifestyle, a refusal to welcome people at the table, an absence during an illness or death, and countless other hurts often remain longer in people's memories than other more world-like rejections. Thousands of separated and divorced men and women, numerous gay and lesbian people, and all of the homeless people who felt unwelcome in the houses of worship of their brothers and sisters in the human family have turned away from God because they experienced the use of power when they expected an expression of love.

– HENRI NOUWEN, in *The Path of Power*, quoted by Michael Ford, *Becoming the Presence of God* (Dublin: Columba Press) p. 75.

New Books

Annulment. A Guide for RCIA Candidates, Ministers, and Others.
Kevin E. McKenna. New York: Paulist Press. Pp. 53. Price US\$9.95.

The little book is useful for all the categories of people indicated in the title, including 'others'. It is clear and concise. Each of the four chapters, as well as the introduction and conclusion, concludes with helpful, summary bullet-points. The style and approach are both accessible and pastoral and resonate with the pronouncements of Pope Francis. The author is a former President of the Canon Law Society of America.

Despite its brevity, this booklet is comprehensive. The introduction gives us an attractive outline of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) as a 'personal journey in community' with the Catholic Church. The focus is on the individual story of each person. A central part of that life-story may be the person's marital situation. Subsequent chapters outline how the Church's nullity of marriage process can help a person on his/her faith journey.

Law in the Church is presented as helping us 'walk together in our journey of faith without trampling on one another's rights'. Marriage is described in biblical terms as a covenant reflecting God's love for his people. The longest chapter is devoted to outlining the possible grounds for nullity.

The final chapter 'Why Should I Petition for a Declaration of Nullity?' addresses many of the misconceptions surrounding the process such as cost and impact on the status of children. The nullity process is presented as a help in coming to terms with a traumatic experience and as a therapeutic participation in God's healing love.

I would have liked a greater integration between the recent reform of the annulment process (*Mitis Iudex*) which is mentioned, and the discussion. For example, the author tells us that only one member of a three judge Tribunal panel can be a lay person; the Pope has increased this to two. The brief process introduced by Francis gets little attention. The new ministry of accompaniment of people participating in the annulment process might well form part of the pastoral care envisaged by the RCIA programme.

Nevertheless, I am happy to recommend this book. It will be of great help to people who have experienced the pain of marriage breakdown who are journeying towards or with the Catholic Church and to those who walk with them.

THE FURROW

Violence, Politics and Catholicism in Ireland. Oliver P. Rafferty SJ. Dublin: Four Courts Press. Pp. 256. Price: €15.95.

Fr Oliver Rafferty, a former professor of church history at Maynooth and later of Boston College, has already written frequently and perceptively on the Catholic Church in Ulster, on the relation of the Church to the British Protestant state in the nineteenth century, and on its relation to the state of Northern Ireland in the twentieth. He deals with some kindred themes in a more extensive form in this book. Some subjects which he had already examined - Northern Catholics and the Troubles, Cardinal Cullen's ultramontaniam, and Fenianism in an American perspective are here analysed in greater depth. Other problems and opportunities which faced the Church, as, for example, its relation to the British empire, are here explored with great clarity and understanding.

Catholics were often treated with a generosity in the empire which was denied then in Ireland. Though a seventh of the land in Quebec, which was not yet settled, was reserved for the Anglican clergy in 1791, the custom developed in the nineteenth century of granting the tithes and a church to the parish priest in a parish where the majority were Catholics. The Catholic bishop of Quebec was paid a whopping salary of £2,000 per year. In other countries financial assistance was given to Catholic schools - education was believed to be an effective antidote to violence - and imperial officials and Catholic clergy often worked harmoniously together.

In discussing Cardinal Cullen's ultramontaniam and how that impinged on his pastoral commitments and political outlook, Fr Rafferty remarks that, contrary to the views of some of his critics, it would be misleading 'to give the impression' that he was 'so caught up in a spirit of conflict that he had lost the ability to be sensitive to the fundamental aspects of Christian spirituality'.

Two chapters have a particular relevance in this year of commemorations - chaplains in the first world war, and the Irish Church and the second world war. Recently the air raids of 1941 on Belfast were commemorated and there will shortly be special celebrations to mark the battle of the Somme which is of tremendous significance to Ulster Protestants. The appeal of John Redmond in September 1914 for the Irish Volunteers to fight for Britain, and German atrocities in Catholic Belgium gave a powerful fillip to Irish support for the war. But anti-Catholic prejudices among many of the officer class, who did not understand the need for Catholic chaplains to be close to their men in battle for sacramental reasons, delayed the proper provision of religious services in the trenches and at the front. The vast majority of Catholic chaplains were deeply committed to their duty to attend to the spiritual needs of their men: when a non-Catholic colonel commenting on the courage of Irish soldiers said to Fr Willie Doyle that they feared 'neither man nor the devil' Fr Doyle replied 'why should they? They have made their peace with God'.

Cardinal Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster, who had charge of

all Catholic chaplains, had a ‘concern for his own role bordering on megalomania’. So faulty was his organization that Bishop Henry Cleary of Auckland, who spent six months with New Zealand troops in England and at the front, reported the cardinal’s ‘lamentable failure’ to Rome. The Easter Rising greatly changed the Irish Catholic attitude to the war and the willingness of Irish priests to enlist diminished.

If the Rising complicated the Irish attitudes and contribution to the first world war, the political discontent of Catholics in Northern Ireland did so in the second. Cardinal MacRory, who led the bishops’ responses to it, was unsympathetic to the British cause, maintaining with great exaggeration, ‘that ninety-five per cent of the Irish people were pro-German’ and expressing a preference for a peace dictated by Hitler rather than by Britain. However, Bishop Morrisroe of Achonry denounced Hitler’s persecution of Catholicism and called for sympathy for the cause that was likely to benefit religion. Bishop D’Alton of Meath maintained that when the forces of Christ and anti-Christ were locked in a fierce conflict there was ‘no place for a weak or divided allegiance’.

Despite general support for the government’s policy of neutrality more men went off to fight from the south than from the north. In 1939 and 1941 the northern bishops objected strongly to conscription being introduced and the British government backed off. When the IRA set off bombs in Coventry in 1940 two of its members were executed despite pleas for a reprieve from both the Irish bishops and Cardinal Hinsley of Westminster, but when a policeman was shot in Belfast in 1941 and six men were sentenced to death, appeals for mercy saved the lives of five of them.

Many Irish priests volunteered to serve as chaplains to the British forces and of the total of 680 Catholic chaplains 281 came from Britain and 161 from Ireland. Some of the 281 members of religious orders who enlisted were also Irish.

Fr Rafferty has made abundant use of archival material, much of it not hitherto used by historians, to make available this very valuable and informative account of Irish Catholic responses to various situations and crises connected with Britain in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Belfast

AMBROSE MACAULAY

Joyfully Sharing the Gospel: An Introduction to *Evangelii Gaudium*.
Desmond O’Donnell. Dublin: The Columba Press. Pp 90. Price €8.99

This little book is a gem. It does exactly as it says, and more. Yes, it introduces us to the beautiful work of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*. However the use of the word ‘introduction’ in fact constitutes a rather modest claim. The reality is that Fr. O’Donnell spares us a lot of hard work and brings us directly to the heart of Pope Francis’s words. The author’s passionate spirituality is evident in the short preface and no

THE FURROW

doubt fuels this labour of love in making us aware of what is central to *Evangelii Gaudium*. What particularly appeals in this little book is the introduction to each chapter. Each of these is both informative and inspirational. As well as this there is just enough material here to urge us to explore the document itself. The balance between too much information and not enough is skilfully achieved. I see great value for this text as a workbook or discussion text for a small group, and I have no hesitation in recommending it.

Dublin

JOE McDONALD

Shorter Notice

Nano's Pilgrim Artist. E.E.Yates. Listowel: Red Hen Publishing. Pp.128.

Subtitled *A Creative Celebration of Venerable Nano Nagle* this book intersperses painting and prose in a presentation of the Founder of the Presentation Sisters. Detailing her trip that takes in Ireland and Italy, England and the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand – accompanied by photos – the author depicts a series of murals dedicated to the life of Nano Nagle. These are beautifully illustrated and offer an energising element 'to enable the story of her life to be told and retold'. Intending to both inform and inspire, the author indicates the power of painting murals across the globe to 'brighten lives [and] build community spirit'. This is an imaginative contribution to presenting the vision of Nano Nagle and the mission of the Congregation she founded.

JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

DECEMBER 8, 2015
– NOVEMBER 20, 2016

This series of eight books, promulgated by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization for the Jubilee, are the official catechetical resource for the Jubilee Year. Pope Francis will be speaking on these themes in his weekly catechesis throughout the year. The Pontifical Council will also be publicizing the books on its own Vatican website and, of course, the Official Holy Year of Mercy website.

**For more information
call 1-800-348-2240
Ext. 2173**

**or go online to
OSV.com**



