



St Bernadette's Parish Newsletter 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time 2nd Sept. 2018

Loaves and Fishes: An Experience of the World Meeting of Families— by Francis Etheredge

To begin with, I was a man whose relationship to the Church was like a shopper who kept going in and out of a revolving door; and, therefore, I can say that Christ wanted me to “know myself” and not to be in a kind of “good group” mentality in His Church. I experienced, then, that I am a sinner who needed the healing help of Christ; and, in the culmination of a desperate time, unable to marry, become a priest or to be anything, I was once again considering suicide. By now I was studying the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and I read that if God can create everything out of nothing he can make a new beginning for the sinner; and, in reality, that sinner was me. Through the gift of faith at forty, believing that God would help. I went from being unable to enter marriage, as if it was like passing through a barbed wire gate, to getting married and having ten children, two of whom are in heaven. “This poor man called and the Lord heard him” (cf. Ps. 34: 6). In brief, the Lord has blessed the little I am and continues to make his word fruitful in marriage and family life; and, therefore, I invite us all to hope in Christ whose blessing brings abundance!

“Christ blesses the little we have”

I have chosen the title of this piece in the light of a miracle of Christ which has summed up this whole experience of coming to Dublin for the *World Meeting of Families*. Christ recognised the needs of those who were following him, seeing that they were tired and hungry, and asked how they were going to be fed; and, in response, his disciples brought a boy forward with five loaves and two fishes and, I am sure, they wondered how they were going to feed so many as the cost was enormous and they only had a little food (cf. Mt 14:13-21; Mk 6: 31-44; Lk 9: 10-17; Jn 6: 1-13). Christ, however, blessed the little they had and the food was revealed to be abundant in the sharing of it. I want, therefore, to share three ways that Christ has blessed the little we have.

Three blessings!

The first blessing is, having decided to come to Dublin, my wife began to complain that I was not doing anything to raise money; and, not knowing what to do, as my own work as a writer is unprofitable, I prayed. Unexpectedly I was asked by a brother in our Catholic Community if I wanted a car. We had a car already and, therefore, I asked if I could sell it to raise money to get to Ireland; and, what is more, the answer was an abundant yes! I spent twenty pounds collecting it, was given a full tank of petrol and allowed to drive it over a hundred miles on the remaining insurance to bring it home. We sold it and so began to raise money for our flight. At the same time my mother-in-law agreed to come and so did two young people known to our children. We are now a group of thirteen. A young Spanish man came to stay and brought some money with him to help us. Bearded and not known to my children without a beard, one of them suggested I shaved for money and, as this plan grew, we raised around three hundred pounds. Between these activities and a variety of gifts we began to see the possibility of coming to Ireland materialising. We plunged in and bought flights for thirteen of us and prayed and hoped for accommodation, trying various contacts. Through one of the other families coming around the same time as us, we were offered accommodation in St. Bernadette's Parish Centre for a week: Nineteen of us for a week and twenty five of us for the first weekend! Gradually, discovering where the Parish Centre was and the willingness of other's to organise a bed for my elderly mother-in-law, the possibility of coming to Ireland was becoming a reality!

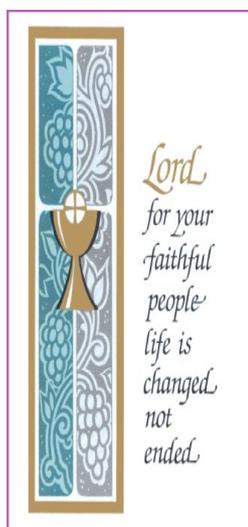
The second blessing is that we come as we are and, not being a fake family, we come with our reactions. I was afraid for the fragility of our faith and hoped that God, inspiring us to come and making it possible, would help us with any “negativity” that we encountered. Pope Francis' apology, then, really struck a chord with one older child who understood what was happening and spoke of the Pope “taking responsibility” for what had happened in the name of the Church. I was delighted to see the papers respond well on Monday morning and so emerged prayers for healing.

One of our youngest children was complaining about coming to Ireland and did not want to come; he, and an older one, were doubtful it would be a good experience and were reluctant to come. In response to both we prayed. After our arrival, and as we greeted the Pope in Dublin, these children and their friend wondered what was the point of going to the main street to catch a fleeting glimpse of Pope Francis. After being present for the first drive past, appreciating the need of Pope Francis for a welcoming response, four of our elder children wanted to go an art gallery instead of waiting for the second drive past. Beginning to get weary from walking, on the Sunday morning, two of the older ones were not enthusiastic about walking to meet Pope Francis in the Park, especially when there were free buses available; it was windy and drizzly and they were tired. We set off together, with Fr. Brian, a few parishioners, a wheel chair, and, in addition, a younger son complaining too. Remembering a previous reading and the experience of Moses leading a complaining people in the desert, I said to them: God will encourage us and complaining wears us out. When we arrived at the Phoenix Park, we found that although our large group of twenty five had three separate venues, we were able to be situated in one place, very close to a large screen; and, as the day developed and people ate, drank, rested, “chilled”, went on their phones and generally relaxed, with some sleeping, we were more or less ready for the Eucharist with Pope Francis. On the way out, then, what I noticed were the following graces. Our youngest complaining son, hearing that the next *World Meeting of Families* is going to be in Rome, said: Can we go?! As regards the two older children who had been tired and were now a bit more rested, it was an absolute pleasure and relief to see one of them smiling as she rode in the wheelchair home and another one too. We returned to St. Bernadette’s fairly late, had a brief rest and joined others for a wonderful meal.

The third blessing of Christ lies in the expectation of our children; and, bearing in mind our budget, there has been a concerted effort in the researching of modest outings, free if possible, to parks, museums, sights and sounds and tastes of Dublin. Thus, we have also been able to pay for a Sanderson’s tour of the city by Stephen, a tour of Dublin Castle and, we hope, a visit to the sea-side. Our experience of asking the way, travelling by bus, walking, is of a people who wonder at the existence of large families and groups and indeed appreciate, look askance at what they see or start to tell us “their” stories and so enter our prayers!

A fruitful faith and the community of the Church

We came, then, as thirteen, our family of ten, my mother-in-law and two friends of our children; we joined a family of seven, the parents and five of their six children who had arrived the day before and we were joined by another family of five, a father and four of his children. We shared meals with an Irish priest, Brazilians and an Italian priest who cooked for us. So many people, including a neighbour of ours, have made this journey of faith possible; indeed, it is through our membership of a small community, like an extended faith-family, that we have been formed, fed and helped over many years of marriage and family life to believe that Christ turns our suffering into joys, like he turned water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana. Christ did not wait for the couple to begin married life together, He was at the celebration of their marriage and listened to his mother and helped them (cf. Jn 2: 1-12). In other words, the family nature of the Church is coming to life through the existence of faith-formed small communities; people who walk a Christian path of formation together, help each other with the variety of gifts that God gives and, through the ministry of reconciliation and the reception of the Eucharist are formed as a forgiving family and receive the nature of a servant: to be of service in the family and for others. But, at the same time, the blessing of Christ is an “abundant” blessing; and, therefore, it always “rises”, like dough, giving more than was originally given; and, therefore, I hope you will be disposed to welcome the possibility of becoming a part of the rebirth of the Church as the family of God. May the Lord bless you abundantly for being so hospitable to us!



We extend our deepest sympathy to those recently deceased:

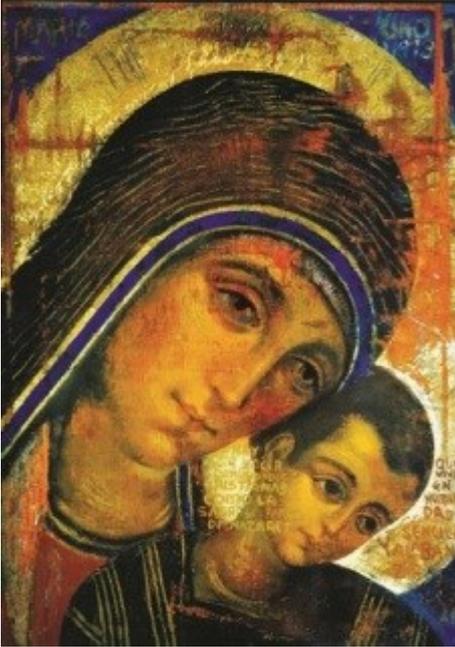
Noel Lawlor

May they Rest in Peace.

Amen

From 1st Sept the Saturday evening Mass time will change from 7pm to 6pm.

How is new growth possible?



One of the sentences which struck me most over the days of the **World Meeting of Families** was said by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin when he welcomed Pope Francis at the Papal Mass in the Phoenix Park;

“In these years Ireland has had its Winter moments but also its moments of Spring. Those of us who know what an Irish winter is like – and we have had good experience of that this year – know also what happens when the first rays of spring sun emerge Ireland changes”.

In order for that new growth to emerge we need to return to the roots of our Christian Faith. The small communities of the early church shared everything in common, their lives of faith, love, care and concern impressed even their strongest critics.

With growth comes also pain and requires the willingness to let go of all that has caused the present rot in the Church.

If the Spring is to lead to new growth then everything that is and has been destructive must be pruned and taken away.

If new growth is to happen then it must be nourished and cared for in the environment of small Christian communities. These communities will be the necessary leaven in Parish Communities.



This is Baptism Weekend in our Parish.

We remember in our prayers those who will become new members of our faith community and ask the Lord to support their parents and families during this special time.

Groups returning to Parish Centre this week

Karate **Tuesday 4th September** 7.30pm to 9.30pm

Unislim **Wed 5th September** 6pm to 7pm

AA **Wed 5th September** 6.15pm to 7.15pm

Stroke Group **Thurs 6th September** 10.30am to 12.30pm

Pilates **Thurs 6th September** 6.30pm to 9.30pm

Active Retirement will be back the following week **Monday 10th Sept**

Adult Choir will also be back **Monday 10th Sept.**