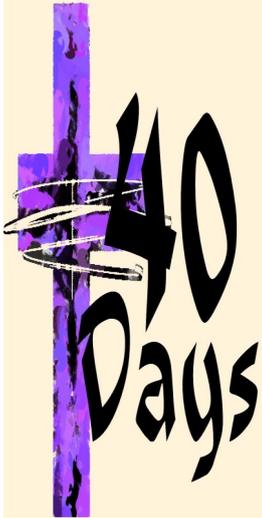


## THE CHURCH OF THE FUTURE

Most Rev. Diarmuid Martin Archbishop of Dublin  
Saint Michael's Church of Ireland, Limerick, 19 March 2019  
(Part I, Edited extracts)

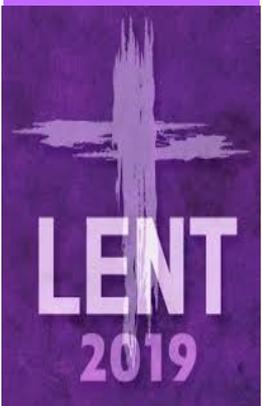


St Mary's  
Parish  
Hadding-  
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Serving  
the  
Community

Serving  
the  
Family

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the



I remember once giving a homily where I worked in the Vatican that I opened with the phrase: "I entered the seminary in Dublin in 1962 and left it in 1969 into a different Church and a different Ireland". My superior at the time and one of my *maestri* in life said to me afterwards: "I liked your opening, but you have to remember that in my life I have gone through that type of radical change on four or five occasions. The important thing is to recognise change and to come out of change always on the right side and by that I mean looking in the right direction".

To look towards the future means to extricate oneself from the contingencies of the past to be free to look dispassionately to the future. The difficulty is to identify what is contingent and what is essential.

This is particularly difficult when the past had been dominant for generations and when continuity and tradition are prized as they are in the Catholic tradition. I can well remember as a teenager finding in the introduction of my prayer book a long article on why the Mass could only be celebrated in Latin. It read convincingly then, but not now.

One of my fears about the future of the Church in Ireland is that in the fear of change some people will seek to find comfort zones where they can feel the support of the likeminded and not open themselves to the challenge of change. They can build firewalls between their belief and the world in which they live. They can take refuge in what Pope Francis calls "an auto-referential Church".

Jesus Christ came to bring liberty. Hiding fearfully in what can appear to be tradition is a great temptation. It is not necessarily the message of Jesus Christ.

Constantly repeating truths can in itself be a sign of fearfulness and a retreat from realities. This is the problem with "cultural warriors of certainty" who focus perhaps on one aspect of the truth and affirm a certainty in a way which comes from human assertion and from within a personally defined safe space. These people can become a source of division and partiality and polarization and can in their own way manipulate Church leadership into a certain sympathy with them and into taking wrong decisions.

Alongside the fearful in today's Church, there are also other groupings. Not all change is or was good. I was interested to read a collection of comments made over the years by Cardinal Godfried Daneels, former Archbishop of Mechelen – Brussels, who died in these days. He was considered one of the more progressive Cardinals and his comments thus have an added interest.

He was sceptical about forms of new interest in religion that lacking in discernment could in the long run be dangerous as they could give rise to "an erosion within the Church of the specific of Christianity, leading to doubts about the unicity of Jesus Christ and the separation of moral values from the person of Christ."

He spoke of the danger of reducing the liturgy to a space for humanitarian concerns and an instrument for the simple celebration of the communitarian. He noted that: "Trying to reduce the liturgy into a moment of theological teaching or of catechesis, or of protest or campaigning or of raising funds simply drains the liturgy of its essential". The liturgy is the action of Jesus Christ. He stressed that while in the past the role of the priest almost vanished captured into the ritual, today it is the quality of the priest as animator that inspires us and thus he becomes an actor rather than a servant.

These are not the terms that one expects to hear from the more liberal wing in the Catholic Church. Daneels is very clear that renewal does not mean returning to a society totally Christianised. Neither does he see the Church as is a marginalised minority in society. He saw the Church as "a spark in a dry field".

The presence of the Church in the future may not be a dominant one but it is not an irrelevant one. In the face of the logic of the moral certainties of the cultural warriors, Cardinal Daneels reminded us that: "moral coherence is fundamentally a gift of grace".

Where does this leave our reflections on the future of the Church in Ireland? The sociological data send us mixed signals. We have statistics about decline in religious practice and yet there is a new vibrancy in many areas. 48% of Catholics between the ages of 24 to 29 in the Archdiocese of Dublin registered at the last census as "of no religion". Yet my experience is that there are parishes and communities that have never been as vibrant at any time in their history as they are today. Numbers may be reduced but perhaps

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in the past we placed far too much trust in our numerical presence.

Renewal is never our own creation. Renewal will only come through returning to the Church that we have received from the Lord. The Church must constantly undertake a path of renewal and conversion that ensures that what grows and matures into the future truly is the Church of Jesus Christ and not something of our own creation.

Let me look at one particular challenge for the future. The first thing that came to my mind when I was asked to give a talk on the *Future of the Church* in a Church of Ireland Church was "which Church are we talking about?"

When I entered the seminary in Dublin in 1962, the majority of my classmates had probably never met a protestant or what they might have instinctively then called a non-Catholic....

Relationships have changed. I noted in the visitors' book of my residence that when my predecessor Archbishop Edward Byrne died in 1940 it was only some days after the event that the name of the Church of Ireland Archbishop appeared.

The first message of congratulations that I received on my appointment to Dublin was from the Church of Ireland Archbishop John Neill. Both he and his successor Archbishop Michael Jackson have undertaken numerous common actions with me. In addition, we have experienced true ecumenical friendship. At moments of real difficulties for me personally, they have been a true support. We are very much at home in each other's Cathedrals. We are seen together on the streets of Dublin.

Where do we go from here? Where are the areas where ecumenical collaboration can improve? I suppose I should be asking where are the areas where we can make a real qualitative leap within ecumenical relations, in the face of the changing religious culture? We have to move from the situation of just ticking conventional boxes and ritually celebrating the same annual events.

[Eds note: *The Archbishop underlines the importance of an ongoing theological dialogue, notably on the matters where there are differences between the Churches.*]

How do we develop a common presence of our believers and our Churches in tomorrow's society? The experience of Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudate Si* has opened a wider path of ecumenical collaboration in the area of the environment and climate justice. This experience can open opportunities for young people from both traditions to develop new relationships in reflecting on the place of belief in pluralist societies and the contribution they can bring as believers to public life. Young people in our separate Christian schools can come together more often and not just on the sports field.

*(To be continued)*

## St Mary's Spring Diary

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Monday 25 March:</b>   | 5:45pm Pastoral Council Meeting   |
| <b>Tuesday 26 March:</b>  | 7:00pm St. Brigid's Service of Light  |
| <b>Wednesday 27 March</b> | 7:00pm St. Conleth's Service of Light (Confirmation ceremony)                                       |
| <b>Thursday 28 March</b>  | 7:00pm St. Mary's Service of Light  |
| <b>Thursday 11 April</b>  | 10:45am Confirmation Day: Parish Schools and St. Conleth's  |
| <b>Sunday 14 April</b>    | Palm Sunday:<br>SVP Advocate Collection   |
| <b>Sunday 21 April</b>    | Easter Sunday   |
| <b>Thursday 25 April</b>  | 7:15pm Education Lecture:<br>"St. Mary's: the Art<br>and Craft of Stained Glass."<br>William Earley |
| <b>Saturday 27 April</b>  | Diocesan Pilgrimage to Knock  |
| <b>Sunday 4 May</b>       | Share Appeal Sunday   |
| <b>Saturday 11 May</b>    | First Communion: St. Conleth's College  |
| <b>Saturday 18 May</b>    | First Communion: St. Mary's and St. Brigid's Schools  |
| <b>Friday 31 May</b>      | First Communion: St. Declan's Special School  |
| <b>Sunday 2 June</b>      | Feast of the Ascension: World Communion Day   |

### In Memoriam

9.30am: Michael and Mairead Lyons (Anniv)

11am: Stephanie Kennedy (Months Mind)

### Masses on 30<sup>th</sup>/31<sup>st</sup> March 2019

6pm: Gerry Walsh (Anniversary)

11am: Phyllis Devin (Anniversary)

### Masses and Confession

**Sundays:** Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm

Croatian Community Mass 6.30pm

Daily masses 10am and 12.40pm, Saturday 10am only

-Rosary daily after 10am mass

**Adoration Blessed Sacrament, Weds 10.30-12.40**

### Church Collections Last Week

**1<sup>st</sup> Collection: €1,060**

**Share Collection: €815**

**Weekday collections: €805**

**THANK YOU**

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