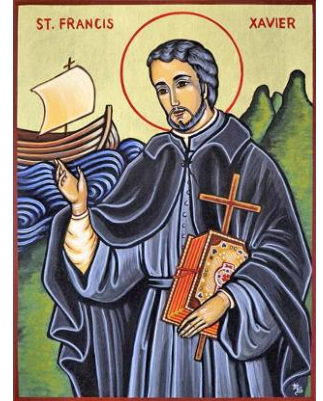


Synopses of the talks follow →

*Novena of Grace in Honour of
Saint Francis Xavier
4th March to 12th March*

*First celebrated in St. Michan's Parish
in 1712 and celebrated annually
in Dublin since then*

*Booklets commemorating the 300th
Anniversary of the Novena of Grace
available for €1 each*



A Brief Outline of the Speakers and Talks

Sunday	4th – 12 noon	Fr. Bryan Shortall OFM Cap <i>Rise! Let us be on our way!</i>
Monday	5th – 7:30pm	Br. Niall O'Connell OFM <i>Francis and the Eucharist</i>
Tuesday	6th – 7:30pm	Bishop John McAreevey <i>Eucharist alive in our lives</i>
Wednesday	7th – 7:30pm	Fr. John Kelly <i>India & Dublin – Communion with One Another and St Francis Xavier</i>
Thursday	8th – 7:30pm	Veronica Jackson <i>Youth and the Eucharist</i>
Friday	9th – 7:30pm	Rev. David McDonnell <i>Eucharistic People</i>
Saturday	10th – 6pm	Fr. Tom Cox <i>Hunger for Healing</i>
Sunday	11th – 12 noon	Paddy Pender <i>Our faith through the ages</i>
Monday	12th – 7:30pm	Fr. Bryan Shortall OFM Cap <i>Closing Reflections</i>

Synopses of the talks follow →

12th March – Fr. Bryan Shortall OFM Cap. *Closing Reflections*

Jesus does not speak the language of our time. I'd like to share this poem which gives insight to the way we operate today...

*The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings
but shorter tempers;
wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints.
We spend more, but have less;
we buy more, but enjoy less.
We have bigger houses and smaller families;
more conveniences, but less time.
We have more degrees but less sense;
more knowledge, but less judgment;
more experts, yet more problems;
more medicine, but less wellness.*

*We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly,
laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry,
stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little,
watch TV too much, and pray too seldom.*

*We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values.
We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.*

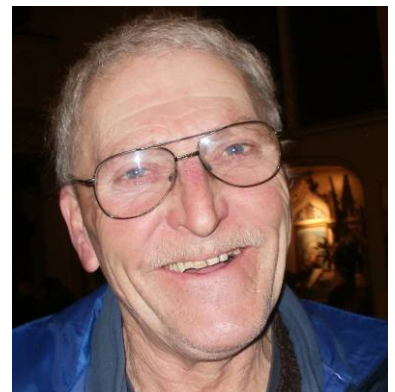
*We've learned how to make a living, but not a life.
We've added years to life not life to years.
We've been all the way to the moon and back,
but have trouble crossing the street to meet a new neighbour.
We conquered outer space but not inner space.
We've done larger things, but not better things.*

*We've cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul.
We've conquered the atom, but not our prejudice.
We write more, but learn less.
We plan more, but accomplish less.
We've learned to rush, but not to wait.
We build more computers to hold more information, to produce
more copies than ever,
but we communicate less and less.*

*These are the times of fast foods and slow digestion;
big men and small character;
steep profits and shallow relationships.*

*These are the days of two incomes but more divorce;
fancier houses but broken homes.*

*These are days of quick trips, disposable diapers,
throwaway morality, one night stands, overweight bodies,
and pills that do everything from cheer, to quiet, to kill.
It is a time when there is much in the showroom window
and nothing in the stockroom.*



*A time when technology can bring this letter to you,
and a time when you can choose either to share this insight, or to
just hit delete.*

*Remember, spend some time with your loved ones,
because they are not going to be around forever.*

*Remember to say a kind word to someone who looks up to you in
awe,
because that little person soon will grow up and leave your side.*

*Remember to give a warm hug to the one next to you,
because that is the only treasure you can give with your heart and
it doesn't cost a cent.*

*Remember to say "I love you" to your partner and your loved ones,
but most of all mean it.
A kiss and an embrace will mend hurt when it comes from deep
inside of you.*

*Remember to hold hands and cherish the moment
for someday that person will not be there again.*

*Give time to love, give time to speak,
and give time to share the precious thoughts in your mind.*

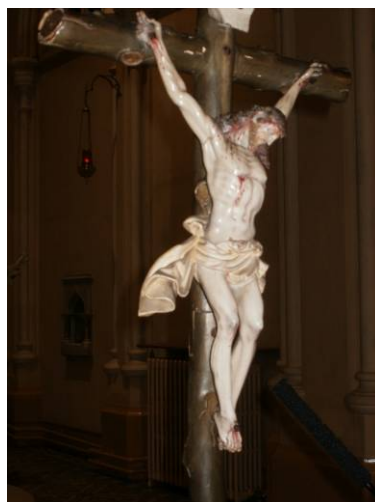
AND ALWAYS REMEMBER:

*Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take,
but by the moments that take our breath away.*

In the Gospel this evening, the prophet (Jesus) is not accepted in his own town. The people spring to their feet on hearing what he has to say, and they run him out of town.

Nowadays, we are ridiculed for being Catholic. Most have no idea what a Novena is and less of an idea why we would attend one.

Nowadays, the world says *be in the glossy pages of HELLO and you'll be happy* but that's not really true. Behind the glossy pages, there's often other stories – stories of addiction, family breakdown, rehab in the Betty Ford Clinic and more...





11th March – Paddy Pender

Our faith through the ages

Look around the church – what do you see?

Well OK – it needs a good paint job, but look beyond that! The fine stain glass windows, beautiful mosaics and marble are treasures, gifted to us in memory our ancestors who have died.

This window dedicated to St. Francis was given to us in memory of Francis Pilsworth. The Rosary Window was given to us by the people listed on the marble tablet. Each panel tells a full episode from the Scriptures. The artists who created this were not just crafts-people, but they must have had a fantastic understanding of the Scriptures in order to portray so much. The Sacrament Window could well be used as a teaching tool for all of us as the many parts of the liturgies are detailed – nothing seems to have been omitted. And this too donated in memory of one of our loved ones. Similarly, the window dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus and the apostle John – *mother, behold your Son and Son behold your mother.*

Now, take a quick look at the bench you are sitting at. Almost every bench contains a plaque in memory of parishioners from more recent times. Rather than this church just being a building in need of a good paint job, this is a building bursting with life and memories.

Now step back in time to the end of the 19th Century. The back wall of the church was about here, at the entrance to the sanctuary where I'm standing. Outside, behind the wall, were the garden and priest's house. Possibly, where Fr. Bryan is sitting was the cabbage plot – we all remember the Cabbage Patch Dolls – don't we!! The back wall was a blank wall with the large crucifix hanging on it – the large crucifix now hanging on the wall facing the altar. In fact the whole church was very plain. That was the deal when permission was given for the church to exist at all.

As you know the people of this area are very stubborn, so when they were told that they not celebrate the sacraments during the Penal Days, you know what they did! At the risk of death, they continued to celebrate the sacraments because their faith was much more important than man made



laws. To live without faith, is to die. So, the faithful used to gather in Mass Houses and makeshift centres to celebrate the sacraments and at one of these Masses the building collapsed, causing death and turmoil. It was then that Chesterfield gave permission for the construction of this church along with five other churches in the city. While the people could celebrate the sacraments in safety the buildings could not be ostentatious and had to be in a back street out of view. So between 1817 and 1890, this was a plain, simple church for our ancestors to celebrate the sacraments in safety. This fine sanctuary came when the rules were relaxed and boy, did we show the authorities how to decorate!

And what was happening outside of this church building? Well, in 1795, the foundress of the Irish Loreto Sisters, Teresa Ball, was baptised in the Mass House that was located near Greek Street. Teresa Ball came from a wealthy family and was educated outside Ireland since education was forbidden for Catholics. On the other side, Teresa Mullaly and Fr. Mucaille worked tirelessly to bring faith and education to the *poor Popish people*, as we Catholics were known as back in the day. In 1797 they succeeded in getting the first Catholic School opened in George's Hill.

Some figures to explain something about our ancestors. Between 1823 and 1865, 11,951 people were baptised and of those, there were 2,212 different family names – not different families, but different family names. We must assume that many of these died without reaching adulthood, or had to move away.

The extent of St. Michan's Parish goes well beyond the boundaries of the parish. We know that many safely moved to other countries since every week in the parish office we receive requests from far and wide for information from the church registers. What is clear is that this parish extends to every corner of the globe. The faith that was nourished here in St. Michan's is now nourishing people throughout the world, and has nourished millions before us.

We step back to 1712 when the first Novena of Grace was celebrated in the Mass House where Teresa Ball was baptised. I have no doubt that the graces received over the 300 hundred years since the Novena started have made the survival of faith possible through some extremely turbulent years.

What started thousand years as a small shrine located at the ford between Church Street and Stoneybatter, dedicated to St. Michan and has grown into this parish here in Dublin. The shrine was stopping point for travellers entering and leaving the city. It grew into a settlement, then a monastery and then spent many years hidden and struggling to survive – which thankfully, by Grace, it did. The riches of this church are not like the riches we see Jesus getting so annoyed about in the Gospel – this church is spiritually rich and this richness has been passed on through the centuries to all of us here and to millions of people throughout the world.

We all know the saying *Where there's a will... there's a way!*

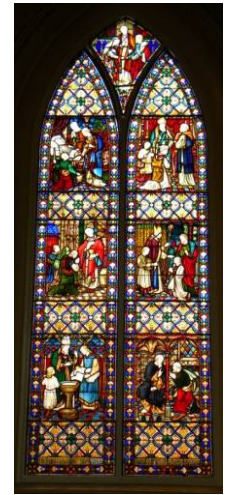
We survived by the strength of our will and that faith behind it. But there is another ending to this well know expression! *Where there's a will... there's a relative!*

Well we are relatives but what is it that we have inherited?

- Through the Rosary Window we have inherited a belief and



dedication to the Rosary. Fifteen panes depicting fifteen different stories from Scriptures, bringing them to new life.



- The Sacrament Window is testimony to those risked their lives so that we could celebrate our faith
- The window of St. Francis along with the twelve medallions depicting twelve of our Irish saints remind us to learn from their example as we grow in faith
- The Holy Family Window reminds us that even when we experience disharmony in our families, we need to come together and bring back the harmony.
- The window with Mary and St. John reminds us that when grief and separation come to us, God sends us friends to help us through – *parent behold your child – child behold your parent.*
- Finally, the large window behind the altar reminds us of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus, as celebrated at every Mass.

This is our inheritance – and it is the legacy we will pass on to those who come after us.

I am the Resurrection and the life, whoever believes in me will never die.

10th March – Fr. Tom Cox *Hunger for Healing*

As you can see I'm not small! I am – not to put a tooth on it- fat.

It'd be a fair guess that I've eaten recently-unlike Fr. Bryan and his leaner colleagues here.

Question is what did I fill myself with? Did it really nourish me or did it just satisfy temporarily. I'd have to say it was the latter.

Bad choices!

You'll remember the recent visits of President Barak Obama and Queen Elizabeth II. I'm sure you'll certainly remember the nuisance of the security and how it affected your moving around the city. A friend of mine observed keenly the two visits and commented about the all too short – in fact- cut short visit of the US President versus that of the Queen of England which was for four days I think. He reckoned that Barak's



short “is feidir linn”, high impact visit with a rally on College Green, was a bit like a fast food meal. It seemed like a good idea at the time- but it left you awful empty in the long run. Compare that with the Windsors leisurely 4 day visit- that he said – was a satisfying meal. Why because healing and being renewed and being nourished takes T-I-M-E.

Healing of any wound comes from the outside in. You can’t quicken or hasten it. You certainly shouldn’t pick at the wound- but many can’t resist. What wounds have brought you limping in from the outside?

What are they? Have you named them?

We cover our physical wounds with plasters, bandages and we cover our emotional wounds a little more subtly. Some go it alone, withdraw, others turn to a numbing addiction. One thing for sure is that we’re all in need of healing. But it does take time. I’m told the Novena of Grace came thanks to the Jesuit St. Francis Xavier. Their founder St.

Ignatius said that he believed that God would ask us at the end of life- did you enjoy your life? That’s it- not how many pilgrimage or novena points you clocked up but did you enjoy it. It’s a good question to ask yourself. And maybe what am I doing in life that blocks the joy of life for me.

300 years of prayer at this Novena of Grace is a lot of outpouring into the chalice of life on this altar. I mentioned to our own people about your continuous praying this Novena for 300 years. They were in awe of that. Three women in fact, came to me after Mass and mentioned that when they were growing up in Dublin, they had fond memories of attending the Novena. That was before they married and moved to Offaly!

But our people in the parish of Ferbane in West Offaly have our own proud tradition. From our soil arose a man to be called Fr. Stephen Daly- the first Capuchin priest in Ireland. We still remember him every year on March 1st just gone by, 392 years later after his death. We will especially remember him on July 4th coming as the nearby church of SS Patrick and Saran is 50 years old.

Why do we remember?-Because we know Stephen Daly stood for something important. A man of God for the things of God. He had begun work on rebuilding the old monastic site of St. Saran- beside his home. In some ways he was to us a St. Francis “rebuilding my church.” Not ignoring the best part of the foundations that went before, but using what is good and healing and beautiful from our past and our heritage.

But for Fr. Stephen Daly’s untimely death- it’s entirely possible that we’d have a Capuchin Friary there and Fr. Shortall & Br. Kevin would have to learn to speak in a pure Offaly accent using words like “Grand” all the time. Now that would have been a terrible fate for any Dub!

In our parish we have a Penal Chalice, from around the time your Novena started here. On special occasions we use it and every time I raise it, I find myself face to face with the descendants, men, women and children of their ancestors who had also gazed on the Eucharist cradled in that cup.

A cup of blessing in their suffering,
a cup of grace in every trial they face
A cup of healing in their hungers.

“Everybody’s got a hungry heart”- the great Bruce Springsteen sang. He got that part right. And everybody feeds their hunger. Will it be for you



the fast food of the modern world or the eternal, slow embrace of the Eucharist to warm our cold hands, to bandage and heal what is broken and wounded in us.

Last night I sat as darkness fell with a man whose brother- a native priest of Ferbane- had died. His remains were as they say in mid-air and he was facing a sad journey this morning to Shannon airport to meet him, as he did so many times before in joy-but this final time- in sadness. They are a couple who lost a son to cancer and have grappled with that short but awful question “why.” His wife Ann recalled what a neighbour said at that time of their son’s death.

“Because of your son, you will never lose sight of heaven in your life.” She never forgot it and has found it to be true. It may be that our wounds, serve us in some way we don’t understand, to keep sight of heaven, to remember as we do that as we “hunger for healing” that in this Novena- all is “Grace”.

I end with a short prayer of Blessing for you.

*I bless you with the love of Christ.
May His love carry you safely all your days.
Jesus may I experience your love.*

*I bless you with the presence of Christ.
May his presence be beside you, within you, before you, always.
Jesus may I experience your presence within me.*

*I bless you with the healing of Christ.
May his presence be beside you, within you, before you, always.
Jesus may I experience your healing.*

*I bless you with the Body of Christ.
May the Eucharist be the source and summit of your journey back to God.
Jesus may I feel renewed by your presence in the Eucharist.*



9th March – Rev. David McDonnell ***Eucharistic People***

It is a great honour for me as Curate of St. Michan’s, St. Werburgh’s and All Saints, to be here with you at this Mass tonight and indeed in these nine days of prayer as Christians throughout Ireland prepare for the International Eucharistic Congress. In 1600s, St. Werburgh’s Church had a strong association with Dublin Castle and British Rule, and its rector boasted that *there is not a single papist in my parish unlike the parish of St. Michan which boasts many Mass houses!*

Our communion is impaired, fractured even, but the Baptismal Faith that we share and the Eucharists we offer open our hearts to our essential unity. Sacramental Grace helps us to grow more perfectly into his likeness, individually, and as a Church. And especially so when we celebrate Eucharist as part of a Novena of Grace.



Novenas are about waiting, listening, facing truths and can lead to surprising transformations in our lives. Those nine days from the Ascension to Pentecost were difficult days of Grace. The eleven apostles, the holy women, the great body of disciples were confused and bewildered. Certainties had been challenged, expectations overturned. It puts the demands of post Celtic Tiger Dublin, real as they are, into context. We have all had to learn that we are never really in control of our destiny – no matter how much we would like to be.



This parable of the kingdom which we have heard proclaimed for us in tonight's Gospel, tells us about church. It sheds light on the life of faith.

From the shadow of the impending cross, Our Lord tells us that it is God who is in control. The gift of life has been showered upon you and me to bring forth the fruit of good works. We are the tenants, creation is the vineyard, the life is the kingdom – the Church. We have given our life to become more fully ourselves by becoming more like God. It is through prayer we become more like Christ.



In this walled and protected space of the vineyard, good fruits can grow, life can flourish. Whilst the Lord of the vineyard remains intimately concerned and committed to the vineyard, he goes away. The life of the vineyard is provided for, sustained and maintained but he goes into another country. This is not an image of a puppet master God or a celestial childminder. We have freedom and responsibility – graces bestowed on us by God.



This vineyard is not unloved and forgotten. To it, servants constantly come; prophets and teachers, priests and Levites, tending, cultivating, feeding, inviting and searching; but instead of welcome they receive abuse – beating, brutalising and death. The vineyard becomes our plaything. But the Lord of the vineyard is not brutalised, he remains concerned – His love is so deep that the sending of His Son seems worthwhile.



The folly of the chosen people is great – *let us kill the heir...* this is **nonsense**. Tenants do not inherit through murder – they may achieve short-term control but not ownership. The legalist's answer is *put those wretches to a miserable death*. But that is **not** what Our Lord says. *The Kingdom of God will be taken away and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom*.



This is the warning to every stream of the Church in every age – Live Eucharistically – ask that your life be caught up in the transforming self-offering of Christ the Great High Priest – serve Him in the service of those who are made in His image.

Like the vineyard, life is a wonderful and an undeserved gift. Christ has come so that we may have life more abundantly – but it is a **gift** not a right or possession. We have been leased it and are invited to live it thankfully, Eucharistically, so that our lives are not only transformed but are transforming as we bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.



When we turn from a life of Grace to a life of ownership and greed and sin, we exile ourselves from that fruitful, tended and protected place. We try to control and own God, own the Church, own the world. There can be only one supreme Being, and if it is me or you, it cannot be GOD.



8th March - Veronica Jackson (CYC) *Youth and the Eucharist*

Catholic Youth Care is preparing young people for the Eucharistic Congress. Today's culture is fascination by "makeovers" whether it's houses, people or back gardens, we all wait anxiously to see the end result. The current programme that we may be transfixed on is *Operation Transformation* where everyone wants to change their image and lose some weight through healthy eating and exercise. The Novena can be our time for a makeover and an opportunity for us to transform our relationships with God and with one another. For Lent, CYC has organised *Get Fit for God* a programme of exercise and prayer (<http://www.irishcatholic.ie/site/content/youth-get-fit-god>)

This poem by Robert Frost sums up for me our faith journey.

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I marked the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

We travel the pilgrim road of faith, a road that is perhaps less travelled. Looking towards the Eucharistic Congress, we in CYC decided to try a creative way of teaching young people about the Eucharist. We based our teaching on the Road to Emmaus where the two disciples gather to share their story about Jesus and the impact that his teaching had on their lives.

We began last November with Stage One – a Gathering Prayer remembering our loved ones who have died and sharing our stories. When a loved one dies, our dreams are shattered and it is very difficult to see



new possibilities. As we walked along Dun Laoghaire Pier we shared our stories stopping at different points along the pier to remember those lost at sea, those lost in the floods and the many other ways we experience loss.

In Stage Two we looked at the Scripture and we brought the Word to the street by visiting seven churches. Our journey began at St. James' Church where Irish Pilgrims traditionally began their Camino to Santiago de Compostella in Spain. Reading extracts from the Road to Emmaus story at each stop, the young people made their way to St. John's on Thomas Street in silence. They visited the Polish Parish church in St. Audeon's on High Street then to the crypt in Christ Church Cathedral. This stop had the biggest impact on the pilgrims because it was here that they understand the importance of listening to the Word. At the church in Merchant's Quay we discussed the importance of the prophets in our lives – prophets being those people who teach us about our faith. At the Capuchin Friary in Church Street we discussed how the Eucharist is clearly visible through the work of the Capuchin Day Centre and we finished with a short prayer service in St. Paul's Church in Arran Quay.

The next stage will be moving from the Word to the table of the Eucharist and for this we are holding a retreat in April to celebrate our community together as we break bread together. Then in May we are to mission the young people who were Confirmed by encouraging them that the Eucharist has a social dimension. We have organised a 5Km walk in the Phoenix Park and we are asking each family to raise €5 for charity which will be divided equally between the Vincent dePaul and Trócaire.

Eucharist is very alive even among the young people even though they may not be going to church.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, and I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference.



7th March – Fr. John Kelly ***India & Dublin - Communion with one another*** ***and St. Francis Xavier***

Many things have changed over the 500 years since the time of St. Francis Xavier. The landscape of the world has changed dramatically since Francis went with the difficult task of bringing the message of the Gospel to the peoples of the East.

Many things have also changed since the Novena of Grace was first preached here in this parish, 300 years ago. What did the people of the parish know about India, China and the East where Francis Xavier ministered. With the arrival of our local fruit and vegetable markets did people know about chillies or spices? Indian food or takeaways were hardly around 40-50 years ago. Now we have Indian restaurants – we like Indian food! We have Indian takeaways – they're nearly as popular as the local chipper. We have Indian doctors and nurses caring for us in our hospitals. We may even have Indian neighbours.

What has not changed in 300 – 500 years since the time of St. Francis Xavier is our need of the Novena of Grace. Today, as much as then, we need what Francis Xavier gave his life to bring to the peoples of the East – the Mass – Communion.



As priest this was his first mission. To share the bread – to have communion with the peoples of the East. The Novena of Grace, a novena of praise and petition has stood the test of time. God continues to ask us to honour Francis Xavier – his fruitful servant by inviting us to ask favours through his intercession.



This Novena is a great act of faith on your behalf and the generations who have gone before us. St. Francis Xavier repeats the words of Jesus to us: *Ask and it shall be given, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened for you.*

This Novena is a time of renewal, a once a year spiritual-spring cleaning, to bring Jesus back to the centre of our lives. Jesus in the Mass gives us the courage to cope with what life throws at us.



St. Francis Xavier through this Novena, through you and me continues his spiritual ministry. Through Francis Xavier, God's gifts, spiritual and material, are poured out for us.

Our first purpose here is to thank God. To thank God for every good gift. To give thanks to a generous God and then to make our petitions. We know that while at table, he first gave thanks – and when he had given thanks, and only then, he broke it and gave it to them. He gave thanks and then he shared the communion.



That's what we are invited to do during these nine days. To give thanks for the generous ways that God has gifted us – so no harm to reflect on our blessings – the people that surround us, the gift of children, grandchildren, and the unique and special ways that God has gifted you...

All of this takes place in communion with Christ and each other in the Mass. Through St. Francis Xavier we are especially united with the peoples of the East, India and Goa.



Our communion, our Mass is where we are embraced by God. Here we experience the intimacy of God. The Mass is where God takes on concrete flesh, takes on skin in our world. Jesus still becomes flesh and lives among us.



There's a story told of a young Jewish boy who would not go to school. He simply would not attend school. When left at school he would run home. His parents tried everything. Finally in desperation the parents took him to a Rabbi. The Rabbi simply said, *if the boy won't listen to words, bring him here to me. They brought the boy to the Rabbi.* He simply picked up the boy and held him to his heart for a long time. Then still without a word he put him down. What words could not accomplish, a silent embrace did. He went to school and became a great scholar.

This story expresses wonderfully how our Mass works – how our communion works. In the Mass, God physically embraces us. Words have a certain power. Often they fail us. When words fail we have the language of ritual. Jesus for most of his ministry used words and when he had exhausted himself the night before he died he went beyond them. He went beyond words. He gave us his physical embrace.



A ritual to keep us in his heart.
The Mass is to be our communion with him.
The Mass is God's embrace.
God physically touches us in the Mass.

God touches us here. There are times when even with God when words



aren't enough. God has to pick us up like a mother picks up a child. Physical embrace is what is needed. That's why Jesus gave us the Mass – His Body and Blood.

As God touches us in the Mass and Communion, we try to break out of our self centred dreams, to let go of the things we cling tightly to.

St. Francis Xavier spent his life caring for the sick and broken bodies he met while ministering in the East. The Mass was the nourishment he needed to sustain him. As we gather at this table tonight, we give thanks, we petition and we are nourished by the same food that nourished Francis Xavier and we pray that Francis will give us the grace and the courage to pick up the bits and pieces of life and allow the Mass – Christ's prayer for the world to beat the centre of our lives.



6th March - Bishop John McAreevey *Eucharist alive in our lives*

I took the theme of *Eucharist alive in our lives* in this the year of the Eucharistic Congress. In the Transfiguration Gospel that we have just heard, Jesus took three of his closest friends, Peter, James and John, up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves. This was a special time of prayer, during which they witnessed the Transfiguration off Jesus. His face became aglow and his clothes were dazzling white, and then they saw Jesus in communion with three key figures from the Old Testament. We don't know what they spoke about, but in response to this very special experience, Peter cried out – *It is wonderful for us to be here! Let us build three tents here.* Then Peter, James and John heard a voice tell them – *This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him* and there that experience ended.

The men came down the mountain puzzled. They had been transported to another level, a level they didn't understand. The Church has interpreted the experience of the Transfiguration as a preparation for Jesus and his disciples as the crucifixion drew close.

We can often ask the question "*Can this experience, this closeness to Jesus be only for his close followers?*"

The presence of Jesus in the Eucharist does for us something similar to the Tabor experience Peter, James and John experienced. We are friends of Jesus so there is no reason to believe that the experience that was there for the apostles would not be there for us too. Every time we celebrate Eucharist we are close to Jesus, we remember loved ones, and when we listen to Jesus to we too hear "*This is my beloved Son, listen to Him!*"

Because we are brothers and sisters of Jesus, the Father says to each of us, "*You are my beloved.*" In Eucharist, the Father reminds us who we are.



When we were baptised, we received the Spirit as the apostles did, and when we take time to be alone by ourselves in a special place such as the chapel, we too can justly exclaim, “*it is good for us to be here...*” But we have to go back to our families, our jobs, our responsibilities – we have to look after each other and love each other.

The grace we receive in the Eucharist prepares us for our responsibilities. The experience of the Eucharist is a constant reminder that Jesus is close to us. It reminds us who we are and sends us out as brothers and sisters to others.



The Eucharist: Communion with Christ and with one another



5th March - Br. Niall O’Connell OFM ***Francis and the Eucharist***

High in the Himalayan Mountains lived a wise old man. People would travel up from the village to seek his guidance. A couple of lads from the village decided to play a joke on the wise old man and discredit him.

One lad came up with the idea to capture a bird and hide it in his hands. He knew of course that the wise old man would know that he was holding a bird so he devised a plan.

Once the old man would say it was a bird, they would ask the old man if it was alive or dead. If he said ‘alive’, they would crush the bird and if he said ‘dead’, they would release the bird.

A week later the lads met the wise old man and as they predicted, he guessed correctly that they held a bird. They asked the question, ‘is it alive or dead?’ The old man looked at the lads for a long time and then smiled knowingly and said – ‘It all depends on you.’

And so it is with us – how we live Eucharist depends on each one of us. God offers us freedom in how we respond to his giving of Himself to us in Eucharist. We can choose how we live the freedom that is given to us, it all depends on you! Perhaps the vision that Francis of Assisi had of Eucharist can help us.

We know that Francis’ own writings that the Eucharist was central to his Christian faith, for him it was total giving of God in freedom to us out of love – All is gift and therefore the only response is of offering all back to God. For Francis the Eucharist is a sign of “God holding nothing back of Himself but pours Himself out totally in saving and redeeming grace to us in the sacrament. Christ gave himself without reserve. The Eucharist reminds us that Jesus on the cross emptied himself to the point of death for us; he holds nothing back but gives himself totally to us. And what other response can we make than to give ourselves over to the Father in





the poser of the spirit.

In Eucharist we see the love that God has for us. We come to know the one who created us in love to love. As Pope Benedict said: *we are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary"*



In Eucharist we see who we are – beloved of God and like all occasions of being in the presence of goodness we become good and want to do good! Think of a time you were in the presence of good – didn't it inspire you to be better than you are? For Francis, sin was our inability to perceive ourselves as gift given by God and dependent on God – sin was to claim our giftedness as our own!



Awareness of the greatness of who we are before God touches our deepest selves and touches the whole of our lives; our hopes, pain, lost-ness and joys. This awareness impels us to go on to others; to feed others with love, car compassion, concern and hospitality. St. Augustine tells us *become what you receive ... become the bread for others."*



The challenge as Francis would see it is to be brother and sister to all we meet and all of creation. All is gift and our response can only be amazement and gratitude which must lead to action. To us we must become more concerned with others than only our selves. We are opened to an expended heart that care and loves all that God creates. To beat Eucharist is a dangerous thing because wherever we take, bless and break bread, and share it together we come face to face with the living God, who in giving himself totally to us, asks us that we give ourselves totally to Him in return and become co-creators in building the Kingdom of God. When we say *Amen* at the end of the Eucharistic Prayer, we accept this challenge to bring what we hear and receive in this church out to the day to day world we live in, in our daily living, the fact that we receive Christ in the Eucharist must make a difference in our everyday living. We must pour out our hearts out in love to all we meet. **It all depends on you!**



We close with the words of Francis of Assisi:

"The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles himself, that for our salvation, he hides himself under the ordinary piece of bread! Brothers and sisters look at the humility of God and pour out your hearts before him!"

4th March - Fr. Bryan Shortall OFM Cap *Rise! Let us be on our way!*

Jesus made his followers feel like they could fly! He said things that set them on fire. People followed him from town to town to hear the good news. He challenged people to get up and walk... he helped the blind to see again... he cured lepers back to being socially acceptable again. He even forgave sinners – he loved the sinner, not the sin. The disciples went around the world, at the command of Jesus to preach the 'Good News'. We have our parents, grandparents and all our family and friends to thank for passing on the faith that was passed on to us – unavailable in shops to buy – freely given and freely received.

Jesus was there in the good times – the healings, the cures and the joy. But not far from this was the shadow of the cross, and suddenly Jesus was



gone. He was dead. Yes, he had mentioned from time to time that he would have to suffer and die. Many could not accept Jesus was the Messiah that God had sent... on God's own terms... a servant who was prepared to wash the feet of his disciples... to kiss a leper... one who was not afraid to eat with sinners. Here is someone who can identify with the pain and suffering of people.

These days, Irish society is being crucified in many ways... carnage and mayhem, and it is obvious that crucifixion is a feature for us. Road traffic accidents and mob rule in some suburbs, and just as Jesus cried out in Gethsemane *Put that sword back in its scabbard!*, he could cry out today *Put down that gun!*

Most magazines have pictures of beautiful people wearing beautiful clothes having beautiful lives. But behind the surface, there is often the undercurrent of mental and physical problems. There are addictions, relationship difficulties and many other problems.

And some young Irish can be so indifferent today. I have met people who are so hurt by the coldness of others. You look into their eyes and they are lifeless. Indifference can be even more crucifying to Jesus than when he hung on the cross.

Indifference, by GA Studdert Kennedy

When Jesus came to Golgotha, they hanged Him on a tree,
They drove great nails through hands and feet, and made a Calvary;
They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep,
For those were crude and cruel days, and human flesh was cheap.

When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed Him by.
They would not hurt a hair of Him, they only let Him die;
For men had grown more tender, and they would not give Him pain,
They only just passed down the street, and left Him in the rain.

Still Jesus cried, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do,'
And still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through;
The crowds went home and left the streets without a soul to see,
And Jesus crouched against a wall, and cried for Calvary

In the midst of the bad news, there is good news. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is hope for all of us. An nature too, we have new life. Flowers are blooming and leaves are visible on the trees again. Even though we have difficult times in our lives, we remember that in the Resurrection, there are no difficult times. Can we believe that Jesus loves us unconditionally? Yes, we can. And when we feel far away from Jesus, can we be sure he is actually closer to us? Yes, we can.

Jesus tells us in the Gospel of John

I have told you these things so that you may find peace in me. In the world, you will have hardship, but be courageous. I have conquered the world.

So let's be positive. Let us lift up our hearts. The late Pope John Paul II wrote in his book "Rise! Let us be on our way!"

If you are what you should be, you will set the whole world ablaze!

