

Synopses of the talks follow →



Novena of Grace 2013

Halston Street Church, Dublin **in honour of St. Francis Xavier**

Theme: "Unrolling the Scroll"

Monday, 4th March Fr. Bryan Shortall, ofm cap "Tired of all the Bad News"	7:30pm	Saturday, 9th March Paddy Pender "Pilgrims for our time"	6:00pm
Tuesday, 5th March Fr. Frank Keevins, CP "Jesus the Physician"	7:30pm	Sunday, 10th March Fr. Tony Egan, OSA "God in Christ has reconciled us to Himself"	12noon
Wednesday, 6th March Fr. Robert McCabe, CF "Grace Builds on Nature"	7:30pm	Monday, 11th March Most Rev Charles Brown (Apostolic Nuncio) "The Door of Faith is always Open"	7:30pm
Thursday, 7th March Dr Fáinche Ryan (Mater Dei) "I Believe in the Holy Spirit"	7:30pm	Tuesday, 12th March Fr. John Cummins, Adm (Carlow Cathedral) "Because You're Worth It!"	7:30pm
Friday, 8th March Fr. Richard Hendrick, ofm cap "What is Grace?"	7:30pm		



**A chance to find out more
about your personal journey with God
and the call of the Spirit for you.**

YEAR OF FAITH 2012-2013

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

Synopses of the talks follow →

12th March – Fr. John Cummins

Because you're worth it!



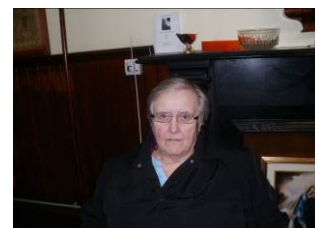
The title for this evening is "Because you're worth it." But I think we need to have a little bit of honesty first - I'm a great believer in honesty! Did anyone think that we might have a demonstration by L'Oreal tonight? How many thought that we'd have a few free hair products available? Put your hand down, Paddy Pender!

Well, guess what? It's Lent! Sorry to disappoint you! But I'm sure there are plenty of hair and beauty practitioners who'll be only too glad to look after you.

This is a significant day; I'm sure I'll remember it for a long time to come. Today the Cardinals began the conclave to elect a new Pope. We're conscious of them and we keep them in our prayers, asking the Holy Spirit to guide them in their discussions and decisions. But we're also at the end of this Novena of Grace, the 301st, and this too is an important and significant occasion. This is a time for gathering in the fruits of the prayer of the last nine days; it's a time for looking back - what has happened for us? How has God been working in this community, and in you yourself? It's also a time for looking at the future. What next? What difference does this time of prayer, this time of grace make for us? Have we been changed by it in any way? Or do we need to **make** any changes in our own lives? And why should we? Why are we here at all? The answer, I think to those last questions, is because **you're worth it**. Life is short; it's also very precious; it's the only life we've got, God's gift to us - to be treasured and used and lived, and we've got to live each moment as best we can.

In society today, we hear so many stories of people who have been put down and undervalued. We hear and we know people who have suffered violence, perhaps in their own homes, perhaps from family members, people who have suffered in institutions, perhaps. We live in a society where many people are led astray, getting into trouble with the law. We see those whose lives are damaged by drugs, alcohol, gambling, internet addictions. We see and we know people who are homeless, who are rejected, people who hear again and again in their experience of life - "I'm not worth it", people who have little sense that they are loved and that their lives are important. We might not have suffered any of the more extreme things, and yet may still feel that life is hard, that every day is a struggle, that the world is one big, confusing place, where so many things have changed that it's hard to know where we're going. You might be trying to raise a family, trying to make ends meet, trying to hang on to values and faith, and it's a struggle, you wonder who's on your side?

And then there's a society that calls on us to indulge ourselves - treat yourself, pamper yourself - because, they tell us, you're worth it. And it might be nice, and it might feel good and give us a little lift, but deep



down, it doesn't answer the needs of our spirit. We're here in the middle of Lent, and Lent has become meaningless for so many people. So much of our Lenten practice is just an outward token with no real inner conversion or change of heart. Yet we're told that this is a time of conversion, a time of renewal, a time for ridding ourselves of some of the baggage we carry, letting go of the dross and following Christ in a new freedom and love. And we're disillusioned perhaps by the Church; so much has changed, so much makes us wonder why we should stay with it. And yet we're here, and have been here over these days of this novena.

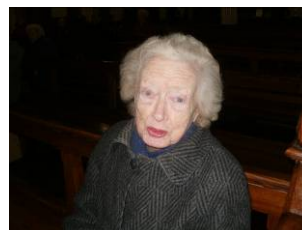
To all of us, our God says loud and clear - "you're worth it; you're precious; you are loved."

To *all* of us, he says, "you are my creation, created in my image and likeness; you are my son, my daughter, my beloved. To you I send my Son, Jesus, to live in you, to nourish and strengthen you." The first reading showed the waters flowing from the Temple, giving life; the gospel told us how Jesus is the one who gives healing and life to the man who had been sick for most of his life, unable to reach the waters of the pool. It is Jesus who raises him up. Jesus is the water that gives life; he is the one who heals, who raises up those who are depressed or downhearted; he is the one who hears our prayers, lifts our burdens, gives us strength so that we carry on. It is he who transforms whatever suffering we might bear into something that can be a source of life for us, something that can give us meaning and hope, even joy. The invitation is to come to him; come to the waters; come to him. Invite him in; let him fill you; let him be present in your life, in your home, in your thoughts.

It's the most amazing thing - that God can choose to live in us. Here in the Eucharist, he gives us his Son so that Christ can live in us, nourish us, be our strength and energy, not just for our own sakes, but also for those others we meet each day. He wants us to live with love and care and generosity. He wants us to live with a sensitivity to the presence of God in one another; he wants to live with eyes that are open to the needs of our sisters and brothers, to the aching of their hearts, the poverty of their spirits, the hunger and thirst of their bodies.

And so we are invited to see Christ present in one another. This is what we might call the sacramental nature of humanity - that each person can be almost a sacrament, a place where God's presence is encountered. Can you imagine how different the world would be if we were to live in the continual awareness of the presence of God in one another? Look at the person beside you - Christ is present in that person, and in you too. Can you imagine the reverence we would have for one another, if we treated each other not as ordinary human beings, but as sacred places mediating the presence of God? And it's not just the most worthy, the saints, the seemingly holy people, or even those who live good lives - this is everyone, whether they know it or not: the lowly, the down and outs, the drunks, those who have lost their dignity, wrong-doers. Indeed we find it easy to appreciate the presence of God in the young, the children, but in those who are truly last of all?? Christ is present in all of us.

We find ourselves here in the middle of Lent, at the end of this Novena of Grace, praying to St. Francis Xavier who left his homeland in the north of Spain to bring the news of Jesus Christ to the peoples of the Far East, in

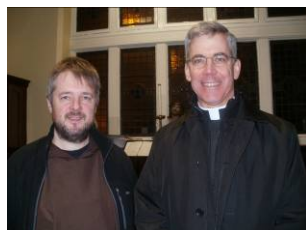


India, Japan and China. He baptised thousands. Why? Because he believed that they were worth it; he recognised their dignity.

With his example before us, on this day of Lent, Jesus is saying something very profound: because you're worth it, he says, because you're a child of God, called to witness to God's presence in the world, and to be a sign and sacrament of God's presence, take up your cross and follow Christ; because you're worth it, make the sacrifices that will make you a better person in the long run. Because you're worth it, live for others; not just because they are worth it, but because you are too. You're too precious to waste your life on serving yourself alone; invest it following Christ and serving his people. Go out from here, bringing with you the fruits of this time. Go out from here, nourished by the love of the God who knows you, who knows you at your most vulnerable, at your weakest and your strongest. Go out from here in the confidence and faith that he lives in you, that you have a dignity and a value that are greater than anything the world can give you, because you are precious to him, loved by him, his daughter, his son. That's pure gold, and you're worth it.



11th March – Most Rev. Charles Brown (Apostolic Nuncio) *The Door of Faith is always Open*





The Gospel (Jn 4:43-54) this evening is a beautiful meditation on the virtue of faith. The official had a sick son and he asked Jesus to cure him. Jesus told him to return home as his son would live. AND the man believed and returned home without any evidence that his son was well. He returned home, confident that Jesus was telling him the truth even though he had not seen any evidence to confirm what Jesus had said. The official realises that it is true when his servants run out to meet him and tell him that his son is well.

Faith is the power to believe. It is the ability to believe even though we cannot see any evidence. Evidence is faith based and it is about trust in the other. He trusted that what Jesus said was true. The gift of faith brought with it the gift of healing. The official believed in Jesus and it was his faith that made it possible for his son to get well. Faith requires trust.

Pope Benedict XVI declared this year as the Year of Faith. We need to increase our faith conscious that the door of faith is always open. God wants us to grow in faith. We don't do this just once in our lives – we are constantly growing in faith, and we need to constantly grow in faith. It's a relationship which needs constant care and attention. We have to completely go through the door of faith again and again and again.

Faith grows with prayer and when we pray our faith increases. When our faith increases, our desire for prayer grows. It is a cycle – a virtuous cycle.

God is revealed to us through the Church is faith which leads to trust. Faith is the power to believe in certain truths. We believe since these truths come from God.

We also need to study our faith. In these times, the world tells us that God does not exist and tells people to do what they want, when they want to. We need to protect ourselves against that negative message which is promoted by the media. And how do we do this? There are a couple of simple but effective ways;

- (1) prayer and
- (2) studying our faith so that we can respond to the world when the world challenges out faith.

The Church of God is the body of people who believe. The gift of faith is given to everyone at their baptism. We believe as a group of faith people and we need to strengthen and support each other in our faith.

Here in the church you have the banner for the Year of Faith on display and as you can see the Church is represented by a ship. I also heard earlier this evening that the roof on the Capuchin church in Church Street was built by a boat builder. There has always been a strong link between the boats, sea and the church. The word 'nave' comes from the Latin word 'navis' which means ship. The Church in Ireland has come through the persecution of Penal Times and today there are new forms of persecution,



but the ship, the Church moves on since it is powered by God.

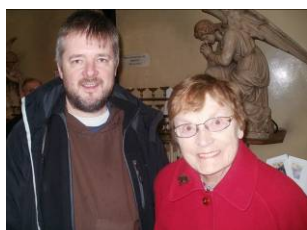
I have travelled the length and breadth of this country and I have seen great witnesses to our faith throughout the country. While it may seem that the world is against the Church, but we move forward in faith.

I ask you to pray especially this week for the Cardinals in Rome as they elect our new Pope. They will have a Mass for Electing a New Pontiff and then after lunch they enter the Sistine Chapel and cast their votes in the first ballot. This is a time for us to pray.

It is a joy for me to be here for this Novena of Grace. Francis Xavier was a great example of faith and a man transformed by his faith. Let us pray for ourselves and in this year we will grow and progress in faith and that the door of faith will always be open for us.



10th March – Fr. Tony Egan OSA *God in Christ has reconciled us to Himself*



Someone once said that “mercy is our identity, for we are created out the very mercy of God.”

And we have a wonderful example of this in this morning's beautiful story of the Prodigal Son, where St. Luke commands us to see the unending mercy and forgiveness of the Father and to do likewise.

In that story we meet a God who knows the weakness of our human wills



and hearts; a God who knows the temptations we regularly succumb to. Yet, he is still always willing to forgive us and reconcile us to himself. No matter how far astray we go, no matter how many our stupid mistakes, no matter how much we behave like the younger son, if we are really sorry and show true repentance, God forgives us.

And all because he is a God of mercy and compassion, slow to anger, abounding in love. A God who never gives up on us and seeks us out in all the strange places where our bad choices often take us in life.

This morning, then, we rejoice in the fact that the God we worship and adore is always ready to forgive and reconcile us to himself; ever on the lookout for his wayward children, eager to welcome them back home.

And we have to learn to act towards others in the same way. This means that if we are to experience God's forgiveness, we also need to be forgiving to others. If we are to be reconciled with God we need to learn how to forgive those who wrong us, to love those who make mistakes, to look for the good in others even when we disagree with many of their life choices.

Unlike the elder son in the gospel story, we need to let go of past hurts, grudges and resentments, anger and hatred. This means being always ready to welcome the repentant brother and sister back into our embrace.

Otherwise we cannot pray: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." As someone so rightly put it:-

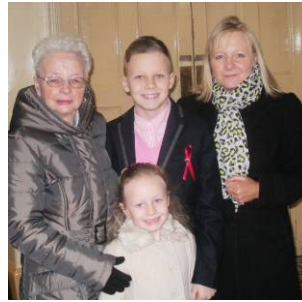
"When we forgive we cancel the debt of sin; we let go of resentment and we set free both ourselves and those who have sinned against us. This is why to sin is human, but to forgive is truly divine."

This morning, then, "whether you are like the younger son or the older son, God is waiting to welcome you home to that place where you can rest in the embrace of His unconditional love." {cf: Henri J. Nouwen}.

"God brings out the best in us and helps us; when we are our worst it brings out the best in God."

Prayer: "My Divine Saviour, it is never too late to draw closer to you. During your earthly life you welcomed many people who came to you after a good part of their life was already spent. Let me not hesitate to follow their good example. You call me as I am, and desire to help me make the most of what I have. Lord, Jesus, I am willing to try with the help of your grace. Amen."





9th March – Paddy Pender *Pilgrims for our time*



For me, the word pilgrim always conjures up images of holy men and women making a difficult journey, with very few belongings and a stick in hand. Pilgrims generally rely on the hospitality of others to survive and they make their pilgrim journey in the spirit of the gospels.

Usually we see the pilgrim as someone who moves from their home to another place – maybe to a religious shrine like Lourdes or Medjugorje or Knock or maybe even walk the Way of St. James to Santiago de Compostela. It's not the distance that we look at when we consider a pilgrimage. Nor do we focus on the destination. The most important thing about any pilgrimage is how we are changed – how we have grown closer to God and more in tune with our hearts and souls.

The Book of Lismore tells us

‘Going on pilgrimage without change of heart brings no reward from God. For it is by practising virtue and not mere motion of the feet that we will be brought to heaven’

All this can sound a million miles from Halston Street and from our lives in the inner city. But if you think of the history of this parish, you can see that our ancestors were pilgrims in the very true sense and we have inherited that tradition.

A thousand years ago when people made the journey to Dublin from the northern counties, they crossed the river near Stoneybatter before entering the city. The reasons for visiting Dublin were many and varied, but what we do know is that few would cross the river without offering a prayer at the shrine in honour of St. Michan which was erected near the crossing. Their journeys were both business oriented and pilgrimage.

Over the centuries, the parish of St. Michan has moved from the small shrine to eventually be located here in Halston Street. In a sense, the parish of St. Michan has been on pilgrimage for a thousand years. It has moved and grown in accordance with the Book of Lismore and we have moved and grown with it. You see, no pilgrim can complete a pilgrimage without having an effect on those they encounter on the road and an effect on themselves. As the shrine of St. Michan became a church and then a Mass House and then this church here, the people who worshiped at each of these places were affected by those they met and worshiped alongside. They looked out for each other through very difficult times and most managed to hold on to the faith and even pass it on so that we can be here today.

The craftsmen who worked on this building could never be accused of just putting in the hours doing their craft! They created a church which is spirit-filled and is a testimony to their faith. To create the fine

windows and wonderful mosaics, they had to know, live and believe the Scriptures that they depict.

During the summer just gone, thousands took part in the Eucharistic Congress Pilgrim Walk. During the pilgrimage, the pilgrims visited seven churches in the inner city, including Church Street and Halston Street. All the pilgrims that we spoke to confirmed that the experience of visiting the churches had a wonderful impact on them. Most had started out to walk from church to church but found themselves moved inside by the welcome they received and the prayerfulness of other pilgrims they met along the road. The impact was unexpected making the experience all the richer.

But the congress is over and now we ask how we can be pilgrims in our time. I'm not sure we have to ask how we can be pilgrims in our own time, but we could slow down and recognise how we are pilgrims.

Many will look around and see Capuchins, Presentation Sisters, members of the Legion of Mary, members of St. Vincent DePaul Society and others they believe fit easily into the pilgrim role. Yes, they're right, but that's not the whole picture! Everyone fits into the pilgrim role. The people who look at the likely suspects probably make the best pilgrims themselves.

All around us, people rushing everywhere, busy all the time, lots of worries to deal with. I hear snippets of conversations as I walk in town and I can say that many of the people I come across are wonderful witnesses to the gospel in very simple, but profound ways. Some days, I witness the Road to Emmaus as I walk down Mary Street! People walking and talking, with faces downcast and then out of nowhere, another joins them and helps them to see their situation differently, and hopefully in a more positive light. Those of you who sell fruit, vegetables and other produce know exactly what I mean because daily you are the ones lifting people's spirits.

Another more common image is that of children being brought to school and worried parents helping each other with the difficulties that the current climate brings to any family. In every sense, these normal daily journeys are not mere motion of the feet, but everyone involved is moved. Being a pilgrim in Dublin today is as simple as being a good listener for others, offering Christian support to others. It's as simple as walking alongside someone who is having a difficult time.

St. Francis tells us to '*Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words*'. This applies to us today just as much as it applied to the early Franciscans eight hundred years ago.

Over the last twenty years I have taken to the roads and bogs in Ireland with this staff in my hand. There is a story behind this particular staff which I think sums up the pilgrim! Back in 1990, I was doing the tourist trail with an American visitor. While in Mayo, we visited Ballintubber Abbey and as we strolled through the graveyard one of the local clergymen came over to us for a chat. He enthused about the abbey, its history and his plans to re-open the pilgrim road from the abbey to Croagh Patrick which he pointed to way off in the distance. He asked where we were from and when he heard I was from Dublin, he laughed and said "*Sure a Jackeen like you wouldn't be able for that!*" Ever heard of the expression – red rag to a bull? Well, I was hooked and decided I would be back to the abbey as soon as the route was open. September 1990, four of us headed West and set out on Tóchar Phádraig and headed towards Croagh Patrick. Before we set out, Fr. Frank cut this stick for me and it has been my companion through thick and thinner. It stabilises me on the muddy paths, is my lever should I fall in a bog and my pace setter on the long roads. But more than that, the pilgrim staff has a special significance. Before a pilgrim sets out on pilgrimage with their staff in hand, they make a circle around themselves with their staff. The circle marks out the sacred ground on which they stand and each step they take is sacred since it is on this sacred ground. It is a sign of the pilgrim's commitment to God and the interior journey home to God.

In our Gospel this weekend, the younger son sets out on a journey and when the good times are over and he is forced to seriously look at his life and the choices he has made; he then recognises his need to change and return home to the father. At the outset he is only focused on getting away from his home with his inheritance and enjoying himself, but it doesn't take long to exhaust his resources and realise that he was wrong and that he needs more than freedom, pleasure and money. He is a changed person by the

time he gets home.

The challenge for us is to take time to recognise ourselves as a pilgrim. We may not have a staff in hand, but we can make a morning offering to happily greet others regardless of where they come from or how they are. The effect of that commitment will probably never be known to us, but those you meet will be forever grateful.



'Going on pilgrimage without change of heart brings no reward from God. For it is by practising virtue and not mere motion of the feet that we will be brought to heaven'



8th March – Fr. Richard Hendrick ofm cap ***What is Grace?***



A great monastic elder decided to take a young novice to see the Nile. He had never see the Nile and was very excited. The elder on the other hand was hoping to use the trip to teach the young novice. When they arrived at the great river, the elder asked the young monk if he had any questions. He listed off question after question
What does water feel like?
What's under the water?
What lives in the water?
Where does it all come from?
How fast is it going?

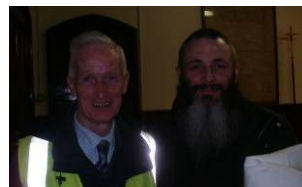
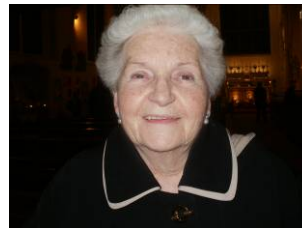
And lots more... So the elder pushed the monk in to the water to find all the answers to the questions he had asked, and then he pulled him out and said *Now you know all about the water – let's talk!*

Grace is like that. We talk endlessly about it but do we know it at all. Do we know what grace is?

It is the wonderful current of God's love. The earliest doctors of the church tried to describe this wonderful feeling and came up with the word Grace.

Grace is a free gift from God to each and every one of us. It is the experience of living in God's love. Today, in this church, the Sacrament of Confirmation was administered to the children of the parish schools. Today the children received the grace of the sacrament but we need to pray for the grace to blossom and for them to continue to live in faith.

Grace is an extraordinary gift since the Lord never denies grace to his people. His love for each of us never changes. We may change but God never changes.



The Spirit burns powerfully here, during the Novena of Grace as we ask for favours. Remember, God never leaves a prayer unanswered, even if the answer is not the one you want. Experience the grace of these nine days and open your hearts to the life and love of Christ. It's important that we know we are necessary to God's plan. God has chosen you and me to be a conduit of grace at this moment, in this place. We are called to the instruments of his grace.

We are called to be the presence of Christ HERE. We each do it in the most ordinary things – housework, driving, typing, taking the children to school, in all the simple things we do each day. Whatever we do everyday – that is where the Spirit of God meets us. So we must open our hearts to God's love. The Novena of Grace started here 301 years ago. When it started it was a seed that has grown and sprouted so that the Novena of Grace in honour of St. Francis Xavier is now celebrated in parishes near and far. Today we are praying to St. Francis Xavier in union with all those praying this Novena in their local parish. Let us pray for the prospective of eternity where we live, move and have our being.

Everyone single person is called to be a saint. Called to be a saint in the ordinary things we do. And let there be Grace filled prayer for another 301 years.



7th March – Dr. Fáinche Ryan ***I Believe in the Holy Spirit***

A famous German theologian of the last century, Karl Rahner, is famous for having remarked that one could dispense with the doctrine of the Trinity for Christians and it really would make little or no difference to the average person. I wonder if that is true, and sadly I think it might be. Think about it. Most of us when we pray to God, pray either to the Father or the Son; and while when we pray the 'glory be' we do indeed pray to the Trinity – for the most part I think Rahner is correct, we don't pray to the Trinity – and the Holy Spirit rarely gets a look in.

And yet, *Come Holy Spirit, Veni Sancte Spiritus* is a prayer that lies at the heart of the Church. It is a call from our human helplessness, emptiness and sinfulness. We cry to the Holy Spirit when we realise our own weakness, our own inability to make change, to act, to be influential. It is a real cry from the heart.

And I think back over my own life, I see that yes, the Holy Spirit has been active. Twenty of more years ago I was a happy new teacher of Physical Education and Science in Cliften, Co. Galway. Happy but with itchy feet, for I left my permanent pensionable job after just four years, travelled and worked, and did a retreat, on the advice of an Irish Capuchin that I met in Namibia, I must add and began to study theology. It can only have been the Holy Spirit that gave me the itchy feet, and guided me through many



experiences and countries to bring me here tonight. But had I been crying to the Holy Spirit? I don't remember long hours in prayers but you know I think I had, although I didn't realise it – as a young person, I was asking God, if God existed to help me live a meaningful life. Come Holy Spirit.

And then I think of the early Church. The First Reading we have just heard is from the Acts of the Apostles (4:23-31). Some scholars say this book of the bible should be called the Acts of the Spirit because the Spirit is so active in it. If you get a chance read the Acts and see how the Spirit seemed to guide every move of the early Church – before every decision the early followers of Christ prayed to the Holy Spirit, and then did what they felt the Holy Spirit was asking. Today's reading tells us that *When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness* – Come Holy Spirit.

It seems that to pray *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, Come Holy Spirit is a dangerous activity. It uprooted me from a comfortable, settled life in Cliften, and it set Peter and John and all the rest along paths they might have preferred not to travel. The early Jewish followers of Christ were forced to admit non-Jews into their community – and we hear later in the Acts that these new followers did not have to be circumcised, nor did they have to obey the laws around clean food that the Jews had. With the Holy Spirit it seems we are no longer in charge. All our rules and regulations are challenged. The Holy Spirit shows us that they are simply manmade rules, they can and must change to help us journey toward God: I wonder what changes we are being called to today, this year. The Holy Spirit comforts and at once disturbs, for the Spirit reminds us that we belong to God, God does not belong to us. The Holy Spirit blows wherever it wills – sometimes a gentle breeze, sometimes a gale. I am reminded of the last words spoken by Benedict as Pope: he spoke of how his time as Bishop of Rome and Pontiff of the Church Universal have been both tranquil and rocky; but we know that the Holy Spirit has been with us, and with him, through it all.

The Spirit was active in the early days of Christianity too, in the founding of the Church bringing the Church to birth, and challenging it to reach out to others, the Spirit challenged people to change. In today's reading we hear how the Spirit gave people the power and the strength to speak boldly, it helped them to grow to know God afresh, in new ways. It was the Spirit who guided the Church in the development of the seven sacraments, and in the calling of the various councils, from which we got our wonderful, powerful prayer, the Creed. All these things brought changes in Church practice, changes to the life of a Christian. Calling on God, calling on God's Holy Spirit, trusting in God's Holy Spirit present in our Church means being open to God, and to the surprises God may bring into our lives. Come Holy Spirit

To call on God in this way is a brave step, because you never know what you might get. God is not pre-packaged or computerized. God shocks us with challenge. A Church which is really open to the power of the Spirit does not try to protect itself by ancient certainties, but is ready to dance afresh with the Holy Spirit, to venture into pastures new.

When Jesus left us on this earth he didn't leave us with lists of rules and



regulations but, as we heard in the gospel, he promised us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. This Spirit is to guide the Church always into newness, into closer relationship with God. Our Church always needs to change, not to suit the world, but to more truthfully show the world what difference it makes to believe in a God of love.

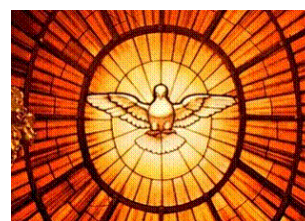
But does the Spirit make any difference to my life? As an individual trying to follow God. And it does, it really does. Another theologian, this time a Dominican, was key here. A man called Yves Congar wrote a huge book/tome on the Holy Spirit. Congar spent all his time and energy writing this huge book as he wanted to remind us that the Holy Spirit lives in each one of us, is central to our lives as Christians. The Holy Spirit changes us so that we really grow in Holiness, so that we grow in wisdom, and like the apostles grow in boldness in speaking the word of God in our lives. It is the Holy Spirit living deep inside each one of us that inspired us to come to this novena this week, tonight, and it is also this Spirit which is saying to each of us be brave, be open, be willing to change and grow. For you are beautiful, very beautiful in God's eyes. Don't be afraid to show this beauty to others. Each of us are gifted with beauty in different ways - some of us are gifted with kindness, some with cooking skills, some with listening or teaching skills, some are good parents, some are strong and supportive friends. Let us nourish all these gifts and share them to help to spread the Good News: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and so too shall we, if we say yes to God. We can only say this yes, with the help of the Holy Spirit – and this yes, is not simply a promise to pray and to go to Mass but it is to live our lives differently, to allow what are traditionally called the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit to guide our lives. These gifts are wisdom, understanding, counsel, or courage, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. I suppose it is good to remind ourselves that fear of the Lord means respect, and honour for God, not to be terrified of God. These gifts enable us to live differently, to be agents of change, agents of God, to grow into the Truth that is God.

Tonight we pray in particular that those gathered in Rome to select a new Bishop of Rome, may they allow themselves to be guided by the Holy Spirit.

And so tonight we pray Come Holy Spirit, we believe in you, we need you. Come Holy Spirit from the depths of our being and help us to grow, to flourish like flowers in spring. Come Holy Spirit, we believe in you, we believe that you are the Lord the giver of life, give life to each one here, and especially give life to the Church here in Halston Street, and to the People of God throughout the world, the Church Catholic. Make us a life giving Church, a Church of hope and of joy, a Church of newness and of mystery, a Church which truthfully and boldly speaks of a good God to the world. *Veni Sancte Spiritus*



Come Holy Spirit



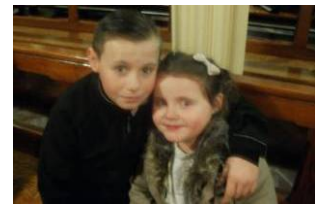
Veni Sancte Spiritus

*Veni Sancte
Spiritus*

*Come Holy
Spirit*

6th March - Fr. Robert McCabe CF

Grace Builds on Nature



Celebrating baptism with soldiers, their families and their newborn babies is one of the more enjoyable ceremonies which military chaplains celebrate. It's an occasion of new relationships, of reflection for new parents, delighted godparents and proud grandparents. During the pre-baptismal preparations, I always ask parents and godparents to give "good solid answers" to the questions put to them at the start of the ceremony.

What name do you give your baby? e.g. **Thomas**
What do you ask of God's Church for Thomas? **Baptism**

Some time ago, I had a baptism of a child whose godfather could not attend the preparation sessions. When he flew home for the big day, the parents warned him that "Fr. Bob wants good solid answers to the questions" and told him to be sure to answer out loud and clear...He did except his answer to the question "What do you ask of God's Church for this baby? was "a good solid baptism"!!

This Novena of Grace reflecting on the life and work of St Francis Xavier during the Year of Faith called by Pope Benedict remind us of the fact that we are all in relationship with God and with one another.

At our baptism, our name was called out in God's house for the first time. Since then we have grown in relationship with our parish community and with all whom we meet at prayer or whom we carry in our prayers – friends undergoing chemotherapy, family who have emigrated, neighbours in prison, victims of addiction or trauma.

Enquiring about a person's name shows that we are interested in them. In a few days time, at the end of the conclave, we will wait to hear the name chosen by our new Pope. We will pray for him and look forward to his guidance and the manner in which he reflects his relationship with God to the church entrusted to his care.

This evening's scripture passages remind us of God's constant hope that his people will develop their relationship with God and neighbour by observing his commandments. This is one of the first duties which parents and godparents take on at baptism. Could I suggest this evening that parents and godparents might explore the beauty of the Sign of the Cross as an essential way of deepening our sense of God's grace?

Francis Xavier enjoyed making the sign of the Cross. He wasn't gifted with languages but his joyful Christianity and his love of the Cross were sufficient for his missionary endeavours. Could we imagine the calm and contentment which he experienced in making the sign of the Cross on his long ship journeys toward India? Can we consider his delight at seeing

new converts make the sign of the cross and their expression of their new Christian identity?

The Cross features as the ship's mast in the logo for the Year of Faith. The ship symbolises the Church which is guided by Christ – His name is written across the mast and the sails. Last week Pope Benedict reminded us that the ship does not belong to the Pope but rather to Christ. The sun represents the Eucharist – our source of energy. God's Spirit is the wind which powers the ship of faith. We are on this journey together since baptism and we are nourished by the Eucharist and the outpouring of God's Holy Spirit.

Francis Xavier, when he blessed himself before Mass, he linked in to Christ, to his disciples chosen at the Sea of Galilee including the apostle Thomas who travelled to India after the Resurrection and Pentecost. And that's why Francis Xavier was so successful. He joyfully proclaimed his relationship with God and neighbour every time he made the Sign of the Cross in blessing, in forgiveness, in consecration and in celebrating the sacraments.

Tonight, like Francis Xavier, like St Thomas and like all the other saints and sinners who have been part of the long journey in the Barque of Peter since the Sea of Galilee, we are invited to be solid Christians. Why not explore the beauty of the Sign of the Cross with your children this Lent? Our two-year old children these days know how to use the remote control for the telly or how to move their finger across the iPhone or their thumbs on the Playstation in order to tap into a virtual world.

This virtual world is a place of disconnection from reality and a distraction from our obligations towards God and neighbour. The virtual world will not solve the anxieties, pains, loneliness in our lives when the screen goes blank. This year I'm encouraging parents and godparents to explore the sign of the Cross with their children – not as a means of escape but a method of linking in with people like St Peter, St Thomas, St Francis Xavier and the holy men and women down through time whose relationship with God and neighbour has helped them to offer care, support and encouragement for all in need.

Grace builds on nature - it does not replace nature. We need to build steadily on what we have been given at our baptism and our building block is prayer. The Novena of Grace gives us an opportunity to recalibrate our setting and evaluate our expectations of prayer and deepen our awareness of God's grace.

Often I'm asked to pray for someone who has been sitting exams. My answer is "I will but I hope they are studying also!" In the month of July or August people ask me to pray for good Leaving Cert results. My answer is "we can't change what has been written but let's pray instead for the examiners who are correcting your daughter's exam papers – that they are generous with their correcting and give even better results that your child might deserve."

As we invoke St Francis Xavier this evening we gather at the altar – a solid structure where God's Holy Spirit transforms our offerings into the nourishment of the Eucharist. May our meeting with the Lord this evening



help us to give solid witness to our faith as parents, children, godparents, godchildren and friends. **Amen**

5th March - Fr. Frank Keevins CP *Jesus the Physician*



Jesus, at the beginning of his public ministry, unfolded the scroll and claimed a two-fold mission to Preach the Good News and Heal the Sick. A little while later, when John the Baptist was in prison, this question was put to Jesus – *Are you the one who was to come or is there another?* His response was, *The blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the dead raised and the Good News is preached to the poor.*

Jesus invites all the weary, wounded and broken-hearted to come to him. *Come to me all you who are weary and weighed down and I will give you rest.* Preaching is a kind of healing since ultimately, the Good News tells us that God loves us, loves us just as we are. This is the surest foundation to experience healing in your life and feeling the love that Jesus brings.

Jesus is the Divine Physician. He invites all who are sick to come to him and tells us that he came, not for the righteous but for the sinner.

Forgiveness is a deep form of healing and is also a mission of the church. One of the ways that the church is faithful to this mission is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. God is a God of Forgiveness, slow to anger and abounding in love.

As followers of Jesus we are called to forgive others. In tonight's Gospel, the question is asked *How many times must we forgive?* The parable reminds us that forgiveness should not be measured nor should limits be set on it. Forgiveness is meant to be a permanent measurement of the heart. *To err is human, to forgive divine.*

Forgiveness is a divine quality. Forgiveness is an expression of the goodness of God. Without forgiveness, who should survive? God loves us not because we are good. God loves us unconditionally. There is always hope for the sinner. No matter how far down we go or how low we get, there is always God. We get it wrong a fair amount of the time and it is wonderful we have a God so willing and so available to forgive. In the Scriptures we have so many stories and parables to demonstrate God's forgiveness – the Prodigal Son, the Lost Sheep, the Unforgiving Servant and the Lost Coin to name just a few.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation is so important for all of us since if we would be lost if we were measured by our deeds. The challenge for us comes when God is so willing to forgive; we are called to forgive others.



The Church is also faithful to its mission through the Sacrament of Anointing. Anyone sick among you, let him come that he may recover. The priest is the instrument of Jesus. Jesus stretches out his hands over you. Jesus blesses you with oil.

Jesus can perform no miracle in his home town since the people have no faith. It is our faith that works the miracles. *Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be well.*

Great miracles do happen. I've often witnessed spiritual miracles. I've witnessed transformations – anger and bitterness transformed into acceptance. I've witnessed terminally ill patients accept the news of their illness and are transformed to be free to make their final journey home to God.

Will everyone anointed here tonight be healed? Yes. You will be healed in the way God wants you to be healed. Jesus does not promise that we will get what we ask for. We need to come in trust knowing that God heals in God's way.

Sickness is the language of love. It is sacrifice. It is the sacrificial love for the sake of others for a better world.

Everyone of us is hurting, wounded and broken. We all have need of Jesus. And we, everyone of us is capable of being a wounded healer, called to heal others as we have been healed.

This evening, after the anointing, be resolved to go to the people at the core of our lives and let us anoint them with love.



Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant will be well.

4th March - Fr. Bryan Shortall OFM Cap *Tired of all the Bad News!*

All around us is bad news, so this evening I want to give you some good news. I want to lighten things so that we can leave here lifted up and smiling, and lighter. Many of you remember the missions and novenas of old. Lots of talk of hell and damnation. Lots of raised voices from the preachers – even shouting and screaming at the congregation trying to put the fear of God into everyone. Those days are gone – thank God!

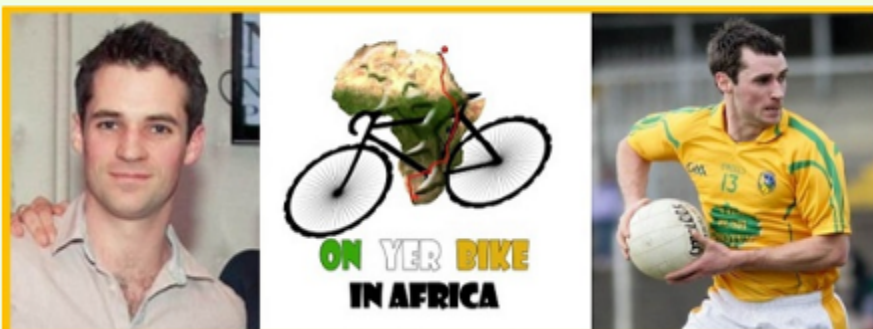
There are plenty of problems all around us and indeed we are no strangers to problems in our own lives – each and every one of us. So tonight, I'd like to tell a few good news stories, complete with good humour. *(Here's one of two of the stories shared at the novena.)*

A little boy, Joey, needs surgery to remove his tonsils. Naturally, his parents are worried sick but they tried not to let him see how worried they were so as not to worry him. When the day for the surgery came Joey's parents were frantic but Joey seemed to take it in his stride. After the surgery, Joey was sitting up in the hospital bed, delighted with life and delighted with the experience he had just come through. He told his parents that he met God and that God told him he would look after him so he knew he would be fine. *God spoke to you? How do you know it was God?* His father asked. *Yes, Dad. I was in this room and there were three girl angels and one boy angel. I knew they were angels 'cos they were dressed all in white, with a cap on their heads and a thing covering their mouths. Suddenly the boy angel called out and said "Oh God, look at those tonsils." With that, God came over. He was dressed in a green outfit similar to the angels and he looked at and said "Do not be afraid, Joey. I will take care of you. You will be fine." So I didn't worry because God promised to take care of me.*

In a different hospital, a doctor has to give bad news to a patient. He has to let the patient know that he needs one of his legs amputated. He promises that once the leg is amputated, the man will feel a lot better. The surgery goes ahead and the man returns to the ward to start his recovery. The doctor calls in to see him and tells him he has some good news and some bad news. *'The bad news is that we amputated the wrong leg, but the good news is that your leg seems to be improving.'*

Just today I was talking to one of the teachers from Brunner and she was telling me that one of the teachers, Philip, is cycling the length of the African continent to raise money for Pieta House, a charity which helps those affected by suicide, having suicidal tendencies or self-harming.

Cycling Challenge – On Yer Bike in Africa, Philip Howard



Philip Howard a primary school teacher and G.A.A Man tell us about his 7,500mile Cycling Challenge in aid of Pieta House.

On the 10th of January 2013 the annual Tour d'Afrique begins. A 7500 mile cycle challenge and adventure through the back roads of Africa starts alongside the ancient pyramids in Cairo and finishes at the foot of the majestic Table Mountain in Cape Town.

The Everest of endurance bike races takes four months to complete and travels through ten different countries, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Botswana, Namibia and South Africa.

Competitors will travel an average of 77 miles a day over a variety of challenging surfaces and through difficult and often intense climatic conditions. I Philip Howard, a primary school teacher and G.A.A. man will take part in this extreme bike expedition.

My cycling experience is quite limited but I love my fitness and am looking forward to preparing in the following months for the cycle challenge ahead.

In doing the cycle I am taking a career break from my job as a teacher in St Pauls, North Brunswick Street in Dublin's inner city and I am planning to organise some fundraising events to raise as much money as possible for Pieta House, a charity for the prevention of Suicide and Self Harm.

Depression and suicide are obviously massive problems in Irish society and I feel very strongly about helping this worthy cause.

If you like to find out more information about my cycling challenge or you would like to sponsor me, you can go to www.onyerbikeinafrica.com and all details are available on the site.



Philip is on a career break to cycle 7,500 miles and will hopefully raise much needed funds for his charity. It's a wonderful good news story at a time when there is so much bad news, and he is an inspiration to us. You can find out more on <http://www.ooyosports.com/inspiring-people/>.

So tonight, let us start this novena, the 301st novena to St. Francis Xavier in this parish, with good news in our hearts. And remember that we can ask God for our needs but we also have to help God out with our request. I am reminded of the man who prayed constantly to win the lottery. Week after week he complained that he never won, and finally God said "*Help me out here – you have to buy a ticket in order to have a chance to win!*"