

# Church of St. Michan 1817-2018

## Celebrating the Novena of Grace in Honour of St. Francis Xavier since 1712



4 <sup>th</sup>	12noon	Fr. Bryan
5 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Bishop Fintan Monahan
6 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Healing Service
7 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Mercy in the Markets
8 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Bishop Denis Nulty
9 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Fr. Tim Bartlett
10 <sup>th</sup>	6pm	Sr. Louise O'Rourke
11 <sup>th</sup>	12noon	Fr. Bryan
12 <sup>th</sup>	7:30pm	Fr. Bryan

*4<sup>th</sup> March to 12<sup>th</sup> March 2018*



## Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> March Mercy and Blessing

**Just three words! BE NOT AFRAID...**

Mercy and reconciliation is available for everyone.

*Frs. Bryan, Séán and Richard*

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Jesus  
meets  
his  
mother  
on his  
way to  
Cavalry

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## Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> March Mother's Day

**Happy Mother's Day** to all mothers, nannas and great-grannies here on earth and all those looking after us from heaven. Remember, however powerful you think, even know, that your mothers are here on earth, they are much more powerful and dangerous from their new home in heaven. They know everything – don't they? And sadly, as Parish Priest, I have had the honour of officiating at the funerals of so many wonderful mothers. It is a great blessing for me, and an honour, to journey with the bereaved families at this most difficult time confident that these mothers continue to look after their families from their heavenly home.

I'd like to tell you a story from my own childhood about my mother. I was coming home from school along the canal when a fella from my school slashed my schoolbag with a Stanley Knife. I only had the bag a few days and I think it probably had Man. Utd. emblem on it so I wasn't happy at all. We exchanged digs, rolled on the ground for a while. We both claimed the win at the end of the scrap. During it all some markers fell from my bag and yer man started using them on me. After about ten minutes of scrapping, we went our separate ways and the minute I got home, my mother took one look and said: "*What were you fighting about?*" "*I wasn't*" I answered, a bit annoyed that she knew I was fighting before I even told her! But she kept asking questions "*Who were you fighting with?*" and "*Why were you fighting?*" I still don't know to this day how she knew what I had been up to. I guess mothers have that extra sense – or maybe someone told her before I got home; a neighbour or even my brother who got home ahead of me. However, they do it, mothers manage to see things you don't imagine they could see. And when they go to God, they still see us, still love us and still connect with us. With all the love they shower on us during life, that love must be maximised in death.

Last evening when Sr. Louise spoke at the Novena, she quoted Archbishop Fulton Sheen "*Broken things are precious. During Eucharist, we eat broken bread because we share in the depth of our Lord and His broken life. Broken flowers are used to make and give perfume. Broken incense is used in adoration. Paradoxically sometimes the only way the good Lord can get into some hearts is to break them.*" (Archbishop Fulton Sheen). Our Lord has to break our hearts in order for him to get into them. We pray that the Lord will strengthen people following a death. We pray for Mammies here on earth and in heaven. May they be ready to greet us when we too die.

I've mentioned this story before, but I think it is worth retelling here. It reminds us just how powerful a mother can be, especially the mother of Jesus! *The Lord was going through Heaven one day and noticed a variety of people that he didn't expect to see so he went to Peter to see how they had gained access. "Peter, did I not ask you to be careful about the people you let in? Did I ask you to make sure they are worthy, that they have led good lives and that they are free from sin?" "You did Lord, but every time I closed the gate on someone, your mother opened a window!"*

Call on Mary, our mother in heaven when you're in need. Call on your own mother too. Experience the transcendent compassion in life and in death. Experience the tough love approach during life and you'll probably get a strong push from heaven when you need it!

**Fr. Bryan**



## Saturday, 10<sup>th</sup> March

# Preparing in faith for the World Meeting of Families

Good evening. My name is Sr. M. Louise O'Rourke, a sister from the Congregation, Disciples of the Divine Master. They say the Lord works in mysterious ways, well I think the fact I'm here this evening is proof of that. A chance meeting with Fr. Bryan in the corridor in the Diocesan Offices a few weeks ago has brought me here this evening. When I asked him, what I should talk about, he simply said, 'just tell the people that God loves them.' So, if you remember anything from what I'm going to say, remember that God loves you. That's really the essence of the whole Bible and in particular the Gospel we heard tonight. As well as telling you, that God loves you, I hope to share some thoughts on the theme of the novena:

"Preparing in faith for the World Meeting of Families".

The World Meeting is not an event for us Catholics to gather in a holy huddle and pat ourselves on the back; or on the other end of the spectrum, to beat ourselves downwards and forget to celebrate the gift of our faith, and the family of faith. It's a time to deepen our faith, acknowledge our history, for good and for bad, but importantly to look forward to a future of hope. It won't be the Church of yesteryear, not even a Church comparable to the times of the visit of Pope John Paul II, but a Church that reflects the people of today, with the joys, hopes, sufferings and challenges of today. It will be a Church that is based on people having a living and life-giving relationship with Jesus Christ and who are so enthused that they can't help but share it with others. A Church that is catechised and not just sacramentalised.

The measure of success, if we want to use such a word, of the World Meeting of Families, is really the legacy that it will leave to our country and the seed ground which we are preparing now in our parishes, our communities. From there, as a quiet but effective presence, like the yeast in the dough, we bring this fervour and experience to our homes and families. The World Meeting won't be just about the amount of people who travelled from abroad to be here next August or how many people turned out to see the Pope, God willing, that he comes. The grace that we reap as a country is the change it brings, not at an institutional level but a local level, down to the level of your family and mine.

Preparing for the WMOF, we need to look to our own families. We are all too well aware of the different struggles that families face on a daily basis. In our families, we may be the only one or one of the only ones practicing our faith and this might be a source of worry and concern. So often, people come to talk to us as Sisters, concerned that a child, grandchild, a sibling is far from the Church or not practicing. Remember God alone knows the heart. Perhaps some of you are here to make this Novena to pray for a particular member, for a particular intention. And we remember them this evening. There is a cliché which is often quoted: "You can choose your friends but you can't choose your family!" but Archbishop Desmond Tutu goes one further saying: "You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them." It's true. One of the greatest gifts which we have is our family and too often we wait for an obituary to tell them that.

All families have their struggles and can seem broken beyond repair. Throughout the years, I have come to understand more and more that life is a gift. A fragile gift, a gift which we carry in clay vessels. St. Paul reminds us: "We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us." (2 Cor 4:7). Clay jars can break easily too and we can break easily. In this regard, I like to remember a quote from Archbishop Fulton Sheen: "*Broken things are precious. During Eucharist, we eat broken bread because we share in the depth of our Lord and His broken life. Broken flowers are used to make and give perfume. Broken incense is used in adoration. Paradoxically sometimes the only way the good Lord can get into some hearts is to break them.*" -(Archbishop Fulton Sheen).

Yes, we all have cracks but that doesn't mean we are uselessly broken. Those cracks are the hairline fractures of life which remind us that we are fragile and that we can break. The cracks make us who we are and God loves us in our brokenness. It's when we are crushed and broken and disappointed, our dreams shattered, that we begin to rely more on the Lord. In China, when a precious vase breaks, the vase is put together, the cracks are painted over in gold paint, indicating that the cracks are precious and are now part of the vase. So in some sense we are and will be always cracked, until we reach that perfection in Heaven. In life we carry our scars and we are reminded that even Jesus, after his Resurrection, kept the marks of his battle with death, He shows the disciples the wounds on his hands and feet.

We can prepare for the World Meeting of Families by rediscovering the essential elements of family life and how to 'repair' the cracks. Pope Francis sums this up very well: He says: "*Living together is an art, a patient, beautiful, fascinating journey... This journey of every day has a few rules that can be summed up in three phrases: "Please, thank you, and I'm sorry."* It may seem simplistic but it's not always easy. To ask is to acknowledge that I am in need. To thank is to recognize that I appreciate the effort and the other's generosity, to say sorry is to acknowledge that we are not perfect, that we make mistakes but that we can start anew. This is a basic itinerary that all families can try to adapt. We love each other as we are, but we don't leave each other as we are. We try to help each other discover that fullness of life which God wants to offer us so freely.

To rediscover family means taking time to talk to our children, about life, about God, about faith. To tell them that they are loved. Now more than ever, children need real families and not virtual ones! Children are getting their life advice from a Google search browser, thus cutting off relationships with parents and establishing an independency which more than often descends into rebellion. People are looking for love in the wrong places because the basic family nucleus is not offering it.

As families, we need to realise that whilst life can be hard, it is a gift. Life is messy and families are messy, love isn't always pretty but there is goodness in it. The hidden truth in our communities and parishes is that people are living all kinds of damaged dreams in their families. And the reality is that

some of it can't be fixed. Life doesn't turn out the way we planned, but if we look and are open to receiving it, we will see graces and blessings that God has sent our way. Grace covers the gap between the spirit and the flesh, our willingness and our weakness. Truth be told, Jesus came from a dysfunctional family too! In the Scriptures we see how Mary and Joseph even lost Jesus when they were going up to Jerusalem, and for three days! The story before Jesus was one of a mixture of saints and sinners, so also is the story since Jesus.

In the promotion leaflet for the novena which explains the origins of the Novena, there is a beautiful explanation of what grace is: "Grace can be seen as the power within us that gives us the strength to reach out to others in generosity, care and love." This is what family is about. This reaching out is often seen in the most difficult and challenging situations of our journey, a time of grief, sickness, disappointment, betrayal.

However, it can be hard to accept that suffering is part of life. Each last Friday of the month we have a special holy hour to pray and intercede for particular and general needs of families, including our own. People sometimes forget that sisters and priests come from families which have their struggles and difficulties too. Growing up and even today, when my own family is visited by different problems and challenges, I see love in action. Often I saw and I see tough love in action too. I see brokenness and how the Lord used broken things to show the humanity of life and the power of grace. And we see that in our readings that we heard: "God loved us with so much love that he was generous with his mercy." The mercy of God is a healing balm that gives us the grace to carry on even when it would be easier to stay down when we fall.

To prepare in faith for the World Meeting, we must cultivate faith in the family. How do we do this? In a simple way. Creating and cultivating a culture of life and respect. If in our families, we don't love and respect each other as created as children of God, how can we expect our children, our teenagers to grow up to respect life, especially the smallest and the most vulnerable. Life is really a gift. That is why it was important for me today to go out and walk for life, to join the thousands of people who gathered to give a message to the world that life should be respected from its natural beginning to its natural end. It was a powerful witness to the sacredness of life and we pray that the efforts pay off in these coming weeks.

Tomorrow we celebrate Mothers Day. We live in times in which much has been said about woman, her dignity and her role in the family and the world. It's fitting to say a few words about the importance of the motherhood of religious women. One of the saddest things I sometimes hear a sister say is that they enter religious life because they don't feel called or have the vocation to be a mother. Every religious sister should be able to say: 'I would have been a good mother or a good wife'. The same can be said of every priest or brother. First of all, a vocation is a call that the Lord places in the heart of the human person. A vocation is a human reality, since the human person was created for love, and only the human heart can experience a call to love and respond to it with love (MD, 29). Women realise this call to self-donation, which is engraved in her nature as a woman, by being spouses and mothers. These are the two interconnected channels by which a woman expresses her call to a generous and sacrificial love, a compassionate love that is capable of giving life. Compassion which is not wishy-washy, seeking to 'make things better' but compassion which empowers and brings forth life, born and purified in the crucible of love, often tough love.

Last year Pope Francis raised eyebrows around the world when he told a group of 800 nuns they must be spiritual mothers and not 'old maids.' What is the Pope trying to say here? I don't physically have children so how can I be a mother? Chastity is not just not having sex. Consecrated chastity is actually a vow to love, not one person as in marriage, but to love God and all that flows from God. I

get to be spiritual mother to 7 billion people! To be as Mary was to Jesus. Just recently the Pope gave us a new Marian celebration: “Mary Mother of the Church” to be celebrated the day after Pentecost. He explained saying that just as Mary could not be understood without recognizing her role as being Jesus' mother, the church cannot be understood without recognizing its role as being the mother of all believers. Too often we don't see the Church in this way, we see it as oppressive or just telling us what to do, like a nagging mother telling us to eat our vegetables. We don't see the Church as a mother who nurtures and helps us to grow.

Yet each day we need to grow. And religious life is a daily journey of growth, just like in a family. It requires daily leaps of faith. It's a daily surrender, handing it over. There is always more fear, more control, more selfishness, more loyalty and more love that God is calling me to hand over to Him. Fear. Despair. Anxiety. Doubt. Distress. Worry. These words describe feelings that rob us of joy, comfort, confidence, protection, and purpose. My journey so far in religious life has brought me immense happiness and satisfaction alongside times of sadness and challenges. It's not always easy to embrace the challenges which religious consecration presents but during these years I have come to understand that whilst it is possible to give without loving, I cannot love without giving. Concepts like obedience, celibacy, chastity and long-term commitment are often looked upon as frightening.

Coming into religious life was an act of faith and love, both on my part and God's part. People often ask me: “Are you sure?” One hundred percent surety doesn't enter into the equation here but what I am sure of is that God has a unique plan for me. If I reach the point where I am 100 percent sure, I feel I have deleted that space for the Holy Spirit to work because God is a God of surprises. Any commitment must be renewed daily because it is a relationship built on unconditional love. Love matures, it is never finished and complete.

It may seem that religious life and other sectors of our Church are on a journey without a map. At times it might even seem that the preparations and the momentum for the World Meeting of Families is struggling to take off. But that's okay! Moses didn't have a map yet he let the people on a journey of exodus, out of themselves and into the desert where they had to look at what was really essential and to look deep down into ourselves and find the wellspring of faith. Maybe that is what is being asked of religious life and of the Catholic Church at this time. We don't know where God is leading us, by offering us the opportunity to host this great event in August, our little country of Ireland. But we embark upon this journey as the people of God: maybe in the desert, on the periphery, at the frontier but always as beloved sons and daughters of a God who loves us, personally, unconditionally and forever.

*Sr. M. Louise O' Rourke pddm*



## Friday, 9<sup>th</sup> March WMOF and Family

I am delighted to be here this evening. As Fr. Bryan said, I am from Belfast and the first time I visited Dublin was back in 1979 when I was 14 years of age. I was invited to join the choir which was signing

at Pope John Paul's Mass in the Phoenix Park. Now I am working to bring Pope Francis to Ireland for the World Meeting of Families which will take place in Dublin this August.

My first time in this beautiful church was last year during your Bicentenary Celebrations. If these walls could talk, what stories they would tell of the families who came to church here – their prayers, their history – two hundred years with story upon story and prayer upon prayer. I am certain that of all the prayers offered here, the majority of prayers are for family members; someone with an illness, worries about the children, prayers to help alleviate poverty, hunger, prayers for relatives who have to be away from home and the list goes on. All prayers for the family.

The family is the most important body in the world. St. John Paul said, *the future of the world depends on the family*". Pope Francis added to this when he said, *the future of the world and of the Church stands or falls on family*. Pope Francis also says that *no family fell from heaven perfectly formed. Plates can fly in families, but not to worry if you learn these three words*.

- ☺ **Please** shows respect and sensitivity towards the other. It is the commandment to love that Jesus taught us.
- ☺ **Thank You** shows gratitude. Our Lady's first words were to thank God for asking her to be the mother of Jesus even though her initial reaction was one of fear. Did you ever think about our first hospital? It is our family. Whatever pain we have, we turn to a family member first.
- ☺ **Sorry** it can be really difficult to say sorry. Often we Irish go silent but then after a while we might make a gesture like a cup of tea so the other knows we are sorry

Pope Francis personally chose Dublin for the World Meeting of Families. He had been in Dublin years before when he was Fr. Bergoglio SJ and spent some time studying English. While in Dublin, he learned that we are a warm people. He celebrates the missionary tradition of the Irish and tells people that the Irish were missionaries throughout the world and that is why there are churches and cathedrals dedicated to St. Patrick in every country across the globe.

The Irish people are a family loving people. We've always believed in family and continue to be a **Family Friendly Society**

So, the World Meeting of Families is coming to Dublin – what can you do?

Be part of it!

- Volunteer
- Host a family
- Register on <https://www.worldmeeting2018.ie/en/>

Just like we remember 1979, the year Pope John Paul II, now St John Paul, came to Ireland, generations to come will remember 2018 and WMOF (World Meeting of Families)

Pray for your own families

Pray for the families coming to WMOF

Pray for Pope Francis, successor to Peter for personally choosing Dublin

Let us pray for each other...

I just remembered that the second time I came to Dublin was to see Mother Teresa – Dublin is the city to meet people who become saints!!

**Fr. Tim Bartlett**



## Thursday, 8<sup>th</sup> March What is Family?

I am honoured to join you this evening as you continue your Novena of Grace here in St. Michan's, Halston Street. I am most grateful to Fr. Bryan for the invitation and to Paddy Pender for the satnav coordinates to make sure I arrived here in good time! What is Grace? Grace is the power that allows us to extend beyond our own limited capacities, our own limited talents and abilities to be larger than ourselves. I have needed the power of grace at so many points in my life, in fact grace allows us to be followers of Christ and not only people who wear the jersey but who are prepared at times to take the tackles, the hits and the rigour than any match entails. I'm reliably told this is one of the oldest parishes in the Archdiocese of Dublin, your beautiful church, perhaps less well publicised than its Anglican namesake, dates back to 1891. This Novena of Grace is in the context and the frame of the upcoming World Meeting of Families – now less than six months away! So what is the World Meeting of Families all about?

The World Meeting of Families is Pope Francis' gift to the Irish Church. How we unwrap that gift depends on how much we want to get involved in the preparatory Amoris programme, the diocesan events, like our Picnic in PuncHESTOWN or indeed the national events such as conferences and seminars. Nothing makes sense unless we connect it to family. The biggest challenge we are all confronted by is what will be left after the Pope, if he comes to the event, has returned to Rome, what will we be left with the following Monday morning, what will be its lasting legacy?

It's good to reflect on the media images of Family. I immediately think of the radio advertisement from **123.ie** on the father and daughter and the dodgy shower door! **"can a man have no peace in his own home?"** and the daughter responds **"I want therapy from this family!"** We all come from homes with dodgy shower doors! What is our definition of Family. There are many definitions of family. I like the simple quote **"family is God's greatest masterpiece"**. One of the greatest threats Pope Francis suggests in *Amoris Laetitia* is a **"culture of the ephemeral ... everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks, exploits and squeezes to the last drop"**<sup>1</sup>, like the Boyne Valley honey jar!

Family means everything to me. When both parents die, the heart of the home is gone. Siblings do their best and mine, Christy & Ann, Leo & Dolores are most supportive, but it's simply not the same. I felt the death of the second parent, my mother, when I walked into our home, located in the very centre of a farmyard, where all of life passed by our very door. Mamma slipped into eternity in April 2010, the morning of the Icelandic ash cloud that grounded all aircraft, it was just after Easter, her death was so different to Dadda's death. He was four years living with the effect of a stroke, four years you might say trying to die and yet his body was so strong. I remember that Sunday evening well as I returned home and turned the latch key, it was a 'basta lock', I remember every moment of opening that door. The AGA cooker was out, the chair at the end of the table was empty, the tea-

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<sup>1</sup> Amoris Laetitia §39

towel was in the very place I left it some days earlier. You see our home was just like any other normal home, when the oil ran out that the cooker burned on, it was always Mamma's fault, Dadda's fault – **"you should have rang Leinster Petroleum"**! There was no one left to make that call. That cooker has never being lit since.

It was at home we learned to pray, there were no 'Do This in Memory' or 'The Bridge' programmes, we simply went to Mass. Last into the car was usually myself sitting on the handbrake, in the front of the car between parents – health and safety how are you! Memories of Mass in my younger days were more focused on who the celebrant was. He called to the house, he was out on the farm, he had a word for everyone as we left the Church. Knowing the priest was much easier then; the priest was very much part of family.

Coming from a home where faith is very natural is a blessing but not something I take for granted. I think of my mother's prayer book which I have beside my bed, she loved Martin de Porres; my father's second name was Erc, the deacon who worked with St. Patrick. Growing up on a farm gave me and my two brothers and two sisters a super appreciation of the creator God. Seeds are sown, they grow and they are harvested but they must be minded. Cows are milked twice a day, 365 days a year, including Christmas Day, as my father would often remind us. I'm not sure how he would cope with the apps and technology the grandchildren's generation use to great effect on the same farm today, apps such as **'AgWorld'**; **'BackPaddock'**; **'Herdwatch'** & **'Geo Measure Area Calculater'**! Imagining telling Dadda you could measure a field without having to walk it, to foot it, as we did in the past!

A farm gives you a seasonal cycle that allows for a deep appreciation of the creator God – light and darkness; birth and death; coming into the world; going out of the world. I remember the winter a neighbours dog did huge destruction on new born lambs, that memory stays with me. I recall the package coming from the United States – it was clothes from older American cousins, they had outgrown the sizes, they were as welcome as a trip today might be to TK MAXX! I think of the nights we prayed together as family – it was the Rosary. One brother kicking the other to make them laugh! Innocent days! I also remember the Sacred Heart lamp lit on the kitchen wall, when the light was out you knew you had no power. Everything was hung around that lamp, doctors appointments, dates for herd testing and of course the box of parish envelopes.

I often wonder what my parents would make of their youngest becoming a Bishop! My father would worry for me, that I would over do it, but would also have a certain respect that if I said yes to something, I'd make a fair good effort at it. My mother would be sorry I was now going to be so far from home, so far from the roots of the trees I climbed, so far from the fields I herded, but she too like all mothers would be inwardly happy. Although I always promised them I would never go on the missions, or venture too far from home, little did I factor in on that phonecall from the Nunciature in April 2013. I left the Nunciature with news I could share nowhere, at least initially. My life would utterly change.

Family is having someone to check in with; family is where you can kick off your shoes and chill out, even if there is a hole in your socks; family is where you can and should be yourself. I thank God for my family tonight; I thank God for my friends who keep me grounded and taking it a bit easier and I thank God for the priests and people of Kildare & Leighlin who have become my new family. I pray this Novena of Grace, which has been going on for 306 years will help each of you to deepen your appreciation of family. What is a parish but a family of families. What is a diocese but a family of parishes. A church is to a community what a home is to a family.

All the families in our parishes, all our own families are much more like the Simpsons than the Waltons. In the words again of Pope Francis, the family is “**the nearest hospital, the first school for the young and the best home for the elderly. Sometimes plates can fly, children can be a headache. How much happier our family lives would be if we understood the importance of the words please, thank you and sorry**”<sup>2</sup>. In this messy but grace-filled reality family life is lived out at parish level. Our parishes must be outbound, not inward looking. Our parishes must be missionary in their outreach to the broken, the excluded and those who feel uncertain of their place in society.

When I was Parish Priest in St. Mary’s Parish, Drogheda there was a great phrase that resonated with many: “**Oh, she’s from the far side**”, the far side wasn’t that comic strip created by Gary Larson, but a stone’s throw across the River Boyne! Or it might be said: “**he’s a Duley-gate man**”, which meant he never ventured far from Duleek Street! How possessive we get about territory and identity. A parish defines who we are, what school we send our children to, what club we play our football with and ultimately where we want to be buried. In Kildare & Leighlin we are currently looking more radically at our structures and our parish groupings. Even at these very tentative preliminary early stages I can detect a huge loyalty of parishioners to their local church. It’s where they always go, it’s part of the very fabric of their being.

I would like to see our parishes develop a deeper appreciation especially of those who come less regularly to Church. The door is always open. In the messiness of life, let’s open those doors wider. There are families new to the parish who might like a visit and a word of welcome. They are too busy, too many things happening to make the first move immersing themselves into the parish community, let the parish community be the ones to welcome and include them. And in doing so let’s not forget the families who are very much part of our parish life, who practice their faith, who pay their dues, who support our schools. The parish as a family of families need’s both. And of all things this needs to be a lasting legacy of the World Meeting of Families.

So what is this World Meeting of Families? It is a celebration of family as the cornerstone of our lives, our communities, our church. The World Meeting of Families event will open locally in every Cathedral in every Diocese in the country on Tuesday 21st August. Then we will have a three day Congress hosted in the RDS from August 22nd – August 24th. There will be a Festival of Families on Saturday night, August 25th and the Final Mass, hopefully with Pope Francis present on August 26th. Pope Francis if he comes to Ireland is coming to us to speak about family.

With less than six months to go, what can you start to do this evening? Five things, I suggest, think of your four fingers and thumb!

First finger: **Volunteer?** Close to 2,000 to date have volunteered; Irish people have a great spirit of volunteerism. You can find out more by looking up [volunteer@worldmeeting2018.ie](mailto:volunteer@worldmeeting2018.ie)

Second finger: **Register for the event?** Book your ticket online, again to date 5,500 have registered, families from abroad are registering in their thousands, don’t let us locals miss this World event! Let’s keep the home side up!

Third finger: **You might even consider hosting a family from abroad?** Rathmolyon / Enfield is on the outskirts of Dublin, details again online. Remember Children under 18 are completely free! For more information about this wonderful, once in a lifetime event, check out [www.worldmeeting2018.ie](http://www.worldmeeting2018.ie)

Fourth Finger: Get involved in the **AMORIS – Let’s Talk family; Lets Be Family** programme.

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<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, Message in Ecuador: 6 July 2015

And the thumb: You are great people of prayer, **pray** for the success of the World Meeting of Families, pray for the Pope and all of us involved in its organisation.

May St. Francis Xavier, St. Michan, Venerable Matt Talbot and all the Saints help us as we as parish, as family of families prepare for this wonderful world event. Amen.

**Bishop Denis Nulty**



## Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> March Mercy in the Markets

I still remember my First Confession which took place in the school hall back in 1977. After that I went in Confession in our local church in Rialto. My mother and Nana would tell me all kinds of frightening stories about the devil being beside me in the confessional, and I'd be so scared, kneeling in the dark, worried sick that the devil would appear to me. In the dark I could hear the whisper of the person on the other side of the box and then waited for the flap to open.

I'm sure all of us have frightening memories and stories about going to Confession. Very few avail of the sacrament and some say they prefer to tell God their sins directly. Others prefer to confess to Joe Duffy on radio, or Oprah, or Ellen, or Jeremy Kyle and the list goes on. These are very public confessions and come without the gift of absolution. On the other hand, there are lots of Confessions being heard in the churches around Dublin city – the Blessed Sacrament Chapel on the Quays, Carmelites in Whitefriar Street and in Clarendon Street, and indeed Saturday mornings in Church Street.

There is nothing however, to match the Grace received through the Sacrament of Confession.

There are lots of stories told about Confession. *There was a priest hearing Confessions one day and each person came into the box, told their sins and ended with "and I threw peanuts in the lake". The whole afternoon it went the same with everyone ending with "and I threw peanuts in the lake". Finally, he opened the shutter and there was a small boy barely visible above the shelf at the grill and the priest in frustration said, "and I suppose you threw peanuts in the lake too?". A little voice uttered "No! I'm Peanuts!"*

I heard the following story told by a priest some time ago. *The Lord was going through Heaven one day and noticed a variety of people that he didn't expect to see so he went to Peter to see how they had gained access. "Peter, did I not ask you to be careful about the people you let in? Did I ask you to make sure they are worthy, that they have led good lives and that they are free from sin?" "You did Lord, but every time I closed the gate on someone, your mother opened a window!"*

So, go to Mary when you need help and healing and encouragement. She has the ear of Jesus and she will never let you down.

The great gift to the church in our time is the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis tells us that Mercy is the beating heart of the Gospel. No one, none of us, need ever fear God's mercy! It is freely given and is there for the taking. Even though the Year of Mercy ended, God's mercy never ends.

On Good Friday, we will recall the crucifixion of our Lord – crucified between two thieves. Romans did not crucify people for theft so we believe their crimes were a lot more serious. While one thief mocked Jesus, the other said *"Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong."* And he was saying, *"Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!"* And He said to him, *"Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:40-43)

Just think of it. He was first into heaven. Jesus not only forgave him, but he also canonised him. The very thought of it makes me try harder to be the best person I can be. Jesus loves all of us even those I find it difficult to get with.

**Fr. Bryan**



## Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> March Healing Service

There are lots of ways for healing. We have hospitals with wonderful staff – doctors, nurses and carers. We have medicines, tonics, lotions and ointments – lots and lots of different kinds of healing available through the doctor or over the counter.

I met a lady one day who was praying for healing with the relic of Padre Pio and she was drinking Holy Water. It's very good to have faith and prayer is essential for healing BUT we also have to take our medicines when necessary.

During my time as chaplain in Beaumont Hospital I often visited patients in the wards and prayed with them. I always carried the Holy Oils with me so that I could also administer the Sacrament of the Sick. This sacrament was known to many as the Last Rites and some saw or believed it to be a sign of the patient's pending death. The Last Rites frightened people. Many of us grew up with the image of the priest at our final hours, as one who came with bad or sad news.

Nowadays we talk of healing. The Last Rites are better known today as the Anointing of the Sick or Sacrament of the Sick. It no longer speaks of death but of life.

One day while on duty in Beaumont, I was chatting with one of the patients, dressed in my habit with the curtains partially drawn around the bed. With the corner of my eye, I noticed two women come in and stop in their tracks with the fear of God on their faces. It was the wife and daughter of the man I was chatting with but when they walked in, they didn't notice I was chatting, they only saw the habit and the oil and immediately thought he had died.

Tonight is about healing. It's not about fear but about spiritual healing, about the Lord restoring us and leading us to wholeness.

Maybe there is a friend or relative who can't be here but needs healing. Or a relationship that is broken. Or someone who is far from home in need of healing and support. Everyone is welcome to come forward for healing – healing with absolution and restoration of our spiritual life.

**Fr. Bryan**



## Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> March Marriage

### ***Celebrating Marriage***

The theme of this years' Novena of Grace in honour of St. Francis Xavier is *Preparing in faith for the World Meeting of Families*. It is my happy duty, then in that context to reflect this evening on the gift of Marriage as a sign of God's love for us.

### ***Marriage and Family***

As we know marriage has been a time honoured ritual in secular and religious society for many generations. Marriage and the family that is invariably associated with it is seen by many as a fundamental unit in society, the ideal environment for children to be brought into the world and for them to thrive, grow, develop and mature.

### ***Changing Society***

In the modern society that we live, with the increase in individualism, with the weakening of community spirit and doing things *together*, the lessening of the ideal of duty and responsibility towards the long established norms that were regarded as part of the greater, collective common good - the traditional sacrament of marriage and the family unit have come under severe pressure.

### ***The Reality of the Situation today***

Cohabitation, as an alternative to marriage has increased greatly in recent times, the numbers of children within a family is on the decrease, the traditional age for those who opt for marriage is on the increase, 34.6 years old for males, 32.5 years old for females! In Ireland and of course elsewhere more and more couples are opting for just a civil ceremony, if they marry at all and many don't bother with the religious ceremony. That is the current reality, that is our starting point.

### ***Why Love, Marriage, Family in Church Context?***

So, if I were to lay out a stall on what the Church regards as worth celebrating, this special year of WMOF2018, in this elusive concept of love, the institution surrounding it called sacred marriage and the benefit of all of this for family and children – what would I have to say?

### ***Theme of Love***

The heart of Marriage, the heart of a wedding liturgy is a celebration of **love** in the truest and deepest sense and that is obviously our starting point! What is this term love that we hear about so frequently in popular culture and dominates our religious thought and sacred texts?

The vast majority of songs, poems, indeed all literature waxes lyrical about love. According to the Beatles in their famous song – “Love is all you need”.

Despite it being talked about all round us - it is difficult to pin down what is the true meaning of Love, that we celebrate St. Valentine’s day and in so much romantic imagination.

The heart of all the major world religions is the great quest to love.

### ***God is Love***

St. John in the bible defines God as love. Our vocations as

Christians is to live lives of love. The reason we are here today is to celebrate love, love at the heart of the Eucharist. Yet are we able to define exactly what this means?

What is love for us as individuals?

What is love for a couple when they get married?

An example to illustrate:

### ***Have a Little Faith***

I had the joy of reading a fine book recently by the best-selling author Mitch Albom a book called *Have a Little Faith*. A true story of the author, a famous story teller being asked by his Jewish Rabbi friend and pastor to deliver the obituary when he would die. In order to be able to do so he met him over a series of meetings to get deeper insight into his beliefs, his philosophy of life. One of the chapters entitled “A good marriage” is interesting. The Rabbi was a married man himself had officiated at several weddings during his ministry.

‘Could you predict the marriages that would survive’ Albom asked the Rabbi.

“Sometimes” he said. “If they’re communicating well, they have a good chance. If they have a similar belief system, similar values they have a good chance.”

What about love?

“Love they should always have, but love changes”.

What do you mean?

“Love, the infatuation kind – that can shrivel. As soon as something goes wrong – that kind of love can fly out the window.”

On the other hand a true love can enrich itself. It gets tested and grows stronger. Like in the musical Fiddler on the Roof. In Fiddler on the Roof when Tevye sings “Do you love me”. Tevye and Golde – ***their love is proven through action, not words.***

That kind of love – the kind you realize you already have by the life you’ve created together – that’s the kind that lasts.

***Love that is proven through action, not words according to the Jewish Rabbi.***

Pope Francis, in talking about the Joy of Love in this letter on this topic and in preparation for World Meeting of Families reminds us of this concrete love in action where he tells us that 3 words and very real in making this happen:

*Please, thank you and Sorry.*

Love becoming real through action and not abstract thoughts, songs sung or just words.

***Sacrament of Marriage***

The main theme of course in the Liturgy of the Sacrament of Marriage when couples get married is a celebration of that Love. Love that is from God. Love that is the very definition of God. Love that is shared and lived out between a husband and wife.

Love through actions and not just words....!!!!

***‘Give and Take’***

At a jubilee celebration I was at recently a veteran dad of many years of Marriage was giving advice to the guests. In his view the recipe for a happy marriage could be summed up in 2 words – “Give” and “take”

She gives the orders – He takes them!!!

***A Trinity at the Heart of Marriage***

It is often said that in marriage it is not just about a couple but more accurately 3 people at the heart of a Christian marriage. One could say it’s about the Bride, the Groom and God who is there to inspire and assist when things get tough, for better, for worse....

***St. Valentine and Ash Wednesday***

In many ways it’s perhaps no small coincidence, maybe a “God-incidence” that Ash Wednesday, three weeks ago and St. Valentine’s day coincided this year. With the themes of these two celebrations coming together it blends the ideals that - the great challenge of love is only possible through sacrifice and giving and invariably focused not on one’s self, but the other.

***Clock Symbol***

There is a good symbol given by Joseph O’Connor in a short story of his called Redemption falls and it runs:

*A couple are like the hands of a clock:*

*Sometimes together, many times apart – sometimes even as opposed as the poles – but the fulcrum of love and loyalty holds them both in the same circuit so that they meet again when a little time has passed.*

### ***Symbol Developed***

What a good symbol, for what we celebrate today, the Holy Sacrament of Marriage, that clock image. Two independent people like the hands of a clock coming together as one, yet maintaining their own separateness. Individual yet one.

Almost paradoxically - a couple yet single, united in God's blessing. Sometimes close, sometimes drifting apart with the many storms that relationships and life may throw at them.

Yet in Christian Marriage we believe that the fulcrum that helps to hold them together is God's love, God's grace, God's blessing as time goes by. The candles on the altar lit during a marriage ceremony beautifully symbolize and signify this individuality celebrated and maintained through togetherness.

### ***Steward of Christendom***

One of the most interesting books I read in recent years was a novel called *The Secret Scripture* by a man called Sebastian Barry. In the mid 1990s he had a very successful play entitled *The Steward of Christendom*. It was a play about a retired head of Dublin City Police, now in a home for the elderly.

He is a difficult old man, solitary and moody. As he looks back on his life he recalls episodes that shaped him. One of these captures a key moment when he abandoned his authoritarian façade and discovered unexpected gentleness.

### ***Birthing Experience***

In a long speech he thinks back on an occasion while his wife was giving birth to their youngest child and how deeply the experience touched and affected him. It made him think back on their marriage, on how the children depended so much on their mother and how stupid and silent he was, especially with his only son.

### ***Revelation of Grace***

"I started to tremble", he says "it was a moment in your life when daily things pass away from you, when all your concerns seem to vanish, and you are allowed by God a little space or clarity and grace. When you see that God himself is in your wife and in your children, and they hold in trust for you your own measure of goodness. And in the manner of your treatment of them lies your own salvation." In that passage Sebastian Barry captures in a very real yet almost mystical way the call from God at the heart of Christian marriage to self- transcendence and unselfish commitment to the other.

### ***The celebration of Love and Marriage in the Christian Context***

That is at the heart of what we celebrate in faith when we talk of Christian Marriage. That is the core of what we celebrate on St. Valentine's day. It's the living out of a vocation of love. It's more than just a fanciful and attractive ideal. It's the stuff and substance of our faith. It's at the heart of what we celebrate and highlight as part and parcel of WMOF2018 this year! Long may we appreciate the gift of love and marriage and the family, the gift that puts flesh on the God given reality of the presence of love of God in a very real way!

***Bishop Fintan Monahan***



## Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> March

# Jesus drives the money-changers from the temple

There is a tendency to look at this Gospel and see anger. But remember that offerings made in the temple had to be acceptable, pure and kosher, and some pilgrims travelling long distances relied on being able to purchase offerings close to the temple. Reading the Gospel, it sounds as if some of the vendors were inside the temple and not just on the periphery. When Jesus removes the vendors and moneychangers, he is removing for distracting the temple-goers from their prayer. They are in danger of losing sight of God in the midst of all the buying and selling.

I've come across people who will not go to some of the well-known pilgrim locations because they feel they are too commercial. I've seen the vendors with their stalls selling medals, beads and holy water but they are not inside the churches or basilicas – they are outside but convenient for people to bring back souvenirs and prayers to family and friends.

It is not anger in the Gospel, but Jesus removing those who are not respecting the temple. Jesus restores the temple to a house of prayer – his father's house. God looks at the hearts of those who come to the temple – their prayers are the prayers of the heart.

**Fr. Bryan**

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*Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.*

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