

St. Nicholas News

Francis Street Parish, Dublin 8. ---- 01-5157512 ---- 01-5611390



6th Sunday Ordinary Time 12 February 2023

A REBEL PRIEST



Fifty years ago this week, there ended in Cavan a short-lived but bitter religious dispute that, at its height, revived a practice of the Penal Law era: the celebration of Mass outdoors, in defiance of authority, by a rebel priest. The authority in this case, however, was the Catholic bishop of Kilmore. And in another twist on historic precedent, the focus of

the rebellion was a former Protestant school, long used as a Catholic church until the diocese ordered it closed. The bishop considered the building unsuitable and, in an era of falling vocations, a drain on scarce priests. But the people of Portlongfield, a remote townland on the Cavan-Leitrim border, had other ideas. Unwilling to forgo their local place of worship in favour of a four-mile trek to the nearest alternative, Killeshandra, they were determined to keep the converted chapel open. So they approached the septuagenarian Fr Clarence Duffy - a native of Shercock in East Cavan, but radicalised by many years in America - who came out of semi-retirement to lead their rebellion. With the interior of the church locked, he instead took to celebrating Mass against a gable wall outside, using a borrowed table for an altar and an improvised structure comprising what a local newspaper called "gun-barrel piping, overlaid with polythene normally used to protect silage" for a chapel. The dispute made national headlines for a while. Despite pulpit warnings against attendance, a fund-raising "social" organised by the rebels was oversubscribed, with 200 people showing up, many more than expected. In an attempt at conciliation, meanwhile, the diocese turned to another vestige of penal times: offering a series of occasional "station Masses", hosted by the homes of selected parishioners, in lieu of a local church. But the stand-off ended on February 5th, 1973, with a new bishop provisionally reopening the building at Portlongfield and celebrating a Mass of reconciliation there. At which point, Fr Duffy returned to semi-retirement, while warning that he would hang around the area for a while in case the bishop reneged. Even before the Portlongfield drama, to borrow a phrase from crime reporting, Fr Duffy was well known to the church authorities. Educated in Salamanca, he had spent decades in the southwestern US where, working among the Hispanic poor and writing for the Catholic Worker newspaper, he became "a thorn in the side of the hierarchy and the state department". As explained in an interview with this newspaper in 1970, he returned to Ireland a believer in "Gaelic Christian Socialism", agreeing with most of the politics of James Connolly and James Fintan Lalor. But he was also critical of many Catholic Church doctrines, including the *Ne Temere* decree, which required that children of mixed marriages be raised as Catholics. He thought many of Ireland's problems, including the renewed Northern Troubles, were the result of "sectarian schools", favouring a general separation of church and state, with a new constitution on which Northern Protestants would be consulted. And he blamed what he saw as the Catholic Church's regressive attitudes to women on "the Italian idea of sex". During the row over Portlongfield, he announced plans to set up "an ideal model parish", which would include a "credit union, maternity guild, and health clinic". But the church question aside, he was also preoccupied with cross-border cooperation and with ideas that might peacefully end partition. At one local meeting, attended by invited representatives from north and south, he proposed a nine-county autonomous Ulster, to be part of a federal Ireland within the British Commonwealth. This was promptly rejected by a unionist delegate, who feared a nine-county parliament "would vote itself out of existence and into a 32-county Republic at the first opportunity". But in his desire for north-south co-operation on socialist principles, Fr

Duffy was open to all political possibilities. "You might even get Paisley in charge", he warned, a prospect that did not worry him. The two had already met for talks: "We got on all right. I did not expect to convert him, but he is honest. The first thing he said to me was: 'We will have no Christian unity.'" After his brief spell of national notoriety via the church protest, Fr Duffy seems to have faded from the news, at least in Ireland. If the Portlongfield dispute was permanently resolved, he told the Irish Press in 1973, his next move would be in Northern Ireland, encouraging "all the people of the Six Counties to return to being Christians". How far he got with that mission is unrecorded in newspaper archives. By the time he died in 1976, according to the Anglo-Celt, he was back in the US. He had spent what remained of retirement working with "youth training programmes, rehabilitation centres for alcoholics, and senior citizen co-operative colonies" in New Mexico.

*Courtesy Frank McNally
Irish Times*

Remembered in Prayer Eileen Mahony (Recently Deceased)

Saturday 6pm Mass

John, Josephine, Mary & Joan
Hannon
Bridget Delaney (9th A)
Mary Deasy (3rd A)
Pat Dolan (20th A)
Eileen Kimmage (3rd A)
Fr. Declan Doyle (9th A)

Sunday 11.30am Mass

Tom Reilly (1st A)
Mary Ennis (11th)
Liam Stynes (3rd A)
Sylvia Holmes (15th A)
Annie Clarke
Jimmy & Vera Geoghan
Philip & Bernadette Kinsella
Daniel O'Neill
Mary & James Field

6TH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME

Penitential Rite

As we begin, let us call to mind God's goodness to us.

You enlighten our hearts and minds. Lord have mercy

You call us to recognise the dignity of all.
Christ have mercy

As the Body of Christ you call us to rid the world of everything that dehumanises us. Lord have mercy

May the God of compassion, who blesses each one with immeasurable dignity, forgive us our sin and bring us to life everlasting. Amen

Sirach 15:15-20

If you wish, you can keep the commandments, to behave faithfully is within your power. He has set fire and water before you; put out your hand to whichever you prefer. Humankind has life and death before them; whichever a person likes better will be given them. For vast is the wisdom of the Lord; he is almighty and all-seeing. His eyes are on those who fear him, he notes every action of humankind. He never commanded anyone to be godless, he has given no one permission to sin.

1 Corinthians 2:6-10

We have a wisdom to offer those who have reached maturity: not a philosophy of our age, it is true, still less of the masters of our age, which are coming to their end. The hidden wisdom of God which we teach in our mysteries is the wisdom that God predestined to be for our glory before the ages began. It is a wisdom that none of the masters of this age have ever known, or they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory; we teach what scripture calls: the things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard, things beyond the mind of humanity, all that God has prepared for those who love him. These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit reaches the depths of everything, even the depths of God.

Alleluia, alleluia!
Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for revealing the mysteries of the kingdom to mere children. Alleluia!

Matthew 5:20-22

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not imagine that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I have come not to abolish but to complete them. I tell you solemnly, till heaven and earth disappear, not one dot, not one little stroke, shall disappear from the Law until its purpose is achieved. Therefore, the man who

infringes even one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be considered the least in the kingdom of heaven; but the man who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of heaven. 'For I tell you, if your virtue goes no deeper than that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven.

Prayer of the Faithful

Father, Son and Spirit you persist in loving us. We praise you and thank you. Lord hear us

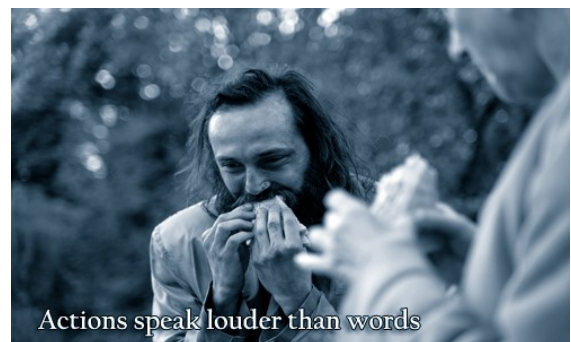
Lord, you call each of us to be a light for the world. May we live beyond the narrow confines of our own needs and wants by reaching out to those most in need, in our society. Lord hear us

May those who have survived the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria be generously supported by the nations of the world. Lord hear us

We call to mind all those who have died, and all who mourn for them. May we be inspired by their memory to live more faithfully the Way of the Lord. Lord hear us

For the millions of people, who have been displaced by war, that we will not close our hearts or our countries to them. Lord hear us

In silence we remember those who need our prayer and support.....Lord hear us



Reflection

Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding. The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others. You must be the change you wish to see in the world. But service can have no meaning unless one takes pleasure in it. When it is done for show or for fear of public opinion, it stunts the person and crushes their spirit. Service which is rendered without joy helps neither the servant nor the served. Service rendered for its own sake is the noblest of all. Humankind becomes great exactly in the degree in which we work for the welfare of all people. A man who was completely innocent offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world. It was a perfect act.

Mahatma Gandhi