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29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 17th October, 2021.

Dear Parishioner,

I have never played a trumpet (or even a tin whistle) but I am conscious that, when you read the main item in this *'Dear Parishioner'*, you may be inclined to say, **'Our Parish Priest is blowing his own trumpet.'** When I looked up the internet to see if that saying was included among sayings of different kinds, I read that it refers to **'talking about oneself or ones achievements in a boastful or proud way.'** The reason for saying that *'I am blowing my own trumpet'* is that I have decided to include the homily (sermon) that I gave at the two Confirmation ceremonies in the parish a few weeks ago. I think most parishioners will know that Bishop Ray Browne only confirmed children in a few parishes this year, because the ceremonies did not go ahead at the normal time (February to May) due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

When I found that I would be confirming the boys and girls who had been in 6th Class in our three schools in the 2020-2021 school year, I began to give some thought to what I might say on those two occasions. I felt it was an opportunity to ask the question **'What does it mean to be a Catholic and a member of the Catholic Church?'** My hope was that I might say something that would help the parents of the children being confirmed in the time ahead in their ongoing task of passing on the faith to their children. Have some of those parents come to me since Confirmation Day to tell me, **'Fr. Denis, what you said in your homily gave us a lot of food for thought. You know we never asked ourselves the question you posed!'** No, that has not happened and I did not expect it to happen, even though I hope that one parent might have said something about it to another. I decided to include it in this Dear Parishioner in the hope that some little bit of discussion might take place within the parish.

In the past week, a priest in another parish told me about a conversation he had, on the occasion of First Communion in his parish. He spoke with a couple who were present because the husband's child was receiving First Communion. Their own child had received the previous week in their home parish. In the course of their conversation with him, both parents admitted they would not be taking their child to Mass regularly in the time ahead because their own faith meant little or nothing to them. (The last paragraph **(We were shocked)** on the back page is not connected with the previous piece. It is taken from the Mission Month Booklet) *Fr. Denis O'Mahony*

Homily at Confirmation Ceremony, Abbeydorney, 28th September 2021.

As I thought about what I would say, especially to you, the parents of those being confirmed today, I thought it might be good to look at the question

'What does it mean to be a Catholic in the Ireland of the 21st century!'

If you find yourself in a group where that question was being discussed, how would you go about answering that question? You might say, **'I never asked myself that question before.'** I just knew that I was a Catholic, like my parents and grandparents and most of the people I know. I was baptised in the Catholic Church, I had 1st Communion and Confirmation, got married in the church and I learned that being a Catholic meant belonging to an organisation, where the members followed the teaching of Jesus Christ. The central point in that teaching is to love God and to love other people – even those who are not likeable and those who think differently from me.

What does it mean to be a member of the Catholic Church? Being a Catholic is like belonging to an extended family – people somewhat like oneself, with the same beliefs, who feel a concern for me and want the best for me and for other people, not just Catholics. Being a member of a group or organisation means meeting other members and doing things together. One of the things we do is we worship God together. When we do that, we become more aware of all that we have in common, we see that other people have particular needs that we don't have and that people face problems that we have never faced. We find ourselves being called in some way to make life better for others and we see that when we do that, we feel good about it and we feel happy about doing more for others. We don't wait to be asked, we volunteer or offer ourselves.

What does it mean to be a member of the Church in a particular parish (For most here present, that is Abbeydorney Parish.) A way of bringing Catholics together is to group them in a particular area – urban or rural. We call that a parish. The Catholic Church is a worldwide organisation and each parish is a tiny part of that organisation. While I might go outside the parish for work or leisure or for socialising, I might not be known as a Catholic outside my parish, even though I continue to live as a Catholic wherever I am. I feel that the best way I can be a Catholic in my parish is to be a good parent – keeping the promise I made when I brought my child for Baptism. On that occasion, all those present heard about the challenge facing us, as parents. In the blessing at the end of the ceremony, we heard 'The parents are the first teachers of the child in the

the way of faith . May they be the best of teachers, bearing witness to the faith in what they say and do.' The priest reminded us that what we said to our child by way of guidance and instruction was important but the real test for us was in **'the doing'** - in the example we gave to our children. In modern language, we were being called to be good **'role models'** to our children.

What is meant when people talk about somebody being 'a practising Catholic'? Normally, it means that the person is a regular church-goer and is active in other ways in the parish. If the parish system is to be effective, there has to be involvement of the parishioners in the life of the parish. Some will hold positions of leadership and they will be expected to lead by example. That understanding would have been very much the way *'a practising Catholic'* would be described and that is, probably, what somebody would answer if asked the question, *'What is a practising Catholic?'*

Nowadays, we hear a lot about 'non-practising Catholics'. Where do they fit in? In many organisations, people pay membership fees but do not involve themselves in the day to day running of the organisation. They may attend particular activities or functions once in a while. In the Church context, non-practising Catholics would be seen as people, who gave up attending Mass regularly but who came to the church for special occasions e.g. Christmas and Easter Masses. They would be slow to accept that they were lesser Catholics than regular Mass attenders (*who practised their faith*) and others might say about them that they gave a wonderful example of *'good living.'*

I brought along a book with the title **'Contemporary Catholicism in Ireland'**. It is not a book written by one person but a number of articles by different people. The first article in the book is entitled **'Being a Catholic in Ireland today'**. At the end of the chapter, the writer says **'Being a Catholic in Ireland today is about "thinking Catholic"**. Thinking Catholic is more than knowing the teaching of Jesus Christ and his Church. It is really a distinctive mind-set which guides the practice of Catholicism in ones life. **It involves doing whatever is necessary in terms of faith development, to think critically about what Catholicism means and what its implications are for daily living.'**

When I was five years old, my mother told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down *'happy'*. They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life. *(John Lennon in Reality, October 2021.)*

Seeing your Life through the Lens of the Gospel (John Byrne OSA in Intercom Magazine, October 2021.)

1. Jesus had spent much time teaching his followers that discipleship was a life of service, a life of giving oneself for others. In spite of that, James and John were thinking of what they could get out of it. For Jesus, for the apostles, and for each one of us, the glory of God is revealed when we allow God to work through us, as we give ourselves for others. When have you found that you reach a fuller life, and others benefit, when you act in a spirit of service?

2. One of the great problems in a community, a parish, or an organisation is when you have people jockeying for status and positions of power. The good of the group and the people it serves takes second place to personal prestige. You have probably seen this happen. Perhaps you have also witnessed people with a spirit of service that allowed them to value the good of the group over personal rewards. Recall them and give thanks for their witness.

3. Jesus himself is the great model of this spirit of service. **Think of the aspects of Jesus' life and ministry that have inspired you to imitate his giving of his life for others.**

God's Word this Month (Reality, October 2021)

Servant Leader: Today's Gospel ends with one of the most important statements in the whole of Mark's Gospel. Pay particular attention to Chapter Ten, Verse 45 (Mark10:45). Jesus offers us an example of how leadership must be exercised. He has come not to be served but to serve and he will do this most explicitly by giving "his life as a ransom for many". The Greek word for ransom means the price paid to free those held unjustly against their will (slaves, prisoners of war, or kidnapped people.) Jesus will free people, ensnared by evil, through his death. He is not the Messiah of conventional Jewish expectation. He is God's suffering Messiah. Those who wish to be his disciples need to learn this in order to follow him.

We were shocked and amazed at how they came to our rescue because they had been three days on the road coming from Dar es Salaam. When they had finished, I offered them all the Tanzanian shillings I had in my bag, equivalent to €30. The biggest shock of the day came then. The lorry driver said 'Msaada ni Msaada', which means 'Help is Help' and, when I tried to force the money on them, one of the other guys said, 'Last Sunday at Mass, we heard the story of the Good Samaritan and, today, we would like you to think of us as the modern day 'Good Samaritans' and, with that, they packed up and continued their journey with the parting words, **'Father, remember us in your prayers.'**