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15th January, 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Dear Parishioner,

This was the week when I imagined a parishioner or two approaching me and saying, *'Fr. O'Mahony, so you were living it up again for a few days in a hotel in Killarney!'* Of course, I then pictured myself, like those politicians, who are accused of using *'taxpayers money'* to fund a trip to a conference a few hundred miles from home (or maybe, outside the country). I would imagine myself saying *'Yes, we stayed in a hotel and we were well-looked after but we were doing a bit of work of well – listening to speakers, who had something worthwhile to say to us, which might be helpful in our priestly work.'* So much for that chat, which did not actually take place! One of those, who spoke to the priests and deacons of the diocese at our annual assembly, would be known to people in Kerry and, indeed all over Ireland, because of his football ability and because of a slight bit of controversy associated with his life on and off the field. Those not deeply interested in sport, may remember the involvement of Aidan O'Mahony in the TV series **'Dancing with the Stars'** in 2017.

Like many sportspeople who have retired from full time playing of games or participating in sporting activity to a lesser degree, because of age or other reasons, Aidan O'Mahony has written about his life in sport but there is much in the book that accounts of the games in which he played, the All-Irelands medals which he won. It deals with problems he had to face up to and experiences which he found very testing but which brought to a point where he knows he learned about life and about himself. After hearing speak last Wednesday, I felt I should not delay in getting the book – **UNBROKEN** – *'A journey of adversity, mental strength and physical fitness.'* The final paragraph of the description of the book, given on the back cover says, *'Unbroken is an account of the discipline it takes to be part of one of the country's most successful Gaelic football teams. It is also of managing external and internal expectations and pressure, and of how asking for help only makes us stronger.'*

In the **'Dear Parishioner'** issues that you have seen up to the end, I have tried to have material from magazines of the same month as they appear. A slight crisis has come because of the end of Reality Magazine last month. I hope that, as happens with magazines and papers sometimes, the number of Dear Parishioner readers will not fall. **(Fr. Denis O'Mahony)**

In Memory Of Orla

She Was Gone Before We Ever Got To Hold Her

She was tiny and petite, exquisite and perfect. She was so beautiful. "An-álainn ar fad." Very beautiful, indeed. I could see her mum's eyes, her dad's nose, her long elegant fingers. She took my breath away. **She arrived too early, so this little girl was in that horribly named "non-viable" category.** With the most savage cruelty, the universe was instructing her distraught mum and dad to say goodbye to her from the moment they said hello. I watched as the pink woolly hooded little jacket, which delicately dressed her, would never fulfil its function of keeping her warm. **That first time, looking into her hospital crib, the powerlessness overwhelmed me. A tsunami of emotions flooded. Screaming panic, bereft isolation, confusion, bewilderment. A ferocious need to protect her parents, knowing instantly that it is futile.** Then the need to sob, convulse, away from everyone in a quiet place. Maybe that would take the pain away but it just caused exhaustion. They had started calling her by her name before this day. They had chosen Orla, meaning Golden Princess. There were so many strange experiences from those strange days. Nothing made sense. Today we might be able to ask the pertinent questions. The lonely little Chapel of Rest stands in pastel, restful shades on the hospital grounds. Is that long walk to reach it really that long, or was it our grief that slowed us down? This was a second-trimester bereavement. The Early Pregnancy Loss section carries the full story in its name. Pain and heartache saturate it. The gaunt faces of mums emerge, dulled and numbed from shock. Dads also looking awkward and unsure. Shattered dreams. **"Tread softly for you tread on my dreams,"** wrote WB Yeats.

There are images that will never be erased. Orla's dad being so brave and stoic, but I know him, my son, and he is crumbling inside. Orla's mum, looking at her baby with such pride and such pain. Her heart breaks into a thousand little pieces as we watch and witness. The grandads - One grandad leaning on the iron railings outside the mortuary, running on empty, but still holding up to keep it together for his beloved daughter. The other grandad at the bottom of the beautiful garden, ashen pallor, hands in face trying to find strength from somewhere to keep going for his beloved son. Her granny, my counterpart, strong and selflessly determined to do all in her power to comfort her girl, knowing it's not possible. The uncles, three grown men, tall and proud, tear-stained faces. A grand-uncle, who

went through this many, many years ago and who is reliving it all, looking on. Then there is the kindness of strangers, the Bereavement Midwife and chaplain who would do anything for you. The sensitive priest who celebrated the Mass of the Angels for us. The sacristan, who prepared the little country church which gave us such privacy. The workers on the road who stopped and fell silent as our little girl was tenderly carried by her dad in a little white coffin and brought into the House of God. All are so kind; all are so sad. It's not right. It's not the correct order of things. There is not a single word or sentence that will make it easy. It will always sear our hearts. Why did this happen? What God could be so cruel? Why snatch her away from us before we even got to hold her? **"Is féidir leis an saol a bheith an-chrua uaireanta."** Life can be very cruel sometimes. In my dreams, she is full of life and vibrancy. Always running, always chuckling, but out of my reach. Still petite, exquisite, perfect. She has come into our lives, and we love her with a love that will never end – a tiny little girl who packed an enormous punch. *"Know how much you are loved, Orla. Know how strong your place is in our family. To the moon and back a thousand times, baby girl. We love you, and we always will."* **(Majella Sheehan taught with the FCJ Sisters, Bruff, Limerick and is retired. Reality Magazine, December 2022)**

A Tale of Two Mopeds

A few short years ago, I was the proud owner of a moped, my economical transport to work at a Dublin hospital. On a glorious August Bank holiday Monday, I set off for work as usual. Shortly afterwards the heavens opened and a huge deluge of rain poured down on bone dry tarmac, a treacherous combination, the bike skidded and I was thrown off. As I lay prostate on the ground and unable to move, a car approached. Two doctors got out, examined me and, concerned that I might have broken my right leg, called an ambulance. **It was embarrassing to arrive at A & E in my workplace and to have to relay what had happened. However, I was treated with utmost courtesy and care and witnessed the same compassion being extended to all around me.** Fortunately, I had not sustained any major injury and was discharged later that day. Extensive elbow bruising reduced my mobility for several days. However, I was aware that I had been saved from serious injury and was grateful to be alive.

Many years later, I arrived at the scene of an accident in London. A young pizza delivery-man had been knocked off his L-plate (contd. on back page)

motorbike. He spoke no English and was clearly distressed. I attempted to comfort him as we awaited the ambulance, which arrived very quickly. When the paramedic assessed him and recommended hospital admission, he was determined not to go. He rose and stumbled away, leaving his bike on the roadside. **I suspect he may have been an undocumented worker and was afraid of either losing his job or been extradited.** My heart ached for the good man, as he suffered physically, psychologically and socially. We meet many who are bruised and broken by harsh experiences. Some suffer great physical pain, others a dark cloud of sadness, the grief of loss robbing life of joy. Economic hardship and political turmoil ravage world peace. We place our hands into the glorified hand of Jesus, so that, fortified by his grace, we are more able to reach out a hand of friendship to all who suffer.

(Sr. Siobhán O'Keeffe, Healthcare Chaplain, in Messenger January 2023)

Seeing Your Life Through The Lens of The Gospel

John Byrne OSA Intercom January 2023

1. *John is one who directs people to Jesus as the one who had a life-giving message for them. Who have been the people in your life whose example or advice pointed you in the direction of a fuller life? Who has helped you to appreciate the importance of Jesus and his message?*
2. In the narrative, John recognised that Jesus had more to offer people than he himself. He had the humility not to need to be the star of the show. **Whom have you known with that grounded sense of their own place?**
3. *John proclaims Jesus as one who takes away the sin of the world. Who have been the people who, for you, continued this mission of Jesus and led you from sin and guilt to forgiveness and freedom? For whom have you done this?*
4. It was not just on the cross that Jesus gave his life as the Lamb of God. His public ministry was a constant struggle against injustice and oppression. When have you shared in this mission of Jesus? Who have been models of this for you?

The article by Sr. Siobhán O'Keeffe is not the first article from the Sacred Heart Messenger to be included in 'Dear Parishioner'. Because a good number of parishioners receive the 'Messenger' every month, I will not make a habit of including articles from that magazine in 'Dear Parishioner'. **(D. O'M)**