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1st January, 2023. Solemnity of Mary.

Dear Parishioner,

Do you recall anything I said in my Christmas homily? Is that a fair question to ask a week later! You might remember that I started by referring to the editorial in the Irish Times of the 24th December. Among the bits of information that I gave you was that the Christmas song, Santa Claus is coming to Town, composed and recorded in 1934, is accepted as the most popular Christmas song. The editorial went to say that a hymn composed 60 years later in 1994 by Bernadette Farrrell, an English hymn-writer, 'Christ be our Light' is one of the hymns being sung by choirs at parish Masses. The greater part of the editorial was given to reflecting on some of the thoughts in that hymn.

On St. Stephen's Day, I read the Irish Independent and the editorial that day caught my eye, like the Irish Times did on Saturday. The editorial heading was 'This Special Day Gives Us All A Chance For Reflection'. The first few sentences were about folklore associated St. Stephen, the first martyr, followed by some comment on the Wrenboy tradition in Ireland. This day is also dubbed 'Lá an Dreoilín', or Wren Day, and it is a time for partying, with plenty of music, song and dance.' A little bit more of the editorial told about the different things people might do on St. Stephen's Day before going on to say 'Whether in active or passive mode, this time of year does offer a golden opportunity for a little quiet reflection on the things that matter. It is best to take that opportunity for quiet thinking. It is time to look at the year which is fast dying. It's also a time to consider looking at the upcoming new year and what opportunities that will bring .

We get a chance to connect with family members and old friends and also openings to make some new friendships. It is a time to think of those exiled from our country, to think about those who are less fortunate than ourselves, and perhaps stricken by illness or other forms of distress. Extending a helping hand in such cases can help the giver as much as the receiver. The prayer of St. Francis, "For it is in giving that we receive" is more apt than ever at times such as these. We wish everyone joy, rest and peace on this special day. Even though St. Stephens Day was a few days ago, I think the advice given in what I have written above is valid at all times.

A Musical Interlude.....with Con O'Sullivan (1922-2003).

Towards the end of 1967, some months before our ordination to the priesthood, Captain Con O'Sullivan, hit the scene! Yes, everything about Con was dramatic. An army man, with a difference. He was coming to go on the seminary staff, not as drill master, but as a tutor in speech training. It didn't take long for us to appreciate the gifts he had to bring. However, it seemed for us in the final year, a bit late in the day. Our minds were set on ordination and mission postings only a few months away. From then on, he came from his home in Newbridge, near the Curragh of Kildare, once a week, and, in later years, more often. In a matter of months , our class of twenty three was ordained and dispersed to different African countries and to South America. Con himself continued however, as a visiting staff member for many years, teaching generations of Kiltegan students.

Seventeen years later, after a bout of illness, I found myself on temporary assignment back in Kiltegan. This time, I was a colleague of Con's on the teaching staff. He was by now, a Lt. Colonel and retired from the army. With his wife, Marie, an accomplished musician, he had set up the Leinster School of Communication, at their home where they offered courses in drama, speech training and music. Between them, they directed many musicals and plays in Newbridge and many other venues. These included the annual musicals of our own First Year students. In addition, Con prepared his students for the examinations, set and conducted by the London Guildhall School of Music and Drama (LGSM). At one stage, one of our seasoned missionaries, Fr. Oliver Leavy, in Grenada, West Indies, mentored a youth group, called '**Spice Island Youthquake**', which he took on a concert tour of Ireland. Con and Marie were very taken by them, seeing a lot of potential, so much so, they suggested coming on a holiday to Grenada, and spending time there, honing the group's stagecraft, and upping the quality of their performance. However, shortly before they were due to leave for home, Marie took ill suddenly and, sadly, died in Grenada. Con, bereft at this great loss, yet undaunted, returned alone to Grenada the following year, honouring his beloved Marie's memory by completing what both of them had begun together.

Points to

In the course of his work in Kiltegan, Con made a huge impact on many students, giving them confidence in themselves and helping many to discover talents and abilities they had difficulty in recognising and owning. In some

instances, through his patient encouragement, and use of techniques, he helped many of them overcome a stammer and become competent speakers. In many cases, they achieved the highest grades in their exams. I learned a lot from Con, during our short few years together in Kiltegan, as we worked on two musicals together.

There are, as you would imagine, many stories of Con. The one I like best recalling had its own measure of drama and comedy. Before I left to return to Africa, he invited me out for dinner. Knowing how he liked to take a drink, I insisted on driving and persuaded him to stay the night in Kiltegan. After a very enjoyable outing, we arrived back in Kiltegan about 1.30 a.m. We started to climb the steps to the main entrance, as quietly as possible. It was a frosty night. Suddenly, I fell forward on the steps, grazing my shins. 'My God almighty,' roared Con, "I'm the one who's supposed to be drunk. I hope none of your religious superiors are looking out the window at this spectacle." Whether this hastened my departure for Africa the following year, I will never really know at this stage, I suppose. Thanks, Con, for all those memories.

(Nicholas Motherway, in Africa, January/February 2023. Fr. Motherway, a member Saint Patricks Missionary Society, worked in Nigeria and Kenya and is now living in his native city of Cork. He has contributed articles to Africa magazine, under the heading 'A Musical Interlude, since January 2022.)

Points to Ponder

If John in his Gospel speaks of Mary, the mother of Jesus', St. Paul, in today's second reading says even less – 'When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman' Mary's name is not even mentioned. It has been suggested that this is in the spirit of the New Testament, where there is no privilege of class or individuals. People are distinguished by one thing only – by their service to the community, in the name of Jesus the Lord. This applies to Mary as much as to any of the apostles, as to any other Christian disciple. Today's feast, however, is called 'Mary, Mother of God', and not just 'Mother of Jesus'. For both Jews and Muslims, who have the deepest respect for God and even for his name, the idea that God could have a human being for his mother is blasphemous. It is a contradiction in terms for the Creator of all things to be mothered by a teacher. Mary gave birth to the human child that is Jesus, but that child is the second Person of the Blessed Trinity. *(Continued on back page)*

(Continued from third page) Jesus is both human and divine: two natures, as they say, but only one Person. Mary, as the Mother of Jesus, is also the Mother of that Person and that Person is God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Clearly, we are not expected to be able to understand or explain this any further. The nature of God is quite beyond us. We need the simple and trusting faith of the shepherds. *(living space.sacredspace.ie)*

Seeing Your Life Through The Lens of The Gospel

John Byrne OSA, Intercom, December 2022/January 2023

1. The story tells us that the shepherds helped Mary to realise the significance of the child born to her. She treasured their words and pondered their meaning. Who have been the people, who have helped you to understand the meaning of significant events in your life? Remember them gratefully.
2. We are told that '*Mary pondered these things in her heart*'. What part has faithful reflection on life played for you? How has it been helpful to you in deepening your appreciation for the gift of life?
3. When the shepherds realised that they had been witnesses to a wonderful manifestation of God's love for his people, they glorified and praised God? Recall ways in which you have been made aware of God's love for you. How have you expressed your gratitude?

The Irish Wake: The death of a person is a community event. It affects us all. The Irish tradition of the wake and big funeral were wise community events, recognising the need for support in the work of grieving, the need for all to wrestle with our understanding of death, suffering and grieving. Indeed, we and many other ancient cultural traditions, have much wisdom that we need to hold on to in the twenty first century. (Jeremy Corley et al (eds.) Maynooth College Reflects on Facing Life's End in Furrow Magazine, December 2022.

Three wise women would haveasked directions, arrived on time, help deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, brought practical gifts and there would be peace on Earth.

(Reality magazine, December 2022)