



Image of the day

Crosses at St Fin Barre's Cathedral Cork



Palm Sunday crosses become Cork covid memorial

Last year, with the palm crosses for Palm Sunday 2020, already purchased and delivered to Saint Fin Barre's Cathedral, Cork, the question was 'what will we do with them?'

The Dean of Cork, the Very Reverend Nigel Dunne, fastened them to the railings at the Cathedral gates to announce the start of Holy Week, where they remained throughout the week.

Many passers-by assumed, however, that the crosses were a memorial to those who had already died of Covid-19

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around the world. One said 'You will have to do this every Palm Sunday now, not just for Holy Week, but as a memorial to those who have died during this pandemic.' The seeds of a tradition were sown.

And so, in 2021, the tradition has been continued. Announcing Palm Sunday and Holy Week while church buildings are closed for public worship, but also again as a memorial to those who have died in the Coronavirus Pandemic, the crosses have been tied again to the Cathedral railings.

For the love of God, do not remain silent over Disappeared: Primate at annual Mass in Armagh

The Catholic Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland, Eamon Martin, has made an impassioned plea for anyone with information about the location of the bodies of the Disappeared to come forward.

Speaking at the annual Mass for the Disappeared in St Patrick's Cathedral, Armagh, he spoke movingly of the pain and suffering the families of the Disappeared continue to bear.

“I appeal once more today to anyone out there who has even the slightest amount of information, to show compassion and mercy by sharing it with the Independent Commission or with others,” the Archbishop told worshippers.



“It's never too late to bring the key that will ease the suffering of others and help them find peace and consolation.

“For the love of God, do not remain silent,” he said. The Mass was attended by relatives of the victims, and was also streamed live on the internet — enabling people across Ireland and beyond to hear his message.

“Our thoughts today are especially with the families of Columba McVeigh, Joe Lynskey, Robert Nairac, and Lisa Dorrian,

“The recent unsuccessful searches for Columba and for Lisa must have brought you their families so much pain.

“Our hearts go out to you.

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“You and your loved ones have known terrible suffering.”
The Archbishop said there had been little progress over the past year in recovering the last of the Disappeared.

“Sadly, there has been very little progress over the last year in the search for answers.

“For some of you — especially those of you outside of Ireland — and I know some of you are tuning in today - the Covid restriction have only added to your sense of separation and loss.

“And we think of the members of your families who are sick and vulnerable, and those who have died.

“In some cases, having never been able to be reunited with the bodies of their loved ones.

“Not to know where your murdered loved one is buried must bring an unbearable burden of suffering. Some of you have carried that burden for almost 50 years.

“Not to be able to grieve properly, to have a Christian burial, to lay flowers on a grave...we cannot imagine your pain.

He also paid tribute to the work of the Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains (ICLVR) in its search for answers, as well as to the Wave Trauma Centre, which offers support to the families of the Disappeared.

As the Mass concluded, relatives of the victims lit candles in their memory. - *Courtesy Belfast Telegraph. 29.02.2021*



53rd International Eucharistic Congress to take place in Ecuador

Pope Francis has accepted and approved a request from the Archdiocese of Quito in Ecuador to designate it as the venue of the 53rd International Eucharistic Congress.

A statement released by the Pontifical Committee for International Eucharistic Congresses said the event “will be held in the year 2024, on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the consecration of that noble country to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.”

“This great ecclesial gathering will manifest the fruitfulness of the Eucharist for evangelization and the renewal of faith in the Latin American continent,” the Committee added.

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Preparations in Budapest for 2021 Congress

The statement went on to note that in the meantime, preparations continue for the next International Eucharistic Congress, scheduled to take place in Hungary's capital, Budapest, from 2 to 5 September 2021.

Speaking to journalists on board the papal flight bringing him back to Rome after his Apostolic Visit to Iraq from 5 to 8 March, Pope Francis announced his intention to travel to Budapest on 5 September to participate in that Eucharistic Congress' closing Mass.

The International Eucharistic Congress took place in Ireland in 2012.

Suicide bombers attack Indonesian cathedral service

A bombing at an Indonesian cathedral wounded 20 as worshippers celebrated the start of Holy Week on Sunday last.

The two attackers were killed as they rode a motorbike into the compound of the church in Makassar city on Sulawesi island, authorities said.

Indonesia's chief security minister Mahfud MD told reporters in the capital Jakarta: "The two [bombers] died."

Twenty church officials, congregants and security staff were injured by debris, authorities said. A church security guard

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tried to prevent the two perpetrators – who have not been identified – from entering when the explosion occurred, they added.

One man commented : “There were several injured people on the street. I helped one woman ... who was wounded and covered in blood. Her grandchild was also injured.”

Forensic investigators have been poring over body parts to determine the attackers’ identities.

Geashill Parish History

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in interest in parish history.

This, in part, is due to the collecting policy of the RCB Library which has resulted in many parish record collections being transferred from local custody, catalogued and made freely available to researchers. It is also a product of more primary sources material being made available on websites so that much research can be successfully undertaken at home.

The RCB Library’s Archive of the Month for March features a history of Geashill parish church, Co. Offaly. The parish is an ancient one, with clerical succession lists recording rectors as far back as 1218, and a union with the Augustinian monastery of Killeigh being mentioned in 1515. The old medieval church was still in use by 1804, but the newer church – still standing today – was built in 1814 with funds from the Board of First Fruits.



The Library's collections include a wealth of material for Geashill – parish records dating from 1713, records from the Diocese of Kildare, many photographs of the church and an abundance of architectural drawings which help to give an understanding of the importance of architecture in telling the story of a building and a parish.

This Archive of the Month article is written by Sylvia Turner, a semi-retired university tutor in education who lives in Winchester. She has a long-held interest in Irish history and her research relates mainly to Kerry, the home of her grandfather's ancestors, and Offaly, her mother's home county. Sylvia's story is a personal history of the church, weaving her own family history with that of the church, and

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explores the intimate link between the church and the town itself.

Sylvia states: “Geashill Church is an example of how a church can give an insight into its history through its memorials and the inscriptions on gravestones. However, when supplemented with documentation, more detail emerges relating to church history and previous generations of worshippers whose lives were often marred by poverty and disease. These people are frequently hidden from view, lying in unmarked graves here or overseas where they endeavoured to make better lives for themselves.”

C of I Correspondent to Irish Times

Clerical

Chaplain to the Mother’s Union Armagh Diocese

The Archbishop of Armagh, the Most Reverend John McDowell has appointed the Rev’d Alan Cross, Rector of Lissan to be the Diocesan Chaplain to the Mother’s Union.

Books, Broadcasts, resources and webinars

St Patrick’s Pilgrimage: Journey to Place – Journey to God

Church of Ireland Publishing has announced the publication of the twelfth book in its Braemor Studies series. St Patrick’s Pilgrimage: Journey to Place – Journey to God explores the relationship between people and pilgrimage in Ireland in the

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21st century, incorporating reflections and interviews with pilgrims, as well as a detailed look at the scholarship and history of pilgrimage in the Christian Church. The author is the Revd Karen Salmon, Curate of Willowfield in Belfast. The book is available here and priced €6/£5.

[[] <https://store.ireland.anglican.org/store/product/172/st-patricks-pilgramages-journey-to-place>]

Derry & Raphoe magazine

The Easter 2021 edition of 'n:vision', the award-winning diocesan magazine, is now available at -

<https://www.derryandraphoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Nvision-Easter-2021-lores.pdf>

Media review

Simon Coveney turns down British offer to nominate representative to help organise Northern Ireland centenary

Belfast Telegraph

[[] <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/simon-coveney-turns-down-british-offer-to-nominate-representative-to-help-organise-ni-centenary-40248006.html>

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Coveney's snubbing of NI centenary forum shows Republic doesn't practice what it preaches: DUP

Belfast Telegraph

The Irish Government's refusal to nominate an official to the body celebrating Northern Ireland's centenary suggests it is “failing to live up to the standards they lecture others about”, the DUP has said.

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Irish Foreign Minister Simon Coveney personally turned down an offer from Secretary of State Brandon Lewis asking for a representative to sit on the Northern Ireland Centenary Forum.

Mr Lewis, in a letter to the Irish government, wrote that the centenary “is an opportunity for everyone to celebrate Northern Ireland and its contribution to the UK over the last 100 years”.

But Mr Coveney responded: “We would not propose that the Irish Government (through the Department of Foreign Affairs) be a member of or be formally represented on the forum.”

Details of the correspondence relating to the forum were revealed following a Freedom of Information request by Dublin's Business Post newspaper.

The forum, announced last August by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, held its first meeting in October.

Civil Service to shift 23,000 workers from central offices

Belfast Telegraph

The Northern Ireland Civil Service is in talks with trade unions about future remote working for up to 23,000 workers, the Belfast Telegraph can reveal.

The Department of Finance, responsible for personnel matters in the NI Civil Service (NICS), said the remote working habit established in the pandemic was here to stay. Regional hubs are being prepared for workers in locations outside Belfast, such as Downpatrick, Craigavon and Ballykelly.

But the trend could leave NICS offices under-occupied or even empty — such as the Department of Education's Rathgael House Bangor office, Castle Buildings at Stormont

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and city centre offices like the Child Support Agency's HQ Millennium House.

Schools urged to decide over use of transfer tests this year

Belfast Telegraph

One of the bodies that sets transfer tests in Northern Ireland has ruled out using verbal reasoning to decide which pupils to admit in 2022.

The Association for Quality Education (AQE), which intends to go ahead with the tests, also said pupils would get an extra 10 minutes for each paper.

Earlier this month, the other exams body the Post Primary Transfer Consortium (PPTC), asked schools to consider using verbal reasoning tests to decide which pupils to admit in 2022.

But in a guide for parents, the AQE states: We will not be using verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests. We will be using the same type of questions that we have been using for the past 11 years.”

Verbal reasoning tests the understanding of language, logic and verbal comprehension while non-verbal reasoning evaluates problem-solving skills.

Vatican language on gay blessings ‘hurtful’, says Ireland’s youngest Catholic bishop

Irish Times

[[] <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/vatican-language-on-gay-blessings-hurtful-says-ireland-s-youngest-catholic-bishop-1.4521262>]

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Report on publication of independent review commissioned by Scripture Union relating to John Smyth.

Daily Telegraph

[<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/03/25/former-christian-charity-head-admits-extraordinarily-incurious/>]

Responses to UK Government's 'New Plan for Immigration'.

Church Times

Report on responses from faith groups and charities to the Government's 'New Plan for Immigration'. Includes comment from the Bishop of Durham, Paul Butler.

[<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2021/26-march/news/uk/charities-condemn-uk-asylum-proposals-as-inhumane-and-deceitful>]

Further coverage of the launch of the Church of England Pensions Board's first Stewardship Report.

Pensions Age

[<https://www.pensionsage.com/pa/CofE-Pensions-Board-publishes-first-annual-stewardship-report.php>]

Opinion - Stop bashing AstraZeneca - it's only trying to help - Ben Spencer

This time last year, as the pandemic ripped through Britain and we all grappled with our new life under lockdown, Oxford University was looking for a commercial partner for its nascent Covid-19 vaccine. The geneticist Sir John Bell, who had strong relationships within the pharmaceutical

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industry, had brought in the US drugs giant Merck Sharp & Dohme (MSD) to negotiate a deal - Ben Spencer writes in The Sunday Times

But Sarah Gilbert and Adrian Hill, the Jenner Institute academics who had developed the Oxford vaccine, opposed the arrangement. They insisted any manufacturer had to agree to distribute the jab globally, at an affordable price.

The MSD deal fell apart, and a few weeks later AstraZeneca, the Anglo-Swedish drug maker, came on board. The firm agreed to supply the Oxford vaccine, at cost, for the duration of the pandemic. And it would provide it profit-free to developing countries in perpetuity.

Twelve months on and AstraZeneca is battered and bruised. Every day another assault arrives in what is beginning to look like a global smear campaign.

For months now, European leaders have conducted attack after attack. In January, the French leader, Emmanuel Macron, described the vaccine as “quasi-ineffective” for the elderly — to the dismay of scientists. In the following weeks, that claim utterly disproved, further doubts were raised across Europe about efficacy, safety, supplies.

More than 20 countries suspended the jab over a blood-clot scare — despite the protestations of scientists across the world that the pause would cause more deaths from Covid than clots ever could.

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Even now — after the European Medicines Agency definitively ruled the vaccine is effective and safe — Norway and Denmark have retained their bans. The European rows can, perhaps, be put down to politics — a by-product of lingering resentment that has permeated across the Continent and beyond in the wake of a messy Brexit. But the kerfuffle that took place in America last week was simply baffling.

When the Oxford team published its phase-three results back in November, based on 23,000 people, it was deemed to be sufficient evidence for approval in Britain and Europe. In America, though, the Food and Drug Administration had concerns. No matter, AstraZeneca responded: a bigger trial was already under way in America, Chile and Peru.

Last week, the headline results from that study were reported. They showed the vaccine was 79 per cent effective at preventing Covid-19 and 100 per cent effective at stopping severe disease and hospitalisation. Crucially, it was 80 per cent effective among over-65s. And there were no findings of blood clots.

Still Joe Biden's chief medical adviser, Dr Anthony Fauci, hit out, claiming AstraZeneca had issued an "outdated" and "misleading" assessment of the jab's efficacy. Within 48 hours the firm had recalculated its data, addressing Fauci's concerns. The result? Efficacy dropped three percentage points — from 79 to 76 per cent. Hardly devastating. And its effectiveness among the elderly went up from 80 to 85 per cent.

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So why would America intervene in this way? Vaccine nationalism? To protect US rivals? Are dirty tricks at play? It is impossible to say. The whole episode is utterly perplexing.

But there is a more serious issue. These repeated attacks dent confidence. The vaccines — AstraZeneca's, Pfizer's, Moderna's or indeed Russia's — offer us an escape from the Covid-19 crisis, our route back to normality. But only if people use them. Every assault, smear or politicised attack increases vaccine hesitancy. It is time our leaders united behind the jabs — whatever their branding. The consequences, if they don't, do not bear thinking about.

Ben Spencer is Science Editor. The Sunday Times. March 28 2021,

Poem for today

I Sit Before the Fire and Think

I sit beside the fire and think
of all that I have seen
of meadow-flowers and butterflies
in summers that have been;

Of yellow leaves and gossamer
in autumns that there were,
with morning mist and silver sun
and wind upon my hair.

I sit beside the fire and think
of how the world will be

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when winter comes without a spring
that I shall ever see.

For still there are so many things
that I have never seen:
in every wood in every spring
there is a different green.

I sit beside the fire and think
of people long ago
and people who will see a world
that I shall never know.

But all the while I sit and think
of times there were before,
I listen for returning feet
and voices at the door.

'I Sit Beside the Fire and Think' was a song found in J.R.R. Tolkien's 'The Fellowship of the Ring'. Bilbo sings this song, mostly to himself but with Frodo present, just after he gives Frodo the mithril vest and Sting in Rivendell.

Music for Holy Week

This Joyful Eastertide

King's College Cambridge.

[[] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tipsbcfuB4>]

Listen to King's College Choir, free, on their website:

[<http://bit.ly/kingslisten>]



My Song is Love Unknown

Samuel Crossman & John Ireland's beautiful Passiontide hymn: 'My Song is Love Unknown'. Sylvia Burnside, accompanied by the New Irish Orchestra, on Songs Of Praise. Click on photo above.

When I survey the wondrous Cross

The day before churches were shut down in Sydney, Australia, with a very reduced and socially-distanced St Andrew's Cathedral Choir, very quickly recorded, several well-known hymns and psalms in the hope that you find them all useful in this difficult time when churches are unable to meet. The two hymns below follow in succession.

A live performance of the greatest Good Friday Hymn; Isaac Watt's beautiful 'When I survey the wondrous Cross'.
[[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCiucN8spqg>]

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By Cool Siloam's Shady Rill

The Glasgow Orpheus choir conducted by Sir Hugh Robertson sing the hymn tune, Belmont. The choir existed from 1901 to 1951. The choir disbanded as an act of respect on Sir Hugh's death. The Glasgow Phoenix revived the tradition.

[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QUvVoTVII0Y>]



Pointers for prayer

Heavenly Father,
your Son battled with the powers of darkness,
and grew closer to you in the desert:
help us to use these days to grow in wisdom and prayer

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that we may witness to your saving love
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty Father,
whose Son was revealed in majesty
before he suffered death upon the cross:
give us grace to perceive his glory,
that we may be strengthened to suffer with him
and be changed into his likeness, from glory to glory;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Hold in your hands, Lord
our families & friends
our neighbours
those whom we worry about
and those who worry for us.
And in these same hands
hold every family,
especially those for whom today
has brought new burdens and fresh sorrows

We remember with thanks the numerous Mothers' Union
members who, over the years, have used their God-given
gifts to change the world. We pray that, in our day, we'll also
be willing to use our gifts to help transform lives and
communities

We pray today for the church across the world, especially in
places where they are experiencing hardship and
persecution. We stand together with our sisters and brothers
and pray for God to bring relief from their circumstances.

Holy God,
you know the disorder of our sinful lives:
set straight our crooked hearts,
and bend our wills to love your goodness
and your glory
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Almighty God,
you have created the heavens and the earth
and made us in your own image:
teach us to discern your hand in all your works
and your likeness in all your children;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who with you and the Holy Spirit reigns supreme over all
things,
now and for ever.

Speaking to the Soul

As Jesus rode along, the crowds spread out their garments on the road ahead of him. When he reached the place where the road started down the Mount of Olives, all of his followers began to shout and sing as they walked along, praising God for all the wonderful miracles they had seen. “Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!” But some of the Pharisees among the crowd said, “Teacher, rebuke your followers for saying things like that!”
Luke 19:36-39 NLT

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Palm Sunday was a day full of surprises for many people. They had hoped that Jesus might be the one who would kick the hated Romans out of the land. They wanted to see him come in power taking on the occupying army and setting the people free at long last. It would have suited them well if he had turned up on an impressive war horse and led a rebellion. But that wasn't Jesus' way. Instead he turned up on a donkey of all creatures. Donkeys are undoubtedly attractive and loveable but you would never start an uprising with one! As so often, Jesus turned people's expectations upside down, and indeed everything that would happen in the coming week was going to shock them to the core.

People reacted very differently to Jesus on Palm Sunday. There were some who showed him the respect of laying their coats on the road and who shouted and sang their praises. They recognised that Jesus truly was the Messiah, sent by God to bring hope to the nation. But then there were the Pharisees who were appalled by this outburst and who encouraged Jesus to rebuke his noisy supporters. But Jesus informs them that the praising couldn't be stopped, because if they ceased to praise him the stones along the road would burst into applause!

This Easter there will be very different reactions to Jesus. Some will cheer, and others will be completely unmoved by it all. But be sure of this – the praises of Jesus will go on. They cannot be stopped.

QUESTION

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What do you make of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you that in your son we learn what it really means to be a servant. Help us to be willing to be your servant today. Amen.

