

Consecrated Life in Dromin- Athlacca 15/08/15

In my younger days in my home parish of Killeedy there was always an added buzz around this time of the year when priests, brothers and nuns came home for their holidays from different parts of the world – both far and near. They were like swallows coming for their yearly visit. Like visitors from America there was a special welcome. Houses were whitewashed or painted. The visitors would do their round of visits and were usually brought into the Parlour – a room only used for the special occasions. In this parish of Dromin-Athlacca there was a higher visibility level because of the big numbers who joined the Religious Orders.

Some years before this many of those who ministered abroad especially in places like the Far East, South America and Africa very rarely came home at all. Africa was known as the White Man's grave as many of the earlier missionaries were not able for the hot climate.

As we celebrate this year of Consecrated Life it is worth reflecting on the enormous amount of good that our priests and religious have achieved at home and abroad down through the years. They have worked in the most difficult of conditions and circumstances and very often in the shadow of violence and terrorism. They have not got the credit they deserved.

Some years ago President Mary Robinson on some of her worldwide travels witnessed at first- hand the fruits of so much missionary effort and was loud in her praise. So much of this was done without any fanfare or the glare of any publicity.

In the play, Julius Caesar, we have the words of Mark Anthony "The good that men do is very often interred with them". In the Book of Wisdom we read; here is a list of generous people whose good works have not been forgotten especially by God himself. Their glory will never fade. The good works, the many different projects in the poorest countries are fitting testament to the many departed priests and religious from this parish. We still have many living and every one of them has a story to tell. Many of them have gone out when they were young and experienced to missions that demanded the utmost courage and bravery and often found themselves in situations where there was a threat to their safety. They brought the good news in terms of faith,

providing educational services, better living and social conditions. Generally they were working with the poorest and most deprived. In all of these countries the Irish are highly regarded and respected mainly because of the great missionary effort. The Irish have contributed more than most to the development of these primitive countries.

The great missionary and religious tradition of this parish is due to the vast reservoir of faith within the community. Going back the years when faith was hard. It survived because of the many sacrifices of the people. They cherished that faith and this was to become the bedrock of so many vocations. The number of vocations reflected what this faith meant to the people. They were generous and many were willing to join in the mission of Jesus. Jesus being completely connected to God the Father gave him a sense of mission. This is an essential part of consecrated life; the mission to bring about good and to drive out the spirit of evil from the world. St. Paul saw this as his purpose and to show and tell people what the love of God was in action.

Appropriately we have a Religious Order called after St. Paul; The Sisters of Charity of St. Paul and many Sisters have come from this parish. The Order first came to Kilfinane in 1903 and to Kilmallock in 1927. Thousands of girls throughout Co. Limerick and further afield owe their education to the convents in Kilmallock and Kilfinane. Many of those came from the Parish and some of these went on to join the Order. The Order of Sisters of St. Paul has as one of its philosophies that all children get a primary education to give them a good start in life and also that they would be instructed in the faith. The foundress of this Order, a French woman, Mother Genevieve Dupuis, a lively and spirited Parisienne, and who lived to 90 years of age, once wrote to her Sisters saying "I value the gold of your charity".

This evening, as part of the Year of Consecrated Life, we mark and celebrate that golden heritage and tradition not just in that Order but in all the consecrated of this Parish Past and Present. Above all we give thanks to God for their lives.

This presence has often been undervalued and not been given the recognition it deserves. We know only too well that more prominence can be given to failings which pale into insignificance when we dwell on the overall picture.

Finally as we highlight the role of the priests and religious of this parish we must always be mindful of the great support that they have received from the parishioners down through the years; spiritual, financial and emotional. The religious are well aware of this, nor have they forgotten their roots. They have enriched this parish community in many ways, connecting them with the crest of the world and making us more aware that worldwide we are all part of one Christian family based on our union with Christ and one another.

So we give thanks for all our priests and religious of this parish, for their Passion and Commitment and for those still among us that they will still exercise their ministries with joy and hope for the future. Amen.

This homily was delivered by Canon Fitzmaurice parish priest of Croom at the Mass to mark the 'Year for Consecrated Life' in Dromin Church