

Before going to Ireland, I had heard much about the crisis of faith in the Irish Church, the lack of trust in their hierarchy, and wholesale alienation of the young. The Irish Church, like our own, has been rocked by the scandal of priest pederasty and there is lingering anger over the apparent complicity between the Church and the Irish state over orphanages, forced adoptions and reform centers that were at times more penal colonies than homes. The mistrust, suspicion and anger of Irish Catholics is understandable and Church attendance in the Republic is clearly down. But hope and faith are alive in that island country, a country that once evangelized our faith around the world. Humble, Catholic men and women witness to their faith in small and simple ways every day. Isn't that what we are all called to do?

When I was a Holy Cross Associate, our community of lay volunteers committed to a day of fasting every week. Each Wednesday, the six of us would fast all day and then eat a simple supper together in the evening. One fast day, the smell of Tater Tots from the school kitchen was driving me to utter distraction. I told Greg, my housemate and fellow teacher, that I didn't know if I could hold out. He looked at me a little wild eyed and said, "You have to! Knowing that you are keeping the fast is the only reason I am making it through."

Acts of faith such as attending Eucharist, fasting, Reconciliation, and devotional prayer are means for us to slow down and acknowledge God across our day. Through these acts we praise his name, give thanks for blessings received, and plead for our needs and the needs of others in our world. But let us not forget that as Church we offer these prayers as "many made one" in the Body of Christ. We should be mindful that our presence at Mass or kneeling in prayer before Our Lady might be the very act that strengthens the flagging hope of a fellow Catholic, just as witnessing the faith of others has strengthened our own faith in the past. But the witness we give can be even greater than that. Islands of prayer in the midst of a bustling, modern, post-Christian world are oases of God's promise, places of respite that offer succor to world-weary souls in search of truth and meaning in lives too often overwhelmed by the white noise of modern life. As a believer and a priest, I found respite and refreshment in a church just off Grafton Street. Imagine what it might mean for the young man who is searching for meaning or the business woman who is desperate for soul food. We shouldn't parade our faith as a trophy, but genuine acts of faith and piety offer praise to God, strengthen the Body of Christ, and evangelize the world.

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Downtown in Dublin

by Rev. Gary Chamberland, C.S.C.

I recently traveled to Ireland for 10 days with some undergraduates who were spending the summer living and learning there. We spent most of our time in Connemara in the rugged west of Ireland where we had Mass at the outside altar at Máméan (the Pass of the Birds) between Counties Galway and Mayo. It is said that St. Patrick stood on this spot as he looked down upon Connemara and gave it his blessing. We rode bikes on Inis Mór (the largest of the Aran Islands) and marveled at Dún Aonghasa, a prehistoric fort on the edge of a 100 meter high cliff overlooking the Atlantic. It was there in the west that Ireland best met my romanticized notion of Ireland with its pony carts, stone walls, green hillsides, and sheep beyond counting.

Dublin held a different story - bustling, energetic, and thoroughly modern. Polish accents were only outnumbered by American ones and African, Spanish and Italian weren't far behind. While many were the voices of tourists, others were not as this land of emigres has become a land of immigrants. The face of Ireland is changing and not everyone has red hair, blue eyes and freckles anymore. The pulse of modernity is apparent everywhere with even the most traditional looking pub boasting a high-tech system to control food orders and payments. The native Irish of Dublin weren't the quaint woolen wearing folk of postcards, but jeans and sneakers types with cellphones in hand hustling

to make a buck. All in all - except the cigarettes - they seemed a lot like us.

Perhaps the busiest street in Dublin for locals and tourists alike is Grafton Street, a pedestrian only thoroughfare lined by high end shops and gelato stands filled with buskers plying their trade before an endless street of pedestrians trying to take it all in. The 2006 film *Once* shows a street musician singing his own songs on Grafton Street simply hoping for a break.



On my final day in Dublin, I too was hoping for a break. Tired from walking and in need of respite from the cacophony of sights and sounds around me, I spied a small sign pointing to St. Teresa Carmelite Church. It seemed so out of place among the luxury goods and the swelling crowds of one of the most expensive shopping streets in the world. The sign pointed to Johnson's Court, a tiny lane on the side of Grafton Street, so I expected to find a quiet little chapel tucked into a mews. My only hope was

that it would be unlocked so that I might get in a moment of quiet prayer amidst the hubbub of the city. What I found instead was true food for the soul.

Passing through a small courtyard, I entered the vestibule of a church clearly open for operation. St. Teresa's, a large church occupying the block between Grafton Street and Clarendon Street, was filled with people at prayer. At 12:15 PM, I had come in just as the offertory of Mass was beginning. I was in a transept while the nave and the other transept were equally full. On the side was a chapel



filled with statues and racks of candles. The soundtrack of those moments was the clink of coins dropping in the offertory boxes as folks lit candles and prayed for whatever need had brought them there. Across the way, a long line of penitents prayed the Mass as they waited their turn to be reconciled in the sacrament. My eyes beheld a cross section of humanity: old ladies fingering beads and praying with holy cards, a young priest in line for confession, and a couple of Irish secondary schoolers in their uniforms. The man next to me, head in hands, poured out his soul to God in the midst of existential or spiritual anguish. Through it all, the congregation celebrated Mass by giving praise to the Almighty, seeking his intercession, and offering themselves to be used in this world according to his will. As Mass ended, the crowd turned over but never seemed to decrease, and as I sat there praying and marveling at this oasis of prayer (if not exactly calm), a bell rung. I looked up to see another procession approaching the altar with another priest ready to start Mass again.

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