



# Christmas Newsletter 2024

Dear Friends,



***The Infancy of Jesus, the Son of God***, is something that we hear, read and sing about, dramatise and express in art, all the while perhaps wondering whether we have even begun to understand it: Jesus' childhood is shrouded in mystery, wrapped in silence. What does it mean for God, the Creator of heaven and earth to become vulnerable, entirely dependent, starting out on the long process which we know as "growing up"? How could God, an all knowing, all seeing, immortal being, put himself in a position of such apparent ignorance and dependency, and yet remain true to His identity? As the sinless Lamb of God, born of a sinless Mother, we know that his childhood development did not involve the correction of moral faults, false perceptions or selfish motivations, though it did involve suffering. In his recent profound encyclical on the Sacred Heart, ***Dilexit Nos***, Pope Francis presents for our contemplation the thought of how Jesus' human heart was formed by his loving parents. In

no.s 39-42 of the encyclical, the Holy Father gives various examples of Jesus's heart to heart encounters with others:

*"40. Many a page of the Gospel illustrates how attentive Jesus was to individuals and above all to their problems and needs. We are told that, "when he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless" (Mt 9:36). Whenever we feel that everyone ignores us, that no one cares what becomes of us, that we are of no importance to anyone, he remains concerned for us. To Nathanael, standing apart and busy about his own affairs, he could say, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you" (Jn 1:48).*

*41. Precisely out of concern for us, Jesus knows every one of our good intentions and small acts of charity. The Gospel tells us that once he "saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins" in the Temple treasury (Lk 21:2) and immediately brought it to the attention of his disciples. Jesus thus appreciates the good that he sees in us. When the centurion approached him with complete confidence, "Jesus listened to him and was amazed" (Mt 8:10). How reassuring it is to know that, even if others are not aware of our good intentions or actions, Jesus sees them and regards them highly."*

He then considers these examples in the context of Jesus' infancy:

*42. In his humanity, Jesus learned this from Mary, his mother. Our Lady carefully pondered the things she had experienced; she "treasured them... in her heart" (Lk 2:19, 51) and, with Saint Joseph, she taught Jesus from his earliest years to be attentive in this same way.*

In other words, our Holy Father suggests to us that Jesus was formed by his holy parents, to express His all knowing, all penetrating Divine goodness in a human way. This is not of course because of any neediness on God's part, but because he chose that it should be this way. Why? One reason might be that during his Passion, Jesus would give us His Mother, to form our humanity to be like Christ, so that one day we can also be like him in His Divinity. Indeed, in an earlier passage, Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of childhood memories in our deeper formation:

*20. In this age of artificial intelligence, we cannot forget that poetry and love are necessary to save our humanity. No algorithm will ever be able to capture, for example, the nostalgia that all of us feel, whatever our age, and wherever we live, when we recall how we first used a fork to seal the edges of the pies that we helped our mothers or grandmothers to make at home. It was a moment of culinary apprenticeship, somewhere between child-play and adulthood, when we first felt responsible for working and helping one another. Along with the fork, I could also mention thousands of other little things that are a precious part of everyone's life: a smile we elicited by telling a joke, a picture we sketched in the light of a window, the first game of soccer we played with a rag ball, the worms we collected in a shoebox, a flower we pressed in the pages of a book, our concern for a fledgling bird fallen from its nest, a wish we made in plucking a daisy. All these little things, ordinary in themselves yet extraordinary for us, can never be captured by algorithms. The fork, the joke, the window, the ball, the shoebox, the book, the bird, the flower: all of these live on as precious memories "kept" deep in our heart.*

For God to truly have a human heart like ours, it was necessary that he become a child. For us to be truly sons and daughters of God, it is necessary that we become like little children, in the school of Mary His Mother and St Joseph. Let us ask them to take each one of us by the hand this Christmas, and guide us past all the trappings and deceptions of the secular age, towards the simplicity of an individual and communal life that is genuinely rooted and grounded in Love, nourished by Contemplation.

## **Centenary Celebration of the Death of our Foundress: the Servant of God Mother Marie Adele Garnier**



On 15<sup>th</sup> June this year we were joined by our Bishop William Crean, Clergy and faithful friends, to celebrate the important occasion of the Centenary of our Foundress' Passover. Many gathered on the lawn in prayer and





thanksgiving as Mass was celebrated from the balcony. The weather was not everything we had hoped for, being extremely windy, but our Bishop encouraged us all in prayerful perseverance through the “storm”. Our good electrician friend Toddy Stafford surmounted the



challenges posed to the sound system which amplified the sound of the wind and was at times overcome by it; the Mater Dei Academy (Cork) sang their hymns and chants with all their hearts; the 9 concelebrating Clergy managed to keep their feet on the balcony as their vestments billowed in parachute like fashion and one of them kindly reassured us afterwards that they had still been able to pray!

At the end of Mass we processed to the beautiful memorial built by those of our friends who are skilled in construction and stone work, and decorated by the Cobh Women’s shed with individually hand crafted and glazed mosaic pieces. This part of the celebration was in a sheltered corner of the Bible Garden and hence we were out of the wind, and able to listen peacefully to the Mater Dei Academy choir sing a hymn to Our Lady against the backdrop, in the distance, of the Lourdes Grotto.



Bishop Crean took the opportunity at this time to greet and congratulate the members of the Women’s Shed who were present. It was important to us to end the ceremony with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, and Benediction was given from the Balcony. Our wonderful team of helpers had prepared a beautiful reception, and to our surprise the sun appeared towards the end of the ceremony, almost like a reward



for everyone's fortitude and perseverance. We all greatly enjoyed the recital given by the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Army Band from Collin's Barracks, who honoured us with their presence and played a very appropriately selected repertoire, culminating with an encore of "Oh when the Saints go marching in"! Of all the complements which could possibly be made about the day, the one we were least expecting was: "Congratulations on the weather"! However this is precisely what we were told more than once: we then learned that there had been torrential rain in almost every other part of the county and indeed the whole country that day, so people were just so grateful that they had stayed dry! Mother Foundress said that the Holy Mass was the Sun of her life – something for us all to think about! The homily given by Bishop Crean at the Mass on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2024 can be found on the Cloyne Diocesan Website.



The following day, Mother Prioress went to Tyburn Convent, London, to take part in the Centenary celebration there on the actual date of Mother's death: 17<sup>th</sup> June. The Solemn Mass was celebrated by the Papal Nuncio to Great Britain, Archbishop Miguel Maury Buendía. After Mass, there was a very joyful procession to the tomb of Mother Marie Adele which is situated beside the Crypt of the Martyrs, and the prayers for her canonisation were said. The crowd which attended this occasion was unexpectedly big considering that it was a Monday morning. The help and support of many lay friends was once again evident in the beautiful culinary preparations, exquisite decorations and enormous celebratory cake!





## General Chapter 2024

The Second great highlight of this year, coinciding appropriately with the centenary, was our General Chapter. Those of our Community who were Chapter Members left at the beginning of September and returned in late October. Needless to say, the gathering of 40 Sisters of our Congregation at the Mother House was uplifting in itself and we thank God for the grace of His Holy Spirit which brought about much renewal and vigour. Important decisions were peacefully made, and our Congregation stepped out into the next phase of its mission with a great sense of unity and purpose.

*We are also pleased to announce the re-election of Very Reverend Mother Marilla (Aw) as our Superior General! We thank her for her tireless and courageous service to the Church and our Congregation over the past eight years and continue to support her with our prayers for the years ahead.*



Our General Chapter pictured here in the Martyrs' Crypt with the postulator, Dr Alan Kershaw, and investigator, Msgr. Tasciotti, for the Cause for Beatification of Mother Foundress, and below: celebrating Solemn Vespers of St Edward the Confessor, Patron of Westminster.



## Fundraising and Developments

A major project in the second half of this year was the re-roofing of the Gate-Lodge on our property which needed to be done urgently. As many of you know an SOS email was sent out, since for the health and safety of our tenant we had to begin the work immediately. This is the time to say

**A VERY BIG THANK YOU**

to all who contributed so generously so that we quickly reached the required amount of €17,000.

While we were away at the General Chapter, a fundraising project began with the modest aspiration of purchasing a new coffee machine for our increasingly busy tearoom. The group "Caring is Sharing" which raises funds for Cobh charities came on board with an offer to hold one of their online auctions over a period of weeks. As the news spread, they became overwhelmed with donations of items to auction and a great deal of activity on the auction site itself. As they saw the support being given, these good ladies set about making sure of the maximum outcome, and undertook to continue selling un-auctioned items at a jumble sale as well as finding other online platforms to sell off furniture. They gave hours of their time at the Priory and on top of everything they also held a raffle! The final figure raised is still unknown but it has been a very great and touching outpouring of local support.

This year we have been blessed with the entrance of a Postulant and several aspirants are discerning our way of life, and we became aware that it would be good to remedy our lack of a Monastic Chapter Room. Our builder, Aidan Moran, has been able to do this in a very cost effective way by moving slightly a partition wall and creating the necessary space. We now feel more Monastic when we hold our Chapters! We are just looking for some choir stalls to finish it off, so if anyone knows of an old convent which has these to give or sell, let us know!

However, another problem remains, which is that of the damp encroaching on some rooms, which has put two rooms in the Novitiate out of service. Please join our prayers to St Joseph. If you feel moved to be part of what we do, please consider what help you may be able to give in terms of fundraising and donations. Every little counts!

We send each and every one of you our friends our warmest Christmas greetings, and prayers that the peace of Christ which he so earnestly wants to give you as His own gift, will flood your homes and your lives.

The Tyburn Nuns at St Benedict's Priory

If you would like to donate to St Benedict's Priory please send a cheque made out to **St Benedict's Priory** to the above address or go to

[www.benedictineadorerscobh.ie](http://www.benedictineadorerscobh.ie) (paypal) or make a bank transfer to: St Benedict's Priory, AIB Bank, Account Number 12884-131, Sort Code: 93-40-62 IBAN: IE61 AIBK 9340 6212 8841 31 BIC: AIBKIE2D