

## Mass of Thanksgiving

6 January 2012- Kilmallock

Thank you Canon Fitzmaurice for giving me this opportunity to address the Congregation on behalf of the Sisters of Charity of St. Paul the Apostle. I speak especially on behalf of all the Sisters here present, those who have passed through the schools as pupils and teachers and members of the community here and those who are laid to rest nearby and further afield.

While ending our formal involvement in a long standing, highly valued and fruitful ministry of Education here in Kilmallock is tinged with sadness, it is above all a celebration of THANKSGIVING – we express our deep gratitude to God for the many blessings bestowed on our Congregation and the people of Kilmallock and Ballingaddy and neighbouring parishes through the presence of the Sisters here – especially the blessing of so many Sisters who entered the Sisters of St. Paul from this area.

But let me assure you immediately that the Sisters will continue to live and minister in various ways here in Kilmallock and this area hopefully for many years to come – so if anybody had an eye on a nice bungalow on Glenfield Road there will be no FOR SALE sign going up in the near future!

Thank you Canon for arranging this inspiring Mass this morning, a very fitting tribute to the life and ministry of the Sisters here – and I believe there are refreshments in the Pastoral Centre afterwards which will provide an opportunity to renew old acquaintances and recall memories. Thank you too for the thoughtful foreword to this souvenir Mass booklet.

As I listen to the beautiful singing and organ this morning and look up at the choir, I'm reminded of the many Sisters who have mounted the stairs to the Choir loft for many years – what joy it must be for them to look down on you this morning. A special thank to past pupil Fr. Liam Enright for adding so much to the liturgy.

I take this opportunity to thank Canon Fitzmaurice, Fr. Cussen and all their predecessors, living and deceased, for their loyal support and appreciation of the Sisters right from the early days at Sheare's St. through to St. Joseph's Convent, now a flourishing Coláiste Iosaef, to the present day community at Glenfield Road.

We are especially grateful that you provided such a peaceful resting place for many of our deceased Sisters in this idyllic spot by the Church – an assurance that we will continue to be remembered in prayer by the people of Kilmallock for many years to come. A special thank you to Canon Fitzmaurice for facilitating this – Buiochas o chroi.

Thank you Fr. Mullins for your presence and kind words which we greatly appreciate. Just a glance at the Limerick Leader tells us what a busy man you are so mile buiochas.

Indeed our Congregation has enjoyed a very good relationship with successive Bishops of Limerick from the time of Bishop O'Dwyer at the beginning of the last century to Bishop Newman and Bishop Murray who lived in Kilmoyle in more recent times. Of course we had a very personal link with the much admired bishop and educationalist, Bishop Henry Murphy – known to Sr. Teresa and the Murphy clan as their beloved Uncle Har.

Our Foundress Genevieve Dupuis, always held that education extended far beyond the classroom door and encouraged the Sisters to become involved in the life of the parish by visiting the homes of the pupils and the sick and supporting parish activities. The sisters here in Kilmallock have continued to do just that. Through their involvement in the schools and parish, the Sisters got to know the people very well – perhaps you could draw a line from O'Rourke's Cross to the Cross of Black and complete the circle – then you would have a good idea of the territory covered by the Sisters – a very sincere thank you to all the families in this area for opening their homes and their hearts to the Sisters, for giving them the privilege of sharing their family joys and sorrows. Your hospitality and generosity were an enormous help in broadening the ministry of the Sisters.

Today we focus in a special way on the Primary School as Sr. Teresa retires as Principal thus ending our official involvement in Education in Kilmallock – although we continue to be members of the Board of Management of Coláiste Iosaef. Sr. Teresa is the last in a line of illustrious women to hold the post of Principal of Scoil Uí Eilí agus Uí Ruairc and more recently Scoil Mocheallóg. You can check out Aine Fitzgerald’s interesting article in this week’s Limerick Leader for more details. However I must pay a special tribute to Sr. Teresa on this occasion for leading Scoil Uí Eilí agus Uí Ruairc and more recently Scoil Mocheallóg in such an efficient, calm and thoughtful manner respecting staff and pupils and introducing innovation and change as needed. All I can say is well done good and faithful woman – I wish I could say come aside and rest awhile but in the words of a well known political slogan – “A lot done – more to do”! And there is always more to do – Sr. Teresa has willingly accepted a responsible role in Congregational Leadership which will be a new challenge for her but she may also have a little more time for her many ministries here in Kilmallock. Beatha and slainte chugat Teresa – go maire tú an céad.

The well known teacher and writer, Bryan Mc Mahon, wrote in his autobiography “The Master” that the teacher leaves his mark on three generations in a parish – now I wouldn’t like to contradict such a learned man as Bryan McMahan, but I believe that the influence of a teacher cannot be measured and that is the privilege and responsibility of the teacher. To you teachers, I say that you can never estimate how far reaching your influence is – what a wonderful privilege you have to help shape the minds of the young.

Genevieve Dupuis, our Foundress, had a very simple philosophy of education – “Do your best for the children” she exhorted us. It may be simple but it is very challenging. To all who have responded so admirably to this challenge here in Kilmallock – Boards of Management, Parents Associations, Principals, Staffs – teaching and non-teaching, parents and members of the local community – go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.

To the pupils of Scoil Mocheallóg and Coláiste Iosaef, I say be proud of your school, enjoy your school days and respond generously and courageously to the challenges set before you.

This is a difficult period in education in Ireland generally, here in Scoil Mocheallóg it is a period of change and transition. However, you can look forward with hope and optimism building on a firm foundation. May the plans for your new school, now on paper, soon become a reality.

Go mbeannaí na Mairtíorgh O hEalaí agus O Ruairc agus Naomh Iosaef foirne agus daltaí na scoileanna agus go dtuga Dia fomhar torthúil ar an obair go léir.

It is no coincidence that today's celebration is held on the Feast of the Epiphany – the day when Christ was manifested to the world. As Sisters of St. Paul our mission is “to seek to manifest God's love for all” and “to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ”. This is the Mission we entrust to you with great confidence knowing that the future of Catholic education is in safe hands.

Through the ministry of the Sisters of St. Paul here in Kilmallock for over 80 years and continuing on into the future,

If we have manifested God's love for all

If we have helped to nurture the faith

If the light of Christ has shone a little brighter

If hope has been kept alive

And if the minds of the young have been opened to the wonder of possibility –

Then with grateful hearts and in joyful spirit, we say buíochas le Dia, thanks be to God, Mission accomplished.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir agus go mbeannaí Dia sibh.