

THE GIFT OF LOVE

"Now Faith, Hope and Love remain - and the greatest of these is love."

So wrote St. Paul many years ago to his converts in the Greek city of Corinth. Pope Benedict took many people by surprise when he dedicated his first Encyclical to the virtue of love. They should not have been surprised of course - he was writing about the core and foundation of our whole Christian Religion. In his final farewell to his closest friends Jesus said: "Love one another as I have loved you. I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you, and your joy be complete."

St. Paul, who normally didn't suffer fools gladly, wrote with feeling and gentleness on the qualities of love. "Love is always patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful - it is not arrogant or rude - love endures all things."

Before we start measuring ourselves against these qualities of true love it may be worth stating bluntly - love is the most precious gift we can give or receive. It can produce emotions ranging from profound joy to deep sorrow. This is true for the smallest child as well as the strongest man.

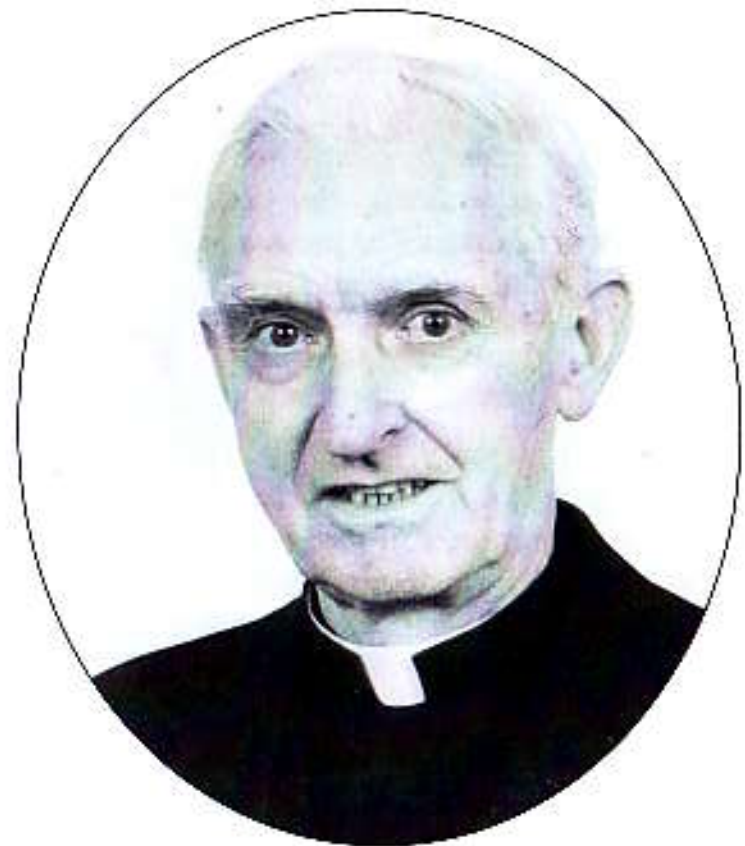
St. Francis was always gentle in his writings and prayers. His words are worth recalling: "O Divine Master, grant that I may seek not so much to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive."

So to get down to the realities of life. In our world time is always in short supply. So why not write down a list of people we should call upon in hospitals or retirement homes (and for their sake keep your visits short.)

Also friends recently bereaved. Write or phone, or email absent friends and relatives. Offer a lift to a neighbour who may need your help to get to Mass or shopping or visit a friend. (Of course it takes time and patience.) Pray for all the people in your life who love you and whom you love, especially those who may be finding life difficult.

In that way human love mirrors God's endless, unconditional, compassionate love. God love us all.

20 April 2008



Dean Denis O'Connor

Diamond Jubilee
1948 - 2008

Dean Denis O'Connor

Fifty glorious years of service to Jesus and His Church is something to be proud of, especially when those golden years are given by a holy and gentle priest as he strode like a colossus across this diocese of ours, Cork and Ross. We could easily be pardoned for thinking that service such as the Dean's would wind quietly down after the fifty-year period. To think and accept such would be tantamount to saying we never knew the man.

Ten years later the real gem appears - the diamond. Imagine it; it looks so eerie - sixty years. The gentle spiritual giant continues in the service of Jesus and his Church. He does not ask that his service be recognised or acknowledged. He simply says, "I have done no more than I have been asked to do."

Well done, Dean. We are all behind you, way behind you. I do not know what brings the next jewel, but whatever it is, I pray that it will be yours.

From all your parishioners across the diocese, best wishes for a lovely Diamond Jubilee. Ad Multos Annos.

Mrs. Kevin O'Callaghan, PP

A Profile

Our beloved Dean was born in Dromore, near Bantry. He attended the local national school where his father was Principal and went to Farranferris College for his secondary education. At Farranferris he achieved a love and knowledge of the Irish language, engendered by trips to Ballyferriter in Co. Kerry with his school. He was ordained in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, on 20th June, 1948. The day after his ordination, Fr. Denis said his First Mass in Maynooth in the presence of his parents and family members.



Fr. Denis' first appointment was in Youghal. After ministering in the Cloyne Diocese he was appointed as chaplain to the Reparation Convent in 1954 and from 1957 he served successively as curate in the South Parish, Carrigfada (near Rosscarbery) and Kinsale.

In 1970 he was appointed to Togher, which was gaining the status of Parish, and there he oversaw the building of the new church and parish residences. He was then appointed Administrator of the North Cathedral in 1977. Four years later Fr. Denis moved to Farranree, before coming to Dennehy's Cross in 1984.



In 1988 the late Bishop Murphy appointed him Dean of the Dioceses of Cork and Ross. In 1998 he retired as Parish Priest of Ballineaspaig but to the delight of the parish stayed on in Denny's Cross and continues to serve us and the Diocese in so many ways.

The Dean has endeared himself to parishioners wherever he served, and we, the parishioners of Ballineaspaig, hope he will have many more happy days in our midst



Dean O'Connor on his ordination day, 20th June, 1948 in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth.

The Dean writes *- a Jubilee Keepsake*

During the Dean's twenty-four years of service in the parish of Ballineaspaig he has written frequently for the Parish Bulletin. As an anniversary tribute the following pages reprint a small selection from those numerous articles, which have informed, moved and inspired his parishioners and others over the years.

In September 2000 the Dean's writing received national recognition, when he received the Irish Religious Press Association Award for the best editorial in a Parish Newsletter in 2000.

JUST A THOUGHT FOR NOVEMBER

Loneliness is a painful experience. November can be a lonely time - the dark evenings, nature dying, sadly remembering loved ones now no longer with us.

People who have experienced time in prison tell me of the awful loneliness of their life - the feeling of being in a shut-in world where nobody cares.

Of course we don't have to go to prison to experience loneliness. We can build walls between ourselves and others, and our immediate reaction might well be a sense of security. But the eventual outcome is starvation of the spirit - the pain of loneliness. We care about no one, and nobody cares about us. We are alone, and lonely.

But it doesn't have to be so. The fact is we all need a friend - a friend with whom we can share our deepest feelings, our joys and sorrows, our pain and fears, someone who understands, somebody who really cares - a real friend.

But remember - if you want to have a friend, you must be a friend. Think about it. Act upon it if you can. You will never be lonely.

14 November 1993

SPREADING LOVE, TRUST AND FRIENDSHIP

I want to tell you about one of the lovely things that happen in this Parish. A week or two before Easter I called casually to a house on the Wilton Road. The lady of the house had just been acting hostess to a group of her neighbours who live alone. Nothing elaborate - a cup of tea, a cake and a chat. But everybody went home feeling great.

This wasn't the first time I had stumbled on such a gathering in this Parish. I know that others have done likewise for their neighbours in similar circumstances, spreading love, and trust, and friendship. On other occasions I have found new arrivals in the Parish being invited in for a cup of coffee and an introduction to their immediate neighbours - a beautiful thought, and Christianity in practice.

"I was a stranger and you made me welcome. Lord when did we see you a stranger and make you welcome? As often as you did it to one of these, the least of mine, you did it to me."

Keep up the good work - and spread the Good News.

30 April 1995

AN ADULT ATTITUDE

Just a few weeks ago senior Garda authorities announced that they would shortly mount their annual Christmas blitz against drinking drivers. There was even a suggestion that the alcohol limit would be further reduced. This really sent the alarm bells ringing for some devoted souls.

This is as good a time as any to clarify our thoughts and position on drink. No doubt it has an honourable place in life when properly used. It's part of our desire to extend hospitality to friends and neighbours - and hospitality has deep roots in our Christian tradition. We need to laugh and cry, to celebrate and relax in each other's company. Some people are by nature inhibited and knotted up, and need a few drinks to unwind in company.

Now most people know that alcohol needs to be handled with care—and act accordingly. That's great. Unfortunately a minority adopt a sort of junior schoolboy attitude to the law - if I'm not caught it's alright. It's not you know. We need an ADULT ATTITUDE to drink! This is important rather than the law. We must open our eyes to the reality that drink can, and does, wreck lives - not just on the roads, but in homes as well. Christmas can be a nightmare for too many people, and leaves nothing but sad memories of fear and worry, covering up for the offender, and the real hardship of poverty at the end of it all. These people don't sing and laugh with their friends at Christmas.

These words are not written from a "kill-joy" attitude to life - but from a humble and sincere wish to encourage everybody to enjoy a lovely Christmas in 1997, and ensure that everyone else will too - and love you for it.

14 December 1997

THE FAMILY OF GOD

Many years ago I was locking up the church for the night when I noticed a note left on the altar before the tabernacle. I took it and read it. It contained a desperate plea to the Lord for a very special request. I knelt and prayed for that intention.

We all meet situations in life when only God can solve the problem which confronts us. Then our fervour really takes off. But, like other emotions, fervour quickly fades - like a star that shines brightly, but for one night only.

Some people regularly say, "I make my own way to God", "I say my prayers", "I don't feel the need to go to Mass", "Those who go are a lot of hypocrites anyhow". The reality is our fits of fervour on our lonely way to God do not yield enough strength for our day to day service of the Lord (except for saintly hermits). We need help. We need to kneel down with others who live the Faith. We need the feeling and support of community. It's just being human, that's the way we are made. Any of us who have been in Lourdes have experienced the support and examples of others in prayer.

The Lord knew this, so he left us his Church, and his own special prayer and sacrifice - the Mass. We desperately need his help to see what is true and good and beautiful - and follow that path. God knows we are all far from perfect and may stumble and fall along the pathway of life, but then forgiveness and repentance is very much part of our Christian inheritance and our relationship with the Lord.

We are all very much the poorer, those within the family of God, and those who have opted out, if we turn our backs on him and walk away, even for the holiday period.

Have a lovely break, come back safe and refreshed, and "Praise the Lord".

27 June 1999

FATHER, FORGIVE THEM...

Many years ago I was speaking to a young mother when her son aged four came in crying: "Mammy, Jimmy kicked me." His mother replied: "You go back and give Jimmy two kicks" - which he promptly did. Then two small boys were crying. The memory of the incident never left me. I know they were only children, and I'm sure the mother only intended to instil a sense of confidence and independence in her child. But it was the wrong way of doing it.

We are made in the image and likeness of God. Forgiveness of wrongs and hurt is at the heart of this likeness. Jesus himself stressed this so often, as in this Sunday's Gospel. "I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you,..." Hurts, abuses and injustices burrow deeply and actively in the memory. We cannot deny the reality of hurt, but we need not dwell on it. "Woundology" is in fashion in today's world. Retribution does no good to the one who deals it, or to the one who receives it. Poking at old sores drains our energy, and prevents healing.

One of the truly wonderful and Christ-like asides from the Northern troubles are examples of forgiveness for perpetrators of horribly cruel and dastardly crimes against innocent people.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa wrote: "The world is hungry for goodness and recognizes it when it sees it—and has an incredible response to the good. There's something in all of us that hungers after the good and the true, and when we glimpse it in people, we applaud them for it. We long to be a little like them."

There is nobody like you - and you can make a difference. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

18 February 2001

FATHER'S DAY

This is Father's Day. I know you will want to get a present which will symbolise all the love that you feel in your heart for him. To be ruthlessly honest, it can and sometimes does happen, that relationship between father and son (or daughter) isn't the beautiful reality that God intended it to be. Remember John McGahern's novel of the domineering father and the family who all left him one by one because they could not relate to him.

There is another story of a Jewish Rabbi and his son. The son chose his own way in life much to the disappointment of his father, who wanted him to follow in his own footsteps and become a Rabbi too. The rift widened with the years, and the only memories left were bitter ones. Eventually the father phones, and invites his son to come home. The son, mindful of many arguments and accusations, hesitates - "I can't," he says. The father's love shines through in his response: "Then come as far as you can, and I'll go the rest of the way." Life is too short and too precious to fritter it away. This is the day to go as far as you can.



This is true too in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. If we have strayed away from him, this is the day to turn back and "He will carry you on eagle's wings" to the home and security where you belong. You recall his own words - if one of the flock strays he leaves everything else aside, and goes in search of the one who was lost. And having found it returns home rejoicing. "I have found the one who was lost." Give our Father's love a chance to shine in your life and everybody will share the joy.

18 June 2002

FOUR WORDS OUR LORD NEVER SAID: "I TOLD YOU SO."

I attended a function last week. The chief speaker began by apologising to some youthful helpers for a remark he had made earlier reprimanding them for some indiscretion. The remark was "I told you so." This made me think. It made me feel guilty. I remembered my own admonition "Didn't I tell you!" In effect I had said three things that were unworthy of me. First that I had superior knowledge and wisdom. Secondly reminding others of their lack of knowledge and wisdom. Thirdly that I do not trust others - which I should have. To make me feel even more guilty I could recall that Jesus never said, "I told you so" even when he had very good reason for saying so.

(A) Jesus was called to a sick child, the daughter of Jairus. When he arrived apparently the child had died. But Jesus said, "She is not dead, but sleeping." The mourners mocked. Jesus took the child by the hand, raised her up, gave her to her parents - and what did he say? "Give her something to eat."

(B) Jesus was called to his friend Lazarus. When he came Lazarus was dead and buried for four days. When Jesus asked that the tomb be opened even the sister of Lazarus gasped in horror. Jesus restored him to life and health, and what did he say? "Take those bandages off him and let him go free."

(C) Perhaps the most noteworthy of all was Peter's triple denial - in spite of forewarning from Jesus. After his resurrection when Jesus returned to his apostles what did he say to Peter? "Feed my lambs, feed my sheep" - He never referred to Peter's cowardly denials. His only concern was to restore his lost self esteem.

As followers of Jesus we could well get rid of sentences like "I told you so", "Didn't I tell you that would happen." As my grandmother used to say, "Never push a man when he is going down hill." Our aim must always be to build up self-confidence and self-esteem, and be generous in trusting others—even if sometimes it's not earned.

2 November 2003

LENT 2005

Wednesday next is Ash Wednesday – the first day of Lent. The word Lent of course is another name for Spring. And Spring is a time for new life, fresh starts, cheerful optimism and brighter days ahead.

Lent is a good time to ask ourselves a simple but fundamental question: "What is life for?" Some of you will remember the name Dag Hammarskjöld, the one time dedicated and deeply Christian Secretary General of the United Nations. He said the longest journey is the journey inward to the centre of your being.

It is difficult to find time to answer the simple question – "What is life for?" The truth is it is easier to fret and worry about so many things like Martha in the Gospel, than face the answers this question might demand.

The Lord said, "I have come that you may have life and have it to the full." Happiness and fulfilment are worthy objectives for everybody. In the words of the late lamented Michael Waldron, "Happiness is an inside job" – a policeman's way of say that my own attitudes will largely decide whether my life is fulfilling, glad and peaceful, or sad and sorrowful. If I believe this – and further if I am convinced I can change – then I can walk bravely down the road of life. Furthermore, I must take responsibility for myself and what I do, and stop blaming other people

A deep personal peace is the promise and legacy of Jesus to us. Remember he lives in us. Lent might be a good time to get in closer touch with him through personal prayer – perhaps weekday Mass – visit to the church - rosary. And for my parting shot today I will quote what a saucy youngster said to me many years ago: "If you feel alright would you place notify your face."

Have a cheerful Lent.

8 February 2005

THE BEAUTY OF THE WORLD HAS MADE ME GLAD" - MISQUOTE FROM KEATS

"All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small.
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God has made them all."

The long, lazy, hazy days of summer are here at last. Hopefully, we will be able to spend more time in God's good fresh air during holidays and long balmy evenings. It's really a wonderful time to enjoy the beauty of God's creation and thank him for this. Of course we need to be tuned into the wonders of the world, or we miss out. Like the countryman who was walking down the street with his city cousin - he suddenly stopped. "I'm sure I heard the sound of a cricket," he said. "Don't be silly," the city man replied, there are no crickets in the city." He stopped again. "I know I heard it," he said, and sure enough he found a cricket on a window sill. The countryman's ear was tuned into the sound of the cricket; the other's was not.

The brilliant architect Frank Lloyd Wright wrote once, "The longer I live the more beautiful life becomes. The earth's beauty grows on me. If you ignore beauty, you'll soon find yourself without it, and your life will be impoverished."

Many people are so drawn to the physical attractiveness of human beauty that they miss out on the deeper and more lasting qualities in themselves and others. The media feed this outlook. They present models and super-stars as the ultimate aspiration for the young (and sometimes not so young).

A famed psychiatrist wrote on the topic - "They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when darkness sets in their true beauty is revealed only if there is light within."

God made us all with our own unique beauty and attractiveness - let us be thankful and appreciate who we are, and what we are. Moladh go deo le Dia.

12 June 2005

"YOU MUST LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR AS YOURSELF"

This straightforward and unambiguous command of Jesus is worthy of some reflection. Obviously he expects us to have a healthy self-confidence and appreciation of ourselves - not to be confused with selfishness. The Lord knew quite well that we tend to project our own feelings on to others.

This little story illustrates the point. A man was sitting on a bench at the entrance to the town where he lived when he was approached by a stranger. "What are the people in this town like?" he asked. "What were they like in the town you left?" was the response. "They were a mean, selfish lot - they wouldn't lift a finger to help you, to be honest, I was glad to get out of the place," said the traveller. "I'm afraid you'll find them much the same here," said my friend. The following day another man came along and asked the same question of my friend. Again he replied by asking the same question, "What kind were they in the town you left?"

"Oh, they were the nicest people you could find anywhere, kind and understanding, generous and helpful, to be honest, it broke my heart when I had to leave." My friend replied, "I think you will find them much the same in this town."

My friend gave two absolutely contradictory replies, yet he told no lie. In fact he was right - the point of the story is that very often we see other people, not as they are, but as we are. We can't offer love and warmth to others if our own hearts are cold and empty. We can only love with the quality of love that is in us.

Of course it's easy to love certain people because they are naturally loveable, but not so easy to love others. But this is the real test of love. Where there is not love, sow love, and you will reap love. Where there is no love, put love and you will find love.

Now that's a challenge worth pondering on a cold November morning.



13 November 2006

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made."
(Robert Browning)

Our host was celebrating his 90th birthday – his wife too was celebrating – but a mere 80th. It was a night to remember, with great joie de vivre, and celebration. Our host welcomed us all, making special mention of his older sister, who hopped on the train at Dunmanway 80 years before, and settled in Dublin thereafter. She arrived almost as sprightly after her trip from Dublin on Friday night.

As you know, the Yanks are great for surveys of all kinds. Dr. Heather Keyser from the University of Michigan did a survey of different age groups to determine their attitudes to aging. Apparently how we react to growing older is a combination of health and perspective. A positive outlook is even more important than declining health – people are remarkable in their ability to adapt to circumstances.

The survey further shows that spiritual beliefs (especially Church going) are good for you. They positively affect physical and mental health, with beneficial effects ranging from prevention of cardiovascular disease and depression to increasing longevity. (Think of that !!)

Of course there is no point in trying to fool ourselves that life at 80 is as trouble free as at 30. "For everything there is a season, a time for every matter under heaven. A time to weep, and a time to laugh – a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

But one thing for sure I've learned from my birthday friend – in older years we should give ourselves time for good memories, less time for nostalgia – pretending that the past was any better than the present.

Thank God for the good we have done - and not worry about what we haven't done. And never, ever, cut ourselves off from family and friends, and neighbours. "And the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds."