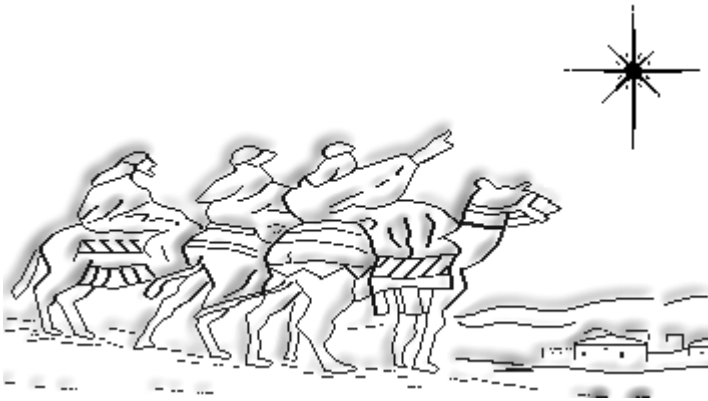


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Dear Friends

Advent 2021 has arrived and we are looking forward to Christmas and reflecting on the year past. What have we been doing and what has been keeping us busy, you may be wondering? Life we know has been very difficult for everyone this year. Covid has been uppermost in most people's minds as we all struggle to live as normal a life as we can. While we are always enclosed and life hasn't changed too much for us, we are acutely aware of the pain and suffering it has imposed on so many people. Several times daily we make intercession in our communal prayer for all affected by covid in one way or another. While working from home has been a relief to some it has been a big burden on others. Death has taken its toll on so many, the pain of not being with loved ones at the end and then the restrictions around funerals. Financial worries, restrictions on social life, access to vaccines and all manner of things have also taken their toll. We continue to hear of people we know and don't know having Covid. We are praying continuously for an end to the virus and for the recovery of people who have contracted it.

As we celebrated the liturgy during the year and met the saints who cared for people during plagues in the past, we were more alert to their stories and hearing about those plagues and how long they lasted. Covid will certainly go down in history as having plagued humankind. Technology has not figured large in our experience of life up to this but since the arrival of Covid Zoom and webcam have become part of our daily language.

Advent 2020 dawned and we had a community celebration around the advent wreath and lit the first candle reminding us of the coming light of Jesus on Christmas Eve. We uploaded a series of videos for Advent, one for each week and one for Christmas on our website. This we continued throughout the year for Lent, Easter, Mt. Carmel day and the feast of St Teresa. These are still on the website in case you have missed them. New ones are being uploaded this Advent.

We celebrated our Christmas Mass without our usual congregation, praying for each one by name thinking that this year would be different! Sadly, with the rise in numbers recently and the new variant we will not open this Christmas either. Be assured that you will each be remembered as if there. Lockdown was announced very quickly as soon as Christmas day was over and our last Mass in our Chapel was on St Stephen's day until May. From then on, we had Mass daily on webcam picking and choosing where we would go to Mass each day! We visited parishes all over Ireland and we were truly enriched. We prayed for all the Priests who worked so hard to keep their parishes together and minister to their flocks. They went to great lengths to keep their Churches open and safe and to be present for the needs of their parishioners. So many parishes could not have functioned without their dedicated team of volunteers. God bless one and all.

We began the New Year with a prayer reflection on the Eve in thanksgiving for all God's blessings and goodness during the year and asking His continued blessing and protection for 2021. Shortly after Christmas storm Bella blew up one night as we all slept and our reindeer who were resting in their shelter out front must have thought they were being transported to Lapland as it blew them about shelter and all! Luckily there were no cars parked!

On 2nd February, day of prayer for consecrated persons, we had a prayer reflection around the gospel of St Luke and Our Lord's presentation in the temple and the meeting of Simeon with Mary and Joseph.

We all had a trip out in February as we went to Clonskeagh hospital for our Covid vaccine, and again in March for our second shot!!! We thanked God for all who worked so hard to find and provide a vaccine and those who were working to administer it. The frontline workers are of course in our thoughts and prayers constantly.

On 17th March "The Cry of the Deer" filled the beautifully decorated Chapel of St Patrick's College Maynooth as soloist and Seminarians sang their hearts out. Dr John O'Keefe conducted and they sang Ronan McDonagh's compositions for Mass texts and hymns. Fr Surliss led us in the Liturgy and gave a wonderfully inspiring homily on St Patrick. All in all we had a feast of prayer, praise, song and music to honour our Patron saint. For the Easter ceremonies we tuned in to R.T.E. for Holy Thursday, Knock on Good Friday and to Mullingar Cathedral for the Vigil and Easter Sunday Mass. We regularly tuned in to the Redemptorist Community in Clonard and joined Br Ryan as he celebrated the stages to Priestly Ordination.

We missed not being able to be physically present at these liturgies and it certainly made us a bit more creative. We had a wonderful paraliturgical celebration around the washing of the feet on Holy Thursday and we celebrated other events likewise, our last one being a prayer service in the cemetery to pray for all our beloved dead in November.

In 2020 Pope Francis announced that 2021 would be dedicated to St Joseph. He wrote a letter on St Joseph which we shared on our website.

On 19th March we were happy to join Fr Míccéal O'Neill O. Carm in Rome for his reflection on St Joseph based on the joint letter which he and our own Superior General Fr Saverio Cannistrá had written on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the proclamation of St Joseph as Patron of the Universal Church.

We tuned into Knock later for the evening Eucharist. Pope Francis joined the celebration via the internet and delivered his message. He has declared that Knock has been elevated to an International Sanctuary of Special Eucharistic and Marian Devotion. We quote from his address;

"My dear brothers and sisters present at Knock, and all of you who may be watching from afar, the elevation of the National Sanctuary of Our Lady of Knock to an International Sanctuary of Special Eucharistic and Marian Devotion is a great responsibility. You accept to always have your arms open as a sign of welcome to every pilgrim who may arrive from any part of the world, asking nothing in return but only recognizing him as a brother or sister who desires to share the same experience of fraternal prayer. May this welcome be joined with charity and become an effective witness to a heart which is open to receiving the Word of God and the grace of the Holy Spirit which gives us strength. May the Eucharistic mystery which unites us in communion with the Risen Lord and with one another always be the rock on which to live out faithfully our vocation to be "missionary disciples", like the Virgin Mary who made herself a pilgrim of the Gospel of her Son. May she protect us and console us with her merciful countenance. I greet you all as I implore God's blessing upon you and I ask you to pray for me."

We were reminded of the people who witnessed the apparition and stood and knelt there in the rain for two hours praying and honouring Our Lady. We think of the hardships these and people before them went through to practice their faith. They faced death if caught attending Mass and yet they remained loyal and faithful to the Mass and the Rosary. The covid crises has been an opportunity for creativity around liturgy and prayer with many people turning to the web for spiritual nourishment. Many prayer services, liturgies, scripture schools etc. have been of great benefit to many many, people for which we are grateful.

The good weather during the summer meant that we had al fresco meals while the sun shone and Sr Teresita who is from Peru said it was the first summer she experienced since coming to Ireland four years ago.

Sr Regina continues her knitting for Community Connect and we all offer our sympathy when she has to rip!

We vacated our Chapel one afternoon and Kerrie and friends recorded some beautiful musical reflections, one for Our lady and one for St John of the Cross. The links to these are available on our website.

All our courses were on zoom this year. Our ongoing formation meeting was cancelled last year due to covid restrictions and Jessie Rogers, Dean of the Faculty of Theology, Maynooth, kindly agreed to give it via zoom this year. The title of the course was - In the spirit of Elijah - the Carmelite nun and her prophetic vocation.

At the moment we are following the Advent Tarsus Scripture course which all can join by linking in to Tarsus.ie The leaders/formators course was also held on zoom as were the meetings of the younger sisters in Carmel. Our Association General Assembly was held in Ballyvaloo Retreat Centre after a number of postponements. We were blessed to be able to have them and we have all become more at home with technology as a result!

Our animals keep us entertained. Súile being a collie cross has boundless energy and is always waiting to have a ball thrown or to go chasing squirrels. Ono is more sedate, having a heart condition and paces himself more wisely. Our cats Tuppence and Abby know the routine and when the sisters will be going walking, and are ever ready to accompany those who will have them. Our neighbours must know when ever our donkeys feel neglected, as Glen's bray can be heard far and wide. Poor Seolta does try but only a squeak comes out. He has other ways of getting attention! At the moment we have Patch, a retired cow who is a big pet and her daughter Spot. They keep the fields in order.

George, our resident buzzard has got used to us and is not nervous any more as we approach and remains on his perch at his duty. He keeps the stream clean! Even the jays have got quite cheeky and come very close, giving out to us that we are trespassing on their territory! The community of gold crests has grown quite considerably and they are quite noisy as they all chatter together. Harry and Henrietta, the herons from U.C.D visit regularly and Buí the white egret calls occasionally.

COP 26 has come and gone and we must not let it be forgotten. We hope and pray that all the good it achieved will make a difference in people's lives and we will all learn from it and make changes in our lifestyles. Our gardener has long had ecology in mind and leaves patches of wild flowers all over the lawn as he cuts. It is wonderful to see so many bees from the neighbourhood visiting the different plants and shrubs in the garden according to the season.

We take this opportunity to thank all our friends for their kindness and support over the year, you are always in our prayers. We wish you a very blessed Christmas and 2022.

Don't forget to look for updates on our website www.roebuckcarmel.com