

CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER



Dear Friends

As we approached Advent last year there was great uncertainty about whether we would be in lockdown for Christmas. The Omicron variant of Covid 19 was moving through Ireland and how serious it would get was still a big question for the authorities. It made us reflect on how uncertain life for the Holy Family had been as Joseph saddled the donkey and prepared to travel with Mary to Bethlehem. We prayed for all the people in our world today who like the Holy Family have to leave their homes and nations and seek shelter in foreign lands. The pain and suffering so many are enduring all over the world. Our crib which is a frame covered in sacking was a stark reminder of all those who are forced to live in makeshift tents due to war and oppression. We were daily reminded of the people of Afghanistan so recently caught up in political unrest and innocently having to suffer.

Many young people lost their lives on our roads over Christmas and many families were left grieving. There was so much to pray for and implore God's healing grace for all who were suffering. Christmas day dawned and we watched the rain pour down incessantly. The Sisters were lamenting that lots of families go for walks on Christmas day and they wouldn't have a pleasant walk today. It was only the next day when we turned on the radio for the news that we realised some families didn't even get to have Christmas dinner they were so busy trying to prevent their homes from flooding. Wexford seemed to have got the brunt of the rain and rivers overflowed their banks, washed away bridges and flooded homes. We certainly had plenty to pray for. Little did we know that Russia was to invade Ukraine and cause such hardship and suffering. As the people of Ukraine were forced to leave their homes and flee their country, we all had to think about how we could help both those people remaining and those coming to Ireland. The people continue to leave their homeland, for some there is nothing left and the countries welcoming them are struggling to find accommodation for them particularly as winter is setting in. As we write, the plight of asylum seekers mostly men coming to our country is being highlighted as the accommodation for them is also scarce. The angels came at Christmas to sing peace on earth and how we long for it still.

Life in the Monastery carried on as usual. Sr's Maria, Teresita and Teresa have been doing a course which has modules in January and September. It had to go online – Zoom - for Covid and they took it up again in January.

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Abby



Tuppence

The entire community did the course from the Carmelite Priory Oxford entitled "Letting Teresa Speak" in January/February. Sr Jo Robson of Ware Carmel was presenter and it was given online over six Saturday afternoons. We then signed up for Peter Tyler's course on St. Edith Stein (Sr Teresa Benedicta of the Cross) in March. The course was to celebrate the centenary of her baptism in the Catholic Church on 1st January 1922. Both courses were excellent and we got lots to reflect and pray about from them both.

We were blessed to have Fr. Jim Noonan for our annual retreat in June. Our retreats for the past two years have been on Zoom so we really appreciated that Fr Jim came in person and we had such a prayerful retreat. Our three Sisters took to Zoom in September for their course and sadly Sr Margaret from Darlington Carmel had to retire from the course due to her treatment for cancer. One of our youngest members. She will be held in our prayers.

In October, two Sisters attended Fr Matt Blake's course on Edith Stein in Ballyvaloo while the rest of the Community attended via Zoom. Fr Matt knows Edith so well and really introduced us to the person of Edith. We were all encouraged to take out the books again and to find for ourselves the real Edith.

We are looking forward to joining the Avila Community on the Mondays of Advent for their reflections on the Advent prophets.

We celebrated the fourth centenary of the canonisation of St Teresa on 12th March, St Patrick's day on 17th St Joseph on 19th and united with Pope Francis as he consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. We vowed this year that we would celebrate the Easter ceremonies here in our own Chapel as we had to go online for the previous two years. Man proposes and God disposes, or as someone said if you want to make God laugh tell him your plans. On 28th the birthday of St Teresa the first of us tested positive for covid. All but the two Tipperary sisters got it. They were kept on their feet having to do everything while the rest were in quarantine. Trays were prepared and lined up on the kitchen table and as each meal was prepared it was dispatched by the kitchen sister to the runner who delivered it to the various rooms via windows and back doors! Strict isolation and all trays sanitised before returning to the kitchen for the next meal. There were breaks in communication at times and the sisters had to be inventive in getting attention. One sister living across the cloister from the kitchen had to put a wind instrument out the window and blow hard to attract attention or die of thirst!! While we were all out of quarantine by Easter none of us had the physical energy to make the necessary preparations for the ceremonies and we joined RTE and the Traveller Community for the Liturgy of Holy Thursday and Carlow Cathedral on Good Friday. We joined Mullingar Cathedral for the Vigil which as usual was a wonderful celebration. There was an adult Baptism and two adult Confirmations.

In the weeks before Christmas Jack our Jay was very vociferous which was unusual as they are usually very shy birds. Jill seemed to have left him and anytime we went outdoors he followed us back and forth giving out letting us know we were trespassing on his territory. We thought he was on his own and not liking it one bit. One morning during Christmas when we pulled back the curtains what a surprise awaited us. Jack was very serene and calm on the ornamental tree with the bird feeder and with him were Jill and their family Gillian and Jacob. We don't know if Jill had gone to find her straying brood but they were certainly all home for Christmas!



Súile



“Sadly, we lost our gentle Ono in July.”



Glen & Seolta

“Our Sisters in Tallow celebrated the silver jubilee of the opening of their new monastery and invited us to join them in the celebration.”

George our buzzard has got quite used to us now and is regularly seen quite close to the house. He “keeps” the stream and surrounding acres and we are very happy to have him. The poor squirrels have a hard time of it, between George, Abby and Tuppence the cats and Súile the dog, not to mention the Sister that feeds the birds! Still, they persevere and are as cheeky as ever.

Sadly, we lost our gentle Ono in July. Last year when vet Tom came to give the annual vaccinations and health checks, he found that Ono had developed quite a significant heart murmur. Treatment began immediately and there were scans and ultra sounds to determine the extent of his illness. We thought at first he wouldn’t see Christmas. Then we thought he mightn’t make Easter Tom was extremely attentive, regularly texting to ask about Ono’s progress if he hadn’t heard from us for a while. While Ono was quite ill, he was able to live the life he wanted to. He still continued to escape to U.C.D for his wander in the woods and help Gerry in the garden. Tom made sure he didn’t suffer from his condition as gradually it worsened until he just wore out. Tom took him into intensive care on a Sunday thinking that a different medication might work but it was not to be. Ono was such a gentle dog, friendly with everyone, and he is missed by all.

Our donkeys keep us busy, Seolta has learned that if you put your head to it and push long enough and hard enough it will eventually give – and so we are constantly repairing fences!! Seolta will happily crawl out under the wire while Glen will not pass as much as a piece of string so gets left behind, gets stressed and starts calling out for rescue. He does not like to be separated from his best friend. An electric fence was deemed necessary along our stream as the cattle were walking in it on occasion and contaminating it. Our heron friends Henry and Henrietta have been put off a bit by the electric fence. With a wing span of up to two metres a quick getaway can be awkward! Buí the white egret is happy to land on the bank and duck under the wire and into the water.

Bl Titus Brandsma was canonised in Rome on 15th May, a wonderful Carmelite who died in the concentration camp of Dachau on 26th July, 1942. St Edith died the same year on 9th August in Auschwitz.

Our Sisters in Kilmacud invited Fr Simon Nolan to give a lecture on St Titus and invited us to join them. We had a lovely evening and some of the Sisters returned the visit. After covid it was great to meet again as we missed our usual annual ongoing formation gatherings!

Our Sisters in Tallow celebrated the silver jubilee of the opening of their new monastery and invited us to join them in the celebration. Two of our Sisters travelled for the occasion. They had a little stop over on the way home and it was late when they arrived. They had a key to get in if they happened to be late. Súile recognised the sound of the car and knew she didn’t need to raise the alarm and had a great welcome for the latecomers. All went well till they tried to come down the corridor for bed and discovered that an inner door was locked. A ladder was found and the kitchen window in the cloister was unlocked so a nimble nun hopped in the window and all was well. The rest of the Community slept in peace!

The Sisters in Knock Carmel asked Dr Jessie Rogers to give a talk on synodality via Zoom. The Sisters invited the other Carmels to join for the presentation and we were delighted to do so. Dr Jessie is best known for her Tarsus lectures on the Scriptures and she is equally good on synodality.

We have just been to Malahide Carmel to celebrate Sr Joseph's platinum jubilee and what a great day for her. May she have many more days to celebrate.

As we approach this Advent there is great suffering in the world. The cost of living is becoming increasingly difficult for so many, housing is a real problem and the war still rages in Ukraine causing untold suffering. We cannot forget that there is war and oppression in many other countries also. The angels sang of peace on earth. We pray that this Advent we will be more aware of the Lord living in our hearts bringing peace within so we can go out and bring peace wherever we go.

We wish you a blessed Advent and Christmas and be assured of our continual prayers for you and yours.

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