

Fr Fintan Crotty ss.cc. – Funeral Mass Homily.

In September of 1988, the same year this church was consecrated, I came as a newly ordained priest to live and minister with Fintan here in Sruleen. It was no accident, but a deliberate decision on the part of Eamon the Provincial at the time and his council, to pair me with Fintan as had so many before and after me. Fintan was so easy to live and work with, and we all benefitted from his wisdom, experience and balanced approach to life and ministry.

In the Autumn of that year we had cause to attend a meeting in Cootehill, so after Mass we headed off and was gone all day, returning to the bungalow in late evening. We had an old-fashioned telephone answering machine and when anyone phoned and we weren't there, they would hear: *'Hello, this is the Sacred Hearts Community, we are sorry we cannot take your call right now, but if you leave your name and number we will get back to you as soon as we can!'* When we went into the office after getting back, there were sixteen missed calls and one message, presumably from the person who had made all those calls.



I was shocked when I played back the message, for the exasperated person who had been trying to get us all day let rip and said: *"to hell with the Sacred Hearts Community, you're never there when I call!"* I'm sorry, I tell a lie, he didn't say to hell with us, he used the 'F' word against us. Well, as a young, zealous and ardent priest, I was full of indignation and outrage that such a message could be left on above all things, a presbytery answering machine! I was going to find out who it was and reprimand him and maybe report him to the guards for his profanity. Fintan of course, took a very different approach, laughing his head off and asking me to replay the message again and again, not to find out who it was, but to continue to belly laugh for all he was worth. This was one of many valuable lessons I learnt in my two very happy years with Fintan.

One of the roles Fintan himself had as a young priest was that of *Vocations Director*. Writing to a young man in July 1964 who was trying to decide about joining us, Fintan wrote him a letter which is quite revealing about how Fintan saw a vocation as a gift and his own faith, enthusiasm and joy is very evident. In it he wrote the following:

"A vocation to the priesthood is a wonderful blessing from God, and if young people only realized the happiness to be found in it, we would have many more vocations. Sometimes we feel we are giving up things, but in reality we are chiefly on the receiving end. We can also do a great amount of good for others. From what I hear about you, you seem to have all the necessary qualifications, so I pray that God will give you the strength to do what is right. Hoping to see you soon. May God bless you. Yours sincerely, Fr Fintan"

That young man on the receiving end of that very encouraging and positive letter is here today, concelebrating this Funeral Mass for a Brother who had a big influence on his life and vocation: Fr Peadar Cronin, who proclaimed the Gospel for us, this year along with Bishop Pat Lynch who he was ordained with, will be celebrating 49 years of priesthood. So what did these young men in the 1960's and many people since, see in Fintan?

They saw the Andrew of today's Gospel, who was not afraid to share with others the joy he found in Christ.

They saw one who took his vocation seriously but who didn't take himself too seriously.

They saw and experienced someone who cared about them and their families, who he kept in touch with and visited during their six years of studies in the States.

They saw one who had a different image of God to what was current at the time: a broad, wide deep, compassionate, loving, merciful, kind and **joyful** Father; and my oh my, didn't Fintan himself embody and live such characteristics.

Fintan lived and ministered as another great Brother of ours did on Molokai, for Damien's *modus operandi* was encapsulated in what he said in one of **his** letters home to **his** family:

"If they can come to love their priest, then surely they will come to love Our Lord."

And Fintan had a great love for his people, a love that was returned a hundredfold.

He was interested not in buildings but in people
Not in laws but in love,
Not in Ego but in others
Not in rules but in revelations
Not in speaking down to people but in building them up
Not in judgments but in acceptance
Not in ultimatums but invitations
Not in excluding but in inclusion
Not in condemnations but in encouragement
Not in the letter but in the spirit.

Long before the Church was calling for lay involvement, Fintan was without any fuss and fanfare, building up and encouraging communities that would share, collaborate and utilize the diverse gifts and talents present in the Holy People of God. And Fintan did all this with great humility, never seeking the limelight nor any accolades for himself, just happy and content that the kingdom, like the little mustard seed, was growing, wherever he was called to serve. Listen now to part of a homily Fintan wrote for the 'Sunday-Homily' section of our website just a week or two before he died; and again its very revealing of the kind of minister he was, and the kind of image of Church he encouraged:

"The thrill of finding Jesus, as the two disciples did, is still there. It began in the streets of Bethany, but Jesus still lives and walks on our streets. We simply ask him where he lives. His reply "I live in you, I live in your neighbour. I live in the Eucharist and in the Scriptures. I can be found in the beauty of the world all around you. The treasure of great price is all around us. Like Andrew let us find him and share him with joy and gratitude."

Like the Andrew of today's Gospel, Fintan brought us to Christ through his faith and trust in the Lord.

Fintan saw and related to others as family. There was his natural family of birth who he loved and cherished and kept in contact with. He had a particular love and gratitude to his parents Anastasia and Martin, who gave him and his siblings such a firm and loving foundation, that the rest of their lives could be built on.

The other cherished family in his life was of course the family of the Sacred Hearts: Sisters, Brothers and Secular Branch members. It seemed that the Congregation was a natural fit for Fintan to move from one close and loving family to another. It was like heart speaking to heart. And like all hearts and all families there was a similar brokenness that also spoke to him.

He saw and experienced in the order, similar loving relationships he had grown up with, that all led back to the source of all love in the heart of our Father. And this gratitude for this happy coincidence or God-incidence of hearts was clearly evident in Fintan's loyalty, fidelity and dedication to his vocation, lived out so convincingly over so many years with us. Many of the messages of condolences we received mention Fintan as a **true** son and Brother of the Sacred Hearts.

And the third family we have to mention is the family of his many and countless friends, so many of you joining us in prayer today and for that we are so grateful. Once you became a friend of Fintan, it was a friendship for life. We all marvel at how he got the time to continue right to the end, to keep in touch with so many. To continue to show he was still with and for you, to continue to be interested in you in your successes and failures, in your struggles and achievements and to continue to be able to encourage and support you. And these friendships, spanned and bridged across many a divide:

Spanning the young and the old
Ireland and England
Male and Female
Sister and Brothers
conservatives and liberals
between Rich and poor
Serious souls and jokers
religious and atheists
Rugby and Hurling
Golf and tiddlywinks
Gaelic football and Soccer

And if Oxford United ever win the title, we'll immediately begin the process for Fintan's canonization, for we'll claim it as his first miracle!

Along with Fintan's faith and his family there's another word beginning with 'F' that has always been associated with him and that is 'fun.' There's a lovely painting of Our Lord that crops up now again, painted by that ubiquitous artist, 'anonymous!' Anyway, its called the '*Laughing Jesus*,' and it has Jesus with head tilted slightly backwards having a good hearty laugh. I'm not sure if Fintan had a copy of this in his room, but the image painted was certainly one that Fintan believed in, for he reflected a joyfulness that ran deep and ran constant. Again as a friend said in a message: 'you just couldn't be sad around Fintan.' He had a quick wit, and was able to see the funny and absurd side of life,

and many a tense and awkward situation was diffused by Fintan's humour. He had a mine of stories, anecdotes and jokes, and who cared if you'd heard some of them before, as they were for the most part very funny.

But there's another 'F' word that links and is a common denominator to the three 'F's' of Fintan's faith, family and sense of fun, and that is of course his faithfulness. Faithfulness to his vocation, to the sacraments especially the Mass, to his ministry, to his religious Congregation, to his friends and to the embodiment of a joyful image of God

And because Fintan stayed mostly the same as the years went by, we thought we would have him forever. We had plans for his retirement, but God had even bigger and better plans. And we, and Fintan knew that he never would nor could retire completely, for how can you '*retire*' from a vocation that was always lived so fully and so faithfully.

Towards the end, Fintan came to realize that the Lord who he had served so faithfully all his life, was calling him to a new and more abundant life. He had like Paul of the first reading: fought the good fight, he had poured himself out, he had finished the race and above all he had kept the faith.

There was little preparation needed, for Fintan was going to pass from one life to another in the presence of the same Lord, who he had served so well as a priest and religious for so long. And weren't we Blessed, that Fr Fergal was with Fintan before he died, to reassure him we were all with in prayer, and to anoint him with the oil of healing as he himself had anointed so many, with much love and tenderness.

And we might think it a strange, sad irony that this '*people person*,' this '*people priest*' was alone when the time came on the 6th January to cross from one side to the other. But I know for certain, that Fintan was not alone, for there were many there to link him across the threshold. Among them his parents Anastasia and Martin, his Sister Sr Angela and his Brothers Patrick and Brendan. Also in the welcoming party were the Sisters, Brothers and Secular Branch members of the Congregation, among them Fr Andy and Bro. Harry who both died last year. And around them and among them were the countless friends and parishioners who Fintan had assisted in their return with his prayers and blessings and anointing: there to repay the compliment.

You know, reflecting on the many gifts and talents that Fintan had and the many lives he touched, we could be forgiven for feeling inadequate in the face of such a legacy. A record and a legacy we could never come close to. But I can hear Fintan say: "it's not about imitating me, but about **you**, using your own unique and different gifts and talents to best of **your** ability." It's no coincidence that Fintan's return to his Lord and Saviour, was on the Feast of the Epiphany, that celebrates among other things, the joyful offering of the gift of our lives to the Christ-Child.

St Francis of Assisi as he lay dying, called around him his brother friars, and his last words to them were in the form of a blessing, and a challenge. He said that he had discovered through the Lord, what was **his** to do, and he prayed that they too would discover what was **there's** to do.

Fintan likewise, in his life and in his death is saying to us: “find out what you are to do in the Lord, but in so doing, offer joyfully the gift of yourself to others,” and what better way to honour him and his legacy?

And so we can just imagine can't we, as Fintan is being ably assisted across the threshold by so many who he himself had supported and helped, we can hear him say to them: “did you hear the one about Paddy the Irishman, Paddy the Englishman and Paddy the Scotsman?” and they will say back to Fintan, “they'll be plenty of time for those jokes and stories after we sit down together, and enjoy the sumptuous banquet the Lord has prepared for us. And this Eucharist, and indeed every Eucharist, is a foretaste, reminder and invitation to the heavenly banquet that is eternally celebrated in heaven.



‘Did you hear the one about the priest like no other who gave himself to others with such love, and humility and joy?’ Of course you did, but more; for we were all fortunate enough to know him and call him a Brother and a friend. So Fintan, dear Brother and friend, may you continue to enjoy the company of those you loved and assisted, and may they continue to enjoy your love and company, until we all one day, are reunited in the Father’s Love. In the name of the same Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Fr Michael Ruddy ss.cc.