

The Churches of St John & St Patrick

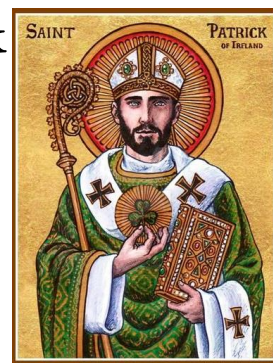
servicing the Parish of St William

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15th April 2020

Dear Parishioners,

They say saints are very rare. But are they? Did I ever tell you about the time I met two saints in one day? I visited Rome several times during the Pontificate of St John Paul II with a priest friend of mine, Fr Walsh. The Holy Father used to celebrate Mass in his chapel in the Vatican at 6.30am each morning and sometimes priests visiting Rome were allowed to concelebrate with him. So every year we wrote our letter pleading our case but got nowhere.

And then we went again in January 1992. One afternoon, having delivered our usual letter a day or two earlier, we returned to our hotel and the man at the desk said, 'There's a message here from the Vatican.' This time it said, 'Yes'!

We duly presented ourselves at the Bronze Door of St Peter's the next morning and were led to a library, where we vested together with about twenty other priests. We took our seats in the chapel and a moment or two later the Pope entered. He could see that we were in awe of him and so he reminded us, 'Praised be Jesus Christ!'

'Saints are just ordinary people.' they say and in one sense they're right. We're all called to be saints. But there was something special about John Paul II. Praying next to him was like sitting next to a generator. You could feel the power. How apt the words of the Psalm were that day which said, 'May your hand be on the man you have chosen, the man you have given your strength.'

I couldn't help noticing the kneeler the Pope used. It looked as though it were made of bronze and the top of it, though it was cushioned, lifted. During the time of Thanksgiving after Holy Communion he opened it up and took out a few pieces of paper and read them. They were prayer requests from around the world and in the silence he brought them to the Lord.

Back in the library after Mass we had the immense privilege of meeting the Holy Father and also received from him a Rosary, which I subsequently gave to my Mum. She still has it. I suppose, since it was given by a saint, it's a relic.

As you can imagine, Fr Walsh and I returned to the hotel on cloud nine. I'd just met one of my heroes. Could things get any better? Well, after lunch we decided to walk back to St Peter's to make a pilgrimage in thanksgiving for the blessings of that morning. Strolling along the Via Della Conciliazione which leads to the Basilica, I happened to look across to the other side of the road. A priest was walking along. He was carrying a briefcase, a black gabardine mac over his cassock, and wearing a black beret. 'Cardinal Ratzinger!' I shouted in Fr Walsh's ear. No two people ever crossed a road so quickly.

He welcomed us warmly and, despite being a very busy man, spent some time chatting to us about our parishes and the diocese. I took the opportunity to thank him for his books, which had been

a great inspiration to me over the years, and still are. Will Pope Benedict be canonised one day? We'll see. I say I met two saints that day.

The memory of that visit to Rome came back to me this week because Thursday (16th) is Pope Benedict's birthday. He'll be 93 years old. Remember to say a little birthday prayer for him. We all remember his visit to Great Britain in 2010. This is what he said during those wonderful days to children and students. But the message is for us all:

'It is not often that a Pope has the opportunity to speak to so many students. And since I have the chance now, there is something I very much want to say to you. I hope that among those of you listening to me today there are some of the future saints of the twenty-first century...

When I invite you to become saints, I am asking you not to be content with second best... God wants your friendship. And once you enter into friendship with God, everything in your life begins to change... You begin to feel compassion for people in difficulties... You want to come to the aid of the poor... to comfort the sorrowful, you want to be kind and generous. And once these things begin to matter to you, you are well on the way to becoming saints...

Dear friends, I promise to pray for you, and I ask you to pray for me.'

I know you all will.

God bless you,

Father O'Shea