



diocese
of limerick
our catholic community

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I want to greet you on this second weekend since we've been able to return to public worship together. It's great to see and support each other. Thanks for the way you kept up the spiritual communion that united us even during the months when we were apart. The daily prayers, the participation on-line in liturgies, the living out of your faith during this difficult COVID time – all of this has built up the Church.

It's remarkable how we adapt as people and it shows the strength of our faith that we turned to completely new mediums, virtual mediums to stay connected with something that yet has such depth and meaning for us. I know of people for whom last weekend was their first Mass since COVID reached our shores last year. The joy and sense of freedom they now experience having been vaccinated is truly wonderful and we rejoice in and thank God for this.

The Past Year

Now that we are returning and that some semblance of normality finally appears to be taking hold around us, let's be mindful of those for whom this past year has had nightmare elements – elderly cut off from loved ones, those dying unaccompanied, the isolated bereaved and many of those bereaved on foreign shores, the hidden victims of domestic abuse, the increasing numbers of those with mental ill-health issues. It has been nothing less than a traumatic, stressful and exhausting time for some and that has touched us all in some way or another. I heard from one person who talked about seeing some parishioners – and not just elderly ones – for the first time in months at Mass last weekend and how their health had very visibly deteriorated. So, let's be very attentive to those around us who may need a reassuring word, a helpful gesture, a listening ear as they nervously greet this new normal.

It is a time to again acknowledge the care so heroically given during COVID by healthcare workers and many others. We must continue to take inspiration from that and bring that deep sense of care with us into our everyday lives as we move forward. They fought so hard this past year, trying to keep people alive. They fought so hard also trying to ease the tragic and lonely passage for people who were, without loved ones by their sides, departing to the next world – another remarkable illustration of how much we treasure life. I am mindful also of priests' ministry especially to the bereaved. In time, I hope we can dedicate a special Sunday to celebrate healthcare/frontline workers. In the meanwhile, these days we remember healthcare workers as they face added strain due to the cyber-attack on the IT system.

Pentecost – A Celebration of Life

Today, however, is Pentecost Sunday. It is such a wonderful celebration of life. It comes as Spring is bursting into Summer. The heart spontaneously joins in the line of the psalm: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth."

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"Come and see the works of God tremendous his deeds among us" – Ps. 66 (65)

It's a good day to be thinking about the many ways we can continue to care also as we move out of Covid.

As we gingerly step our way out of COVID we remember how as a people we showed such courage and resilience across this past year. But a timely reminder of how we so need courage and resilience elsewhere looms with this coming Tuesday marking the third anniversary of a Referendum that permitted the Oireachtas to legislate for abortion. I do not want to rehearse all that was said then. While, as the democracy maxim states, the people have spoken, that does not mean other voices are to remain silent; that those who believe in the sanctity of the life of the unborn should go quiet. I would like to quote a remark attributed to Martin Luther King: "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter."

Life matters. An Ireland worth working for, an Ireland worth dreaming about, an Ireland worth presenting to the world will always be a country where life matters and where we care for one another. Indeed, it has been said that the most important words we can utter in life are: "we care".

Continuing to Care

As Irish people we like to see ourselves as caring people and in so many ways we are. We saw how we put the vulnerable and elderly centre stage during the past year of Covid. We learned to care in so many new ways – wearing masks, keeping social distance, sanitising. We are becoming increasingly alert to the need to care for our planet.

We need to continue to care especially when we hear: that the average age of death of those who are homeless is 38 for men and 44 for women; that we have the fourth highest incidence of drug-induced deaths in Europe.

And, surely, we need to care, too, when we hear that in the year following the Referendum, 6,666 lives were ended in the womb through abortion.

And we need to be vigilant in our care as legislation is weaving its way through the Oireachtas allowing for Euthanasia that will impact so enormously on elderly, vulnerable people, an issue that is far more complex than the limited discussion around it suggests.

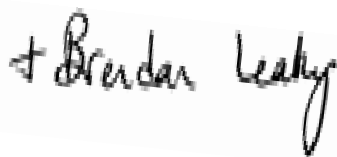
All life Matters

You see, all our lives matter. We saw that in COVID when we said 'yes' to life. So, this Pentecost, let's allow the Creator Spirit disturb us. Yes, there are many complexities in life to explain. But we cannot be indifferent to the cries of the off-the-radar homeless, the bewildered addicts, the unborn who may be denied life, the vulnerable elderly.

Let's ask the Enlightening Spirit to open our eyes to see how we can dare to care in practical helpful neighbourly ways, in civic ways by keeping in contact with politicians about these issues, and in social ways by speaking out about what matters.

Remember: Our own lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

With kind regards and asking for a remembrance in your prayers,



✠Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick