

Deputy Mayor, Cardinal Brady, Bishop Lee, Reverend Fathers and Sisters, fellow parishioners and friends. On behalf of the parish pastoral council, I extend to you all a warm welcome to the Sacred Heart Parish. It's marvellous to see so many people here to mark this occasion. I would like to thank Deputy Mayor, Councillor Davy Daniels and the city councillors for attending the celebration tonight. Many of the city council members are regular parishioners here, when they come with their families instead of in their robes. Indeed a number of them are active members of various ministry teams. I particularly thank our Deputy Mayor for the genuine warmth and the sincerity of your welcome for Cardinal Brady at City Hall this afternoon. Mind you, I thought you were playing close to the wire when you reminded the cardinal of Waterford Footballers defeat over his native Cavan team at Breffni Park. I would also like to express our gratitude to the City Council staff for their work both this afternoon and tonight.

I welcome and thank Bishop Lee for his presence here tonight and I thank him for his continued support for our priests, our parish and our community and for his leadership in these difficult times.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome Cardinal Brady on his first official visit to the Diocese of Waterford and Lismore and especially here, to the Sacred Heart Parish. I thank you sincerely for taking time to travel to the opposite end of the country. Little did any of us know when this was arranged many months ago, that the last 10 days would have been as they have been and that your role as Archbishop of Armagh would have been so extremely demanding.

Cardinal Brady, a few weeks ago on Mission Sunday when you preached in the parish of Kilmore you said **“Every member of the Church can, and should be, involved. Each one of us, according to our own abilities, can help to bring the light of Christ and his Gospel to those yet to know of His love. You also said that “‘Mission’ means going beyond the border”.**

Its wonderful that you are here tonight to share this great occasion because the people of this parish truly embody that message of Mission and so many are actively involved in strengthening our faith community and, going beyond the border, is second nature to many of the people gathered here. Indeed, many of them would not just cross the border for you; they'd completely dismantle it as well.

I hope that your time among us will give you some respite from the pressures and stresses of your role as Primate of All Ireland and that you enjoy your brief stay in Waterford City.

Tonight is a landmark on the faith journey of this community. We mark 40 years since the church was opened. Like any construction job, this one was not without a few controversies. For example, the contract was awarded to a Cork firm and some of the locals weren't all that impressed to have this gang of Rebels moving in on Deise turf. Even to this day, people make wise cracks about what the Cork lads did or didn't do while they were building the church.

This church was built at a cost of 180,394 pounds and as part of the larger St John's parish; people did their best to pay the debt. But it was really only in 1974, when the Sacred Heart Parish was created, that a big push was made to clear the amount that was owed.

The first parish priest Fr Michael Russell made clearing the debt his mission and in his very early days, he came up with the idea of a "Car a month Draw". He called a meeting of some of the key people and told them of the plan. As they headed home that night, they were all of the opinion that Fr Russell had gone mad. Imagine having to ask people for a pound for each ticket. Remember that in 1974, a pound was a lot of money.

Anyway, with the plan in place, the people of the parish were galvanised to sell tickets. They went door to door, to the city factories and other places of work and people stood, selling their tickets every weekend, in the centre of the city, regardless of the weather. The car a month draw ran for many years and was hugely successful. It was **largely** responsible for paying for our magnificent church.

I looked back at the account books for the parish for those years and two things struck me: One is that, without the aid of computers and spreadsheets and modern technology, this parish was blessed with a meticulous book keeper and from the very start, every detail was entered. Going through the book, page after page, there were no mistakes, no tipex or crossing out, everything always perfect on the first entry. It's an amazing skill but then, Tommy White was and still is an amazing man.

The second thing that struck me was it seems that there were never ending efforts to fund raise for the church. Apart for the car a month, there were several other draws, including raffling two houses, there were fashion shows, dinner dances, dog nights, quizzes, carol singing and everyone seemed to be involved. The first curate, Fr Curran, who is with us tonight, did a sponsored cycle that raised 1000 pounds and many years later, Fr Gerry Condon decided he'd get in on the act. As you all know, Fr Condon's event was a race around one lap at the dog track.

All these endeavours took great commitment and involved hundreds of dedicated parishioners and tonight, I thank all the people who in those early days, worked tirelessly for the Sacred Heart Parish.

We remember in a special way those who are no longer with us and have gone to their heavenly reward and we thank God for their goodness and generosity to this church.

The first parish committee was a men only organisation and they steered the parish along the rough road of its early days paying off such a huge debt. But be under no illusion, as the old saying goes, behind every good man, stands a mighty woman and while the men were steering the parish, let me assure the women were not only making the tea and sandwiches, they also were the petrol and the wheels that kept the motor moving.

It is marvellous to say that, heading in to the 41st year since the church opened, there are still so many people involved in a plethora of different ministries. Their ages range from 8 to 88 and I thank everyone who gives their time and their talents, unstintingly, for the good of this community. We often think of the people we see at Mass like the Eucharistic ministers but tonight, given that we are celebrating the church's birthday, I'd like to particularly thank the team of people who keep the church looking so well. I think of the ladies that sneak in with the hoovers or dusters and mops when no one else is around, those who polish the ciboria and altar vessels, clean the candle stands, fill up the holy water bottles, all who care for the church grounds, and the ladies who look after the flowers. You know, at one point last year, the lady who principally looks after the flowers was sick and was unable to come down so instead, the flowers were transported up to her and she created the arrangements from her bedroom and back they came, magnificent as always. Peg O'Connor exemplifies that sort of spirit and dedication that flow through this community and makes this parish so special.

Lots of you here tonight have great memories of occasions in this church. Most houses in the parish have mantelpieces and walls adorned with pictures of the wonderful occasions of Baptism, First Holy Communion, Confirmation or Weddings. The church has been the place of many special celebrations, I think of the consecration of the church in 1979, of the great fun and community spirit we shared at 25th anniversary celebration and on the occasion of the visit of President Mary McAleese. I think of our Annual Carols by Candlelight Service and of the Special Mass we celebrated for the victims of the 9-11 bombings. I think of our penance services before Christmas and Easter, when, the reflective, spiritual atmosphere helps many people to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. But the church is also a place that has sad memories for all too many families, Those who have sat in the front seat on the left when they came for the funeral Mass of a loved one and in their time of need have been consoled and comforted by the parish community.

None of these sacraments or celebrations would have been possible without the priests of this parish. And I'd like to thank all the priests that have served this community in the last forty years. Some of them have been able to join us tonight and I thank you for being with us. We have been blessed with hard working men, who always put the needs of the people first and that continues with our present priests, Fr Melody and Fr Chestnutt. Both of them seem to work about 100 hours each week and no matter what they have arranged in their personal lives, it often gets cancelled or postponed, even at very short notice, if there is someone in the parish that needs their help. I sincerely thank them for all the work they did for tonight's celebration and much more importantly for the ongoing dedication and commitment that they give, 24 / 7 to this community.

I will share a secret with you – Fr Melody does a magic trick that very few people have seen. But if you ever have something printed that you want him to throw an eye over before you post it, or put it in the newsletter, before your page has hit the table, a red pen suddenly becomes attached to his right hand and God can he use it. He says he developed this affliction while working in VERITAS for eight years but I don't know, I'd say he was born with that red pen in his hand.

But he met his match a fortnight ago, when his first draft of tonight's booklet was proof read. It came back looking like it had been centre stage, at an open heart surgery. There was red as far as the eye could see and for the victims of Fr Melody's red pen, can I simply say thank you Paddy.

I want to thank all the people who worked behind the scenes to create tonight's celebration. I thank my fellow members of the parish pastoral council who helped to plan this event, the people who created the beautiful commemorative booklet, those who took part in the Liturgy and the ladies from the Hospitality group who have taken care of the catering tonight.

Cardinal Brady, on behalf of the people of the Sacred Heart Parish, I'd like to present you with this crystal lamp as a memento of your visit to our parish. I thank you again for honouring us with your presence. We hope and we pray that you will many years of health and strength to continue leading the Catholic Church in Ireland with wisdom and integrity. And one last thing, Perhaps next summer, when you're having a word with the man above about the blue and white of the Breffeni Men, would you ever throw in one for the blue and white of the Deise boys and Please God, both teams will make it to Croke Park next September.