



Cardinal shares joy and spirituality with Diocesan Vocation Directors, Seminarians and Formation Staff.

On March 7th and 8th, a Conference for Vocations Directors from around the country took place in Knock House Hotel, Knock, Co. Mayo. The keynote speaker was Cardinal Lazaro You Heung-Sik, Prefect of the Dicastery for Clergy in Rome who was accompanied by the Dicastery Secretary, Monsignor Eamonn McLaughlin.

Cardinal You Heung-Sik was most anxious to visit Ireland as Irish Columban missionaries had spread the Gospel in his native Korea and Knock afforded him the opportunity of visiting the international shrine and praying to Our Lady.

The Cardinal's input throughout the conference was hugely appreciated by all those who attended; 18 Vocations Directors, 31 Seminarians, Seminary staff from St. Partick's College Maynooth and Redemptoris Mater Seminary in Dundalk, the local Archbishop Francis Duffy and the two other bishops who sit on the Council for Vocations- Bishop Larry Duffy and Bishop Phonsie Cullinan along with Fr. Willie Purcell and Deacon Eric Cooney.

 DICASTERY
FOR THE CLERGY



Cardinal Lazzaro You Heung-sik
Prefect of the Dicastery for the Clergy,
Archbishop-Bishop emeritus of Daejeon.



Msgr Eamonn McLaughlin
Dicastery for the Clergy,
Priest of the Diocese of Raphoe





Cardinal shares joy... (continued)

The Cardinal's simple but profound faith set the tone for the two days which gave great encouragement not only to the Vocations Directors but to all. Cardinal Lazaro underlined for us that the promotion of priestly is not about the implementation of a particular programme but the communication of the joy of living out one's personal relationship with the living Jesus Christ.

For the Conference participants there was a real sense of unity and deep love for the priesthood.

There were opportunities for both the Seminarians and Vocations Directors to ask questions and make their own observations and this was a necessary part of the Conference in order for all the attendees to hear about current lived experience.

The most important part of the all-too-short Conference was the great encouragement we received. With a good number likely to come from the Propaedeutic Courses in Spain this Autumn to boost the current number in seminary here and the momentum which was built up during the Year for Vocation to the Diocesan priesthood there are real grounds for hope.

The last session of the Conference was devoted to practical ideas coming from the Vocations Directors themselves to maintain the momentum of the dedicated year for priestly vocations which will end officially on Good Shepherd Sunday, April 21st.



The following objectives emerged:

- The Council for Vocations will distribute a book on practical ideas for how to accompany prospective candidates.
- The Council for Vocations will distribute a checklist for the propaedeutic courses.
- Regional meetings of Vocations Directors will be given priority.
- The Come & See vocations weekend will be continued (St. Patrick's Seminary will be the venue)
- The chairperson of the Council for Vocations will report on the Conference to each bishop and to the Chairperson of each of the departments of the IEC.





- Each Vocations Director will also send a brief report to his bishop
- The Council for Vocations will undertake more research, updating some research done in 2019.
- It is proposed that in June 2025 Vocations Directors from around the country will be invited to partake in a conference in Rome held by the Dicastery for Clergy for their formation.
- The Council for Vocations will promote the Holy Hour in each Cathedral on the weekend of Good Shepherd Sunday, April 20th /21st for the specific intention of praying for vocations to the priesthood.
- More emphasis will be given to use gatherings of young people to promote the idea of vocation in young people's lives. Such gatherings as Youth 2000, Pilgrimages to Lourdes, Medjugorje, Taize, etc., JPPI Awards groups, Youth Faith Camps, etc. were mentioned.
- In each diocese attention needs to be given to a budget for vocations work and to a greater emphasis on priestly vocations in PPC meetings, the Chrism Mass, Confirmations, etc.



Summary Report provided by
Bishop Cullinan, Chair of the
Council for Vocations

There was a real sense of encouragement during the Conference. The Cardinal brought up back to basics, to the essentials. It is not arguments but the witness of authenticity and joy which bring about a response in the hearts of men whom God is calling to follow in this particular path of priesthood.



Personal Video Message from Pope Francis

In February, the day before Pope Francis went into hospital, he had a meeting with Msgr Eamonn McLaughlin. When he heard that Msrg McLaughlin and Cardinal You Heung-sik were visiting Knock to address the Vocation Directors and the Seminarians and formation staff, he gave this personal message, which Msrg McLaughlin recorded on his phone.

The video message was in Italian, the following is an English language translation of the Pope's message.



Dear brothers and sisters, Bishops, Priests, Seminarians:

I am delighted that Cardinal Lazzaro is with you, accompanied by a priest who works at the Dicastery.

My prayer is that you have a fruitful conversation together.

I also pray for an increase in vocations, that they will flourish. And we must ask this from Our Lady of Knock, your Mother, that she will obtain this grace for you.

I want only the very best for you.

I am praying for you, and you pray for me.

I will now give you my blessing +

Bye, Bye!



On both days of the conference, Cardinal You Heung-sik concelebrated mass. On Thursday 7th he celebrated the mass of Our Lady of Knock and on the Friday 8th the commemoration of Saint John of God. Many of those present have asked for copies of the Cardinal's homilies, which he has sent to us, which can be found on the following pages.



Homily for Thursday 7th March, - Mass of Our Lady of Knock.

Rejoice. Exult. These words from the Prophet Isaiah echo our sentiments today as we gather in this sacred place to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Lamb of God offered on the altar of the Cross out of love for us and in obedience to the Father's will. In the words of Saint Peter on Mount Tabor, at the vision of Moses and Elijah before him: **Lord, it is good for us to be here** (*Mt 17:4*). Indeed, it is wonderful for us to be here. Nowhere is the saying, **a picture paints a thousand words**, more fitting than right here in Knock, at this beautiful International Eucharistic and Marian Shrine. As Mrs. Bridget Trench said on that wet evening, around 8pm, on 21 August 1879: **A hundred thousand thanks to God and to the glorious Virgin that has given us this manifestation.**

We see in the Gospels how those who have a personal experience of the Lord, run to share the Good News with others, and invite them to **come and see**; suffice to contemplate the scene of the empty tomb on that Easter Sunday morning. The witnesses to the apparition at Knock ran to their families and neighbours to share the Good News, and invited each other to come and see. Mary Mc Loughlin, in her testimony said: **I told Miss Byrne to go for her uncle, Brian Byrne, and her aunt, Mrs. Brian Byrne, or any of the neighbours whom she should see, in order that they might witness the sight that they were enjoying.** Today, we are those witnesses, called to share the Good News of the Risen Lord and to invite others to come and see, so that they too may share our joy in the knowledge that God is with us.



God is with us

When I gaze upon the vision that is represented here in this Chapel, my heart is filled with joy, wonder, love, and gratitude. My dear friends, God is with us, **yes until the end of time** (Mt 28:20). Mary, our Mother is with us. The Angels, the Saints, and the Holy Souls are with us.

Each one of us here is a child of God, created in His image and likeness. Each one of us is unique, beautiful, and precious to God. God loves me. God loves you. God loves us. God is our Father. Jesus is our brother. Mary is our Mother. We are here today by the grace of God, as His beloved sons and daughters. To us, His disciples, Jesus says: **Remain in me, as I in you... I am the vine, you are the branches... I have loved you just as the father has loved me... you are my friends... You did not choose me, no I chose you.** (Jn 15).

Friends, I encourage you to always trust in the Lord. Never lose hope. Jesus Christ is risen. During the day, we should say often: **Jesus, I trust in you.** In his letter to Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan, Chairman for the Council of Vocations, on the occasion of the *National Year of Prayer for Vocations to the Priesthood in Ireland*, which began on 30 April last year, the Pope Francis wrote: **Ireland, like a number of countries in Europe and elsewhere, has seen fewer priestly vocations in recent years. Though this situation is certainly a challenge, it also presents us with an opportunity to renew our trust in the Lord, who never abandons his flock and promises to remain with his people until the end of time.** God has called us to be His disciples today. May Our Lady of Knock help us to follow her Son with faith, hope, love, trust, and joy. God is with us and invites us in turn to be with Him.



God calls us to be with Him

God calls us to be His missionary disciples, His light in our world. The Lord tells us: **whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing** (*Jn* 15:5). If we remain united to Jesus, we will bear much fruit; if we do not, we will not. Pope Francis often reminds us that we are not called to be sad or unhappy disciples. No. We are called to be the Lord's joyful disciples, His joyful witnesses, His joyful friends. Where does this joy come from? How might we sustain this joy? Through union with Jesus Christ in silent prayer.

In his Angelus address last Sunday, Pope Francis asked those gathered in St. Peter's Square the following question: **what is my prayer like? Is it a price to be paid, or is it a moment of trusting abandonment, without looking at the clock?** Let us be honest with God, who knows what is in the heart of each one of us, and with ourselves: what is my prayer like?

Do I pray with the Word of God? What place does the Word of God have in my daily life? Let us ask for the grace today, through the intercession of Our Lady of Knock, Saint Joseph and Saint John the Evangelist, to love the Word of God and to place the Word at the heart of our daily lives.

A Christian is someone who lives the Word of God. As the Psalmist says: **Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path** (*Ps* 119:105). If we are to live the Word of God, then we must love our neighbour.



God calls us to love our neighbour

Jesus said to His disciples: **My command to you is to love one another, as I have loved you** (*Jn* 15:12). Our world is being torn apart by wars and violence and wounded by widespread individualism. Pope Francis calls on Christians throughout the world **to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another”** (*Jn* 13:35). This was Jesus’ heartfelt prayer to the Father: **“That they may all be one... in us... so that the world may believe”** (*Jn* 17:21). **Beware of the temptation of jealousy! We are all in the same boat and headed to the same port! Let us ask for the grace to rejoice in the gifts of each, which belong to all** (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 99).

If we are like Christ, people will be attracted to Him; if we are not, they will not. **People prefer to listen to witnesses: they “thirst for authenticity” and “call for evangelisers to speak of a God whom they themselves know and are familiar with, as if they were seeing him”** (*EG*, 150). The priest is a gift from God to his people. The priest does not live for himself, he lives for God, and he lives for others. Let us never forget the words of Our Lord when he said: **Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends** (*Jn* 15:13). We must keep before our eyes the image of the Good Shepherd, who came to serve and not to be served. In the words of Saint Paul: **As the chosen of God, then, the holy people whom he loves, you are to be clothed in heartfelt compassion, in generosity and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other if one of you has a complaint against another. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond** (*Col* 3:12-14).

In conclusion, Pope Francis, in his message for the *National Year of Prayer for Vocations*, wrote: **how much the world needs the witness of good priests who imitate the Good Shepherd and know how to share the love of His Sacred Heart.** I encourage you to persevere on the great journey of faith, always seeking the face of Christ, whom we adore in the Holy Eucharist and recognise in our suffering brothers and sisters (cf. *Christus Vivit*, 299).

Dear brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are called to be holy. **Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace... when all is said and done, “the only great tragedy in life, is not to become a saint”** (*Gaudete et Exultate*, 34).

Our Lady of Knock, our Mother, and the highest honour of our race, guí orainn.



Homily for Friday 8th March, Commemoration of St. John of God

As we gather here on this Friday morning, the 3rd Week of Lent, 'round the gable wall, in a spirit of poverty, humility, and gratitude before the Lord, the Lamb of God, we do so as beloved sons and daughters of God, and children of Our Lady of Knock. How consoling and comforting is the invitation in the First Reading to conversion: **come back to the Lord your God**. What does the Lord promise in return? **I will love them with all my heart (Hos 14)**. In order for us to be effective witnesses for Christ and to attract vocations to the Priesthood, then we, first, **need to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength (Mk 12)**. Only by loving God first, can we in turn love our neighbour.

In his beautiful video message that we heard yesterday, Pope Francis said: **It is my ardent hope that vocations will grow in Ireland. We must present this request to Our Lady of Knock, Your Mother, that she will give you this grace**. Those words, your Mother, struck my heart when I heard them. Mary is your Mother. Hanging upon the Cross, on Good Friday, Our Lord said to His Mother: **this is your son**; then turning to His beloved disciple, he said: **this is your Mother (Jn 19:26-27)**. Let us ask Our Mother of Knock to receive from her Son the grace of many good priestly vocations to serve the Church in Ireland and beyond.





When I contemplate in my heart the apparition scene here at Knock, I am reminded of the famous dream of St. John Bosco: there is a great battle at sea, but when the Pope steers the ship safely between the two columns – first, to the one surmounted by the Host, and then the other, topped by the statue of the Immaculate Virgin – the enemy is defeated, and peace is restored.

Before I depart from you today, and before you pay a return visit to me in Rome, I would like to offer you this simple message: **love Jesus in the Eucharist; love Mary, your Mother; love the Holy Father.** These three loves are common to all the Saints, one of whom was Saint John of God, whose memorial is commemorated today.



Love Jesus in the Eucharist

In the words of St. John Bosco, **I beg you to recommend to everyone, first, adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and then reverence for most holy Mary.** If we are to be what the Lord calls us to be, then we should be able to say with Saint Paul, **it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me** (*Ga 2:20*). Do you want to attract vocations to the priesthood? Radiate Christ. How? Visit Him often in the Blessed Sacrament. Love Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and you shall be truly happy.

We envy the shepherds who went to visit the grotto of Bethlehem to see Him, kissed His little hand, and offered Him their gifts... and yet there is no reason to envy them, for their fortune is ours, too. The same Jesus they visited in the grotto is in our Tabernacle. The only difference is that the shepherds saw Him with the eyes of the body, whereas we see Him with the eyes of faith. Nothing will please Him more than our frequent visits to Him (St. John Bosco).

As fishers of men, called by the Lord to serve Him in such a precious ministry as that of a Vocation Director, it is commonplace to ask: what can I do to promote vocations? While there are many kinds of hooks, nets, and bait, with which to draw forth priestly vocations,

I encourage you to do the following: **Trust in the power of the Holy Eucharist and Our Blessed Lady. Do what you can and leave the rest to God.** As Saint John of God would say: **Labour without stopping. Do all the good works you can while you still have time.**



Love Mary, your Mother

Early every morning, I go to the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes in the Vatican Gardens. I go to visit and spend time with my Mother. She receives for me all the graces that I need to serve Her Son and His Church, especially priests, deacons, and seminarians, for that day. When I am there, I pray for you. My mission is to care for all priests. Each day, on my way to and from the Office, I try to greet every priest I encounter. Sometimes the priest, or indeed a Bishop, has a sad or tired face. I try to leave him with a smile.

Our Lady of Knock is smiling down upon us, her beloved children. Do not just walk to Mary in your life, but run to her, especially into her loving arms. You are her son. You are her daughter. You want to radiate Christ and attract vocations, then stay very close to your Mother and you will see many miracles.

Love the Holy Father

We are very blessed to have a private message from the Holy Father in these days, to encourage and inspire us in our ministry. As you know, he was not well the day of the recording, and the next day he went into hospital for a visit. He was very happy and determined to be with you virtually, to thank you, to encourage you, and to bless you. In return, Pope Francis asks us to pray for him.

Let us pray for Pope Francis, asking the Lord to help him steer the ship of the Church through the stormy waters of life, so that we may arrive safely at the port of Heaven by staying within the pillars of the Eucharist and Our Lady of Knock.



