

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION: NOVEMBER, 2020

Saturday next, 21 November, 2020, is the *Memoria*, the liturgical commemoration, of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple. It is the patronal feast of the Presentation Sisters, founded by the Venerable Nano Nagle in Cork in 1774 for “the Instruction of poor Girls in the principles of Religion and Christian Piety”, and of the Presentation Brothers, founded by Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice in Waterford in 1802 for to do precisely the same for “poor boys”. It is, therefore, a day of special devotion for the members of these religious congregations and, of course, for all who work in the various schools each of them established in Ireland and across the globe.

This celebration is based on the tradition that, at the age of three, Mary was consecrated a virgin to God in the Temple in Jerusalem by her parents, Joachim and Anne. This tradition derives from the *Protoevangelium*, an Infancy Narrative, attributed to James, “the Brother of the Lord”, part of what experts call the Apocryphal New Testament, which, notwithstanding doubts about the authenticity and the orthodoxy of its constituent documents, is deemed to relay certain ancient traditions – including that of the Presentation of the BVM – worthy of respect by the People of God.

This *Memoria* celebrates Mary’s unconditional “Yes” to God: “Let it be done unto me according to thy word (Luke 1:38). It reminds us of the “Yes” to God we uttered by proxy at our Baptism, a “Yes” to be actualised every day of our lives as - through, with and in Christ, in the power of the Spirit - we present our very selves “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1)”. It adumbrates the Universal Call to Holiness, God’s invitation to each and every member of the People of God, without exception, “to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love ... (LG, 40; CCC, 2013)”. It reminds us, in effect, that, irrespective of our state in life, whether clerical, religious or lay, whatever the circumstances in which Providence has set us, each of us is called to love God above all for his own sake and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God. It cannot be emphasised strongly enough or often enough: The “stuff” of our everyday lives is the “stuff” of our love, of our service to God and neighbour, and, therefore, of our sanctification. As the 1793 Rule of those who became the Presentation Sisters – adopted almost *verbatim* by the Brothers in 1809 – insists, “perfection [i.e. of Charity] ... depends not so much on doing extraordinary actions, as on doing *extraordinarily well* the ordinary actions, and exercises of every day”. For the lay men and women engaged today in the apostolate of the Catholic school, the practice of charity and the way to holiness requires that they discharge every one of their professional duties to the very highest standard, for the glory of God and the good of the neighbour, without “rapine in the holocaust (cf. Isaiah 61:8)”, short-changing the Lord, shirking or cutting corners, anything slap-dash, slipshod or second-rate, only giving, day in, day out, in matters small and great (cf. Luke:16:10), their “almighty best”, because Love would shame those who settle for less.

Schools need both management and leadership. Management is about Know-How, leadership, about Know-Why (see Bennis, 2009). Good management will ensure that all the arrangements for safety are in place, that staff and students know and follow them. Good leadership, however, will mobilise and energise the school community with a sense of common purpose. Good leadership in Catholic schools is always Faith-leadership, faith-based, faith-guided, faith-sustained. For us - patrons, trustees, governors, managers, staff, of Catholic schools - Christ is always the Know-Why. It is his love that will drive us (cf. II Corinthians 5:14) to give our all to those in our care, helping them pass unscathed “through the valley of the shadow of death (cf. Ps 23:4)” that is COVID19.