

Religious Profession, 20/3/14.

Buenos dias a todos. Una palabra bienvenida especial a la familia de Hermana Maria desde Argentina. Bienvenida a Irlanda al Maguires!

Today we are privileged to witness something very rare in Ireland today, a young woman consecrating her life to God. A religious vocation is a mysterious thing, it's an affair of the heart, it doesn't always make sense, sometimes it doesn't even make sense to the person who has it!

Thomas Merton, the well known Trappist monk, said " monks do not expect to be understood by men because they do not fully understand themselves."

So why do people choose this way of life, the road less travelled? There are many answers. I like the one given by Bro Charles de Foucauld who is known as the Missionary of the Sahara, he was martyred in Algeria in 1916.

He was beatified in 2005 by Pope Emeritus Benedict and his life was the inspiration for the founding of the Little Brothers of Jesus. The Little Brothers have a very simple ambition, they want their way of life to be a question mark for others.

They want people to ask " why do they live in that way?

When Charles was asked why he lived in poverty and solitude in the Sahara desert he said " for me, it is a necessity of love."

I like the simplicity of that.

If a vocation is anything it's an adventure, an openness to God, a willingness to be where God wants us to be. The words of Helder Camara the famous Brazilian archbishop capture this sense of adventure very well;

" Accept surprises that upset your plans, shatter your dreams, give a completely different turn to your day and.....who knows.....to your life?

It is not chance. Leave the Father free himself to weave the pattern of your days." This `weaving of our days` brings its own challenges and uncertainty, even its own pain.

In the `weaving of our days` a vocation is stress tested. It is often thought that when a girl enters the convent she is entering a haven of peace, a sanctuary where one is shielded from life's conflicts and difficulties.

The priest/poet Gerald Manly Hopkins expressed this thought very strikingly in his verses on the occasion of a nun taking the veil;

I have desired to be

Where no storms come,

Where the green swell is in the haven dumb,

And out of the swing of the sea.

As anyone who has spent time in community will tell you, living in community has its own challenges, life doesn't stop at the convent door, we don't leave our humanity behind us when we go into religious life.

A vocation is never just an external thing, something that we 'do.' It's something we are, something that touches our hearts. One of the most beloved saints in the Church, St Therese of Lisieux known as the The Little Flower described her vocation in a very radical way;

She said "in the heart of the Church I will be love." Today Sister Maria is making the same promise, she is saying that she wants to live a life of love in the heart of the Church.

This is very radical and very generous. It is very radical in the sense that it is counter-cultural in the Ireland of today, in the Ireland of 2014 a Religious Profession is almost unheard of.

It is very generous in the sense that it is not a short term commitment, it is a life long promise. The Gospel tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is like finding treasure in a field.

When you find it you sell everything you have to possess it. This is what a religious vocation is about, investing everything for the sake of the Kingdom. It's not about doing the sensible thing, that's why in the eyes of the world there is always a touch of madness about it!

Today Sister Maria will seal her vocation. No human reason explains or justifies this act of self-giving, only the words of Christ at Bethany;

What she has done for me is a good work, she has done what was in her power to do.

Vaya con Dios Maria!

