

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL
LEAD THEM



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BRENDAN MCCAULEY

A Little Child Shall Lead Them.

ISBN 978-0-9569072-7-1

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*And they overcame Satan
by the blood of the Lamb and
by the word of their testimony, and
they did not love their lives to the death.*

Revelation 12:11

A NEW PENTECOST



Frank Newman is not Frank Newman's real name. This story is about how Jesus revealed himself to Frank and his wife Grace and how Jesus filled them with His Holy Spirit and showed them signs and wonders they never thought possible.

My wife Angela and I from Northern Ireland and Frank and Grace from the Republic of Ireland were fairly typical Catholics going about our daily lives when God made himself known to us during a move of the Holy Spirit in Ireland in the 1970s.

God did the choosing and we responded. We gave our lives to Jesus and were baptised in His Holy Spirit and spoke in tongues and received various gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.

We met Frank and Grace in 1985. They were around ten years older than us. We loved their warm welcome and gentle wisdom and we grew to value their friendship.

Frank and Grace remained within the Catholic Church and held a weekly prayer meeting in their own home for over forty years. Angela and I on the other hand went on a long prophetic journey that took us through various denominations and into many nations.

Grace died suddenly in her early sixties and Frank died over a dozen years later. Frank missed her every single day.

A couple of years before Frank's death I was ministering with my Canadian friend Lionel Batke, in the county next to Frank's. Early one Friday morning I'd a dream in which I was told to go urgently and interview Frank and write a book for him. God said if I'd do this He'd make the time up to me.

Previously Frank had asked me to write a book about his experiences with Jesus. On another occasion Frank said he'd only have one regret in life and that would be if he went to his grave without his story being told.

I arranged Lionel would take the remaining meetings and I went and spent the weekend with Frank. The story you are reading comes from that encounter.

Some people's names have been changed and most place names and geographical locations have been omitted. This is at Frank's request. Frank was a private person. His main intention was that all the focus and glory should go to Jesus. He wanted his story to be a Testimony of Jesus.

Frank and Grace Newman are not their real names. Frank is used because the storyteller was *frank* in his narrative. The wife is called Grace because she truly was a

lady full of *grace*. Newman is used because in Ephesians 2:15 we were told Christ created one *new man*.

In 1959 Pope John XIII at the 'sudden inspiration' of the Holy Spirit called for the first ecumenical council for the Roman Catholic Church. Part of the council's purpose was to foster Christian unity and an other part was the Pope's prayer the council might be a 'New Pentecost.'

Frank likened the Pope's prayer to an experience he'd had as a young boy. He said, My father kept an untamed donkey. Day after day my sister and I pestered him to let us to ride on this stropy animal.

Finally, one summer's day Dad dragged the donkey into the hay shed and put my sister on its back. The donkey bolted and my sister screamed. She'd daily petitioned Dad for months but her donkey ride lasted only a few seconds.

I insisted on my turn. Once more the donkey was dragged into the hay shed and Dad placed me on its back and gave me the reins.

Once again Neddy bolted but I had a plan. I grabbed his mane with my right hand, clutched his tail with my left hand and held on for dear life.

Off we went! Twice around the house, once down the field and back up again we galloped. I was fully determined but so was the donkey.

In the end I found myself lying in the ditch with a sore body and a bruised ego.

I sometimes think our encounter with the donkey was a lot like Pope John XXIII asking for a New Pentecost in the Catholic Church.

GRIEF SURELY LEADING ME



Ireland, Saint Patrick's Day, 1973. Spring had returned like a child with a new box of paints. Our noisy crows were black flecks against a bright blue sky and our fields and gardens were splashed yellow from gorse and daffodils. It was a month before Easter but already resurrection was in the air.

After Mass, Grace and I and our three children drove to see my parents on their farm. My father wasn't well. On the way we visited my brother in hospital who was recovering from a hernia operation.

We laughed and sang as we bounced along in our old red Ford. Small bursts of brown birds appeared and disappeared and sunlight came streaming through the windows. A lonely magpie flew high overhead.

In the backseat the children were arguing.

Our eldest girl said, Yes Liam. Daddy is my daddy.

Liam said, No he's not. He's my daddy.

The debate continued.

Then Liam offered a compromise. He said, Let him be my daddy. You can have the dog.

I'd met my wife Grace nine years earlier. Our worlds turn on little unintended things. In 1964, after a Higher Diploma in Education I volunteered to go teaching with the Kiltegan Fathers in Minna in west central Nigeria. In September of that year this option quickly disappeared when militant Muslims overran Minna College.

Unusually I was offered a job teaching in a Girl's Convent School. Later I moved to a boy's school and found lodgings above a newsagent's shop.

One Sunday after Mass I was sitting in the parlour reading *The Independent* when a beautiful young lady strode into the room with a large smile and a twinkle in her eye.

She offered her hand and said, Mr Newman I believe!

I said, Frank Newman at your service.

Now we were happily married in a car full of life and laughter. We arrived into the hospital car park and Grace remained with the children while I made a quick call on my brother.

When I returned Grace looked bemused.

I said, What happened?

She told me Liam had pointed to the large statue in the Hospital car park.

He said, Mammy, who's that in the corner.

Grace said, That's a statue of St. Joseph, son.

Liam said, Mammy, St. Joseph will take me up to heaven.

Grace thought this a strange conversation from our little son. She fetched a notebook from her handbag and wrote and dated this remark. That little blue notebook remained in the car for years.

On the farm Liam sang songs and my mother nursed the baby. It was a warm happy day. I remember my father's laughter as we chatted over lunch. I stayed behind to look after him for a couple of days.

When I returned home Liam was leafing through a catalogue. Shortly after he went to bed I heard a noise from his room. I was taking Lemsip for a cold I couldn't shake off. When I entered Liam's room he spied the cup and said, Thanks Da. He thought the hot drink was for him.

Though normally I'd never allow him up after he'd gone to bed I said, Liam would you like to come downstairs?

He jumped at the chance. Downstairs he grabbed the catalogue and sat on my lap. He opened the pages and pointed. He kept saying, Dan Daddy I'm going to buy you this. Dan Daddy I'm going to buy you that.

He was promising me the sun, the moon and the stars. When I carried him back to bed he kept singing,

Daddy Newman is a great good boy!

Daddy Newman is a great good boy!

The same words over and over again. I didn't know it at the time but he was delirious from the effects of a cancer tumour in his kidney.

This was 19th March 1973 – St Joseph's feast day.

Next day when I came home for lunch Liam was lying

on the sofa deathly pale. He kept saying, Oh blast, Mammy, my back! Oh blast, Mammy, my back!

We took him to hospital where he was kept in for tests.

On Friday I was called to speak to a visiting consultant. While I was waiting for the appointment an old nun shuffled over and sat down.

She said, God still heals and miracles can happen.

I thought, What the hell is she talking about?

The more she talked the more annoyed I became. I felt rescued when my name was called.

I sat across from the consultant. I asked, Have you met this condition in children before?

He said, Yes I have.

I said, And how are the children doing now?

He hemmed and hawed and looked at his pen.

I knew they were all dead.

My sister, a nurse, arrived at this point. The consultant suggested we take Liam to a certain hospital.

My sister said, Why not take him to this other hospital?

He said, That'll do fine.

Seemed it didn't matter where we took Liam. Now I understood what the old nun was talking about. Someone had told her my son was going to die.

That evening Grace and I drove Liam to the city hospital. We had a puncture on the way. While I was changing the wheel Liam kept poking his head out of the passenger window singing,

Daddy's shirt peeping out.

Daddy's shirt peeping out.

He thought it was a game. We sang songs. As we neared the city, Grace started singing, *Nearer my God to me*, the Catholic version from St Basil's Hymnal:

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to
Thee.

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!
Deep in thy Sacred Heart let me abide.

Thou that has bled for me, sorrowed and
died.

Sweet shall me weeping be, grief surely
leading me,

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!

The words *grief surely leading me* kept running around in my head. I thought to myself, Frank you thought education might lead you. Gaelic sport might lead you. Politics might lead you. Facts might lead you. Philosophy might lead you. Knowledge might lead you. Theology might lead you. Work might lead you. But you never thought grief might lead you.

This was a new concept. I thought of my harsh response to the nun hours earlier. Now something else was happening. Something I'd no words for. Something bigger and independent of me. Was I was being presented with an opportunity that didn't look like an opportunity?

Was grief surely leading me?

PADRE PIO CAME TO SEE ME



Shortly after Liam's diagnosis Grace and I dropped into my home church and lit a candle. We were the only ones there. I said, Grace I believe the way we're meant to face this situation is to view it as if we were looking back at it from thirty years in the future. So that in thirty years time we can look back on 1973 and say, We're glad we responded in that way.

It was almost as if we were being given the gift of hindsight prior to the challenge. Afterwards we'd often say there wasn't one single thing we'd have done differently in 1973. This idea of thirty years into the future became a framework from which we operated. It gave us perspective and enabled us not to be overwhelmed by our grief.

We've often said 1973 was the best year of our lives for it was Liam's sickness and death that started us on a quest that eventually led us to Jesus Christ as our Lord and

Saviour. And from the scriptures we also gained the joy of knowing we'd see Liam again in heaven.

Prior to Liam's death I was only a cultural Catholic. Often I'd find myself at Mass wondering what it was all about. I suppose I gave mental assent to all of the doctrines of the Catholic Church. If they taught transubstantiation then I believed in transubstantiation. Who was I not to believe?

The same went for The Immaculate Conception, Papal Infallibility and a host of other beliefs. Who was I not to believe? Was I a learned theologian?

If there'd been a new edict from the Second Vatican Council saying there were now four persons in God then I'd probably have gone along with that too.

Those were the days when doctors, teachers and priests had great power and authority. The doctor wrote you a prescription in a script you couldn't read and you took it without question. The priest gave you penance for sins and you didn't disagree.

Liam was in an isolation ward . We weren't supposed to visit but I went in anyway. He was thrilled to see me. He nearly came out through his eyes with joy. There were twelve cots in the ward. Liam was in the corner without a toy or a picture book. I sat opposite and held his hand.

He said, Daddy what will I be doing in heaven?

His little brown eyes were so earnest.

I said, Liam you'll be praying for Mammy and Daddy in heaven.

He said, Ah no Daddy. I'm too small to pray.

I said, You'll be looking after Mammy and Daddy so.

He said, I will.

I'd a regular routine during the summer school holidays. I'd stay with my sister to be near the hospital. I'd sleep from 9.30pm to 4.30am and I'd be at Liam's bedside before 5am. He'd always be awake with a big smile. His first words were always, Daddy sing a few songs. He couldn't say few. I'd always start with *Danny Boy*;

*Oh Danny Boy, the pipes, the pipes are calling,
From Glenn to Glenn and down the mountain side.*

Just Liam and me singing songs and holding hands. At 5:20am I'd say, Liam I have to go now but I'll be back later. His trusting eyes knew I'd keep my word.

At 5:30am I'd attend mass in the nearby Catholic church. Afterwards I'd walk to another church and so on. From 5.30am to 9.30am each morning I'd be at mass in various churches. Then I'd spend more time with Liam. Grace would come later.

One morning out of the blue Liam said, Daddy, Padre Pio came to see me last night.

I said, Did he so?

I didn't quite know how to respond. When Liam took sick, people gave us copies of prayers to say. One was a prayer to Padre Pio. I wondered if Liam had seen this prayer.

But Liam was adamant. He said it was Padre Pio himself who came to see him.

Around this time Grace and I became friendly with a local Padre Pio devotee. One day this man visited with

one of Padre Pio's mitts and prayed for Liam. Afterwards he said, Frank, if Liam is cured you might do a pilgrimage to San Giovanni.

To my own surprise I said, Sure I'm going to San Giovanni anyway.

Never in my life had I ever intended to go to San Giovanni and here I was saying, I'm going anyway.

I said, I'm not into doing deals with God. If God heals Liam, well and good but I'm going to bring him to San Giovanni anyway. Let God do what he will do. I will do what I will do.

I told Grace my intentions and although we were tight for money she said, No problem at all Proinséas. We'll go and take Liam.

Grace often affectionately called me Proinséas, the Irish for Frank.

We decided on October. We'd spend two days in Lourdes before going on to Rome. On our flight to Lourdes we sat behind a couple we got into conversation with. The wife said they were going to see a Catholic mystic.

As soon as she mentioned the mystic I instantly knew I'd meet this man. I said nothing to Grace at this point. I didn't know how to explain to her my sudden knowledge that I'd meet this mystic.

After a couple of days in Lourdes we went on to Rome. There we were met by two friends who were studying for the priesthood. We were chatting over coffee in the Hotel Adrianna when I told them I'd like to meet this mystic. Grace looked strangely at me.

They said they hadn't heard of this mystic but they would make inquiries.

Next day Liam and I headed off to the tomb of Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotondo. Grace was not interested. She went shopping with the ladies. It was a long journey by train, nearly 400 kilometres. We boarded a carriage with five soldiers. One of our friends spoke to the soldiers in Italian and explained we needed to get off at Barri station in order to take a bus to San Giovanni.

When the soldiers alighted at their stop they explained to the newcomer passengers to look after us and to make sure we got off at the right place. One of the soldiers was an artist. He drew sketches of lakes and boats and birds for Liam. He also let Liam draw bits and pieces. We kept these pictures for ages afterwards.

From Barri we travelled the last 50 kilometres to San Giovanni along a mountainous road in an old rickety bus. It was very hot.

San Giovanni Rotondo was a beautiful piazza. Liam and I were the only people in the whole place. We walked around sightseeing and went to Padre Pio's tomb in the middle of the church. For some reason I wanted to place Liam on the tomb but there were railings that prevented me.

Suddenly there was a rattle of keys and two women scurrying towards us with mop buckets. They opened the gate to the tomb. Before they knew it Liam and I were also inside the railing. They were flustered at our presence but when I gestured my desire they nodded their

heads. One of the ladies took Liam and set him on top of the tomb.

As we were leaving the church Liam turned to me and said, Daddy I'm not going to die at all. It's you who's going to die.

I said, Liam I don't think that arrangement would solve our problems either.

That was the end of that conversation but I often wondered about it afterwards.

I carried Liam on my back around the piazza. At a spot near the middle I was struck by the sweet smell of perfume. I couldn't understand where it was coming from. I walked over to the flowers about forty yards away. Once I moved away from the sweet spot the smell of perfume disappeared. It definitely wasn't coming from the flowers.

I walked back to the sweet spot and the beautiful smell was still there. I moved in the opposite direction to see if the fragrance was coming from that direction and as I moved away from the sweet spot, again the beautiful scent disappeared. In the end I eliminated every other part of the piazza except the middle bit where the fragrance was heady and strong.

I was standing pondering this phenomenon when a young Capuchin monk appeared striding towards me. I recognised him. It was Padre Alessio who'd been Padre Pio's minder and servant. I'd seen him on *The Late Late Show with Gay Byrne* on Irish Television a couple of years previously. We started chatting.

Padre Alessio was warm and hospitable. He showed us

around. We visited Padre Pio's bedroom and the oratory where Padre Pio received the stigmata. Liam and I spent all afternoon with Padre Alessio. There was only Liam, the cleaning ladies, the perfume, Padre Alessio and myself in this special place on this special day.

There were no empty seats on the train back to Rome. I sat on the floor with Liam on my knee. He was distressed with the heat. I ordered Orange juice. Liam became annoyed with me. He pushed the litre of juice into my face over my glasses and down my shirt.

I felt so sorry for him. This was so unlike him. A little tender child dying from cancer tired and troubled turning on the one who truly loved him. I wasn't angry. In fact the more desperate his plight and his rejection of me the more I reached out to Liam with love and compassion. As the train rattled along he soon fell asleep in my arms.

As I listened to his breathing I realised just how much I was often like Liam in that little incident. So often I'd rejected God and His offers of love. So often I'd thrown good things back into His face. But like me with Liam, God loved me all the more.

I'd travelled to San Giovanni Rotunda hoping to find some answer, some treasure, and although we had a wonderful time, I felt I still hadn't found what I was looking for. But as I sat on that crowded train I realised no matter how much I'd kick against God and blame him for this and that He would still love me. I might reject Him but He would never reject me.

In my confusion I'd fuss and fume but He would never stop loving me. He really was my Father in Heaven. I felt

God had spoken to me in my difficulties. I'd found this little treasure in a darkened corner on the dusty floor of a packed Italian train. I wasn't angry with Liam. My heart broke for his plight. I would happily have given my life for his life.

Back in Rome our friends had located the mystic at a place twelve miles away. They and Grace were amused at my desire to meet this mystic but they were happy enough to humour me. The mystic's place was a massive building site of rubble and sand and cement. There was a queue outside an old Nissan hut that doubled up as an oratory and chapel.

Grace and our friends went sightseeing and Liam and I joined the queue for a ruddy-faced man who was distributing holy pictures. There were about twenty people ahead of us. When we neared the front of the queue the man with the pictures looked up and stared at Liam with blue piercing eyes. Turned out this was the mystic. We received our holy picture and stepped outside into the sunlight.

We hung around waiting for Grace and our friends who soon came back smiling and laughing. We stood chatting while Liam wandered off to play in a pile of sand. A door behind Liam opened and the mystic came out and turned left. Liam was standing nearby. The mystic stopped and very slowly and carefully placed his stigmatic hands upon Liam's head and prayed.

Grace and I and our friends all watched this but I saw something completely different from them. If there was a recording made of this incident you would have heard me

repeating the phrase, *Isn't that extraordinary. Isn't that extraordinary.*

I was totally gobsmacked. All around the mystic and emanating from him was a huge ball of silver light accompanied by a sweet smelling perfume and a humming noise. This sound lasted the whole time he prayed with Liam. He then turned and still glowing with silver light walked to another door about forty yards away and entered in. All during this I kept saying, *Isn't that extraordinary.*

I turned to Grace and our friends and said, Wasn't that light and perfume and buzzing sound amazing?

Grace said, What light and perfume and buzzing sound?

They heard no sound, smelt no perfume and saw no light. They only saw the mystic praying for Liam. I thought about this. There were eight eyes looking in the same direction. Six saw nothing unusual and two saw silver light. I must have had a vision.

I had only one thing left to do before we left Rome's heat and sunshine for the fresh winds of Ireland I washed my feet in Father Tiber. Liam was in good humour but was visibly growing weaker by the day.

Soon after we arrived home he was called in for chemotherapy.

A WINDOW TO HEAVEN



Dr Diane Komp is a paediatric oncology specialist who has worked with hundreds of little children who've died from cancer. In her 1992 book, *A Window To Heaven* she says, I have watched over the years to observe, not which Scripture passages are recommended to the sick children's parents by their pastors but what parts of the Bible the parents seek out on their own.

There are three passages they study and restudy: Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the story of Job, and the story of Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah.

Diane's words rang true for me.

On Holy Saturday Night 1973 at Mass one of the scripture readings was from Genesis 22 about God asking Abraham for the life of his beloved son Isaac.

The preamble on the Mass leaflet said people who are suffering would probably benefit most from this reading. This was a strange statement but it resonated with Grace

and me and during that Mass we chose to respond like Abraham and willingly allow God the life of our beloved son Liam if that's what He wanted.

We said, Yes, to God! In Abraham's case he had to do the killing but in our case cancer was taking Liam's life and we had little choice in the matter. Afterwards we never reneged on this *Yes* or ever resisted the unfolding events.

During that Midnight Mass I remembered the famous Mother Teresa phrase, *Something beautiful for God*. I kept hearing those words throughout the Mass and in the end I believed something beautiful could come out of our pain and sorrow and the loss of Liam.

I believed our dry little desert could someday blossom like a fragrant rose and although we didn't resist the emerging story it was still a hard rocky road we'd never walked before.

Afterwards we were sometimes tempted to revert back into traditional religion and become cultural Catholics again. Often this appeared an easier route. No pressure. Let someone else do the thinking. No having to be led by the Holy Spirit. No having to walk by faith. But when we'd be tempted to doubt we'd think back to that Holy Saturday Night and that first big *Yes* to God.

Intuitively we knew our first *Yes* contained within it thousands of other *Yeses* but we also knew God would strengthen us for our journey. There was also comfort in the fact that Grace and I were in unity about this choice. Our agreement made it all bearable.

It seemed as if two roads diverged in Chapel that night

and we took the one less travelled. We decided to walk in the ancient pathway where we'd find rest for our souls. We chose to let God be God. We opted to believe all things would work together for the good of those who loved the Lord. And that made all the difference.

Years later a friend came to one of our home meetings. This man would occasionally go into ecstasy during worship. He did so that night and during his ecstasy he rapidly flicked through his Bible page after page with his eyes closed. He suddenly stopped with his finger on Romans 4.

He then opened his eyes and read the chapter, which is all about Abraham believing God and being justified by faith. He looked at me and said, Frank I believe God is comparing you to Abraham in this passage. Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. I think God is saying the same thing to you.

The call and the dilemma of Abraham and Sarah have been important to Grace and me since Liam's death. The loss of a beloved son was very important to both them and us. They had the same feelings and misgivings as we had. We were all part of planet Earth. We slept in the same way. We hoped in the same way. We were just ordinary people God touched and called for His purposes.

Fathers have to do hard things sometimes. The final time Liam was in hospital I made an unscheduled visit. The large ward was deathly quiet. I was only allowed a few minutes. I took Liam in my arms and held him close. I wanted to hold him forever but all too soon I was asked to

leave. As I did so, for the only time during any of his hospital stays, Liam cried his heart out.

I tucked him into bed and said, Son I'm so sorry but I really have to go now.

As I walked down the corridor I could still hear him crying and calling, *Daddy come back, Daddy come back!*

My heart was tearing.

Yet alongside Liam's pleas I could also hear words within my spirit from Galatians,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I'll never forget that time. That little painful slice of time. Seemed like we were all being crucified in some way or other. I loved Liam so much. He loved me and saw me as someone who was reliable, as somebody that would not walk out of his life forever. Somebody who would be always with him. Someone who would do anything for him.

Liam's love for me has been precious.. When I'm tempted to doubt my worth I always say, Jesus loves me. My family loves me. Grace loves me. Liam loves me.

Liam's chemotherapy was scheduled for Monday. On Sunday night I went jogging for I was still playing Gaelic football and handball. I ran past the Church of Ireland just as the congregation was leaving the evening service. Our

Protestant neighbour stopped me. She asked about Liam. She said they'd a new rector who believed in healing.

She asked, Would you like to meet him?

I said, I would.

Entering a Protestant church in the Republic of Ireland in 1973 was a big step for a Catholic. Entering a Protestant church on a Sunday evening dressed as a jogger in a Gaelic jersey was an even bigger step. The neighbour introduced me to the minister and explained the situation. Within minutes he was on his knees on the floor of the church praying for Liam.

Afterwards he said, Frank, in the Church of Ireland, we have a little healing service with the anointing of oil. I'd like to pray with Liam tomorrow before he goes into hospital if that's okay.

I said, I'd like that.

He said, You might mention it to your parish priest out of courtesy.

I said, I will.

We arranged the Church of Ireland minister would come and pray for Liam the following day during my school lunchtime before the afternoon chemotherapy session. Next morning after Mass I mentioned this to the parish priest.

I said, The Church of Ireland minister is coming down today to pray with Liam.

The parish priest became visibly uncomfortable. He hemmed and he hawed. Then he said, I suppose it's all right as long as you don't believe in it.

Liam set on Grace's lap while the minister prayed and

anointed him with oil. Afterwards he said, Sometimes death is the perfect healing. He was the first person I'd ever heard say that. His words took some pressure off Grace and me.

Within five minutes of his leaving there was a loud knock at our door. It was the parish priest. He also prayed for Liam. Catholics and Protestants praying in our home was a new thing.

Sometimes after chemotherapy Liam wouldn't feel too bad. Other times he'd be so sick his eyes would turn back in his head. I never mentioned this to Grace. I always felt so helpless that I could do so little for my beautiful boy.

I never blamed God. I sometimes wondered what it was like for God to watch His own son dying on the cross. Liam was a brave little boy. No whimpering or whining. Yet sometimes I'm haunted by the memories of his eyes turned back in his head.

One evening Grace went to visit a friend. There was an electricity strike at the time. We'd no light or heat. I decided to put on a coal fire. We were out of firelighters and the sticks were damp. I was struggling to start a blaze. Liam who was lying on the couch saw my predicament. He climbed off the couch and came to me kneeling in the dark and he put his head on my shoulder. He said, Poor old Da.

My usual practice was I'd go to early Mass and Liam would stay in bed. Upon my return I'd hear him getting out of bed and coming down the stairs. When the door opened. I'd be waiting there with my welcoming arms and he'd rush into them for a cuddle and hug.

One Wednesday I positioned myself inside the door. His footsteps were heavier than usual. Slowly the latch went up and the door opened. Liam stood there like a living corpse. He just managed to reach my arms before he vomited.

I put him back into a bed from which he'd never again rise in his own strength. At night we only had candles and the fire. When Liam couldn't sleep I'd sit with him in the chair in front of the fire. In the morning I'd put him in beside Grace and I'd try to get some sleep myself. The doctor came on Saturday. She said Liam would be more comfortable in hospital.

I knew he would never return alive to our home. I'd heard a quote from the Christian existentialist Gabriel Marcel. He said, *To say I love you is to say you'll never die*. In one of Marcel's plays a character declares, *To love a being is to say you, you in particular, will never die*.

This is a theme Marcel returns to again and again in his writing in his attempt to show the nature of the relationship between hope and love. Basically he's saying, Because I love you, because I affirm you as being, there is something in you, which can bridge the abyss that I vaguely call death. He is saying, Love doesn't deny death rather love says death is not the end.

When I was carrying Liam downstairs for the very last time I stopped halfway and I said, Liam I love you.

And as in Marcel's insight I was telling Liam he'd never die at least not in my heart. I then took him to the back window looking out onto green fields and the mountains. Again, I said, I love you Liam.

I then took him to the little red Sacred Heart light in our living room. Again I told him I loved him. I said, As long as that light is glowing there I'll always remember you. I walked out the door with him in my arms and as I did so the glass in the door smashed behind me.

When we left the yard Liam said, Daddy, where are you taking me?

I said, I'm taking you to hospital. I will be with you all the time.

He was happy with that.

Even when facing death Liam was a determined little man. I thought I might rub honey on his lips to ease his distress but when I tried to, his hand shot out and he said, Daddy, don't want it.

At one point when he was sleeping I thought I'd slip some honey on his lips. The thought had hardly been formed before his hand shot out and he said, Daddy, don't want it.

I said to Grace, I think he knows my mind.

My last memory of Liam alive is praying *The Our Father* with him. He was slipping in and out of sleep. He woke up and said, Daddy where's Mammy?

I said, Mammy's sleeping. She'll be here later.

As we started *The Our Father* I couldn't get beyond the first two words – Our Father.

I pondered, Our Father? Is He really my father? Is he really Liam's father? If so then he truly is *Our Father*, a loving father for both Liam and me.

When I thought like this some burden lifted. I left the hospital that night with a lightness to my step because I

knew there was a Father in heaven who has taken our suffering and carried our sorrows.

I came back Wednesday morning around 4:30 am. I planned to stay most of the day. Our daughters were with my sister. Grace arrived around 6 am. I left for a few hours sleep. No sooner had I put my head on the pillow than the phone rang.

It was Grace. She said, Proinséas, you'd better come. There's a change taking place.

When I arrived Liam was unconscious. A young doctor was trying to resuscitate him.

I silently prayed, Lord please don't revive our lovely little boy. He has suffered enough.

Shortly afterwards the nurse said, Your son has gone.

A LITTLE CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM



After Liam died, Grace and I sat with him for a couple of hours talking. I so loved Grace. There was strength in our relationship and a sweetness between us. The doctor said he'd be interested in exploring exactly what happened to Liam so we gave permission for an autopsy. We were to collect the body next afternoon.

The following morning was so disjointed. No more Liam of the welcoming eyes. No more songs together. When we came for the body the mortuary gates were locked. Quite a few cars from our home place accompanied us to help bring Liam home.

Grace and I were sitting on a wall waiting for the mortuary gate to open when a bus pulled up across the road. Out of it stepped a man who walked into a shop, bought something and got back on the bus again. I was feeling unsure of the next part of my own journey but like

the man on the bus I knew I'd get whatever I needed for the journey ahead.

Then the gate opened, the chaplain arrived, prayers were said and we headed for home in a low November sun, which for huge swathes of the journey shone and sparkled on Liam's little coffin.

As we travelled along, others joined our little cortège. On our way we met a noisy wedding party reminding us not everyone was sad that day. In the end there was quite a large cavalcade of us arriving into our town just as the pupils were being let out of school. Hundreds of bustling students surrounded us as we carried Liam into the church for the next day's funeral.

While shaving on the funeral morning I had a strong sense of *déjà vu*, a feeling of this being a moment I'd been preparing for all my life. I thought, There's a big job to be done and I'm ready for it. I'd made promises to Liam. I told him I loved him and I would never forget him.

I'd said, Liam I will do all the readings at your Mass. And wherever you're going to go I'm going to go before you as far as I possibly can. One day we will meet again in heaven.

So I went up to his open grave before Mass and I jumped into it and stood and prayed and praised God. Then I did a press up. I couldn't lie flat because I was wearing a suit. I felt I had gone as far as I physically could in fulfilling my commitment to Liam to go before him as much as I could.

But all my life, did I dream it? In my memory I always recall I was alone in that graveyard but Grace afterwards

insisted she was also there with me. Maybe I was so focused on keeping my promise to Liam that nothing else seemed to register at that moment.

During mass we sang, *Suffer Little Children to Come unto Me* and *Give me Joy in my Heart keep me Singing*. I especially asked the choirmaster to sing, *Give me Joy*. In Liam's obituary I wanted the words joyfully regretted to be included in the death notice in the national paper.

Years later I discovered what we experienced then was actually very scriptural in the sense that joy is the reward one gets for recognising and accepting the divine deposit in every situation no matter how difficult. We weren't happy that Liam was dead but we still had joy. Sadness and joy can coexist together.

Although we hadn't fully committed our lives to God at this point, we both felt God was teaching us there was a Power higher than either of us orchestrating our responses to the situation. By recognising that Power and living in the provision of that Power this thing called joy was our reward. Grief was surely leading us but joy was in our hearts.

When they placed Liam's little coffin in the grave I took the spade from the gravedigger and shovelled it all myself. The first shovel I more or less lashed into the grave. It ricocheted off the coffin. In some strange way I felt we were carrying the war to death. *Where O death is your victory? Where O death, is your sting?*

Liam was buried on Friday. On Sunday I togged out for the local Gaelic team. Before the kick off the opposing players lined up and shook my hand. Their full back in

particular was very sympathetic. We then proceeded to belt the hell out of one another for the rest of the game. Football and being a part of the wider community helped ease Grace and I back into everyday life after the death of Liam.

I also got involved in training local GAA teams. If I had one strength in dressing rooms it was that I was focused. I never allowed deviation from the target. I made the main thing the main thing. We never gave up until the very end. We won a lot of games by one or two points. I liked this because it meant we weren't giving in when times get difficult. And I don't remember ever been beaten by more than three or four points, which meant my own men were holding firm against the opposition.

I became a selector for the County under 21 team. At the time they were going through what became known as The Golden Years. At the beginning of these Golden Years one of the older selectors decided to retire from the locality, which meant there would be a vacancy in the senior selector's team. I was the automatic choice to take his place but the Lord had other plans.

The team I was training was playing away and very soon into the game it became apparent to all present that the referee on that particular day was trying to produce a home win. He was less than fair to us. At the end of the match the crowd rushed the field.

Some were very angry and very verbal at the referee. I intervened and managed to drive the crowd back from the referee. There was lots of pushing and shoving. I then

turned to the referee and expressed my own frustrations with his poor performance. Later I apologised to him.

Soon afterwards a letter dropped through my door. I'd been summoned before the County Board to give an account of myself. The referee reported I'd assaulted him. I pondered what I should do. I knew a few phone calls to the right people would silence the whole affair but since Liam's death I wanted to do the right thing. I thought of Jesus saying, Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

I decided to let due process go ahead and I turned up before the general-purpose committee. The charge was read out and I was asked how I pleaded. I made no plea for mercy nor did I attempt to subvert the course of justice.

I said, The referee is an honourable man. If he says I'm not guilty then I'm not guilty. If he says I'm guilty then I'm guilty. He has said I'm guilty so then I plead, Guilty as charged!

I was given six months suspension. The knock on effect of this was, I no longer automatically proceeded to become a senior selector. This meant I missed out being on the inside during the successful Golden Years.

But I'm sure this was all for the best because I could so easily have been carried away with all the success and celebration that I might have missed out on what God was doing in my life. I believe I got the better Golden Years in the end.

During Liam's illness we became friendly with another couple whose son was a patient in the same ward. One

afternoon I was playing with Liam while Grace was speaking to the mother of this other boy.

I overheard the mother say, I'm off now Grace. I'm going to a prayer meeting.

And with that she disappeared out the door. Her words piqued my curiosity. Prayer meeting?

My father was chairman of a cooperative creamery. Every month he chaired a creamery meeting. I was regularly at political meetings, teacher's meetings and football meetings. But I'd never in my life been to a prayer meeting.

In my mind the words prayer and meeting were incompatible. If there was a meeting there'd be no prayer. When there was prayer there'd be no meeting. Yet for some reason the words prayer meeting penetrated deep into my thinking. When I later mentioned this to Grace she had no memory whatsoever of this incident.

A fortnight before Liam's death I'd met the local Church of Ireland minister. He prayed for Liam both at our home and openly in his church. We'd become friendly. Five days after Liam's death I told Grace I'd like to have a prayer meeting in our home with a few people to read the Bible and see what sense was to be made of Liam's death. She agreed with me. I invited the minister and some folk from the Church of Ireland and some of my fellow teachers.

On November 19th 1973 twelve of us met in our front room for our first ever prayer meeting. I'd no idea what was supposed to happen. We read and discussed the Bible.

The Church of Ireland minister was the only one who knew how to pray spontaneously in his own words.

We agreed to meet for ten weeks and if nothing of any significance happened by that time then we'd just let it all go. I hadn't encountered charismatic renewal meetings at this time. There may have been some in Dublin or elsewhere but I'd never heard of them.

After ten weeks we just continued without further discussion for our meeting together was doing something good for all of us. From the outset I determined there'd be no easy way out. I didn't want to resort to formal prayers I'd said thousands of times before.

I suppose I was seeking God in a new way. Seeking to really hear His voice. Looking for something alive and real. Something that was different because what had happened to us was different. Liam had died and our world had changed. We were looking for a real encounter with God. We were very expectant.

From the very beginning of our prayer meetings I thought we should leave out an empty chair. This was a symbol of the presence of the Lord in our midst. We'd read from Matthew 18 where Jesus said, For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them.

Then as time passed I became obsessed with a problem caused by this chair. I thought, If Jesus is really present with us then why are we spending all our time talking about Him rather than talking to Him.

I shared this with the group. Some were disturbed at the prospect of actually talking to Jesus. Then one evening I risked my perceived respectability within the parish and

my status as a teacher and actually started speaking to Jesus not as if He were present but on the basis that He was present.

Perspiration ran down my back and beads of sweat appeared on my embarrassed face. This was a huge turning point in my spiritual life. I was acknowledging Jesus before men and He was acknowledging me before His Father in Heaven. A new door had opened but it was still a culture shock.

Our meetings have always been open to all and sundry, Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. We were never affiliated with the official Catholic Charismatic Organisation. Our meeting grew out of Liam's death. We've had continuous weekly meetings ever since. Well over forty years.

So in the end, *Something Beautiful for God* did emerge out of Liam's death. Our spiritual awakening and salvation really started with the death of our lovely son. From the word go I'd a sense we were not to let Liam's death be the end of anything but rather the beginning of something.

I determined Grace and myself should not go back to business as usual and almost pretend Liam never existed. In the end out of his death came forth new life for Grace and me and many others. Certainly a huge transformation occurred in our worldview. We began to see things in a brand new way. The Bible became a fresh and living book.

When I first heard about charismatic meetings my mind was completely blown away at the idea that people were actually speaking in tongues like on the day of Pentecost. I remember thinking, If rowing a boat from

Dublin to California would enable me to experience what the early Christians experienced I would gladly take on that task.

At our prayer meeting I began to talk about the possibility of us speaking in tongues but this was a bridge too far for some. Many didn't really expect the Holy Spirit to manifest in our midst; the notion of Jesus in the chair was hard enough for them. I didn't know at the time how to cross that bridge but I knew I was going to find out.

God was doing a new thing in Ireland and I was going to be part of it.

Grace was my anam cara. We loved being together. Yet some old underlying anxieties and questions still remained. I still hadn't found what I was looking for.

Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. Peter was converted again when Jesus cooked him fish on the beach and told him to feed his sheep. I was converted the year Liam died. Grace and I came to a living personal faith in Jesus Christ that year. That's why we often said 1973 was the best year of our lives.

We started the weekly prayer meetings in our home a fortnight after Liam's burial. As these meetings continued we became more at ease with one another. Although we hadn't grown up in a culture where we'd normally share spiritual things, we grew to enjoy fellowshiping and talking about what Jesus meant to us.

At one meeting the Church of Ireland minister proposed we arrange a prayer meeting in the local community hall on Good Friday evening at a time when

both congregations were leaving their respective churches.

This was a radical thing for 1974 Ireland, a revolutionary step in our town. Even though I'm normally a man under authority I never bothered asking the parish priest. Another priest friend of mine relayed to me a conversation he overheard between my parish priest and the Bishop.

My parish priest was complaining to the Bishop about the strange goings on at the prayer meeting at Frank Newman's house every Thursday night. He asked the Bishop what he should do about it.

The Bishop said, Do nothing about it. Men and women praying together for their families, their communities and their nation is a very good thing.

Before the Good Friday meeting a nun almost put a spanner in the works. The Church of Ireland minister was a great man for making small liturgy leaflets with a few scriptures and some words for every occasion. I had the leaflet printed out at the convent. One of the nuns decided to improve the liturgy and inserted a decade of the rosary after the scripture readings. Thank God for Tipp-Ex.

Around a hundred Catholics and Church of Ireland people came to that Good Friday meeting. The Church of Ireland minister and I were leading. But just before it officially started, when people were still finding their chairs, something extraordinary happened to me. It was as if I were taken over by an outside power for to my own surprise I stood up and I announced loudly, I am saved!

I kept saying, I am saved! I am saved! I am saved!

What Jesus did for me on the cross on that first Good Friday hit me with such impact that the only response I had was to stand up and announce I was saved. Those were the only words that actively reflected what I understood and felt at that particular time.

So when people ask me when was I saved I reply I was saved on that First Good Friday when Jesus Christ died on Calvary's cross. But the penny really dropped in a big way for me on Good Friday 1974. I'd never heard the expression *I am saved*, before in my life. It was a most extraordinary thing for a man like myself to stand in front of a mixed congregation, some of them my own pupils, and tell them I was saved.

For three weeks in June 1973, I managed to say two thousand two hundred and fifty Hail Mary's each and every day. Fifteen Full Rosaries. In the Full Rosary there are the fifteen decades. Three fives of the Joyful Mysteries, the Sorrowful Mysteries and the Glorious Mysteries.

I was able to do this because I was supervising the Leaving Cert and most days I'd have six hours of silence during the exams. The Rosary was the only way I knew how to pray, to pour out my need to the Lord, in those days. It was the only way I could express the desperation in my spirit as regards the situation of my dying son.

Once when I was summoned before the local Bishop for not honouring Mary at our meetings I mentioned this fact to him. The Bishop was a great Marian man.

I said, Bishop I don't say the Rosary at all nowadays. I admire Mary. I respect Mary. I love Mary. I pray like Mary. Mary prayed in tongues and I pray in tongues.

Mary prophesied and I prophesy. Mary told us to do whatever Jesus tells us to do. Jesus told us to pray always to the Father in Jesus' name. That's how I pray nowadays.

Of course I honour Mary. She is a great example to us all. Mary rejoiced in God her saviour and I rejoice in God my saviour. Mary kept holy and sacred things in her heart and I keep holy and sacred things in my heart. Mary is a wonderful example and a wonderful mother. She is a holy spiritual lady blessed amongst women who knew how to pray and prophesy and be filled with the Holy Spirit and incarnate Jesus to the world. She also knew how to suffer.

The Bishop was perturbed.

I said, Look Bishop if where I am today is wrong, isn't it awful poor reward I got for all these prayers I said to Mary?

Prior to the recent move of the Holy Spirit within the Catholic Church the Rosary was the main prayer of the Irish people. There wasn't much else certainly not for the common people.

We were a creedal church that said taught prayers rather than teaching people how to pray spontaneous to God in Jesus name. I've read that only 3% of Catholics have ever heard their father pray for them in a spontaneous way.

My father never ever prayed or said the Rosary. My mother would make an attempt once every few years after the missionaries had been through. It might last for a night or two. I never said the Rosary as a boy. I never heard anybody say a spontaneous prayer until I met the

Church of Ireland minister in 1973. Afterwards we began to pray from our hearts in our home prayer meeting.

The real miracle for me in my life was that love replaced anger and meaning replaced absurdities and joy replaced grief. The signs and wonders were the source that brought me to this point. It's really all about being obedient to Jesus. As Mary told the men at the wedding feast of Cana, Do whatever he tells you.

I often think Liam like Mary had to suffer much. Liam paid a big price but his suffering and death opened the door for Grace and I to come to a living faith and an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ through his Holy Spirit.

Grace always said 1973 was the best year of our lives, which sounds strange considering it was the year we lost our beautiful boy.

LEAVING THE LAND



As a young boy I was always thinking and wondering about life. One day when I was eleven I was crossing a field near our house when I suddenly found myself outside my body looking back at my body. I was amazed. I clearly remember repeating to myself, Who am I? Who am I? Who am I?

And then whoosh, quick as a flash, I was back in my body again. A body I have occupied ever since.

I'm the same person who went back into my body in 1950. I'm aware I'm not my body but I inhabit my body. Since then I've been totally certain of this reality. And I know it will be so until death do us part. I had this experience on my own in our field.

I'd often bring Grace to the exact spot and remember the incident. I didn't tell anyone about it at the time. I hadn't the words or the vocabulary. I wasn't frightened by this experience. I was tantalised by it.

Often the questions would come. Who am I? Who is Frank Newman?

My father was a quiet man, chairman of the local Cooperative Creamery and chairman of the local Fianna Fáil party. He was also the arbiter of disputes within the parish. I'd heard many thrilling stories of his exploits as a freedom fighter from others in the community. To my young mind he was a mountain of a man. Although his generation were not openly affectionate I have fond memories of him saying, *You Dickens You*, a term of endearment he used towards me.

I was the son to inherit the farm, the eldest boy after two girls. In all my years at the National School I experienced no sense of achievement. Seemed the only purpose was to qualify me for my duties as a farmer. The intention was to get through school as fast as possible and say goodbye to education forever.

I enjoyed the presence of animals. I'd a natural affinity for cows, calves and horses. I felt at home with them. I hated school. I used every opportunity and feigned every kind of an illness to avoid going. I was a torture to my two elder sisters and they hauling and pulling me down the high road of a morning and me yelling and balling and dragging my feet.

The reason I hated school was because one of the main teachers strongly disagreed politically with my father. He made me pay for my father's sins. He called me an idiot and treated me as second-rate student. Fear was the dominant feeling. Fear hounded me through the halls and chased me through the corridors and class-

rooms. I was punished. I was slapped. I was beaten. This teacher was the reason I skived off school whenever I could.

After a period of absence I'd be demoted to join my younger brother and his friends in the class below. Because I knew a bit more than them, they saw me as a boy who could help them out of tight corners by answering questions. Then after some weeks when I'd prove to be too bright I'd be sent back to the higher class. I was a bit like the boxer who was too heavy for the flyweights and too fly for the heavyweights.

At National School we learned prayers, *The Our Father*, *The Hail Mary*, *The Glory Be To The Father*, and *The Hail Holy Queen*. It was nearing Confirmation time. Learning the Catechism was a big deal and although I was rarely at school I was still expected to take part. One of the lads from our village used to fetch four pints of milk from us every day. On Friday evening he brought an urgent message from the school principal.

He said, Frank, The Master wants you to learn *The Hail Holy Queen* in Irish off by heart for Monday morning. The priest is coming to examine us!

I swallowed hard. This was something else The Master had forgotten to teach us.

My mother said, Don't worry son. I'll help you.

On Monday morning the priest was firing questions and we were going at it hammer and tongs, our nervous voices betraying us.

What does the sacramental grace of Confirmation help us to do?

The sacramental grace of Confirmation helps us to live our faith loyally and to profess it courageously.

What is the character of Confirmation?

The character of Confirmation is a spiritual and indelible sign, which marks the Christian as a soldier in the army of Christ.

What is necessary to receive Confirmation properly?

To receive Confirmation properly it is necessary to be in the state of grace, and to know well the chief truths and duties of our religion.

After we have been confirmed, why should we continue to study our religion even more earnestly than before?

After we have been confirmed, we should continue to study our religion even more earnestly than before, so that we may be able to explain and defend our faith, and thus cooperate with the grace of Confirmation.

Why should all Catholics be confirmed?

All Catholics should be confirmed in order to be strengthened against the dangers to salvation and to be prepared better to defend their Catholic faith.

At this point the headmaster turned to me. He said, Frank would you mind giving us *The Hail Holy Queen* in Irish please?

My face reddened and I drew breath. I stood up and boldly pronounced, *An Salve Regina*, and with memories of my mother's soft voice in my ears I began,

Go mbeannaítear duit, a Bhanríon Naofa,

A Mháthair na trócaire, Go mbeannaítear
duit
Ár mbeatha, ár mílseacht agus ár ndóchas
Is ort a ghlaoidimid,
Clann bocht dhíbeartha Éabha.

I delivered it word perfectly. Thank you, Mammy! I stopped going to school shortly afterwards.

My brother and I were inseparable growing up. I never remember us fighting or arguing. We had horses on our farm and we loved them. We were reckless. When I was thirteen I was asked me to ride a mount in the local parish races. This was a fierce honour for a young fellow. I grew excited at the thought of public men and cheering crowds.

Shortly before the big race my brother and I were galloping along an old stony path on our farm. I was on a wild mount and I was struggling to control him. We were charging along when my brother's horse gave my animal a clip. My horse somersaulted, cracked my body off the road and fell on top of me.

Then as she rose she clapped her hoof on top of my left leg and pulled off everything except the actual kneecap. I still have that horseshoe scar on my knee and I still get flashbacks of me clawing on the stones with the tops of my fingers bleeding and my knee bones sticking out and flesh hanging off.

Cars were scarce in those days. A couple of Americans visiting our neighbours had one. They drove me to town where without any pain relief the doctor stitched me up

before sending me on to the nearest hospital for surgery. I remember being sick from the chloroform.

It took a long time for the healing. I was no longer any use on the farm and all my hopes of glory at the local races burst like a bubble on bath night. My father was philosophical about it all even though his eldest son was no longer any use about the farm and was in fact emotionally disengaging from it.

One evening a year afterwards in 1953, I was helping my mother fill a tank with milk. We carried it in buckets. While she tipped her bucket in I said, Mam I think I might like to go back to school again.

The official age for leaving National School was fourteen. I never attended much after I was twelve and not at all after my horse riding accident. I didn't really expect my mother to take my suggestion seriously but with the help of her brother who was a teacher it was arranged I'd board at a Grammar School. So on 28th August 1953 I restarted my academic career. Fifty-four scholars took the entrance exam, I came last and was inserted at the bottom of Class 1B.

In the Academic Stakes I started off as an also-ran but soon I was galloping along and gorging on the information I was receiving. There were great teachers at that school. Kind teachers. The Irish teacher was excellent. No corporal punishment. No beatings. No working on the farm. No riding horses. Instead we'd a study period in the evenings.

On my second day at school, for the very first time in my life, I donned a pair of football socks and football

boots and felt the power of Gaelic Football. I felt vulnerable because my knee was still weak but I went from strength to strength and within three years I captained the winning league team and within four years I won a County Minor Championship medal and within 10 years I had a County senior championship medal. I also won handball competitions. For the first time in my life I felt I was achieving success and being praised and affirmed.

I blossomed at boarding school. At Christmas they moved me from 1B to 1A. When you're at the bottom of the pile the only way is up. By the June exam of the next year I was in the top three in the 1A class and never lost that position afterwards. Back home I was the only lad playing senior football and this endeared me to the girls.

At my school if a student remained after the Junior Cert the usual plan was that he became a candidate to become a Religious Brother. And as my plans didn't include becoming a Brother I left boarding school and attended a local day school. Things became more difficult.

Now I had to cycle to and from school and study facilities were non-existent. Distractions were great. I was playing with the local football team and dancing with the local girls. Finally with my Leaving Cert exam on the horizon it was decided I'd go into another Boarding School. There was only one problem. This new school didn't allow its pupils out to play football and I was due to play for our local team in the County Final. Our trainer came to the rescue. He was friendly with the principal of my new school and an exception was made. We won the County Final but while my teammates were cele-

brating our victory I was safely back in my dormitory bed.

My new school was a junior seminary for Maynooth. Over half of its students would normally become priests. My two good school friends often discussed this. Amongst the ordinary people there was incessant talk about the end of the world and the Virgin Mary appearing here and there but at school there was a deeper and apparently more profound communication about life and faith and the nation.

The Church seemed to be the only group speaking with conviction about anything. Perhaps they could help me help my father who showed no interest whatsoever in religious activities. Perhaps there was redemption for him. I hoped I could redress some of the injustice in Africa.

Eventually the three of us decided we'd go to St. Patrick's Missionary Society in Kiltegan, Co. Wicklow in the hope of finding truth and meaning in life. I spent five years there, first a year of preparation, then three years doing a degree at University, then one year's theology in Kiltegan.

I loved the camaraderie of the seminary and the challenge of study. I was always in the top 2%. I also enjoyed regular sporting success. Yet always in my heart of hearts I knew there was something missing.

Its been said we have a public life, a private life and a secret life. In my secret life I was still a young man on a donkey I couldn't control.

I think the problem was because I never really had the

revelation that Jesus once and for all took away the sins of the whole world including mine. I was only ever as good as my last confession. I never understood and lived in the fullness of the victory from Jesus' death on the cross.

There was also always a general sense of sordidness in the air because of the contorted sex education Irish Catholics received in those days. There was little or no understanding of adolescence and growing up.

The great Irish seanachai Eamon Kelly said, If the Irish people did what the priests told them to do then babies would have to be imported into Ireland.

I think I volunteered to go to Africa not so much because I wanted to go somewhere but because I wanted to leave somewhere. I wanted to flee Ireland. Escape from a world that held little or no meaning for me. A world without joy.

In some people's estimation I might have been viewed as successful. After a disastrous start I finally excelled at school. I remember getting a 90% Mark in one section of the Junior Certificate. I'd won Gaelic football Championships and medals for handball.

There were also two special girls I was genuinely friendly with. Yet I never experienced any real sense of celebration. No Joie de Vivre for Frank! It seemed there was a large black hole in the centre of my world.

I've since heard the quote based upon Blaise Pascal's writing, There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every person, and it can never be filled by any created thing. This aptly described me.

I was often at odds with myself. My decision to go into

a seminary aged nineteen was so tentative, so haphazard. There was no great deliberateness, no certainty. It seemed just like going to university. I think I chose the priesthood because the Catholic Church was the only body talking with authority about life even though it didn't always make a lot of sense to me.

But they spoke as if they knew what they were talking about and that was comforting. I also had one uncle who was a priest and another uncle who was a Christian Brother. I never considered the whole issue of celibacy. It just didn't figure. There were many excellent young men I personally knew who opted for the priesthood. It was seen as a good thing.

I never thought of talking to my father. He never gave an opinion. I don't know if I ever saw myself as a priest. I imagined myself as one continually seeking and searching for the big answers. In seminary the main work of making us holy was cantered on activities like The Rosary, meditation, exercises of piety, recitation of the office, penance, cold showers and so on but none of this really helped me.

One day I came across the works of Thomas Merton. One thing he wrote became a touchstone for me. He said, A man has found his vocation in life when the movement of his thought has been arrested.

The nearest I ever got to this arrested condition occurred in a couple of classes taught from the Bible.

Fr. Tom Curran's main purpose was to equip us to defend Catholic doctrine and to undermine the Protestant position. Yet when he taught from the scriptures my heart was warmed and my spirit lifted.

It seemed there was more than just teaching going on. It felt like something very good was being released into the classroom. I could have listened to him all day. Fr. Vincent McNamara also taught from the scriptures. His classes were always alive with hope and possibility as he expounded on art and morality and mission from the Old and New Testaments.

But mostly it was not like this. There was far too much lifeless information, man made laws and traditions, philosophy, theology, church history, Latin and so on. The Mass was in Latin in those days. In the end I left seminary because I wasn't able to find God there. Wasn't able to find the answer to my enduring questions, Who am I? Why am I here? What's my purpose in life?

I did well academically; theology and Latin were no trouble. I remember being interviewed in front of the whole class by a visiting professor. He asked me theological questions in English and I had to answer him in Latin. It wasn't a bother. I also had good friends in seminary. I did a Philosophy degree hoping this might provide some revelation but in the end I was left none the wiser. My mind was still far from being arrested.

It gradually dawned on me that what I desired was not available in the seminary. The mysteries were not being adequately explained. The treasure I sought was missing. I could have continued. It wasn't an issue of celibacy or difficult studies. But for me God was not to be found in the seminary.

One day on a spur of the moment decision I bit the bullet and opted out. I left disappointed. I knew there

must be something more than this but I couldn't imagine what that something was. I turned and quickly walked away. I imagined the seminary I'd just left becoming a fragile glass cathedral shattering into thousands of shiny pieces each one a gimlet eye that warily watched my wandering steps.

In those days none of us could have dreamed of the looming changes. Had someone prophesied that in ten to twenty years I'd be speaking in tongues and daily praising God for his signs and wonders in my life I'd have laughed them out of court.

Had another prophesied that within a generation Ireland's seminaries would be empty of vocations, they would have been called false prophets. I thought I was an isolated case but in truth I was only the tip of an iceberg of a great exodus from the priesthood in Ireland and worldwide.

I left in 1963 right in the middle of The Second Vatican Council. Pope John XXIII had called for this Council and asked God for a New Pentecost for the Catholic Church. He died in June of 1963 when the seminaries were bursting at the seams but soon the haemorrhage would begin.

In those days Sunday Mass attendance in Ireland was around 95% of the Catholic population. Today in middle class areas it is somewhere between 30% and 40% and in some socially deprived areas of Dublin it's now under 5%. Overall in the Republic of Ireland Mass attendance is thought to be in and around 18% of the Catholic population.

Secularism is fast becoming the new Irish religion. This is not good news. But God's ways are not our ways and his thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are above our ways and his thoughts above our thoughts.

Remarkable things were about to unfold that would change our world forever. Ireland's time had come. Pope John XXIII's prayer was being answered.

Modern neuroscience research says if we don't travel and meet people outside of our family and community we risk becoming insular and nit picking. We grow to be intolerant of all others beyond our flock or tribe.

Mark Twain said, Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad wholesome charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

Thank God for my Protestant neighbour who opened a door when Liam was dying. She boldly introduced me to the Church of Ireland minister, a new pastor saying new things. He was a blast of fresh air into a dry and dusty room. He helped me escape from my little darkened corner. There wasn't a sectarian bone in his body. He loved everybody.

It was lovely to hear him chatting about the Lord and the Bible, inspiring to hear him pray spontaneously. He was maybe not an answer to prayer but he was certainly an answer to a deeply felt need in me, a need to experience the freedom and joy of the Holy Spirit.

Instinctively I needed a God that wasn't just a house trained sectarian domesticated deity. My Catholic

schooling taught me things my father never would. They said, *Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*: Outside of the Church there is no salvation. This position never resonated with me. Through the Church of Ireland minister I came to understand the God of the Christians was the God of all believers and not just the God of the Catholics.

In 1973 when we began our home prayer meeting Ireland was at war. Blood was flowing in the streets of Northern Ireland, Catholics and Protestants killing one another and so easily consigning one another to hell. The newspapers and television screen were constantly stirring up old wounds and inflaming our emotions.

This was the result of historical issues. Before the 1169 Norman invasions from England, Ireland had been a single national unit with its own system of law, culture, language, political and social structures and an indigenous Christianity dating from a time before St. Patrick.

In the twelfth century the English forced their own brand of Roman Catholicism upon the Irish by the sword and in the Sixteenth century they forced their own brand of Protestantism upon the Irish by the gun.

These two imposed colonial religions helped fuel the eight hundred year old war between Ireland and England resulting in the Northern Ireland conflict that was named *Na Trioblóidí* or The Troubles. These Troubles were primarily political with strong ethnic, sectarian and religious dimensions.

These were infused with the usual pain of injustice and confusion caused by uncaring colonialism. Over 3,500 men, women and children would be killed before they

ceased. My heart is sad remembering this. Even today many Irish, Ulster and English hearts are still wounded and bleeding from the awful loss of loved ones during The Troubles. There is still much healing to be done.

The Church of Ireland minister occasionally invited me to meetings in his home. That's how I met the Rev Cecil Kerr in 1974 the year The Troubles claimed its 1,000th victim. Cecil was a gentle man and a great listener. He was lecturing at Queen's University Belfast at that time. Cecil was a Church of Ireland minister who'd recently been baptised in the Holy Spirit.

He then began meeting Catholics who'd also been baptised in the Holy Spirit. God was changing Cecil's theology and worldview much like St. Peter at Cornelius' house in Acts 10. The parallels were obvious, Jews didn't associate with Gentiles, Protestants didn't associate with Catholics. Peter told Cornelius, It's against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile but God has shown me I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

Peter was even more stunned when the Holy Spirit fell upon the Gentiles and they began to speak in tongues and praise God. Peter's lifelong theology was changed by a single experience. The Gentiles had received the Holy Spirit the same way he and Jesus' disciples had.

When the apostles in Judea heard the Gentiles had received the word of God they were concerned. Peter allayed their fears. He said, If God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ who was I to withstand God?

Cecil Kerr was a modern day St. Peter. When he

realised Catholics were being baptised in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues and praising God he accepted them as true believers. This led to him and his wife Myrtle founding the *Christian Renewal Centre* in Rostrevor, Northern Ireland in 1974. This centre was a place where Catholics and Protestants could fellowship and share their faith together. This was a revolutionary stance for its day.

In John 13 Jesus said, My children, a new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

If Christians, whatever their denomination, are just as alienated and superficial in their relationships with each other as everyone else then no amount of empty rhetoric or slick marketing will ever make up for it! Nothing convinces unbelievers that God exists like the discovery of Christians who love one another.

The Holy Spirit always brings love, joy, peace and unity. It happened in Acts 2 with the Jews, in Acts 8 with the Samaritans and in Acts 10 with the Gentiles.

Satan and his demons can't ever manifest love, joy, peace and unity. They're always into strife and condemnation. The Kerr's revelation and vision was that the Kingdom of God was a kingdom of love, joy and peace and that God is no respecter of persons but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.

The Church of Ireland minister invited folk from our meeting to an event called *The New Wave of The Holy Spirit*. Only two of us Catholics were brave enough to attend. A

couple of other Church of Ireland ministers were also in attendance. They were so unlike us. For the life of me I couldn't understand their theology. At the end of the meeting someone asked, Who would like to receive the Holy Spirit?

I raised my hand.

One of the Church of Ireland ministers prayed over me. He read Jesus' words from Luke 11, If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!

These words impacted me. I didn't speak in tongues but when I arrived home after midnight I started reading the first lines of the *Acts of the Apostles* and I didn't stop until I reached the very end of the book. I was a thirsty cat lapping up fresh milk.

I saw that Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles all spoke in tongues and prophesied. The first Pope Peter spoke in tongues and prophesied, as did the rest of the apostles, as did Mary the mother of Jesus. She was in the upper room with the rest of the disciples when the promised Holy Spirit fell. Mary had already prophesied in Luke 1.

I was excited and delighted to think that what happened in the Book of Acts could be available to Frank and Grace Newman in Ireland in 1974.

Could it be true that Jesus was really the same yesterday today and forever?

Was He really still baptising people in the Holy Spirit?