

Speaking notes of Bishop Michael Duignan on his appointment as Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora while continuing to serve as Bishop of Clonfert

Good Morning! Thank you for coming here today, I very much appreciate your warm welcome.

Childhood Memories

With the passing of time and the advance of age our memories fade somewhat. At this stage, I cannot remember every detail but I do remember the rather rudimentary rope swing. As children, we used to beg our mother to push us high up into the air and over and back for as long as she had the time and the patience. Often as she pushed, she sang and at times, we sang along with her. She nearly always started to the quick tempo of *“Her eyes they shone like diamonds, I thought her the queen of the land, And her hair hung over her shoulders, Tied up with a black velvet band.”* We knew when she was coming towards the end. The pace would slow down and she would sing: *“If you ever go across the sea to Ireland. Then maybe at the closing of your day. You will sit and watch the moon rise over Claddagh. And see the sun go down on Galway Bay.”* Back then, I would never have imagined that one day I would be standing here, within a stone’s throw from the Claddagh and that famous bay that runs from Co. Galway through to Co. Clare, having been appointed by Pope Francis as the next Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora.

A Rich Heritage of Faith and Gaelic Culture

Tá a fhios agam go bhfuil oidhreacht luachmhar an chreidimh láidir sna dúichí seo i nGaillimh, i gContae an Chláir agus i Maigh Eo. Cuireadh na fréamhacha sin síos i laethanta tosaigh na Críostaíochta in Éirinn.

Rugadh in aice le Baile Átha Luain mé agus tá cur amach agam ar Chathair na Gaillimhe ó laethanta m'óige. Blianta ina dhiadh sin agus mé ag obair i gColáiste San Aingeal i Sligeach is minic a tháinig mé go dtí an ollscoil trasna an bhóthair uaim anseo.

Bhain mé taitheamh i gcónaí as fuinneamh agus cruthaitheacht mhuintir an cheantair seo agus an tuiscint dhomhain a bhí acu ar a n-oidhreacht Ghaelach idir cheol, léann, spórt agus na healaíona.

Aithním freisin an fíorghrá atá agaibh don Ghaeilge. Cosúil le chuile dhuine eile, rinne mé staidéar ar an nGaeilge ar scoil, ach ina dhiadh sin, agus mé ag staidéar thar lear, ní raibh mórán deiseanna agam mo chuid Gaeilge a chleachtadh. Tá meirg tagtha ar mo chuid Gaeilge dá bharr, agus tá obair le déanamh agam ar mo chuid líofachta. É sin ráite, tá suim mhór agam inár dteanga dhúchais agus anois agus mé ag teacht go Gaillimh tá spreagadh agam nach raibh agam roimhe seo mo shuim sa teanga a mhúscailt agus feabhas a chur ar mo chuid Gaeilge in athuir.

Tá súil agam gur féidir liom é seo a dhéanamh le cabhair ó phobail na bparóistí Gaeltachta sa Deoise. Tá súil agam go mbeidh foighne agaibh liom agus mé i mbun foghlama arís. Tá mé ag súil go mór le bualadh libh go luath.

(I am conscious of the rich heritage of faith in these parts of Galway, Clare and Mayo that has deep roots in the early days of Christianity in Ireland. Born in Athlone, I am familiar with the City of Galway from my childhood days. In later years, my work with St Angela's College in Sligo brought me frequently to the University across the road. I have always enjoyed the vibrancy and creativity of the people of this area and their deep rich appreciation for the best of our Gaelic traditions in the arts, music, sport and learning. I am also conscious of your genuine love for the Irish Language. Like most people, I studied Irish at school. I then studied abroad for many years and had few opportunities to use the Irish I had learned. At this stage, my Irish has grown rusty. It is not as fluent as I would like it to be. I have a great interest in the language and I now have a motive that I have not had before to rekindle that interest and improve my Irish. It is my hope that I can do this in particular with the help of the people of our Gaeltacht parishes. I hope you will be patient teachers and I look forward to visiting you soon.)

Since October 2019

On a personal level, these last few years have had more of the feel of a giant rollercoaster than the gentle rocking of a childhood swing. In October 2019, I was ordained Bishop of Clonfert and received a warm and generous welcome from the priests, religious and people of the Diocese. In March 2020, we entered what has until now seemed to be an interminable battle with Covid-19. At a stage when I had hoped to meet people, we had to stay apart for the health of everyone. On one

hand, lockdown after lockdown presented great challenges to ministry and curtailed many of my plans. On the other hand, it gave me a great opportunity to spend time on the phone in conversation with and to get to know our priests. It also allowed me the opportunity to reach out by means of the wonders of the internet to the Diocese as a whole.

Bishop Again for the First Time

Last November, things took another turn, when we heard that Pope Francis was thinking of appointing one bishop for two Dioceses - the Diocese of Clonfert and the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. Soon afterwards, we had very fruitful and positive facilitated discussions with our priests, groups of laity from every parish and our diocesan committees on the topic of our future. More than once, the question emerged as to who would be the new bishop for the two dioceses and how would he be able to manage all the moving parts. Although others may have made presumptions about whom it would be – I never did. Last week when Archbishop Okolo asked me on behalf of Pope Francis to become the Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and the Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora along with being the Bishop of Clonfert – it was like being asked again to be a bishop for the first time. A moment, where half of you feels like turning away, while the other half of you feels called to stay and do the Lord's work. I am very conscious of my own sinfulness, of my own flaws and weaknesses, my particular ways and shortcomings, my need to listen and to learn. At times, the thought has crossed my mind that the Holy Spirit must indeed have a sense of humour in

trusting me with the care of not just one but with two distinct dioceses. Such however is now the reality I find myself in. I pray as I have done on many occasions in my life for the grace – as the words of Katherine von Schlegel’s great hymn *Be Still My Soul* so beautifully puts it – “to leave to my God to order and provide”.

A “Western Spring”

There is no doubt that today is a historic day for the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. It is also a historic day for the Diocese of Clonfert and indeed for the Catholic Church in Ireland. Under the guidance of St Peter himself in the person of Pope Francis – we have been nudged together to do something genuinely new. To paraphrase the words of that great poet from the Aran Islands - Máirtín Ó Dúráin we are being called to bring about a new “An tEarrach Thiar” – a “Western Spring”. As faith communities, we have been through and are living through enormous changes. The times we are called to live in are very different from those of the past. There is much that we are engaged in that is no longer capable of holding up to others the life-giving meaning of the Gospel as well as it once did. There is much that we need to free ourselves “from” in order to free ourselves “for” the journey of the road ahead.

Prayerful Discernment

Today, we turn a new page in the history of the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the Diocese of Clonfert. We begin a new stage in our journey. A

stage that I hope will be in the best sense of the term deeply “synodal”. Over the next months and years, there is much to be worked out and work it out we will together. It will require patience and generosity from all of us, from our parish communities and our dioceses. It will mean both listening to each other and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. In the process, we are called to prayerfully discern how we, as a people of faith, are to walk together into the future. A future that will require all of us – bishop, priests, religious and laity to work shoulder to shoulder, to renew in our own hearts a lively sense that life is better not worse when lived with Christ. With our hearts renewed, perhaps our greatest challenge will be to respectfully show forth in deed and word the value of knowing Christ. To unlock the life-changing potential of the Gospel, especially for those who lie hurt and broken, feeling rejected, on the edges of our church and our society.

In Gratitude

I would like to thank His Holiness Pope Francis for placing this trust in me. Thank you also to his representative in Ireland, Archbishop Okolo, for his gentle encouragement, guidance and support over the last while. I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of the Bishops of the Western Province - Archbishop Francis Duffy (and previously Archbishop Emeritus Michael Neary), - Bishop John Fleming, Bishop Kevin Doran and Bishop Paul Dempsey. I would also like to mention and thank Bishop Emeritus John Kirby for his leadership of the Diocese of Clonfert over the years and his kindness and assistance to me.

Today marks the anniversary of Bishop Brendan's installation here as Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Apostolic Administrator of Kilfenora. I do not think we should let a day like today go by without recording the debt of gratitude the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and indeed the Diocese of Achonry owe to you for your many years of faithful service as a priest and bishop. I would also like to acknowledge your contribution at a national level as part of the Episcopal Conference and in particular your work in the area of Catholic Education. Retirement will not fully come for a while yet, but when it does finally come, Bishop Brendan, you deserve it. I hope you will forgive me if I interrupt now and again for a bit of advice. I am sure all here, wish you all God's blessings for a healthy and happy future

I would like to thank all who were involved in preparing for today, those here in the Cathedral especially Monsignor Peter Rabbitte and Father John Gerard Acton, all who enhanced the liturgy this morning. I am delighted to be joined here this morning by Father Michael Mc Loughlin Dean of the Diocesan Chapter. Thank you also to Father Martin Whelan and the staff in the Galway Diocesan Office along with, Monsignor Cathal Geraghty, Marcella Fallon and Isabelle Mulkern in the Clonfert Diocesan Office. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends to whom I owe an immense debt of gratitude for their love throughout the years.

Prayers and Pilgrimage

Later today, I hope to visit the Poor Clare Convent on Nuns' Island to ask the sisters there to pray for me and for our two dioceses at this time. This evening, on the Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, I will make a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Clonfert to invoke Our Lady's intercession for the road ahead and on this World Day of the Sick to remember all those who are sick at this time.

In conclusion, I invite you to pray with me in silence for a few moments. Let us pray for the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora and the Diocese of Clonfert - their people, priests, religious and all those men and women of good will who find a home there. Pray for me, that in spite of my weakness, God may strengthen me for the task ahead. Pray that we may make good companions on the journey and that our future will be blessed because we, together with Christ, have travelled on the "Way" (Jn 14:6).

Pause for silent prayer

Ba mhaith liom críochnú le sliocht ó Lúireach Phádraig:

Críost liom, Críost romham,

Críost i mo dhiaidh, Críost istigh ionam,

Críost fúm, Críost os mo chionn,

Críost ar mo lámh dheis, Críost ar mo lámh chlé,

Críost i mo luí dom, Críost i mo sheasamh dom,

Críost i gcroí gach duine atá ag cuimhneamh orm,

Críost i mbéal gach duine a labhraíonn liom,

Críost i ngach súil a fhéachann orm,

Críost i ngach cluas a éisteann liom.

St Nicolas of Myra, Pray For Us

St Brendan, Pray for Us

Our Lady of Lourdes, Pray for Us

Our Lady of Clonfert, Pray for US

Our Lady Assumed into Heaven, Pray for US

Amen