

Introduction:

The last prayer we say at every celebration of Mass is 'Thanks be to God'. I often think that this is the most fervent prayer that is said!! For some it means that the Mass is over and now we can move on to the next thing whatever that might be. For others it is a prayer of great gratitude for what has taken place. There is a sense of gladness and reverence in their hearts. For many it could be a mixture of both. And of course, there are people who don't know that this prayer is said because they are gone by that time!

World Meeting of Families

Something similar took place recently at the World Meeting of Families in Dublin. On Sunday evening, August 26th, as the plane carrying Pope Francis took off from Dublin Airport, there was a great sense of Thanks be to God in the air. For many there was a real gladness that this had taken place in our country. The tens of thousands of people who had flocked to Dublin from all over Ireland and from many other countries of the world filled the air with the joy of their faith. It was a real confirmation of the presence of Christ in his Body, the Church. It was wonderful to be there.

Other people, including, I'm sure, those responsible for security through those days, were glad that it was over without any serious incidents. Now they could move on to other things that were more important. Life would get back to normal – at least until the All Ireland Football Final the following weekend!

RDS

I had the privilege of being in the RDS in Dublin from Wednesday to Saturday morning. It was a wonderful experience for me. Thousands of people came through there each day to reflect on and talk about marriage and family life in all its aspects. There was a sense of joy in who we are as Catholics. So many commented on this as their experience of being there. There were people there of all ages, many nationalities, all shapes and sizes and all one in their gladness and in their searching.

There was also a huge variety of exhibition stalls for the services available in the Church to support and encourage couples and families in growing together in love, in faith and in hope. The energy in that place was amazing. And the joy was palpable.

This is what the World Meeting of Families was about. The only reason Pope Francis was coming to Dublin that weekend was to reinforce the importance of what was happening in the RDS during those days. What an amazing job he did on that, despite the many issues that others were placing in his way. What a wonderful man we have in our Holy Father! Thanks be to God for him

Now what?

The 'thanks be to God' that we pray at the end of each Mass is in response to being sent out 'to proclaim the Gospel of the Lord'; 'to glorify the Lord by our lives'; 'to love and serve the Lord'. So too the 'thanks be to God' that so many of us felt as Pope Francis left us must bring us to a determination to put our energies into building up Marriage as a central Sacrament and all family life as the place where we are at our best as the Church – the Domestic Church.

Just as the Mass is never an end in itself but rather a call to a fresh beginning in our following of Christ, nurtured by Christ's Word and Christ's Body and Blood, so too those glorious days in Dublin should not end but be seen as a call to make a fresh start in our family life and for couples to make a fresh start in the marriage relationship.

Who is responsible for the follow-on?

Obviously, husbands and wives have a primary responsibility for making their marriage the best that is possible for themselves and for us. Parents have the responsibility for the quality of life in which their children of all ages grow into maturity. Children and young people have a responsibility for how they and their parents can live together in love and joy.

But none of these can do it in isolation. The parish community have a very important role in all of this by creating a marriage and family friendly surround for couples, parents, children and young people by making available many of the resources that were present in the RDS and that are there to be called on for our parishes. A lot also depends on the Diocese through its leadership being involved in bringing forward all that was learned and celebrated during the World Meeting of Families.

Conclusion:

Many of our parishes worked hard to prepare for the World Meeting of Families. They were greatly helped in this by the wonderful resources that were developed by the organising group. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for their genius and hard work. Now it is a call to every parish to work hard at following up. Those resources that were used to prepare for it are still valid and should be used extensively.

The Movement of Continuous Prayer for Marriage & Family Life is an ideal way to build on what has happened. By dedicating a day a month to pray for Marriage and Family Life, a parish creates a forum for regularly thinking about and praying for these. It gives individuals an opportunity to contribute to the health and well-being of couples and families by committing to an hour of prayer on that day. It involves children and young people in shaping the future. And it can develop into a Diocese having continuous prayer for these two vital foundations of our faith community.

NB This article was written for The Net, a monthly paper in the Diocese of Derry, and is published in the October issue 2018. I send it to you as an incentive to renew your efforts for the Monthly Day of Prayer for Marriage & Family Life in your parish. So much is at stake in the commitment we make to encourage couples and families to be the best they possibly can be – for their own sake and for the sake of the Church and society.