**Re-dedication of Belderrig Church**

**and it's 150th anniversary.**

**Homily**
Sixteen hundred years is but a drop in the ocean in this area of Mesolithic and Neolithic remains, of the Ceide Fields and Belderrig Valley, of thousands of years of human habitation by farmers and fishermen. However, close on sixteen hundred years ago a young boy from Wales found himself minding sheep near here, on the shore of North Mayo. After he escaped from the cold and isolation of this area in winter and returned to his family, he had a vision in his sleep. He wrote; "I saw a man called Victor, who appeared to have come from Ireland with an unlimited number of letters. He gave me one of them and I read the opening words which were; 'The voice of the Irish'. As I read the beginning of the letter I seemed at that same moment to hear the voice of those who were by the wood of Voclut, which is near the Western Sea. They shouted with one voice; 'We ask you, holy boy, come and walk once more among us.' The Western Sea still crashes onto the shoreline beneath us here and the roots of the wood of Voclut lies deep under farmland at Lacken. In short, this area called St Patrick back to Ireland. He heard the voices of the children of north Mayo, returned to Ireland and the rest is history.
St Patrick forged the first link in the chain of faith in this area. Many links have been added in the centuries since then, most of them unrecorded.

Today we remember in particular the link established one hundred and fifty years ago, when this church was built and today also we create the new link which will, with God's help, continue the chain of faith in this area into the future.

Today we look back and we look forward. In looking back we think of the deep faith of a people who, with very little to live on, decided that a mud and daub building should be replaced by the structure in which we now gather. We remember their faith, their sacrifice and their selflessness. We remember the values which inspired their lives and which they handed on to their children. We recall their family traditions. Most of all we recall the significant moments in their lives which they celebrated within these four walls; baptisms, First Communions, Confirmations, weddings and funeral. We salute their memory and we thank them for what they handed on to us.

Fifty years ago, when this church marked the centenary of it's dedication, there was no obvious sign of the turbulence or the swift drop in altitude that was to come to this church and every other church in Ireland with the decline in Sunday Mass attendance, the almost total absence of vocations to the priesthood, the child abuse scandal, secularisation and a host of other issues. And yet, while this church has seen the practice of the faith change greatly during the past half century, I honestly think that the real faith of people may be as strong and as challenging ever.

What has changed is the way people practice their faith; not necessarily their faith itself. In years to come, therefore, as people look back at all the various links in this chain of faith in Belderrig down through the centuries, the link we celebrate today and then lay aside may seem as strong as in any previous age.

The new link, which we begin to cast on this day, will, with God's help, carry this church through the next fifty years. Unfortunately, Belderrig now has no Post Office, no primary school, no pub and while, thankfully, it still has a Community Centre, it is becoming more isolated as the population in this general area declines. And as the number of children in our schools in this wider area continues to decline, as our young people continue to seek work and live elsewhere, the question foremost in many minds is; what shape should this new link take in order to serve the long tradition of faith in this area.

As this community declines in numbers, the need for a meeting place for your community becomes all the more urgent. And the focal point for your most important meetings in this area will be this building, this church. It is here that the new members of this Christian community will be welcomed into the parish community at Baptism. Within these four walls, new family units will be created and blessed when the marriages of the next fifty years take place here.

It is here also that this community will gather in sadness to commend a member to God's mercy and comfort each other with the assurance of faith in eternal life. It is here too that parishioners who feel burdened by sin and alienated from God and man, can experience the peace of being reconciled in Confession. And here also that each of you can taste the Divine when you receive Christ in Holy Communion. This church, these four walls have a role to play in this community over the coming fifty years which no other place or institution in our land can provide. This is and will be your common home, your community gathering place for all the important occasions in your lives.  Furthermore, while as an individual you may not gather here every Sunday but you should be able to come here whenever you wish to do so and find the door always open. I cannot think of any other place in this area or any other one, where you and future generations can be assured of such a welcome.

The shape and quality of the new link in the chain of faith in this area will depend on you.  You will keep the doors of this church open. You will provide the warmth of the welcome. You will also provide much of the meaning which people will find here as the priestly presence in this entire area grows less. At times you will probably feel despondent. You may feel that you are raking the embers of the ashes of the past but given God's providential care for all of us, I believe that from those embers will come a new flame of faith.

And that flame of faith will cast the new link which we are forging on this afternoon. I am confident that although the new link will be very different in shape to the previous one which we celebrate today, it will not be the last one.

Today I compliment and thank all who were involved in the recent restoration of this church. As in every family, different views were taken about what should be done, how it should be done, who should do it and when it should be happen.  However, a common desire to see a church here for the future prevailed and today we can rejoice in this and be proud of what has been achieved. Future generations, however small in number, will be forever grateful to you for what you have done.

The inscription on the tomb of Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St Paul's Cathedral in London reads; LECTOR, SI MONUMENTUM REQUIRIS CIRCUMSPICE . Reader, if you seek his monument look around you. When future generations visit this church and think about the faith of us, their ancestors, if they seek an expression of that faith, all they will have to do is look around them.