

***Happy St. Patrick's Day!*** So many celebrations across the country have been cancelled for St. Patrick's Day due to the Coronavirus and the desire to protect our friends and neighbors along the way. Yet, for those of Irish descent, it is also a reminder of a troubled history. Our faith has encountered many difficulties along the way—and the persecution of the faith in Ireland is one example. These are very unusual times, and I'm sure this won't be the last time I say it. St. Patrick's day is a good time to remember the people at Ballintubber Abbey in Ireland, and their faith in the midst of the persecutions. When Catholics were forced to teach the faith at meeting stones in fields for fear of persecution, the roof of the Abbey had been torched by reformers to discourage the gathering of the community for Eucharist. In all kinds of weather, Mass was celebrated in the shelter of the archway of the sanctuary. For the last 800 years, Mass has been celebrated there without interruption. That does not mean that the community was able to gather there each time Mass was celebrated. Extreme persecution prohibited the community to gather, yet the faith remained strong. Even now, there is a powerful vibrancy of faith that marks the community at Ballintubber. We are asked, for a period of perhaps a few weeks to not gather for liturgy due to the necessity of protecting the larger community. This is an unprecedented situation for not only one nation, but for the world. Our hunger for Eucharist is a good thing because it denotes an awakening within our soul, and as with all fasting during the Lenten season, it helps us to appreciate with ever-deepening gratitude the mystery of God made present for us all.