

MASS IN GLENVILLE

Glenville is a remote country village a few miles from the main Cork to Fermoy road. Glenville, whilst a pretty name does not evoke much of a reaction. However, it's Irish name, "Gleann an Phreacain" is full of atmosphere and beauty. This is the Glen of the Raven. It is situated in what can only be described as a cull de sac because on arrival in the village the road seems to go nowhere. The village is typical of many small remote Irish villages in that it has a few houses, a couple of pubs and shops and an old well used Church. On the edge of the village there is still to be found the country estate of the landed gentry. This property is now in great decay with a decaying old English gent in occupation. The people of this place are generations old and are the ancestors of peasant farmers and poor village folk. While the whole Irish nation is undergoing huge change and prosperity, Glenville lives in a different era. Here people take their time to talk. It is usual to park ones car in the middle of the road and chat to neighbours and friends. As in all small rural quiet places there is a great hunger for gossip and news. There is a constant search going on for something or someone to interrupt the quiet and routine of this old place. My own personal involvement with this community happened when the parish priest went on holidays and asked me to celebrate Mass in the Church at the weekends while he was away.

The Church in Glenville is old and unremarkable as a building. As you enter with the feel of cold flagstones underfoot you are greeted first with the musty smell of dampness. The Church is long with pillars running down the sides positioned there to hold up the roof. The roof is high and arched with rafters and beams criss-crossing to create a little interest in what is dull and forgettable. The old altar pinned to the gable wall is marble and brassy and cold. Because the sanctuary is small the too large lectern is a bit out of place pushed to the side to create space for the altar moderne. I was greeted by Ann, the sacristan. She obviously has been looking after the Church for years. I knew on entry into this Church that I would have to leave my enlightenment and contemporary theology at the door. Change comes slowly to Glenville, I thought. I discovered quickly that change came here very quickly because of the shortage of priests in the Diocese. Fr. Cashman, the Parish Priest was a priest alone administering two churches at the same time.

Very quickly it was down to work and Ann was furnishing me with all the details of how Fr. likes to do things here. Fr. usually hears confessions, if there are any a half an hour before the Mass and afterwards he dashes off to the other Church to say mass there. This Old Catholic community was in actual fact way ahead of the rest of us in its ability to empower the laity. During the week, for example, they celebrate Liturgies of the Eucharist because the priest is unavailable. Any time there is exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, the members of the Legion of Mary take responsibility for the celebration of the liturgy.

As mass time approached, I took the opportunity to gaze upon the faithful. There was a mixture of old and new, of farming stock and town, of Catholic and Tridentine Catholic. Mass was celebrated and everything was fine. People obviously had their favourite places to sit. It is very important for the men to have their thrones. Real men stayed at the back by the door. Some sat on the steps that lead up to the choir gallery. Devout ladies sat near Our Lady and saints planted themselves in the first two rows of seats. The notices however were interesting. One notice mentioned a meeting in the area to do with farming worms. Another had to do with concerns about a proposed super dump for the area. The meeting for the dump was to be held in KADES KOUNTY INN. This meeting hall doubled as a bar and dancehall in the village. No doubt some great discussions have taken place here over the years.

Mass over, the men gathered outside at the gates to have their smoke and listen to some of the gossip going around. The women headed for the local supermarket to do their gossiping among the baked beans and tins of fruit. One of the great rituals of the village, the worship of God had taken place and now people were free again to roam and do their sinning at their ease. As I exited the Church and entered the throng the people politely greeted me. A Red Sea parted to let me through. I got into my car and headed off back to the main road and join the river of life rushing by.