

THE PILGRIMAGE, an Irish Story

"A Christmas talk to be given by Father Kenneth, in the Parish Hall". I had never been really interested in religion - my attitude was, "Who needs it?" But Father Kenneth changed all that. He was a real heartthrob, and I couldn't wait to go to his talk on Thursday evening.

As usual, I was late, and my friends had thoughtfully prepared a collapsible chair for me. (There were usually some of those around, old chairs with broken seats). At all events when I thankfully sank into it I went a lot further than I had anticipated and ended up in a heap on the floor. My cheeks were an ever more brilliant crimson than usual but - I found myself being gently helped to my feet by... Fr. Kenneth himself. I felt so grateful. My mind wandered off and I only came to myself to hear him say finally: "I want you all to go on a Pilgrimage".

A Pilgrimage! Enough said. Off I went on a bee line to Sr. Stanislaus and put my name down for the Christmas Pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady at Knock. My friend Maria wasn't going. She was going to read to her Grandma instead.

For a wonder I was the first on the bus and had a good long wait. At last we were off and St. Stanislaus announced that we were going to pray. We said the Rosary, followed by a verse of "The Bells of the Angelus". Half way there we stopped at a village, and I had a bag of French Fries. Back on the bus again, and we said the Litany of Our Lady, followed by a verse of "The Bells of the Angelus". Then we said the Litany of the Saints, and sang a verse of "The Bells of the Angelus". This was followed by the Litany of St. Joseph, and another verse from "The Bells of the Angelus". Then the Litany of our Lady again, and a verse from....ZZZZZZZ.....

When I came to myself we were in Knock, so I went to refresh myself with some French Fries. We went into a big building like the Coliseum and heard Mass. This was followed by confessions, with a number of priests entirely swallowed up by the penitents, or sinners, or whatever we were. It was as if the whole Basilica was out in the Atlantic and sinking like the Titanic. The ceremonies concluded with "The Bells of the Angelus".

Out of the Church I sustained myself with some French Fries, and stepped into a puddle right up to my middle. (It rains 364 days a year in Knock, and on the 365th day, it pours). I bought some souvenirs for Fr. Kenneth, and climbed onto the bus for the journey home.

On the way home we said 15 decades of the Rosary and I was helping Sr. Stanislaus with the responses. Dropping my Rosary beads, I made a dive to recover them and collided with an umbrella giving myself a nice example of a black eye. I didn't realize it was black until I looked at it later. We stopped at a village, where I had some French Fries with onions.

Finally the spires of home appeared in the distance and the bus halted for us to depart. Warily I gathered my belongings and clambered down the steps, getting stuck in the door as I did so. Down onto the pavement I fell! Flattened and embarrassed, I could see Fr. Kenneth coming down the street. "O Joy, I thought! Hiya there, Father" I said, I've been on a pilgrimage like you said". He looked at me.

On her way down the street from her Grandma's came Maria. She looked as if she had been lying in a shoebox all day wrapped in tissue paper. She looked as neat as a statue. I was suddenly aware of my disheveled appearance. Was Father Kenneth looking at my wet hair, the mud on my lower regions, the hole in my skirt, my flushed and greasy countenance which still showed signs of onions and French Fries, my beautiful shiner of a black eye? "I'm worn out Father", I said.

His kind and compassionate countenance softened as he looked at me. "My dear," he said gently, "I was speaking of a pilgrimage of the Spirit". And a happy Christmas to you too Father Kenneth!!

Fr. Pat