

NOTE: The Catholic Church in Ireland does not have parish-based Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as we know them in Eastern Africa. Most Catholics do not recognize the name “Small Christian Communities.” Dublin Archdiocese uses the term "Cell" and "Small Cell" as equivalents. Some parishes have *Lectio Divina* groups, but they are not dynamic or permanent. Other parishes have *Bible* Study groups that come and go. Various religious congregations and international movements have specialized SCCs following their charisms. But the importance of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ -- is a common denominator as seen in the following homily.

Introduction: “Good morning. Welcome to our Sunday Eucharistic Celebration. My name is Father Joe Healey (that is spelled with two “e”s – Healey – SPELL OUT). I am delighted to be here in Kilgarvan. This week I have met some very interesting people named Healy spelled “ly.” I guess we Healeys add the second “e” when we went to the United States. I am an American Maryknoll missionary priest who has served in Eastern Africa for the last 50 years. I grew up in a strict Irish Catholic family in Baltimore, Maryland on the East Coast of the United States. My mother was so strict that she wouldn’t even let our dog eat meat on Friday. Our concelebrant today is Father Leo Shea, a Maryknoll classmate from Boston, Massachusetts. His DNA test says that he is 99% Irish. I’ll let him tell you himself what the other 1% is. Today is the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B. In the Gospel today Jesus says: “I am the Bread of Life.”

Homily by Father Joseph Healey, MM
St. Patrick’s Parish
Kilgarvan, Kerry, Ireland
19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
8 August, 2021

Jesus is the Bread of Life

Today I congratulate you on persevering during this worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. We thank God that we are among the 50 Catholics who can participate in person in this mass and receive Holy Communion. Other parishioners are joining us through online streaming on Facebook. We are in solidarity with other parishioners in their homes, in Nursing Homes, and traveling who cannot be here. We are grateful for the medical personnel and caregivers who are taking care of us.

I am temporarily living in the United States while waiting to go back to Kenya in East Africa. Presently the Delta Variant is affecting Nairobi so I can’t return there right now.

Today our Gospel from St. *John* is about the Eucharist. It is part of Jesus' "Discourse on the Bread of Life" that we have been reading for several weeks. Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

On hearing these words many disciples stopped following Jesus Christ. So Jesus said to the 12 disciples, "Do you want to go away as well?" Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? "You have the words of eternal life."

What about ourselves here in Kilgarvan? What is our answer? The Second Vatican Council says that "the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life." It is our DNA, an essential part of our Catholic identity. We are reminded of Pope Francis' powerful words: "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak."

I am reminded what Father Con Buckley said in his homily here at Kilgarvan two weeks ago: "We are a Eucharistic people. We are a Eucharistic community. We are the local Family of God." This says it very well.

I am grateful that I can be here in the Diocese of Kerry to do research on my Healey Family History. I first came to Ireland in 1958 when we thought the American Healeys originally came from Cork. But then my brother Thomas and I's DNA results in 2017 directed us here to Kilgarvan and nearby Gurteen. I thank Tricia Hegarty, Eileen Scanlon, Tom Mac Donnell and others in the parish who are helping us in our family history research.

I went to Nairobi, Kenya in 1968 to serve in the Regional Catholic Bishops' Office. I served under a strict Irish Capuchin priest named Father Killian Flynn, OFM Cap. Most people said it wouldn't work. A young American priest with modern communications ideas working with a efficient, well organized Irishman who did not suffer fools gladly. No, it won't work. But Father Flynn was from Cork so when I mentioned my Cork family roots he smiled and said: "You are going to do fine here."

This veteran missionary Father Flynn gave me some wonderful advice as a new missionary. He said, "live in Africa with a sense of humor and a sense of wonder." I have tried to live this ever since.

Right now Africa is the fastest growing continent for Christianity in the world. Please pray for us because, independent of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have a Eucharistic famine or hunger in Africa. Due to the lack of priests and the lack of sacramentalized marriages, on any given Sunday in Africa – like today -- most Catholics (up to 60% in some surveys) participate in a "Sunday Service Without a Priest" where there is no Holy Communion rather than participate in a regular mass. This is especially true in rural areas.

There is an interesting connection between Kilgarvan Parish and my missionary service in Eastern Africa. Your Mission Statement reads: "Our Parish is a group of families and individuals who strive to live out the Gospel message. The Gospel gives meaning, direction and hope to our

lives.” In Kenya where I serve we have a Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church. Over 50,000 small communities of laymen and laywomen on the local level in our parishes meet in the middle of the week to read the Gospel of the following Sunday and connect it to our daily lives. The Gospel is our DNA. So the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ -- is a bond between Kilgarvan and Kenya. As an expression of this bond, in today’s Mass the Final Blessing will be in *Swahili*, the main language of East Africa.

A final word: Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania and a devout Catholic, once said: “In Africa we have problems, but we remain cheerful.” We all can follow this good advice.

Rev. Joseph G. Healey, MM (on safari in the USA and in Ireland)
Maryknoll Society
P.O. Box 43058
00100 Nairobi, Kenya
254 0723-362-993 (Safaricom, Kenya)
+ 1 973-216-4997 (AT&T, USA)
Email: JoeHealey@jghealey.com
WhatsApp: 1+ 973-216-4997
Skype: joseph-healey