

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

I have probably read a thousand column inches of commentary on Brexit since the beginning of the year and, with less than thirty shopping days left until the dreaded 29 March, the subject and the language used in discussing it continues to fascinate me. And yet, there is a lot about the whole question I simply do not understand. So today at lunch time I was particularly interested to listen to Radio 4's "World at One" programme. I have to own up immediately to being partisan: the last item on the programme was being broadcast from Sligo. The small port city on the north Atlantic seaboard where I grew up, and which my parents only left when I was in my mid-twenties, was on the BBC news! I recognised the voice of Mairead McGuinness, vice-President of the European Parliament and MEP for the west of Ireland. I had met her regularly in Brussels and most recently in Rome where she was articulate in her appreciation of and support for Pope Francis' inclusive vision of Europe's future. But the principal reason why the item arrested my attention was that Mairead explained what the 'backstop' was. And, honestly, I had never understood what it entailed until today.

Another piece of the Brexit jigsaw has lodged itself in my brain, even if there is a lot I still do not get. I mention all of this because my penny dropping while Mairead McGuinness explained her take on Brexit reminded me yet again that learning is a process, and a process that lasts a long time. Each Sunday at Mass we recite the Creed. Sometimes we sing it; both the Latin words and the melody of *Credo III* are familiar to most Catholics. Some of the words are short – *God*, for example – and some more convoluted, e.g. *consubstantial*. And do we really understand what *begotten not made* might possibly mean? We celebrate with great joy the mystery of the Incarnation – *et homo factus est* – each Christmas, but do we comprehend just how significant for human history is the fact that in Jesus of Nazareth our God visited the earth? Understanding the *backstop* is child's play by comparison.

We will be hearing a lot about Cardinal Newman in the coming months in the run-up to his canonization, but few of us – and the question is, did he, initially at least – understand what is meant by the *catholic* Church, the Church in which both as an Anglican, and later as a Catholic, Newman professed belief. Our Lent Course, which commences on Monday 11 March, will study the Creed (the Nicene Creed which we profess each Sunday) and my hope would be that during the six weeks most of us have a Mairead McGuinness moment! We profess belief in truths held by the Church, but how wonderful it would be if we understood them more clearly for ourselves, and loved the mysteries they represented. Cardinal Danneels wrote a wonderful pastoral letter on the Creed, shortly before retiring as Archbishop of Mechelen, in which he encouraged his readers to *pray* the words so that they might *love* the truths they conveyed.

Father Patrick.