

I am delighted to welcome all of you to the Cathedral of the Assumption here in Carlow as we mark the centenary of 1916. I was the one who chose this date because of its significance for our town, for our people and for our parish. It was on this day – May 4th 1916 at shortly after 3.30am that Michael O’Hanrahan was executed. The O’Hanrahan family, having moved from New Ross in 1880 when Michael was just three years of age, settled in the shadow of this splendid Cathedral we are reliably told, the back garden of their home backing onto the grounds of Carlow College and the Cathedral. I am delighted to bring you tonight the good wishes of Michael’s two grand-nephews Pearse and Harry who unfortunately can’t be here, while I welcome very warmly Michael’s grand-niece Deirdre and her husband Peter who travelled from Straffan in Kildare to be us on this special centenary night. I equally welcome the Christian leaders from the Carlow area and the priests, religious and lay faithful who gather this centenary night.

In our planning of an evening like this we chose to centre our celebration, not on something that might smack of revisionism, not even to dwell too long on history, because history is essentially ‘his-story’ or ‘her-story’. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at the launch of Greg Daly’s book ‘1916: The Church and the Rising’ reminded us *“one-sided history is prejudice. Truth must be based on the inevitable subtleties of history and must try to understand the varied dimensions of any event. History is a history of light and shadows, of ideals and mistakes”*. As a diocese and a parish, we decided to centre our commemorative celebration in the praying of the psalms, in the intercessions at the end of a day’s work, in the offering together as an ecumenical family our Evening Prayer. We do so on the night that a family who lived here so close to the Cathedral for twenty-two years, lost a son, a brother in the executions that followed the Easter Rising.

The Cathedral and faith would have played a significant part in the life of the O’Hanrahan family. So much has been said on 1916, that there is a recurring danger of overload. I simply want to reflect on the role this building, and more importantly faith played in the early formative years of the Hanrahan family. I was reliably told some time back that Michael O’Hanrahan’s three sisters were baptized here – Mary, Margaret and Ellie, so nothing for it, but to dust down the old baptismal registers. A social history could be written by the information contained in Church Registers, and that is why they need to be protected and preserved, not for the prurient but for posterity. What I discovered in my research was not only the baptism record of the three younger girls but also of the sixth son.

So to the findings of that research - **Mary Anastatia Hanrahan** was born on 09/04/1883 and baptized the following day by a Fr. Patrick Cosgrave; her cert like her sisters, clearly states the parentage: Richard Hanrahan and Mary Williams, residing on Tullow Street. Her godparents were Peter McEvoy and Mary Ann Maher and the offering for the baptism was four shillings! There were five baptized that day by Fr. Cosgrave. **Mary Margaret Hanrahan** was born on 07/04/1886 and baptized on 13/04/1886; her godparents were John Clowry & Eliza Governy and the baptism was performed by a Fr. James Byrne. He baptized five babies that day. The Hanrahans gave an offering of three half-crowns on the day! The youngest **Ellen Hanrahan (Ellie)** was born on 08/10/1888 and baptized the following day on 09/10/1888 by a Fr. Edward

Kavanagh; her god-parents were Patrick McDarby and Mary Kenny and the stipend presented was seven shillings! There is an additional reference to her marrying a Thomas O'Reilly on 06/08/1930 in St. John the Baptist's Church, Clontarf in Dublin. There were three baptized by Fr. Kavanagh that day in 1888. As an aside to my assiduous research on the three Hanrahan girls and their baptism here in the Cathedral, I came across the baptism of the youngest of the Hanrahan boys, **Richard Joseph Hanrahan**, born on the 30/03/1881 and baptized on the 11/04/1881; the stipend offered then was a half a crown! He was one of two baptized that day.

By 1902 the O'Hanrahan family would have left what was formally known as Lowry Lane off Tullow Street and moved to Dublin, settling in 67 Connaught Road, Phibsboro. By the time they moved from just off Tullow Street – Michael would have been 25; Richard 21; Mary Anastatia 19; Mary Margaret 16 and the youngest Ellen or Ellie was just 14. Their home here in Carlow and the new home up in Phibsboro were by all accounts safe places for the national identity to ferment and prosper. As strong as the daughters were in that cause, all members of Cumann na mBan, their mother Mary was equally fervent in her nationalism and in her faith. The Weekly Irish Times dated April 29th, May 6th and May 13th stated in a side column bearing the heading: **'Four more leaders shot on Thursday'**: *"It was officially announced on Thursday, 4th May, that four more rebel leaders had been convicted by courtmartial and sentenced to death. They were: Joseph Plunkett, Edward Daly, Michael O'Hanrahan and William Pearse"*. The small piece, written from a very jaundiced perspective added *"the above were shot that morning"*. On the evening before the execution a car was sent to bring Mary and the three girls to Kilmainham Gaol to meet Michael for the last time. The mother chose not to travel and one of the three sisters stayed back with her, while Ciss and Ellie made that fateful journey. So much has been made of the 'Signatories' in recent commemorative events, that it's important to give equal prominence to those who never signed and also those who were the innocent bystanders, the civilian casualties. I include Nurse Margaret Keogh of Leighlinbridge, who was shot as she tended to the wounded; Nurse Keogh's grand-nephew Fr. Peter Keogh, a Carmelite priest, is prior of the community tonight in KInsale and indeed many of her descendants continue to have a very close affiliation with this Cathedral.

Two Capuchin priests, Fr. Augustine and Fr. Albert Bibby, a native of Bagenalstown, were among those deputed to spend those last hours with those sentenced to death. The role of those priests who ministered to the condemned was not just mere official duty. They had to be touched deeply for the rest of their lives by the horror they witnessed and by being privileged to share those final hours with those who faced the firing squad. The words of the letter to the Romans resonates this evening: *"the life and death of each of us has its influence on others"*. Apparently it was a common sight to see a volunteer with his rifle grasped firmly in his hands and his rosary beads running through his fingers. The faith dimension of 1916 must never be overlooked; no amount of wreath laying or proclamation recitation will ever reflect the huge faith these men and their supporters enjoyed.

The letter to the Romans goes on to say: *"if we live, we live for the Lord and if we die, we die for the Lord"*. An important theme that has emerged in the different projects of history groups right around the diocese, in recent commemorations stretching from Newbridge to St. Mullins, is the centrality of Christian faith in shaping people's vision for society and what citizenship means. The Proclamation is really a charter for citizenship. The historian Francis

Jones attributes the following words to O'Hanrahan during his final hours: *"I am ready to give my life for God and my country. In a few hours I shall be with my God where I will plead the cause of beloved Ireland ... this is God's will, and it is for Ireland"*. The Capuchin Fr. Augustine who attended him at the end said he was *"one of the truest and noblest characters that it has ever been my privilege to meet"*. And his final request to the priest: *"Father, I'd like you to see my mother and sisters and console them"*.

"Whether we live or whether we die we belong to the Lord", the letter to the Romans continues. The Mater Hospital in Dublin played a huge role in tending to the wounded from the Rising. Among those brought into the Mater on Wednesday, May 3rd was a wounded volunteer, Patrick McCrea. He had apparently minor pellet wounds in his hand and leg. He was wounded in the fighting at the GPO and was sent out on a message errand and was told then to get treated. He was transported into the hospital in a cart of cabbages. However the plan failed and as soon as he arrived an English soldier was dispatched to keep McCrea under guard. The soldier refused even to leave his duty of watch even for meals. Student nurses used chloroform to try to move him from McCrea's door, but to no effect! Until the following day May 4th, when one of the nurses became friendly with the soldier and distracted him to go for tea in the dining room. The other staff immediately got McCrea into the mortuary chapel, put him into a coffin and the hearse took the remains away! The volunteer arrived on a cart of cabbages and left in a hearse to continue the struggle and the fight. Surely a sublime message of faith somewhere there!

Our remembering can never be just looking back; it must also look to the present. Archbishop Eamon Martin at the Arbor Hill commemoration last week reminded us *"the way, we remember says a lot about who we are today, our sense of identity, what is important to us now also shapes our future, because it helps us discern the kind of people, society and nation that we want to hand on to our children and grandchildren"*. We look back so that we can more confidently move forward. The GPO 1916, the fifteen executions in the Stonebreakers' Yard in Kilmainham Gaol, the battle of the Somme, the Irish Peace Park in Messines, the burials at Ypres – all the anniversaries will merely remain dates unless we are brave enough to learn from the past so that we might revision our shared future. A future that will indeed be one of lights and shadows, ideals and mistakes. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy let us be as cognisant of those mistakes and learn from them as we are enthused by attaining those ideals. Amen.