**Fr. Paddy Byrne has a weekly column in the Nationalist papers.
This column appeared in the edition published 11th May 2010.**

I have a recurring dream, it centres itself around my leaving cert. I find myself sitting my history exam and not having a clue of any of the answers. I wake up anxious but with a great sense of relief.

Once again for thousands of students soon it is time to sit the Junior, Leaving Certificate and Third Level exams. Exams are stressful occasions when young people can feel pressure and anxiety. The Leaving Certificate is an important milestone in the lives of our young people, the vast majority sits this state exam, which in many ways itself, is a rite of passage, into a more adult and responsible life. This is a time of great uncertainty for the Class of 2010. Not just sitting exams but trying to find employment. These days candle shrines burn brightly in many of our churches, representing the prayers offered by parents and students at this time.

St Paul once said

*WITH GOD ON OUR SIDE WHO CAN BE AGAINST US?*

Essentially being open to the love of God in all our lives is surely a great gift. The life that this young generation now enter more fully is a vibrant one, full of energy and yet very challenging. I don’t think it is easy to be a young person in the present culture we find ourselves in. All of these young students will now experience the competitive environment that is the point’s race, finding the right college course and career path in an uncertain global economy where so often only the fittest and leanest survive. The ‘burden of youth’ at times can be tragic, manifesting in addiction, anxiety and mental health issues. However, the enthusiasm, resilience and sense of hopeful optimism that is so real for young people, will carry them through the difficult weeks ahead.

It makes sense to me now, why this group of young people, find themselves engaging in school liturgies and lighting candles in their local Church. I believe faith in the living God is a great source of strength and love for our young friends. Yes, there will always be difficulty and disappointment in life, but faith gives us a confidence and inner peace, that allows us all to live life to the full. God invites us to manifest our hopes and dreams into the realities of our day to day lives. Faith is grounded, in the knowledge that our God abundantly loves us for who we are, not for who we may like to present ourselves as. Faith allows us to hope even in the face of adversity and human struggle.

Essentially faith informs us that we are not alone. Our God resides in depth of our human experience, even in the stress of getting ready for the Leaving Certificate or Third Level exams. Over the coming weeks pray for young people that the good Lord will bless them with strength, happiness and peace. A prayer I always prayed as I faced exam time and never let me down was,

*HOLY SPIRIT, SEND YOUR POWER, HELP ME TO REMEMBER ALL THAT I HAVE LEARNT, INSPIRE ME WITH THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE,*

*AMEN.*