

Fr. Paul's Homily at St. Munchin Church, Limerick, Ireland July 16, 2006

About 150 years ago some Limerickmen abandoned their homes, boarded ships, sailed the ocean, and then by rail, boat or wagons crossed into the middle of North America, where they built a railway line in Missouri. They helped found the city of Cameron, and in 1867 Father John Hogan, originally from Grange, bought property there, where other Catholics erected a small wooden church they called St. Munchin's. In 1893 they replaced it with a larger and sturdier structure. Today that is the only church named for St. Munchin in the entire world - except for this one in Limerick. Father Hogan became the founding bishop of our diocese.

When I became the parish priest in Cameron 5 years ago, I learned that Munchin was the founding bishop of Limerick. One day I opened up my email and discovered a greeting from the current bishop of Limerick, Donal Murray. Last year, when Cameron celebrated its sesquicentennial, Father Michael O'Shea visited us, and for the first time in history, priests from the two St. Munchin's Churches offered mass together. Being with Father Michael is like being on retreat. He embodies the zeal of the first settlers from Limerick, and his visit to us kept the message of Christ alive in Cameron.

Today Cameron sits on the intersection of two highways. The rail line is long gone. We have about 10,000 people, including 4,000 prisoners. A large store draws shoppers from several counties. We have small businesses, a good school system, a well-run city government, several parades each year, and a municipal band. Cameron is surrounded by farmland, where we grow corn, soybeans, alfalfa and milo, and where we raise cattle for food and milk.

Catholics make up about 12% of the population. We have about 270 Catholic households around Cameron, and another 30 or so at St. Aloysius Church in Maysville. I am the only priest there, but we employ several lay people to assist with administration, religious education and worship. About three years ago we made some improvements to the St. Aloysius building, and later this year we will do the same for St. Munchin's.

Some of our families descended from the original Limerick settlers. I guess you could call them our Soda Cakes. Others have moved in more recently because they like what they see there. We expect St. Munchin's will continue to flourish and grow.

So the main reason I wanted to come here was to thank you and your ancestors. When Jesus summoned the Twelve, he sent them out in pairs and gave them authority to perform mighty deeds. They packed light. They visited homes. They enjoyed hospitality. They preached repentance, they drove out devils, they anointed with oil, and they cured the sick. Somebody from Limerick had the same idea. Yes they left here because of famine and hardship, and yes they arrived in America looking for a better life for their families. But they did something else. They preached Jesus Christ. They entered America with the authority of the gospel, and they filled our land with its message.

Today we are called to do the same, and it isn't easy. Jesus sends us out to proclaim this message: repentance to sinners, temperance to abusers, hope for the doubtful, and healing for the hurt. But when we preach Christ, it sometimes seems that his message isn't getting through. Even people we love don't always listen. We cannot find the right words. Or we are so burdened by our own struggles that we cannot lift others from theirs.

Yet somehow the Spirit of God is at work. We do not always see the results of our preaching. Your ancestors didn't. If they could see Cameron today, they would be amazed that the gospel became effective because of the sacrifices they made. It can happen. Let us all continue to preach this gospel even when others challenge its message. It is God's word, and it will bear fruit if we remain faithful in what we say and do.

Again my thanks to you and your families for what you have done for us. We at St. Munchin's keep you at St. Munchin's in our prayers as together we go out in pairs to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ.