

2025 Jubilee Year of Hope Coleraine Parish Pilgrim Day.

Our Pilgrim Journey for the Jubilee Year of Hope was to bring us to the birthplace of St Brigid at Faughart, Co Louth and to Slane, Co Meath, the birthplace of Christianity in Ireland which St Patrick initiated. Both saints, Patrons of Hope gifted to our people centuries ago. The date set for the Pilgrim Journey was Saturday 5th April – Feast day of St Patrick's first convert to Christianity. The next day Sunday 6th April, Feast day of St Patrick's Ordination. An appropriate weekend Saturday to arrive at the Hill of Slane. The year our Pilgrim journey undertaken on 5th April 2025 was the 1500th anniversary year of the death of St Brigid 525. Such a suitable weekend and year to travel on our Pilgrim Journey to both Faughart and Hill of Slane.

Our Pilgrim Journey began with an 8.30am start from Coleraine Pick up point. Our 49 pilgrims who came on the journey were upbeat with the spirit of the day that would unfold and the beautiful clear sky day that we were graced with. En route to Faughart, the birthplace of St Brigid, the recitation of the Glorious mysteries of the Rosary were recited.

Fr Neil Farren gave a brief summary of St Brigid born 451, who along with St Patrick and St Columba are patron saints of Ireland. St Brigid established a monastery in Co Kildare. She employed the help of seven other women and built two more monasteries one for men and one for women. She established a school of art which included illumination and metalwork She died in the year 525. St Brigid was buried in Kildare but her remains were later re interred at Downpatrick, Co Down in 1185, where the tombs of St Patrick and Columba are also located today at Down Cathedral.

St Brigid Shrine site at Faughart near Dundalk, was chosen by Cardinal MacRory as the National Shrine of St Brigid for the whole of Ireland in 1934. Upon arrival at the St Brigid's Shrine, we entered the oratory for the celebration of the Mass of St Brigid. A parishioner from Faughart made available to us the Relic of St Brigid, received from Lisbon in Portugal, where the head of St Brigid was relocated to the Jesuit Church there. Our pilgrims were blessed with the relic and a

Penal Cross. The Faughart site is a tranquil space surrounded by beech trees and a stream flowing the site. Stations of the Cross are set along this beautiful landscape. In the main, the Pilgrims were truly blessed also by the gem of this sacred Faughart Shrine location which was unknown to them till now.

Then our journey took us to the Hill of Slane, a place of yesteryears was a great school of learning and piety. St Patrick was first to erect a monastery there. It was here upon his arrival, that St Patrick lit the first Easter Fire that declared Christianity had arrived on the Emerald Isle. The monastery was destroyed by the Anglo Norman Invasion in 1170s. The present ruined buildings of a college and church was built in the 1300s for the educational and worship purposes.

Upon our arrival, there was just the short walk up the grassy hill, thankfully dry, that led us to the 13th Church and College which now are in ruins. There we had a short prayer service recitation the Breastplate Prayer of St Patrick. The youngest member of our Pilgrims lit the Candle that would be used for our Parish Easter Liturgy.

After Slane our journey brought us to the Belmont House Hotel in Banbridge, where we were treated to a superb meal that kept everybody in good spirits till time to head back to the Coleraine Parish.

It was a Pilgrim Day much appreciated by all our Pilgrims, to tranquil places previously unexplored, spiritually uplifting and to be recommended for others to journey there for a Pilgrim Day in this Jubilee Year.