

***“Victory over the world – our faith” – by Sr Claude Carey  
from the “Brigidine & Patrician Post Primary School Year Book – 1978”, Tullow.***

Every age has its unsung heroes and yet their deeds live on in the annals of time. Doctor Daniel Delany, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin (1783-1814) deserves a far more important place than has hitherto been assigned him in the ecclesiastical and educational history of this country.

Born in 1747 of farming parents in the townland of Paddock, Laois, a couple of miles from Mountrath, he was the elder of two brothers. While his children were still young, Mr. Delany died. Evidently Daniel's early years were influenced by his mother's sisters who told him about Ireland's chequered history and about the Irish monks who kept the lamps of sanctity and learning burning from the 5th to the 12th century. He was able to see for himself the desolation brought about by the iniquitous Penal Laws.

In those days Mountrath formed part of the estate of Sir Charles Coote and was a town of considerable commercial importance. But the persecution of the Catholics was relentlessly pursued. Daniel Delany was scarcely five years old when the Bishop of the Diocese, Most Rev. Dr. Gallagher, ended his painful existence in a wretched hut, thatched with straw and rushes, near the Bog of Alien. The only place of worship in the parish was a small thatched chapel built on a sand-bank close to the Nore. Here Daniel, at the age of ten years, received his first Holy Communion and here too he learned to serve Mass. In a Hedge School, near his home, he got the first rudiments of learning.

Mrs. Delany was willing to allow her only son (the younger boy died young) to go to France to prepare for the priesthood but the severe penal restrictions created an almost insurmountable barrier. Through the aid of influential Protestant friends, Daniel at the age of 16 years, crossed safely to Paris. Here he reaped to the full the advantages of his scholarly training and gained the highest distinctions in the college of his adoption. In 1770 he was ordained and for some years he remained on the teaching staff of the College. He had friends and acquaintances among the Irish Brigade and among the exiled Irish who peopled France in those years.

In 1777 he returned home in disguise to the great joy of his mother but soon he discovered that Ireland's plight had deteriorated spiritually and politically. The Whiteboy agitations were rife, chapels were nailed up, dues were refused and the Lord's day was profaned by faction-fighting, cock-fighting and other vicious practices. Fr. Delany, after a few months, was appointed C.C. to Bishop O'Keefe in Tullow, Co. Carlow, which was then the residence of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. As far back as 1315, an Augustinian Monastery was founded in Tullow but time dealt harshly with that institution.

When Dr. Delany took up his priestly duties in Tullow the gloom of the long Penal Winter hung heavily over the people. Catholic education was denied them and emissaries of the Bible Societies were busy at proselytising activities. Public games on Sundays were accompanied by drunken scenes and brawls. Fr. Delany realised now that his hopes rested on the work of educating the children and young people. He hit on the idea of establishing Sunday Schools, and working on the natural and inherent taste of the Celt for music he formed a band and trained the children to sing appropriate hymns. He had all the gifts and personality of the youth leader and gradually he helped the young to look upon Sunday as the brightest and most pleasant day of the week. He soon found useful assistants of both sexes among the educated portion of his flock which he carefully trained as catechists.

When the numbers in the classes increased he formed three divisions, (i) Schools for First Communicants, (ii) Confirmation Schools, (iii) Reading Classes. Soon, older people came to these classes and a President, Vice-President and two teachers were appointed to each school. A full school day was initiated and Fr. Delany celebrated Mass each day at noon for

his pupils. Soon these organised methods brought about a wonderful reform in the lives and conduct of the people.

Fr. Delany's mother died in 1781; she bequeathed her property to him for his pious undertakings. He invested portion of this property and the interest therefrom went to charities. He likewise provided for the distribution of prayer books among the school-children on the day of their first Holy Communion. The religious institutes — the Brigidine Sisters and the Patrician Brothers — which he founded perpetuate these works of charity.

Fr. Delany was appointed Coadjutor Bishop to the See of Kildare in April 1783 at the early age of 35 years. The great J.K.L. said that Dr. Delany "was a person gifted with rare adornments, he was one of the few men who never failed to employ his talents to render virtue attractive and vice abhorrent." When the old Bishop **Dr. O'Keeffe** heard of his Coadjutor riding in a gig, or ordering the Angelus bell to be rung, he would exclaim anxiously, "Oh! this young hot-head will get us all into trouble."

The first and by far the most remarkable movement of his episcopacy was the introduction into the diocese of the annual Corpus Christi processions. His relative and friend Dr. Butler, Archbishop of Cashel was the first to introduce the Eucharistic processions among the laity. Love for the Blessed Eucharist was the ruling passion of Dr. Delany's life. In the old and dilapidated Chapel of Tullow he publicly held these processions preceded by Adoration night and day during the octave of Corpus Christi; he took for his episcopal motto — "Fortiter et Suaviter."

In 1785 Dr. Delany established the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament in Tullow parish. The Rebellion of 1798 interrupted these devotions but as soon as peace had been restored the Processions and the Adoration were resumed. Dr. O'Keeffe died on 18th September 1787 and 17th February 1788 Dr. Delany received faculties as Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. During his episcopacy the first practical relaxation of the Penal Code was achieved and the Irish Bishops set to work to gather together the scattered stones of their sanctuaries and to cover the land once more with churches, monasteries, convents and schools.

In Tullow his Cathetical Society extended their activities to the visitation of Catholic families in the parish. In 1792 Sunday Schools were established in Mountrath with the help of Mary Dawson from Tullow. She was buried in an old Church of the Penal Times in Tullow. During the horrors of '98 the military and their horses were housed in this church.

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