

The chief-celebrant of the mass was Canon Shane McCaughey PP, Castleblayney, who also preached the homily. The following is the text of the homily:

“Some of you may be familiar with the French Philosopher Paul Ricoeur who died in 2005. He was a lecturer and writer of books and essays, the most recent of which was titled “Memory, History, Forgetting” published in 2004. In it he posed the question as to why do some historical moments occupy the forefront of our collective consciousness while other profound events are forgotten. Why does history “overly remember” some events at the expense of others?

‘He gives a number of illustrations of this. In the west everyone is conscious of the genocide of the Jewish people during the Second World War, known as the Holocaust while at the same time few recall the genocide of the Armenians decades earlier, also a holocaust. Historians and commentators put their own perspective, their own slant on our history, he claims, often to the detriment of our wellbeing.

‘I believe we can today add another illustration to this revisionism in the way that the Catholic Church and particularly the religious orders in Ireland have had their record of dedicated service completely and comprehensively ignored to be replaced with a narrative that insists that all our religious orders should be demonised and totally condemned for the failings of individual members.

‘This rewriting of history is not a balanced reassessment of centuries of exceptional generosity by the Church in Irish society, but is a consensus of group thinking which extends through the media, journalism and offices of the state, which wishes to denounce and silence the voice of the Church and relegate it to the bizarre extremism of fringe fundamentalism. In this new dispensation the favoured historians are determined to engrave in the memory the scandalous behaviour of the few in our clergy and religious, while forgetting forever the enormous contribution to education, healthcare and community development of the vast majority of priests and those in consecrated life.

‘While the Church speaks of “charity to truth”, the new narrow liberal agenda may grudgingly accept and tolerate the charity of individuals like Sister Consilio of Cuan Mhuire, Brother Kevin in the Capuchin day centre and Father Peter McVerry with the homeless, but will condemn and ignore the call to truth made by Pope Francis on his visit here in August.

‘We have come together this evening to repudiate the revisionism of our history. We as a community wish to acknowledge and celebrate the contribution that the Sisters of Mercy have made to Muckno and the surrounding parishes since your arrival in 1905. When Canon James Meegan invited the Sisters of Mercy to set up in Castleblayney he was attracted by the mission statement of their founder Sr Catherine McCauley, who wished to do something practical for the poor and to present to them the compassionate face of God. Through the establishment of their three school the Sisters provided education to the children of this and neighbouring parishes at little cost. Over the decades since, thousands of people have benefitted from an education made available through the heroic sacrifices of so many women who put all their energies as well as their salaries in to the service of the young people.

When the workhouse closed the Sisters took charge of the nursing care there and enabled it to evolve to become St. Mary’s hospital and then to the wonderful nursing home of today.

'The interaction with parishioners and particularly the contact with the poor and marginalised by way of visitation and charity enabled this parish to have a real sense of community built on the foundations of the beatitudes. The development of the life-giving ministries of the more recent decades saw the Sisters leading the way in the any initiatives that have come to fruition in childcare, housing, environment and the arts. The wonderful Íontas centre which was the vision of Sr. Celine Mc Ardle's provides the visitor with a real sense of astonishment as they discover the fabulous facilities which are so accessible to the whole community.

'As we come together this evening in this sacred place we wish to acknowledge the rich legacy you have provided As you share stories and bring back to life the memories of the past may you come to realise that your work has not been in vain.

'Your memories and history will not be forgotten and the plaque we dedicate today will stand as a testament to future generations who when they look back on these times will be able to determine that the narrative being foisted upon us by a narrow and blinkered society is far from the truth. As you have journeyed with this community over the decades you have helped them to overcome hardships and disappointments, and enabled them to celebrate with joy the blessings of life. You have allowed our people to know that the message of Jesus to go teach all nations was well carried out in your service to us. As your attention turns to the developing world, may God continue to bless you, to nourish you and strengthen you.

'In Isaiah today we are told that the seed of integrity will spring up in the sight of the nations. St Paul urges us to be united in our convictions and in St Matthew's Gospel we find Jesus thanking God for revealing God's mysteries not to the learned and the clever, but to mere children. He invites us who may feel overburdened to remember that His yolk is easy and light and we will find rest in Him.

'May I conclude with some lines from the beautiful prayer "Prophets of a future not our own", associated with St Oscar Romero;

"It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own"

'The seeds sown here by the Sisters of Mercy over the decades will continue to produce fruit in the future. We salute you Sisters for your convictions as you follow the path laid down by Sister Catherine McCauley. We pray you find comfort and consolation in the presence of our saviour, for the vocation of your lives will stand as a wonderful example of witness to the truth in challenging times. You are truly "prophets of a future not your own".