

‘Communion with Christ and with one another’

Last Sunday evening (August 5, 2012) parishioners from the parishes of Greencastle, Gortin, Cappagh, Newtownstewart, Drumragh, Drumquin, Ardstraw West and Castleberg turned out in large numbers to a Mass of Thanksgiving at Formil Mass Rock in the parish of Greencastle.

The people of the parish felt they wanted to contribute in some way and they thought the outdoor Mass at the Mass Rock would be a unique experience. It brought the Eucharistic Congress to a conclusion.

Priests from all the parishes involved took part in the celebration of the Mass. Father Eugene Hasson, parish priest of Greencastle being the chief con-celebrant.

This is the second time that Mass was celebrated at Formil Mass Rock in living memory. The last time a ceremony like this was held at the Mass rock was when the then parish priest Fr. Seamus Shields led the celebration.

Formil Mass rock is one of three known Mass rock sites in Greencastle parish. Tradition has it that years ago the older people in the area always encouraged the children to pray at this Mass rock.

Open air worship was a common feature in Ulster and particularly in Tyrone where the defeated O’Neills fled to exile in 1607. For the next one hundred and fifty years at least, the penal laws were in force, and the Catholic population had to travel long distances on foot and at the mercy of the elements to hear Mass in some hidden glen or valley.

When we look around nowadays and see our fine churches and schools – let us remember the heroic sacrifices that were made to preserve and hand on the faith that we share today. Despite the centuries of persecution and the most determined efforts to stomp out the faith, the people remained faithful.

Greencastle parish has come a long way in the past two hundred years since the time when the Penal Laws were in force and poverty was everywhere. We still have reminders of those dark ages at the Mass rocks.

Michael Haughey
August 5, 2012.

