

Bishop McKeown Joined Pilgrims at Historic Mass Rock

Michael Haughey.

Upwards of two hundred pilgrims gathered at a historic Mass rock site in Greencastle parish on Sunday August 3<sup>rd</sup> 2014.

The event had been organised to celebrate and acknowledge our continuing pilgrimage of faith.

Mass rocks were used as an altar in Ireland back about three hundred years ago as a location for Roman Catholic Mass. Observing the Catholic Mass was made illegal at the time of both Cromwell's campaign against the Irish, and the Penal Law of 1695. There are three Penal Mass sites in the parish of Greencastle and in the previous two years pilgrimage was made to the other two, Crouck in 2013 and Formil in 2012. Dorville was the most physically challenging of all the three pilgrimages but it was most rewarding for all the people who made the pilgrimage on that Sunday.

The chief celebrant of the Mass was the recently appointed County Antrim born Bishop Donal McKeown who was paying his first visit to Greencastle parish. Bishop McKeown was assisted at the Mass by Fr. Eugene Hasson PP Greencastle and visiting priests Fr. Mark Monaghan SMA and his brother Monsignor Danny Monaghan SMA. Also present was Fr. Kevin Mullan PP Langfield (Drumquin) parish. Many people participating in this year's pilgrimage remembered the celebrations at each of these locations with Father Seamus Shields back in 1981.

Carraig an Aifrinn (Mass Rock)

***“In a lonely mountain valley in the country of Tyrone.  
Lies one of Ireland's hollowed spots deserted and unknown.  
But few who write historic tales or wield the poet's pen.  
Can say with pride I've knelt beside the Mass Rock in the Glen.”***

These few lines written by Felix Kearney refer in particular to the Corradinna Mass Rock in the parish of Drumragh but are an apt description of any of the Mass rocks scattered throughout Tyrone and indeed Ireland. It was in these holy glens that people risked their freedom and lives to keep the faith of Padhraig in spite of persecution. The courage and faith of priests and laity at this time was incredible.

And understanding of the history of English rule in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is needed to comprehend the origin of Mass Rocks. During this time the practice of the Catholic faith was banned under pain of death, churches were desecrated and a bounty of ten pounds – twice that of a wolf – was placed on priests' heads. Hung drawn and quartered if discovered, our priests struggled to keep the faith and serve their congregations. People hid priests in their homes and Mass was celebrated in these houses. The need for a larger venue to meet the demand for the sacraments was recognised. Isolated locations were found with a large rock acting as the altar and round

these altars the people secretly made way to attend their religious duties. Lookouts were posted around the place of worship and these would raise the alarm at the first hint of danger.

Virtually every parish in Ireland has a Mass rock where the people knelt in the heather, went to Confession, receive the sacraments and then dispersed quietly back to their homes. Through the generations the people have kept their love and respect for these Mass rocks and today people remember with pride and gratitude the brave men and women who risked their lives so that we could practice our faith in peace.

I will leave the last word to Felix Kearney:

***“no more on Corradinna Hil, the sentinel stands on guard.  
Our ancient foes, the hated yoes have gone to their reward.  
And we who worship God and peace, should bless the fearless men,  
Who kept the faith of Padhraig, round the Mass rock in the glen.”***

parish of greencastle  
penal mass rock sites

diocese of derry – on pilgrimage to our

*'I am a passing guest, a pilgrim, like all my ancestors' psalm 39:12.*



Formail  
5<sup>th</sup> August 2012

We gathered with our neighbouring parishes to give thanks for the International Eucharistic Congress that took place June 2012 and for which we had prepared together over the previous two and a half years.

Father Francis Bradley a native of Badoney Lower gave the homily.

Crouck  
4<sup>th</sup> August 2013

We gathered to mark the 'Year of Faith' initiated by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI October 2012 – our visiting preacher was Fr. C.Kevin Gillespie SJ President of Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, USA.





Dorville  
3<sup>rd</sup> August 2014

We were joined on this most physically challenging Sunday afternoon by our new bishop Bishop Donal McKeown, on his first visit to our faith-community.

Pilgrim's Prayer.....  
God of the nomad and the pilgrim,  
May we find our security in you and not in our possessions.  
May our homes be open to guests and our hearts to one another  
So that all our travelling is lighter and together we reach our goal.

**Celtic origins**