**Motherhood, Media and Me – maintaining Faith in a Changing World**

*Delivered at Knock Novena, Monday August 19th 2019 by Carole Coleman.*

Hello everybody, what a joy for me be here with you to help celebrate the Knock Novena.

My talk is entitled Motherhood, Media and CMe because I am first a wife and mother, and I happen to work in the media which influences SO much of our lives. We now spend several hours a day engaged with media of some sort be it television, radio or online.

Let me tell you a little bit about my house. I was born in London, grew up in co Leitrim, and attended boarding school in Newtown Forbes, County Longford.

My husband was born in the windy city of Chicago and our two daughters in Russia.

Every day I thank God for bringing us all together as a family. For us to have come from such disparate places -and still feel like we were always meant to be together – is one of the miracles that feeds my faith.

What is my faith? For me faith it’s a feeling of contentment and balance inside that comes from my belief that a power much greater than me is directing everything.

But it also about knowing and enjoying my purpose in all of this. Growing up in a Catholic home in Leitrim and a convent boarding school, I believed that God had a plan for me.

As a girl my dream was that I would travel the world and live in hotels. I wouldn’t have to cook or clean - just explore foreign parts and meet interesting people. I loved hearing the names of faraway places like Vladivostok or Chatanooga, or Galilee.

I didn’t know then I was going to be a journalist and that for a number of years I would literally live out of a suitcase as I travelled across America , Europe, parts of China, Russia , Venezuela, Mexico , Guatemala to report on people and issues there.

On Sept 11th 2001 I was in Washington DC when terrorists flew aeroplanes full of ordinary people into the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington which resulted in the towers collapsing and 2500 people dying. That tested all our faith. The fact that it was carried out by people, seemingly in the name of THEIR faith, was very hard to take.

I interviewed victim’s families, firefighters, politicians, and eventually came face-to-face with the then president of the United States GW Bush. I knew him to be a person of deep religious faith, but in questioning him, I needed to know how he squared that faith with invading Iraq and Afghanistan in retaliation for the attacks. Hundreds of thousands have died as a result of these military interventions, and from the ruins in Iraq Islamic State emerged.

So sitting there with the US president, my girlhood dream of being a high flyer was working out. But was this ALL of God’s plan for me? I was working hard, doing a good job - yet it all seemed a bit self-serving. So when I prayed, I imagined myself as an empty vessel and asked God to fill me with a purpose.

And different things started to happen. Now as a wife, and mother of two daughters (aged 11 and 12) I know the bigger role God had in mind for me was to nurture and love. I’m sure it’s the same for many of you. It just took me longer to figure it out!

I get chills watching our 12-year-old daughter cooking for everybody because I know that it was me and my husband and her grandparents who taught her. Watch my younger girl dance her improvised routines gives me greater satisfaction than any radio broadcast. Of course my kids think that mammy interviewing ministers on radio or speaking here at the Basilica is normal. As a woman I’m proud to be a strong role model for them.

I do most of my praying with the children. We thank God for what we have and ask to be kept safe for another night. My go-to woman, in a panic has always been Mary. But when I pray the Hail Mary my girls tell me not to say “at the hour of our death”, so for now we have modified that line to a more child friendly version. They are not yet contemplating death but looking forward to their lives.

In attempting to pass on my faith, I realise that our children are growing up in a very different world as they share their childhoods with children of many faiths and none.

We often talk about our Muslims friends and how they must be just like us because in the end of the day we all believe in a higher power.

We have friends too who are not being brought up in any religious faith. But we understand they too have some guiding principles because they are good people. As a mother I strive to see Faith as a positive thing. Not a chore, or extra weekly activity but a way of life. A smile, a helpful act, a kind word. Faith is Love.

So to the second word in my title, media.

I know many of you are thinking right now, you don’t hear much about faith or love in today’s media.

The daily news is mostly negative, the issues are often difficult. Churches - of any denomination, are not particularly popular with much of the media.

Old Media

My 30-year career has been in what’s known as OLD MEDIA - newspapers, radio and television.

Over those years the Catholic Church worldwide has received some very critical, yet crucial press.

I was in college in the late 1980s when clerical abuse issues emerged into the public domain. The news and the fact it had been hidden for so long was a big story. Many of my college contemporaries became editors and writers who went on to expose wrongdoing - in the church and elsewhere in society.

To a certain extent I think my generation were blinded to the good that happens every day in our churches. After all WE - you and I - are the church. Without us there is no church.

Some people will say to me that the church revelations destroyed their faith.

I tell them that my faith, my relationship with God is above any institution. It’s in here.

In my 30 years in journalism we’ve also gone through huge social change. Many religious school and hospitals have been replaced by those with a pluralist ethos.

Last year arch bishop of Dublin Diarmuid Martin said on the radio program I work on that it is probably no longer tenable to have a maternity hospital “wholly governed by religious”.

However he believes there is a pastoral role to be played in such hospitals where people are dealing with death and serious illness.

In the same interview Archbishop Martin said he felt it was time for the young generation of church leaders to take over.

Where will these leaders come from?

Last week my parish lost one of our 3 wonderful priests to another lucky parish. We hope he will be replaced but the trend is pointing to more lay involvement. We are the church so if we want it to continue it looks as if we will all have to step up.

I recently read a book by and American Catholic who argued if just 1 or 2 % more Catholics became actively involved in their local church it would be completely transformed. In most parishes just 7% of parishioners are highly engaged.

New Media

My old media is very quickly being superseded by New Media. On Facebook or Instagram anyone can have their own news channel and some people broadcast their lives. I read that last week that a leaving cert student opened her results live online. Her followers watched as her excitement turned to disappointment and tears.

We were told Social media would bring us all closer together, build campaigns, even overthrow undemocratic regimes.

Now we see the downsides. What you put online stays online, long after you wish it wouldn’t. Young people are bullied by hurtful comments. This happens main at night - because social media never shuts down. People have taken their lives due to bullying.

40% are talking to strangers on line. 50% of young people online are made to feel that they are not good enough.

I worry for my children, and feel a huge responsibility to teach them how to use the internet for their benefit, while avoiding the dangers. It’s not easy.

If that’s new media I think I prefer old media.

We may be all sick of Brexit, but at least Irish newspapers and broadcasters continue to highlight homelessness, inequalities in our health and education sectors and the plight of refugees here and abroad.

I spend much time covering the issues that churches worldwide are concerned with. I know I can do better. Instead of simply highlighting problems I try to seek out people who believe they have solutions.

Earlier this year I interviewed a mother whose 21-year-old daughter took her life after being bullied in person and online. Instead of shutting herself away that mother is working every day to try and prevent this happening any-one else.

Before I go, let me tell you a bit America where I spent the first 13 years of this century.

I travelled across the states for a book called “Alleluia America” and visited the large variety of religious groups that co-exist in America - evangelical, Mormon, Jewish, Amish, Muslim. I went to see famous evangelist Billy Graham and a fellow in rural Kansas who had appointed himself Pope

More than us, Americans love to talk about their faith.

I found that young people in America often use church as a way to bond, make friends and make music. There is always food to be had and church outings.

Church is a place to go with family, I believe it needs to speak to each age group, or young people in particular will fail to be engaged. A young person and an older person do see life and death in the same way.

I hope in the future to also see a more inclusive church.

I noted in America how central the Holy Bible is to Christian Faith.

In an Amish home in Pennsylvania it was displayed very centrally – clearly the most important item in the home.

Most hotel rooms in America have a copy of the Holy Bible.

I’ve always found the Bible a daunting read, all that small print and dense paragraphs.

So I have a pack of cards, with a line of Bible verse on each.

The Bible is was original media. It is often called the Good News. And we could certainly do with more of that.

So here’s some news for you

“Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, what the lord has prepared for those who love him.”

Thanks for listening.