



fraternitas

Ars Gratia Christi

Official Newsletter of The Fraternity of St Genesius, St Mary's Presbytery, Dublin Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth, Ireland.

Volume 1

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Issue 1

From the Father Director

Welcome to the Fraternity of St Genesius. Over the past few months you have been joining this new association and offering your prayers and sacrifices for the men and women of the theatrical and cinematic arts. For your kindness and willingness to join us in this apostolate of prayer and support, I thank you and ask God's blessing upon you. This association seems unusual: a fraternity of Christians praying for actors and their colleagues – why, you might ask? Where did the idea come from? In this first letter, perhaps a brief account of how this started might be useful.

The idea for the Fraternity was born in a little church in London: Corpus Christi Church, Maiden Lane, in the West End. Thanks to a friend I came to know and love this church: it is a haven of peace in the city, and so whenever I am in London I like to go there. On my first visit a few years ago I noticed a statue of a Roman martyr – it turned out to be St Genesius, the patron of acting and theatre. I knew him well as I had often visited his tomb when I was living in Rome. During Holy Hours in Corpus Christi over a period of a few years, my attention was constantly being brought back to the statue and I found myself praying for those under St Genesius' patronage. Since that first visit the idea of forming a family of prayer for them presented itself and remained in my heart. In conversations with friends over the years we had often spoken of the need to renew culture and of the possibilities those in the arts and cinema had of helping re-Christianize our society.



Culture has a tremendous influence on society and particularly on our young people, and it needs to be reclaimed for Christ. Other things were also occupying my mind and through personal experiences and meetings I came to realize that many in 'the business' were struggling, be they famous or unknown. One meeting in particular touched me and made sense of my reflections.

One night, while working as a seminarian in New York, I joined a group who went out to help the homeless. One young man who was sleeping out Battery Park told me his story. He was not from New York - he had left his home in the Mid-West (for what reasons he did not tell me), and had come to New York to pursue his dream to be an actor: his story was hardly unique – the city is full of aspiring actors, most of

whom are to be found working in diners and the service industries while they look for work. He had planned to stay with his uncle, but discovered too late that his uncle had moved and left no forwarding address. With nowhere to go this young man ended up on the streets. When I met him he was trying to get a job, but so far had been unsuccessful: having neither home, agent, or money did not help. The group I was with took him under their wings, but I later discovered that his experience was typical of many men and women struggling to make a living in theatre and cinema. In my prayer I remembered him and those like him, but I could not forget the 'famous' ones either, the ones who 'made it'. While we watch the glamour of their lives from afar, the reality is different.

(Cont'd on the back page)

Fraternity News

Status of the Fraternity

The Fraternity was founded on the 19th January of this year and since then the Acting Council has been engaged in the work of establishing the Association, writing a [Constitution](#), sorting out financial affairs, applying for charitable status and doing preparatory work for the application to the Church for formal recognition.

Associations like the Fraternity are governed by the Code of Canon Law (1983) and are referred to as Private Associations of Christ's Faithful. The Code recognizes the right of the faithful to form associations, but in order for those associations to be recognized as such by the Church, and in order to use the term 'Catholic' they must receive formal approval, usually from the local bishop. To obtain this approval the association must submit its statutes to the bishop: in the Fraternity's case this means the Constitution.

At the first meeting the Council appointed a Constitution Committee to prepare a draft Constitution. Over the last four months the committee worked on the Constitution recognizing that it had to fulfill a number of criteria which would not only prove practical in governing the Fraternity in the early days, but also to conform to both Canon Law and civil law. The work is now complete, and the Constitution is due to be adopted by the Council at its next meeting. It will then be submitted to the Revenue Commissioners for approval in the hope that the Fraternity may be awarded charitable status. We also hope to present it in the coming months to Dr Michael Smith, the Bishop of Meath, for his approval. As this process continues, we ask your prayers for a successful conclusion. When the Constitution is complete and adopted by the Council, copies will be available for members.

Council

At the first meeting an Acting Council was put in place. The members of this founding Council are: Fr John Hogan, Father Director and President. Mr Christopher McCamley, OCDS, Council Secretary. Mr John Cahill, Council Treasurer and Financial Advisor. Ms Yvonne Mulligan, Membership Secretary. Mr Donal O'Sullivan-Latchford, Media Secretary. Sr Carmel Casey, DC, Counsellor-in-Charge: Religious Goods. Sr Eucharia Kenny, RSM, Counsellor-in-Charge: Apostolate for Epilepsy. Mrs Elizabeth King, Assistant in Apostolate for Epilepsy.

Novena to St Genesius

From the 17th to the 25th August, a novena in honour of St Genesius will be held in St Mary's Church, James' Street, Drogheda. This will be the third year of the novena, and the first time the Fraternity will host it. Thanks to Fr Denis Nulty, Parish Priest of St Mary's the novena prayers will be recited at the usual daily Masses in the parish, and a shrine erected in honour of the Saint. The novena will begin with a Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit for the Outpouring of Grace on Friday, 17th August at 7.30pm. At this Mass Holy Oil will be blessed in honour of St Genesius. Part of the programme will be a performance of Handel's *Messiah* on Friday 24th August at 8pm. Feast day celebrations will culminate with Mass at 3pm on Saturday, 25th August. Petitions for inclusion in the novena can be sent to the Fraternity. Details of novena events are as follows:

Friday, 17th August

Opening Mass: Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit:
For the Outpouring of Grace
Includes Blessing of Holy Oil in honour of St
Genesius. 7.30pm

*Novena prayers will be said at all Masses in St Mary's.
The times of Masses are: Saturday, 10am; Sundays
9am, 10am, 11am, 12pm, 7pm;
Monday-Friday 8am.*

Wednesday, 22nd August

Holy Hour of Prayer and Reparation before the
Blessed Sacrament. 8pm

Friday 24th August

Performance of Handel's *Messiah*. 8pm. Tickets
€20 (Concessions €15) available from the Fraternity
or St Mary's Parish Office, James Street.

Saturday, 25th August: Feast of St Genesius

Feast day celebrations. St Mary's Church:
3pm Holy Mass:
Chief celebrant: Most Rev. Michael Smith,
Bishop of Meath.

Preacher: Fr John Hogan, Father Director.
At the Mass the Anointing of the Proto-Icon of St
Genesius will take place.
Followed by blessing with the relic of St Genesius.

The Saint Whose Time Has Come

Fr Owen Gorman

Fr Owen Gorman is a priest of the Diocese of Clogher based in Enniskillen. He is a columnist in ALIVE! Newspaper. This article is an edited version of the homily he delivered at the feast day Mass of St Genesius in St Mary's Church, Drogheda, on the 25th August 2006.

My dear friends, if the name of St. Genesius and the story of his life and martyrdom are not at all familiar to you, then you are not alone: most of the Catholic world knows little of this man whom the Church from earliest times has identified as the patron saint of actors and those suffering from epilepsy. This lack of familiarity with St. Genesius should not surprise us because one of the unfortunate features of contemporary Catholicism in Ireland and elsewhere is a huge lack of familiarity with the saints and what they stand in patronage over. Pope John Paul II throughout his papacy attempted to rectify this spiritual lacuna by making the vigorous promotion of the saints a central aspect of his papacy. The saints, he believed, embody for us the truth that the Catholic faith can be lived with great heroism by the most ordinary of people in the face of the most extraordinary opposition.

This is the 'gospel of grace' that is central to our Catholic faith: it is the good-news that if we open the doors of our hearts to Christ then over time we are transformed through the free gift of God's grace in His Son. When the saints are promoted then they draw us to this truth as we see through their lives living examples of what God's grace can accomplish in those who choose this radical openness to Christ. And in the case of St. Genesius we find one who begins to live this openness to Christ in the most dramatic of circumstances.

Looking over these the details of his life and conversion it is obvious why the Church felt compelled to identify him as the patron saint of actors and actresses. It was through his acting that he came to discover the truth about Christ and in doing so he represents an exemplar for those dedicated to the acting profession. Ultimately, like Genesius, our talents are meant to lead us to Christ and through our talents Christ is meant to be glorified and proclaimed. But there is not only the gift of his example there is also, as with all the saints, the force of his intercession and the wonderful thing about this novena is that it has brought an ancient saint out of obscurity and has lead us to call upon his intercessory power before God. There are great times I believe to pray to St. Genesius for the simple reason that God will wish to validate the rediscovery of this saint through signs and miracles.

To help establish the cult of devotion to him more firmly, God, I believe, will be so generous in answering Genesius' prayers on our behalf. God never wants his saints to be forgotten and when they are He leads us back to them and calls each generation of his children to engage in devotion to them. I think we can take the fact of this novena as a small proof that God wishes to move many more hearts to a living personal relationship with Genesius. But more than that, I think that He wishes through devotion to Genesius to bring his grace more fully to bear on the lives of his actor sons and daughters. God above all sees the pressures of their calling and He offers the patronage of Genesius to them as an expression of His Fatherly providence; as a sure means to a deeper union with Christ and as a statement to them that they are not and indeed are never alone but that He is with them and calling them to be with Him. Through this patronage and through our prayers offered up on behalf of actors, God is enabled to penetrate more deeply into the world of entertainment. He has his eyes fixed on that world; He is jealous for its conversion to Christ; He sees the pain of these who are a part of it; the hidden dangers that lie within it; the enduring performances that yield to us such delight and sadly the sinful tendencies that it publicly supports and parades. In all of the ambiguities of the world of acting and entertainment, one thing is clear: that God wills it to be reconciled with Christ – to be purified and redeemed by the blood of His Son. St Genesius is to be an instrument in this reconciliation.

I think that it is true to say that those who dedicate their lives to these arts in this day and age, whether as actors or as scriptwriters or directors or producers, are in particular need of a lot of spiritual support. The environment of the arts is one that can so often stand in unashamed contradiction to the values of the Gospel. One thinks of the recent success of *The Da Vinci Code* as a case in point. Here is a blatantly anti-Catholic work that unfortunately was a runaway success. And while it is true that gifted groups and individuals within the film industry are working to deliver quality films that are four-square behind Christianity – one thinks particularly of the recent success of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* – at the same time many films in our cinemas and on our TV's are sullied by scenes of mindless violence, crude language and sexually

explicit images. While this may be art, in my own opinion it is bad art because it does nothing to promote the true dignity of the human person. Bad art be that as film, television, drama, or music, deforms the human person and undermines the moral fabric of society. If bad art becomes that which we consume, that which we watch, that which we read, then our moral compass will be confused and over time we will begin to accept the unacceptable and to accommodate ourselves to every sort of perversion and sin. Bad art empties the human spirit of the life of grace and sets us at odds with God.

My dear people, this is the spiritual battle that exists at this time. It is the battle for art, for the life, the soul and the future of art, where God on one side wishes to inspire His children to use their talents for His glory and the building up of a civilization of truth, beauty, decency and love and where Satan on the other hand seeks to cultivate within the hearts and minds of writers, directors and actors an anti-art of perversion, disorder and untruth; an anti-art which many of God's children now serve to the moral degradation of our world. In this spiritual battle God does not stand on the sidelines but continually puts before us through his Church the communion of saints whose help we are called to avail of not only for ourselves but for those such as actors and actresses, scriptwriters and directors, whose spiritual need is great. In this battle for the soul of art, for the soul of film, for cinema, for theatre, God gives us Genesius as one who lived as an actor in this world and who now intercedes for them as a Saint from the next. But for the power of this intercession to be realized in the lives of those who dedicate their lives to acting, then the children of the Church must hear the call to accompany actors and actresses spiritually through prayer, bringing them to Christ through St. Genesius in the hope that the victory of Christ may be manifest in their lives. Given the pressures that many actors face, from the cult of celebrity at one extreme to the reality of poverty at the other, this service of prayer for them is a real service of love. So let us serve the acting community each and every day by praying for those who dedicate their lives to acting. Over the years their talents have brought us so much joy and many of their performances have been source of inspiration for us. In acknowledgment of this and in appreciation for it, may be pray for them especially those who do not know God and who have experienced much suffering in their lives.

I wish to end with a thought from the French novelist Victor Hugo. In one of his writings he once remarked that *'there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come.'* He was right you know: whole armies cannot stop an idea whose time is

now; its momentum and force is such that in time it conquers the world. An idea whose time has come is unstoppable. The same I believe can be said for the saints of God. When God wishes to shine his light and that of His Church on the life of one of his saints then not even the armies of hell can prevent this. In my own opinion this is what God is doing now in relation to St. Genesius. After a long time in the dark, He is shining his light on this most ancient of saints and putting him before us now as a witness to Christ and as a friend and intercessor for the whole Church but particularly for the acting community. Time alone will tell whether indeed the time has come for Genesius. But if it has as I think then the spread of devotion to him will catch on and the lives of so many actors will be the better for it. We all have a part to play in the spreading of this devotion. Let us accept our part in the great drama of redemption and assist God in this plan of reconciling all his children in Christ.

What is Dedicated Membership?

Dedicated Members are the ordinary members of the Fraternity. In spirit Dedicated Members unite themselves with all the members of the Fraternity in prayer and sacrifice for those we are spiritually accompanying.

The obligation of Dedicated Membership simply consists in the recitation of the Daily Prayers of the Fraternity (Prayer to the Holy Spirit, Daily Offering, Decade of the Rosary: The Hidden Years, and the Prayer to St Genesius), and the offering of sacrifices for those being prayed for.

The nature of the sacrifice will depend on the individual person, based on their health and ability. The principle to be followed is that some form of penance which does not harm the body or mind, be offered to God as a prayer. Traditional means of sacrifice include prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Personal situations will reveal other possibilities and while zeal is welcome, it must always be tempered with prudence.

Dedicated Members are also the 'missionary' members in that they are to promote, as far as possible, the aims of the Fraternity and try to recruit members to join us in our prayer. Dedicated Members may also form prayer groups which may or may not include other members. (If any Dedicated Members are interested in forming prayer groups, please contact the Council.)

The Life of St Genesis

According to an ancient Roman tradition, St Genesis was an actor of some renown who was martyred for the Christian faith. A seventh century document claiming to be the Acts of his martyrdom, relates that Genesis lived in Rome at the turn of the 3rd/4th centuries, and died in the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian around the year 303 AD. According to the Acts, Genesis was a gifted actor, comedian and playwright and the leader of a troupe of actors. Theatre in Rome at this time was in decline and those who worked in the profession rarely performed the great dramas of the Greek and Roman playwrights. Mimes and pantomimes were the fare at the theatre and these tended to be boisterous and at times risqué.

When Diocletian initiated his great persecution, Genesis, who was a pagan, hatched a grand scheme to construct a play parodying the Christian faith. Diocletian was due in Rome in the summer of 303 to celebrate his twenty years as emperor and various civic and cultural events were being organized for the visit. Given the emperor's hatred of Christians, a farce mocking Christianity performed during the jubilee celebrations would not only amuse the emperor, but might also win Genesis favour at the Imperial court and could prove quite lucrative; but first of all he had to do his "research". Approaching members of the Christian community Genesis managed to persuade them that he wanted to convert. Genesis was accepted, enrolled as a catechumen, and he began the period of instruction which would eventually lead to baptism. He was particularly interested in baptism – the concept of water washing away sinfulness and the old way of life fascinated the Romans whose love of water and bathing led them to be open to its spiritual significance. Discussing the sacrament at great length with his teachers, Genesis decided that this would form the theme of his comedy. When he had done enough research he abandoned the catechumenate. Gathering his troupe of actors he explained the scenario of his farce, and together they composed the comedy: Roman mimes and pantomimes were mostly improvised. The Acts tell us that as he was directing the troupe what he had learned from the Christians was occupying his mind and he found himself struggling to resist believing in Christ.

As he had hoped the emperor was present at the performance and Genesis himself led his troupe of actors in the farce: he was playing the role of a sick man confined to bed who was crying out for baptism. As the play grew more outrageous – to the delight of the emperor, an actor playing a priest came on stage to

"baptize" the ailing catechumen. As the actor poured the water over his head, Genesis was suddenly struck by the grace of God: he saw the truth of Christianity and began to profess his faith in Jesus Christ. It soon became clear to the emperor and the audience that he was no longer acting. According to the Acts, Genesis addressed the emperor himself and called on him to embrace Christianity.

The performance was stopped and Genesis and his troupe were arrested. While his colleagues were released having convinced the emperor they had nothing to do with Christianity, Genesis continued to profess the Christian faith. When persuasion failed, he was handed over to the prefect of the praetorium, Plautian, who tortured him in an effort to make him recant and offer sacrifice to the Roman gods. This torture was horrific: he was beaten with rods, racked, lacerated with iron hooks and burned with torches, yet Genesis remained steadfast. After much suffering he was finally condemned to death and was beheaded. According to the Acts, his last words are believed to have been: "*Our Lord Jesus Christ is God and we shall have life in his name*". While Genesis' mock baptism was not valid since the intention of his fellow actor was not to baptize, through his martyrdom he is considered to have been "baptized by blood".

Hearing of his death, the Christians realized that Genesis had been converted and put to death for the faith. They managed to secure his body and buried him in the Cemetery of St Hippolytus on the Via Tiburtina with other Christian martyrs. Following the Christianization of Rome, his remains were exhumed and enshrined in the Church of San Giovanni della Pigna near the Pantheon in Rome. In 1591 they were transferred to a tomb in the Church of Santa Susanna where they lie to this day. Genesis is the patron saint of actors, actresses, comedians and those who work in the theatrical arts; with the advent of cinema, he is also regarded as its patron. He has also been adopted as a patron of epilepsy. His feast day is celebrated on the 25th August. There is evidence of devotion to St Genesis the actor-martyr in Rome from as early as the fourth century just decades after his death and in the lifetime of people who would have either known him or known of him.

The Fraternity has no source of income and depends on donations to cover printing of the Newsletter, literature and postage. If you would like to send a donation to support us in our work we would be very grateful.

The Proto-Icon of St Genesisius



At the feast day Mass the Proto-Icon of St Genesisius will be blessed and anointed. It was commissioned as the first icon of the Saint. In the next issue we will look at its significance.

(From the Father Director, *Cont'd from page one*)

In those hours of prayer, the lives and difficulties and in particular the sheer influence of these men and women came before my eyes. Who was praying for them?

I spoke to particular friends, and like spiritual companions they reflected, prayed and guided me. I consulted with people in the business: their reactions were positive and supportive. The question on our minds: is God asking for something to be done? Such an association, as far as I could see did not exist in the Church and the aims would be noble and in keeping with the Church's mission. On a pilgrimage to Fátima in June 2006 I confided the idea to Our Lady and consecrated it to her Immaculate Heart – if this was to happen it would be hers not mine - part of her mission. St Genesisius continued to haunt me and I tested the waters. In our parish in Drogheda we conducted a novena for actors in 2005 leading up to St Genesisius' feast day – over seventy of our parishioners joined in. Last year we repeated the novena, once again it was a success. Various graces and favours were received – were these signs? In January of this year I decided to test the spirit and invited a number of people to join me for a meeting in order to discuss the ideas which had been preoccupying me. We met on the 19th January, and that evening the Fraternity was founded. So far indications are positive, and with the eagerness of the Council members and the generosity of those who are joining, we are moving forward in the hope of doing a little good for Christ's sake and for those we believe St Genesisius wants us to keep in our hearts and prayers. As we proceed we will continue to pray and trust in God and we ask you to accompany us on this journey as companions.

Fr John Hogan

The Fraternity of St Genesisius

presents

in celebration of the Feast of St Genesisius



Messiah

by

George Frederic Handel

St Mary's Church,
James' Street, Drogheda

on

Friday 24th August 2007
at 8pm

The Occasional Singers

Conductor Robin Moore

Soprano Rachel Talbot

Altos Dearbhla Walsh
Sarah Lane

Tenor Anthony Norton

Bass Gerard Noonan

Accompanist Edward Holly

Tickets €20 (Concession €15) available from
the Fraternity (086 266 2565) or
St Mary's Parish Office, James' Street,
Drogheda, Co. Louth (041 9834587).

Fraternitas is published by the Fraternity of St Genesisius. Please address all queries and correspondence to: The Fraternity of St Genesisius, St Mary's Presbytery, Dublin Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth, Ireland. Tele: 086 2662565. Fax: 041 9845144. Website: www.stgenesius.com