



Blessed John Sullivan

We mark the anniversary of the death of Blessed John Sullivan on 23 February. Here follows an edited version of **Bishop Denis Nulty's** homily at the Beatification Anniversary Mass in Clongowes Wood College last year on the feast of the Ascension. Bishop Nulty is Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin.



We gather on this the first Anniversary of the Beatification of Blessed John Sullivan. The ceremony of beatification took place, a year ago, in St Francis Xavier Church on Gardiner Street in Dublin. We very appropriately gather in Clongowes Wood College, a year later to the date, because it was here in Clongowes, Blessed John spent most of the later years of his life, his home for twenty-one years.

It was right that he be buried in the

grounds of Clongowes, but like so much of his life, he grew to become used to different traditions, Anglican and Roman Catholic and even in death he would have to jostle with different final resting places. His mortal remains were exhumed as part of the process of his cause for beatification and canonisation in 1960.

Here in the People's Church at Clongowes his remains rested for a couple of days in late September 1960. All

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day long people queued to pay their respects. It remains my ardent desire that in a September in the not too distant future his body will return here for three days of Reverence and Reflection. It is here in Clongowes and the surrounding parts that John Sullivan's story is best told and best known.

The official testimonial documents, presented to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome, run close to 700 pages. Those pages are littered with testaments to the heroic virtue and faith of one John Sullivan. Since becoming Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, in close to five years I too have received many letters from people telling me of family members healed through the intercession of Blessed John Sullivan. Personal stories; heroic testimonies; private encounters. We know this man was and remains a holy man; it was in these parts, on these roads, out on the corridors, up in the classrooms, at the front door that people encountered Blessed John and in that encounter they met Christ. Here was a man 'confirming the word by signs that accompanied it'. We are reminded of

this today as we celebrate the Feast of the Ascension of the Lord. The Ascension is not a feast of the Lord's departure but a feast of his active and life-giving presence amongst us. As people, who love our faith and deeply care about our Church, we may get discouraged by the decline in faith or practice today, which finds expression in so many ways. People of the calibre of Blessed John Sullivan offered many signs that accompanied his preaching of God's word in these parts.

In the Apostolic Letter that accompanied the news of the Beatification, Pope Francis mentions especially Blessed John's 'witness of the love of Christ towards the poor and the distressed'. In other words, it was nothing he necessarily said, he never gave an interview to a journalist, never sent a tweet or liked something on Facebook. He simply rode his bicycle on these roads, visited your homes and blessed your sick. Ascension feast day is about the Lord coming closer to us, not leaving us. People like Blessed John Sullivan were the face of Christ in their day; we are called to be the face of Christ today. 