

**today's
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MISSION STATEMENT

Today's American Catholic is a journal of inquiry, reflection and opinion on matters of faith, religion, and ethics in 21st-century America. Our goal is to promote religious dialogue and to deepen the faith of our readers. *Today's American Catholic* is produced by Catholics who value the role of religion, respect different ideologies and share the conviction that belief informs civic responsibility. Founded in 1993, *Today's American Catholic* is a tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

David M. Fortier
Founding Editor

Thanksgiving Walk

By Jane Bailey

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My dog and I are on our daily walk, holding on to the last days of fall as hints of winter let us know that soon our walks will be curtailed by snow. Keltie suddenly pulls harder on his leash, yanking me forward around a bend in the road where I am stopped dead by the sight of a lone tree with yet every leaf still on its branch—peak at its peak. The magnificent gush of crimson freezes

me, even with the dog pulling me onward.

I cannot, dare not, move for fear the moment will disappear. The blood-red tree shimmering in the morning sunlight is a glowing beacon, a feast for the eyes so beautiful, so touching, that I need to soak it in, to have and hold as a piece (the peace) of this autumn season. How this one tree managed to keep its leaves this late in the season is a miracle, along with the gift of sight to see it. I whisper a prayer of thanksgiving for miracles and move gently forward, driven to pull just one leaf, one perfect leaf for remem-

brance. As I reach for a leaf, the gravestones surrounding the tree rear up, protecting their sacred ground.

It occurs to me that this is exactly where I want to be buried, under and within this tangled nest of roots, branches, and magnificent leaves; to have my ashes scattered amid the tangle to nurture the fertility of this perfect place.

The sound of a car engine suddenly invades my privacy, and I hear the engine stop and then a car door slam. I turn and see a woman pulling a pumpkin, now two pumpkins from her trunk. Kneeling, she places the

pumpkins on a grave and ever so gently clears surrounding debris and arranges the pumpkins just so. As she arranges them I realize that I am the intruder, not she.

I stare at the power of simplicity. The simplest of things—a magnificent tree, the placement of pumpkins on a grave—take on the sacredness of eternity, even as the dog moves me on.

Jane Bailey is a freelance writer who lives in Litchfield, Connecticut. Jane enjoys writing creative nonfiction where she explores matters of the heart.

Impressions of Ireland

By Sarah A. Dolan

I just returned from a two-week visit to Ireland. I arrived a week after Pope Francis's visit. I have 12 first and second cousins in County Fermanagh and County Antrim in Northern Ireland who I usually visit every two years. My cousins are traditional Irish Catholics. Since coming back, I have had time to reflect on my visit from many points of view.

My cousins and I usually went to Mass at the local Catholic church in Antrim. One Saturday, however, they decided to go to what must have been the oldest Catholic church in Northern Ireland. From the outside it looked like a long, low, white box. The wall behind the altar was bare except for two long green stripes of cloth, which hung down on either side of the tabernacle, with a prayer printed on each of them.

There were about 200 people in attendance. Most of them appeared to be over 70 years of age. The priest who offered Mass was assisted by one of my nine-year-old cousins. Some of the parents had refused to let their daughters assist at Mass; this was the first indication that I had of people's reaction to the clerical abuse crisis.

There was a small shelf built into the wall at the back of the altar about a foot away from the tabernacle. It was here that my young cousin placed the paten, the chalice, and the remains of the water and wine.

On September 16, when I was to return to New York, it was announced at 3:00 p.m. that my flight was canceled. No explanation was given. So I sat there by myself at Dublin airport, wondering what I was going to do. Within minutes a special bus arrived, and all of the approximately 253 passengers that were stranded were taken to the nearby Carlton Hotel. We were provided with dinner, bed, and breakfast the next morning. All expenses were paid by the airline—a fine example of the kindness of strangers, and a fitting end to my trip.

Your Take on TAC

At a recent meeting, TAC editors discussed the possibility of adding a new feature to the paper: a "Letters to the Editor" section that will include correspondence from subscribers, contributors, and readers. This will give readers the opportunity to respond to our articles, and open up a new place for dialogue. We would like to begin incorporating this new feature on a trial basis over the next few months, and encourage readers who might be interested to send letters via email to TACEditor@att.net or to our "snail mail" address at 21 Overlook Drive, Hamden, CT, 06514. Thanks as always for your readership and support, and we look forward to hearing from you!

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