

Painting tells amazing tale of the Duagh Ciborium

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Were it not verifiable it would be counted among the region's many tall tales and dismissed by history writers as a rural legend. But it happened and the amazing story has now been immortalised in a beautiful painting by Killarney artist Dermot McCarthy that hangs in St Brigid's Church, Duagh.

A blue cross on a parched yellow background tells the whole story. At the centre of the cross is a representation of the Ciborium itself and at all four of the cross's extremities is a little watercolour depiction of the story's main chapters.

“The parish is delighted with it,” Duagh Parish Priest, Fr Pat Moore, told The Kerryman on Friday as he explained the story to us, with the aid of McCarthy's painting. At the very top of the blue cross is a painting of how the artist imagined the penal Mass at a rock by the Sméarla.

At the end of the left arm is painted the turf-cutter extracting peat from the Ardydonegan Bog and directly opposite is a painting of Fr Beazley discovering the Ciborium just as he was about to feed the sod of turf in which it was encased to the parish fire.

At the very bottom of the piece is a painting of the altar in St Brigid's, where the Ciborium is once again used to celebrate Mass. And on all arms of the cross, between the centre and the paintings, runs a lovingly rendered text, explaining each picture.

Since its discovery, Fr Moore said, the chalice has been used at both the Eucharistic Congress in the Phoenix Park in 1932 and the Papal Mass in Galway in 1979 - the sectarian regime under which it was once proscribed is long gone from the land.

Holding the vessel in one's hands is quite amazing - modest, yet priceless, it contains its fantastic history well. It is ornate, but not overly so and you can imagine how it would have complemented a less-affluent form of Catholicism.

Made of Spanish silver, it is one of only three such chalices (that we know of) in the country.

There are many who are in no doubt that the chalice's path home was pre-ordained. Too much conspired against it.

"It's amazing the sleán didn't cut through it. If it had been there until today the machines would have destroyed it," Fr Moore observed.

Well, the considerable political machine of power at the time failed to destroy it and all it stood for, and no doubt the Duagh Ciborium will survive us all as a living artefact Kerry will always treasure.