

Parish Festival 2022, St. Mary's, Star of the Sea, Largs

From 16-25 September, St. Mary's celebrated its second Parish Festival. The first one was in 2019 but the pandemic made it impossible to have any in 2020-2021. The idea of the Parish Festival has a number of aspects. First, it is to celebrate the parish's patroness. The feast of St. Mary, Star of the Sea, falls on 27th September but the Church allows a parish in some cases to transfer its patronal feast to the nearest Sunday so that as many parishioners as possible can take part. Secondly, the Festival gives the parish the chance to organise various celebrations of all kinds, which are detailed below. Thirdly, the Festival brings people out builds up the community by means of the various activities involved and by the preparations for them. In the case of the 2022 Festival in Largs, a fourth reason for it was to wave a defiant goodbye to the pandemic!

Plans for the Festival started in late 2021 and were spear-headed by a sub-committee of the parish pastoral council. The net was cast wide to catch the best and most pragmatic ideas and many heads and hands soon set to work to turn the ideas into reality. We were keen to get the children of St. Mary's Primary School as involved as possible and they certainly played a big part in the celebrations.

The Festival kicked off on Friday 16th September with the Mass of St. Ninian, attended by the school children and a good number of parishioners. A Dinner Dance was enjoyed by 70 or so parishioners in the parish hall on the evening of Saturday 17th. On Sunday 18th, Sir James MacMillan and a few of his professional singing friends enhanced the music at the 10am Mass, with some parts of the Mass being sung from a composition of William Byrd, and with a responsorial psalm composed for the occasion by Sir James himself. On the Sunday evening at 6pm, we had a "Songs of Praise" with the top ten hymns voted for by the different Christian congregations in Largs. Monday 19th was a solemn day, and Mass was offered for the soul of HM Queen Elizabeth II.

On Tuesday, we had an early bird 7am Mass for the workers, with breakfast in the hall. A concert of choirs and solo music, involving the primary children and various choirs from Largs and Fairlie, delighted the three or four hundred strong audience on the Wednesday night. On Thursday afternoon, we had a Mass for the Sick, a moving moment for all who attended. Friday 23rd was very much a day for the children: a bouncy castle at the school and then a family fun night with a quiz and pizza in the evening.

On Saturday 24th, we had a Garden Fete, with numerous stalls of all sorts, and crowds of people milling around. There was tea and coffee, of course, but there were also two gin and whisky tasting sessions for the maturer palates! The final event was the Solemn Mass of St. Mary, Star of the Sea, on Sunday 25th at 10am.

Led by the children, four young men carried the statue of Our Lady in procession from the hall to the church. Two children crowned Our Lady and the Child before She was lifted back onto her pedestal. The music for Mass was beautifully executed by our parish choir and organist, with the children taking the lead in the readings and the procession of the gifts.

My prayer for the parish was that we would all be open to whatever graces of God Our Lady saw that we most needed. I am sure many seeds of grace were sown. While parishioners all thoroughly enjoyed the Festival, it was our hope that, above all, She did, too!

Photos, courtesy of Mike Condron.