

FAITH AND BEGORRAH

In a far-flung corner of county Limerick lies the ancient but little-known church named Kilroy Abbey, whose cornerstone was laid by St. Patrick Himself, according to local legend. The countryside thereabouts is a truly enchanted piece of Irish sod, with hills of ever-changing green looming above the shifting mists of the valley below. Anyone having the fortunate circumstance to pass by this jewel of a place ought to seek out the abbey, and while strolling through the cloisters, should take particular note of the second gargoyle from the left on the chapel side of the building. All of the other gargoyles are standard Gothic fare, exhibiting faces of either beautiful angels or hideous monsters, with the differences between them almost completely eroded over time. But this peculiar stone carving, which is remarkably well preserved, shows the rear profile of a priest astride a steed, the tail of which forms the drainage downspout. The priest's face can be seen looking back over his shoulder with an expression of horror and dismay, as his disheveled robes are lifted aloft, and his holy buttocks are exposed for all to see. There is even a Latin inscription under the trickling tail. Devout church-goers in the area dismiss this blemish of embarrassment on their venerable abbey as the work of a renegade Protestant free-mason, who was promptly relieved of his commission as soon as his cheeky horseplay was discovered. But if a visitor were to venture from Kilroy Abbey into town, and spark a conversation with one of the inhabitants over a pint at the Swallow and Pea, another more profound explanation for the impious gargoyle may emerge - particularly if one were to come across someone of local extraction, blessed with the gift of the gab and skilled in navigating the corridors of Blarney Castle. A person possessing these attributes might tell a story something like this:

On a dismal Christmas Eve, hundreds of years ago, Father Francis, the parish priest, was celebrating Midnight Mass in the chapel of Kilroy Abbey. It had been a particularly difficult year for the church and its parishioners. The four horsemen of the Apocalypse seemed to have taken up permanent residence in the valley, and all had been affected by their presence in some form or another. There had been more funerals than baptisms and more nights of hunger than wedding feast days. Father Francis' flock gathered before him that night grimly portrayed the effects of the past year's harrowing events. In the front row sat the widow O'Hoolihan with her passal of brats. Eight of them, all under twelve. Just last Easter she had buried her husband, the former town butcher, when the dreaded pox had swept through. Now the poor soul took in washing to support her needy household. Father Francis feared there would be no Christmas goose this year for the O'Hoolihans. Behind them, huddled in the torchlight, were pew upon pew of down-trodden families looking thin and pale, and none with enough clothes on their backs to ward off the winter's chill. And in the back row, all alone, hunched Two-Tooth-Jack, the village ne'er-do-well. Only a year ago he had been known as Jack Flash, all dapper and charming with his dazzling smile. But when his sweetheart ran off to Dublin to comfort the sailors and he turned to the bottle for solace, he soon found that his services as a stable-groom were no longer required. From one month to the next, as his crises compounded, Jack's once-handsome face had become increasingly mangled with each successive drinking binge. And as his tribulations continued to take their dental toll, his confessions had become ever more startling, not to mention harder to understand.

Confronted with a destitute congregation and an ever-dwindling budget, Father Francis had been forced to stretch the communion wine for Christmas mass, using the last drops from his cough bottle. It had also come as no surprise, when he had received a letter earlier that day from the Archbishop, chiding him and his parish for having the lowest tithing collection in the entire diocese. Father Francis had taken the senior cleric's correspondence as a warning that if an increase in the abbey's pecuniary emoluments was not forthcoming, then changes would be made. And knowing the Archbishop and his ways, he feared what those changes might be. With this in mind, Father Francis had included in his mass a reading from the parable of the prodigal son, along with the usual nativity scriptures of the Advent season. This text was aimed particularly at Lord Mildew, the

largest landholder in the area, who only came to services at Christmas and Easter. Father Francis was not actually expecting the prodigal tale to make cranky Lord Mildew repent his past and suddenly start supporting the church regularly. But at least he could confirm to the Archbishop that he had opened a dialogue of sorts with the wealthy but delinquent landlord. However, to Father Francis' surprise, just as he was delivering the "fatted calf" punchline of his story, with His Lordship directly in his sights, Lord Mildew rose from his pew, his face beet red, and began shaking his gnarled shillelagh at the pulpit. For a moment Father Francis thought he was about to hear a bellowing rebuttal from the Lord, chastising him for his divinely-inspired insolence. But to his further astonishment, as soon as Lord Mildew had attained an upright position, his knees buckled, and he dropped dead in a noble crumple. Father Francis immediately announced a hurried benediction and Merry Christmas to discharge his flock from their holy obligations, and then switched his ecclesiastical mission toward administering Lord Mildew his posthumous last rites.

A week later, after Lord Mildew's funeral and wake, where Father Francis had clandestinely filched a new reserve of communion wine, the priest was sharing a pot of afternoon tea with Mick, the abbey's custodian and jack-of-all-trades. "Times are tough, Mick," the priest was saying through a mouthful of crumpets. "Somehow in the new year we have to raise more money, but I have no idea how." Just then, the two men were startled by a commotion in the cloisters. They both jumped up, still with their mouths full, and headed in the direction of the noise. In the shadow of the arches, they were met by a tall, straight-backed figure with a haughty expression, whom Father Francis recognized as Sir Griswald Grimes. At his first glimpse of the sourpuss knight, the priest was curious as to the purpose of his unexpected visit. Sir Griswald attended mass even less frequently than Lord Mildew.

Sir Griswald introduced himself as Lord Mildew's steward and solicitor, and wasted no time on formalities. "In accordance with the Catholic church's regulations on tithing," he said, "In his will, Lord Mildew has left Kilroy Abbey two animals, or ten percent of the twenty steeds in his stables. Specifically, there is the horse, named Begorrah, and the other... animal... is known as Faith."

Father Francis surveyed the two animals, who were eyeing each other warily, as they struggled with their harnesses and pawed at the grass with nervous excitement. Begorrah looked like an old lanky warhorse of dubious lineage. And Faith was a young and feisty mule. "Sir Griswald," asked Father Francis, "In your opinion, do these two beasts constitute a worthy ten percent share of the renowned stables of Mildew Manor?"

"In the eyes of God, are not all creatures considered equal?" retorted the solicitor.

"Spiritually, yes, perhaps. But Faith and Begorrah..." The priest struggled for words.

"Then the Lord's will be done." With a dismissive pursing of his lips, Sir Griswald Grimes turned on his heel and strode off.

Suddenly Faith started to bray incessantly, and Begorrah replied with a tumultuous chorus of neighing. It soon became clear from their antics that the stallion Begorrah's one desire was to breed with the spunky molly mule, while on her part Faith wanted nothing to do with Begorrah and his lascivious intentions. The priest and Mick, with some unsolicited, groggy help from Two-Tooth-Jack, worked far into the night to settle the animals into separate pastures, well out of earshot from each other. When this ordeal was finally over, Mick and Father Francis sat by the fire and savoured a shot of whiskey, also pilfered from Lord Mildew's private stock. Both men were short and lean with long beards. So they looked like a couple of leprechauns sharing a glass together.

“The nerve of old Lord Mildew, sending us his reject animals.” Father Francis poured himself a refill from the late Lord’s jug. “If I had any proper say in the matter, I’d damn him to Hell.”

“Would it cause any harm if I tried teaching the horse to race?” asked Mick. “I’ve always wanted to compete in the St. Patrick’s Steeplechase, even if there’s no chance to win it.”

“I can’t see Begorrah ever pulling a plough or a wagon,” sighed the priest. “And he looks too stringy for stew. So, Mick, you might as well please yourself with the beast.”

For the next few months, Mick put Begorrah through his paces every day. The horse had a long, loping stride and could work up some speed, but it never seemed to remember anything it was taught from one session to the next. Meanwhile, Father Francis was getting quite accustomed to riding Faith everywhere he went around town. The mule, who would only allow Father Francis to mount her, was generally dependable and well behaved, except whenever it caught sight of Begorrah. Then it would attempt to bolt, presumably to protect its sterile virginity. Whenever this happened, the priest had to fight furiously with the reins to maintain control.

Finally, the special day in March arrived. The running of the St. Patrick’s Steeplechase was a festive event that attracted entrants and spectators from all over County Limerick. On this particular outing, Mother O’Hoolihan, her bonnet adorned with a spray of shamrocks, had brought her brood to watch the fun. And Two-Tooth-Jack was roaming through the crowd, guzzling green beer and begging for alms. Father Francis, sitting astride Faith, noticed Lady Mildred, Lord Mildew’s widow, accompanied by Sir Griswald Grimes, seated in the stands reserved for the upper classes. They were certain to have entered several of His Lordship’s best horses in the tournament. At the starting line with the other jockeys, Mick sat proudly on Begorrah, waiting eagerly for the hunting horn to commence the contest. When the blast sounded, and the horses lunged ahead, Faith the mule caught sight of Begorrah in full gallop, and let out a terrified, high-pitched bray from the sidelines. On hearing her squeal, Begorrah pricked up his ears, broke from the pack, and came charging in her direction. With her nemesis fast approaching, Faith took off, running like the wind, with Father Francis holding on for dear life. The chase proceeded completely off course over hill and dale, to the cheers and jeers of the onlookers. But neither the priest nor Mick was able to control the frenzy of Faith and Begorrah, until the mule finally eluded her equine admirer in a thicket far beyond Kilroy Abbey. Following the steeplechase, the town crier included a reference to the mayhem in his recounting of the race. “Abbot’s ass runs for cover,” was his whimsical phraseology.

“It seems we’ve been training the wrong beast all along, Mick,” said Father Francis that evening, over a ration of communion wine.

“Sure, Father, it’s the truth that Faith was the quicker of the two today,” admitted Mick dolefully.

“Let’s enter her in the Whitsun Derby in May!” Father Francis grinned. “You could teach me to race. What have we got to lose?”

During the next two months of intensive training, Mick was forced to admit that Faith was a far smarter pupil than the sex-crazed Begorrah. The Whitsuntide contest went off without a hitch, and the Town Crier summed up the outcome on his rounds just after vespers. “Oyez! Oyez! Abbot’s ass shows!” he hollered for all to hear. But the news was already the talk of the town, as everyone had seen the race that afternoon, and had been captivated by the show of Faith in her third place finish.

BEFORE READING FURTHER, PLEASE CONSIDER MAKING A DONATION. I HOPE YOU ENJOY THE REST OF THE STORY.

The next morning in the market, Mrs. O’Hoolihan held up a sack of onions she had bought with her payoff from the day before. “Bless you Father,” she called to Father Francis, as he was transported by Faith through the cobblestone streets.

Based on the success of her maiden outing, the next progressive step was to register Faith for the St. Swithin’s Sweepstakes in July. And as an odds-on favourite, it came as no surprise to hear the town crier shout when the match was over, “Abbot’s ass out in front”, to announce her winning triumph. Father Francis put aside part of the prize money for the Archbishop, and used the rest to purchase a demijohn of communion wine. That night he and Mick dropped by the Swallow and Pea to join in the continuing revelries.

“Mick, my good man. Did you happen to see Lady Mildred Mildew’s face when they awarded us the purse today?” Father Francis asked with delight. “She looked like Our Lady of Perpetual Hellfire!”

“It’s a sure bet Her Ladyship was expecting her dear steward, Sir Griswald Grimes to collect the money,” replied Mick, pulling on his pipe. “Too bad their wonder horse, Mildew’s Hope, came second to Faith.”

“I made a special point to thank Sir Griswald once again for the mule,” said Father Francis. “Then I invited him to come to mass this Sunday. I promised my sermon would be about the parable of the talents.”

From over by the bar, the two men heard Two-Tooth-Jack calling, “Hallelujah Father!” displaying half a tankard of ale in one hand, and a sixpence in the other. “Here’th to your thweet athh for the beer!”

“That’s no way to talk to a clergyman!” interjected the bartender, landing a solid right hook on the drunkard’s chin. The nasty punch left its unfortunate recipient sprawled senseless on the floor in a bloody puddle of stout, surrounded by broken glass and his last two cuspids. Following the bartender’s infamous blow, the hapless good-for-nothing was known thereafter as Toothless Jack.

The Michaelmas Cup in September attracted far more interest than usual. By now, all of County Limerick had heard of Father Francis of Kilroy Abbey and his miraculous mule. And everyone was keen to see it in action and hoping for it to win. The race, as anticipated, proved to be a neck-and-neck struggle between Faith and Mildew’s Hope. The town crier’s evening proclamation “Abbot’s ass back in place” recapitulated the disappointment felt throughout the parish earlier that afternoon at the actual event. Word of the mule’s second place finish soon spread through the entire diocese, which had been counting – and betting - on Faith to carry the priest to victory. So a wave of dejection passed over the countryside when it was learned that in this particular test of Faith, their beloved mule had come up short by a nose.

“The nippers and I are still rooting for you,” encouraged Mother O’Hoolihan whenever she encountered Father Francis on her laundry deliveries.

“Jufft wai tlll neckfft ime,” Toothless Jack would chime in, during his more lucid and articulate moments.

In truth, Faith's second-place set-back created the opportunity for a splendid showdown between Faith and Mildew's Hope at the annual St. Nicholas Run for the Holly. This was the most prestigious race of the year, and was always held on the Saturday before Christmas. The purse of fifty Irish sovereigns was provided by Lady Mildew Herself. But in reality, the Mildew stables had won the prize every year since its inception a quarter century ago. So there had never been an actual payout of the coveted golden guineas.

"Think of it Mick," mused Father Francis at the Swallow and Pea on the eve of the race. "Fifty pieces of gold. 'Twould be like finding the pot at the end of the rainbow."

"And it's sure that Faith can win it," nodded Mick. "She beat Mildew's Hope on St. Swithin's Day, and she can beat him again tomorrow."

"I like to believe we have Jesus and the angels on our side," responded the priest. "But I'm keeping my fingers crossed just the same."

The early Saturday market on the village green was bustling with energy and excitement. Shoppers were rushing here and there, haggling for choice cuts of game and bartering for Christmas sweetmeats, before heading off to the historic Run for the Holly later that afternoon. At ten o'clock in the morning, the activities were in full swing, when the town crier rang his bell on the town hall steps and delivered his mid-morning message. "Hear ye! Hear ye! Archbishop scratches abbot's ass!" His devastating words quickly resounded throughout the village and spread like wildfire to the neighbouring communities in the county. Every echo of the town crier's words brought with it a new rumour and tidbit of gossip. But one fact was certain. The Archbishop did not approve of horse-racing in general, or mule-racing in particular as a means of raising money for the sacred church. And so he had righteously decreed that Fabulous Faith the mule was to be withdrawn from the St. Nicholas Run for the Holly.

By five minutes after ten, the news had reached Kilroy Abbey, and Father Francis and Mick sat despairing together. "This shenanigans looks all Grimy and Mildewed to me, Mick," said Father Francis. "Sir Griswald Grimes and the Archbishop go fox-hunting together every fall at the All Hallows Chase. That's when they must have cooked up this caper. And I suspect the Archbishop was easily convinced to play holier-than-thou and intercede on behalf of Sir Griswald's beloved Lady Mildred. Imagine! Receiving divine intervention from the Archbishop for a horse! Just so the beast could go unchallenged and his darling mistress' hoard of precious guineas could remain in her clutches."

"Maybe Jesus will help?" suggested Mick. "We could pray..."

The priest sighed. "Ah, Mick, havin' Jesus on our side doesn't count for a blessed thing if the Archbishop is working against us. And we were so close to the pot o' gold... Faith and Begorrah..."

"We've lost Faith for sure," answered Mick. "But Father, we still have Begorrah."

Slowly a smile spread across the priest's face. "Then what are we sitting around here mopin' for, Mick?" cried Father Francis. "We've got a race to run today! Faith and Begorrah!"

Compared to the lively hustle of the morning market, the atmosphere at the village fairgrounds before the race was sombre and bleak. Many parishioners approached Father Francis to offer their condolences and give Faith a rub on the nose and a consoling tug at her bridle. For all those who

came forward, the priest repeated a quiet benediction, wished them Merry Christmas, and breathed a few words of wisdom in their ear. Just before it was time for Mick to mount Begorrah, Father Francis found him in the crowd. "Mick my son," he said. "Let me give you a little blessing for the race. I just thought it up this minute." He hugged Mick close while he recited the following words. "May the track rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. And may you be half an hour across the finish line before the Archbishop knows you're in the race." With tears of inspiration brimming in his eyes, Mick left Father Francis and ran toward the stables to saddle Begorrah for the Run for the Holly.

While the other horses jostled for position at the starting post, Mildew's Hope stood apart, seemingly aware of his superior pedigree and sublime favourite status. Mick, astride Begorrah, lurked in the shadow of Mildew Manor's pride and joy, and waited for the bugle to sound. When the race commenced, history began to repeat itself. As in the St. Patrick's Steeplechase, when the horses started to run, Faith noticed Begorrah, let out a screaming bray, and took off with Father Francis, as fast as she could go. Begorrah, of course, heard the mule's cry, and lustful as ever, headed in her direction. But this time, because of her racing training, Faith didn't escape from the scene. Eager to join the fun, and urged by Father Francis, she instinctively jumped out in front of the pack of charging horses. By the half-way point in the course, the race had become a two-horse-and-one-maverick-mule contest. Faith had maintained her head-start, and possibly increased her lead. Behind her, Mildew's Hope galloped mightily, and beside him, Begorrah loped along with a happy gleam in his eye, never losing sight of Faith. Both horses were benefiting from the reduction in air resistance resulting from the slipstream Faith was creating in her wake. Meanwhile, the rest of the field had faded away into the background.

It took the crowd of spectators a little time to catch on to what was happening. But when they realized that Faith had illegitimately leapt into the fray and was leading the race with Begorrah close behind, they began to chant with great glee. FAITH AND BEGORRAH! FAITH AND BEGORRAH! As the three animals approached the home stretch, Father Francis noticed that Faith was starting to tire and slow down. Begorrah, seeing that he was catching up to his favourite ass and determined to get to her first, put on an extra spurt and bounded by Mildew's Hope at the finish line to win by a convincing length. FAITH AND BEGORRAH! FAITH AND BEGORRAH! The fans continued to shout.

It was at that instant when Begorrah realized his lucky break had finally come. Faith, with Father Francis on her back, was standing at the finish line with her hindquarters before him, totally exhausted from running the race of her life. Fulfilling the erotic fantasy of his wildest dreams, Begorrah, still with Mick aboard, whinnied with ecstasy, took a rearing leap and mounted her from behind. The force of his lunge immediately locked the horse and mule into a firmly coupled position, and brought a mortified bray from Faith. But also in his fervour, the old warhorse had tipped the surprised Father Francis forward in his saddle and pushed his priestly robes up his chest to his oxters, leaving the holiest of his anatomical holies susceptible to December frostbite. To make matters even more difficult, Begorrah had looped his front legs around Father Francis' shoulders for support, so the poor priest, with his arms firmly pinned, had no means of straightening his attire. When the onlookers saw this spectacle, they phased out chanting FAITH AND BEGORRAH! and took up a new tune. HURRAY FOR FATHER FRANCIS! HURRAY FOR FATHER FRANCIS! HURRAY FOR FATHER FRANCIS! HE'S A HORSE'S ASS! Amongst the singing, shouting, and barnyard noises, only the widow O'Hoolihan was silent. Leaning against a tree and regarding the carryings on over Father Francis' defrocking, she swooned quietly away, pining for the glory days when the Master O'Hoolihan, her beloved butcher husband, had been in his prime. "What a fine sausage Himself could produce," she secretly reminisced as she succumbed to a case of the vapours and slipped gently to the ground.

Eventually, Mick was able to clamber down from Begorrah, and with some help from Toothless Jack, who had staggered forward from the crowd, separated the three intertwined bodies. While Father Francis composed himself, Mick took a victory lap on Begorrah, who seemed to be smiling the whole way around the course. Then Mick and Father Francis approached the winners' podium, where Lady Mildred Mildew and Sir Griswald Grimes were impatiently waiting. She had a bough of holly in her hand and he had a bulging bag in his fist. Both had hostile scowls on their faces. After receiving the holly branch, squeezed into his palm prickly-side-down by her Ladyship, Father Francis secured the prize sack of golden sovereigns from Sir Griswald's reluctant release. Then the priest turned to face the boisterous throng. When they had calmed down, with his tongue stuck in his cheek, he exalted the late Lord Mildew for bestowing the best two beasts from his stables on Kilroy Abbey, and effusively thanked Lady Mildew for sponsoring the St. Nicholas Run for the Holly. Then with an open heart, he congratulated Mick and Begorrah for their accomplishments, and promised that the prize money would be used for the good of the community. Finally, waving the holly bough and money-bag high in the air, he praised Jesus and urged the multitude to keep the Faith, and wished everyone a Merry Christmas. When he finished, the cheers and applause were deafening. And once more the crowd started to sing. FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW! FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW! FOR HE'S A JOLLY GOOD FELLOW! AND SO SAY ALL OF US!

The town crier's post-race broadcast that evening was impertinently pertinent as usual. "Abbot's ass breaks wind and inspires masses!" he bellowed across town. Later at the Swallow and Pea, Father Francis and Mick were reflecting on the good turn their fortunes had taken.

"I counted them all, Father," Mick was saying. "And I bit each one too, to make sure they were pure gold. There's fifty true guineas in that bag for sure."

"But we won more than just the prize purse today, Mickey, me lad," grinned Father Francis, raising his glass. "I took the share of this year's winnings that I'd been saving for the Archbishop, and bet all the money on Begorrah's nose. He paid off at forty to one, Mick. We'll never be short of communion wine again!"

"I wonder what the Archbishop will say about the race," said Mick. "We're bound to hear soon."

"I'm sure he'll object," replied Father Francis. "But he'll want our profits just the same."

On Christmas Eve, while visiting the village shops, Father Francis found Mother O'Hoolihan with her sons buying special treats for Christmas dinner. "I took the advice you whispered to me before the race, Father," she said, "And I bet on Begorrah to win. It'll be a grand Christmas this year for the O'Hoolihans, thanks to you!"

Father Francis slipped the widow a half crown. "Make sure there's a fat goose on your table tomorrow, Mrs. O'Hoolihan. With enough meat on its bones to fill the bellies of eight growing lads and their mother!"

"Bless you Father, and Merry Christmas!" she replied.

At the Swallow and Pea, the priest found Toothless Jack, and presented him with a set of false teeth, whittled from the finest ash wood by a journeyman from the barber's guild. "From now on you'll be known as Jack Ash," he told the poor beggar.

“Thansh Sho Mush, Father Franshesh,” said Jack Ash, trying them on for size. “An’ Happppy Chrishmush!”

Seizing Jack Ash by the shoulders, the priest gave him a hearty shake. “Now I want you to sober up,” he admonished. “And when you can walk a straight line, pay a visit to the widow O’Hoolihan. Take her a sprig o’ mistletoe and give her a hand folding the bed sheets. A woman such as herself needs a man about the house.”

Later at midnight mass, the chapel of Kilroy Abbey was filled to overflowing with happy faces, and the Christmas carols were sung with a greater gusto than Father Francis had ever heard before. And there in the front row, beside the widow O’Hoolihan and her eight brats, sat Jack Ash, his shirt starched and pants pressed, smiling shyly with his new teeth. The priest noticed that no one from Mildew Manor had attended the service, and wondered exactly what details Her Ladyship and Sir Griswald had disclosed to the Archbishop concerning the proscribed race. He also pondered what steps the Archbishop would take, and how soon. But it wasn’t until the town crier’s rounds the next morning that the Archbishop’s ultimate reaction was revealed. “Hear ye! Hear ye!” he called. “Archbishop dies of apoplexy during midnight mass!” When Father Francis heard the news, he said three Hail Mary’s and six Faith and Begorrah’s.

Father Francis decided to interpret the two propitious apoplectic deaths during midnight mass, two Christmas Eves in a row, as a sign of divine approbation. He therefore went ahead with plans to develop a quality racing stable at Kilroy Abbey, and with Mick’s assistance, became known for breeding some of the finest thoroughbreds in all of Ireland. Mick went on to become County Limerick’s most acclaimed jockey, while Father Francis’ parish blossomed into one of the strongest and most prosperous in the diocese. And although the Catholic Church never fully sanctioned Kilroy Abbey’s racing endeavours, he was never threatened again by ultimatums from the Archbishop. He and Mick would often stop in for a libation at the Swallow and Pea, and sometimes marvel at the enduring friendship of Faith and Begorrah, who had become inseparable stable mates since the famous St. Nicholas Run for the Holly. Often Father Francis would speculate that the Run for the Holly had been Faith and Begorrah’s happiest moment, and he freely admitted it was his most cherished day too.

Father Francis lived a long and fulfilling life, loved by his parishioners for his kindness and generosity, and famed for his equestrian enterprises. Whenever someone sought his advice, he preferred to pass on the sage counsel of his sainted namesake of Assisi. “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. The courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference.” Then he would suggest talking things through over a draft at the Swallow and Pea. On his death, Mick, who had served steadfastly to the end, petitioned the presiding Archbishop to install a stained glass window in the chapel in the priest’s honour. He suggested a scene depicting Father Francis and Faith, who had remained his favourite animal to his dying day. The Archbishop refused the request, on the pretext that only saints, Bible heroes, angels and the Holy Family were eligible for stained glass immortality. Apparently donkey-loving parish priests did not qualify. So Mick arranged for a secular stone mason to reshape one of Kilroy Abbey’s gargoyles into a representation of the most triumphant – if not the most reverent - hour of Father Francis’ life. For the inscription carved beneath it, Mick sought the help of Patsy O’Hoolihan, the widow’s youngest son by her first marriage. The now learned scholar who had a way with words, had taken the cloth and knew the Latin, and was glad to oblige Mick’s request. When Mick’s asinine hi-jinks was discovered, all of the parishioners, who had adored their dear Father Francis, deemed it to be an apt tribute, and no one had the will to change the bawdy likeness back to an ugly spitting daemon. And thus the saucy commemoration remains to this very day. The original Latin text underneath is quoted by only the most erudite intellectuals of the area. But every

schoolchild in the county is familiar with the vernacular Limerick translation of the Ode to Father Francis of Ass-icy, which is the title he is now fondly remembered by.

One Christmas, a priest saying mass,
Was blessed with a marvelous ass.
Not rounded and pink,
As at first one might think,
It was grey, had long ears and ate grass.

The priest's ass could run with great haste,
And it often would win when it raced.
But when his fine ass
Was finished, alas,
It was chased, but no longer chaste.

Faith and Begorrah!
Amen.

THANKS FOR READING FAITH AND BEGORRAH.

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