

Views from the Pews – Another possible miracle

Imagine you are a farmer in a rural part of South Armagh, it's 2.00 am and your wife has called for an ambulance because you have had a heart attack. When the ambulance arrives, its signage clearly indicates it's come up from the Republic of Ireland.

The crew assess you quickly and then tell you that because Belfast A and E is exceptionally busy, it's in your interests to take you straight to Dublin, via County Louth.

'And besides, Professor O'Rourke is on duty tonight and he's the best stent expert in the whole island'.

So you cross the border, without fuss, and receive the care you need. You make a full recovery.

Such things would not have happened a generation ago. Your farm was a battleground back then, and the border was 'hard' in every sense of the word.

Then came what we know as the Good Friday Agreement, which is remarkable for its degree of risky compromise, and which resulted in a 'soft' border, where goods, services, expertise, and care, cross without hindrance.

Does this development qualify as a miracle according to CS Lewis' criteria?

There was nothing Natural about the hard border. At best it was a political compromise which cost all sides dearly. At worst, it was the moral equivalent of the Berlin Wall.

But the Intervention by politicians (most if not all of whom would be most anxious to be seen as Christians) has a Supernatural feel to it. Especially the relationship between Martin McGinness and Ian Paisley, which was previously belied unthinkable given the previously destructive rhetoric on both sides.

The change in the border's status has brought vast change in Ireland, a softening of hearts, and the abandonment of old ideologies. For those who remember the '70s, this change rates as a miracle.

All this is threatened by post-Brexit negotiations. Prayer is urgently required, coupled with action to preserve what has been achieved. Miracles can so easily be undone by thoughtlessness or neglect.

And what the ambulance crew didn't tell you was that their grandfathers had both been IRA snipers, who had crossed that border not to heal, but to harm.