

First Year Mass, St Dominic's College, Cabra, October 2015

My name is Aoife Cullen and I am a First Year student in St. Dominic's College, Cabra. Our school is an all-girls school, located near the Phoenix Park in Dublin. Starting secondary school was scary for me as I did not know what to expect, but I have settled in well, have made new friends and really like my new school. Each year the first year classes are named by a different subject department. This year, being a very significant one in Irish history, our classes were named after some of the signatories of the 1916 Proclamation. I am in Class MacDonagh, the other classes are Pearse, Connolly, McDiarmada, Clarke and Plunkett.

Our school is a Catholic School, founded by the Dominican Sisters. Each year a special mass for first years is organised by the Religion teachers. This is arranged to make the First Years feel welcome and to help them to settle in. It took lots of preparation for the teachers to organise the mass. Each religion teacher asked their class for volunteers to have a special role in the mass such as doing a reading, singing or bringing up a gift. We learned that each first year was going to be given an opportunity to plant a daffodil bulb. These bulbs would be blessed by our priest, Fr Michael O'Grady from the Precious Blood Parish in Cabra, during the mass.

Our mass was held in our school Chapel. Everyone carrying out a special role was brought down to the chapel to practice, while everyone else was in class preparing for the mass by learning all of the responses and the hymns. A date was set for the mass by the teachers, our principal Ms Donnelly and Fr Michael. The preparation for the mass was over and the day of the First year mass had come.

The mass started with all of the students singing the opening hymn while Fr Michael walked up the aisle and onto the altar. Fr Michael introduced himself and opened the mass. Some of the girls in my class read a commentary while others carried up six baskets containing daffodil bulbs for each class. The girls who were reading told us that the baskets contained a daffodil bulb for each first year student, we heard about how daffodil bulbs are planted and how long it takes for them to flower. We heard about how planting these bulbs would be like us laying down our roots in St. Dominic's College and how we would always be part of the Dominican family. One of the girls read about how the bulbs will grow into many different beautiful shades of yellow, just like we will grow with individual talents, abilities and beauty as the years go on. After this, four girls read us some rules for growing daffodils. The first was that daffodil bulbs must be planted deep, she related this to us, we must be one hundred percent involved in the school and work hard so as to plant our roots deep. The second rule for growing daffodils is that you must allow the stems to brown after they blossom, again this was related back to us, there may be certain things we do not like or may find difficult, but we must learn to take the bad times

with the good and learn from this experience. The third rule we learned was that daffodils must be watered before they will germinate again; we were told that we too must look after ourselves and our health by eating well and exercising. The last rule for planting daffodil bulbs is that they are best planted in groups. Everyone in our school community is unique and valued. We must support each other and enjoy each other's company. Fr Michael used a special prayer and blessed the daffodil bulbs.

When the mass was over we went outside, class by class, to plant our daffodil bulbs in the garden. Most people compared the size of their bulb with their friends and I know that my friends and I definitely enjoyed the experience of planting the bulbs deep in the ground and covering them with soil. It was a memorable experience.

This march we noticed little green shoots starting to pop up out of the soil in our school garden. Every day on our way into school we were watching 'our' daffodils to see how much they were growing until eventually they started to blossom. They were many glorious shades of yellow and all different, just like us. Our teachers told us that every year daffodils will grow here. I think this is really special because every year we see them growing, we will be growing too, facing new challenges and new opportunities. We will do so with support from friends, teachers and our faith. We will remember what it was like to be in first year, how scared we were and how small we felt, just like the little green shoots this Spring.

When we graduate in sixth year, we will remember that we were the ones who planted the daffodils, which will hopefully keep growing after we leave the school. They will remind the teachers of us and when we laid down our roots in the Dominican family in Cabra in October 2015. Our daffodil planting was a very special time for us.