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Anthony Foley Mass appeal prompts massive response



by Paul Keenan
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Munster legend Anthony 'Axel' Foley

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The initiative launched by the son of Munster legend Anthony 'Axel' Foley to get people going back to Mass has been met with huge support across Ireland and beyond.

Eleven-year-old Tony set up a Facebook page in honour of his father to appeal to people to attend Mass for eight Sundays to Christmas to remember both the famed player and other deceased family and friends.

Fr James Grace of St Finnan's church, who watched as Tony led the lighting of candles on the first Sunday, October 30, described the boy's appeal as "a great initiative".

"People are responding greatly," he told this newspaper. "Ours and neighbouring churches were packed. It was like Christmas morning."

Tragedy

Recalling the tragedy of losing Anthony at the young age of 42, Fr Grace expressed his belief that his son's impact on so many "is the grace of God working through this tragedy".

Speaking to *The Irish Catholic* of the reaction locally, Fr Chris O'Donnell of St Michael's church in Limerick City said the initiative had served to "affirm people in faith" and there was widespread positivity for it in the city.

"You could not be anything but positive about this," he added. "It is something so good from one so young and with no agenda."

In the city's Moyross parish, meanwhile, Fr Tony O'Riordan said the Masses initiative had prompted families of those preparing for First Holy Communion to begin a Saturday night vigil gathering in response.

"There was a very positive response to the proposal," Fr O'Riordan



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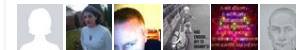
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explained. "The first one was last Saturday night and it was a really nice occasion. Parents said afterwards they were glad they came and felt uplifted by it."

Praising Tony Foley, Fr O'Riordan said the invitation, "coming from a child, has a power to it".

A spokesperson for the Diocese of Limerick told this newspaper: "Across the diocese, Masses were very well attended at the weekend, some parishes reporting a noticeable increase. We would hope that attendances would grow even more over the coming weeks, not least now as we are into the month of All Souls when we remember, just as Tony is hoping the public would, deceased loved ones at Mass."

Bishop Fintan Monahan of Killaloe also offered words of praise for the initiative saying, "the social media aspect of this has really caught the attention of people. Anything that encourages people to pray is a good thing."

Meanwhile, pilgrims to the Holy Land from the Diocese of Killaloe took time on October 30 to remember Anthony Foley as they celebrated Masses in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and sang The Fields of Athenry in his honour.

More than 31,000 people have already liked the Facebook page and messages and prayers have been pouring in from all across the world.

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Very sad to hear of the death of Fr Michael Ross SDB. He was a fearless, tireless and cheerful promoter of the Gospel. RIP

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