

I remember, shortly after I was ordained, being at the North Dublin Clergy Fellowship. One of those there was the then Rector of Howth (a Parish I was eventually to serve in until I retired), Canon Frank Blennerhassett. Over the years, Frank had made a name for himself leading tours to the Holy Land. In all innocence I asked him, ‘Frank, how do you go about organising these tours of yours?’

Maybe Frank was wary of this new young Curate – was he thinking of moving in on his territory? I got a very cagey reply – ‘There’s a lot more to this than you think – I’ve had to work at building up contacts over the years.’

I thought about that as I read our Gospel reading for today; the words of John the Baptist’s disciples to their master referring to Jesus:

‘Rabbi, the one who was with you ... he is baptising and all are going to him.’

i.e. this young fellow is starting to muscle in on your territory.

I just want to set this alongside another conversation between two clergy in Dublin in 1990. Back then, the Archbishop of Dublin had asked a young clergyman, Willi Stewart, to plant a Church in the middle of Dublin, just south of the river and not far from Christchurch Cathedral. This was to be a very different style of Church of Ireland Parish that was charged with the task of reaching out to a growing number of people becoming disillusioned with Churches of all descriptions.