

Now you can check for osteoporosis at home

SCIENTISTS at the University of Limerick have developed a simple test kit that can detect if members of the public are at risk of osteoporosis.

Millions of people will be able to benefit from the procedure that shows tell-tale signs of the brittle bone disease without the need for any expensive diagnostics in a hospital or clinic. It works by taking a small nail clipping and sending it off to a laboratory for analysis, with results returned as quickly as within a week.

Women aged over 45 are particularly prone to osteoporosis, and bone breakages as a result of the condition are one of the main reasons for females of this age being admitted to hospital.

The Osentia at-home test – which is clinically proven, safe

By **Fergal Blaney**

and accurate – has just hit the market, initially in the UK.

It can currently be ordered online through the UK-based website www.superdrug.com at a cost of £39.99, or approximately €46, although it is not yet available on Irish shop shelves.

The initial research that led to the development of Osentia arose out of collaboration in 2004 between UL's materials and surface science institute and the Limerick Regional Hospital, now University Hospital Limerick.

The collaboration led to a discovery by Dr Mark Towler and Professor Declan Lyons, which was patented by the UL Technology transfer office. This paved the way for further refinements

by UL campus company Crescent Diagnostics Ltd, now operating in the UK as Crescent Ops Limited.

Speaking about the launch of Osentia, Dr Mary Shire, vice president of research at UL, said: 'This is an exciting development and demonstrates how research can positively impact people's lives.'

'We are proud that this development started at University of Limerick and congratulate all of those involved in the long and hard effort that we know it took to bring this important development to the marketplace.'

And Professor Noel O'Dowd, director of the materials and surface science institute at UL, congratulated the team involved in the research.

'It is really gratifying to see such a success story,' he added.

Dr Mark Doooley



MORAL MATTERS

Only in silence can we learn to live and love

LAST week, my publishers sent me one of the first copies in English of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI's Last Testament. It is a beautiful book that shows a saintly man looking back upon a long life of service to humanity and the Church.

My editor at Bloomsbury wrote me a note saying: 'What other pope has ever expressed regret, sorrow or dealt with his shortcomings so honestly and humbly?' Pope Emeritus is now blind in one eye, wears sandals 'like a monk', and prefers to be known simply as 'Fr Benedict'. He has never regretted his decision to abdicate and, with a bow to Pope Francis, remarks: 'Perhaps I was not truly among the people enough.'

However, it is in the final line of his Last Testament that Benedict offers his most touching insight. From the seclusion of his monastery, he ends his long life with this: 'It has become increasingly clear to me that God is not, let's say, a ruling power, a distant force; rather he is love and he loves me – and as such, life should be guided by him, by this power called love.'

When I read those words, a tear escaped my eye. In that one little line, Benedict captures the true essence of all religion. Only through love can we encounter God as he really is.

Two days after reading that, I met with Benedictine monk Fr Laurence Freeman, director of the World Community for Christian Meditation. He is, as I like to describe him, an evangelist of silence in a world of noise.

A former banker and journalist, Fr Laurence is half-Irish, his mother coming from Bere Island off Bantry Bay. It is from that place of beauty and stillness that he leads a number of silent retreats each year. It is, however, in his writings on silence and contemplation that we catch a stunning glimpse of the Divine.

Fr Laurence was a student of the great spiritual guide John Main, a priest who recovered the ancient contemplative dimension of Christianity. Together, at the invitation of the Archbishop of Montreal, they formed the first monastery devoted to the teaching of Christian meditation in 1976. When Fr John died in 1982, it was left to his young 30-year-old protégé to keep the vision alive.

That he did so by establishing a worldwide 'monastery without walls' is testimony to Fr Laurence's unique ability to show how we touch the depths of the human soul only in silence. John Main believed the greatest theological statement ever made was by St John when he said: 'God is love.' Both he and Fr Laurence believe love, as 'the pure primal energy of the Creator', bursts 'into consciousness through the selfless practice of forgiveness and compassion, generosity and loving kindness'.

As he approaches the end, Benedict XVI lives a life of simplicity, seclusion

and silence. In this silence, where the sacred heartbeat is most forcefully felt, he has rejected the idea of God as a 'ruling' or 'distant force', and experiences the divine simply as love.

That, too, is the central message of Laurence Freeman, but it can only be truly learned in and through silence. It is such a beautiful thing to realise that, simply by sitting in peace, you can experience what John Main called 'the infinite expanse of love'. And yet, it is a truth that I have felt directly.

Of course, you don't have to retreat to a monastery to experience the miracles of silence. That is because we each possess a monastery of the heart. We each have the capacity to withdraw into our inner cell at any time of our choosing.

It is there, in the silence of the heart, that you learn how to live and love. It is there, as Fr Laurence puts it, that you begin to 'see reality through the eyes of others even when their view seems to contradict ours... It involves loving our enemies even when we feel like humiliating or deleting them, patronising them, giving them false signs of peace, taking revenge for their past deeds or punishing them'.

Our world is in such dire need of hope. Last week, as the US presidential election raged, I received so many messages of despair, so many tearful emails. The words of W. B. Yeats had never seemed so pertinent:

*'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.'*

Is it naive to think we should respond to such 'passionate intensity' with silence? In silence, you discover that while things might fall apart on the surface, something remains constant in the depths. You discover that the only response to such despair is to let life be guided 'by this power called love'. This happens, says Fr Laurence, 'between friends and groups of friends who quietly restore an uncivilised society to humane values. Their experience of the truthfulness of silence helps them trust each other with their differences. Those differences can be respected without violence or divisiveness'.

For me, the most reassuring response to our sad situation came from two sanctuaries of silence. From within the walls of the Vatican, an old pope spoke of life being guided by love. From a monastery without walls, a nomadic monk spoke of 'facing the painful facts of our world with faith, hope and love, thereby making the world more civilised – simply by the way you live and tell the truth'.

Not for the first time it is the monks who will lead us from darkness to light.

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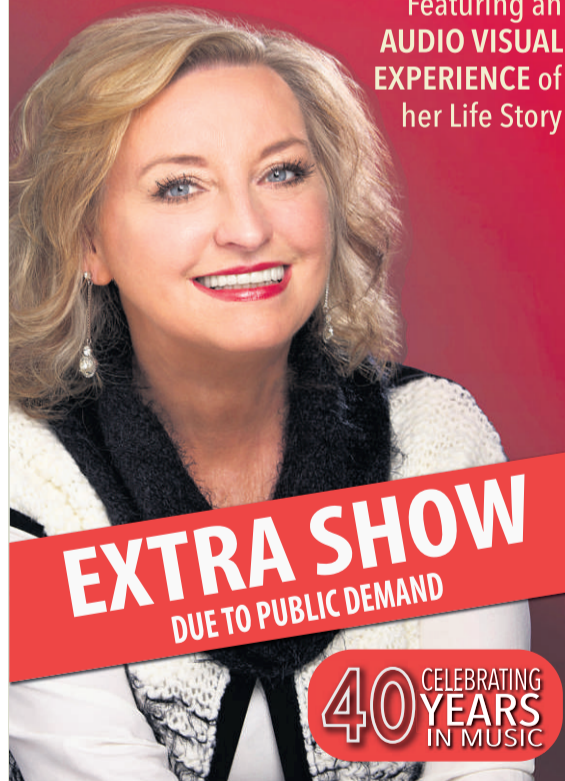
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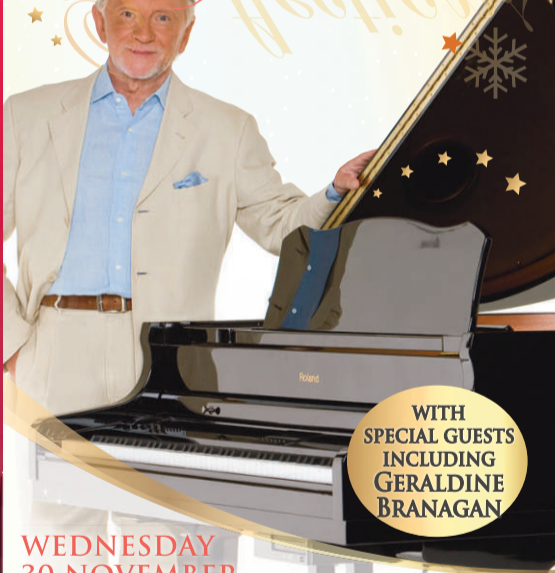
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