

BETS ON THE BOX

with Féilim Mac An Iomáire



AGAMEMENOMOMICS - ODDS SLASHED ON GREECE LEAVING THE EURO

This we were force to slash the odds on Greece leaving the Euro following the ECB's statement that it will no longer accept Greek bonds as collateral for lending money to commercial banks.



We now make it 3/1 for the indebted state to leave the Euro having quoted 4/1 last week while the odds on Greece holding another general election in 2015 have been also chopped from 11/4 to 9/4.

Elsewhere, Paddy Power are offering 6/4 for the Dollar to hit parity with the Euro before the end of this year.

Should the Mediterraneans come out on top it will be there greatest triumph on the continent since Euro 2004, but they haven't been this cornered since the battle of Thermopylae and further pressure from the ECB could lead to Syriza backtracking on their commitment to keep Greece in the Eurozone.

OFF WITH HIS CEANN - BARRETT 5/2 TO GO



An Ceann Comhairle, Sean Barrett, is coming under increasing pressure from the opposition and we're betting on whether or not he can hold on to his position.

According to our good selves it's 1/4 for Mr Barrett to still be in his

position in June 2015 while it's 5/2 for him to be forced out of his post in the same time period.

Meanwhile, Paddy Power are also taking bets on Good Friday alcohol sales after the Minister for Justice confirmed that she was examining the possibility of lifting the ban.

Here, it's 2/5 for the ban to still be in place for the Easter 1916 centenary with odds of 7/4 available on the nation's pubs being open for the celebrations.

KIM CHASES THE ONE AND HOLY SELFIE

Kim K is clearly sick of being photographed with mere mortals and now has her eyes firmly set on the Jesus prize for her next selfie.



But, while we can't work miracles here at Paddy Power, we can offer punters the chance to wade in on which unsuspecting world leader might find themselves snapped next with the duck faced Kim.

If Jesus is what Kim's after then Pope Francis is about as close as she's going to get but at 25/1 it might be time for her to think again. It's more likely she'll see the Dalai Lama crack out his selfie stick at 20/1.

PADDYPOWER.

RECLUSE WOMEN



AT ONESIE WITH HERSELF: Ger relaxes in her hermitage



SOLITUDE: Geraldine with sister Margaret in Glendalough

Geraldine joins the nuns at monastic retreat as she enjoys the silent life of being a hermit

By GERALDINE COMISKEY

IT'S AUSTERITY - but not as we know it.

Never mind the water charge, property tax, the USC and all those cutbacks, which seem designed to make our lives a misery.

It is possible to lead a spartan lifestyle without bailing out the bankers, as I found out this week - when I headed into the wilderness to lead the life of a hermit.

Long before our EU masters were dreaming up ways to make us suffer, medieval mystics were doing deprivation - and loving it.

Call me a miserable masochist, but I was in the mood for some purification, penance - and solitude.

Frenzy

And I'm not alone in my need to be, well, alone. Joining a hermitage is all the rage for anyone who needs a break from the frenzy of modern life.

And where better to try the ascetic lifestyle than in Glendalough? The ancient monastic site in the wilds of Wicklow is where St Kevin lived in isolation, on and off, for seven years at a time, back in the sixth century.

Unlike the saint, I didn't have to climb up a cliff, crawl into a tiny cave and use a rock for a pillow.

My 'cell' was a far cry from St Kevin's rocky bed. 'Cillín Ciarán' is a spacious studio flat with an electric shower and kitchenette, cooker, fridge, heaters, hair-dryer, even a microwave and



COSY: Geraldine in her hermit's 'cave'

electric blanket - this was more about pampering than penance. There was also a prayer-stool and a rocking chair.

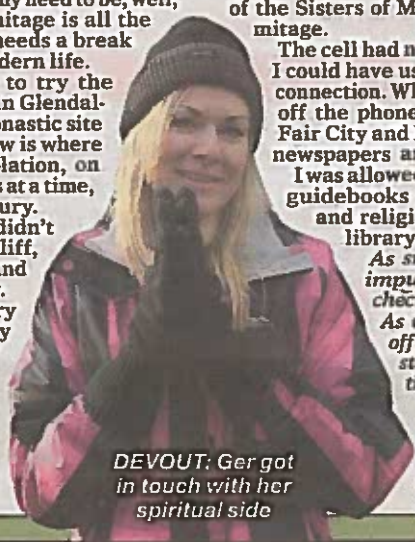
Two of the five cells sleep two, but "most people come alone", said Sister Margaret of the Sisters of Mercy, who run the hermitage.

The cell had no broadband, although I could have used my mobile internet connection. While it was bliss to switch off the phone and laptop, I missed Fair City and Eastenders, talk-radio, newspapers and novels.

I was allowed to read only the Bible, guidebooks to the monastic site, and religious books in the nuns' library next door.

As snow fell, I resisted the impulse to go online and check the weather forecast. As a news-junkie, I felt cut off from the world - until I stepped outside and entered the winter wonderland.

Normally on a cold day I'd cower indoors, but, with nothing else to do, I explored the woods and mountains,



DEVOUT: Ger got in touch with her spiritual side

including part of the Wicklow Way. I was sure even the most ardent atheist would leave this place believing in God - if only because it would be stretching credulity to think that such a marvellous ecosystem was designed by accident.

Back in the hermitage, I didn't have a hairshirt to wear, so I put on my pink, sparkly, fluffy onesie. I was sure St Kevin would have worn exactly the same garment if it had existed 1,500 years ago.

Still, it was hard to get the hang of, well, hanging out with myself, so I went for nocturnal rambles, stopping off at the oratory and library, where I munched chocolates while reading books about monasticism.

My natural nosiness got the better of me and I walked past the other hermitages to see if I had a neighbour, but the hermit next door was very quiet. Still, I felt safe. Sr Margaret had assured me: "There's never been an incident in the 14 years we've been here."

Strange

There's no such thing as a typical hermit. "We've had people of all ages, from 25 to over 65," said Sr Margaret.

"We have priests, mothers, grandmothers, young women, people from all walks of life. Some people just come here and go straight to sleep. People have strange ideas about it before they come here - one girl was worried she'd have to fast. It's not about fasting or hardship - just having space to be alone.

"The only pre-condition is that you are on your own personal and spiritual journey," says Sister Margaret.

Hermits usually pay €50 a night and can stay as long as they like. I stayed the minimum two nights - and you know you need a break when you have no time for one.

But I spent the second night waiting for dawn - so I could return to civilisation. I was craving a chat. My brief spell as a hermit made me face up to the fact that I'm not a loner.