

**Jerry Dowling RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Errill Church**  
**Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

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Jeremiah (Jerry) Dowling, Knockardgannon, Errill, Co. Laois. January 1st 2021. Predeceased by his wife Teresa and his granddaughter Jade. Sadly mourned by his sons Tom, Dinny and Diarmuid, daughters-in-law, grandchildren, Paul, Jennifer, Aoife, Jaque, Luke, Katie, Hayley, Tommy and Taylor, nephews, nieces, neighbours, relatives and friends.

**Homily**

Perhaps not surprisingly, I did not know until I read Jerry's death notice in Rip.ie that his official name was Jeremiah and not Gerard as I had presumed. I assume he was baptised Jeremiah and I was wondering the reason why his parents would have called their first child Jeremiah. Was it a family name? Or was he called after a very famous figure in the bible, the prophet Jeremiah. I was thinking about that yesterday after my conversation with you particularly about Jerry's childhood. Let me tell you just a little about the prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah was only a child when the Lord called him to become his prophet. Jeremiah protested that he was too young to be the Lord's servant, that he was just a child. The Lord reassured him and promised him that he would always be with him to protect him. Jeremiah went on to become one of the greatest prophets of the Old Testament. I began to think about what you shared with me about this Jeremiah and the similarities between him and his Biblical namesake. At the age of just 10 or eleven and the oldest of six children his father gets ill and ends up in hospital in Roscrea. Jerry's mother sends him into the hospital to bring his father home. The hospital don't want to discharge him because he is so ill. Jerry comes home to tell his mam. But his mam wants her husband home. He comes home but dies later that night. That was an enormous amount for a ten year-old to deal with and was sure to leave a huge impression on his life. With his father's death he was suddenly 'the man of the house'. Like his namesake in the bible he might well have protested 'Ah Lord please

don't ask me to take on this responsibility, I'm only a child'. But like his namesake, Jeremiah Dowling did go. He went to work with local farmers but at home also helped to raise his younger brothers and sister. Without a doubt those early childhood experiences must have fundamentally influenced his outlook and approach to life. An ethos of hard work, taking nothing for granted and a tendency to worry characterised all of Jerry's ninety years of life. I suspect the fact that his dad died when he was so young and that he had also witnessed the deaths of his wife Teresa and all of his five younger siblings must have saddened Jerry greatly. It would also mean that when he reached his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday last October he felt a huge sense of achievement that he had lived so long.

But going back to those early childhood experiences and incredible challenges that faced Jerry before he ever became a teenager. What were the things that helped Jerry face those enormous struggles. Jeremiah in the bible had the reassurance from God, that he would be with him to protect him. Jeremiah Dowling might not have heard the Lord's voice so directly but he did have strong faith in his God, a faith he was baptised into a faith he was raised in by his mother. He also I suspect had something else and that was community, firstly in Dromard and most especially in Knockardgannon. That lovely Irish phrase that speaks about neighbours 'living in the shelter of each other' was certainly a reality for Jerry in the 77 years he lived here in this community of Errill. Dinny, when you called me on Friday night to say that your dad had passed away I had just been reading a story about a man who like Jerry had also contributed greatly to local community. He had asked that on his tombstone would be written a motto he had tried to live by. It simply said *"Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better because you have been in it"*. As I began to think of all that Jerry had brought to this community of Errill over so many years I thought that Motto could be on Jerry's tombstone too: *"Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better because you have been in it"*. This community is certainly a lot more beautiful and better because Jerry Dowling, his late wife Teresa and you his family have lived here. Jerry's dedication to St. Bernadette's Hall and across the road in St. Kieran's Cemetery over so many years is immeasurable. His involvement and dedication to the FCA , the GAA and

community organisations like Muintir Na Tire and the local Water Scheme were also a huge part of his life. On a number of those projects and organisations Jerry had worked closely with another Camross born priest who served in this parish, Fr. Sean Collier. In my first few conversations with Jerry I was left in no doubt that he regarded Fr. Sean as something of a personal hero and I suspected I was going to have to go a long way before I measured up. A few years ago I had the task of addressing the long-serving St. Bernadette's Hall Committee about some possible plans to do a major renovation of the Hall. The original plan pretty much involved an almost complete re-building of the hall. As I outlined the plans Jerry showed little reaction and to be honest I was not sure if he was hearing all of what I was saying. At the end of my little presentation Jerry simply said; 'So one Camross man built this hall and now another one is going to knock it' To be honest I was not sure if that was support or criticism. Ironically, after many obstacles the work on the renovation of the hall is due to begin early in this new Year. I hope the builders will realise that Jerry may very well be keeping a close eye on them from across the road in St. Kieran's.

That first reading today from the Book of Ecclesiastes seemed rather appropriate for Jerry Dowling. There is a time and a season for so many things under heave. As we have acknowledged, in Jerry's 90 years of life there was a time and a season for so many things, and so many of them in this community. There was time too for his working life, first as the explosives man in the Lisduff Lime Works and later as a driver all over the country with Tipperary Glass. There was time for more than forty years of marriage with his beloved Teresa who also made such a wonderful contribution to quality of life in this community. Perhaps most of all there was time in Jerry's life for his family and in more recent years I think he relished his contact with his grandchildren, even if that meant that there more people in his life to worry about. For all that and so much more we give thanks to God today for Jerry's wonderful life and we commend his soul to God's merciful love.

Finally, (and I know I have gone on a lot longer today than Jerry would approve of!) I picked that gospel this morning telling the story of the Presentation of the baby Jesus in the Temple for a particular reason. It is

the reaction of the Simeon the old man in the temple that reminded me of Jerry. Simeon, the gospel tells us, was, like Jerry, an upright and devout man. When he had lived long enough to set eyes on the baby Jesus, the Messiah he could say *'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised;*

As Jerry slipped away so quietly and so peacefully in Portlaoise last Friday evening those words of Simeon could easily have been his own *'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised;*

And if had wanted to add in a few more words he could have borrowed those words from St. Paul in today's second reading and made them his own..... *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.*

Gerry you have done all that. Go now into the eternal Peace and Joy of Heaven. May St. Bernadette, St. Kieran, Simeon, St. Paul, the prophet Jeremiah, Fr. Sean, your parents, Joe, Sean, Liam, Maurice, Peg, your little grand-daughter Jade and your beloved Teresa all be on hand to welcome you today. Amen