

**Kathleen Ryan RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

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Ryan (nee Kirwan), The Bungalow, Gloscha Road, Rathdowney and formerly Donaghmore, Co. Laois. January 7th 2021. Peacefully in her 97th year. Kathleen, predeceased by her husband Peter Paul. Sadly mourned and lovingly remembered by her children, James, Vera, Michael, Rosemary, Paul, Catherine and David, sons-in-law Willie and Simon, daughters-in-law Anne, Solenn and Sally, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, sisters Carmel and Norrie, sister-in-law Breda, nephews, nieces, relatives and friends. Also remembering at this time her daughter-in-law Caroline (deceased) and her son-in-law Shay (deceased).

**Homily**

Over the past months We have witnessed many funerals in this parish of people who seemed to have so much more living to do. We are left wondering what way they would go; how would things have turned out for them, and we are saddened by all that could have happened and now is lost forever. In the case of Kathleen who lived well into her 97th year, it is all different. For Kathleen, her days among us were lengths of years and joy. Every indicator says she lived a long, and fulfilled life.

Kathleen has died well into the autumn of her life. As a woman who loved her garden Kathleen would have appreciated that each season of the year has its own beauty. Spring has its beauty, with its superabundance of life and growth. Well wrapped up in winter, we can appreciate the trees and bushes glittering with frost; the mantle of snow covering ugly landscapes, the warmth, welcome and comfort of homes. Summer is a tranquil season. It is a time for holidays and festivals, slowing down of the tempo of days, long evenings, bright mornings.

Autumn has its special beauty. The poet John Keats, described it in the following words:

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,*

*Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun.*

It is a time of harvest and fruitfulness. The trees look spectacular in their autumn garb.

There is an autumn in life too. The good fight has been fought. Energies are declining but with it comes the shedding of responsibilities and much contentment. Many people shy off the very thought of it, but the poet had another angle. He could see the riches, the achievement, the colour, the contentment of autumn. That too is the experience of many people as they grow older; a sense of duty done, life lived, love given and received.

Autumn signals the end of an age of life. In the flaming forests, life is declining and winter is about to set in. Decline is not the whole story, however. Dead leaves are falling to the ground but they are not alone. The seeds of new life are also falling. Jesus thought of this when he spoke of the grain of wheat. It falls to the ground; it seems to die but in the act of dying and being received into the earth it gives birth to the green sprout, beautiful and bountiful. In the winds and storms of autumn the seeds are shaken from the branches. Sometimes they are caught by a gentle breeze, other times it is a violent storm that snatches them. In the end they fall to the welcoming earth which is ready to receive them and is life giving. Dying is part of living and a step along the road of on-going life. We are here today because it is Kathleen's time to die. In the autumn of her life, she released her spirit to God; was received by his welcoming love and made ready for a new spring in God's life-filled presence forever.

Yes the sun set on Kathleen's life last Thursday evening, the 7<sup>th</sup> of January. The sun had risen in Kathleen's life almost 97 years earlier on

Monday the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1924 out in Donaghmore. According to our parish records Kathleen was baptised the day after she was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and her Godparents were Michael P Guidera and Annie Kirwan. Like her mother before her Kathleen went to Secondary school in the Brigidine Convent in Mountrath. At the age of 16 Kathleen headed for Dun Laoighre, where she worked in the famous Lees Department Store. The decade or so that Kathleen spent in Dun Laoighre coincided with the Second World War or the Emergency as it was known in Ireland. Whatever the excitement and social life that 1940's Dun Laoighre and Dublin had to offer it was a man closer to home who captured her heart. Kathleen and Peter Paul Ryan were married out in Grogan church on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1951. The witnesses that day were Kathleen's sister Vera and Kevin Nugent from Waterford. As with most Irish women in 1950's Ireland, marriage meant an end to working outside the home. So Kathleen said farewell to Dun Laoighre and dedicated the greater part of her adult life to being a wife, mother and homemaker. Kathleen and Paul initially set up home in the square and a few years later moved up to the Glosa Road. She was to remain there for more than sixty years until she moved to Kilminchy Nursing Home just over three years ago. I know that you as a family would want to acknowledge that one of the main reasons that Kathleen was able to remain living in her home well into her 9<sup>th</sup> decade and with as much independence as possible was because of the care and support she got from Catherine and Vera and of course her loyal and faithful housekeeper and friend, Dinah Kelly.

Through the years, I understand that Kathleen did her bit to support the local building industry in this town as she had Tommy Hickey and Michael Kelly on something of a retainer making various up-gradings and extensions to the Ryan family home. And I gather, while the inside was very important to Kathleen the outside was equally important. With the help of Fergal Fitzpatrick, Kathleen developed and maintained a very beautiful garden. Whatever about the garden and the house extensions, primarily, Glosa Road was a home where Kathleen and Paul raised you their seven children. As with every family, I'm sure there were Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries. When I asked Paul and David to describe their mam, they used words and phrases, like

low-key, understated, calm, devoid of drama. I also know from the witness of others that Kathleen was a woman of great faith and that Faith was regularly nourished by her participation in the Eucharist here in this church and elsewhere. At the end of her life, Kathleen can certainly borrow those words from St. Paul in the second reading today..... and make them her own..... *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.*

I would like to leave you with three final thoughts today as we say farewell to Kathleen. Last night after my conversation with David and Paul, I was reflecting particularly what you had said about your mother's love for her garden and how maybe that is a symbol of the legacy of almost 97 years that she leaves to you and your children and grandchildren. I was reminded of something I read just a few days ago. The story was about a man called Edward Bok. Many years ago he was commissioned by the King of Denmark to lead a band of soldiers against pirates who were playing havoc with shipping along a certain coastal area of the country. Mr. Bok set up his headquarters on a lonely, rocky, desolate island just off the coast, and after a few years was able to clear the pirates out of the area.

Upon returning to the mainland Bok reported to the King. The King was very pleased and offered Bok anything he wanted. All he wanted, he told the King, was a plot of land on the island where he had just lived and fought for so many months. They told him the island was barren. Why would he want to live there? "I want to plant trees," was Bok's reply. "I want to make the island beautiful." The King's aides thought he was crazy. The island was constantly swept by storms and high winds. He would never be able to get a tree to grow there.

Bok, however, insisted, and the King granted him his wish. He went to live on the island, built a home, and finally was able to bring his wife to it. For years, they worked industriously, persistently, planting trees, shrubs, grass. Gradually the vegetation took hold, the island began to flourish. One morning they awoke to hear birds singing. There had never been any birds on the island before.

Eventually the island became a showplace and now is visited by thousands of tourists each year. When he died the grandfather requested that the following words be inscribed on his tombstone: "Make you the world a bit more beautiful and better because you have been in it." Not just because of the garden but I'm sure **YOU** who have known and loved and been loved by Kathleen all your lives would believe that could be Kathleen's motto too: " For almost 97 years she has made the world a bit more beautiful and better because she has been in

**My second thought** is inspired by this unique coffin that lies before the altar today and in which lies Kathleen's mortal remains. For the benefit of those of you joining us on the webcam today this coffin was made by Kathleen's family. The wood is from a Spanish Chestnut tree which once proudly stood at the entrance to Tynans of Peafield outside the Pike of Rushall. I realised therefore this is a tree which I passed a thousand times on my way home to Camross over the years. This same Spanish Chestnut also provided the wood for Paul's coffin almost twelve years ago. Recently, one of my friends gave me a gift of this beautiful book titled; *The Company of Trees*. The author of the Book, Thomas Pakenham has a passion for trees and has written many books on the subject. He speaks about one of his favourite childhood books which was called *The Wood that came back*. As I look at Kathleen's unique coffin today I cannot but think of those two book titles. This is certainly The Wood that came back, back to life, back to be used in this most sacred way. Today Kathleen and Paul are both in the Company of Trees, they are reunited uniquely in the company of trees and in this year which would mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their marriage.

**The final thought** brings me back up to Dun Laoighre or Kingstown as I'm sure many people were still calling it in the 1940's when Kathleen lived and worked there. Kingstown or Dun Laoighre was then one of the great ports of departure for Irish people as they emigrated from this country hoping to find a better life elsewhere. I'm sure Kathleen would have been very aware of the heightened emotions and dramas that played out at that port on a daily basis. Today, Kathleen herself leaves on her final journey. This church is something of a departure lounge where we have gathered to pray with her as she takes her leave of us. I

would like you to picture yourselves standing on a dock, beside one of those great old-time sailing vessels. It's standing there, sails folded, waiting for the wind. Suddenly a breeze comes up. When the captain senses the breeze as a forerunner of the necessary wind, he quickly orders the sails to be let down and sure enough the wind comes, catches the sails full force, and carries the ship away from the dock where you are standing. Inevitably you or someone on that dock is bound to say, "Well there she goes"! And from our point of view it indeed does go. Soon, the mighty ship, laden with its' crew and goods, is on the horizon, where the water and the sky meet and it looks like a speck before it disappears. It's still mighty and grand, still filled with life and goods, but it has left us. We are standing on the dock, quite alone. But, on the other side of the ocean, people are standing in anticipation, and as that speck on the horizon becomes larger, they begin to shout something different. They are crying with joy, not abandonment, "Here she comes!" And at the landing, there is welcome, joy, embracing and celebration.

You miss Kathleen. She is quickly receding from your sight. This funeral Mass and her burial later in the local cemetery are our farewells, our version of "there she goes". But goes where? From our sight, from our community, from our care and love and friendship. How she will be missed. But she is not diminished, nor made poorer. We must remember in faith that "Here she comes" is the cry on the eternal shore where Jesus, who understands the human heart is waiting. And there is Kathleen, now forever larger than life, filled with life and laughter and in the arms of the One who makes all things new again, the One who says, "Welcome Kathleen. Welcome Home"