

Mary-Anne Creagh RIP

Funeral Mass

Monday 18th January 2021

Mary-Anne Creagh (nee Dowling), Harristown, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. January 16th 2021. Peacefully at home. Predeceased by her husband Michael. Sadly mourned by her loving family Michael, Margaret (Nelson), Helen (Fortune), Liz (Dowling), Anne (Conroy) and Chris (Kavanagh), sons in law, grandchildren, great-grandchild, her sister Lil O'Connor, sisters in law, nephews, nieces, neighbours, relatives and friends.

Homily

Following my conversation with Margaret and Ann on Saturday afternoon I had an opportunity to reflect a little about some of the thoughts ye had shared with me about your mam. A few of those things really stood out for me. Apart from a few short years spent working and living in Templemore, Mary Anne spent all of her eighty eight and half years of life in this parish. And apart from a few years at the very beginning when the Dowling family lived here in Pound Street and later when she lived with her three aunts in Clonmeen Upper, Harristown was to be the centre of Mary Anne's life and her world.

The second thing that struck me was when we spoke about what Scripture readings we might pick for your mam's funeral you both wondered was there any reading which would highlight the theme of food. Understandably, you wanted to focus on Mary Ann's gift and skill as a cook, a baker, a jam-maker and a homemaker. Perhaps even deeper than that, food and the preparation of food was in Mary Anne's life an important symbol of her love as a mother. Food was also a symbol of her generosity and the gift of hospitality she extended to so many who crossed the threshold in Harristown over the years, whether that was workmen who came to help on the farm or the wide circle of friends which her children might land into her. So we settled on that beautiful

first reading from the prophet Isaiah which speaks of heaven in terms of a banquet of rich food. The host of the banquet is God himself and today Mary Anne is the one at the receiving end of God's gracious love and hospitality.

The third thing that stood out for me was the date of Mary Anne's birth. The 28th of July 1932. When Mary Anne arrived into this world, Ireland was still basking in the afterglow of one of the most significant events in Irish history. The Eucharistic Congress had taken place in Dublin exactly one month earlier and the highlight had been when over a million people had gathered for Mass in the Phoenix Park. One of the things that event highlighted and confirmed was the importance of the Eucharist and the Mass as the centre of our Catholic Faith. It was a faith that Mary Anne was raised in and which she in turn passed on to you her family.

At the heart of every Mass, every celebration of the Eucharist there is that very simple everyday thing which Mary Anne knew a thing or two about, bread. In every celebration of the Eucharist bread is taken, blessed, broken and given. In all of our lives that very same four step movement happens. We are taken, blessed, broken and given. At Mass the priest takes the bread in his hands and blesses it during the Eucharistic Prayer; then he breaks it and it is given to us as The Body of Christ.

Through our birth and baptism we, each one of us, is taken into God's hands; as the bread is taken so are we.

In life we are blessed by family, friends, love and joy; As the bread is blessed, so too are we.

We are broken by failure, loss, pain and heartbreak; As the bread is broken, so too are we.

In death, after a life of giving, we are given back to the mystery from which we came; As bread is given, so too are we.

Central I believe to Mary Anne's simple but rock-like faith was that belief that when we take, bless, break and give bread to one another at Mass,

The Lord is especially present in our midst. Perhaps at times unconsciously, she knew that what happens to the bread at Mass also happened to her in her own life.

For that reason I would like to use that image of the bread, taken, blessed, broken and given as way of reflecting little more on Mary Anne's life today.

As bread is taken so was Mary Anne was taken into this world.....

As we have already noted, Mary Anne Dowling was born in Pound Street in Rathdowney on Thursday 28th of July 1932. She must have been born early in the morning because according to our parish records she was brought down the street to the parish church and baptised the same day she was born. Her godparents were Margaret Dowling and her next door neighbour, Dan Whelan. The family later moved to Harristown Cross. Mary Anne spent a few years living with her three aunts in Clonmeen and while there, like Alice Taylor, Mary Anne went to school through the fields to Graigue. I don't think she had the happiest memories of that particular establishment and rumour has it that while she may have set out every morning from Clonmeen, Mary Anne did not always arrive in Graigue but rather sought refugee status under a bridge somewhere on the route. I also gather that one of her great childhood friends and neighbours, later to be Fr. John Delaney helped her with her school work. I had not realised that I shared something in common with Mary Anne, because Fr. John was also one of my teachers in my Seminary days. As a young woman, Mary Anne went to work in Maher Brothers Drapery Shop in Templemore and during that time she lived with one of her cousins in the town. She later came back home to Harristown Cross to care for her mother.

I'm not sure if Harristown Cross was ever a gathering spot for the famous Irish tradition of Dancing at The Crossroads but I suppose it was always wise for those traveling the roads, whether on foot, cycling or in a pony and trap to pause at a crossroads. One young man who certainly liked to pause on that journey at Harristown Cross was a certain Michael

Creagh from Harristown Upper who regularly visited his cousins in Ballybuggy. Not so much to be aware of any traffic coming from the side roads Michael's reason for slowing down at Harristown Cross was more to do with getting the attention of the beautiful young red-haired Mary Anne Dowling. Michael and Mary Anne were married in Rathdowney Church on the 16th of October 1957. While marriage may have brought a big change to Mary Anne's life, it did not bring a change of address as she moved less than a mile up the road to the place she was to call home for the next 67 years and three months.

As bread is blessed so too are we and so too was Mary Anne.....

I think Mary Anne would say that she was richly blessed in her life. She was blessed in her forty five years of marriage with Michael. She was blessed with extraordinary culinary and homemaking skills. She was blessed with a sense of fun. She was blessed in her family, both the family she was born into and the family she and Michael created together in Harristown. And in a very unique way Mary Anne has shared the blessing of her family with so many others. Individually and collectively you have contributed so much to the quality of life in this community over many years. You have shared your gifts and talents and created precious memories for so many people in times of sadness, in times of healing and in times of celebration. I would like to take this opportunity of your mam's funeral and having you all together to say thank you for all you do and all you are. Mary Anne was justly proud of all you have become and I have no doubt she also experienced that as a tremendous blessing. Your care for your mam in the last few years was wonderful and no doubt you all saw it as an opportunity to return the care, kindness, affection and love she gave to you since you were born. As an avid Bingo player Mary Anne was used to hearing the phrase; Lucky for some, Number thirteen. At bingo and in life number thirteen was a lucky number because that is the number of grandchildren she had and she loved everyone of you. She was also blessed to see the birth of her first great grandchild, Elka.

Lil, you were Mary Anne's last remaining sibling and from my vantage point you shared an extraordinary bond. You were sisters but I think

also each other's best friend. Ye finished each other's sentences and I have no doubt that Mary Anne saw your companionship particularly in recent years as one the precious Blessings of her life. I think it was you Anne who said to me that somebody asked you recently how your mother was and you said Yes They are doing fine. Lil, these are your children too and you are their mother. I know that ye will all continue to be there for each other.

And I believe Mary Anne felt very blessed in her strong Catholic Christian faith which hugely influenced her outlook on life and which sustained her in good times but even more importantly when things were difficult.

Yes as the bread is blessed so was Mary Anne richly blessed and we give thanks today for those many blessings.

As the Bread is broken so too are we and so was Mary Anne. While there were many Joyful and even Glorious mysteries in Mary Anne's life you cannot live for more than 88 years , be the mother of six children and not also experience the sorrowful mysteries of life as well. She experienced the deaths of five of her six siblings and in 2002 the heartbreak of losing her husband Michael. In recent years Mary Anne was not just been broken by loss of loved ones but also by a loss of health and independence. While as a parent she was probably quiet open minded but that did not stop her worrying about you her children and indeed long after you considered yourselves children. That worry can also be a form of brokenness at times. But whatever, the loss, whatever the worry, whatever form the sorrowful mysteries came in, Mary Anne could call on a combination of strength of character a healthy sense of humour and very simple but also very strong Catholic Christian Faith

Yes as bread is broken, so too are we and so too was Mary Anne

As the bread is given so too are we and so too is Mary Anne!

Today we give your mother, your grandmother, your sister, our neighbour and friend back to the mystery from which she came. This final

giving back has been preceded and prepared for by many countless acts of giving and sharing that Mary Anne has done in this community, in your immediate and extended family and in the countless individuals whose lives she has touched in one way or another through her eighty eight years.

And so it is. At every celebration of the Eucharist that Mary Anne participated in here in this church and in many other places, Bread was taken, Blessed, Broken and Given. Every time that happened the Lord was present to her in a unique way. In her own life too she has been taken blessed broken and given and because of the way she has lived that life The Lord has also been present a little more in this world. Last Tuesday evening, I had the privilege of one final visit with Mary Anne in Harristown. While she was very weak she was completely alert as we prayed the prayer of anointing and the Last Sacraments with her. Mary Anne received the Eucharist for the last time. This spiritual food which had sustained and nourished her faith all her life was now food for her final journey. With the last little bit of energy she had she lifted her hand to bless herself, in the name of the Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit, The Holy Trinity.

Eighty eight years and six months ago Mary Anne Dowling was blessed with Holy water at her baptism in the name of the same Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. How many times since in those 88 and half years has Mary Anne raised that hand in blessing. This morning we gather here in this church in Rathdowney, the Church of the Holy Trinity. So Mary Anne, In the name of God the Father who created you, in the name of God the son who suffered and died for you and in the name of God the Holy Spirit who empowered and strengthened you in Faith, We send you on your final journey to heaven today. I'm sure they have already begun preparing that banquet of rich food talked about by Isaiah and no doubt one of those many rooms in the father's house is also in readiness.

Mary Anne, may your gentle soul rest in peace Amen

