

Breda McGrath RIP
Funeral Mass
Errill Church
Wednesday 27th January 2021

Breda McGrath, Clonmeen, Errill, Co. Laois. January 24th 2021.
Peacefully in the tender care of the nurses and staff of Patterson's Nursing Home, Roscrea. Sadly mourned by her sisters Nellie (Bannon), Nan (O'Keefe) and Angela Campion, sister-in-law, brothers-in-law, nephews, nieces, grandnephews, grandnieces, relatives, neighbours and friends.

Homily

I was reading somewhere recently about one of the biggest Hotel Chains in the world called Holiday Inn. The company was recruiting 500 new staff for all kinds of positions in different departments of the company. Tens of thousands applied for the jobs and a total of 5000 were interviewed. The managers conducting the interviews had an interesting criteria for coming up with the successful candidates. They excluded all the candidates who smiled fewer than four times during the interview. Now, I'm not sure what kind of an interview Breda or Bidy would have done to get the job in Campions, Shop, pub and Petrol station across the road here in about 1955 but I was struck by the number of times I have heard in recent days and indeed saw written in the Condolence section of RIP.ie how so many people remember Breda's smile, and particularly from her time working in Campions for over 32 years. As I think back over the visits I have had with Breda in Patterson's Nursing home over the last four years I was also struck by even when she was not able to communicate verbally she still had a lovely gentle smile beaming across her face.

In these extraordinary eleven months we have all lived through we have, I think, come to appreciate the power of simple gestures and acts of kindness. Smiles fall into that category big time. Someone has written very powerfully about the power of a smile:

“A smile costs nothing, but gives much. It enriches those who receive it, without making poorer those who give. It takes but a moment, but the memory of it sometimes lasts forever. None is so rich or mighty that he can get along without it, and none is too poor but that he can be made rich by it. A smile creates happiness in the home, fosters good will in business, and is the countersign of friendship. It brings rest to the weary, cheer to the discouraged, sunshine to the sad, and it is nature’s best antidote for trouble. Yet, it cannot be bought, begged, borrowed, or stolen, for it is something that is of no value to anyone until it is given away. Some people are too tired to give you a smile. Give them one of yours, as none needs a smile as much as he who has no more to give.”

So when people think of Breda McGrath and remember her smile they are saying so much more about the character and personality of the woman we honour with Christian burial today.

Apart from the last four and a half years in Patterson’s Breda lived all of her 81 years here in the community in Errill, first in Clonmeen and then in Lismurragha. The family decided not to present any symbols of Breda’s life today at her funeral mass but having listened to John and Angela tell me a little about Biddy’s life it struck me that if we were bringing symbols today perhaps one of the most important would be a bicycle. The bicycle was an essential companion through much of Biddy’s life. It brought her to and from her Primary school in Togher, in the parish of Templetuohy, to and from the Vocational school in Rathdowney and for those thirty two years, to and from her work in Campions here in the village. For the most part I’m sure those bicycle journeys were uneventful except perhaps for the morning when her neighbour Jack Murray, who liked playing tricks on people, stood out on the road in front of Biddy on her bicycle. Unfortunately her brakes were not working and when she swerved to avoid Jack, he went the same way and they both ended up in the nettles. Somehow I suspect Jack may not have been treated to one of Biddy’s smiles that morning. Biddy’s bicycle did not just facilitate her education and her working life, it also allowed her to have a great social life. In particular it allowed her

to get to dances in Errill and Rathdowney often in the company of her older sister Nelly. Music, song and dancing were all very much part of the McGrath family. Angela, played for me a recording of both Bidy and Nelly singing from over fifty years ago and they both had stunning voices. I gather it was not unusual at any dance here in Errill to have McGraths both as part of the band on stage while many more were treading the boards of the dance floor.

Breda McGrath was baptised on Wednesday the 29th of November 1939 in Grogan church at that font over there. On that day Breda officially became part of the faith community of this parish. In her family life in Clonmeen and Lismurragha, in her school life and in her life in this community that gift of Faith grew to be a very important part of Breda's life. Her faith was nourished here in this church on a weekly basis by the Word of God and by the Eucharist. On that Wednesday in Grogan church over 81 years ago a candle was lighting close to the baptismal font. That candle symbolised the light and the life of Christ being passed on to Breda at her baptism. Today, on this Wednesday of her funeral a similar candle lights here beside Breda's coffin. The symbolism is the same. In the darkness of death we believe that Breda now goes to share in the eternal light and life of Jesus Christ in heaven.

Angela, you told me about those last hours you were able to spend with Breda in Pattersons on Sunday evening. A candle was burning beside her bed and as you watched the light of the candle and the life of your sister both ebb away, you wondered which might go first. In the end I think they both died almost at the same moment. I thought of the words of the poet Tagore: Tagore *"Death is not extinguishing the light; it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come"*. Today we are gathered here in Errill because in an earthly sense for all of you who are Bidy's family and loved ones, a very bright light has been extinguished in your lives. But for Bidy herself, a new dawn has come.

I'll leave you today with some familiar words, again from that same poet, Tagore. I imagine them as Breda's parting words today:

I have got my leave.

Bid me farewell, my friends!

I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door

---and I give up all claims to my house.

I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbours for long,

but I received more than I could give.

Now the day has dawned

and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out.

A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

Breda, Biddy, May your gentle soul rest in peace