

Catherine (Cathleen) Walsh RIP

Funeral Mass

Rathdowney Church

Monday February 22nd 2021

Died 19th February 2021. Peacefully in the Mater Private Hospital, Dublin. Pre-deceased by her son Seamus. Sadly missed by her husband Liam, children Kevin, Edward and Lena and their spouses, Berny, Constance and Tony, grandchildren Catherine, Lydia, Alasdair, Evelyn, James, Elanor, Harry, Kate, Jane, Constance, John and Eddie, great-grandchild David, brother Fr. James, sisters Phyllis and Sr. Monica relatives and friends

One of the days after Christmas I was delighted to receive a letter from Kathleen in Dublin. In the letter she brought me up to date on what had been happening to herself and Liam since I had last seen them at home. She told me how happy she was to be able to tune into Mass here in Rathdowney and keep in touch with what was happening back home. Her main purpose in writing was to ask me to celebrate Mass for her son Seamus' anniversary which was coming up in January. Thankfully, Kathleen also included her mobile phone number in the letter and I followed up with a call to her so that we could arrange a date for Seamus' Mass. We had a great chat on the phone and the Mass for Seamus was arranged for his actual anniversary on the 14th of January. Kathleen called me after the Mass which again she had joined on the webcam and it struck me that even though it had been 43 years since her young son had been tragically killed while learning to fly, the pain for his mother was still very real. In the last few days I have reflected back on that last conversation with Kathleen just over a month ago and I think again of a beautiful book of poetry called *She Walks in beauty* edited by President John F. Kennedy's only daughter, Caroline. Introducing a section of poems about motherhood, Caroline writes the following: "*But I can certainly say, like everyone does, that becoming a mother is the best thing*

that ever happened to me. Having a child defines us for the rest of our lives. No matter what else we do, we will always be that person's mother. We give our children the gift of ourselves, and they give us so much in return....Each mother-child relationship teaches us our limitations and our strengths. It changes us in constantly unfolding ways and entwines us in the unpredictable mystery of another life"

Cathleen McGrath of Clogh, Castlecomer obviously grew up in a home of Faith where the idea and the reality of a vocation was affirmed and fostered. And while Sisters Rosari and Monica and Fr. James were called to respond in the context of Religious life, Cathleen and her other siblings followed their call in different ways. For Cathleen, whatever the other many responsibilities and interests in her life her vocation to be a wife, a mother and later a grandmother was what defined her most and that which gave her the greatest fulfilment in her more than 91 years of life. When I asked you Kevin, Edward and Lena for a word that would best describe your mother and your experience of her you spoke of Selflessness. When I spoke to you Fr. James in Crewe on Saturday night you talked to me of what a wonderful sister Cathleen had been to you and your siblings over the years. The writer of the First Reading which Lena read for us today asked the question; "Who shall find a valiant woman, who shall find a woman of strength?" You who have been Cathleen's family, both the family she was born into and the family she and Liam created together have I think been very blessed by this valiant woman we honour with Christian burial today.

Cathleen was born on the 3rd day of September 1929. For a woman who went on to become an astute bookkeeper and 'Financial controller' in the various successful business that she and Liam built up together, September 1929 was an interesting and salutary time to be born. The day after Cathleen's birth, the infamous Wall Street crash began which was the catalyst for The Great Depression across America and Europe. Businesses large and small were wiped out and the effects of what happened in those early days of September 1929 were to be felt for decades to come.

After her primary education in Clogh and Secondary in the Presentation school in Castlecomer Cathleen left County Kilkenny and headed North West to Yeats Country and her first job as a Butter Maker in Ballinfull Creamery. After a short time there Cathleen moved closer to home and in the early 1950's arrived here in Rathdowney to continue her skill of Butter Making at the Creamery in Donaghmore. That move to Donaghmore was to change the course of her life. Donaghmore Co-op was one of the main employers in this area at that time and I always get the sense that there was great comradarie and loyalty among the staff that worked in Donaghmore in it's hay-day. Cathleen fitted in very well and developed many life-long friendships. It was not all about the work either and I gather that in the company of friends like Lil Dowling and Gemma Bergin Cathleen regularly cycled to dances in Borris In Ossory and elsewhere. It was at one of these dances in Borris In Ossory that Cathleen was to meet Liam Walsh from Garryduff. The rest as they say is history. Liam and Cathleen were married in Cathleen's home parish of Clogh in August 1955. Liam came from a farm in Garryduff and he has retained a love and passion for farming and animals all of his life. I think it was Napoleon who once referred to England as a Nation of Shopkeepers. Well out in Garryduff, in addition to the love of farming there was in the Walsh DNA an entrepreneurial gene which produced a family of shopkeepers. After their marriage, Liam and Cathleen moved to Kent in England where they set up their first successful business. Their four children were born in Kent. Cathleen became the great multitasker, helping to run the business, raising her family while at the same time upskilling herself in the areas of Book-keeping and shorthand. And as if that was not enough she then decided to train to be a Montessori teacher.

She does not neglect her tasks, She willingly works with her hands. She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths.

In 1966, Liam and Cathleen and their family returned to Ireland and took over a business in Dublin but the long term plan was always to return to Rathdowney. This dream they achieved in 1977 when they

opened a very successful business on the Square which incorporated a Pub, a grocery and a gift ware shop. Liam and Kathleen retired from business ten years later in 1987. It was then that they moved to the Rectory and Liam was able to return to his first love of farming, raising pedigree cattle and horses. As the pace of their lives changed it gave both of them time to indulge a few pass-times which had been put on the back-burner. Cathleen took up Golf and Bridge. She loved both and the more competitive the better. Cathleen was also an avid reader soaking up books and substantive articles on a whole range of subjects found in the Magazines of the Sunday papers. Cathleen was to acknowledge that these years in The Old Rectory were the happiest of their lives. I'm sure another factor in that happiness was that it was these years that also saw the arrival of their twelve grandchildren and more recently David, their first great-grandchild.

Over the last five or six years, at Cathleen's invitation, I visited them on First Thursdays of every month to bring them Holy Communion. Sometimes they might be in the middle of a late breakfast. We sat at the Kitchen Table, the toast would be set aside and we would break another kind of bread together. There was something very simple yet very sacred about that little ritual. The Kitchen table, the toast, the Eucharist. Somehow it symbolised for me how their life long faith had been woven into their everyday lives in a seamless way. It was a faith which has sustained Cathleen through the Joyful, Glorious and most especially in the sorrowful mysteries of her life. It was a Faith which I'm sure may have been tested particularly during times of loss and none more so than when Seamus died in 1978.

After a long and surely fulfilled life of over 91 years Cathleen Walsh's earthly journey has come to an end. This church, which was just being built when Cathleen first arrived in Rathdowney seventy years ago and where she has worshipped so faithfully all of those years today becomes her departure lounge as she sets out on a new journey. With St. Paul in that second reading today Cathleen can say: *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.*

I'd like to leave you today with some words from a poem called *DEDICATION* by the great Donegal poet; Patrick MacGill

FROM DEDICATION

BY PATRICK MACGILL)

“I speak of the old women
Who danced to yesterday's fiddle
And dance no longer.
They sit in a quiet place and dream
And see visions
Of what is to come,
Of their issue,
Which has blossomed to manhood and womanhood –
And seeing thus
They are happy
For the day that was leaves no regrets,
And peace is theirs
And perfection.”

Cathleen, May that Peace and Perfection of Heaven be yours this day, and May you rest in Peace Amen