

Lil Kelly RIP
Funeral Mass
Errill Church
Monday 1st of February 2021

Elizabeth (Lil) Kelly (nee Holohan), Churchquarter, Errill, Co. Laois. January 26th 2021 in her 92nd year. Predeceased by her husband Paddy. Deeply regretted by her sons Pat and John, daughters-in-law Siobhan and Orla, grandchildren Michael, Emer, Patrick and Kate, her sisters Sally (Jennings) and Winifred (Murphy), nephews, nieces, relatives and friends especially her dear friend Teresa Robinson. The family would like to express a special thanks to the doctors, nurses and staff in the COVID ward at Portlaoise Regional Hospital for their wonderful work and care in these difficult days.

Homily

Exactly three years ago on what was also the first Monday of February 2018, we gathered in huge numbers for Paddy Kelly's funeral in Errill Church. Back then, Corona was still only a beer, a mask was something by and large, to be worn for fun. Cocooning was what a caterpillar did while waiting to become a butterfly and social distancing was something Paddy and Lil kept from their fellow dancers on the dance-floor. Who would have believed on the day of Paddy's funeral that just three years later, only ten people would be able to be physically present for Lil's departure. It is particularly sad and poignant because I know that Paddy and Lil were very faithful when it came to attending funerals both near and far.

The last time I saw Lil was on New Year's Eve, the evening of the 31st of December. Pat had brought Lil to my house because she wanted two Mass Cards, one for her cousin's wife, Sarah Holohan in Galmoy and the other for her niece, Breda Maher in Drom. I waved at her in the front of the car and wished her a happy New Year. It was not to be. The very

next day, the First of January, Lil began to feel ill and just over three weeks later she passed away. Yes, the circumstances of Lil's illness and death and her funeral here today are dreadfully raw and bring home to all of us the painful reality experienced by so many families in Ireland and across the world in the last year. Today, it is you the Kelly family who carry the burden of this grief and our hearts go out to you at this time.

Despite the sadness of Lil's death there is also cause for us to have Hope. Lil's funeral has been delayed for a few days and I suspect that she who liked to manoeuvre a little in order to get things the way she liked them, might just be happy that we say farewell to her on St. Brigid's Day the First of February. Lil would be happy it is so close to Paddy's anniversary tomorrow but also I think because today is the first day of Spring. Lil lived her life very much in harmony with nature and with the seasons of the year. For Lil, Spring brought with it the promise of new beginnings, new life, the birth of baby calves the appearance above the ground of delicate snowdrops and golden daffodils and the prospect of months of enjoyment working in her beautiful garden in Churchquarter.

- Lil's love of nature and her sensitivity to the seasons of life, came no doubt, from being raised on a farm in Levalley in the parish of Galmoy. Lil Houlahan was born in Levalley on Sunday the 21st of April 1929 and she was to be the 4th oldest of a family of twelve children. She would have eight sisters and three brothers. Like most children of the time Lil walked the three mile journey to school in Galmoy . With a big gang of Houlihans themselves and meeting other children along the way, it would be a large group of scholars who would descend on Galmoy every morning. Being among the older members of the family Lil took on roles of responsibility at home at an early age. Her younger sister, Sally now living in Warrenpoint County Down paid a lovely tribute to Lil:

- *'In having 8 younger siblings Lil was a second mother to us – she was capable and could do ten jobs at once. When she started working, her half-day on Wednesday was the highlight of our week, she would cycle into the yard at home and produce a block of ice cream from her front basket – how we loved it! Then she would brush and sweep and wash for our mother as they talked non-stop. How she cheered us up. What a great girl she always was, full of energy and goodwill. I remember her as a good and positive woman to everyone who needed help, from family to neighbours'*

Lil had various jobs during the 1950's and 60's but eventually she came to Errill to work in what was Collier's shop. That move to Errill was to change her life forever because it was there that she met a dashing young local farmer called Paddy Kelly. It was the era of the Showbands and Paddy and Lil shared a love of dancing. Their favourite weekend spot was the famous Las Vegas Ballroom in Templemore which I reckon was the source of many love-stories around Errill. Their love of dancing lasted right through more than fifty years of Paddy and Lil's married life and as well as the enjoyment they got they made many wonderful friends in the process. Paddy and Lil were married in Galmoy church on the 28th of September 1966. In the early 1960's Paddy had taken over his uncles' farm down Borohan Lane but in 1969 He and Lil together moved to the farm and house in Churchquarter which was to be their home for the rest of their lives. Paddy Kelly was a very progressive farmer open to new ideas and techniques. Lil was as happy working outside as she was in the house so together they made a great farming couple. Growing up in Levalley, Lil's parents had raised pigs and Lil brought that idea with her to Churchquarter keeping six sows and raising thirty to forty piglets annually for many years. In these days of early Spring I know there are little baby calves being born all over this community. The same is true in Churchquarter. Lil had a particular skill in coaxing these young calves to feed and drink from a bucket. It is a skill, I gather which demands a degree of patience, a virtue not always shared by some of the men in Lil's life. Lil loved everything about farming and long after she and

Paddy had retired, her first question to Pat each morning was; 'how are the animals and were there any new calves born last night?' The beautiful first reading today from the Book of Proverbs which Siobhain read for us spoke about The Valiant Woman who does not neglect her tasks but works diligently with her hands. Lil Kelly's hands, that happily milked cows, planted crops, pruned her roses, turned turf on the bog, those same hands were equally skilled and gifted when it came to maintaining her home and making apple tarts and Christmas cakes. I'm not sure what went wrong in the lead up to this most recent Christmas but I see from the notes the family gave me that Clare Bergin you somehow 'rescued' the Christmas Cake. I'm not sure what that means but I'm sure you do.

Notwithstanding the sad events of the last month of her life I believe Lil Kelly felt very blessed in the life she has lived for almost 92 years. She felt very blessed in her family or maybe I should say her three families, the family she was born into in Levalley, the family she married into when she met Paddy Kelly and most especially the family that she and Paddy created together in Churchquarter. John when you met Orla and it became obvious that your future would be down in County Cork I'm sure Lil was just about able to cope but when Pat, the farmer at home became serious about a woman from Canada little alarm bells were ringing in Churchquarter. Siobhain, you shared with me an interesting early insight you had of your future mother-in-law. After you had met Pat and your trips from Dublin to Errill became a little more frequent, you were eventually introduced to Paddy and Lil. With her characteristic hospitality Lil invited you to dinner in Churchquarter. It was just you and Lil alone in the kitchen getting dinner prepared. You are sitting at the kitchen table and Lil is standing at the sink with her back to you as she peeled the potatoes. There was a little silence and then in a very clear voice Lil said. 'The Cows, Siobhain, are not moving to Canada. Thank God they didn't and thank God you decided to stay. (Although I'm sure there was sadness on the other side of the Atlantic in Nova Scotia for Anne and Jim and your family) When Paddy and

Lil's family expanded beyond Pat and John to welcome Siobhain and Orla and later four grandchildren, Michael, Eimear, Patrick and Kate it brought a whole new Joyful dimension to both Paddy and Lil's life. Perhaps it was that early experience of 'mothering' her younger siblings but Lil had a great way with kids, be they her own grandchildren or the many grand nieces and nephews who came to visit.

When both Paddy and Lil's parents passed away, Churchquarter became a gathering spot for both the Holohan and Kelly extended families from near and far and Lil relished that role of hospitality which came so naturally to her. In the small group gathered here today in the church we have Lil's nephew, Jim Ryan and Paddy's niece Hillary Grey. John and Pat wanted you here not only because ye were such an important part of Lil's life but you also represent the extended Holohan and Kelly families who cannot be physically present today. Clare Bergin, you are here today also because you have been such a loyal friend and neighbour to Lil and the Kelly family. You also represent the many more wonderful friends and neighbours in Errill and beyond who enriched Lil's life and particularly in the last three years since she lost Paddy. Yes, Lil was also truly blessed to have lived among you, her neighbours and friends. I know that the Kelly family have been overwhelmed by the support and friendship they have received in the last four weeks and on their behalf I thank all of you today. There is one other friend I need to mention today who sadly cannot be with us. Theresa Robinson, I know you are joining us on the webcam today. In covid terms ye were part of the same Bubble and long before this pandemic I rarely saw one of you without the other being close-by. Thank God for the gift of such friends.

About a week or ten days after Paddy died three years ago I called in one evening to say hello to Lil. It was duskish and there she was sitting alone in semi darkness holding a photograph of Paddy in her hand. It was a scene I will never forget as it spoke to me of the incredible bond between them and the heartbreak she was now feeling because in an earthly sense that bond was broken. Lil, today you are reunited with

your beloved Paddy in heaven and I can only hope that he has already booked some Dance Hall up there to celebrate your arrival.

The last line from the Book of Proverbs today read:

*Charm is superficial and beauty fades,
But the woman who honours the Lord is to be praised.*

As we have mentioned, Lil loved music and dance but if I could borrow a musical term, the backing track to all of Lil Kelly's very full and busy 92 years of life was her deep faith and her complete trust in her God. It was a faith that sustained Lil in good times and most especially when the storms of life blew in her door. It was a faith which was not just expressed in public worship and in private prayer but also lived out in practical and often unseen ways. There are many charities and religious orders who will now be the poorer because of Lil Kelly's passing. That was her quiet, discrete way of reaching out to those less fortunate than herself.

I have always believed that those who live close to the earth and to nature have something of an advantage when it comes to accepting death. Whether it is planting Beet, potatoes, Turnips, strawberries or beautiful roses as Lil did so many times, there is always some form of a seed involved that is buried in the ground. The planter knows that like Jesus spoke of in the gospel, that seed will go through the act of dying before any new life can appear above the ground. That very same mystery of nature is at the heart of our Christian faith. As Christians we believe that death, our death, is not God's final word in our regard. Yes, we die and yes like the seed, we are planted, buried in the earth but that act of dying and burial also gives way to a new life. Today is Lil's time to die and as we bring her later for burial in Errill we realise in faith that, as it was for Paddy, St. Kieran's cemetery is today the gateway for Lil to her new and eternal life.

Lil did not have an opportunity to say goodbye even to those closest to her. So I want leave you with some final familiar words from the poet

Tagore . I give them to Lil today as words she might use as she bids us farewell :

It was beautiful as long as it lasted, the journey of my life, I have no regrets whatsoever, save the pain I'll leave behind.

Those dear hearts who love and care, and the heavy with sleep ever moist eyes, the smile in spite of a lump in the throat and the strings pulling at the heart and soul,

The strong arms that held me up when my own strength let me down, each morsel that I was fed with, was full of love.

At every turning of my life I came across good friends and family who stood by me, even when the time raced me by.

Farewell, farewell my friends, I smile and bid you goodbye.

No, shed no tears, for I need them not, all I need is your smile, If you feel sad, do think of me, for that's what I'll like, when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die

when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die. I suspect that in the hearts of many joining us today Lil Kelly will never die. May she rest in peace