

Nora Browne RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Monday 1st of February 2021

Nora Browne (nee Ryan) wife of the late Connie. Peacefully at home, January 29th, 2021. Deeply regretted by all her heartbroken sons and daughters. She will be sorely missed by her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law, her brother Mick and her sister Joan, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, her aunts Bunt and Ann, nieces, nephews and all her extended family, neighbours and friends.

Homily

I want to begin by sharing with you a very beautiful poem entitled **Nobody Knows but Mother** by *Mary Morrison*

HOW MANY BUTTONS are missing today?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many playthings are strewn in her way?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many thimbles and spools has she missed?
How many burns on each fat little fist?
How many bumps to be cuddled and kissed?
Nobody knows but Mother.

How many hats has she hunted today?
Nobody knows but Mother.
Carelessly hiding themselves in the hay —
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many handkerchiefs wilfully strayed?
How many ribbons for each little maid?
How for her care can a mother be paid?
Nobody knows but Mother.

How many muddy shoes all in a row?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many stockings to darn, do you know?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many little torn jumpers to mend?
How many hours of toil must she spend?
What is the time when her day's work shall end?
Nobody knows but Mother.

How many cares does a mother's heart know?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many joys from her mother's love flow?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many prayers for each little bed?
How many tears for her babes has she shed?
How many kisses for each curly head?
Nobody knows but Mother.

As we gather here this afternoon in Rathdowney Church there are three things I am very conscious of. Firstly I'm conscious that it is just over four months since we were here to celebrate your father, Connie's funeral mass. To lose both of your parents in such a short time is a dreadful blow to you each individually and also as a family. To lose both of your parents in these times of restrictions is even more painful.

The second thing I'm very conscious of is that everybody in this community that I have spoken to in the last few days, every single one of them, without exception, the very first thing they said when speaking of your mother was some version of 'Nora Browne was a lady and a beautiful person'.

And the third thing I am hugely aware and conscious of as I look around this church today is that I am celebrating a funeral mass for a woman whose life was so defined by her vocation to be a MOTHER. And that is why I wanted to begin this reflection with that beautiful poem; *Nobody knows but Mother*

There is a line in that poem that really jumped out at me:

How for her care can a mother be paid?

I'm fairly confident that question will be answered emphatically today as Nora Browne knocks on heaven's door. I suspect St. Peter will be given the day off and Mary the Mother of God will be the one on duty and she will roll out the red carpet for this beautiful, gentle, placid, kind and loving woman. These two women, Norah from Killusty and Daly Terrace and Mary from Nazareth have been friends for a long long time. Going back over many decades Nora Browne was one of a group of women in this town who in the month of May met every day to pray the rosary. Initially I think that gathering took place at the crossroads where the Johnstown Road intersects Harp road and the Kilcoran Road. Later I think it moved indoors to Barbara Fitzpatrick's house. I have no doubt that powerhouse of prayer bore all kinds of fruit in ways that we will never know. As a mother of Thirteen I'm sure that Nora Browne had lots of things to talk to Mary about every-time she prayed the rosary not just in May but every other day of the year as well.

As there are Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries in the Rosary, there were also Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries in Nora's life too.

Nora Ryan was born in England on the 16th of January 1937 but at the outbreak of the Second World War just two years later the Ryans moved home to Killusty Co. Tipperary in the foothills of Slievenamon. Nora was to return to England as a young woman where she worked in the accounts Department of Woolworths. While there she was to meet Connie Browne from Rathdowney. They were married back home in Killusty on St. Patrick's Day 1960. Subsequently they moved here to Rathdowney and set home in Daly Terrace. Very quickly the Joyful Mysteries started to arrive, all fourteen of you but sadly one little boy, Thomas died in infancy.

How many cares does a mother's heart know?

Nobody knows but Mother.

How many joys from her mother's love flow?

Nobody knows but Mother.

If Nora's primary source of Joy was that of being a Mother to all of you I think she also got Joy from living in this community and in particular living in Daly Terrace. I noticed that one of the messages on RIP.ie described Nora as the Stalwart of Daly Terrace. In that beautiful phrase in the Irish tradition, Nora and her neighbours 'lived in the shelter of each other'. Nora I understand maintained an open door policy and that open door in so many ways symbolised her kindness and hospitality. In particular that door was open to your friends at any hour of the day or night. One woman sent me a text this morning specifically to say that Nora Browne was like a mam to so many young people in this town.

The Glorious mysteries in Nora's life came in the form of many grandchildren and great grandchildren. I can recall my earlier visits to Nora when I used to meet her in the Sitting Room and she was surrounded by pictures of herself beaming at First Communions and other happy events in the lives of her grandchildren. I used to wonder how she might be expected to remember all the names but I have since discovered that her way of getting around that was to call all of you 'Child' and I assume that extended to the grandchildren as well.

No woman can have a husband and thirteen children and be spared the sorrowful mysteries of life. I suppose it is just possible that all of you who were the Joyful mysteries in her life could on occasion have been the source of a few sorrowful ones as well.

*How many prayers for each little bed?
How many tears for her babes has she shed?
How many kisses for each curly head?
Nobody knows but Mother.*

Your mother Nora was from a generation of Irish women whose extraordinary faith and trust in God, and his mother, allowed them to do something which we find almost alien today. That is the concept of 'offering up' to God whatever trial or suffering or disappointment they experienced. Somehow each situation was seen as part of God's plan for them and in some real way they united their sufferings and sorrowful mysteries with what had happened in Jesus' own life. I have no doubt that your mam brought her concerns and her worries, both big and small, to her prayer, be that the rosary or when she came here to Mass

every weekend. Combined with what that First Reading from the Book of Proverbs described as her 'inner resources and strengths' Nora's incredible simple but rock-like faith sustained her and moulded her into the beautiful lady that so many people in this community and beyond recognised, respected and admired.

Sometimes a particular incident allows us an insight into the kind of person someone is. As many people in this community may recall one day, I think in 2016 Nora had gone down town to collect her pension and do her shopping in SuperValu. Unfortunately when she came out from the Post Office she was robbed of her money leaving her no doubt quite shaken. As she entered SuperValu she met some women she knew who were doing a collection for Laois Hospice. She apologised that she had nothing to give them because she had just been robbed. Despite the trauma she experienced that day Nora came back down later in the evening to make her contribution to Laois Hospice.

*She opens her heart to the needy, she is generous to the poor.
She is strong and respected, and not afraid of the future.*

Again that beautiful reading from the Book of Proverbs finds such an echo in the life of the woman we honour with Christian burial today.

I know that there are perhaps hundreds of people connecting into this mass for Nora today via the webcam, literally from all over the world. I know that you her family have felt that support of extended family, neighbours and friends very much in these days. But as I look at the thirteen of you sitting here I'm very conscious of how sad this day is for you. Your mam has had the death that she and so many others would pray for, peacefully in her sleep in her own bed at home. Over the last few years you have organised yourselves and your lives to allow you to care for her at home.

As I have found myself saying to other families, over the years, who have sat in these front seats before you, the death of your mother brings with it a unique kind of heartache and even as an adult you can feel very much the pain of being an orphan. For you this heartache is all the more acute because it comes so soon after your dad's death. Your mam's

death brings a new kind of un-belonging into your lives. And that is totally understandable. Your mother was for each of you, your first friend and your longest friend. No friend that you will ever meet on life's journey will have been so interested or committed to you. Together with your father, your mother gave you your first experience of home, they created a safe place for you, a safe place to be born, to take initiative, to believe, to start the journey of loving. Your mother was the heart of your home. Your sadness today is that the heart is not at home. It is gone from this place to a different space. Today your home is joined to heaven in a very profound way. Nora, your mam has gone before you to join your dad, her relatives and friends in their eternal home, our eternal home.

As a final thought today I'm going back to when Nora was born in London in January 1937. London in those early weeks of 1937 was still reeling from the shock of the abdication a few weeks earlier of their King Edward VIII . This meant that in January 1937 there was a new King George VI and his queen, Elizabeth, the parents of the present Queen Elizabeth. When the Queen Mother died in 2002 a very moving little piece which you might be familiar with was published in the London Times on the day of her funeral. I'm well aware that County Tipperary was often the place which provided the greatest opposition to British involvement in Ireland so I'm not sure how the Ryans of Killusty would feel about me making this little Royal connection. However, because Nora came into the world just as that new queen was taking over I thought I would finish by quoting this little tribute from the London Times. It is even more apt today as we say farewell to this beloved sister, mother grandmother and great grandmother:

*We can shed tears that she is gone
Or we can smile because she has lived.*

We can close our eyes and pray that she will come back

Or we open our eyes and see all she has left behind.

Our hearts can be empty because we cant see her

Or we can be full of the love we shared

We can turn our backs on tomorrow and live yesterday.

Or we can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.

We can remember her and only that she's gone

Or we can cherish her memory and let it live on.

We can try and close our minds, be empty and turn our back

Or we can do what she'd want: smile, open our eyes

Love and go on

Nora, May your gentle soul rest in peace Amen