

**Teresa Cahill RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

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*Teresa Cahill (nee Creagh), Moíniseal, Mooreville, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. February 9<sup>th</sup> 2021. Predeceased by her husband Jackie. Sadly missed by her loving family Annemarie, Paula, John and Brian, son-in-law Johnny, daughter-in-law Marian, her beloved grandchildren Max, Kate, Tara, Jack, Claire, Clodagh, Jack, Cora, Rory, Erin and Darby, her brother Sean, her sisters-in-law Anne and Breda, her sisters Kathleen (Morgan), and Sr. Margaret, nephews, nieces, neighbours and friends.*

One of the symbols brought up at the beginning of Mass today was a pack of cards. As many of you here will know one of the great passions and pass-times of Teresa's life was the game of Bridge. While I never had the opportunity to play with her or against her I understand from those who did that she was a fairly accomplished player and like her golf, a competitive one too. She was also fast playing the cards, although some might suggest that by playing faster than other tables she might just have time to slip out for a quick cigarette and maybe even a little tipple. As a starting point for these few reflections today I would like to use that card game as a context. From my only little experience of playing bridge (and I suppose this could also apply to any card game) when the cards are dealt and you get a really good hand it is relatively easy to play. Equally so, while it might not be much fun, when you are dealt a really bad hand it is also easy to play. It is when you are dealt a middle of the road hand with some good cards, some bad ones and some middling ones that's when a little skill and a fair bit of good luck is called for. In truth most of our lives reflect that third hand of cards and the story of our lives is the story of how we played the hand that we were dealt.

For Teresa, that hand was first dealt more than eighty five years ago when she was born into the Creagh family of Ballybuggy on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1935. Last Tuesday morning Teresa's earthly life came to a close

and today here in Rathdowney, her story, her hand of cards is laid out before us.

When Teresa's brother Patrick died out in Ballybuggy back in November 2016 I can recall thinking of his life's priorities in terms of three 'F' words, Faith, Family and Farming. When I began to reflect a little on Teresa's life and what it was that so many of us loved and admired about her I was drawn back to more 'F' words. Faith and Family certainly, but I also thought of words like Friends and Friendship, Flair, Fashion, Finery, Fairways, Fun, Food, and Fortitude.

But first let's go back to another 'F' and arguably what was the most interesting and exciting decade of Teresa's life, the **Fifties**. If any of you are familiar with the novel and subsequent widely acclaimed film, *Brooklyn* also set in the 1950's Colm Tobin could easily have based his storyline on how Teresa Creagh from Ballybuggy lived that particular decade. At the age of 19, and having completed her Secondary education in the Brigidine School in Tullow, Co. Carlow, Teresa was ready for adventure

She set sail for America. Her point of contact across the Atlantic was her aunty Maggie who I assume provided her with accommodation and also helped her to get a job in a bank. Just as in the movie Teresa met and fell in love with handsome young Italian, I think his name was Eddie. They became engaged and planned to marry. Before taking this big step, Teresa decided to come home for a holiday and I presume to tell her parents and family about what the future had in store for her. During her trip home and while cycling through the main street of Rathdowney the striking young woman was noticed by the local butcher, Mr. Jackie Cahill. The rest as they say is history but this is where Teresa's story differs from how the film ended. In Brooklyn, Eilis played by Saoirse Ronan leaves behind a broken-hearted young Irishman and returns to her Italian betrothed in New York. In the Ballybuggy version, Teresa Creagh returned to New York alright but it was to do the honourable thing of returning an engagement ring and refunding the fare that Eddie had paid for her to come home.

In many ways that must have been a difficult journey and decision for Teresa but it was an early indication of the Fortitude which would characterise so much of her life. *Who can find a valiant woman, who can find a woman of strength. She is worth far more than jewels.* Jackie Cahill had found that valiant woman and they were married in the Cathedral of The Assumption in Thurles on Wednesday the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1959 (Was Wednesday the half day in the butcher shop?)

Bridge players have a tendency to go back over games they have played and sometimes regret that they had not bid or played the hand differently. Whatever about Bridge games, Teresa never regretted the life changing hand she played during her more than fifty seven years of marriage with Jackie. When I came to know them almost nine years ago Jackie was in the final chapter of his life and gone was much of the physical strength and zest for life that I have heard of down through the years. But I remember being struck by two things, the obvious spark of love and attraction between the two of them and the gentle care and attention which Teresa showed to Jackie. In the previous decades they had worked hard together to build up a successful business and raise their four children over the shop in Main Street. Along the way they had faced many challenges not least the fact that they both suffered serious illnesses, Jackie in 1979 and Teresa 24 years ago. When Jackie was ill Teresa just ran every aspect of the business herself

*She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths*

*She invites good, not evil, every day of her life.*

*She does not neglect her tasks;*

*She willingly works with her hands.*

*She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths.*

When John took over the business from his father Teresa remained very involved and of course contributed in a unique way to it's success. I was reading somewhere recently how when people are selling houses sometimes they spray certain scents that give off the aroma of freshly baked bread or freshly brewed coffee which attracts prospective buyers who come to view their homes. I was thinking if could have located one

of those sprays which gives off the aroma of chickens roasting or freshly made stuffing it would have been appropriate to spray it in this church today at Teresa's funeral. Those were her signatures and they were welcomed into many a home in this community over the years.

As hard as she worked, I think it is fair to say that Teresa also knew how to enjoy herself and I suspect before the term was invented Teresa knew something of the importance of work-life balance. Both Teresa and Jackie were an integral part of the Rathdowney Golf Club and its development over the years. I understand that they played a very significant part in the transformation of the Ladies section of the club. As much as she enjoyed the first eighteen holes Teresa also loved the 19<sup>th</sup>. Through Golf Teresa made many friends and as I read down through the messages on the condolence page of RIP.ie I was struck by the heartfelt messages left by so many of those friends who had walked the Fairways with her over the years. That sense of adventure first displayed when she headed for America at 19, never left her. Whether it was with the Golden Girls or with her sisters, Teresa loved to head off to the Sun and I imagine what went on tour stayed on tour. The friendships, the fun, the flair, the fashion the finery that zest for living all characterised Teresa's approach to life right up to the end. I will miss her presence around this neighbourhood.

The two 'F' words that provided the soundtrack and the backdrop to all of Teresa's life were her Faith and her Family.

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

Without a doubt, Teresa loved the flair and the finery and the fashion and she carried it off with such elegance and panache. But she also knew the truth of those final words from the Book of Proverbs today. There is so much that fades. What does not fade is the seed of faith planted in rich soil and then nurtured and cared for. The seed of faith planted in Teresa's life at her Baptism on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1935 landed in very deep soil. The gift of Faith was nurtured in Ballybuggy and nourished over the years in the soil of this parish community. It was a faith expressed and deepened in public worship and private prayer and regular meditation. Those elegant hands which made stuffing for

turkeys, played slams at the bridge table, swung many a club on the fairway were also the hands that on a regular basis both received and distributed the Body of Christ in this church. Perhaps, the faith of the woman we honour with Christian burial today is best articulated in that beautiful second reading from St. Paul to the Ephesians.

*This, then, is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural, takes its name:*

*Out of his infinite glory, may he give you the power through his Spirit for your hidden self to grow strong, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith, and then, planted in love and built on love, you will with all the saints have strength to grasp the breadth and the length, the height and the depth; until, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond all knowledge, you are filled with the utter fullness of God.*

*Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus forever and ever. Amen.*

Teresa's final journey to this church today involved a little tour of the parish and in particular it brought out to Ballybuggy where it all began in October 1935. The family she was born into would always be very precious to her. And then the family that Teresa and Jackie created together would be the Joyful, Glorious and maybe even sometimes the Sorrowful mysteries of her life. Ann Marie, Paula, John and Brian I'm sure like many families, you all have had your own unique way of relating to your mother.

Ann Marie, for your mam, Sundays in recent years had two high-lights, her participation in Mass and her weekly conversations with you on the phone which I gather could stretch to an hour and a half covering such topics as the books ye were reading and the films ye were watching to the usual mix of local and family gossip. I know it breaks your heart that you cannot be physically here today or to have been able to be with her over these last few months. But you also know that the love you shared transcended all the distance, space and time-zones.

Paula, our mother is the one who is there for so many of the firsts in our lives, the first smiles, the first tears, the first faltering steps. She has carried us and cared for us in so many ways when we cannot do it for ourselves. It is a rare privilege when we can have the chance to reverse those roles at the other end of life. In these last weeks of Teresa's life you have been afforded that privilege and you have done those simple yet sacred tasks with such great healing love.

Sometimes a name or a title carries with it a little insight into the bond that exists between two people. So Our Brian, as your mother always called you, that must surely tell us something about how precious you were to her and I think how she looked up to you and valued your opinion on so many things. These have been very difficult days and weeks for you and Marian as you have also lost Marian's dad, Rodney. May God give you both the strength you need at this time.

And then there is the one who stayed at home to carry on and build on what Teresa and Jackie had created. John, I have rarely witnessed a bond between a mother and her son like you shared with Teresa. I'm sure there are those who would say, maybe even within your own family, that she spoilt you and it didn't stop even when you lost the head of curls. She had your back. Your pain was her pain. But I also know that in the last years of her life while she could not see her other grandchildren as often she would have liked, the life, laughter and the smiles which Clodagh, Jack, Cory and Rory brought to Teresa was very precious.

There is a beautiful line from the poet Tagore which I love. It says

*when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die.*

Anne Marie, Paula, Brian and John. Today is very real and very raw for you and your families because this valiant woman, your mam who has been a strength and a presence in your lives *all* your lives is now in a sense leaving you. But equally real is the fact that she will live on in your hearts forever.

So as we take Teresa your mam to her place of rest in the grave beside Jackie, let us remember that while we lay her to rest there

we bury her body, but not her spirit;  
we bury her hands, but not her good deeds;  
we bury her heart, but not her love;  
we bury her head, but not her memories.

I would like to finish today with the words of a Blessing. It is '*On the death of a beloved*' by John O'Donohue

Teresa

Let us not look for you only in memory,  
Where we would grow lonely without you.  
You would want us to find you in presence,  
Beside us when beauty brightens,  
When kindness glows  
And music echoes eternal tones.

When orchids brighten the earth,  
Darkest winter has turned to spring;  
May this dark grief flower with hope  
In every heart that loves you.

May you continue to inspire us:

To enter each day with a generous heart.  
To serve the call of courage and love  
Until we see your beautiful face again  
In that land where there is no more separation,  
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,  
And where we will never lose you again.

Until then Teresa, May your gentle soul rest in peace.

