

**Hannah Finane RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

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Hannah Finane (née Phelan), Mooreville, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. March 18th 2021. Peacefully in the tender care of the doctors, nurses and staff of Portlaoise Regional Hospital. In her 101st year. Predeceased by her husband Michael and her daughter Noreen. Deeply regretted by her loving family George, Kieran, Mary, Rita, Michael, Billy and Seamus. Grandchildren, great-grandchildren, nephews, nieces, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.

On a few occasions over the years I have asked Hannah to perform a little task which only she could do. Every so often we have baptised a new member of the community at Sunday Mass. The reason for this is emphasise that when one is baptised they are officially and publicly welcomed into God's family, the Christian Community. Part of The Baptism ceremony calls for the parents and Godparents to make the sign of the cross on the baby's forehead as a gesture of welcome. As the oldest person in the community attending Mass I would ask Hannah to come up and place the sign of the cross on the baby's head and so on behalf of the whole community she would welcome it's newest member. Each time I watched her walk slowly but with determination up that aisle, armed with her precious new hip and normally with Billy's assistance. With a wonderful smile she would bless the child and whisper a big welcome.

I thought of those occasions again this morning as ye helped Hannah up this aisle one last time. We welcome her here today with great sadness but also with enormous gratitude in our hearts for having known such a beautiful lady who lived out in her long and wonderful life, the Faith she was first welcomed into at her baptism almost 101 years ago.

Hannah Phelan was born on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1920 in Raheen just outside of Rathdowney. When someone has lived more than a hundred years we have an even greater interest in all they have lived through. In the last few days I have been looking what Ireland was like when Hannah was born in 1920. The War of Independence here was at it's height in the summer of 1920. I came across a speech given in the British House of Lords on the very day Hannah was born, the 6<sup>th</sup> of May 1920. Part of that speech read:

**“There is no doubt whatever that Ireland is in the worst condition that it has ever been within the recollection of any person alive. The reason is the disappointment which has been over and over again repeated in regard to the claim of the Irish for Home Rule. The principle of Home Rule has been agreed for a long time, but its fruition has been prevented equally long.”**

Even in that speech there were signs that things might be finally about to change. Within a year a treaty would be signed and even as we know, not everybody was happy with the outcome a new beginning was a foot and a new independent country was becoming a reality. Hannah's life has spanned all the stages and growing pains of our country.

The months both before and after Hannah's birth in 1920 also saw the births of some very famous people who had a great influence on many aspects of Irish life. Politicians like former Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave and local TD Oliver J Flanagan Sports stars like the great Laois Footballer Tommy Murphy, the legendary Christy Ring and much loved commentator, Micheal O Hehir, the News reader Charles Mitchell and the actress Maureen O Hara. They were also born in 1920 but Hannah outlived them all by quite a few years.

Hannah attended school here locally but not unusual in those days after Primary School she stayed at home to help out on the family farm. Later she did come back to work in town. In her late teens Hannah was to meet Mick Finane from Coolfin. While in effect they were neighbours

their relationship had to be conducted for some time at a distance. It seems that Hannah developed some dental problems and this meant that she had to go and stay for some time in Portlaoise with her uncle while she received treatment. I'm not sure how this all lasted for but the determined Mick Finane cycled every week to Portlaoise to meet up with Hannah. They were married here in the old church on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 1941, eighty years ago this year. They bought the house across the road which of course at the time was almost out in the country. Ten years later Hannah witnessed the building of this church which would become so much part of her faith life in the following seventy years. Long before the doors of this church opened Hannah and her family were totally committed to this House of God. Mick was part of the crew that built the church and every day Hannah filled an enamel bucket with Tea and bring it over to the workers on the site. And as I discovered yesterday even six year old Kieran honed his business skills during the building of this church. I'm not sure whether Hannah approved or even knew that every day on your lunch break from school you gathered the bets from all the workers and ran with them to the bookies down town. I'm not sure whether you depended on tips or charged a commission but that early entrepreneurial experience obviously stood to you well.

Hannah and Mick raised their family during the forties and fifties when many of the conveniences we take for granted today were still only something to dream of. Initially there was no electricity and the water had to be brought from the pump down the road. Hannah was the quintessential homemaker, an expert knitter and seamstress, growing all their own potatoes and vegetables and managing every penny to get the most and the best out of whatever resources she and Mick had. All of that was done to give you her family the best quality of family and home life possible. But symbolised by that daily enamel bucket filled with tea for those who built this church, Hannah also had a gift for hospitality of reaching out to others. I loved the story of the young traveller boy who Hannah gave breakfast to almost every day. While he always wanted to

go home to his own mam he never forgot Hannah's hospitality. Many years later he met one of your family and told you how much that had meant to him and that he prayed for Hannah every day. That beautiful image of Heaven in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah seems appropriate for Hannah. The banquet of rich food which awaits her in heaven is indeed a just reward for the many who sat at her table here in Mooreville over the years.

In Hannah's life there have been Joyful Mysteries, Glorious mysteries and Sorrowful ones too. She has known the joy of seeing you her family make your own way in the world. She has lived to see the glorious mysteries of Grandchildren and great grandchildren. But she has also known the sadness of loss, the loss of Billy's twin, the much more recent loss of Noreen her daughter, the pain she must have felt for Mary and George and Kieran and Billy as you lost your spouses. The death of her beloved Mick twenty one years ago after almost sixty years of marriage. What sustained her during all those Joyful, Glorious and especially the Sorrowful mysteries of Hannah's life was yes her strength of character and determination but most especially her incredible Faith. Hannah's faith was nurtured by the eucharist and by her personal prayer life which I know she dedicated significant time to every day. The name on every memory card was prayed for daily when Hannah promised to pray for you know that promise would be kept. But I think it is fair to say that the key influence on her faith life was the spirituality of Padre Pio. I think of a number of quotes from the saintly friar from San Giovanni which I think were reflected in Hannah's life.

*"Pray, hope, and don't worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will hear your prayer."*

Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to God's heart. You must speak to Jesus not only with your lips, but with your heart. In fact, on certain occasions you should only speak to Him with your heart."

“My past, O Lord, to Your mercy; my present, to Your love; my future to Your providence.”

As we gather here this morning to say farewell to Hannah and to pray for the repose of her soul, we offer her future to the providence of God. We thank God for the incredible gift of almost 101 years of Hannah’s life and most especially for the powerful witness of her faith. IF ever anybody leaving this church for the final time could borrow those words of St. Paul to Timothy today then Hannah Finane certainly can:

*the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith*

To Hannah’s family George, Kieran, Mary, Rita, Michael, Billy and Seamus. To the grandchildren and great grandchildren, on my own behalf and on behalf of all of our parish community I offer you my sincerest sympathy today. In a very real sense we all share your loss because as the oldest member of our parish community we are also losing our mother figure today. Thank God for the celebrations of last May. Despite the restrictions and maybe because of them, Hannah and all of you shared that moment with not just this community but with the whole country. One of the most wonderful things about that day last year was that the Birthday girl herself relished and loved every moment of it.

Those continuing restrictions mean that you and we cannot give her the send off she most certainly deserves. I want to finish with a poem somebody who very recently lost somebody she loved sent to me yesterday. I think it speaks to how we all feel as we take leave of Hannah today.

Today, we mourn you differently — not in the way we would have liked to, or feel you deserve. A fettered celebration, not enough to even begin to pay tribute to the life you've lived.

Today, we mourn you differently. The pageantry is sparse, Yes we Have the singers to sing your songs, and the shoulders of the fine men you reared — they gladly, though sadly take your weight with pride, and carry you to where you will sleep.

Today, we mourn you differently — your friends and neighbours line the street — a noble gesture, but poor substitute for the squeeze of a shoulder, an embrace, and the vice-grip handshakes full of grief, solidarity and stories.

Today we mourn you differently — the bare handful of us, the chosen few, stand around you, while broad-backed men from the old days tremble in the distance, and from parked cars your friends look on with pursed lips through the condensation.

Today, we mourn you differently. Sad eyes look up from where big hands are holding little hands that don't fully understand — not that the big hands understand much better.

Today, we mourn you differently, but this much is true — you are gone, but not without a trace, as you are in every face you leave behind, in every imprint of your foot on the path you so diligently wore from the rose bushes to the kitchen door.

Today, we mourn you differently.

Hannah, may your gentle soul rest in peace.