

Frances Bowe RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Saturday 8th May 2021

Frances Bowe (nee White), Quigley Park, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. May 5th 2021. Peacefully at home in the presence of her family. Predeceased by her parents Larry and Eileen and her granddaughter Elizabeth. Sadly missed by her loving husband Paddy and her children Thomas, Patrick, Martin, Kieran, Claire, Brian, Sarah, Damien and Jennifer. Her grandchildren Darren, Tiegan, Katelyn, Conor, Naoise, Fionn, Adam, Dylan, Zara, Callum and Roisin, her brothers, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, daughters-in-law and her extended family and many friends.

Over the last few days as I began to get my head around what to say in a homily for Frances' funeral, there were at least five different thoughts going around in my mind. My first thought was that in this parish community we have lost so many people in the last few years but as a close-knit neighbourhood Quigley Park has suffered so much loss of wonderful people, many of whom have been neighbours and friends for over forty years.

The second thought took me back a few months to a conversation I happened to overhear between two Rathdowney people in one of the local supermarkets. One said to the other clearly upset, that she was sorry to hear that 'Lovely Frances' was not well. There was no need for a surname to be mentioned. They both knew who they were speaking of and then I realised that I too knew who 'Lovely Frances' was.

The third thought that has been in my head this week is actually the words of a song by Tom Jones and it's called; 'She's a Lady'

Some of the words of that song are:

*Well she's all you'd ever want,
She's the kind you'd like to flaunt and take to dinner.
Well she always knows her place.
She's got style, she's got grace, She's a winner.*

*Well she's never in the way
Always something nice to say, Oh what a blessing.*

*Well she never asks for very much and I don't refuse her.
Always treat her with respect,*

What she's got is hard to find, and I don't want to lose her

The reason those words have been going around in my head is that quite honestly, I don't think I have ever heard the word LADY used so often by so many people to describe someone as I have heard about Frances, not just this week, not just over the last few months. As I looked down the numerous messages on the condolence page of RIP.ie *Lady* is there in so many of the expressions of Sympathy and it is preceded over and over again by words like, Absolute, Gentle, Lovely, Pure, Kind, friendly, smiling

The Fourth thing that has been very much in my mind were the words of that first reading today from The Book of Proverbs

Who shall find a valiant woman?

Who shall find a woman of strength?

She is worth far more than jewels.

Her associates all have confidence in her and benefit from her expertise.

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.

She opens her heart to the needy, she is generous to the poor.

She is strong and respected, and not afraid of the future.

She speaks with wisdom, and she teaches in a kindly way.

Those who are close to her praise her.

Charm is superficial and beauty fades,

But the woman who honours the Lord is to be praised.

For those of you here in the church today and so many others who knew and loved Frances, know that each of those lines, each of those qualities of The Valiant Woman speak loudly of the beautiful person we honour with Christian burial today. *She willing works with her hands.* Last Friday evening I had the privilege of spending some time with Frances. We talked and we prayed and as part of the celebration of The Sacrament of the Sick I anointed Frances' hands with Holy Oil. As I did so I was

conscious of just 'how willingly she had worked with those hands' as a mother, as a homemaker, as a friend and neighbour. I was reminded of that line again yesterday morning when you all told me of how she had declined your Christmas gift of a Dishwasher, because she simply preferred to work and to wash with her hands.

The Fifth thought I have lived with this week stems from my conversation with Frances last Friday. As she talked me through the various family photographs that hung on the walls of the front room she left me in no doubt that the greatest vocation of her life, the greatest achievement of her life and that which gave her the greatest fulfilment and satisfaction in her life was to have been a mother to the nine of you; Thomas, Patrick, Martin, Kieran, Claire, Brian, Sarah, Damien and Jennifer.

I was reminded again of those beautiful words of President John F Kennedy's daughter Caroline who when reflecting on her own role as a mother, wrote: *"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"*

As ye so eloquently put it yourselves, she was not just your mother, she was your best friend, the keeper of your secrets the one you could go to with anything.

I'm fairly certain that Frances was not a woman given to swearing but in addition to Family there were two other 'F' words which were very important to her, her friends and her Faith. I understand that on Wednesday she almost fasted in preparation for the feast that would await her in Bridget and Frankie's house that night where she would be joined by Mary and Esther. Friday evenings were spent with her close neighbour and best friend from her childhood days coming home on holiday to Moore Street, Mary Loughman and until her sudden death in 2016, that Friday night get-together also included Catherine Treacy. Sundays normally involved time spent across the park with Jacinta.

Then there were the friends met through her love of dancing and music. You were all very precious to Frances as she was and is to you. Together you created many precious memories. You rejoiced with each other in good times and you were there to support each other when the journey was tough and painful. Those are the memories which build friendships. Frances' death cannot and will not rob you of those memories which will sustain you in the difficult days ahead.

The last words of that first reading from the Book of Proverbs were:

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

Frances honoured the Lord in so many different ways and her faith in Him sustained her throughout her life. Being a mother of nine children I'm sure she often knocked on heaven's door looking for guidance and help. That Second Reading from St. Paul which you chose for your mam's funeral reflects her strong faith very well. Even though Frances has died at a relatively young age, she has fought the good fight, she has finished the race and she has certainly kept the faith. The reading goes on to talk of a Crown of Righteousness which is awaiting Frances in Heaven. A Crown of Righteousness is not a phrase we use every day but to me it symbolises every comfort, every luxury, every happiness which this valiant woman, Frances Bowe has coming to her in heaven. She deserves only the best.

There is one other very special group of people who just might have given Paddy and their nine children a run for their money in terms of the love that Frances had for them. I am of course referring to The 11 Glorious mysteries of her life, Darren, Tiegán, Katelyn, Conor, Naoise, Fionn, Adam, Dylan, Zara, Callum and Roisin. You brought special JOY to your grandma's life. As you grow older I hope and pray that so much of what was beautiful about your grandmother's character and personality will now also be part of your lives. I'm also very conscious that as Frances prepared to leave this world she knew that a new member of the family was getting ready to arrive, her twelfth grandchild.

Paddy I saw a beautiful plaque recently depicting a couple. The caption underneath the image of the two people read "*Two People destined to meet... ...will do so, apparently by chance, at precisely the right moment.*" I thought of that line

yesterday when you told me how you and Frances met. By pure coincidence you both ended up coming home to Rathdowney from England the same week back in the early '70's. The destination for both you was Moore Street, where apparently love stories begin. Two People destined to meet... ..will do so, apparently by chance, at precisely the right moment." Ye planned to reconnect when ye both returned to England. You did and the rest as they say is history. On the dance floor and in life during more than forty seven years of marriage ye have kept in perfect step with each other. Our hearts and our prayers go out to you today as you say farewell to the love of your life.

To conclude this homily I want to share with you a reflection which I first heard here a few months ago when a daughter read it at her mother's funeral. It is simply called.....

A Mothers Journey

The young mother set her foot on the path of life. "Is this the long way?" asked the young mother as she set her foot on the path of life. And the Guide said: "Yes, and the way is hard, and you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning." The young mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, she fed them and bathed them, taught them how to tie their shoes and ride a bike, and reminded them to feed the dog and do their homework and brush their teeth. The sun shone on them and the young mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this." Then the nights came, and the storms, and the path was sometimes dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the mother drew them close and covered them with her arms. The children said, "Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come." And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the mother was weary. But at all times she said to the children, "A little patience and we are there." So the children climbed and as they climbed they learned to weather the storms. And with this, she gave them strength to face the world. Year after year she showed them compassion, understanding, hope, but most of all unconditional love. And when they reached the top they said, "Mother, we could not have done it without you." And when

the mother laid down that night she said, "This is a better day than the last, for today my children have learned fortitude in the face of adversity. Yesterday, I taught them strength and tomorrow I will give them courage. The next day came and brought strange clouds that darkened the earth with war, hatred and evil. Her children stumbled and groped through the walls of darkness and the mother said, "Lift your eyes into the heavens and see the brilliant light beyond the clouds of darkness." And the children looked beyond the clouds and they saw the everlasting glory, a glory that guided them away from the darkness and into the light and the mother said, "This day is the best day of all the other days, for today I have shown my children the face of God" The days went on, and the weeks and the months and the years. The mother grew old and she became little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And the mother, when she lay down at night, looked up at the stars and said, "This is a better day than the last, for my children have learned so much and are now passing these traits on to their children." And when the way became rough for her, they lifted her, and gave her strength, just as she had given them hers. One day they came to a hill, and beyond the hill they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide. And Mother said, "I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk with dignity and pride, with their heads held high, and so can their children after them."

Lovely Frances, May your gentle soul rest in Peace