

**Anna Somers RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

*Anastasia (Anna) Somers (née Butler), Churchquarter, Errill, Co. Laois, October 7th 2021. Former National School teacher. Predeceased by her husband Jim. Peacefully, at home, in the presence of her family, following a long illness bravely borne. Deeply regretted by her sons Pat and Kieran and her daughter Anne-Marie, her sister Margaret and her brother Seamus, daughter-in-law Noelle, son-in-law Peadar and her beloved grandson Eoghan, nieces, nephews, relatives and friends.*

I want to begin today by recalling a memory from less than two months ago. It was Thursday the 19<sup>th</sup> of August. At some time during the mid-morning Ann Marie had called into the parish office and I realised Anna was outside in the car. I went out to see her because I was delighted that she was out and about after another spell in hospital during when she herself had thought her life was coming to an end. Here she was out for a drive in the sunshine. A few hours later I met a friend of mine from Kilkenny for lunch at Bowes in Durrow. I was sitting by a window and at one point I looked out there was Anna again sitting at an outside table and with her was Eoghain her grandson and she could not have looked happier. I did not think that day that we would be gathering here at her funeral less than two months later.

As I reflected on Anna's life in recent days and in particular as I thought about her contribution as a teacher here in Errill for twenty eight years and beyond that to the wider community of this parish, there were a few quotations and reflections which kept coming into my mind. The first one is from Archbishop Oscar Romero from El Salvador who was killed because of the courage of his faith and convictions. In a beautiful piece he wrote ,almost as his own personal mission statement he said:

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction  
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.  
Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying  
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.....

This is what we are about:  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation  
in realizing that. This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well. It may be incomplete,  
but it is a beginning, a step along the way,  
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference  
between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; teachers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own.  
Amen.

Those words of Romero seem very appropriate today as we come  
together to bid farewell and pay a final tribute to Anna Somers, devoted

wife and mother loving grandmother, sister, aunt, loyal friend, gifted teacher and mentor, Errill woman to the core but most of all, a faithful disciple of the God she knew loved her.

Those words of Archbishop Romero brought two other quotations to mind:

**"Teachers nurture the seeds of today so they may bloom into the flowers of tomorrow."** And another which I know Anna herself believed very strongly: **"To teach is to touch a life forever."**

In a teaching career which spanned forty years, twenty eight of them here in Errill, how many lives must have been touched forever by the woman we honour with Christian burial today. How many seeds has Anna sown which have bloomed all over the world. Furthermore there is now growing consensus that the early years of life are the most formative and significant for learning. This is where Anna spent most if not all of her teaching career with infants and very young children so her influence in so many lives has been incalculable.

Yes, as I think about Anna the teacher and what so many past students and colleagues alike have said about her I am thinking of the words of the late Pope Paul VI in his 1975 letter on evangelization where he spoke about the importance of teachers being witnesses; *"The people of our day are more impressed by witnesses than by teachers, and if they listen to teachers it is because they also bear witness"*

Among the words I have heard to describe Anna Somers, the teacher, were words like, kindness, thoughtfulness, interested, fair, gentleness, affirming. Those words and more suggest the kind of witness she was.

I can recall some years ago hearing an interview with a well known religious sister from County Kerry. In the interview the sister was talking about the influences that helped her to respond to the call of Religious Life. She spoke about something her father said to her as a young child *Tóg go bog é agus bogfaidh sé chugat. (Tog go bug e, agus buggy se cuait)* The essence of her father's message was that if we say 'Yes' to life and

*not resist or fight it, then life will come freely, gently and fully.* The witness of Anna's unfailing faith. positive approach and Yes to life allows us to gather here today to celebrate that life and the manner in which she lived it. We are not here to canonise her, like the rest of us I'm sure she had her faults, her blind spots, but in those words of Oscar Romero, Anna Somers did accomplish in her lifetime a significant fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work.

Anna's approach to life in general and teaching in particular was also hugely influenced by her own personal religious faith. That faith which was nurtured in her own family and within this community was deepened by Anna's awareness and love of nature. At the heart of today's gospel we see the mystery of nature, the mystery of death and resurrection. The seed must fall to the ground and die before the new life can emerge. Anna has died in the Autumn of the year and in the autumn of her life. The signs of death are all around us but they also bring the promise of resurrection. The poet, Edward Hays in his Autumn Psalm of Fearlessness reflects on all this very beautifully when he says:

*I hear no fearful cries from creation,  
No screams of terror,  
As death daily devours  
Once-green and growing life.  
Peaceful and calm is Autumn's swan song  
For she understands  
That hidden in winter's death grip  
Is spring's openhanded  
Full-brimmed breath of life*

Those very same sentiments are also expressed in Anna's favourite song;

**The White Rose of Athens.** One of the verses contains the lyrics:

*The summer days are ending in the valley  
And soon the time will come when we must be apart  
But like the rose that comes back with the spring time  
You will return to me when spring time comes around*

Anna has died in the month of October which was already an important month for her. It was on October the 22<sup>nd</sup> 1968 that Anna Butler from Church Quarter in Errill and Jim Somers from Currow, Co. Kerry were married in the church in Rathdowney. October is also of course the month of Our Lady. Anna had great devotion to Mary and she made many pilgrimages to Lourdes and more recently to Medjagorje. It was therefore somewhat appropriate that Anna died last Thursday which was The Feast of Our Lady of The Rosary.

I thought of how many times Anna would have prayed the Hail Mary which ends with 'Pray for us sinners Now and at the Hour of our death Amen' For Anna, that hour has now come and as we gather today we give thanks for the many years of saying Yes to Life, Saying Yes to God and for the many ways He found purpose in her life. We give thanks today for the countless young lives she has touched and blessed. But most of all today we gather to accompany you Anna on your final journey to the Father's House

*The summer days are ending in the valley  
And soon the time will come when we must be apart  
But like the rose that comes back with the spring time  
You will return to me when spring time comes around*

Anna, May your gentle soul rest in Peace Amen