

Virginia Conroy (nee Keane) RIP

Funeral Mass

Errill Church

Tuesday 9th of November 2021

Virginia Conroy (née Keane) 6 Court View, Stradbally and formerly 7 Village View, Errill, Co. Laois. Peacefully, at The Midlands Regional Hospital, Portlaoise, November 7th 2021. Predeceased by her beloved husband Noel and her adoring parents, Lucy and John. Deeply regretted by her loving family and her children, Liam, Michael and Mary, grandchildren Tyler and Ava, brothers Eamonn, Sean, Michael, Bobby, Laurence and Alex, sisters Grace, Lucy, Breda, Caroline, Veronica and Mary-Jane, nephews, nieces, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, relatives, extended family and friends.

I know it is a very obvious thing to say but every Funeral is a sad occasion. The sadness comes from the fact that a life has ended. Life long relationships and friendships also come to an end when someone dies. But then from time to time there are funerals which bring an even deeper sense of sadness. As we gather here in Errill this morning to say farewell to Virginia or Jeanie as I think you called her in your family, today is one of those days when there are those deeper dimensions of sadness.

We say farewell to Jeanie just a few weeks after her 50th birthday. Most of us would hope to have a number of decades to live after our 50th birthdays. Jeanie only got those few weeks. There is also terrible sadness that in the last days of her life she buried her husband Noel. For you Liam, Michael and Mary, you have lost both of your parents within ten days and by any standards that is almost unimaginable. And for you, the Keane family, Jeanie is the first of thirteen to die. From the moment of her birth to the moment of her death Virginia Conroy nee Keane faced unique challenges and up-hill struggles. Yes I am conscious that there is very deep pain in this church today.

The main purpose of a funeral Mass in our Catholic tradition is to pray for the repose of the soul of the person who has died. That we certainly do today for Jeanie. But the funeral Mass also allows us to celebrate the life that has been lived. Despite the fact that Jeanie faced so many obstacles and challenges in life from the moment she was born There are many reasons for us as there were for her to celebrate those fifty years of life.

That life began on the 28th of September 1971. She was baptised here in this church on the 16th of November two days after the church was officially opened making her the first or one of the first children to be baptised here. This church was spanking new as it welcomed Virginia into God's family. Fifty years later it becomes the Departure Lounge as we say farewell to her.

Incidentally I looked up to see what was happening in the world in the days around Virginia's birth. Among the things I noticed was that one of the most popular TV programmes was a Western series called The Virginian. I now understand that your mother was a big fan and she was inspired to call her tenth child after the title of that programme. I also saw that the two most popular songs in those weeks around Virginia's birth were The Bee Gee's singing '*how can you mend a broken heart*' and Donny Osmond's '*Go away little girl*'. And when I saw that I thought about your parents and your mother in particular and how she must have been broken hearted to discover the news that her little baby would not be able to hear or speak. But there was no danger your mam and dad would say '*Go away little girl*'. Far from it, I think it is well acknowledged that Virginia was always going to be mammy's pet. She would do whatever she could to make sure Virginia got the best chance in life. That was why I picked that rather unusual gospel for Jeanie's funeral today. At the heart of that gospel story is a mother whose child was not well and she was determined to get help for her daughter. Despite the apparent indifference of Jesus to her and the hostility of the disciples this woman, this mother persisted precisely because she was a mother who would stop at nothing to get the best for her child.

It must have been a very difficult decision for your parents to let Virginia go as a boarder to St. Mary's School for the Deaf in Cabra in Dublin. But in those days that was the best facility in the country help children who could not hear or speak. I gather that Virginia made the weekly journey on her own to Dublin by train as she headed back to school. She got a great education in Cabra and developed among other things the skill of swimming. Virginia loved her time in St. Mary's and made many lifelong friendships. One of the greatest skills that Cabra taught their pupils was an ability to live as independently as possible. Having finished in St. Mary's Virginia returned to County Laois where she trained as a chef in the Rehab Centre in O' Moore House in Portlaoise. It was in Portlaoise that she was to meet her future husband Noel who also had a hearing disability. Virginia and Noel were married on the 12th of September 1998 in The Heath Church. They were to have three children Liam, Michael and Mary. When I mentioned earlier that one of the things we do today is celebrate Virginia's life I am under no illusion that there were a lot of challenges for Virginia and Noel creating and negotiating a family life. But from all that I have learned in recent days, there was real, genuine love there, love received and love given. Perhaps more than anything else it is the blessing of that love that we celebrate here today.

I understand that Virginia loved Christmas and everything about it. She loved to anticipate the joy of Christmas by putting all her decorations up in October. On Christmas Eve at Midnight Mass there is a reading from the prophet Isaiah which says *'The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. On those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone'* well can I say in conclusion, I don't know if her decorations went up this past October but certainly Christmas has come early for Virginia this year. Through her life she has walked at times in great darkness and in the land of deep shadow but now in these days she is in the presence of a great light. She and Noel arrive at heaven's gate together and there she will be reunited with her beloved parents Lucy and John. In God's presence she will hear and speak freely and the struggles which

overshadowed her life in this world will be no more. May she rest there in eternal peace and Joy. Amen