

Sally Kennedy RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney church
Friday 10th December 2021

Sally Kennedy (née Shanahan) Mooreville, Rathdowney and formerly Borohan and Rossmore, Errill, Co. Laois. December 7th 2021.

Predeceased by her husband Joe and her daughter Eileen. Peacefully at Portlaoise Regional Hospital. Sadly mourned by her family Michael and his partner Bernie, Ann, Catherine, Josephine and her partner Robbie, devoted grand-daughter Valerie and her husband Liam, son-in-law John, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, her sisters Margaret, Eileen, Statia and Mary, nephews, nieces, neighbours and a wide circle of friends.

Symbols: Wool, Picture of the family, Bingo board, Flowers, Fashion item, a cd of music, Little chalice

In the last few days I had cause to look back at the recording of the Good Friday Ceremony which RTE broadcast from this church back in 2015. At one point the cross is being carried up the main aisle and at the end of one seat I noticed Sally and there were a few things that struck me. First of all the person sitting directly behind Sally was another Sally, Sally Whelan and ironically, these two valiant women were to die within a few hours of each other. I have since discovered a few more coincidences about these two women, both were from Tipperary, both ended up meeting their future husbands in the Las Vegas Ballroom in Templemore, both husbands were Laois men from Rathdowney parish and both husbands were called Joe. When I looked at that video from 2015 again I noticed that both women are looking at the wood of the cross as it was being carried past them. I wondered what might have been going through their minds as they looked upon the cross. They both have had unique experience of carrying the cross of suffering.

The last time I met Sally was here at mass less than two weeks ago on the First Sunday of Advent. She looked elegant in a brand new purple

coat which I suggested to her she had worn because it was the colour for advent. Over the last few years I have come to know how important the Mass was for Sally. It was the centre of her faith life. When she could not be here in person she joined us on the webcam. I always thought that there was a cruel irony in that for the last fifteen years of her life Sally was unable to take solid food including the communion host. For the last year or so every time Sally came to mass here she was able to receive the eucharist in the form of the precious blood of Jesus from that little chalice which was presented as a symbol at the beginning of Mass today.

At the heart of every Mass, every celebration of the Eucharist there is that very simple everyday thing; bread. In every celebration of the Eucharist bread is taken, blessed, broken and given. In all of our lives that very same four step movement happens. We are taken, blessed, broken and given. At Mass the priest takes the bread in his hands and blesses it during the Eucharistic Prayer; then he breaks it and it is given to us as The Body of Christ.

Through our birth and baptism we, each one of us, is taken into God's hands; as the bread is taken so are we.

In life we are blessed by family, friends, love and joy; As the bread is blessed, so too are we.

We are broken by failure, loss, pain and heartbreak; As the bread is broken, so too are we.

In death, after a life of giving, we are given back to the mystery from which we came; As bread is given, so too are we.

Central I believe to Sally's simple but rock-like faith was that belief that when we take, bless, break and give bread to one another at Mass, The Lord is especially present in our midst. Perhaps at times unconsciously, she knew that what happens to the bread at Mass also happened to her in her own life.

For that reason I would like to use that image of the bread, taken, blessed, broken and given as way of reflecting little more on Sally's life today.

As bread is taken so was Sally was taken into this world.....

Sally Shanahan was born on the 17th of August 1934 in Killough in the parish of Moycarkey Co. Tipperary. There was obviously a creative streak emerging at a very early age as she won a scholarship to Dundrum College to specialise in Confectionary. She used that skill in various retail establishments in Dublin and later back in County Tipperary. A lover of music and song and a very accomplished dancer she was of course drawn to the entertainment hotspots in her native county and I gather in the late fifties and early sixties all roads led to a venue in Templemore with a somewhat understated name of Las Vegas. Well as I have come to learn in my time here, Las Vegas was the beginning of many a love story and marriage. Joe Kennedy, a dashing young farmer and himself an accomplished dancer was also drawn to Las Vegas. From across the dance floor he was impressed by the elegant movements of a young lass from Moycarkey. He asked her to dance and that was the beginning of a relationship which was to change both of their lives. Joe's proposal of marriage was along the lines of 'Sally how would you like to be buried with my people?' She said yes and later today that proposal will be answered in full as Sally is laid to rest along side Joe and 'his people' in the local cemetery here in Rathdowney. When Joe and Sally stood before the altar in Moycarkey church on the 30th of December 1964 they made very solemn promises in front of their families and friends, to be true and loyal to each other, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health till dearth do us part. As I have mentioned already this week, on the day of their wedding no couple can know what the reality and the demand of those promises will be. 'In sickness and in health' Sally and Joe were to come to know the stark reality of what that promise would mean for them. But there would also be many blessings and Sally counted and cherished every one of them.

As bread is blessed so too are we... and so too was Sally

I think Sally Kennedy would say that she was richly blessed in her life. She was blessed with gifts and talents, to sing, to make beautiful creations in the area of confectionary, to knit, a skill and talent she practiced to the day she died. She was blessed in her marriage with Joe and the family they created together. I have only come to know Sally and you her family in the later stages of her life but I can see how much you have cared for her. It has been your opportunity to return to her the love and care that she always gave to you at each stage of your lives. I think Sally felt particularly blessed by her grandchildren and great grandchildren and the joy that you brought to her life.

And I believe Sally felt very blessed in her strong Catholic Christian faith which hugely influenced her outlook on life and which sustained her in good times but even more importantly when things were difficult. Her decision twenty two years ago to move from Borohan here to Rathdowney was principally so that she could be close to this church and be within walking distance of God's house.

Yes as the bread is blessed so was Sally richly blessed and we give thanks today for those many blessings.

As the Bread is broken so too are we and so was Sally. While there were many Joyful and even Glorious mysteries in Sally Kennedy's life you cannot live for more than 87 years, be the mother of five children and not also experience the sorrowful mysteries of life as well. When Joe was diagnosed with Motor Nueron disease in the late 1980's major changes and choices had to be made. Moving from the farm in Rossmore to Borohan, caring for Joe at home for the five years of his illness leading to his death in 1995. Sally's own battle with cancer, the surgery which was necessary to save her life but which also dramatically altered how she could communicate, not being able to eat solid food for fifteen years. Just over twelve months ago I was allowed into Portlaoise for the only time in almost two years and the reason was to give Sally the Last rites because all the medical personnel believed she was close to death. As it turned out, it was not Sally's time to die. She made quite a recovery and was able to return home to Rathdowney. But the joy of her return from the brink of

death was overshadowed by perhaps the biggest cross of all, the tragic death of Eileen down in Cork exactly twelve months ago today.

In recent years Sally was not just been broken by loss of loved ones but also by a loss of health and independence. While as a parent she was probably quiet open minded but that did not stop her worrying about you her children and indeed long after you considered yourselves children. That worry can also be a form of brokenness at times. But whatever, the loss, whatever the worry, whatever form the sorrowful mysteries came in, Sally could call on a combination of strength of character a healthy sense of humour and that very strong Catholic Christian Faith

Yes as bread is broken, so too are we and so too was Sally Kennedy

As the bread is given so too are we and so too is Sally!

Today we give your mother, your grandmother, your sister, our neighbour and friend back to the mystery from which she came. This final giving back has been preceded and prepared for by many countless acts of giving and sharing that Sally has done in this community, in your immediate and extended family and in the countless individuals whose lives she has touched in one way or another through her eighty seven years.

And so it is. At every celebration of the Eucharist that Sally participated in here in this church and in many other places, Bread was taken, Blessed, Broken and Given. Wine too was taken, blessed, poured, and given . Every time that happened the Lord was present to her in a unique way. In her own life too she has been taken, blessed, broken and given and because of the way she has lived that life the Lord has also been present a little more in this world. When I asked you her children and grandchildren to give me a word or a phrase that best summed up the woman we honour with Christian burial today, I heard things like, Funny, strength, independent, One in a million, sense of humour, Unconditional love, stoic, bravery, beautiful person. The words of that first reading today echoed all that I know and have heard about Sally

*Who shall find a valiant woman?
Who shall find a woman of strength?.....
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.*

The more I have come to know Sally and the story of her life, I believe, and I don't say this lightly, she had many of the attributes of what we believe a saint is.

Eighty seven years ago Sally Shanahan was blessed with Holy water at her baptism in the name of the same Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. How many times since in those 87 and half years has Sally raised that hand in blessing. This morning we gather here in this church in Rathdowney, the Church of the Holy Trinity. So Sally, in the words of St. Paul, your time of departure has come, you have fought the good fight, you have finished the race and you have certainly kept the faith. In the name of God the Father who created you, in the name of God the son who suffered and died for you and in the name of God the Holy Spirit who empowered and strengthened you in Faith, We send you on your final journey to heaven today. I'm sure they have already begun preparing one of those many rooms in the father's house for you.

Sally, may your gentle soul rest in peace Amen

It was also cruel that a woman who had qualified as a confectioner and over the years created wonderful cakes and breads for her family and customers in the places she worked, and then she was unable to eat any of them herself.

I would like to reflect on and celebrate the life of this valiant woman by reflecting a little on the eucharist which was so important to her.