

Sally Whelan RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Wednesday 8th of December 2021

Sarah (Sally) Whelan (née McCauley), Castletown, Donaghmore, Co. Laois and formerly Pintown, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary. December 5th 2021. Peacefully in the tender care of the doctors, nurses and staff of the Mater hospital Dublin. Sadly missed by her loving husband Joe and her family Sharon and Eamonn, grand-daughters Chloe, Emma and Mia, daughter-in-law Pamela, her sister Teresa, sisters-in-law Mary and Pat, nephews, nieces, neighbours, relatives and friends.

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 two things that struck me. First of all the person sitting directly in front of Sally was another Sally, Sally Kennedy and ironically, these two valiant women were to die within a few hours of each other. 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 other thing that struck me about Sally Whelan on that Good Friday six years ago was that she stood out in a sense because she was the only person in the church that day wearing a mask. Here we are today and wearing a mask has become the norm. More than anything else the mask has become the most potent symbol of the last two years of our lives. At one level, the mask is the symbol of the fear we all have of contracting the virus, It is also of course our protection from infection. In another sense the mask can be a symbol of determination and freedom because when we wear it we can move about more freely and it allows us to still do many of the things we like to do.

Thinking back to easter 2015 and the mask wearing Sally at the end of that seat down there, brought me to reflect that all that has become so real for all of us in 2021 was very real for Sally six years ago and beyond. The mask was also a symbol of fear for her. She was just two years after her life saving double lung transplant. She knew that she could never afford to catch infections and while the mask at one level symbolised that danger it was for her as it is now for all of us a protection. But also Sally Whelan's mask was a symbol of the freedom and the new lease on life that she experienced for at least five years after her transplant. For fifteen years Sally had lived with the terrible restrictions her illness had placed upon her. Getting on the waiting list for a lung transplant was a huge achievement and cause for hope. Four times she was taken off that list because of various illnesses which meant she was not a good candidate for the transplant. Each time Sally picked herself up again and looked forward. Then there were the occasions when the call came. The nervous excitement followed by deflation when for some reason the organ was not a match. But finally on the 30th of January 2013, Sally's prayers were answered. The successful double lung transplant allowed Sally to have a whole new quality of life and realise some of her dreams. It allowed her to travel, to visit you Sharon in New York where herself and Joe celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary. Another trip to Canada with you Teresa to visit your friend, Doreen Chapman was a memory Sally was to treasure for the rest of her life. She also made a pilgrimage to Lourdes which was another life time goal. It was in Lourdes that Mary the mother of Jesus described herself to St. Bernadette as The Immaculate Conception. So perhaps it is more than appropriate that Sally's funeral takes place today, the 8th of December, The Feast of The Immaculate Conception of Mary.

Like so many other transplant recipients, Sally had a deep sense of gratitude in the first instant, for the person who had donated their lungs to her. There was also a deep sense of gratitude for the staff of the Mater hospital led by Professor Jim Egan. In many ways the mater became Sally's second home and they came to know each other very well. But there was also a huge debt of gratitude to you her family who journeyed with her through very difficult days when she was forced to carry her

cross of illness and uncertainty. You all helped her in your own ways but I suppose it is fair to say, and indeed necessary to say, that you Joe were her rock. I know that over the years I have slagged you and joked and even argued with you about any number of things. However I have always been in awe of the love and care and patience and dedication you showed to Sally. When you stood in front of the altar at St. Cronan's Church in Roscrea on the 2nd of April 1974 you made both solemn promises to each other that you would be loyal and faithful to each other, *for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health till death would do you part*. No couple knows on the day of their wedding how those words will be tested but Joe (and I realise you may not be hearing a word I'm saying about you) you did her proud.

Going back one last time to the symbolism of the mask Sally was wearing in the church here on that Good Friday 2015, it was as we said a symbol of fear of getting infection, it was also more than a symbol of protection, it was a symbol of freedom but it was also a symbol of Sally's determination and a determined woman she certainly was. As you related to me yesterday, when Sally got some notion or idea into her head nothing and nobody could put her off course. The first words of that first reading from the Book of Proverbs today asked two questions: 'Who shall find a valiant woman, who shall find a woman of strength? The woman we honour with Christian burial today was both valiant and a woman of strength. But in addition to Sally's determination and strength of character there was I believe something else very important to her which helped her enormously particularly when life was difficult. That was her strong faith and trust in her God. That faith and trust she shares in common with the woman whose feast day we honour today. In the gospel we heard a few minutes ago, Mary of Nazareth got the shock of her life as she hears that she has been chosen for a role she is not at all sure she is able for. But despite her nervousness and her reservations, she accepted because she trusted her God. How many times during those long years of illness particularly before the transplant must Sally have wondered was she up to the task and could she keep going. She too trusted and a little like Mary she accepted the will of God in her life.

So this is the earthly life that comes to a close today. We gather here today to pray for Sally but also to give thanks more than 73 years of that life. We commend Sally to the care and love of God and Mary where there will be no more need for masks and her sufferings will be no more.

Joe Sharon and Eamonn, Chloe, Emma and Mia, , Teresa. On behalf of our parish community we extend our sympathies to you today. As you say farewell to your wife. Your mother, your grandmother, your sister today and as you bring her for burial in Bealady later I ask you to remember that, today

we bury her body, but not her spirit;
we bury her hands, but not her good deeds;
we bury her heart, but not her love;
we bury her head, but not her memories.

Sally May you rest in Peace