

**Billy Kelly RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Tuesday 29<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

*William (Billy) Kelly, Raheen, Donaghmore, Co. Laois. March 25<sup>th</sup> 2022.  
Peacefully at Tullamore Regional Hospital in the presence of his beloved  
granddaughter Samantha. Sadly mourned by his daughter Mary and her fiancé  
Declan, grandchildren Brendan and Samantha and her fiancé Stephen, great-  
grandchild Thomas, nieces, nephews, relatives, neighbours and friends.*

Apart from the last four years of his life which were in Pattersons Nursing Home in Roscrea, Billy Kelly lived for more than 92 years in this parish community and even more precisely Billy lived all of those 92 years at two addresses in Donaghmore: Castletown and Raheen. Billy was born on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February 1926, the 7<sup>th</sup> of 10 children born to Thomas and Mary Kelly (nee Slattery) of Castletown Donaghmore. I don't know if it is because we are so close to Census Day, but Mary provided me with very precise information about the Kelly family farm in Castletown back in 1926. Because in addition to the 10 children there was also four cows, two horses and 40 hens on the farm. Like many Irish farming families at the time, they were pretty self-sufficient because they also grew all their own fruit and vegetables.

Billy left school at 14 and initially worked on the farm at home. He later worked with local farming families, Stanley Wallace for ten years and for 26 years he worked with his neighbours The Smith family. The last ten years of Billy's working life were spent in town at Harp textiles. During all that time Billy also maintained his own small farm at Ballycoolid.

In the early 1960's Billy met his future wife, Shelia Hurley from the other Raheen, outside Abbeyleix. They were married in Raheen on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 1964. They were to have one precious daughter Mary. Despite being well into his mid-eighties Billy continued living at home on his own after Shelia died just over ten years ago in December 2011. He was enabled to do that because of the support he got from Mary and her

children, Brendan and Samantha, his home help and his wonderful neighbor and friend Mary Dooley. When Billy was no longer able to live alone, he moved to Patterson's Nursing Home in Roscrea where he was also very happy and contented there. I know that Billy's daughter Mary would want me to thank on her behalf all those who have helped and cared for her dad in any way in the last years of his life.

Billy's family brought just two symbols at the beginning of Mass today to reflect unique aspects of Billy's life. The first was a bag of Werther's Original sweets. Billy, I gather, had a very sweet tooth. Evidence of that sweet addiction was to be found everywhere, in his jacket pockets under his pillows every possible place he could conceal his stash. He sometimes declined his dinner in favour of a sweet fix. That first reading from the Prophet Isaiah today speaks of Heaven being like a banquet of Rich Food, a really good dinner. While I'm sure Billy will be very glad to be in heaven he won't be impressed if there is not a few bags of his favourite Wethers Original somewhere on the menu because it won't really feel like Heaven otherwise.

The other symbol presented for Billy was a little tractor to reflect his lifelong love and dedication to farming. Billy lived on and cultivated the soil of Donaghmore all his life. I have always believed that those who live close to the earth and to nature have something of an advantage when it comes to accepting death. Whether it is planting fruit or vegetables or some other crop as Billy must have done many times, there is always some form of a seed involved that is buried in the ground. The planter knows that like Jesus spoke of in the gospel, that seed will go through the act of dying before any new life can appear above the ground. That very same mystery of nature is at the heart of our Christian faith. As Christians we believe that death, our death, is not God's final word in our regard. Yes, we die and yes like the seed, we are planted, buried in the earth but that act of dying and burial also gives way to a new life. Today is Billy's time to die and as we bring him later for burial in Bealady we realise in faith that, the cemetery is today the gateway for Billy to his new and eternal life.

One of the more positive results of the Covid Pandemic and particularly during those long months of lockdown in 2020 was that many people took the time to appreciate nature more. I don't think Billy Kelly need any lockdown to allow him to appreciate the world of nature around him in Raheen and Ballycoolid. Billy had a particular awareness of and love for the birds of the air and he could identify and distinguish them by their flight and their singing. Samantha, you shared with me that rather extraordinary gathering of singing birds just outside Billy's window in Tullamore hospital as he was in his final hours of life. It was almost as if they were waiting to escort him on his final journey.

I have two final thoughts as we say farewell to Billy today. Billy had a very strong religious faith his life was bookended by two very significant dates. He was born and baptised on the 11th of February which is the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. He died on the 25th of March which is the Feast of the immaculate Conception when the Angel Gabriel visited Mary to tell her that she would be the mother of Jesus. So I fully expect that When Billy gets to Heaven today and if St. Peter is showing any hesitancy about letting him in there will be a few powerful people on hand to give him a good reference, there will be Mary whose feasts he was born and died on. And then there will be St. Francis of Assisi who shared with Billy an extraordinary love and affection for the Birds of the air.

Finally, I leave you with the words of a little poem. Billy lived in Donaghmore not a long distance from an area called Swallows Quarter. This poem speaks of the swallows as they begin their Autumn journey. Today Billy also leaves on his autumn journey to the springtime of new life with his God.

Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,  
Starting on your autumn flight,

Pause a moment at my window,  
Twitter softly your good-night;  
For the summer days are over,  
All your duties are well done,  
And the happy homes you built  
Have grown empty, one by one.  
Swallow, swallow, neighbor swallow,  
Are you ready for your flight?  
Are all the feather cloaks completed?  
Are the little caps all right?  
Are the young wings strong and steady  
For the journey through the sky?  
Come again in early springtime;  
And till then, good-by, good-by!

From The Short Story What The Swallows Did

Billy May your soul rest in Peace Amen