

Joe Champion RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Monday 28th March 2022

*Joseph Champion, Ballybuggy, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. March 24th 2022.
Peacefully in the tender care of the Community Nursing Unit, Abbeyleix.
Predeceased by his wife Ellen. Deeply regretted by his daughter Margaret and
his son William, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, cousins, relatives, neighbours
and friends and also his vintage clubs friends.*

**Symbols :Holy water and Rosary Beads, Ellen's Memory card,
model plough, Picture of Jack, Cap**

**Readers: Marie Ryan and Dermot Delaney
P of F Johnny Barber, John Fogarty (Ellen's nephew) James
Barber, Margaret, Patrick**

Joe Champion was born on the longest day of the year in 1945, the 21st of June. It was an interesting time of change in both Ireland and the wider world in the weeks around Joe's birth. Sean T' O Kelly became Ireland's second president on the 25th of June. Count John McCormack the great Irish singer died that summer. The Second World War was just coming to an end in Europe as the Germans surrendered. As a result of the war people all over Europe were starving and homeless. The Irish Government under Eamonn De Valera sent 12 million pounds in aid to help the poorest in Europe. That was an enormous amount of money in June 1945. And now here at the end of Joe Champion's life the situation in parts of Europe is sadly all too similar. People are dying because of War; people are starving and in their millions they are fleeing for refuge and safety. And again, we as a country are sending millions of euros to try to help.

But on that mid summers' day out in Ballybrophy there was I'm sure much rejoicing as an only son, an only child was born into the Champion family. When Joe was only four the family would move to the farm in Ballybuggy where Joe was to spend the rest of his life. By the age of 20

Joe had met his future wife, Ellen Bergin from Grainne in the Parish of Urlingford and they were married on the 24th of November 1965.

The other day I was reading again a piece that was written by Peig Sayers. Peig lived on the Great Blasket Island off the coast of Kerry. Reflecting on her life she wrote these beautiful lines:

*It is a simple life we lived here
But nobody could say it was comfortable.
Often during life I have known God's holy help,
Because I was often in the grip of a sorrow
From which I could not escape.
When the need was greatest,
God would lay his merciful eye on me,
And the louds of sorrow would be gone without a trace.
In their place would be a spiritual joy
Whose sweetness I cannot describe here*

Listening to you Margaret and Willie talking about your father's life reminded me again of those lines.

*It is a simple life we lived here
But nobody could say it was comfortable.*

Joe and Ellen did not always have an easy life and along the way they met significant obstacles. As a very young man Joe had lost one eye in an accident on the farm. Ellen suffered a similar fate. Farming itself, while it was his absolute love and his life also brought difficulties and struggles. But in the last ten years or so Joe has lived with significant ill health which brought him in and out of hospital on a regular basis.

When Ellen died six years ago Joe was broken hearted and what made it even worse that he was in hospital at the time and was unable to be at her funeral. *It is a simple life we lived here*

But nobody could say it was comfortable.

That was certainly true for Joe and Ellen.

And yet while that may have been true, I suspect Joe would not have exchanged his life in Ballybuggy for anything. Ballybuggy was the place where Joe was brought up himself where he learned about farming, where he learned the value of hard work, Ballybuggy was the place where so many other values were learned and nurtured, the importance of family and faith. Ballybuggy was the place where Joe and Ellen lived fifty years of marriage, where they brought into the world, Margaret and Willie. Joe and Ellen, Margaret and Willie were a very close-knit family unit that supported and cared for each other. We give thanks today at Joe's funeral for all those memories created, for the values nurtured and passed on.

I can recall at Ellen's funeral drawing attention to that painting in the room in Ballybuggy which is simply entitled the Angelus. Many of you will know the painting I speak of.

There is a renowned painting by Jean-Francois Millet entitled the Angelus. It depicts a man and a woman standing in a field. They are farmers. He holds his cap reverently as he stands with bowed head, and she in a white cap and long blue apron over her dress clasps her hands as a prayerful look sets her face. They pause in prayer near the end of the workday. At the woman's feet is a basket of potatoes, and at her far side rests a wheelbarrow full of empty sacks. At the side of the man is a pitchfork spiked upright in the ground. The breaking clouds are blushed with light as birds' flit in the twilight. The viewer can almost hear the bells ringing in the spire of the church in the distant right of the painting.

The painting of the Angelus with the farmer and his wife standing in the field, they pause from their work to pray the Angelus. It spoke to me of Ellen and Joe working together as a farming couple their day punctuated by prayers and the acknowledgement of their God. I think of that painting again today at Joe's funeral. The Angelus and The Rosary were much part of rhythm of the day out in Ballybuggy. The Angelus and the rosary prayers of course stem from what happened at The Annunciation when the Angel Gabriel came to Mary to tell her that she

was to become the Mother of Jesus. I think it was appropriate and maybe no coincidence that Joe died last Thursday at around six o'clock, Angelus time and it was the 24th of March, the eve of the feast of The Annunciation. How many times must Joe have prayed that prayer which ends with *'Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death Amen'* I have no doubt that on Thursday evening last, at the hour of his death Mary the Mother of God was certainly with Joe as he passed away.

I don't really think Joe will have any difficulty believing that after his death he is going back to The Father in heaven where he will be reunited again with his beloved Ellen. However, I came across a lovely little story again recently and when I thought of how close the bond was between Joe and Jack his trusted Jack Russel companion so perhaps it is appropriate to share it today at Joe's funeral.

A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room.

"Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know."

"You don't know? You, a Christian man, do not know what is on the other side?"

The doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door, his golden retriever sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear.

"I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing. I know my Master is there and that is enough."

As I said I don't think Joe has any doubts about all that.....

The words of St. Paul in that second reading to Timothy re-echo around this church for Joe as they did for Ellen.

The time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race and I have kept the Faith" Joe, You have and May your soul rest forever in the peace of the God who loves you so much. AMEN