

John Bowe RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Friday 22nd July 2022

*John Bowe, Lisheen, Newtownperry, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. July 19th 2022.
Peacefully at St. Luke's Hospital, Kilkenny. Sadly mourned by his wife
Maureen and his family, Veronica (White), Rosemary (Bowe Vard), Teresa
(Cleere), Kate (Lehane), Diarmuid and Eamon, sons-in-law Tommy, Dave,
Michael and Christopher, daughter-in-law Marie, grandchildren Eoghan and
Niamh (White), Vincent, Shane and Arlene (Cleere), Christopher (Lehane),
Daniel, Matthew and David (Bowe), great-grandchildren William and Thomas
(White), Lorcan (Shaw), Jake (Cleere), his sister Chrissie Kelly, brother-in-law
Michéal Curtis, nephews, nieces, relatives and a wide circle of friends*

As we gather here in Rathdowney today to commend Johnny's soul to mercy and love of God and to celebrate and give thanks for his life there are two basic thoughts or reflections going around in my head. Firstly, I believe that each of us is very much defined, shaped and influenced by the family we are born into, the people we meet on the journey of life and the place where we live particularly if we have lived there all of our lives. The second thought is this and it is not unrelated to the first. As each of us begins the journey of our lives we are given blank canvas together with a set of gifts and talents out of which we are invited to craft and create our life. God gives us certain resources and tools to work with. Each of us will create something uniquely different and with varying degrees of success. Along the way we are helped and assisted by various people who come into our lives. In some way they all have their influence on us and on the shape of the life which we craft and create`

Johnny Bowe's early years were technically in the Parish of Galmoy but this community of Errill and Rathdowney has very much defined and shaped his almost 89 years of life. He has ploughed and cultivated many a field in this community and be it with a hurl or a gun he has proudly represented this parish with distinction. I was not at all surprised that Johnny's family chose that first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes for his funeral mass today. *'There is a season for everything and a time for every occupation under heaven.* In Johnny's life there has been a time and a season for so many things, a time and a season to be a Farmer, a Hackney driver, a car salesman, an Agricultural Contractor, a Jazz Musician, an entrepreneur, an inventor a Hurler, a Clay Pigeon Shooter, a Card player, a Fianna Fail activist, (even though I saw a message of condolence from Charlie Flanagan!!) a husband of 63 years, a Father, a Grandfather and Great Grandfather A man who liked to go to Mass every week and to be there at least half an hour before it started.

I mentioned Johnny the hurler. While Clay Pigeon shooting was perhaps the pastime and sport, he got most enjoyment from for many years after his hurling career ended, I gather Johnny in his younger days was quite a stylish hurler. I was told a story last night by the most reliable of local GAA historians, so I think it is safe to share it here today. The year was 1954 and just two years after Errill had won an historic senior hurling County Championship. Emigration had taken its toll on the playing ranks in both of the parish teams. In the first round of the Laois Junior Hurling County Championship in 1954 Rathdowney and Errill were playing at the same venue but against other teams. A double header. The team that Errill was to play failed to turn up. Rathdowney only had fourteen players to play their game. As Errill presumably got a walk over Johnny Bowe was prevailed upon to play for Rathdowney, and they won. In the second round Rathdowney met Errill and as Johnny stayed with Rathdowney there were Bowe brothers on the two opposite teams. Rathdowney went on to win the County Final and so Johnny played a unique and pivotal role in that victory....Now.... I wonder how it went down in Errill

I thought about all those aspects of Johnny's life as I viewed his body lying in the coffin, his earthly life now completed. His hands are joined together intertwined with his rosary beads in a gesture of prayer. It struck me that throughout his life those hands have been intertwined with so much of what he has achieved in his eighty-nine years. Those are the hands that tilled the land, that guided tractors, combine harvesters, bailers and silage makers. Those hands that controlled steering wheels as he carried passengers up and down the country were the same hands that played the double base in the jazz band. When not up on stage those hands working in harmony with his feet guided you Maureen gracefully around the dance floors of Errill and Templetuohy and Templemore and beyond. Those were the hands that skilfully guided the hurl at countless matches and the gun at many a clay pigeon shoot or held the cards for a game of 25. But those hands were no strangers either to the rosary beads just as they also opened regularly for the communion host, he received up to the time of his death this week. Thinking about Johnny's hands I am reminded again of a beautiful piece I came across a few years ago.....

"Our hands tell who we are. They are believed to be perfect subjects of the mind. As physical labour shows in the callouses on our palms, so does gentleness (or greediness) or strength. Nothing else expresses human behaviour in so many ways. With our hands, we work, play, love, threaten, show joy or grief. Sensitive symbols of faith and friendship, our hands draw to us to everything and everyone we love. Marvellously made and directed by the mind's eye, the mind's ear, and the heart's desire, our hands continually express our lives. (An abusive hand is from an abusive mind. But the gentle touch does exist - even for those who have yet to experience it.) What words cannot say, the hands can express with all tenderness and love.

"Sensitive symbols of faith and friendship, our hands draw to us to everything and everyone we love" To all of you who loved and were loved by the man we honour with Christian burial today, I offer you our deepest sympathy. In recent years we have said farewell to a number of parishioners who in their childhood walked through the fields of Harristown, Graigue Clonburren and Clonmeen to be educated at that little Academy known as Graigue School. I think of people like, Jim

Rafter, Mary Anne Creagh and Fr. John Delaney and more recently, Martin Delaney. Today they are joined by Johnny Bowe. I hope they will be having a great school reunion in heaven. Like all the others, Johnny too can say with St. Paul in the second reading today. *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Johnny...you have and as we raise a parting glass to you today, we pray that your soul may now rest in peace Amen*