

John Phelan RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Monday 3rd July 2022

John Phelan, Castletown House, Donaghmore, Co. Laois. July 1st, 2022. Peacefully in the presence of his family. Predeceased by his sisters Mary (Haslam), Josie (McDonnell) and Eileen (Booth), his brothers Lar and Joe. Deeply regretted by his wife **Moira** and his daughter **Helen**, son-in-law **Sean Sherman**, grandchildren **John, Joe and Moira**, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, relatives and a wide circle of friends.

Symbols: Commentary: **Frank Haslam. Moira, Joe and John and Terry**

Symbols: Soil and animals, Farmers Journal Cap, Picture of Family

Rosary Beads

Readers: **Helen and Moira**

Prayers of Faithful: **John and Joe**

Bread and Wine: **Terry and Catherine**

Eulogy: **Sean**

While I strongly suspect that John Phelan was not a man given to using swear words in his everyday language, having reflected on the symbols which his family presented at the beginning of Mass today and also the conversation I had with Moira, Helen, Sean, John, Joe and Moira I began to think that John's life and the priorities of his life could perhaps be best summed up in three 'F' words, Faith, Family and Farming. And as I reflected a little on those three words in relation to John's life I was reminded of a poem or reflection I came across recently which I think is kind of appropriate as we celebrate John's funeral Mass today. It is simply called; 'CLOSE THE GATE'

For this one farmer the worries are over, lie down and rest your head,
Your time has been and struggles enough, put the tractor in the shed.
Years were not always easy, some downright hard, but your faith in God transcended,
Put away your tools and sleep in peace. The fences have all been

mended.

You raised a fine family, worked the land well and always followed the Son of God,

Hang up your shovel inside of the barn; your work here on earth is done.

A faith few possess led your journey through life, sometimes a jagged and stony way,

The sun is setting, the cattle are all bedded, and here now is the end of your day.

Your love of God's soil has passed on to your kin; the stories flow like fine wine,

Wash off your work boots in the puddle left by blessed rain one final time.

You always believed that the good Lord would provide and He always has somehow,

Take off your gloves and put them down, no more sweat and worry for you now.

Your labour is done, your home now is heaven; no more must you wait, Your legacy lives on, your love of the land, and we will close the gate.

Nancy Kraayenhof

As we close the gate today on John Phelan's almost 94 years of earthly life we gather here to pray for the repose of his soul, we gather to commend John to the mercy and love of God who he has remained faithful to all his life. We also gather to celebrate and give thanks for a life that has been lived well.

John was born on the 4th of November 1928 in Lyrogue. He was baptised in Grogan Church the same day. Having started school in Errill, when the family moved to The Glebe Donaghmore John moved into the Boys School in Rathdowney. Farming was always going to be John's career path in life, and he loved the soil. He particularly loved the soil of Donaghmore. In 1960 John bought his own farm in Castletown and that was to be the centre of his life for the next sixty-two years. As a young man John was eager to be the best farmer he could be. In the late 1950's Michael Dillane had come to Rathdowney to be the principal of the Vocational school here in the town. One of his early innovations was

to establish with the help of his colleagues an early version of The Winter Farming School which allowed local farmers to come into the school at night to upskill themselves in many areas including for example repairing their farm machinery. They could also learn skills around woodwork, metal work, building construction and even basic accountancy. John Phelan was one of the young local farmers who enthusiastically welcomed this opportunity to upskill himself and be exposed to new ideas and trends. Together with others John formed a Young Farmers Club in Donaghmore. In the mid 1950's Many such clubs from around the country eventually came together to form the National organisation initially known as the NFA and later the IFA or Irish Farmers Association. Together with three other young farmers from this area, Paddy Holohan, Gerry Gorman and Robert Moynan, John attended the gathering of over 2000 farmers which launched the organisation in The Four Provinces Ballroom in Harcourt Street in Dublin on the 6th of January 1955.

For all the farmers in this area, the Creamery in Donaghmore was a big part of their lives. It was a place to buy and sell, a place to do business, a place to meet friends and neighbours and exchange stories and news both local and from further afield. For John Phelan, the Creamery in Donaghmore also became the place where love stories begin. It was there that John was to meet his future wife, Moira Ryan from Cull... Knock who had come to work in the Creamery. You were married in Knock Church on the 18th of October 1966.

One of the symbols presented at the beginning of Mass today was John's Rosary Beads. He had a particular love for the Rosary and prayed it every day, sometimes more than once. In John's own life he has lived those mysteries too. I imagine, in farming it is difficult to escape the sorrowful mysteries when things can go wrong, and some years can be very challenging. In his own life, John has known the sorrowful mysteries of losing not just his parents but also his three sisters and two brothers. Thankfully I'm sure there have been many joyful mysteries in his life too, many of them also related to his life as a farmer. The Joyful mysteries of marriage to Moira for fifty six years, that unique relationship between a father and his daughter, a son-in-law whom he welcomed with open arms and has worked along side for thirty years.

I'm sure there were Glorious mysteries too but none that gave John more happiness than his three grandchildren, John, Joe and Moira. I know I may be stealing one of your lines here Sean because you described how John has shared the lives of his grandchildren every day since they were born, he has interacted with them, he has been interested in every aspect of their lives be it their education, their interests in sport or music or whatever. The three of you have brought your grandad to a young old age. We thank God today especially for the blessing of that gift in his life.

And so, as we commend John to God's mercy and love today, I think we can do so confident in the reassurance from the scriptures we heard Helen and Moira read for us earlier. 'The Souls of the virtuous are in the hands of God, no torment shall ever touch them.....In his long life, John has been put to the test and God has found John to be worthy to be with him.... And as St Paul reassures us....' We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus, God will bring them with him...Gd will bring John with him today. Being so close to the soil all his life John Phelan too must have often reflected on the mystery of nature which is at the heart of today's gospel. When the seed is sown in the ground it has to die before new life can come. Jesus thought of this when He spoke of the grain of wheat. It falls to the ground; it seems to die but in the act of dying and being received into the earth it gives birth to the green sprout, beautiful and bountiful. 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 John's time to die and as we bring him later for burial at Bealady we realise in faith that Bealady is the gateway for John to his new and eternal life. I want to finish this homily with a Blessing for John as he leaves us on his final journey today...

John.....May the blessing of light be on you - light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine on you like a great peat fire,
so that stranger and friend may come and warm himself at it.

And may light shine out of the two eyes of you,
like a candle set in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer come in out of the storm.

And may the blessing of the rain be on you,
may it beat upon your Spirit and wash it fair and clean,
and leave there a shining pool where the blue of Heaven shines,
and sometimes a star.

And may the blessing of the earth be on you,
soft under your feet as you pass along the roads,
soft under you as you lie out on it, tired at the end of day;
and may it rest easy over you when, at last today, you lie out under it.

May the soil of Lyrogue, the glebe, Castletown and Bealady rest so
lightly over you that your soul may be out from under it quickly, up and
off and on its way to God.

And now may the Lord bless you and bless you kindly. Amen.