

Michael O'Dea RIP
Requiem Mass
Errill Church
Saturday 13th August 2022

Michael O'Dea, Uxbridge, England and formerly Clonmeen, Errill, Co. Laois. August 10th, 2020. Predeceased by his father John, his mother Teresa and his brother Kieran. Peacefully following a long illness. Deeply regretted by his family, Ann, Derek, Ciara and Ronan, grandchildren Dylan and Ava, brothers Sean and Patrick, sisters Maryann, Ann, Catherine, Teresa and Ellen, extended family, relatives, neighbours and friends.

When I was preparing for this Mass today I was reminded again of the words of a lovely Welsh song *We'll keep a welcome in the hillside*.

Far away a voice is calling
Bells of memory chime
Come home again, come home again
They call through the oceans of time

We'll keep a welcome in the hillside
We'll keep a welcome in the Vales
This land you knew will still be singing
When you come home again to Wales

As far as I understand this song was written back in 1940 when many young men were leaving the towns and villages in Wales to go to war and the song was to remind them that the people who stayed at home would "*keep a welcome on the hillside*" for them when they would return. Sadly, many of those young men never did return.

As we gather here in Errill Church this morning, in a sense we are here to keep *a welcome on the hillside*" to welcome home Michael O'Dea to the parish where he was born almost 65 years ago and which he left almost 48 years ago.

Uxbridge in England had been Michael's home for the last thirty three years of his life, the place where he lived and raised his family, where he worked where he made friends. Before going to England Michael had spent almost fifteen years working in the catering and hospitality business in Athlone, Roscommon, and Galway. However, I know that during those forty-eight years living away Michael remained in close contact with his family and with his native place and came here as often as he could.

As I read through the beautiful account of Michael's life which I'm assuming was read at his funeral Mass in Uxbridge in 2020 there were a few things that struck me. I noted that Michael went to primary school in Graigue National School. I have mentioned this at another funeral recently but 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 and Johnny Bowe. Michael O'Dea represents somehow the end of that tradition because I saw that when he finished sixth class in Graigue the school actually closed.

I was also struck by the sentence in that short second reading today which was also read at the funeral two years ago *'Happy are those who die in the Lord! Happy indeed, the Spirit says; now they can rest for ever after their work, since their good deeds go with them'* Again as I read through his life story it struck me that the concept of Michael 'resting for ever after his work' might be a strange concept for him to comprehend. In his life there seemed to be almost a restlessness, a determination and a desire to try new things and explore new career paths and work opportunities. Realising at an early age that carpentry and the building trade were not for him he went to train as a chef in Athlone, The Culinary journey brought him to the imperial Hotel in Galway, the catering franchise at Roadstone in Roscommon while at the same time working nights at le Chateau Restaurant in Athlone. (Not content with doing two jobs

cleaned chimneys at the weekends to earn beer money and the more chimneys he cleaned the later he could stay out on the town....) The multi-tasking continued when he and Ann moved to England in 1987. The Burger van in Wembley, The Bar and Restaurant at Uxbridge Cricket club while also running The Blue Parrot Café in Hayes. Later There was the BUPA Care home. When illness prevented him from doing all that full time work, he gave his time freely as volunteer at St. Margaret's Church Coffee Shop and The Centre of Hope Brain Tumour Group. Clearly Michael was in many ways a man in a hurry, a hard worker whose life and working career was cut short and as that first reading said 'he died before his time'. And yet despite the relatively short life, Michael achieved much and lived life to the full. And it was not just in terms of work. With Ann he created a family who became the centre of his life and what comes out of that account of his life story was that everything he did he did so that you his family could have the best life possible and along the way many wonderful memories have been created.

We give thanks for all that today as we gather to bring Michael to his final resting place with his parents Jack and Tess. All those very strong character traits and values which come through in that account of his life were traits and values which were first instilled in Michael O'Dea by his parents at home in Clonmeen.

I will finish by simply quoting the last lines from that account of Michael's life and I think these words may have been part of your contribution Paddy: I'm sure they are words you his family and loved ones will all agree with as we say a final farewell today: *Michael was a big-hearted Laois man, an Irish man who wore his shamrock tattoo with great pride, a loving brother, son, husband, father and grandfather. Mike, we will miss you. May your gentle soul rest in peace' Amen*