

Mick Ryan RIP
Funeral Mass
Errill Church
Christmas Eve 2021

Michael (Mick) Ryan, Lyrogue, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. December 22nd 2021. Peacefully in the wonderful care of the nurses and staff of Brookhaven Nursing Home. Beloved husband of Nellie, sadly missed by his sister Sarah (McManus), nieces Marion, Lisa and Ellen, nephews Michael, Eamonn and Sean, relatives, neighbours and friends.

Symbols The Masters of Manton and Mick's reading glasses (Matthew and Alana)

Mick's cap and his tea mug and spoon (Sean and Anna)

First Reading by Marian Mick's niece

Second Reading by Mick's niece Lisa

Prayers Of F by Mick's niece Ellen

Eulogy by Mick's nephew Michael

Over the last few days and particularly on Monday afternoon when I had the opportunity to spend a little time with Mick in Ballyragget as his life was ebbing away from him, I reflected on the truly unique character who was taking his leave of us. Two anecdotes or quotations from two different Presidents came to my mind.

Firstly, when John F Kennedy was President of The United States he once invited together for dinner at the White House all those in the country who had won Nobel prizes in different areas of life. When he welcomed them, he noted; *"I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House, with the possible exception of when President Thomas Jefferson dined alone."* I kind of feel that if I were to invite all the brightest and the best brains and the most talented in this community to a dinner in Lyrogue I

might borrow those lines from President Kennedy and say “*I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at this table, with the possible exception of when Mick Ryan dined alone*” I honestly don’t think that it is over stating the point to suggest that if Mick had been born in another time and another context we would be here today celebrating the funeral Mass for an emeritus professor of any number of subjects from English to local or international history or indeed some specialisation in sport, be that Horse racing or rugby or cricket. Yes, as the first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes suggested, in Mick Ryan’s life there has been a time and a season for so many things under Heaven.

I know that Mick’s death is in the first instance a huge loss for you Nelly who has been his wife for 63 years. It is also a huge loss for you Sarah, his sister and for his nieces and nephews who have been such a special part of Mick and Nelly’s life. But Mick’s death also leaves a very big vacant space on Lyroque Lane and in our entire parish community. Mick Ryan has been a unique reference point for many in this community and beyond over many years. Mick’s thirst for knowledge combined with his keen intellect and something akin to a photographic memory meant that he was like *Ancestry.com*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire* and *Reeling in the Years* all rolled into one.

We all know however that people blessed with extraordinary knowledge do not always make for the best company at a dinner table or a high stool in a pub. Mick Ryan was a welcome guest in any company and that brings me to my second presidential anecdote.

Some years ago, I attended an event where the guest speaker was the then president of Ireland Mary McAleese. The president gave a short speech, but I never forgot it. She said that in her experience of life there were two types of people in the world: **Radiators** and **Drains**. Now we all have experienced the drains in our lives, those people who literally DRAIN us of every bit of energy because of their negativity and pessimism or indeed their compulsive desire to let you know how much they know about everything. We are very fortunate though if we also

know the radiators, those people who radiate love and warmth and positivity. When I think of Mick Ryan I believe he was the quintessential radiator. He was an interesting person; he was interested in people of all ages and we had very interesting conversations. I never came away from a visit to Mick where I had not only learned something new, but I also felt uplifted

This extraordinary life which comes to an earthly conclusion today began on Wednesday the 6th of March 1929 when a son was born to Edward Ryan and Mary Peters of Lyrogue. He was baptised in Grogan church at that font over there the next day 7th of March by Fr. Mackey and his Godparents were John Ryan and Delia Peters. Mick finished his formal education at the end of Primary school and as the only son he was always destined to take over the family farm in Lyrogue. We can only speculate that if things had been otherwise and Mick had been in a position to continue his education God only knows where he would have ended up. However, as he acknowledged recently, Mick had no regrets whatever about the big decisions and choices he had made in his life or even the ones that might have been made for him or presented to him over the years. It is a great blessing to live to 92 and be able to say that.

The biggest decision and the one that he was probably happiest with was the one to marry Nelly Herke from Rathlogan in Johnstown parish. Their wedding took place in Johnstown on the 6th of August 1958. I'm not sure if Mick would have been described as a natural farmer but with Nelly's help, they made a successful team. Mick certainly loved the outdoors, and he loved animals. I understand that he and Nelly at one stage had over twenty cows and each of the cows had an individual name and each name was that of a famous racehorse. I'm not sure if that led to confusion or a crisis of identity for the cows but I'm told they all responded to their names when called in by Mick and Nelly.

Mick died in Brookhaven late on Tuesday night last just as the shortest day of the year, the 21st of December was coming to an end. As the light in Mick's earthly life was being extinguished every house and street was

festooned with light. Of all the symbols of this Christmas Season, Light is probably the most evocative. The story of how light triumphs over darkness has so much to do with why we celebrate Christmas on December 25th (at least in the Northern Hemisphere!) The pagan peoples of ancient times saw the world as a great cosmic struggle between light and darkness. At a certain period of the year the darkness seemed to be getting the better of the light as the days became shorter and the dark nights became longer. Each year they feared that darkness would finally overcome the sun and the light and that their world would be destroyed. Then every year without fail something would happen around the 21st of December. The sun would begin to fight back. Ever so gradually the days became a few minutes longer as the sun regained its strength. It was a cause for celebration and so began the winter festival of lights.

When Christianity came along it was looking for an appropriate time of year to celebrate the birth of Jesus. For Christians Jesus was very much the Light of The World who had overcome the darkness of sin and death. They borrowed the pagan concept of the struggle between light and darkness and light's ultimate triumph after December 21st.

Christians settled on the date of December 25th to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, The Light of the world. Instead of the triumph of the SUN God the Christians changed the vowel, and it became the triumph of the SON of God. The Pagan Festival of Lights became the Christian Festival of Christmas.

For Mick Ryan, the struggle between light and darkness also came to an end on the 21st of December and the light and promise of new life and resurrection triumphed over the darkness of pain and suffering which he had so experienced in recent times. One of the great blessings of Mick's final days was that he was able to spend them with Nelly in Brookhaven.

As we commend Mick's soul to the love and mercy of God we do so through the intercession of his great spiritual intercessor, Padre Pio. As in so many other things Mick was ahead of his time when it came to devotion to Padre Pio. Most people in this country only became aware of Padre Pio after he died on the 23rd of September 1968. However, Mick was very aware of the spiritual power of the friar from San Giovanni while he was still alive.

I want to leave you with a little reflection which I think might very well be words Mick could use to say goodbye today.

I have got my leave.

Bid me farewell, my friends!

I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door

---and I give up all claims to my house.

I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbours for long,

but I received more than I could give.

Now the day has dawned

and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out.

A summons has come, and I am ready for my journey.

Mick, may your gentle soul rest in Peace

Prayer of Padre Pio After Communion

Stay with me, Lord, for it is necessary to have You present so that I do not forget You. You know how easily I abandon You. Stay with me, Lord, because I am weak and I need Your strength, that I may not fall so often. Stay with me, Lord, for You are my life, and without You, I am without fervour. Stay with me, Lord, for You are my light, and without You, I am in darkness. Stay with me, Lord, to show me Your will. Stay with me, Lord, so that I hear Your voice and follow You. Stay with me, Lord, for I desire to love You very much, and always be in Your company. Stay with me, Lord, if You wish me to be faithful to You. Stay with me, Lord, for as poor as my soul is, I want it to be a place of consolation for You, a nest of love. Stay with me, Jesus, for it is getting late and the day is coming to a close, and life passes, death, judgment, eternity approaches. It is necessary to renew my strength, so that I will not stop along the way and for that, I need You. It is getting late and death approaches, I fear the darkness, the temptations, the dryness, the cross, the sorrows. O how I need You, my Jesus, in this night of exile! Stay with me tonight, Jesus, in life with all its dangers. I need You. Let me recognize You as Your disciples did at the breaking of the bread, so that the Eucharistic Communion be the Light which disperses the darkness, the force which sustains me, the unique joy of my heart. Stay with me, Lord, because at the hour of my death, I want to remain united to You, if not by communion, at least by grace and love. Stay with me, Jesus, I do not ask for divine consolation, because I do not merit it, but the gift of Your Presence, oh yes, I ask this of You! Stay with me, Lord, for it is You alone I look for, Your Love, Your Grace, Your Will, Your Heart, Your Spirit because I love You and ask no other reward but to love You more and more. With a firm love, I will love You with all my heart while on earth and continue to love You perfectly during all eternity. Amen