

Joan Hayes RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Thursday 6th October 2022

Joan Hayes (nee Carroll), Main Street, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. October 4th 2022.
Peacefully in the loving care of her family. Sadly missed and deeply mourned by her adoring family **Catherine, Siobhan, Mary, Martina, Claire, Anne, Eithne and Rachel, Eddie, Willie, John, Gerry and Dominic**, brothers and sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, daughters-in-law, sons-in-law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, great-great-grandchild, nieces, nephews, relatives and friends.

Readers: Mark and Caroline. Poff: Aaron, Hannah, Liam, Joanne
B&W: Breda and Bernie

Brothers Seamus and Tom here in the church

Greet on webcam: Joan's sister Agnes and her brothers Joe and Donie in England. Joan's nephew Donal Carroll in USA

One of the unique aspects of a priest's life and one which I try never to take for granted is that we have privileged access to people's lives and often at very significant moments of sadness or happiness in those lives. Last Saturday afternoon I had one of those privileged moments when I went out to visit Joan at Rachel's home in Kyle. Joan was obviously quite frail but very lucid and I believe she was very conscious that her life was coming to a conclusion. We prayed a little and when the prayer was over it was clear she wanted to talk. Looking me straight in the face she said 'Father I know I wasn't perfect but I did my best for them' She then proceeded to name each one of you, her thirteen children, I think in order of your arrival, (every so often she would check herself to make sure she had not missed out on anyone) And as she mentioned each name she gave me a little commentary on each of you. Now ye would have to torture me or get me very drunk before I tell ye what she said about each of you.

At the end of her litany of Saints she said again 'I was not perfect, but I did my best for them'. What struck me so strongly was that this woman defined herself completely in terms of her vocation to be a mother, to be your mother.

Since that visit last Saturday I have been thinking a lot about what it must have been like for Joan to raise thirteen children, and for the most part, on her own. And last night as I listened particularly to Siobhan and Martina speak about your lives growing up and the incredible influence your mam has had in your lives, it is difficult not to be in complete awe of this woman we honour with Christian burial today. I am reminded of three different things. The first is a piece by a Canadian man named Richard Kerr. He once wrote that:

"The most demanding and creative job in the world involves fashion, decorating, recreation, education, transportation, psychology, romance, cuisine, literature, art, economics, government, paediatrics, geriatrics, entertainment, maintenance, purchasing, law, religion, energy, and management. Anyone who can handle all those has to be somebody special. She is. She is a mother."

The second piece is that beautiful poem written by Mary Morrison and it is simply called *Nobody knows but Mother.....* Two of the verses of the poem contain the following lines:

How many muddy shoes all in a row?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many stockings to darn, do you know?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many little torn jumpers to mend?
How many hours of toil must she spend?
What is the time when her day's work shall end?

How many cares does a mother's heart know?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many joys from her mother's love flow?
Nobody knows but Mother.
How many prayers for each little bed?

How many tears for her babes has she shed?
How many kisses for each curly head?
Nobody knows but Mother.

The third thing I thought of was the refrain in that beautiful Don Williams song :

"You're my bread when I'm hungry
You're my shelter from troubled winds
You're my anchor in life's ocean
But most of all you're my best friend."

Catherine, Siobhan, Mary, Martina, Claire, Anne, Eithne and Rachel, Eddie, Willie, John, Gerry and Dominic , I want to extend our heartfelt sympathy to all of you today. The death of your mother brings with it a unique kind of heartache and even as an adult you can feel very much the pain of being an orphan. To paraphrase the words of Don Williams song Your mother was for each of you, the bread, the porridge, the stew, the rice, the semolina when you were hungry, she was your shelter from troubled winds, she was your anchor in life's ocean but most of all she *was* your best friend. The extraordinary thing about mothers is that they continue to live on with us in our lives long after they have physically died. So to all of you her children, her grandchildren, great grand children and great, great grandchild, the greatest tribute you can all now pay to her is to incorporate in your lives what was best in hers.

When I saw Joan last Saturday as part of the Sacrament of the sick, I anointed her hands with holy oil. As I made the sign of the cross on both hands, I thought of what those hands had achieved and the journey they had made during almost 90 years of life. Those hands were key to her being able to fulfil her vocation to be a mother and a homemaker, hands that baked countless loaves of bread, cooked thousands of dinners, changed nappies, wiped bottoms and travelled up and down a washboard for years before the twin tub or the automatic washing machine came to Main street. Those hands that planted vegetables and cultivated her beloved garden to provide food for the table were also the hands that painted many a wall, pasted countless sheets of wallpaper

also marked many a bingo book at the pastime she loved. Those hands were there to shelter you her family from the troubled winds which inevitably from time to time would blow through your lives. As I blessed those hands, I was very conscious that they needed no holy oil to make them sacred. Those hands were also no stranger to her rosary beads. Last Saturday when I was with Joan it was the First day of October, the month of the Holy Rosary. I couldn't but be conscious that as Joan spoke each of you her children's names, she was also fingering her rosary beads. Over the years I have no doubt that each time she fingered those beads in prayer, the intentions of one or more of you her children or grandchildren were uppermost in her mind. She could not be a mother of thirteen without experiencing the Joyful, Glorious, and sadly the Sorrowful mysteries of life. What helped her to face the challenges and storms which life inevitably brought to her door? Well, that gentle strength of character, perhaps even a strength she never fully realised she had, combined with a very positive outlook certainly were key. But I would also suggest that behind and beneath those very positive human qualities was Joan's very strong Christian faith which sustained her in good times and in bad. As a woman of faith and as a mother, it was only natural that she would look to and rely on another mother, Mary the mother of Jesus, who knew something of the struggles of being a parent. It is appropriate that Joan has died during this month of the Rosary. As she slipped away peacefully on Tuesday afternoon, she could say with St. Paul in that 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.* Joan, you have.

To all of you in this unique gathering of the five generations of Joan's family here as we bring her for burial in Bealady later I ask you to remember that, today

we bury her body, but not her spirit;

we bury her hands, but not her good deeds;

we bury her heart, but not her love;

we bury her head, but not her memories. Joan, May you rest in Peace