

Mary (Mai) O'Sullivan RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Thursday 15th of December 2022

Mary (Mai) O'Sullivan (nee Gilman), Moore Street, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. December 11th 2022 in the tender care of the nurses and staff of Brookhaven Nursing Home, Ballyragget. Predeceased by her husband Michael, brothers John and Paddy Gilman. Sadly mourned by her loving family Margaret (Delaney), Catherine (Kay) O'Connell, Kieran, Ann (Koch), Ellen (Delaney) and Rose (Barrett), sons-in-law Jimmy, Tom, Frank, Noel and Danny, daughter-in-law Mary, her beloved grandchildren James, Kieran, Kate (Delaney), Zara (O'Connell), Sarah, Louise (O'Sullivan), Tim (Koch), Conor, Emma and Eoin (Delaney), her brother Fintan and sisters-in-law Teresa Gilman, Kathleen Gilman, nephews, nieces, relatives and friends.

Symbols of Mai's Life

- > Recipe Book - symbolising Mai's love of cooking
- > Rosary Beads - her strong faith
- > Baby Hats / Knitting needles - caps knitted by Mai for Portlaoise Hospital and Niall Mellon Trust for Africa. She loved her knitting & sewing
- > Photo - symbolising business / family life
- > Brooch - Mai's love of style
- > Red Lipstick - She didn't travel without it!!

Readers: Anne and Noel

Prayers of the Faithful - being read by Sarah (O'Sullivan), Kieran (Delaney), Anne (Koch) and James (Delaney)

I could be wrong, but I doubt if Mai O'Sullivan was familiar with a term called *Keyword Extraction*. As I understand it *Keyword Extraction* is a process used to help make sense of the billions and trillions of words and bytes of data available on the internet every day. *What Keyword Extraction* does is that it finds the key words most frequently used in any document or text. By revealing the most often used and most relevant words we can gain a real insight into what this text is about. 'You are sitting there thinking; what the hell is he on about?' Please bear with me. If I had access to that process called *Keyword Extraction*, I would have applied it to the countless words that have been spoken about Mai this week and the many others that have been written about her on the Condolence Page of RIP.ie The *Keyword Extraction* process would have found about five or six most frequently used words or phrases which were key in describing this woman we honour with Christian burial today. Those words would be *Gentle A Lady, That lovely smile, Kind, Great Neighbour, Elegant*. One of those messages on RIP.ie summed her up very well when it said : *She was kindness, gentleness and a quiet elegance all wrapped up in a loving mother friend and neighbour*.

Apart from the last few months in Brookhaven and the eight months before that spent with Kay and Tom in Loughmore, Mai lived all of her life in this parish. She was born on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the 4th of October 1936. She was to be the only girl with three brothers. (The thought struck me that she more than rebalanced that situation with her own family). Having attended school at the Convent here in Rathdowney Mai began working as a bookkeeper at a local business in the Square. Later she was to do the same job in Ker Kelly's famous shop at the end of Main Street. Sometime later, a shy young man from Bunlacken, Cullohill also joined the staff at Ker Kelly's shop. Michael O'Sullivan had spent a two year apprenticeship in the retail business in Co. Wicklow and before he joined Kelly's he had worked for The Delaney Family in The Ossory. I used the word 'shy' to describe Michael because when I looked back on my notes from his funeral over nine years ago I was reminded that while he was captivated by the beautiful Mai Gilman working in the office he was very shy about asking her out. Some of you will remember the story of how the boss man Ker decided to intervene and play cupid. Ker had two All Ireland Hurling tickets

which he offered to Michael on the one condition that he ask Mai to go with him to the match. He did and Croke Park provided the setting for their first date. Now I know that Croke Park has been a field of dreams for many a player but that was first time I had ever heard it described as a place where love stories begin. The rest as they say is history and Michael and Mai went on to form not just a wonderful marriage partnership but also a very successful business partnership. In due course Michael and Mai took over the business in Main street and they created Rathdowney's first Supermarket. Some years later they moved their business up to Moore St where Michael combined the retail business with that of auctioneering and undertaking. In all of this Michael and Mai worked as a team. While I'm sure their priority was to build a successful business the very nature of that business placed Michael and Mai at the heart of this community and gave them a unique insight and knowledge of the people they served. They came to know the struggles and storms in people's lives and in many different ways, most often, quietly, discreetly and below the radar they did what they could to help. Perhaps it is no coincidence that a woman born on the feast of St. Francis of Assisi should be remembered by so many as being kind, generous, gentle and compassionate. The words of St. Francis' famous prayer find more than an echo in the life of this valiant woman we say farewell to today:

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

I am reminded here of something Kieran said to me at the time of his father's funeral, that his dad had an aversion to funeral eulogies. I suppose as an undertaker he had endured more funeral services than most and he was sometimes annoyed by what he might have called the "Bull" that people had to listen to about the deceased. I gather that if he was really annoyed, he would have used the longer version of that word. Well Michael, I'm sorry if I'm going on a bit today but I'm sure even you would want me to pay a generous tribute to that young woman you fell in love with all those years ago and to whom you were married to for almost fifty years.

Underpinning all those marvellous human qualities which Mai is rightly remembered for was a very strong Catholic Christian Faith. I chose that gospel today because it spoke to me of so many of the things I have heard about her over the years. That seed represents the Word of God, it represents the gift of Faith we all receive at our Baptism. What we do with that Gift of Faith is the story of our lives. Mai was the sower and she took that seed of Faith, that seed of love and compassion, and she generously scattered it, sowed it and planted it. She planted it in this community, she planted it in the lives of those in need. She also planted that seed of love and faith in the lives of her family and through you the sowing and the planting continues.

The primary purpose of our gathering here this morning is to pray for the repose of Mai's soul and to commend her to the love and mercy of God. We do so in the faith expressed in the last line of St. Francis' prayer: *and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life*. That line was also at the heart of Mai's faith and when she slipped away quietly last Sunday morning her final words could easily have been those words of St. Paul to Timothy that Noel read for us today: *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith*. she left this world in the belief that she was heading for that eternal life where she will be reunited with her beloved Michael, with her parents and brothers and so many others who have gone ahead of her.

One final thought and I'm not exactly sure how Mai would feel about me making this link. There is something of an interesting parallel between events dominating the news when Mai was born in 1936 and

when she has died in 2022. The story line is similar, A British Royal Prince falls in love with a previously married American woman. Neither situation turns out very well for The British Royal Family. Back in December 1936 that love affair ended with an abdication and a new queen consort arrived on the scene. She later became the much loved Queen Mother. When she died in 2001 The Times of London published a beautiful poem in tribute on their front page. You are familiar with the words, but I think they are as appropriate for this much loved mother and grandmother today as they were back in 2001.

*We can shed tears that she is gone
Or we can smile because she has lived.
We can close our eyes and pray that she will come back
Or we open our eyes and see all she has left behind.
Our hearts can be empty because we cant see her
Or we can be full of the love we shared
We can turn our backs on tomorrow and live yesterday.
Or we can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday.
We can remember her and only that she's gone
Or we can cherish her memory and let it live on.
We can try and close our minds, be empty and turn our
back
Or we can do what she'd want: smile, open our eyes
Love and go on*

Mai O'Sullivan, may your gentle soul rest in peace.

