

Nellie Bannon RIP
Funeral Mass
Wednesday 2nd November 2022

Ellen (Nellie) Bannon (nee McGrath), Oldtown, Errill, Co. Laois. October 30th 2022. Greatly missed by her son Donal and her sisters Angela (Campion) and Nan (O'Keefe), sister-in-law Ann, brothers-in-law Joe, Michael and John, nephews, nieces, neighbours, relatives and friends.

Readers: Antoinette O Keefe and Margaret O 'Gorman

Prayers: Joanne Campion

Music: Tina Cuddy

The last time I spoke to Nellie was about ten days ago. I rang her in Tullamore and when I asked her how she was she said 'I'm as cross as a bag of cats' I said to her that was a sign she was getting better and then she laughed heartily down the phone. We had a few more words, I told I looked forward to visiting her at home soon. She reminded me that she was going to be ninety in a few weeks, and I promised I would celebrate her big birthday with her. Yes, she said, and you will have a drop of whiskey to mark the occasion. Mention of a drop of whiskey with Nellie filled me with joy and fear in equal measure. As some of you will know, Nellie's concept of a 'drop' was unique to her and I believe it was better known locally as a 'Nellie Measure' Only once in my many monthly visits to Nellie over the years did, I succumb to a 'Nellie measure' and it was at around 11 o'clock in the morning near Christmas. I could never risk another one because I would have been in danger of being put off the road.

When Donal called me to tell me that his mam had died in the early hours of Sunday morning, I felt terribly sad. I was sad that she would not get to celebrate her big milestone birthday at home in Oldtown surrounded by the many friends and neighbours who would want to come and share that occasion with her. The venue for the birthday was changed from Oldtown to Heaven. And I'm fairly certain that Nellie has gone directly to heaven. Having died on Sunday morning her funeral was going to be over these first two days of November, All Saints Day

and All Souls Day. And there is something very appropriate about that when it is Nellie Bannon's time to die. The Feast of All Saints yesterday is about celebrating the lives of ordinary people who lived their lives extraordinarily well. I have no difficulty listing Nellie among those we call saints. If for no other reason Nellie deserves that title because of the enormous and unique cross of suffering she has carried both as a wife and mother. Nellie and I had many laughs together over the years but two of my saddest moments in the last ten years also involved this woman we honour with Christian burial today. I will never forget going out to visit Nellie on the evening of the 16th of March 2020 to tell her that her twin daughters, Mary and Margaret had both died that day. The second moment was a few days later when I went with Nellie and Donal to see Mary and Margaret lying side by side in the funeral home. No mother should have to bear such raw grief and pain. To make matters worse the sadness of those March days was all happening against the backdrop of the beginning of the Covid pandemic and the restrictions placed on all of our lives. Family friends and neighbours could not reach out to Nellie and Donal in the manner in which we as a community would naturally do in the face of such tragedy. And yet so many of you did find ways to let Nellie and Donal know that you were there for them. All of that support helped Nellie to carry an unbearable cross and I have to say I was in awe of how she lived those days and the years since. While physically a very petite woman she showed incredible strength of character and resilience. That strength of character and resilience was also matched by incredible faith and a complete trust in her God. That was a faith first given to her at her baptism in Grogan church at that font over there on the 27th of November 1932. In her family life in Clonmeen and Lismurragha, in her school life and in her life in this community that gift of Faith grew to be a very important part of Nellie's life. Her faith was nourished here in this church on a weekly basis by the Word of God and by the Eucharist. On that Sunday in Grogan just short of 90 years ago a candle was lighting close to the baptismal font. That candle symbolised the light and the life of Christ being passed on to Nellie at her baptism. Today, on this day of her funeral a similar candle lights here beside Nellie's coffin. The symbolism

is the same. In the darkness of death, we believe that Nellie now goes to share in the eternal light and life of Jesus Christ in heaven.

Along with that support of family and friends and neighbours, the resilience and strength of character, the unshakable faith, there was yet another aspect of Nellie's character which has helped her in tough times. That I believe was her natural light-heartedness and warm sense of humour. I have a suspicion this sense of humour and fun may be found in the McGrath DNA. It is closely related to that love of music and song which was synonymous with the McGrath family of Clonmeen and Lismurragha.

The two readings that Antoinette and Margaret read for us today are particularly appropriate for Nellie. That first one from the prophet Isaiah depicts heaven as a banquet of rich food which we are all invited to partake in. In Nellie's case the banquet is now prepared not just to welcome her to heaven but also to celebrate her 90th birthday. While there is no mention of it in the text, I hope someone will ensure there are a few 'Nellie Measures' available for the guests.

The second reading from St. Paul to Timothy is one we often hear at the funeral of someone who has lived a good long life. But how appropriate those words of St. Paul are for Nellie Bannon today *The Time of her departure has come, Nellie has fought the good fight, Nellie has finished the race and Nellie has certainly kept the Faith.* In these days of All Saints and all Souls, In this her 90th birthday month we commend Nellie's gentle soul to God.

Before I finish, Donal, on my own behalf and on behalf of this community can I again extend our sympathies to you. I am very conscious that with the death of your mam, you have in a sense been left somewhat alone in this world. I know you can draw on the support of your friends and extended family and I pray that support will always be there when you need it most.

I leave you with some familiar words which I think are kind of appropriate as we say farewell to Nellie today:

*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

Nellie, May your gentle soul rest in peace Amen