

**Abe Kavanagh RIP**  
**Funeral Service**  
**St. Mark's Church, Borris in Ossory**  
**Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

*Abraham John (Abe) Kavanagh, Ballymeelish, Ballybrophy, Portlaoise, Co Laois. Suddenly at his residence on (Christmas day) Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. 2021.  
Deeply regretted by his loving wife Helen, sons John and his wife Niamh, Colm and his partner Mary, David and his partner Emily, daughters Sarah and her fiancé Kieran, Alison and her partner J.P., grandsons A.J., Dylan, Cillian and Alfie, mother in law Lily, brothers in law and the extended Sheeran family, cousins, relatives, neighbours and his many friends.*

It does not happen so often these days but at some time or other we have all experienced an occasion when electricity is suddenly and unexpectedly cut off. Everything comes to a halt, the television goes blank. The radio goes silent, the computer switches off, the cooker goes cold, and worst of all the lights go out. We are caught in a blackout, we are plunged into darkness. For a while at least we feel lost, helpless and perhaps even frightened.

That image has been very real again in this community in these days in the aftermath of Abe Kavanagh's death. On Christmas Day I had just returned to Rathdowney having celebrated Mass in Cullohill. That lovely outdoor calm and silence which normally characterises the early afternoon of Christmas Day was suddenly interrupted by the troubling sight and of the local fire brigade heading out the Donaghmore road. Had some family to deal with a chimney fire on Christmas Day? I hoped it was no more than that. Then less than an hour later I see Canice's name come up on my phone. With a sense of foreboding I answered and listened as he briefly outlined what had happened. It was hard to take it in. The plethora of Christmas lights everywhere seemed so out of place against the darkness which this news brought. A powerful light had gone out in Ballymeelish, in this parish community but most especially in the lives of Helen, John, Colm, David, Sarah and Alison,

Abe's beloved grandchildren, his extended family, neighbours and friends.

Nothing can prepare us for something like this, neither our education, our upbringing nor our experience of life or faith can save us from the effects of such a blow. There is only one thing we can do; just as when an electricity blackout occurs, we stumble and stagger desperately looking for a light, any light, even that of a humble candle. And so we too, gathered here this afternoon, reach out for the only light which can penetrate this awful darkness, the light of Christ. There is a beautiful line from the prophet Isaiah which we heard read on Christmas eve night in both The Catholic and Church of Ireland liturgies ; it says:

*The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light;*

*On those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone*

As much as we needed to hear those words on Christmas Eve we need them much more here in this church today. Jesus is present here among us in Borris In Ossory this afternoon. His light shines on us who are in darkness and in the shadow of this very sad and sudden death.

Despite the very raw sadness that we all feel today I am also reminded on the front of The Order of Service leaflet that this funeral service is in Thanksgiving for the life of Abe Kavanagh .

I imagine that Abe would be a little bemused to see so many clergymen at his funeral because I don't think Abe would mind me saying that he was not a huge fan of organised religion. An incident comes to mind which kind of illustrates my point but is also an example of Abe's great wit and sense of humour. One evening some years ago Abe made his way into town here to have a drink in his favourite local down the street. I have heard it said particularly in the last few days that Abe Kavanagh could easily mix with all kinds of people and age groups. Well on this

particular evening he fell in with really bad company because he was joined by the local doctor, the local guard and the local parish priest! He had a great evening and when Helen came in to bring him home he was telling her how much he had enjoyed the company but then added..... the pub is the only place I want to meet those boys I have no desire ever to see any them at their places of work!!

So yes maybe Abe wasn't too fussed about formal religion but I do know, and all of you who knew him well know that he lived by the highest Christian standards. I believe he took his motto in life from some words in his favourite song:

*Nobody knows what may come tomorrow So let's make the most of the time that God sent*

As I read through the lyrics of that song I was reminded of a little poem which you might be familiar with. It is simply called The Dash

## **The Dash**

by Linda Ellis

I read of a man who stood to speak  
at the funeral of a friend.  
He referred to the dates on the leaflet  
from the beginning...to the end.

He noted that first came the date of birth  
and spoke of the following date with tears,  
but he said what mattered most of all  
was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time  
that they spent alive on earth.  
And now only those who loved them  
know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not, how much we own,  
the cars...the house...the cash.  
What matters is how we live and love  
and how we spend our dash.

So, think about this long and hard.  
Are there things you'd like to change?  
For you never know how much time is left  
that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough  
to consider what's true and real  
and always try to understand  
the way other people feel.

And be less quick to anger  
and show appreciation more  
and love the people in our lives  
like we've never loved before.

If we treat each other with respect  
and more often wear a smile,  
remembering that this special dash  
might only last a little while.

So, when your eulogy is being read,  
with your life's actions to rehash...  
would you be proud of the things they say  
about how you spent YOUR dash?

The two dates which do appear on the Order of Service leaflet today are  
the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 1953 and the 25<sup>th</sup> of December 2021. In between those two  
dates is a little dash which for Abe Kavanagh represents just over 68  
years of life and if he had lived another few months, forty of those years  
would have been spent in marriage with you Helen.

*"What matters is how we live and love  
and how we spend our dash."*

Well how did Abe Kavanagh spend his dash? Many of you who knew him a lot longer and a lot better than me, could answer that question very well. But if I was to make a stab at answering the question I would think of Abe, the loving husband and father, devoted grandfather, loyal brother in law and friend, hospitable, helpful and caring neighbour, hard worker who in the eyes of grandchild number one could fix anything that was broken, talented hurler, (the last Borris man (and maybe the only Borris Man to score three goals in a County final, A man in tune with nature whose favourite place on earth was Garron Bog in the summer time, , a progressive and productive farmer, a man who loved the outdoor pursuits of hunting, shooting, fishing coursing, master pool player, a man who was quick witted and always jolly, at home in the company of any age group, a proud son of this community and yes that word which was repeated over and over again in those hundreds of messages on RIP.ie, a pure gentleman.

*"What matters is how we live and love  
and how we spend our dash."*

*Nobody knows what may come tomorrow So let's make the most of the time that  
God sent*

Christmas Day this year was way too soon for Abe's particular tomorrow but without a doubt we can give thanks and celebrate the life which certainly made the most of the time that God sent.

Abe has remained very close to the soil of Ballymeelish all his life and he was a man very much at one with nature. How many times has he cared for and nurtured that soil and prepared it to receive the seeds to be planted. Over the years he must have reflected on that very same mystery of nature that Jesus picked up on in today's gospel passage

*unless the grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains alone. But if it  
dies, it produces much fruit."*

Jesus used that powerful image to reassure all of us that his death and our deaths would not be the end of our story. Yes as the seed is buried so will we be, as the seed dies so will we, But also as the seed that dies brings forth new life so we too will break forth into a new and eternal life. It is a lovely irony that this man we honour with Christian burial today, this man who so meticulously prepared the soil of Ballymeelish to allow that mystery of death and resurrection to happen over and over again is also the man who for over twenty years, together with Canice, prepared the soil to be a burial place for countless numbers of people in this community and far beyond. The same mystery of death and resurrection happening again and again.

Helen, John, Colm, David, Sarah and Alison. Our hearts and our sympathies go out to you today. The darkness and the numbness of the loss you are now feeling may not allow you to see or feel or hear anything of the Light or Hope of new life being spoken of here. As you step out of the comfort and shelter of your home the profusion of Christmas lights everywhere may almost seem like an insensitive affront to the grief and the pain in your hearts. But despite that, I know that you have been carried this week by the love and the support and the countless gestures of kindness from extended family, neighbours and friends. Each of those gestures is a little clink of light in this awful darkness that now overshadows you.

One last thought before we finish, As you say farewell to Abe and as you bring him for burial in Derrinsallagh later I ask you to remember that, today

we bury his body, but not his spirit;  
we bury his hands, but not his good deeds;  
we bury his heart, but not his love;  
we bury his head, but not his memories.

Abe May your gentle soul rest in Peace

