

**Angela Mullally RIP**

**Funeral Mass**

**Lisdowney Church**

**2<sup>nd</sup> February 2022**

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*Peacefully at her residence surrounded by her family. Beloved wife of Paddy and loving mother to Shane, Michelle, Vivian, Karol, Paul and Brendan O'Neill. Predeceased by her granddaughter Chloe. Deeply regretted by her loving family, brothers, sisters, brothers in law, sisters in law, son in law Ciaran, daughters in law Maree, Moira, Gillian and Joey, grandchildren Jake, Caolan, Nikki, Harry, Rian, Carly, Zara, Rachel, Karl, Mark and Kayla, nieces, nephews, relatives, neighbours and friends.*

*What we have once enjoyed we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us. Helen Keller*

Over the last few months since I became aware of how serious Angela's health diagnosis was, lurking in the back of my mind has been the possibility that I would find myself in this privileged and painful situation of speaking at the funeral of this Valiant woman who embodied all the attributes spoken about in that first reading from the Book of Proverbs.

As I mentioned at the beginning, we have gathered here in Lisdowney today to pray for the repose of Angela's soul, to commend her to the mercy and love of the God with whom she was intimately acquainted. We are also here to offer the support of our prayer and our presence to Paddy and Shane, Michelle, Vivian, Karol, Paul and Brendan, her grandchildren, her brothers and sisters her extended family and all those who are grieving her death. But in the midst of our sadness and pain we have also gathered to celebrate Angela's life.

In the many years that I have known Angela I think I can say that, despite being provoked into it many times by some of the company she kept, she was not a woman given to swearing. However, as I reflected over the last few days on Angela's life and what was really important to her, what kept coming to me was a series of 'F' Words;

Faith, Family, Fun, Friendship, Food, Fortitude, . So I'd like to celebrate Angela's life today by saying a few things about each of those 'F' words.

When I saw that basket of food and produce being presented at the beginning of Mass it reminded me of a night a few months ago when Angela arrived at my house in Rathdowney with a wonderful collection from the harvest in Ballyring and the famous tunnel. Food was an important aspect of Angela's life as any visitor to Ballyring will know. But the food was always the vehicle for and the symbol of something much deeper, of hospitality, the importance of the gathering of family and friends and the creation of memories. Food also symbolised a care and concern for others. I know that you as a family have been somewhat taken aback by the constant influx of food into your home in recent days as your neighbours and friends have reached out to support you. There is a karma here because over the years many the pot and plate and platter went out the door of Ballyring to a family in need or in grief as you are in these days. As Michelle said to me the other day, Food was one of the ways that Angela expressed her Love for family, friends and those who might be in need.

That brings me kind of naturally to the second F word of Friendship. From a very early age Angela had quite the capacity for friendship. At aged just 16, Angela Kelly left her home in John St. Kilkenny and headed west to Galway city. Over the years Angela spoke of those five years in Galway as a very happy time in her life. She began working in the CIE office off Eyre Square. She and three of her work colleagues shared a house together and without taking the analogy too far I have a feeling it was something of a 1960's Irish version of Sex In The City. Being the oldest of ten children Angela had perhaps known quite a bit of responsibility for someone so young and Galway represented a carefree time of adventure. The 1960's were I suspect a great time to be a young person in Ireland with the emergence of the lively music and dance culture. Angela and her friends embraced it completely and they rarely missed a Thursday night at that famous Sea Point ballroom in Salthill. One of those work and housemates in Galway, Tess Fallon has remained

Angela's closest friend all her life. Over the years many other lives would be enriched by Angela's loyalty and friendship, and I count myself blessed to be among them. I thank God for that gift today and I'm reminded again of those beautiful words of WB Yeats when he wrote: *"Think where a person's glory most begins and ends, and say, my glory was that I had such friends"*

While those years in Galway represented some of the great Fun times in Angela's life, it wasn't all about dances and music and checking out the talent on Eyre Square from their CIE office window (well that's what Tess told me they did). This is definitely where they differed from the four girls in New York but Angela and her friends in Galway had something else in common, they shared a very strong set of values including a religious faith. It was not just a faith to be nourished by religious observance and attending Mass but a faith to be lived out in the bits and pieces of everyday life. For Angela, her faith was expressed in an active involvement in organisations like The Wheelchair Association and The Legion of Mary. That active involvement which began in Galway, continued when she came back to Kilkenny where she became involved with The Ossory Social services and many other church based initiatives. For the last fifty years Angela has left her mark on every ministry and aspect of Parish community life here in Lisdowney, be that music, choirs, liturgy, parish councils, school Boards of Management, the community hall and much more. Yes, the 'F' word represented by Faith has been one of the cornerstones of Angela Mullally's life. It is a Faith which has sustained her in good times and in bad, but it is a faith which has also been tested, most profoundly I believe after the death of her beloved grandchild Chloe two years ago. Those prophetic words of Simeon to Mary in the today's gospel; *"a sword of sorrow will pierce your own soul too"* certainly found an echo in Angela's life in her final years. The last lines of that first reading from the Book of Proverbs today read; *"Charm is superficial and beauty fades, But the woman who honours the Lord is to be praised."* Despite that sword of sorrow and the pain of her final illness Angela kept Faith with her God. And that's where the 'F' word of FAITH met the 'F' word of FORTITUDE. Fortitude is perhaps an old fashioned word for COURAGE.

Angela loved the song by Katherine Jenkins which we will hear after Communion today. It is called Dreaming of the days. Some words from that song give us an insight into Angela's faith and courage, particularly when she knew over the last year or so that her life might be coming to an end:

*"I put my trust, Into the hand that leads me, I follow him, Over the lands and sea. Dreaming of the days, When I'll know what to call and, the days when I'll know a name"*

When Angela returned to Kilkenny in 1968, she took up an interesting job traveling the country demonstrating a revolutionary new product from Bennetsbridge Co. Kilkenny, Mosses Brown Bread Mix. A few years later she began working in the office at Avonmore in Ballyragget and I suppose that was the move which was to change her life dramatically. After a short time in Ballyragget one of her work colleagues kept mentioning the name of a certain handsome young farmer from Ballyouskill or Ballyweskill the living up the road in Ballyring. They met, fell madly in love and after signing a prenuptial agreement which had only one clause that Angela would provide a daily supply of Fresh Brown Bread, Paddy and Angela were married in St. John's in Kilkenny on the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1972. Angela, who had grown up in the centre of Kilkenny city, then lived in Galway found herself in the heart of rural Ireland. I'm sure it may not have been the easiest transition and yet as we know, she went on to immerse herself completely in the life of this community.

The second reading we heard today from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians was the reading at Mass last weekend just after Angela died. It is a reading you will be very familiar with because we have heard it read at weddings hundreds of times. To be honest I sometimes think we hear that description of what LOVE is so often at weddings that it loses some of its power and meaning. However, hearing those same words at the funeral of a woman who has been married for just short of fifty years brings perhaps a different kind of perspective on what LOVE really means. *Love is always patient and kind, never jealous, never boastful or conceited, never rude or selfish, never taking offence, never*

*resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins, always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes....*

Now, Paddy you might be tempted to challenge a few of the words in there like the 'always patient' bit and the reading doesn't seem to allow for the wife who 'was always right....even when she wasn't!!! But having observed ye up close for over twenty-five years I believe ye shared an extraordinary bond of love which was *always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes*. The hearts of every person in this church go out to you today.

Some time ago I received a gift of a beautiful book of poetry edited by Caroline Kennedy, President John F. Kennedy's only daughter. Introducing a section of poems about motherhood, Caroline writes the following:

*"But I can certainly say, like everyone does, that becoming a mother is the best thing that ever happened to me. Having a child defines us for the rest of our lives. No matter what else we do, we will always be that person's mother. We give our children the gift of ourselves, and they give us so much in return....Each mother-child relationship teaches us our limitations and our strengths. It changes us in constantly unfolding ways and entwines us in the unpredictable mystery of another life"*

I think of those words of Caroline Kennedy and how they could be so easily the words of Angela Mullally. I am very conscious as I look around this church today that I am celebrating a funeral mass for a woman whose life was defined more than anything else, by her vocation to be a MOTHER, to be your mother. In recent months, the one thing that helped your mam to accept her death was that she had lived to see each of you become what and who you are. As each of you met and married your spouses, as each new grandchild arrived, Angela's heart expanded to shower them with love. Even though there was so much more living and loving that she wanted to do there was also a sense of fulfilment, a journey travelled, a destination reached.

As a final thought I would like to share some words from the poet Tagore words which I think they could Angela's as she leaves us today:

*It was beautiful as long as it lasted, the journey of my life, I have no regrets whatsoever, save the pain I'll leave behind.*

*Those dear hearts who love and care, and the heavy with sleep ever moist eyes, the smile in spite of a lump in the throat and the strings pulling at the heart and soul,*

*The strong arms that held me up when my own strength let me down, each morsel that I was fed with was full of love.*

*At every turning of my life I came across good friends and family who stood by me, even when the time raced me by.*

*Farewell, farewell my friends, I smile and bid you goodbye.*

*No, shed no tears, for I need them not, all I need is your smile, If you feel sad, do think of me, for that's what I'll like, when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die*

*when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die. I suspect that in the hearts of many here today Angela will never die. May she rest in peace*