

Christy Behan RIP
Funeral Mass
Errill Church 30th December 2021

I am reminded this morning of a beautiful Welsh song called *We'll keep a welcome on the hillside*. As far as I understand this song was written back in 1940 during the Second World War when many young men were leaving the towns and villages in Wales to go to war and the song was to remind them that the people who stayed at home would "*keep a welcome on the hillside*" for them when they would return. Sadly many of those young men never did return. The words include the following lines:

Far away a voice is calling
Bells of memory chime
Come home again, come home again
They call through the oceans of time

We'll keep a welcome in the hillside
We'll keep a welcome in the Vales
This land you knew will still be singing
When you come home again to Wales

As we gather here in Errill Church today, in a sense we are here to welcome home Christy Behan to the parish where he was born more than 74 years ago and which he left almost 50 years ago. Thurles has been Christy's home for the past fifty years, the place where he lived, where he worked in many professions. I understand his passion was for any work mechanical and having spent years working on cars and lorries and keeping them road worthy, he then turned his hand to selling them. I believe it was in Thurles where he met and married you Eileen, the place where together ye raised your three children Christine, Patrick and Brenda. Thurles was also the place where he made friends particularly through his music and set dancing. However I know that

Christy always expressed a wish to have his funeral back in his native parish and to be buried here with his late parents Peter and Margaret. On behalf of our parish community I am very happy to welcome Christy home and to keep a welcome for him on the hillside of Ballagh.

In the centre of Kilkenny city there is a little old cemetery called St. Rioch's cemetery there is an inscription on a tombstone which reads as follows

Dear stranger

Pause as you pass by

As you are now, so once was I

As I am now so once you shall be

So prepare yourself to follow me

A pithy little piece and somewhat sobering. But it serves to remind us that our life here on earth is perhaps best described in terms of a journey which we all undertake, a journey which, for people of Faith, has heaven as its ultimate destination, a journey where God is our companion and guide. It is a journey which has twists and turns, hills and valleys, rough roads and smooth ones too.

Thanks to you Brenda, I know a little of your father's story and his journey. You described him as a kind and loving man, a man of good character who people liked to do business with. An outgoing and sociable man who was also an accomplished musician and a lover and teacher of set dancing.

But I know the journey had its rough roads too and particularly in the last years of his life when his mind began to fail him through dementia. That means that for you who love Christy the most, the journey has also been difficult.

The death of a loved one is difficult at any time of year is very painful but even more acute in the days around Christmas. As the light in Christy's earthly life was being extinguished this week every house and

street up and down the country is festooned with light. Of all the symbols of this Christmas Season, Light is probably the most evocative. The story of how light triumphs over darkness has so much to do with why we celebrate Christmas on December 25th (at least in the Northern Hemisphere!) The pagan peoples of ancient times saw the world as a great cosmic struggle between light and darkness. At a certain period of the year the darkness seemed to be getting the better of the light as the days became shorter and the dark nights became longer. Each year they feared that darkness would finally overcome the sun and the light and that their world would be destroyed. Then every year without fail something would happen around the 21st of December. The sun would begin to fight back. Ever so gradually the days became a few minutes longer as the sun regained it's strength. It was a cause for celebration and so began the winter festival of lights. When Christianity came along it was looking for an appropriate time of year to celebrate the birth of Jesus. For Christians Jesus was very much the Light of The World who had overcome the darkness of sin and death. They borrowed the pagan concept of the struggle between light and darkness and light's ultimate triumph after December 21st. Christians settled on the date of December 25th to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, The Light of the world. Instead of the triumph of the SUN of God the Christians changed the vowel and it became the triumph of the SON of God. The Pagan Festival of Lights became the Christian Festival of Christmas. For Christy Behan, the struggle between light and darkness also came to an end just a few days beyond the 21st of December and the light and promise of new life and resurrection triumphed over the darkness of pain and confusion which he had so experienced in recent times.

The journey which began on the 29th of April 1947 in Abbyleix hospital where he was born comes to a conclusion in an earthly sense here in Errill today. This church which was just being built as Christy left fifty years ago is in a sense a departure lounge where we have gathered to pray for Christy and accompany him on his final journey.

*I wait in the lounge of departure
I know not the time of my flight
I hope that it's way off in the future
but it could be I'm flying tonight*

The flight I await goes to Heaven

*I know that it's lovely up there
for I've read it's fine brochure the bible
and I speak to them oft in my prayer.*

*It cost very little to go there
you take nothing with you at all
and you pay by the way you behave every day
and you wait for St Peter to call*

*As I wait for the start of my journey there's so many things I can see
like some one in need of a word or a deed
so I do what's expected of me*

*so I wait in the lounge of departure
never to sure when to fly
but I hope when I do there's a chance I'll meet you
We can all pay the fare if we try*

Eternal rest grant unto Christy Oh Lord. May his soul and the souls of
all the faithful departed rest in peace Amen.