

Gay Brophy RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Thursday 2nd March 2023

Gabriel Brophy, Johnstown Glebe, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. February 26th 2023. Suddenly and peacefully at home. Predeceased by his Mam and Dad and his brothers John and Anthony. Sadly missed by his fiancée Veronica and her son Johnaton, brother Ted and his partner Maise, brother Declan and his wife Mary, His sisters, Sr. Phyllis, Elsie and her husband Billy, nieces, nephews, relatives and friends.

As we gather here today to celebrate the life of a man who was uniquely gifted with his hands and particularly loved to work with wood. I'm reminded again of the story about a young lad who was on his way to school. He was passing a wood carver's workshop and he looked in and saw a huge trunk of a tree which the woodcarver was ready to begin work on. The young lad had to keep going, and for months after that the front doors of the workshop were closed as he passed by, even though he could hear the wood carver chipping away at work inside. Then one day as he was passing, the front doors were open again; the boy looked in and to his amazement, where the tree trunk had been was a figure of a tiger. The young lad walked right up to the wood carver, tugged at his coat and asked: Excuse me sir but how did you know there was a tiger in there?

As we begin our life's journey, we are all given something like that tree trunk out of which we are invited to craft our life. God gives us certain resources and tools to work with. Each of us will create something uniquely different and with varying degrees of success. Along the way we are helped and assisted by various people who come into our lives. In some way they all have their influence on us and on the shape of the life which we craft and create.

The man that we honour with Christian burial today took that tree of life which God gave him, he used the tools and talents which God blessed him with and went on to craft a very full and rewarding life.

Gay died last Sunday morning, the day before his 59th birthday, having been born on the 27th of February 1964. He was the youngest of seven children born to Edward and Margaret Brophy and apart from a few years working in Poland Gay lived all of his life in his family home in Bealady.

The symbols presented at the beginning of a funeral Mass usually represent the work and interests and skills of the deceased and give us a little extra insight into the person. The same is certainly true today at Gay's funeral. We have already referred to the timber and how much Gay loved to work with wood. As has been said to me a number of times over the last few days, Gay could turn his hands to anything and was a bit of a perfectionist. Those skills were most evident when he got to work with wood. The Log cabin and the Pizza oven in the garden in Bealady are just two examples of that skill. The Motorcycle helmet and the lorry both speak to us of the many miles that Gay clocked up traveling over the years. The miles in the lorry were all for work bringing him across Europe as he transported animals in both directions on a weekly basis for many years. I understand that Gay was the first man to transport live Buffalo into Ireland. The miles in the motorcycle were all for pleasure as he and his fellow travellers in the local motorcycle club crisscrossed the highways and byways of Ireland raising much needed funds for charity as they travelled. The Motorcycle Club had the intriguing name of The Lost Souls. I'm not sure if the name refers to how the members viewed their chances in the next life or had some particular motor bike significance!

The fourth symbol presented by Gay's family today really struck me because in way it is different in a very powerful and poignant way. It is a symbol which is not so much reflective of his work or skills or hobbies and yet it tells us so much about Gay Brophy, the kind of man he was and how he was viewed by those in his life who knew him best. The symbol of course in that heart of Gold which I think you made Phyliss.

As I listened to his family and friends in recent days, as I read some of those condolence messages on RIP.ie I can see the significance of that Heart of Gold. As a brother, an uncle, a Godfather, as a friend and neighbour that Heart of Gold symbolises Gay's love and care for all of you. In this community I had another insight to the significance of that Heart of Gold because I knew that Gay was a generous contributor to our Parish St. Vincent De Paul group. That was done quietly and under the radar and yet it said so much about a concern for those who had less than he was fortunate to have.

The Heart of Gold reveals at least two other things to me about Gay Brophy. Over the last few years and particular since Covid I would often walk up towards Grogan. While passing Gay and Veronica's home I would sometimes encounter the fearsome barks of the beloved Snowy. More often I might meet Veronica bringing Snowy for his morning walk. And occasion too I would meet Gay bringing 'the hound' out for his constitutional. Now I read somewhere that most Irish men dislike small dogs and certainly don't wish to be seen walking them. It may be a macho thing. But clearly Gay had not such hangups and he loved that dog to bits.

I said there were two other things about that heart of Gold. Six years ago that heart opened to welcome a very special person into Gay's life and that was you Veronica. Again, in the last few days I have heard some of those who knew Gay for many years say that they have seen him at his happiest since ye got together. I think of that magnificent arrangement of flowers on the coffee table that arrived for Valentine's Day two weeks ago. I think of the last words and gestures exchanged between ye on Saturday night when he kissed you and said good night. Veronica, I know the events of Sunday morning and these last few days have been unbearable for you and it won't get much easier any time soon. I can only hope and pray that you can be consoled by those lasting gestures and words from the man to whom you were engaged to be married. You may not have got the chance to formally exchange those solemn vows 'for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health all the days of our lives' but you both nonetheless lived those vows and that is why the pain is so acute today.

Finally , I want to leave you with an image which over the years I have found to be comforting for many families as they say farewell to loved ones and which I hope you as a family can take some comfort today. As we have already mentioned, over the years Gay embarked on many journeys. He would have sat in many departure lounges at ports in Ireland and across the continent. Today, much sooner than he or any of you who loved him would have wished, Gay embarks on one final journey.

This church where he was baptised, received his First Holy Communion and Confirmation is today something of a another departure lounge where we have gathered to pray with him and for him as he takes his leave of us. I would like you to picture yourselves standing on a dock beside one of those great old-time sailing vessels. It's standing there, sails folded, waiting for the wind. Suddenly a breeze comes up. When the captain senses the breeze as a forerunner of the necessary wind, he quickly orders the sails to be let down and sure enough the wind comes, catches the sails full force, and carries the ship away from the dock where you are standing. Inevitably you or someone on that dock is bound to say, "Well there she goes"! And from our point of view it indeed does go. Soon the mighty ship, laden with it's crew and goods, is on the horizon, where the water and the sky meet and it looks like a speck before it disappears. It's still mighty and grand, still filled with life and goods, but it has left us. We are standing on the dock, quite alone. But, on the other side of the ocean, people are standing in anticipation, and as that speck on the horizon becomes larger, they begin to shout something different. They are crying with joy, not abandonment, "Here she comes!". And at the landing, there is welcome, joy, embracing and celebration.

Those who knew and loved him the most will miss Gay hugely. he is quickly receding from your sight. This funeral Mass and his burial later in the local cemetery just down the road are our farewells, our version of "there she goes". But goes where? From your sight, from our community, from your care and love and friendship. How he will be missed. But he is not diminished, nor made poorer. We must remember in faith that "Here she comes" is the cry on the eternal shore where

Jesus, who understands the human heart is waiting. And there is Gay,
now forever larger than life, filled with life and laughter and in the arms
of the One who makes all things new again, the One who says,
“Welcome Gay. Welcome Home”