

**Jo (Josephine) Finnegan RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Monday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2023**

*Peacefully at St. Vincent's community nursing unit Mountmellick.  
Surrounded by her loving family. Predeceased by her husband Christy and  
brother Donal. Deeply regretted by her loving children **Colm, Aidan, David,  
Chris and Eithne. Sisters Mairead and Dolores.** Daughters in law Sheila,  
Marian and Helen. Son in law Declan. Colleen and Dean, Chris and Edel.  
Grandchildren Aideen, Emma, Lyndsey, Olga, Jovita, Zoe, John, Mollie and  
David. Great grandchildren, nephew, nieces, relatives, neighbours and friends.  
Rest in peace.*

One of the things I learned about Jo from listening to you her family was that in her lifetime she had come to know a number of different nuns or religious sisters. Some of them she remembered with fondness, some perhaps less so.

That fact, together with one of the symbols presented at the beginning of Mass today reminded of a little story which I hope ye won't mind me sharing.

A very old and revered Rev. mother was dying. The nuns gathered around her bed trying to make her last journey comfortable. They gave her some warm milk from their dairy herd to drink, thinking it would soothe her. But she refused it.

Then one of the nuns took the glass back to the kitchen. Remembering a bottle of Hennessy brandy received as a gift the previous Christmas, she opened it and poured a generous amount into the warm milk. Returning to the dying rev mother, she held the glass to her lips and encouraged her to take a sip. She drank a little, then a little more and before they knew it, she had drunk the whole glass down to the last drop. This daily ritual continued for some weeks and the sisters had to replenish the bottle of Hennessy.

After many weeks the reverend mother's time came to pass away. As the sisters gathered around her bed one of them asked her "Please mother, give us some wisdom before you die."

She raised herself up in bed and with a pious look on her face said, "Whatever ye do don't sell that cow."

Jo or Josephine Carroll was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1930. Apart from the last few years living in Mountmellick and the early years at school in Kilcullen and Dun Laoghaire Jo lived all of her life here in Durrow.

When she returned from her education with the Dominican sisters in Dun Laoghaire, she worked in the family business here in Durrow which incorporated a garage and also the Post Office.

One of the other symbols presented at the beginning of Mass was Jo's Rosary Beads. When Jo was a student with the Dominican sisters in Dun Laoghaire one of the other students there was to become her lifelong friend Monica O'Shea from Windgap in Co. Kilkenny. As Jo returned here to Durrow, Monica felt called to be a religious sister herself, Jo would accompany her friend to the Cistercian Abbey in Glencairn Co. Waterford where Monica was to become Sr. Agnes and where she still lives today.

One of the things that Monica and Jo shared in common from their student days was their love of, and dedication to praying the rosary. Like Mary the mother of Jesus, Jo was to know the Joyful, Glorious and also the Sorrowful mysteries of life. One of the great Joyful mysteries of Jo's life began to unfold when in 1950 a young man from Galway arrived here in Durrow to begin teaching at the local school. I am reminded of that beautiful quote from the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson when he said:

*"People destined to meet will do so, apparently by chance, at precisely the right moment."*

Jo Carroll and Christy Finnegan were married here in Durrow in 1954, and in the following few years another five joyful mysteries arrived in

the form of Colm, Aidan, David, Chris and Eithne. I'm sure there were many glorious mysteries in Jo's life but certainly chief among them were her grandchildren, Aideen, Emma, Lyndsey, Olga, Jovita, Zoe, John, Mollie and David. They were joined more recently by great grandchildren.

But nobody lives for 93 years without also experiencing the sorrowful mysteries too and Jo certainly had her share of them. Probably the most heartbreaking time of her life was when her beloved husband Christy died at just 57 in 1987. He was quite honestly the love of her life and when he died part of herself died with him.

In the thirty-six years since Christy died Jo's life has centred around her children and grandchildren

Some years 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'm sure Jo would agree that becoming a mother was the best thing that ever happened to her, and I suspect from what you have shared with me that she was very happy to be defined by being your mother and grandmother. While she lived mostly with Colm and Sheila she spent time with all of you and she particularly loved being able to spend months at a time with you Eithne and your family in Chicago.

In addition to her love and dedication to family throughout her 93 years and having experienced the Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries of

life, the other thing that remained constant was her faith. As her earthly life comes to a close Jo can also say with St. Paul in that second reading today. .... *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.*

**As a final thought** I go back up to Dun Laoghaire or Kingstown as I'm sure many people were still calling it in the 1940's when Jo was at school up there. Kingstown or Dun Laoghaire was then one of the great ports of departure for Irish people as they emigrated from this country hoping to find a better life elsewhere. I'm sure Jo may well have been aware of the heightened emotions and dramas that played out at that port in Dun Laoghaire on a daily basis. Today, Jo herself leaves on her final journey. And her final journey begins on a day that I suspect she looked forward to every year, The first day of Wimbledon. She was I understand a lover of playing and watching tennis so the First day of Wimbledon was a happy day for her.

This church in Durrow where Jo was baptised, received her First Holy Communion and Confirmation and was married here is today something of a departure lounge where we have gathered to pray with Jo as she takes her 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 its' 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.

You miss Jo. She is quickly receding from your sight. This funeral Mass and her burial later in the cemetery are our farewells, our version of "there she goes". But goes where? From our sight, from our community, from our care and love and friendship. How she will be missed. But she 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 Jo, 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 Jo. Welcome Home"

A Final blessing or conclusion to the Prayers of The Faithful

May the road rise to meet you  
May the wind be at your back  
May the sun shine warm upon your face  
May the rain fall softly on your fields  
And until we meet again  
May God hold you in the Palm of His Hand