

John Flanagan RIP
Funeral Mass
Errill Church
Saturday 1st of July 2023

John Flanagan, Ballagh and formerly Castlefleming, Errill, Co. Laois, 25th June 2023. Peacefully, at Limerick Regional Hospital, surrounded by his loving family. Predeceased by his loving wife Mary. Deeply regretted by his daughters Fiona and Catherine, sons-in law Jason and John, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, sisters, brothers, relatives, neighbours and friends.

Homily

In my experience whenever a family choose that first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes for the funeral of a loved one, they are attracted to it because in some way it speaks of how full a life is being remembered and celebrated. There has been a time for so much and so many things in this person's life. I think it is no different today as we come to remember and honour the life of John Flanagan.

As I reflected on John's life story over the last few days and the things I have learned about him it struck me that if there was a symbol of John's life then I would suggest that a *wrench* would be a possible symbol. A wrench as we know is both a tool but also, we use it as a verb when describing changes we have to make in our lives which can sometimes be very painful and challenging.

John Flanagan's working life began in England working with mechanics, fixing cars and other motor vehicles. He later moved into plumbing, forming his own company and later rising through the ranks at The Thames Water Company. When he returned here to Ireland he continued in the plumbing business. In all of that work the *wrench* was the basic tool of his trade.

However, John was no stranger to that other kind of wrench I spoke about too.

John was born on the 13th of May 1942, in the midst of the Second World War or the Emergency as it was known here in Ireland. He grew up in the Flanagan family home in Clonmore Ballybrophy in the parish of Borris in Ossory. The first big wrenching in John's life was when he decided to do what many young Irish men and women did in late 1950's, go to England to find a better standard of living than was available here in Ireland at that time. In post War Britain there was no shortage of opportunities for young Irish people prepared to work hard. John first went to Birmingham where as I said earlier he started working in the mechanics business. He was later to move to the London area.

Like all emigrant communities, the Irish in England gravitated towards places of music and entertainment where they could meet their fellow Irish men and women and dip into the music and culture of home. One of the places close to his work which John frequented was the famous Garryowen Club in Hammersmith. On one such night John was to meet the love of his life, a young Donegal girl, Mary Gallagher from near Ballybofey. They were both very good dancers and that partnership which began on the Garryowen dancefloor remained in step and in harmony for more than six decades until Mary died in March of this year just a few weeks short of their Diamond wedding Anniversary.

John and Mary lived the first half of their married life in England. Most Irish men and women who emigrated to Britain and elsewhere often hoped that one day they would be able to return here to live. When John's father became ill here in the 1990's John and Mary decided to make that move and return home to live in Castlefleming. I'm sure that while it was something they wanted to do it was still another 'wrenching experience' as they left behind friends and family and amenities and services not easily available here. John had always been a great lover of sport and on both sides of the Irish sea they pursued their interest in horses and greyhounds.

I imagine when parents said a tearful farewell to their young sons and daughters heading for the bright lights of Birmingham or London back in the 1950's they worried that they might lose some of the core values

they had instilled in them as children and young people. They worried particularly that their children might lose their faith and their identity as an Irish person. John Flanagan's parents need not have worried. John lost neither of those core values and I suspect that his sense of himself as a proud Irishman only got stronger living away from home. Since coming back home John has in addition to the time given to work and sport has also given a lot of his time to local politics. In this area he has been motivated by his faith and also a strong sense of justice and a desire to challenge the prevailing culture.

Yes, in John Flanagan's life there has been, as was suggested in that first reading today, a time and a season for so many things. Just a few months ago John was to experience the most painful wrenching of all when he said farewell to his beloved Mary. In his work as a plumber John spent so much of his time 're-connecting' and mending that which had been broken or damaged. Today John and Mary -re-connect again and we pray that they are dancing together in Heaven as we speak.

For you Catherine and Fiona, for John's sisters and brothers, grandchildren and friends, that sadly means that you are the ones who are experience that awful wrenching for the second time in just three months. Our sympathies and support go out to you today.

I want to end today by sharing with you a little prayer I came across recently. It is simply called *The Plumbers Prayer*

The Plumbers prayer-

Lord I thank you for this career and the blessings it provides. May you watch over me this day and keep me from harm. Create in me a willing spirit and a happy heart. Grant me the ambition to work hard and give me the strength to finish what I started. May my hands always be prepared to help lighten another's load. And finally, Lord remind me that the quality of my work is a reflection of you to those around me.

John, May your soul rest in Peace Amen