

Marion Meagher RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
2nd of May 2023

Meagher (nee Mahon) Marion, Ballybuggy, Rathdowney, Co. Laois.
April 30th 2023. Peacefully at her home surrounded by her loving and devoted family. Predeceased by her daughter Anne and her brother John. Deeply regretted by her loving husband Nicholas and her children Nick, Felicity, Graham, Douglas, Greg and Jane. Also, by her daughters-in-law Sue, Angela, Margaret and Fiona, sons-in-law Jim, Chris and Neil, her grandchildren, great-grandchildren, brothers and sisters-in-law and her many neighbours and friends.

Yesterday as I stood by Marian's coffin in the front room of her home, two things struck me. Firstly, was that beautiful timepiece she was wearing on a chain, and I think it was a piece she treasured very much. Of course, that time piece apart from being a beautiful item of jewellery with that lovely flower detail on the back, it is in the first instance an instrument of measuring time. That idea was then picked up in today's first reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes which speaks of how there is a time and a season for everything. I am conscious that time also features in a phrase always associated with Marion, "Where does the time go" but I know we are going to hear more about that later. Today we are very conscious of the times and the seasons of Marion's eighty-four years of life and we are here to celebrate that life to the full.

Apart from the beautiful time piece the other thing I was very conscious of was Marion's hands now joined together intertwined with a rosary beads in a gesture of prayer. As I reflected on her hands, I was very mindful of how those hands were so central to many things which you Nicky and your family shared with me about your beloved wife and mother.

Those were the hands that held the knitting needles creating countless jumpers and other pieces of clothing for all of her grandchildren down through the years. They were the hands, sometimes protected by gardening gloves that worked the soil, that planted, that pruned that cultivated her beautiful garden, they were the hands that created thousands of meals for her family and offered hospitality for whoever turned up at her door. They were the hands that held the books that she loved to read, they were the hands, working in harmony with her feet and the man she loved for over sixty-five years danced around many a ballroom floor beginning back in the late fifties at the Blarney Ballroom on Tottenham Court Road in London.

Apart from the shelves of books in their front room I was also struck by the many wonderful photographs of Marian with her children and grandchildren at the various stages of their lives. Again, how many times have those hands held loved ones, to comfort, to console, to embrace and celebrate the times and seasons of life.

Thinking about Marion's hands and all they have allowed her to achieve reminded me of two quotations. One is from a later section of that Book of Ecclesiastes where our first reading came from today. In chapter nine we see that wonderful line:

"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" Marion certainly fulfilled that line perfectly.

The second quote is a much longer one from a beautiful reflection on the importance of our hands:

"Our hands tell who we are. They are believed to be perfect subjects of the mind. As physical labour shows in the callouses on our palms, so does gentleness.... or strength. Nothing else expresses human behaviour in so many ways. With our hands, we work, play, love, threaten, show joy or grief. Sensitive symbols of faith and friendship, our hands draw to us everything and everyone we love. Marvellously made and directed by the mind's eye, the mind's ear, and the heart's desire, our hands continually express our lives..... What words cannot say, the hands can express with all tenderness and love.

Marion's hands were also familiar with those rosary beads and her preferred form of personal prayer was to pray the rosary. As she fingered those beads and prayed those Hail Marys, I'm sure she was doing so for all of her loved ones especially her children and grandchildren. Marion's life in some ways paralleled the life of Mary of the rosary. Like Mary she had known something of the Joyful, Glorious and sadly also the sorrowful mysteries of life. Both of these women suffered the pain of seeing their first-born child die, a pain which is so unbearable for any parent.

So as we gather here today to say farewell to Marion, I am conscious that we do so in these first days of May, the month of Mary. It is also traditionally the month when we remember the deceased members of the Meagher family and we will celebrate that Mass here next Wednesday. Marion now joins that communion of saints. We commend her today to the care and protection of Mary.

Marion, as we mentioned earlier loved to work in her garden. Gardeners are very conscious and sensitive to the seasons of the year. Probably one of the loveliest seasons is the spring when plants and flowers begin to appear above the surface and burst into life and into colour. But the gardener knows that before that can happen there is a time for planting and a time for dying. Underneath the surface much of what is planted in the soil must first actually die before the new life can come. That is the mystery of nature that Jesus refers to in today's gospel. That mystery of nature provides the basis for our Christian understanding of death and resurrection. Dying is part of living and a step along the road of on-going life. We are here today because it is Marion's time to die. In the autumn of her life, she released her spirit to God; was received by his welcoming love and made ready for a new spring in God's life-filled presence forever.

One final thought to leave you with today. A few years ago, I attended the funeral of the mother of one of my priest friends. Towards the end of his homily the priest used some words which I have never forgotten, and I offer them to you as a family today:

we bury her body, but not her spirit.
we bury her hands, but not her good deeds;
we bury her heart, but not her love;
we bury her head, but not her memories.

Marion Meagher, May your gentle soul rest in Peace