

Mark Whelan RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Thursday 19th January 2023

Mark Anthony Whelan, Pound Street, Rathdowney, Co. Laois, January 15th 2023. Peacefully, in the tender care of the nurses and staff of Villa Marie Nursing Home, Roscrea. Predeceased by his mother Hanora and his father Daniel, brothers Dan and Bill, sisters Mary, Kitty and Anna.

Homily

When I was first ordained 37 years ago, I was asked to go and work in a town in the North of England called Scunthorpe. My Parish priest was a very holy but serious English man. Every week he would give me a list of homes and families to visit. His one piece of advice was that no matter how many houses you visit try to ensure that at least one is a place where you will be made welcome and a person who will put a smile on your face. That was a piece of advice that I have never forgotten and one which has served me well. Since coming to Rathdowney eleven years ago every First Friday I visit on average of fifteen homes to bring communion to the sick and housebound. In every one of those homes, I am made very welcome. But If I'm honest one of those calls that I most looked forward to for many years was to Mark's home in Pound Street. I not only knew that I and who I was bringing, Jesus in the Eucharist, would be welcomed with great reverence, but I would also leave with a smile on my face. Coming away from Mark each month I sometimes thought of an event I attended many years ago. The guest speaker was the then president of Ireland Mary McAleese. The president gave a short speech, but I never forgot it. She said that in her experience of life there were two types of people in the world: Radiators and Drains. Now we all have experienced the drains in our lives, those people who literally DRAIN us of every bit of energy because of their negativity and pessimism. We are very fortunate though if we also know the radiators,

those people who radiate love and warmth and positivity. When I think of Mark Whelan, I believe he was a radiator. He was an interesting person; he was interested in people and we had very interesting conversations. No matter what name I mentioned to him he knew them. He always spoke the kindly word and I know he was deeply appreciative of the smallest act of kindness whether that was from his extended family whose pictures surrounded him or his friends who visited him regularly.

When I think back on those monthly visits to Mark I think of a few things. If he was at home on his own, then there would be a western blazing loudly from the television in the corner. I would search for one of the remotes to turn it down so that we could talk. I would of course have to remember to turn it back up to full blast before I left. Then there would be the fog of smoke coming from the radiator himself sitting in the corner. And if Lizzie Bowe was visiting there could be two fogs of smoke meeting in the middle of Mark's living room (Sorry Lizzie if you are tuned in, I was not supposed to let on you were smoking) But Mark was rarely on his own when I called. To be honest I deliberately picked that gospel passage today for a reason. I picked it because it reminded me of Mark. The man in the gospel also had a disability. He could not come to Jesus on his own, so he depended on his friends to bring him on the stretcher and lower him through the roof to meet Jesus who healed him and allowed him to go on and live a full and independent life.

Mark's disability did not prevent him from living independently in his own home but still just as the man in the gospel needed someone at each of the four corners of the stretcher Mark was blessed to have various people in his four corners who raised him up and carried him at various stages of his life and particularly in the last few decades. In recent times that has been the staff of Villa Marie in Roscrea but for years at home in Pound Street the men in each of Mark's four corners were Pat across the street, Seamus up around the corner and his daily visitors, Jimmy and Paul. If I could digress here for a moment, I already quoted one President of Ireland, let me quote another. When our current President Michael D Higgins made the historic first State Visit of an Irish President

to the United Kingdom back in May 2014 he began his speech at the State Banquet in Windsor Castle by referring to an old Irish phrase "*ar scath a chenille a mhairimid*". That phrase translates as "We live in the shelter of each other". One of the reasons Mark loved living back here in Rathdowney was that he lived in the shelter of his great friends and neighbours. I know that Karel will want to thank Mark's friends and neighbours later, but can I also say thank you, not just to the ones I have mentioned but to the other neighbours and friends who called and visited and cared for him. It was pure Christian love in action, and it was a joy to behold.

Back in June 2017 when we had that wonderful party next door in the Marian Centre for Mark's 90th birthday, some of you might recall that I read a little poem to him to mark the occasion. I want to read the first half of it again today for you;

Dear Lord, Today I'm **90** and there is so much I haven't done.

So could you let me live until I'm **91**?

And then if I haven't finished all I have to do, could you let me stay here until I'm **92**?

The world is changing very fast and there is so much more to see, could you manage without me til I'm **93**?

With all this technology there is so much more in store, so really I would love to be on hand when I'm **94**.

And if by then my head is sound and I'm still alive, I would love to live and be around when I'm **95**.

There are so many problems and so much needs a fix, I would like to be able to see it when I'm **96**.

Well Mark for some reason the Lord has decided that whatever problems there are down here then it is not your responsibility to fix them, and he needs you up in Heaven before you reach 96.

While we are all sad to let you go, we also know that you were more than ready for the journey.

With St. Paul in today's second reading Mark Whelan can certainly say: *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith, from now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness.*

I want to leave you with a little reflection which I think might very well be words Mark could use to say goodbye today.

It was beautiful as long as it lasted, the journey of my life, I have no regrets whatsoever, save the pain I'll leave behind.

Those dear hearts who love and care, and the heavy with sleep ever moist eyes, the smile in spite of a lump in the throat and the strings pulling at the heart and soul,

The strong arms that held me up when my own strength let me down, each morsel that I was fed with was full of love.

At every turning of my life I came across good friends, friends and family who stood by me, even when the time raced me by.

Farewell, farewell my friends, I smile and bid you goodbye.

No, shed no tears, for I need them not, all I need is your smile, If you feel sad, do think of me, for that's what I'll like, when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die

when you live in the hearts of those you love, remember then..... you never die. Mark May your gentle soul rest in peace

*Dear Lord, Thank you for this day. Because of you I woke up this morning.
Because of you I can feel the sun's rays on my face this morning.*

*We have traveled many miles together, (halfway around the world and back.)
You were by my side the entire way. For that I am forever grateful. You have
been with me through the good times and surely the bad also, never forsaking
me, just trying to show me the right path to take. For part of my life I have been
In visual darkness, but you have shown me spiritual brightness. I now know
that the only vision that I need Is the vision of your love. You have placed so
many wonderful people In my life that no matter what trials and tribulations I
face, I know that you will always be by my side.*

*Only you know what Is next for me In my life. I just pray that you will
continue to make me a good person. Give me wisdom, courage, and compassion
to always help others the way that they have helped me. Your love Is what
makes every day worth living .(God, bless the entire world!)*

Sean, May your gentle soul rest in peace