

Mary Phelan RIP
Funeral Mass
Rathdowney Church
Saturday 7th January 2023

The death has occurred on 5th January 2023 of Mary Phelan (peacefully in her 99th year) on 5th January 2023 in the exceptional care of the staff of Nephin Nursing Home, Navan Road, Dublin. Late of Ranelagh, Dublin, Rathdowney, Co. Laois and Gortnahoe (The Shop) Co. Tipperary. Predeceased by her siblings Stasia, Dolly, Josie, Timmy, Andy, Celia, Gretta, Tommy, John and Eddie and her cousin Delia Harte. Deeply regretted by her nieces and nephews, especially Fiona, Mary, Rita (Holohan) and Maureen (Magee), grand nieces, grand nephews, relatives and friends

In the centre of Kilkenny city there is a little cemetery in the centre of Kilkenny called St. Rioch's there is a tombstone with the following inscription

Dear Stranger,

Pause as you pass by,

As you are now, so once was I

As I am now, so once you shall be,

So prepare yourself to follow me!

A pithy little piece and perhaps somewhat sobering. But it serves to remind us that our life here on earth is perhaps best described in terms of a journey which we all undertake, a journey which has heaven as its ultimate destination, a journey where God is our companion and guide.

It is a journey which has twists and turns, hills and valleys, rough roads and smooth ones too.

This morning we gather here in Rathdowney to celebrate the funeral Mass for Mary Phelan, a woman for whom there was a time and a season for so many activities under the heavens, a woman whose working career was spent in the hospitality industry , A Bridge Player, A tennis player, an accomplished golfer, an independent woman who drove her car well into her 90's, a woman with a sharp mind who loved tradition and proper etiquette and most of all a faithful disciple of the God whom she loved and was faithful to all her life. We are here to accompany Mary on the final leg of her life's journey after more than 98 years on this earth. This is a journey that I understand Mary was more than prepared for and so today is about celebrating a life well lived.

It is a journey which began when Mary was born in Gortnahoe Co. Tipperary on the 23rd of July 1924. The youngest of eleven children born to Thomas Phelan and Mary Dowling. In an event that found a sad echo in so many Irish families from that period of our history, Mary's mother died while giving birth to her youngest daughter. Almost immediately Mary was brought here to Rathdowney to live with her maternal aunt Sarah Delaney (Pictured on the back of the Mass leaflet) who lived in lower Main St. Sarah had an older daughter Delia with whom Mary became very close. Mary spent her formative years here in Rathdowney before moving to Dublin as a young adult to begin her working career.

I think it is fair to say that all of us are very much defined, shaped and influenced by the family we are born into, the families we may later become part of, the people we meet on the journey of life and the place or places we call home. I'm sure that the three places mentioned in Mary's death notice, Ranelagh, Rathdowney and Gortnahoe and the people she came to know and love in all three, all played a part in shaping the identity of the woman we honour with Christian burial today. But there was also something else very significant which

happened to Mary and which shaped her identity and personality in a very powerful way. I speak of her Baptism which I assume happened in Gortnahoe before she came here as a baby to Rathdowney. Through her Baptism Mary became a child of God. That identity as a child of God was perhaps the most consistent influence in her long life. Because of that we can certainly see Mary's death as a journey home to the Father's House in heaven as the gospel speaks about so beautifully today.

I am reminded of that beautiful Welsh song called *We'll keep a welcome on the hillside*. As far as I understand this song was written back in 1940 during the Second World War when many young men were leaving the towns and villages in Wales to go to war and the song was to remind them that the people who stayed at home would "*keep a welcome on the hillside*" for them when they would return. Sadly many of those young men never did return.

As we gather here in Rathdowney Church today, in a sense we are here to welcome home, Mary Phelan to the home of her childhood *to keep a welcome on the hillside* she left many years ago . The journey will continue from here back to Gortnahoe where it began almost 99 years ago and I'm sure another welcome awaits here there as she is buried in the soil of her native Tipperary.

Mary, our prayer for you today is that you who in your lifetime created places of hospitality and welcome for so many will now be able to enjoy the hospitality and welcome of the Father's House in heaven. May you rest in peace Amen

