

**Mary Townsend RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Durrow Church**  
**Monday July 17 2023**

*Mary passed peacefully in her home surrounded by her loving family after a long illness borne with courage and dignity.*

*Deeply regretted by her loving husband Albert, her sons Fred and Albert, her daughters Patricia (Trish), Antoinette and her predeceased children, her sons in law Donal and David, her daughters in law Liz and Teresa. Cherished "Granny Mary" to her 12 grandchildren Hope, Zara, Daniel, Abbi, Aislinn, Darragh, Cian, Liam, Robyn, Ciara, Shane and Danielle her cousins and a wide circle of friends. Predeceased by her younger brother Edward (Neddy).*

**Homily**

Unfortunately for me but I only came to know Mary in the last months of her life and when she was dealing with the final stages of her illness. However, I loved the conversations we had and the insight they gave me into this valiant woman.

Over the last few days and weeks, I have had the opportunity to hear you, her family and so many others around this community speak of the Mary they knew and loved. As I was reading down through the many lovely tributes to her on the condolence page of RIP.ie there was one that jumped out at me because it seemed to sum up so much of what I have come to know about Mary Townsend. That message read:

*"Durrow has lost it's Mammy and Granny.*

*Mary touched the lives of so many people with her kindness and generosity. Her directness and sense of humour was a tonic to everyone she met.*

*She may be missing from our daily lives but she will never be forgotten.*

*Rest in peace in yourly heavenly home my dear friend."*

Over this past weekend as I tried to get my head around what to say in a homily for Mary's funeral a number of thoughts came to my mind . The first thought that came to me was how much Mary loved all kinds of

music and I think there was nothing she enjoyed more than to be in the middle of group of family and friends surrounded by great music and song. And so the words of a song by Tom Jones came into my head and it's called; 'She's a Lady'

Some of the words of that song are:

*Well she's all you'd ever want,  
She's the kind you'd like to flaunt and take to dinner.  
Well she always knows her place.  
She's got style, she's got grace, She's a winner.*

*Well she's never in the way  
Always something nice to say, Oh what a blessing.*

*Well she never asks for very much and I don't refuse her.  
Always treat her with respect,*

*What she's got is hard to find, and I don't want to lose her*

The reason that song came to my mind was because that word **Lady** kept cropping up so many times in the Condolence messages and in the conversations I have had about Mary.

The second thought that has been very much in my mind were the words of that first reading today from The Book of Proverbs.

*Who shall find a valiant woman?  
Who shall find a woman of strength?  
She is worth far more than jewels.  
Her associates all have confidence in her and benefit from her expertise.  
She invites good, not evil, every day of her life.  
She does not neglect her tasks;  
She willingly works with her hands.  
She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths.  
She opens her heart to the needy, she is generous to the poor.  
She is strong and respected, and not afraid of the future.  
She speaks with wisdom, and she teaches in a kindly way.  
Those who are close to her praise her.*

*Charm is superficial and beauty fades,  
But the woman who honours the Lord is to be praised.*

For those of you here in the church today and so many others who knew and loved Mary, know that each of those lines, each of those qualities of The Valiant Woman find a very strong echo in the life of the beautiful person we honour with Christian burial today. *She willing works with her hands*. A few weeks ago, I had the privilege of spending some time with Mary. We talked and we prayed and as part of the celebration of The Sacrament of the Sick I anointed Mary's hands with Holy Oil. As I did so I was conscious of just 'how willingly she had worked with those hands' as a mother, as a homemaker, as an employee and as a friend and neighbour.

So much of that work with her hands was done with one main purpose in mind and that was so that as a wife and mother she could provide the best possible life for her family. And that brings me on to a third thought. From listening to Mary herself and from listening to you her four children, I would be fairly certain that Mary Townsend considered that the single most important vocation of her life was to be a wife and a mother *to be your mother* and she was more than happy to be defined in terms of being your mother. She was even happier to be defined as being a grandmother.

I was reminded of that beautiful poem written by Mary Morrison and it is simply called *Nobody knows but Mother.....* Two of the verses of the poem contain the following lines:

How many muddy shoes all in a row?

Nobody knows but Mother.

How many stockings to darn, do you know?

Nobody knows but Mother.

How many little torn jumpers to mend?

How many hours of toil must she spend?

What is the time when her day's work shall end?

How many cares does a mother's heart know?

Nobody knows but Mother.  
How many joys from her mother's love flow?  
Nobody knows but Mother.  
How many prayers for each little bed?  
How many tears for her babes has she shed?  
How many kisses for each curly head?  
Nobody knows but Mother.

Fred, Trish, Albert and Antoinnette as I listened to you speak so beautifully of your mam and the central role she has played in all of your lives I was reminded of the refrain of that beautiful Don Williams song:

"You're my bread when I'm hungry  
You're my shelter from troubled winds  
You're my anchor in life's ocean  
But most of all you're my best friend."

The fourth thought that came to my mind was that sitting in Mary and Albert's kitchen you cannot but be struck by the number of religious images that surround you. Now I know those images, pictures and candles are not there as part of the latest trend in interior design. They are there as a statement of faith. These are pictures and images of Mary's friends. Mary's faith was not characterised by some kind of a creed or set of beliefs or obligations. Mary's faith was characterised by a relationship with her God, a friendship with her God. And that friendship also included his mother Mary and a few special go to saints like Martin De Porres and Padre Pio. Now like all good relationships Mary's friendship with God had a few rocky periods, not least when she realised how serious her illness was. But the coolness only lasted a few days before it was back on track again.

Images of Mary the mother of Jesus feature very strongly in Mary's kitchen. These two women had a lot more in common than the recitation of countless Hail Mary's. They shared a lot together not least a common experience of loss and pain and the need to trust their God even when things were confusing and downright hard to comprehend. In Mary of Nazareth's life there were those Joyful, Sorrowful and Glorious

mysteries all involving herself and her family. In Mary of Durrow's case it was no different. There were also the Joyful, Glorious and sadly the sorrowful mysteries too. The Joyful mysteries were her marriage to you Albert and the birth and lives of you her four children. There was also so much Joy in her life here in Durrow the place that was her home for 79 years and place she loved so much. The Glorious Mysteries I might suggest were you her twelve Apostles or twelve Grandchildren in whom she delighted, and you brought so much joy to her life. But all throughout her life Mary also knew and experienced those sorrowful mysteries. She lost her little brother Neddie when he was only five. While still at young woman, both her mam and died. All through her life Mary has known sickness and ill health. Yet despite all those challenges she did not let them get her down and as that reading from Proverbs spoke of, she took pride in her inner resources and strengths. Above all what sustained her in good times and in bad was that incredible rock like faith in the God she loved and the God she knew loved her. Mary's Faith was lived in the bits and pieces of everyday life and it influenced every aspect of her life not least her open door policy and a unique gift for hospitality, Again I was struck by one of those messages on RIP from someone who said that a trip home to Durrow was not complete until time was spent with Mary. Mary's faith also led her to have a concern for those less fortunate..... *She opens her heart to the needy, she is generous to the poor.*

Because of that incredibly strong and straightforward Faith which we celebrate in Mary's life today those words of St. Paul in the second reading, Mary can make her own today. .... *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.*

A few final thoughts 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.

I would like to finish with some lines taken from a poem I have had  
cause to reflect on a lot lately. It is John O' Donohue's beautiful poem;  
*'On the death of a Beloved'*

Though we cannot see you with outward eyes,  
We know our soul's gaze is upon your face,  
Smiling back at us from within everything  
To which we bring our best refinement.

Let us not look for you only in memory,  
Where we would grow lonely without you.  
You would want us to find you in presence,  
Beside us when beauty brightens,  
When kindness glows  
And music echoes eternal tones.

When orchids brighten the earth,  
Darkest winter has turned to spring;  
May this dark grief flower with hope  
In every heart that loves you.

**So Mary;**

May you continue to inspire us:  
To enter each day with a generous heart.  
To serve the call of courage and love  
Until we see your beautiful face again  
In that land where there is no more separation,  
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,  
And where we will never lose you again.

Mary. May your gentle soul rest in Peace

**John O'Donohue**