

Michael Gaughan RIP
Funeral Mass
Durrow Church
Thursday 11th May 2023

Cherished son of Michael and Trish, dearly loved brother of Sarah, father of Killian, Michael Jnr, Saoirse and Grace and uncle of Leon. Sadly missed by his uncles, John & Seamus, aunts Anne & Annette, relatives and a large circle of friends.

I'm very conscious that for all of you who loved Michael as a son, a father, a brother a nephew, an uncle, a friend, his death and the circumstances of his death have thrown you all into turmoil. You have been forced to live in a cauldron of emotions and questions with no answers. Questions that most often begin with *why* or as Mary and Martha in today's gospel said to Jesus; "If only you were here"? Feelings of loss, terrible loss, maybe even feelings of anger. When a death like this happens we all feel a bit lost. In a very real way those of you who were so much part of Michael's life are paralysed. You are suspended in disbelief. I totally understand those feelings and those questions and I also understand that it may take a long time for you to get beyond those feelings and those questions.

Today your grief and your pain moves into a more public setting as we gather here in the church for Michael's funeral. I can only hope and pray that although this very public goodbye to Michael may make you all feel a little more vulnerable, the prayer and support of so many who knew and loved Michael and know and love you will bring you some comfort and peace at this time.

I have to admit that I am struggling and have struggled these last few days to find any combination of words which might in some way respond to the grief and pain which is being so keenly felt in this church today. For all of us but particularly for Michael's family and those closest to him the last few days have been punctuated by awkward silences where words seemed woefully inadequate and meaningless.

And yet despite the inadequacy of words we keep talking, we have to talk and there are a few thoughts I would like to share with you

Firstly, our main purpose for being here today is to commend Michael to the mercy and love of God, a God whose compassion and forgiveness are way beyond our human understanding.

But secondly, despite the rawness and the sadness, today also gives us an opportunity to pay tribute to Michael and to honour and celebrate his thirty eight years of life. Particularly again for those of you who were closest to Michael I can only hope and pray that your lasting memories of him will not be defined by the nature of his departure from this life.

Many of you here in the church who have known Michael all his life or some of your life will have your own stories and memories of your interaction together. No doubt many of those stories have been exchanged over these last few days. The symbols presented at the beginning of Mass today tell us something of Michael's interests and his gifts.

The photographs symbolise Michael's love for his family. Michael and Trish, Sarah and Leon, Killian and Michael Jnr, Saoirse and Grace, the awful pain in your hearts today is there because of how much you loved this man who was your son, your brother, your father and your uncle and how much he loved ye all in return. These last few years of Michael's life have been so difficult for him and each of you in your own way have supported him and carried him. It is only natural that you may wonder was there something more you could have done to prevent this pain. But from the letter Michael left you, you know how much he loved you and how much your love meant to him.

That trowel and the taping knife symbolise Michael's work, his skill, his business. Slabbing, drylining is somewhat behind the scenes work but if it is not done right then no fancy paint or wallpaper will cover the mistakes. I don't think Michael ever had to worry about that and he was proud of his work and he loved when others appreciated his work too. When he had that accident at work three years ago it changed his life completely. Not being able to work at the job he loved was a huge

frustration for him. The surgeries and medical procedures that followed Michael's accident altered so much for him and prevented him from living his life as he wished to do. It brought him into a place of darkness and unfortunately this past weekend that darkness somehow overpowered him. It is very difficult for any of us to fully appreciate or understand what it is like to be in that darkness for a prolonged period of time. One of my closest friends describes that space which she herself finds herself in sometimes, as like being in a deep dark hole where you can see light above but you can't reach it.

It is a sad irony that Michael died just a few hours after so many people in this community and in every community across Ireland participated in the annual walk from Darkness into Light precisely to help highlight, support and hopefully prevent death by suicide.

One of the things I learned about Michael was that even though he did not really know the words of any song he loved music and he loved to sing. Sometimes music and the words of a song can describe best what may be going on inside somebody's heart. Over the last few days there are two songs that have been going around in my mind. They both come from the same album, *A Woman's Heart*. Women can often be much better at expressing and articulating what is going on inside but we know only too well that men can and do experience the same heartbreak. The words of the title song speak to me of where Michael has been these last few years:

*When restless eyes
Reveal my troubled soul
And memories flood my weary heart
I mourn for my dreams
I mourn for my wasted love
And while I know that I'll survive alone
My heart is low, my heart is so low
As only a man's heart can be*

As we gather here in the church today it is a very reasonable question to ask, 'Where is God in all of this?'. Even for people of Faith, when faced

with a sadness like this God seems to be absent. What he has allowed to happen is so tragic, so unnatural. We can only wait to see if he makes some sense of the event which makes no sense to us. The question is always some variation of “Why can a good God allow such terrible sadness to enter a person’s life? Why did he let it happen to me, to my family to my community? The question may also have crossed your minds when something like this occurs: Where is God today?. Where is God for Michael’s parents, Michael and Trish, for Sarah and Leon, for Killian, Michael Jnr, Saoirse and Grace. The only place I can find an answer is up there on the cross and yes I believe he is here. God is in this tragedy. The God we believe in always inhabits our sadness. He always desires to be at the centre of those events in our lives which we cannot understand ourselves. The reason why Jesus Christ can be really present with us at times like this and nothing can separate us from his love is because of that cross and what he went through. If Jesus had triumphantly climbed down from that cross and escaped all the human suffering that went with, would he have anything to say to Michael’s heartbroken family and friends today? I think not. As it is, the only real source of hope and healing, the only clink of light, for this gathering this morning is that somehow the suffering and pain is intimately linked with the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. But just as your suffering and pain and Michael’s suffering and pain and death are linked with Jesus, so too, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead allows us the exact same hope.

As a final thought, I want to share with you some of the words of the second song I mentioned a few moments ago. It is called *Caledonia* They could be Michael’s final words today to all of you who loved him so much

*I don’t know if you can see
the changes that have come over me
And these past few days I’ve been afraid
That I might drift away
I’ve been telling old stories, singing songs
That make me think about where I come from*

*And that's the reason why I seem
So far away today*

*Let me tell you that I love you
That I think about you all the time
Caledonia you're calling me
Now I'm going home
And if I shall become a stranger
No it would make me more than sad
Caledonia's been everything I've ever had*

Michael, you will NEVER become a stranger in the hearts of those you loved. May your gentle soul rest in PEACE.