

Nellie Ryan RIP
Funeral Mass
Tuesday 21st February 2023

Ellen (Nellie) Ryan (née Herke), Lyrogue, Rathdowney, Co. Laois. February . Brookhaven Nursing Home, Ballyragget. Predeceased by her beloved husband Michael (Mick) and her brother John. Sadly missed by her sister-in-law Sarah (McManus), nieces Marion, Lisa and Ellen, nephews Michael, Eamonn and Sean, relatives, neighbours and friends.

To be honest when I woke up this morning I wasn't sure I should begin this homily as I had planned last night but then I decided I don't really have time to change it so here goes, (I suppose with an introduction like that I least have your attention)

My doubts arose from the fact the first part of the homily is really the contents of a dream I had on Sunday night. I'm sure you all have had the experience of having a vivid dream where different characters who are not at all connected in real life come together in the dream and somehow it makes complete sense. Over the weekend, and particularly after my conversation with Sean on Saturday I was thinking about Nellie's story and her life with Mick in Lyrogue. Then late on Sunday night before going to bed I was surfing the TV channels when I came across an episode of one of my favourite Comedy series. Yes Prime Minister. Many of you I'm sure will remember it. Basically, the episode on Sunday night was about Mr. Hacker who had just been elected Prime Minister. The new Prime Minister was discussing with his advisors who he should appoint to the various important ministries in his cabinet. Now I'm sure you are wondering where the hell is he going with this. Well this is the point where reality ends and the dream takes over. Because after falling asleep on Sunday night I had a most vivid dream and somehow I was once again watching this episode of Yes Prime Minister but this time among the people the new Prime Minister was considering appointing to his cabinet were Mick and Nellie Ryan. Now you can see why I doubted even telling ye this but please bear with me because I

think there might just be a little ring of truth to what happens next. One of the Pm's advisors suggested that Nellie would be the ideal candidate as Chancellor of The Exchequer because it was she who was the manager of the money in Lyroque. Someone else suggested that Nellie be considered as Home Secretary or the Minister of Home affairs, A third person made the case for Nellie to be the first female Minister of Agriculture because she had such a knowledge and love of farming. Mick was also being considered for a few different portfolios. Because of his extensive knowledge of history and what was going on in many different countries it was suggested he would make a great Foreign Secretary. Others thought he would be a good Secretary of State for Education but there was unanimous agreement that if he didn't accept either of those jobs then his perfect role would be to be Minister for Culture and Sport.

I will leave you to decide just how off the wall my dream was but I think from all I have come to know of Nellie and Mick and the stories I have heard recounted about them there is more than a little ring of truth to that dream and into what life was like in Lyroque when they were both in their heyday. That first reading from the book of Ecclesiastes again gives us a flavour of their lives when there was a time and a season for so many things under heaven. In that fantasy Cabinet I talked of above Nellie could probably have combined the jobs of Minister of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture because she was as comfortable outside on the farm as she was inside being the homemaker. . I can recall saying at his funeral just over a year ago that while Mick loved the outdoors and he loved animals Mick would probably not have been described as a natural farmer but with Nelly's help they made a successful and formidable team. I loved the story of each of Mick and Nelly's more than twenty cows had an individual name but each name was that of a famous race horse.

That second reading from the Prophet Isaih could not be more appropriate for Nelly Ryan's funeral. The reading describes heaven as being like a banquet of rich food. It is a powerful and evocative image. A

table laid with lovely food is much more than just about satisfying an appetite. Somehow food is deeply symbolic of hospitality, of warmth and welcome. That was a concept Nelly knew and lived very well. Yes she was an accomplished cook and baker but as I understand it that food and those legendary apple and rhubarb tarts were a symbol and a vehicle of hospitality and welcome to Lyroque for extended family, neighbours and friends of all ages. Again I think there was team work because Nellie provided the food Mick supplied the conversation and the entertainment. That very thought led me to choose the particular Gospel we heard today. Actually there were two gospel passages that I kind put together. I'm not sure how the likes of Nelly Ryan felt about the first part of that gospel. There is no doubt she and many others like her would identify with Martha, the one who worked hard to provide the food and the hospitality. Then there was Mary or should that be Mick who was happy to sit and listen and talk and entertain the special visitor with lively conversation. To be honest, I'm never too comfortable with the way Jesus seems to suggest that the one who sits at his feet and talks and listens seems to have chosen the better part. Where would Mary or Jesus have been with Martha's hard work and hospitality. Where would Mick have been without Nelly?

Whatever Martha's reaction to Jesus' somewhat unusual response to her the second half of that gospel tells us just how much she loved, trusted and believed in Jesus. 'Yes Lord; she said I believe that you are the Christ, The Son of God, the one who was to come into this world'. As I sat in Lyroque on Saturday and looked up at that big picture of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the wall in front of me I was reminded that the woman we honour with Christian burial today had exactly the same faith and love of Jesus that Martha in the gospel had.

One of the memories I recalled over the weekend was of visiting Nellie in Brookhaven shortly after she went to live there. She was finding it very difficult to settle down and she missed home and she missed Mick. She was unsuccessfully trying to telephone Mick on her mobile and she told me she was trying to get through to him that she wanted him to

bring her home. I felt a real sadness for her that she was so distressed. Today all that distress is ended. Nellie is on her final journey a journey that will not only reunite her with her beloved Mick and all her family members and friends who have gone before her, but also to be reunited forever with the Lord whom she showed such love and hospitality to in this life. It is now His turn to open the door for Nellie, to welcome her to that banquet of beautiful food and friendship and love.

I will finish with the same reflection I used at Mick's funeral, words which I think Nellie herself might use to say goodbye to all those she has loved.

I have got my leave.

Bid me farewell, my friends!

I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door

---and I give up all claims to my house.

I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbours for long,

but I received more than I could give.

Now the day has dawned

and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out.

A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

Nellie, may your gentle soul rest in Peace