

**Noel Cooney RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> December 2022**

*Peacefully, in the loving care of the nurses and staff of Brookhaven nursing home, Ballyragget. Predeceased by his wife Jill. Deeply regretted by his loving sons Darren, Colin & Brendan and their partners, brothers Joe & John, sisters Margaret & Breda, brothers in law, sisters in law, grandchildren Aoife, Aisling, Clodagh & Jack, nieces, nephews, relatives, neighbours & friends.*

- One of the things I learned about Noel in the last few days is that he loved to play cards and he was a particularly good poker player. One of the interesting things about any card game is how it can also be a great metaphor for life itself. Now from my own little experience of playing cards I know that there is no great difficulty in playing when you are dealt a really good hand. Equally so there is little difficulty in playing a really bad hand. The challenge comes when you are dealt a hand which is a mixture of good, bad and middle of the road cards. Such a hand requires a lot of skill and a bit of good luck as well. In truth most of our lives reflect that third hand of cards and the story of our life is the account of how we played the hand we were dealt. I suspect Poker calls for even a few more skills which are also good skills for life. I know that Noel was also a lover of Country Music and I'm sure he was familiar with one of the greatest Country singers, Kenny Rogers. One of Kenny Rogers' biggest hits was a song about Poker. You might be familiar with it. Some of the lines from that song are

*He said, "If  
You're gonna play the game, boy  
You gotta learn to play it right"*

*You've got to know  
When to hold 'em  
Know when to fold 'em  
Know when to walk away  
Know when to run  
You never count your money  
When you're sittin' at the table  
There'll be time enough for countin'  
When the dealin's done  
Now every gambler knows  
The secret to survivin'  
Is knowin' what to throw away  
And knowin' what to keep  
'Cause every hand's a winner  
And every hand's a loser  
And the best you can hope for  
Is to die in your sleep"*

- I'm not sure if Noel died in his sleep but I do know that he died peacefully on Christmas Eve just a week after he celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday. The story of Noel's life, his hand of cards and how he played the hand he was dealt is in some sense laid out before us today as we gather here in Durrow for his funeral mass.

Noel was born on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1952 in The Balloch in this parish of Durrow. The last years of his life were spent in Ballyragget, first in O'Gorman Home and then in Brookhaven. But as I reflected a little on Noel's life and work the thought struck me that so much of his life and particularly his working life has been lived out on that short stretch of road which connects Durrow and Ballyragget. So much of Noel's working life was spent in close proximity to the production of milk first of all at Farrells Knockatrina farm and later at Avonmore further out the Ballyragget Road. I know that the term The Milky way is the galaxy of stars that we see from the earth but for Noel Cooney The Milky way was the road from Durrow to Ballyragget.

Two other things that I learned about Noel was that he loved his garden and he loved to fish. Gardeners are very much aware of the changing seasons. For someone who loved to work with the soil the image of the seed been sown which Jesus uses in today's gospel would have been one which Noel would have been very familiar with. The mystery at the heart of nature which demands that seeds sown in the soil must first go through the process of dying before new life can come. This mystery of nature is also the basis on which our Christian understanding of death and resurrection is built.

Dying is part of living and a step along the road of on-going life. We are here today because it is Noel's time to die. In the early autumn of his life, he released his spirit to God; was received by his welcoming love and made ready for a new spring in God's life-filled presence forever.

Two final thoughts to finish with today as we say farewell to Noel. I understand that Noel's late wife Jill would not normally have to worry about buying a turkey for Christmas because every year Noel would return home on the days before Christmas with a turkey he had won playing cards. Well Noel I'm sure when you turned up at the Pearly Gates on Christmas eve and Jill was waiting to welcome you I hope you had a turkey to bring her. Which or whether I'm sure ye were both very happy to be together for Christmas again.

Lastly as a fisherman Noel would also have certain advantages over the rest of us as he seeks admission to heaven in these days. When it came to choosing his followers the first people Jesus picked were all fishermen and with St. Peter the fisherman at the gate with the keys, Noel might be allowed to jump the queue. I will end this little reflection for Noel the Fisherman with The Fisherman's Prayer

God grant that I may live to fish  
until my dying day,

and when my Final Cast is made  
I most humbly pray,

when in the Lord's landing net I  
am peacefully asleep,  
that in His Mercy, I may be judged "As  
Good Enough To Keep

Noel May your soul rest in Peace

### **No Frontiers**

If life is a river and your heart is a boat  
And just like a water baby, baby, born to float,  
And if life is a wild wind that blows way on high,  
And your heart is Amelia dying to fly,  
Heaven knows no frontiers and I've seen heaven in your eyes  
And if life is a bar room in which we must wait,  
'Round the man with his fingers on the ivory gates,  
Where we sing until dawn of our fears and our fates,  
And we stack all the dead men in self addressed crates,  
In your eyes faint as the singing of a lark,  
That somehow this black night,  
Feels warmer for the spark,  
Warmer for the spark,  
To hold us 'til the day,  
When fear will lose its grip,  
And heaven has its way,  
Heaven knows no frontiers,  
And I've seen heaven in your eyes  
If your life is a rough bed of brambles and nails,  
And your spirit's a slave to man's whips and man's jails,  
Where you thirst and you hunger for justice and right,  
And your heart is a pure flame of man's constant night,  
In your eyes faint as the singing of a lark,  
That somehow this black night,  
Feels warmer for the spark,

Warmer for the spark,  
To hold us 'til the day when fear will lose its grip,  
And heaven has its way,  
And heaven has its way,  
When all will harmonise,  
And know what's in our hearts,  
The dream will realise  
Heaven knows no frontiers,  
And I've seen heaven in your eyes,  
Heaven knows no frontiers,  
And I've seen heaven in your eyes