

**Mary B McCarthy RIP**  
**Funeral Mass**  
**Rathdowney Church**  
**Friday 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2023**

*The death has occurred of Mary B. McCarthy (nee Kilroy) formerly of the Signal Box, Ballybrophy Co. Laois and recent resident of Parke House, Nursing Home, Kilcock, Co. Kildare.*

*Mary was pre-deceased by her husband Peter, son Stephen and infant daughter Eleanor. She is sadly mourned by her son Peter, daughters Alyson and Sally Anne, daughter-in-law Fiona, son-in-law David and her two cherished grandsons Jack and William. She will be sadly missed by her extended family and wide circle of friends.*

Readers: David and Sarah

I have to admit that I don't often go to the writings of William Shakspeare when looking for some inspiration for a funeral homily. That may have something to do with my memories of struggling with his plays and poems back in my school days. However, having listened to you Sally describing your mother, the kind of woman she was and the things that were important to her, I found myself remembering a line from Shakespeare's play HAMLET. I went searching last night to find the exact quotation I was looking for. The context is a father Polonius giving advice to his son Laertes who is going off to live in France and among the things he says to him is the line: *Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy, But not express'd in fancy; rich, not gaudy; For the apparel oft proclaims the man,*

The father cautions his son to be wise in his tastes and behavior, speaking in platitudes. His line that "apparel oft proclaims the man" is expressed in modern times as "The clothes make the person"; meaning

that people form judgments about others based upon the clothes that they wear. Polonius instructs Laertes that he will appear to be noble if he so dresses, especially in France where appearances are everything.

The reason I thought about those lines from Shakespeare was listening to you Sally I got the distinct impression that it was very important to your mam how she presented herself, She was stylish and glamorous and how she looked on the outside influenced how she felt on the inside. She had her own poetic line to pretty much say the same thing as Mr. Shakespeare

*A little dab of powder, a little dab of paint*

*Makes a girl's complexion something that it aint*

I'm conscious in saying this that sometimes people who attach a lot of importance to their outward appearance could be dismissed as being frivolous or not to be taken seriously. I suspect that would not be said about Mary B McCarthy. I was struck by one tribute paid to her on the condolence page of RIP.ie it read

*She was an inspirational woman and I was very lucky to have known her . She may re-arrange Heaven to suit herself. May she Rest in Peace*

Mary Kirby was born and brought up in Swinford Co. Mayo. David, you said to me that you felt she displayed in her character some of the best qualities of west of Ireland people, like seeing the glass half full, a positive can do spirit that had no time for whinging or lamenting what might have been. Following her education she moved to live in Limerick. Her first job was working at the recently opened Shannon airport. Her role was to look after the various VIP's who stopped over at the airport on there way to or from America. This offered her the opportunity to rub shoulders with world leaders, film stars and the celebrities of that time. For someone who set a high value on style and appearance that sounds like the perfect kind of job to have. It was in Shannon that she would meet the love of her life and future husband,

Peter McCarthy. They moved to live and work in London where they were married in 1959. Eventually they would move back to Dublin where Peter managed the newly opened Berni Inn, Later they would relocate back west to Strokestown Co. Roscommon. In the 1980's Peter and Mary came here to Rathdowney to take over Peadar's in the Square. I was talking to someone yesterday who remembered very fondly that time when the McCarthy's were in Peadar's and particularly she recalled Mary's cooking and maybe more especially her baking and even more especially her famous Pavlova. In 1993 Mary and Peter bought the famous pub out at Ballybrophy station called the Signal Box. Again, from conversations with different people I know Mary and Peter are fondly remembered for the wonderful business they ran, the friendly atmosphere and their kindness to their customers. Following their retirement from the business around 2004/2005 Peter sadly died quite suddenly. Mary continued on living out in Ballybrophy for sixteen years. During that time she became involved in various groups including the Rathdowney Active retirement group. She also of course delighted in her contact with her family and particularly her two grandsons, Jack and William.

I hope this is some little insight into the woman whose life we honour and celebrate today.

Mary has died in the autumn of her life in the autumn of this year. Each season of the year has its own beauty. Mary, I suspect, was someone who was well aware of the seasons even if that had more to do with changing her wardrobe than with nature!! Spring has its beauty, with its superabundance of life and growth. Well wrapped up in winter, we can appreciate the trees and bushes glittering with frost; the mantle of snow covering ugly landscapes, the warmth, welcome and comfort of homes. Summer is a tranquil season. It is a time for holidays and festivals, slowing down of the tempo of days, long evenings, bright mornings. Autumn has its special beauty. The poet John Keats once described it in the following words:

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun.*

It is a time of harvest and fruitfulness. The trees look spectacular in their autumn garb.

There is an autumn in life too. The good fight has been fought. Energies are declining but with it comes the shedding of responsibilities and much contentment. Many people shy off the very thought of it, but the poet had another angle. He could see the riches, the achievement, the colour, the contentment of autumn. That too is the experience of many people as they grow older; a sense of duty done, life lived, love given and received.

Autumn signals the end of an age of life. In the flaming forests, life is declining and winter is about to set in. Decline is not the whole story, however. Dead leaves are falling to the ground but they are not alone. The seeds of new life are also falling. Jesus thought of this when he spoke of the grain of wheat. It falls to the ground; it seems to die but in the act of dying and being received into the earth it gives birth to the green sprout, beautiful and bountiful. In the winds and storms of autumn the seeds are shaken from the branches. Sometimes they are caught by a gentle breeze, other times it is a violent storm that snatches them. In the end they fall to the welcoming earth which is ready to receive them and is life giving. Dying is part of living and a step along the road of on-going life. We are here today because it is Mary's time to die. In the autumn of her life, she released her spirit to God; was received by his welcoming love and made ready for a new spring in God's life-filled presence forever.

One final thought. I came across the other day some words written by the famous actress Audrey Hepburn who was by any standards a pretty beautiful and stylish woman. I'm not sure what Mary would think of

these words from Audrey when she said

*The beauty of a woman is not in  
the clothes she wears, the figure  
that she carries, or the way she  
combs her hair. The beauty of a  
woman is seen in her eyes,  
because that is the doorway to  
her heart, the place where love  
resides. True beauty in a woman  
is reflected in her soul.  
-- Audrey Hepburn*

The true beauty in a woman is reflected in her soul. Mary as we gather here today it is that soul, your soul that we commend to God in Heaven. May you rest there in Peace for ever. amen