

Mary Bergin RIP
Funeral Mass
Cullohill church
Saturday 25th November 2023

Unexpectedly at her residence. Predeceased by her husband Tony, daughter Colette and son in law Pat. Deeply regretted by her loving children Marianne, Elaine, Martin, Bernie, Connie, Siobhan and Nicola, sons in law, daughter in law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and extended family.

Placing the Bible and Cross: **Marianne and Elaine**

Symbols: **Sarah:** Mary's prayer book, a symbol of her unwavering faith.

Clodagh: Mary's glasses, a symbol of her love of reading and crosswords.

Enia picture of Mary and her dog Prince, a symbol of her love for all animals and her lifetime of hard work on her farm.

Tara: Mary's Michael D Higgins tea cosy, a symbol of her love of knitting and her involvement in the ICA.

Hugh: thatched house, a symbol of Mary's beautiful home, where she spent her whole life. Mary was a proud community woman, who's neighbours and friends meant so much to her.

Grace: a family photo, a symbol of Mary's devotion to her family.

Readers: Colette and Frances (Sr. Miriam)

Prayers of Faithful: Luka, Muireann, Maeve, Beatrice, Rosa and Siobhán

Bread and Wine: - **Connie and Bernie** –
Martin will say a few words of thanks.

On Tuesday last, the day before Mary died, for a number of hours in Rathdowney, the electricity was suddenly and unexpectedly cut off. We have all experienced that reality, when everything goes blank, the television goes blank. The radio goes silent, the cooker goes cold, the computer switches off and worst of all the lights go out. We are caught in a blackout; we are plunged into darkness. For a while at least we feel lost, helpless and perhaps even a little frightened.

That image came back to me on Wednesday night when I got word that Mary had died suddenly. It is something of an irony that when someone dies suddenly as Mary did, it triggers off a plethora of flashing bright lights, the Fire brigade, The ambulance, the garda cars. But for Mary herself, in the calm and comfort of her home where she had lived all her days, without warning, the lights simply went out on a life which had just begun it's 90th year. In Mary's kitchen there were signs of the happy days she had experienced just before she died, the cards and the beautiful flowers which had come for her 89th birthday last Sunday.

As news of Mary's death filtered out on Wednesday night and Thursday morning it came as a bolt out of the blue and for many, but particularly for you *Marianne, Elaine, Martin, Bernie, Connie, Siobhan and Nicola*, and your families, neighbours and friends who loved Mary so much. That news plunged you into darkness too. You had all been going about your lives when the call came through, for those of you living away it was to make the journey home to Gurteen, a journey you had all made countless times, a journey which would always have ended with the welcoming smile of your mam, but this time would be different.

Nothing can prepare us for something like this, neither our education, our upbringing nor our experience of life can save us from the effects of such a blow. There is only one thing we can do; just as when an electricity blackout occurs, we stumble and stagger desperately looking for a light, any light, even that of a humble candle. And so we too, gathered here in Cullohill today, reach out for the only light which can

penetrate this darkness, the light of Christ. It is the same light which Mary herself gravitated towards whenever she encountered the darkness and pain that life experience sometimes brings. One of my abiding memories and images of Mary's kitchen last Wednesday night was that as she lay there, just above her was the picture of the Sacred Heart and in front of it the gentle flickering of the Sacred Heart lamp. Just as that picture and that lamp had reminded Mary all her life that she was not alone and that Jesus was there close to her to protect her, now at the moment of her death he was also here with her to reassure her and also to reassure you her family and loved ones.

There is a beautiful line from the prophet Isaiah which we will hear read at Mass in exactly a month's time on Christmas eve night; it says:

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light;

On those who live in a land of deep shadow a light has shone

As much as we need to hear those words on Christmas Eve, we need them much more here in this church today. Jesus is present here among us in Cullohill today. His light shines on us who are in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Despite the sadness that we all feel today I think it is also important that we celebrate the life of Mary Bergin; a loving wife and mother, devoted grandmother and great grandmother or GG, loyal friend, hospitable and caring neighbour, a committed member of this parish community who has contributed so much to so many aspects of life in this area over the years. Above all we celebrate and give thanks for the life of a faithful disciple of the God she knew loved her.

Mary Loughman was born in Gurteen on Monday 19th of November 1934. Her Primary School education was at the Gurteen National School less than a mile from her home. The pony and trap would be needed to bring her in to her secondary education at the Vocational School in

Rathdowney which had opened in 1936. As an only child of her parents, Ellen and Martin, Mary's life was destined to be at home on the farm. It was work she loved and especially any contact with the animals. I gather she had a particular expertise with the cows and even after her marriage Mary was the one who always looked after the milking of the cows.

In her early twenties Mary was to meet Tony Bergin from Ballinakill. They were married in St. Mary's Cathedral in Kilkenny in April 1958. The fruit of their love would be their eight children. While Mary worked hard all her life both on the farm, inside the home, in so many projects and organisations in this community like the ICA, The Community Centre, school Boards of Management and so many others, I would suspect the thing she was most dedicated to and the aspect of her life she was most proud of was that she was your mother.

As a little aside here I was conscious on Wednesday night that the date of Mary's death, the 22nd of November was a very significant date in history because of another death, that of US President John F Kennedy exactly sixty years earlier. Some time ago, I received a gift of a beautiful book of poetry edited by Caroline Kennedy President Kennedy's only daughter. Introducing a section of poems about motherhood, Caroline writes the following:

"But I can certainly say, like everyone does, that becoming a mother is the best thing that ever happened to me. Having a child defines us for the rest of our lives. No matter what else we do, we will always be that person's mother. We give our children the gift of ourselves, and they give us so much in return....Each mother-child relationship teaches us our limitations and our strengths. It changes us in constantly unfolding ways and entwines us in the unpredictable mystery of another life"

As I listened to each of you talk about your mammy yesterday, I was conscious of just how entwined she was in the unpredictable mysteries of your lives. As you listened to the words of that First reading from the Book of Proverbs about the Valiant woman, the woman of strength, you heard more than a strong echo of the woman you were blessed and

privileged to have as your mother. This is the woman whose life we celebrate and whom we honour with Christian burial today.

A few final thoughts I would like to leave you with today. The 22nd of November 1963 was also the day another very famous man died although his death was overshadowed by the tragic events taking place in Dallas. The great Christian writer CS Lewis also died on the 22nd of November 1963. CS Lewis wrote many famous books including one called *A Grief Observed*. Most of that book is heavy enough reading but in one more light-hearted passage he makes the following observation:

When we get to heaven, there will be three surprises: First, we will be surprised by the people that we find there, many of whom we surely had not expected to see. The second surprise is that we will be surprised by the people who are absent – the ones we did expect to see but who are not there. The third surprise, of course, will be that we are there ourselves.

Whatever about the first two surprises I'm not sure that Mary will be totally surprised to find herself in heaven. And that lack of surprise won't be coming from any sense of arrogance or entitlement. It will be because throughout Mary's life she has developed a close and lasting friendship with her God. It is a friendship that has been nourished by her own prayer life, her regular participation in Mass and receiving the eucharist, by her living out in practical ways the faith she professed. It is a friendship that has been characterised by a complete trust in her God and his presence in her life particularly in difficult times of loss as when Tony, and Colette and Pat died. So, no I don't think she will be surprised to be in God's presence today. Those words of St. Paul to Timothy in the second reading today could so easily be Mary's: *the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness.*

In recent months I have celebrated a number of funeral masses for mothers. At one of those funerals a daughter shared the following poem about her mother. It is simply called **Your Mother Is Always With You!** by Deborah R. Culver* I offer it to you Mary's family today.

She's the whisper of the leaves as you walk down the street.

She's the smell of certain foods you remember, flowers you pick, the fragrance of life itself.

She's the cool hand on your brow when you're not feeling well.

She's your breath in the air on a cold winter's day.

She is the sound of the rain that lulls you to sleep, the colours of a rainbow.

She is Christmas morning.

Your mother lives inside your laughter.

She's the place you come from, your first home.

She's the map you follow with every step you take.

She's your first love, your first friend, even your first enemy.

But nothing on Earth can separate you.

Not time.

Not space.

Not even death.

Mary, May your gentle soul rest in Peace.

I would like to finish today with some lines taken from John O' Donohue's beautiful poem; '*On the death of a Beloved*'

"Though we need to weep your loss,
You dwell in that safe place in our hearts,
Where no storm or night or pain can reach you.....
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
