

Peg Phelan (nee Rafter) RIP

Funeral Mass

Durrow church

Saturday 11th November 2023

Peacefully at her residence, surrounded by her loving family. Predeceased by her husband Jimmy, sons John and Joe, brother Sean, grandson Sean and great-granddaughter Bridie. Deeply regretted by her loving children Patricia (Burns), Liam, P.J., Shem, Mary (Lyons), Bridie (Dowling), Eamonn, Ger, Anthony and Fintan, her brother Edmund Rafter, sister in law Betty, sons in law, daughters in law, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, relatives, neighbours and friends

Family members to place cross and bible

Symbols: Rosary Beads, Family photograph, Rose, Andrew Rieu CD

Readers:

Prayers:

Our Father in Irish

One of the many things I learned about Peg Phelan in recent days is that when she went for a walk she used the time to pray the rosary or maybe a few rosaries depending on the length of the walk. As I thought about that and as I reflected on the extraordinary life story of the woman we honour with Christian burial today it dawned on me that Peg's life, in a very real way, reflects the mysteries of the rosary. There have certainly been the Joyful mysteries of her life; the Rafter family she was born into, her marriage to her neighbour, Jimmy Phelan, the twelve children they brought into the world together, living to see you all successfully negotiate your lives, her love of music, her love of animals, her love of Knocknanoran, the only townland she lived in for her 94 years of life, all joyful mysteries of her life and I'm sure there were many more too. There were the glorious mysteries too, she had prayed to see her grandchildren, she lived to be a great grandmother so I suspect she

might describe her grandchildren and great grandchildren as the Glorious mysteries of her life. And if there was a glorious mystery in Peg's life greater than her grandchildren I suspect it would be the incredible gift of Faith she was blessed to have.

But my God did she also know first hand the Sorrowful mysteries of life. Of the many religious pictures, images and items in Peg's home in Knockanoran the thing that most struck me was the miniature of Michaelangelo's Pieta which sits on Peg's mantelpiece. The Pieta is the statue depicting the virgin Mary seated cradling the dead body of her son Jesus as he is taken down from the cross on good Friday. It is the quintessential and almost universal image of suffering and pain and loss particularly a mother's pain at the loss of her son. And I began to imagine what it was like for Peg to sit in that room and look at that image of Mary cradling Jesus and how she in such a unique and real way could identify with what Mary was going through.

It is impossible to honour and respect Peg's life without acknowledging her painful experiences of LOSS. It is something she has known from the very beginning of her life. She experienced the loss of her twin sister when they were born. Having given birth to twelve children Peg was to experience the sudden loss of her husband Jimmy when Fintan was just six weeks old. At the age of 42 she was a widow with twelve children aged from seventeen down to six weeks. A decade on and within three years of each other Peg would be Mary at the foot of the cross as she stood at the graves of her sons John and Joe. Three years later Peg herself would be badly injured in an accident causing the loss of one of her eyes. How could one person be asked to bear so much loss? And yet by the testimony of those of you who witnessed each of those moments of loss there was always resilience, strength of character, acceptance but beyond those incredible human qualities there was incredible faith and trust in her God and a unique relationship with Mary who had travelled this painful path before her. *'when the Lord sends a burden he will always send the shoulders to carry it'* that was the mantra of this extraordinary woman we honour today.

'Who shall find a valiant woman?

Who shall find a woman of strength?,,,,

She invites good, not evil, every day of her life.

She does not neglect her tasks;

She willingly works with her hands.

She works diligently, taking pride in her inner resources and strengths.

Those words of the first reading were written three thousand years ago and yet I think they could so accurately be speaking of Peg Phelan today.

And beyond the acceptance, the resilience, the strength of character, beyond the incredible faith, there was I gather also this positive attitude to life, almost a sacred respect for people and of course for God. Peg's life was also characterised, particularly in later years, by an attitude of gratitude.

When ye were talking about that aspect of your mam's character yesterday I thought of an event I attended many years ago. The guest speaker was the then president of Ireland Mary McAleese. The president gave a short speech but I never forgot it. She said that in her experience of life there were two types of people in the world: Radiators and Drains. Now we all have experienced the drains in our lives, those people who literally DRAIN us of every bit of energy because of their negativity and pessimism. We are very fortunate though if we also know the radiators, those people who radiate love and warmth and positivity. As I listened to you all talk of your mam I thought perhaps she could well be described as one of the radiators.

Patricia, Liam, P.J., Shem, Mary , Bridie , Eamonn, Ger, Anthony and Fintan, to all of you who are her privileged to be Peg's grandchildren and great grandchildren, what an incredible legacy this woman your mother and grandmother has left to you.

From what you have told me I suspect Peg would be very uncomfortable that I or anyone else would be up here saying these things about her today. She never wanted the attention to be about her but about God, particularly here in the church. I would argue though. that the woman

you and others have described to me, was created, as we all are, in the image and likeness of God. Peg in every aspect of her life has tried to live as close to what God called her to be. She has been His faithful disciple. In highlighting how she has lived and faced the challenges that life brought her, we can only be inspired and encouraged to live our best lives too.

In her 94 years in Knockanoran Peg has lived on the land and very close to nature. She would have been very aware of the challenges and opportunities that each season brings. She has died in these November late autumn days. Later as we walk to her grave there are banks of dead leaves which have fallen from the trees in recent weeks and months but they are not alone. The fragile seeds of new life are also falling. I think of that fragile little baby girl born 94 years ago, weighing just over two pounds and not expected to survive but survive she did and what a harvest of life and love she leaves behind.

Because of her closeness to nature I believe Peg would have understood well when Jesus talked in today's gospel of the grain of wheat falling on the ground, the seed being sown in the soil. The mystery of nature is that the wheat grain, the seed must first actually die in the ground before the new life comes from it. That mystery of nature provides the basis for our Christian understanding of death and resurrection. Dying is part of living and a step along the road of on-going life. We are here today because it is Peg'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.

I want to leave you with a final thought today and it is really for you her surviving ten children. I have no doubt that if Peg allowed herself to take pride and satisfaction in anything in her life it was that she was your mother. As I listened to most of you talk about her yesterday, I could get a real sense of the influence she has had on you and how she has been part of the joyful, glorious and sorrowful mysteries of your

lives too. She delighted in your children, her beloved grandchildren and later her great grandchildren. Some time ago at a funeral in Rathdowney 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 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.

Peg, May your gentle soul rest in Peace.

Ár nAthair atá ar neamh,
Go naofar d'ainm,
Go dtaga do ríocht,
Go ndéantar do thoil ar an talamh,
Mar a dhéantar ar neamh.
Ár n-arán laethúil tabhair dúinn inniu,
Agus maith dúinn ár bhfiacha,
Mar mhaithimidne dár bhféichiúna féin,
Agus ná lig sinn i gcathú,
Ach saor sinn ó olc.
Amen.