

Peggy Dunphy RIP
Funeral Mass
Cullohill Church
Wednesday 22nd November 2023

Margaret (Peggy) Dunphy, nee Henderson, The Mill, Upper Oldtown, Rathdowney, Co. Laois, November 20th. 2023 peacefully at Brookhaven Nursing Home, Ballyragget, Co. Kilkenny surrounded by her loving family. Predeceased by her husband Joe, brother Martin, her sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law.

Sadly missed by her daughter Betty, son Michael, daughter-in-law Ann, son-in-law Pat Joe, grandchildren Michelle and Colm, Colm's wife Jenny, sister-in-law Lynda, nieces, nephews, relatives and a wide circle of friends.

These weeks in Cullohill are a time of endings a new beginnings. Next Sunday will be the last Sunday of the Church's year, The Feast of Christ the King. A new church year will then begin with the first Sunday of Advent. Last weekend as Peggy's life was drawing to a conclusion we baptised two new members of our Parish Community. Today we gather to say farewell to Peggy Dunphy, one of our oldest parishioners and the last of her generation in the Dunphy and Henderson families. The mystery of birth and death which has been evident in our parish these weeks is a mystery of nature which is part of our lives all the time.

The experts who have done research in this area strongly contend that the happiest time of our human lives is the nine months we spend in our mother's womb. All our needs are taken care of on demand. Our first experience of death comes when we are expelled at birth from the safety and comfort of our mother's womb out into this great world of the unknown. While everyone waits with joy and expectation for the birth of this new child, for the child themselves it is an experience of death and uncertainty. At the end of our earthly life the circumstances are not dissimilar. Just as we wanted to cling on to the familiar world of the

womb at our birth there are few who would prefer not to cling on to the familiar world of family and friends rather than go out into the unknown that comes with death.

And yet we know that birth, as painful as it was for us brought us into a world of many possibilities, for growth, for love, for happiness. Because of our Christian Faith we also believe that death, as painful as it is, is a liberation into a whole new and eternal life in the presence of God.

Peggy Henderson was born on Wednesday the 29th of October 1930 in Coolnacritta on the border of Galmoy and Cullohill parishes. I think that border was very significant in Peggy's life because while she lived in The Mill, Upper Oldtown, Cullohill Co. Laois since 1959 she was always very loyal to and very proud of her Kilkenny roots across the border. Over the years, in sporting terms at least, Peggy had many reasons to be proud of her Kilkenny and Henderson roots. I am reliably informed that there may even be people in this church today who lost bets and lost money to Peggy over the years because of victorious cats prowling in Croke Park and elsewhere.

The four items that we placed on Peggy's coffin at the beginning of Mass today in so many ways speak strongly about the two great priorities of her life, Her faith and her family. The Bible, the Word of God something she was nourished with all her life as she attended Mass in this church and elsewhere. The Cross reminds us that at her Baptism she was signed with the cross and welcomed as a member of God's family. There is the picture of Peggy with her beloved family. The fourth item is something very unique and, in a way, brings Peggy's family and faith together. It is the rosary beads that Peggy's father was given for his confirmation in the 1890's. Having prayed with that beads so many times throughout his long life, he passed it on to Peggy and now it passes to Michael. As I reflected on those beads and the years of Faith and Prayer invested in them I could not but think how the Mysteries of the rosary were also reflected in the story of Peggy's own life. There were the joyful Mysteries of Peggy's life. Among those Joyful mysteries The Henderson family she

was born into, her parents, her beloved only brother Martin, her home in Coolnacritta, the neighbours and friends she grew up with like the Byrdens,(Burdens) the Colletons and Dollards. (I think of sr. Mary Colleton who died just a few weeks ago) Surely, one of the great Joyful mysteries of Peggy's life was her marriage to her neighbour, Joe Dunphy. Having come from a relatively small family herself Peggy not just became part of the much larger Dunphy clan but also moved to live in the Dunphy family home at The Mill. This meant that there were always family members coming and going to visit their parents and as I know from experience, when there are priests in the family they tend to land in lots of visitors sometimes unexpectedly. But as I understand it, Peggy took all this in her stride. She had a unique gift for hospitality and welcome and she loved to entertain. In this context that first reading today from the Prophet Isaiah is very appropriate for Peggy. The prophet describes heaven as a place of welcome and celebration complete with a well laden table of food and hospitality. Such a place would seem an appropriate reward for Peggy who so often welcomed and entertained over the years. I'm sure there are other joyful mysteries in Peggy's life like her great friendship with her sister-in-law, Mary Henderson and the many adventures the two of them shared with her cousin Johanna Corcoran to places like Tramore (where I think their interest was more in the slot machines rather than the sea or the sand.)

What would the Glorious mysteries of Peggy's life have been? Having listened to you her family I'm going to suggest three of the possible Glorious mysteries . Her Children Michael and Betty and her grandchildren, Michelle and Colm. I think Peggy's faith which sustained her in good times and bad was also a glorious mystery of her life. The third Glorious mystery of Peggy's life I'm going to suggest is the exceptional love and care that she received in her later years from you Ann which so many people have brought to my attention. In a way this was history repeating itself because Peggy herself had cared for her mother and father-in-law Margaret and Michael over many years.

And just as there has been the Joyful and Glorious mysteries of Peggy's life, she has not escaped the pain and loss of the Sorrowful mysteries either. As I mentioned at the very beginning Peggy is the last of her generation of both the Henderson and Dunphy families. That means she has, as her death notice observed been *predeceased by her husband Joe, brother Martin, her sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law*. I know that the death of her only brother Martin in 1971 when she was just 40 herself was a particularly painful loss.

So as I look at that precious rosary beads on Peggy's coffin more than 130 years old, part of its history and journey is intimately linked with the Joyful, Glorious and Sorrowful mysteries of the life of the woman we honour with Christian burial today. But somehow that rosary beads also speaks of the prayer life and the faith which sustained and supported Peggy through the years as it did her father before her and hopefully now as it passes to a new generation it will continue to support and sustain you in the years ahead.

I am conscious that apart from the last few years spent in Brookhaven Peggy has lived all of her life very close to nature and to the soil of Coolnacruita and Oldtown. She would have been very aware of the challenges and opportunities that each season of the year brings. She has died in these November late autumn days. All around us, despite the early intervention of some Christmas lights there are signs of darkness and dying. The trees are bare, the days are shorter and the dark nights grow longer. Everywhere we look there are dead leaves which have fallen from the trees in recent weeks and months but even though we can't easily see them they are not alone. The fragile seeds of new life are also falling and with them, the promise of brighter days ahead.

Because of her closeness to nature, I believe Peggy 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 Peggy'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.

As a final word, I think back to the gospel read at Mass last Sunday, the last full day of Peggy's life. Included in that gospel were some lines from Jesus which he could so easily have been addressing to Peggy as her life ebbed away on Sunday evening. *'Well done God and Faithful servant, you have shown you can be faithful in small things, I will trust you with greater; come and join in your master's happiness'*

Peggy, may your gentle soul rest in peace.