

Today we gather in St Mary's Church in Howth to celebrate the life of Arthur Wheeler; husband to Gaye, father to Mark, Gail and Guy, grandfather, friend. Mark has shared with us something of Arthur's life story, his many accomplishments in the field of law, serving in high judicial office in Nigeria, returning to a senior position in the imperial Civil Service; his love of sport. But what has come across for me is the lovely humanity of the man, his devotion to Gaye, which was obviously a love match. Then there has been Gaye's devotion to Arthur over these last difficult years.

I thought back to the first time I met Arthur here in St Mary's. At that stage the Alzheimer's had set in and I was aware that he was a shadow of his former self. But something of the gentleman shone through, the love he had for Gaye and the love she had for him. It was as if a darkness was coming over him.

In a few weeks we will be celebrating Christmas and we will be hearing those lovely words from the opening chapter of St John's Gospel, part of which Gaye has chosen as one of the lessons for this service:

⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. *John 1:4-5*

The light, the life of Christ, shining in even the darkest places of our human frailty, our mortality.

It must have been hard for Arthur as he experienced the beginnings of his illness, the loss of memory, of vitality that had been so much part of his nature; hard also for Gaye and for the family to watch, grieving the loss of that memory and vitality long before this point where they have come to grieve the

loss of his final parting. A passage I find myself turning to over and over again in situations such as this is from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal. ^{5:1} For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwellingso that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

The words that always stand out for me are: 'So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.' They speak of our hope for Arthur Wheeler this day. The darkness that came over Arthur in the Alzheimer's has not had the final say. Our hope for Arthur this day is that all the weakness and frailty, the loss of memory, the loss of dignity of these last few years and just the limitations of being human, all these are stripped away, swallowed up by life, and he is at peace.

Of course however strong our faith, however much we know that death is a release for our loved ones, there is still a very proper sadness on an occasion such as this as we say farewell to someone who has been so much part of our lives, with whom we have shared so many memories, so much love and in this regard we think particularly of Gaye, of Mark, Gail and Guy and their families on this day. Those of us outside the immediate family circle have come today to assure you of our love and prayers not just for today but for the weeks and months to come as you come to terms to life without Arthur.

Today we commend Arthur to the loving care of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Inspired by the example that he has left us, let us this day dedicate ourselves afresh to our service of God and one another, looking

forward to that day when we shall be reunited with those who have gone before us in the faith.

We give them back to thee, dear Lord, who gavest them to us. Yet as thou didst not lose them in giving, so we have not lost them by their return. What thou gavest thou takest not away, O Lover of souls; for what is thine is ours also if we are thine. And life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only an horizon, and an horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight. Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we may see further; cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly; and draw us closer to thyself that we may know ourselves to be nearer to our loved ones who are with thee. And while thou dost prepare for us, prepare us also for that happy place, that where they are and thou art, we too may be for evermore.