

Not long after my arrival in Howth, I called at the house of Billy and Jackie Webb. I received that warm and generous welcome that is the hall mark of that house. Bill had spoken of his early years, growing up in Glasnevin, the son of a school teacher, his lifelong friendship with Cecil. Stan, Derek, Aubrey, his time in Trinity and beginning with Craig Gardiners, before going out on his own, his career in accountancy and he went on to speak of this Parish of Howth. He spoke with great pride and affection of Jackie and the family. Then, just as he was about to open the front door, he said, ‘Kevin, there is just one thing I want to say to you. For your first year or two here, your biggest sin will be that you are not Cecil Hyland. But don’t worry, Cecil’s biggest sin when he first came was that he wasn’t Frank Blennerhassett. The Parish will take to you.’ There was so much of Bill Webb in that – wisdom, insight, affection for the Parish, loyalty to former clergy and a life long friend, welcome and encouragement to me; all given with that gentle smile we will always associate with him.

On this the day of his funeral, we gather to thank God for this man. His lifelong friend Stan McMullen and members of his family have already spoken with great affection of his many gifts, ways in which he touched and enriched their lives. Many of you come here today with particular memories of your own. There was a generosity of spirit to

Bill. Many have spoken to me of simple acts of kindness, given without any fuss or condescension. Many have spoken of his loyalty, his humour, his modesty, his consideration for others. I know many who feel a great sense of personal loss at his death.

He took a great interest in the wider world. Each day, the 'Irish Times' would be read front to back. This would give rise to some very interesting and engaging conversations. An accountant to his fingertips, he would have some very interesting observations on the unfolding drama of the demise of the Celtic Tiger.

In the course of my time here I have come to know and respect him as a man of deep and sincere faith. Attendance at worship was priority. Until very recently, very few were the Sundays when Bill was not here. He gave freely of his time and talents in the service of this Parish. He was for many years a member of Select Vestry, including a spell as Treasurer and latterly as auditor of our accounts. He was a great encourager of others. He would no doubt have had his own preferences in hymns and worship patterns but was most insistent that the youngsters be drawn into the life and worship of the Church. Two of the hymns he chose for this service would reflect that. The parish, the whole parish has lost a loyal friend and servant. Bill was very much a son, a man of the Church of Ireland. He took great pride in

the contribution our Church has made to wider society – but there was nothing of the sectarian in Bill. He would have had a genuine concern and respect for all Christian Churches in this country.

At the heart of Bill's life was his family, his beloved Jackie, their children Carolyn, Suzanne, Andrea and Rowan. A devoted husband and father they were all his pride and joy and he delighted in the arrival of his grandchildren. It has been my privilege to witness the very obvious deep bonds of affection as Bill faced the final stages of his illness. Jackie and Bill have been a great team. Jackie has often spoken of Bill's unstinting devotion as she has faced her own illness, the help he gave as she cared for their two fathers in their own home. She often said with a smile, 'A lesser man would have run'. Jackie for her part certainly returned the favour as she supported Bill through his final illness. It was fitting, when the end came in the early hours of Sunday morning, that Bill was surrounded by his wife and family as they entrusted him to his heavenly Father.

There is now a huge gap in their lives as Jackie and the family begin to build a life together without the closer presence of Bill. But of course the love that bound Billy and his family together lives on as they remember with tears and laughter one who meant and continues to mean so much. Those of us outside the family circle come today to

offer our love and support, to assure you of our love and our prayers in the days that lie ahead.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. We have just celebrated Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, Emmanuel, God among us in the person of Jesus Christ. In the course of our Christmas services we heard those lovely words from St John's Gospel:-

<sup>4</sup>What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

<sup>12</sup>But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Darkness has not had the last word in the life of Bill Webb. Sickness, weakness has not had the final say. A light has gone out in our lives. But the light shines on, the light of Christ, risen, ascended, glorified. Our hope and prayer this day is life and peace for Bill in the closer presence of the God he served and worshipped, free from pain, from weakness.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.