

This morning we have gathered here in St Mary's for the funeral of May McCabe, a dearly loved sister, aunt, friend. At the end of a long life graciously lived, lived and savoured to the full, we come to remember with thanksgiving one who has been taken from us, one we have loved and whose love has sustained us, one who has been part of our lives. Along with our thankfulness we come with a very proper sadness and loss. However much we know the end is coming, however much we want the suffering of a loved one to be over, there is still that loss, that gap in our lives that no one else can fill in quite the same way. Those of us outside the immediate family circle come to support those who will miss her most, her sisters Norrie and Kay, her nephews and nieces. Ian has spoken of the love and affection in which May was held by all those who loved her.

I first came across May sitting with friends here in Church. This was her Parish Church; she had been baptised here, confirmed here and for the whole of her life she had worshipped here. Indeed the last time she was here was six weeks ago when Sheila brought her down to the mid week service and coffee. She took great pride in her Howth pedigree, that Pat was buried in the grounds of the old Abbey. Ian has spoken of her gradual loss of sight. Looking back it was not immediately obvious to me when I first met her that she was partially sighted. It was only when I visited her in Cross Trees Court, and saw the various aids in the sitting room that I realised just how impaired her vision was. For May, there was no self pity; this was just something she had to deal with. There was still the shopping to do in the village, the Active Retired meetings and outings and of course the hair had to be just right. Even the fall on the escalator in Dunne's Stores did little to curb her determination to be out and

about. Even though she and Pat had no children, theirs was a home where children were always welcome. Family, her beloved Pat, her sisters Norrie and Kay and their children were always in her thoughts and frequently spoken of with great affection. She loved those trips over to England to stay with Norrie and was attentive in her visiting of Kay. In the last two years her health finally did limit her independence. There were no more trips to England. Her visits to Church became less frequent, her trips down into the village became more of an ordeal but she adopted a very practical common sense attitude. She started taking communion in the house but tea was still served. Then came an extended stay in Beaumont and the realisation that the time had come when she could no longer look after herself and the room became available in Brymore. Again, her very practical, common sense attitude meant that she settled in remarkably well into what was now her home.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. We are approaching Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, Emmanuel, God among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Soon we will hear 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 May McCabe. Sickness, weakness has not had the final say. As you come in the door of this Church, which May did for over ninety years, you will see roses climbing up the wall.

One thing that has struck me over the past seven years I have been here is that, even in the depths of the coldest of our winters, there are always buds and flowers on those roses. There is in short always life. That reminds me of something of the resilience of May McCabe. There was the resilience of her nature, that ready smile and cheerful word. The quiet courage that would not lie down as her sight began to fail. There was the resilience of her faith. She came here to be baptised, she came here through all the ups and downs of her long life. She came when Pat died, when sight began to fail. She came to worship, to eat the bread and drink the cup, to sing God's praise, to seek his strength in time of need. So today we come to give thanks to God for this daughter of Howth, to pray for those who will miss her most and to commit her to the loving care of her heavenly Father

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.