

Last Friday, we all; got the news of the death of Harry Brooks and I received a call from the family and the process of planning his funeral got under way.

Harry had not been well for a few months now but he was very fit, very active physically and mentally until just under a year ago. A bereavement, however much we may anticipate it, always carries with a sense of shock, of loss, of sadness. Someone who has been so much part of our lives is now gone and a gap is left that no one else can fill in quite the same way. It is also a time of a gathering together of memories, the things that made a loved one special, their talents, their weaknesses, their love, their humour. As we gather these memories, our remembering promotes thankfulness, gratitude, to the one we have lost, to God himself. And there is a lot to be thankful for.

Harry died just short of his 85th birthday. He had lived in many parts of Ireland before and after marriage. He was born in Cork and a Cork man he remained.. His family moved to Portadown when he was twelve and for a number of years he worked for Denny's at different plants around the country and he finished his working life with Albright and Wilson.

His main love was his wife Gretta and their children Peter and Valerie. He took great pride in watching them grow up and in time rearing their own families. They will have memories this day of a beloved husband, father, grandfather. Harry had one other great love in his life and that was his rugby and his association with Clontarf Rugby Club, which he joined back in 1953.

When his playing days were over he continued his commitment to this club as a volunteer until illness forced him to step aside when he was 84 – he was known to one and all by the nickname ‘Mr Clontarf’. An immense source of pride to Harry and to the family was the award made when he was 80 of ‘National Sports Volunteer of the Year’ in recognition a life of commitment.

So this day we not only bring our sadness at our loss before God, we also brings our memories and thanks giving for the life of Harry Brooks and all that he has meant to family down through the years, his love, his friendship, his loyalty. A funeral also sets our own life, our own hopes and fears within the context our own mortality, our faith in God to whom we commend Harry this day. We have just celebrated the Festival of Christmas. One of the underlying themes of Christmas is light shining in darkness, a light that no darkness can overcome.

On the wall just beside the door of this Church you will see a climbing rose. Even in the midst of winter, there always seems to be signs of life on that bush, a few leaves and buds and even the odd flower. The darkness and clod of the winter can never suppress the life of that rose. Then as spring comes the life within it will burst forth.

Something of this I think came to the mind of Paul as he wrote words of reassurance to the Christians in Corinth:

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ Fool! What you sow

does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

The seed, seemingly so insignificant, so vulnerable, contains within it all the potential of the magnificent plant. But before that can happen we have to let go of the seed, bury it in the earth.

Harry's family are having to let go. It is our hope and prayer and trust that the one we have let go has entered into that fuller life that God has prepared for us all, where there is no more sorrow, no more separation from those who have gone before – only peace in the closer presence of God..

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.