

One of my early memories of my time here in St Mary's is of one Sunday morning at a service of Holy Communion watching Doris and Elsie Curry coming forward to receive communion, Doris' health was failing at that point and I was struck by the tenderness with which Elsie brought her up the steps, helped her with the mechanics of receiving the bread and the wine and then gently helping her down the steps and back to her place.

This delightful pair had lived most of their lives in Rathmines. There they had been active members of Holy Trinity, helping with Sunday School, regular in worship. Then one summer's day they came out to Howth for a drive and were so taken with this part of the world that they decided to look at some of the new houses being built and moved here to Bayside.

So began their association with St Mary's. Here they entered into the life of the Parish, regular in worship, supporting various activities, in the thick of the Fete, enjoying the social life of the Parish, helping with the assembly and distribution of the Parish Newsletter. They not only entered into the life of the Parish; they also entered into the life of the local community and were great supporters of the Good Neighbours Club, at the monthly meetings, at the Christmas dinner. The Good Neighbours Club have been great friends to her Elsie and Doris, with regular visits to Elsie in Howth Lodge.

Shortly after I arrived, Doris was taken ill and after a short stay in hospital died. It was only then that many of us realised that they were twins. Doris' passing was a great loss to Elsie. At the time of Doris' funeral she was heard to say 'There was no guile in Doris.' and the same could surely be said of

Elsie. She continued in her support and membership of this place and anyone calling at the house in Bayside could be sure of a warm welcome.

The time came when her own health began to fail, when she could no longer look after herself. Loss of independence is hard for all of us to come to terms with. I remember being struck at the time with her down to earth common sense as she accepted that the time had come for her to move out of her house and into Howth Lodge. From the very outset of her time there, I was struck by her graciousness, her appreciation of anything that was done for her. We will often talk of a loss of dignity when this stage of life comes but Elsie maintained that gentle dignity – there was indeed no guile in Elsie. Until recently she maintained an interest in this place – even when she might not be sure who you were, a mention of St Mary's and the people of St Mary's brought a smile of recognition.

On an occasion such as this I often find myself searching for a verse of scripture that draws my thoughts together. I found myself turning to the First Letter to Timothy. The Apostle gives his advice to the younger man:

But as for you, man of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. *1 Tim 6:11 ff*

‘pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.’ This seems to me to draw together so many of our memories of the Elsie Curry whom we remember today with love and affection. Elsie fought the good

fight, not just in the recent years of decline but all through a life of faithful witness and service.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. We are drawing close to Good Friday and Easter in which we remember the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the victory of life over the forces of death. We celebrate it not just as an event in the life of Jesus, but as a victory he has won for us all. As our reading I have chosen words from Paul's second letter to the Church at Corinth. In this passage Paul speaks very honestly of our mortality, of the body wearing out. But just as he talks of the reality of physical decline and death, Paul talks of our new heavenly home. The words that really stand out for me are ; "So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." This is our hope for Elsie Curry, that all the limitations of these latter years, the frailty, along with all the limitations that go with being human are "swallowed up by life", that is our inheritance in Christ in the closer presence of our 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.