

This morning we have gathered in St Mary's for the funeral of Patrick Reilly.. His daughter Vicky has already shared with us some of the family's memories and affection for him. They remember a family man, a man who enjoyed his work, his cars, his dogs (who I gather were beginning to edge out his wife and daughters in the attention he bestowed on them).

As Vicky has already said, Patrick is remembered as a family wife, a loving husband, father and grandfather.

He had just celebrated his 71st birthday and the suddenness of his death has come as something of a shock to his family. A funeral is a time to reflect, to take stock. One of the privileges of being with a family as they prepare the funeral of a loved one, is to be there as memories are recalled, how they met, important and not so important events in a family's journey. Even in the sadness there are the smiles as a loved one is remembered.

Today is a day for you to come before God with your own particular memories of Patrick and give thanks to God for all that he has meant to you as husband, as father, as grandfather and friend, to thank God for all that was good and true in his life, his many talents, his pleasure in simple things, his love and friendship.

Those of us outside the family circle have come to offer our love and support at this time as you begin to come to terms with your loss, how best to support one another in the days and weeks and months to come.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. In a few short months, we will celebrate the Festival of Christmas. In the darkest time of the year, we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I often find myself turning to those lovely words from the Gospel of John that we read at Christmas:-

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

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

The old funeral service reminds us that in the midst of life we are in death. In the context of a funeral service, I often like to think of it the other way round: in the midst of death we are in life. For today in this Church, on the occasion of the funeral of Patrick Reilly, we declare that darkness has not had the last word in the life of Patrick. As you go out of this Church you will find two climbing roses on either side of the Church door. Even in the bleakest times of the year, even in the depths of winter, there are always signs of life on those roses be it a leaf, a bud or even a rose.

Bereavement, the loss of one with whom we have shared so much, is a very lonely experience. Yet we do not face it alone. We share it with ones who share our memories, our love our sadness. Not only that, In fellowship with the Apostle John, we follow a Lord who knows what death, what suffering, what loss is all about; one who knew what it was like to weep at the grave of his friend Lazarus. Not only that, he is the one who was raised triumphant over death, breaking the power of death itself. Knowing in his own person what it was all about, I find in him one to whom I can come in my own time of suffering and find real comfort, real strength and real hope.