

This morning we have gathered in St Mary's for the funeral of Mr Paul Smeed. His family remember a family man, a man with a love and zest for life. A native of England, he had made his home here in Howth and had fully entered into the life of this community, very proud of this place. They remember a father and a grandfather, a loving husband to his wife Aileen. They remember a man who faced illness with a dogged defiance. The deterioration over the last few years has been hard for the family to watch, hard for Paul. As David has said, 'he was told over two years ago that he had been dealt this 'bad hand' but being the true professional and character that he was, he played that bad hand so well.'

I think of words from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to Timothy as Paul proclaims, 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.' Today is a day for you to come before God with your own particular memories of Paul 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 courage in the face of adversity, his love and friendship.

In the ordinary course of event, this Church would have been full for this service as Paul's many friends as well as those of his family would have gathered here to give thanks to God for the life of Paul Smeed and to support you his family in this your time of loss. Many will be watching this online and they will be supporting you now with their love and prayers and will support you in the days that lie ahead.

This morning we have read as our lesson those lovely words from Revelation. Coming at the end of a tumultuous book of visions of conflict in the end times this passage speaks of peace in the presence of God:

"See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them as their God;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
<sup>4</sup> he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away."

That is our hope for Paul, our hope for ourselves. The last two years have been very tough, tough on Paul, tough on Aileen, tough on his family as they watched him battle it

out, a battle in which no quarter was given, throughout which he sought to live life to the full. Now his struggle is past and our hope and prayer for Paul is peace in the closer presence of God.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. I often find myself turning to those lovely words from the Gospel of John that we read on Christmas Day:-

<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 Paul Smeed. Sickness, weakness has not had the final say. 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.

Situated as we are, on this beautiful hill of Howth, where we can stand and watch ferries come and go, I will just leave you with this piece.

*A Parable of Immortality.*

I am standing by the seashore.

A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze  
and starts for the blue ocean.

She is an object of beauty and strength,  
and I stand and watch

until at last she hangs like a speck of white cloud  
just where the sun and sky come down to mingle with each other.

Then someone at my side says, ‘There she goes! ‘

Gone where? Gone from my sight - that is all.

She is just as large in mast and hull and spar  
as she was when she left my side  
and just as able to bear her load of living freight  
to the places of destination.

Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says,

‘There she goes!’,

there are other eyes watching her coming,

and other voices ready to take up the glad shout :

‘Here she comes!’