

As the end of life approached the Apostle Paul wrote to the young man Timothy

<sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. *2 Tim 4:7.*

Today we stand in St Mary's Church in Howth, a Church he attended and served with great faithfulness, to honour the memory of Percy Lovegrove. As I sat down to put together this sermon, those words just seem to sum up for me the life and witness of Percy Lovegrove, not only in this place, among working colleagues and the wider community. I first came into contact with Percy just 9 years ago as the family gathered for the baptism of Max, the first of the great grandchildren. I was struck then by the quiet sincerity of the man, the obvious devotion he had for his beloved Doreen and she for him.

I was in the house not long after to celebrate Holy Communion for Percy and Doreen, who by then was confined to her wheelchair. I saw something of Percy's quiet spirituality as, with his customary quiet dignity, he set the communion table, lit the candles and said 'Over to you, sir.' Then over tea served in his impeccable manner, he and Doreen told of their life together, how they met, their courtship and marriage, the birth of David and the move to Kenya, where he rose to a very senior position in the East African Railways and their

subsequent return to Dublin as David prepared to start in Trinity. David has shared with you his own very special memories of this time. In the course that conversation, I learned of a shared link with the town of Mountmellick. As David explained, Percy was born in Blackpool in England. While still a toddler his father died and his mother sent him to be cared for by her sister in Mountmellick. So began his life in the Bailey family in Mountmellick, a family Percy came to look upon as his own. He took upon himself to maintain the Bailey grave in Mountmellick, only in the last few weeks going down to see that all was in order. I recall many chats over coffee as we shared memories of the different families in the town.

What I also began to appreciate that day was his unstinting devotion to his beloved Doreen, his pride in her many talents in dance and in art. As her health declined, this was worked out in an amazing care for her, meeting her every need, ensuring that she was able to be out and about until the very end. It was for Percy a loving enactment of his marriage vow to love and to cherish, for better, for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, till death us do part. A wonderful witness to the rest of us.

Doreen's death was a huge blow for Percy and many in the family wondered how he would cope. David has spoken of 'The Book', the

Auld Cockle Picker that was written in the subsequent months as he shared, in his lovely relaxed style, his life in Mountmellick, his life with Doreen. In this we saw something of a calm reality in his makeup that reflects something of our reading from Ecclesiastes. Percy was a gardener, which is something of an understatement as you reflect on the magnificent flower and vegetable garden that he maintained virtually unaided until the beginning of this year. So Percy would have had a keen understanding of seasons, the need to understand the seasons, the need to work with the seasons –

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born, and a time to die;  
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;  
a time to kill, and a time to heal;  
a time to break down, and a time to build up;  
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;  
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;  
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;  
a time to seek, and a time to lose;  
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

Percy understood that deep reality, in the garden, in the lives and passing of those he loved and a positive acceptance of his own mortality. I remember visiting him in Mater Private just under two months ago and the manner in which he shared the news he had just received from the doctor: a calm acceptance that his time remaining was short, a calm determination to live his remaining days as one deeply thankful for all the blessings that life brought him.

We gather today to show our love and solidarity with his son David, with Kate, with Sarah and Joanna and all the great grandchildren, whose number will increase in the very near future, to assure you of our love and prayers not just for today but in the days that lie ahead. We will in the Parish miss his quiet, cheerful dignity, his faithfulness to the Parish in his worship here, his fundraising through his garden parties, his cheerful help as we put together the Newsletter, as we tided the garden on a Saturday morning. So many of us come here with our own particular memories of Percy as father, grandfather, great grandfather, as friends and colleagues in work, in PROBUS, in gardening circles and the wider community – hold those memories before God and thank God for all that this man has meant to us.

Of course, as Percy would insist, we come here today to confess our faith in the face of death, that death has not had the last word in the life of Percy Lovegrove. As I will often do on the occasion of a funeral, I find myself reflecting on the words of Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians: In this Paul presents us with the reality of our own mortality and death, he talks very plainly 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 Percy Lovegrove, that all the limitations of these last few months, the frailty, along with all the limitations that go with being human are "swallowed up by life", that is our inheritance in Christ. In that confidence we commend Percy Lovegrove, faithful and loving husband and father, loyal friend, man of faith to the loving care of his 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.