

Back in May we gathered in St Mary's Church for the funeral of Barbara Carron. Back then we referred to a wonderful creative partnership between Barbara and her husband William. Today, less than four months later, we gather for the funeral of William.

We gather to stand alongside Rachael as she lets go of those who brought her to birth, who loved and cherished her, who encouraged her.

William was born in Clontarf and, like Barbara, shared a passion for the creative arts. As I was reflecting on what to say today, I was struck by the prayers appointed for Monday in the Church of Ireland Book of Common Prayer in which we are encouraged to give thanks

‘for the continuing work of creation,
our share in it
and for creative vision and inventive skill.

I had known all along that William was a poet – I had not realised that he was an artist in his own right, a superb draughtsman, working in ceramics, an Associate of the Royal Irish Academy. As Rachael remarked, he possibly had to work harder at his art than Barbara to produce his own distinctive genius.

The house at Matakana was very much a place of creative vision and inventive skill. Barbara and William each had their own space in which to work, in which to create. Barbara had her studio in the house, William the shed at the end of garden. In that separation they worked out their common creative spirit. It was very much a home within which they each encouraged and supported each other. It was a place of great simplicity – there were no unnecessary frills either in dress or décor.

William taught for a while in Sutton Park School – something he really enjoyed. When you think of the other people on the staff at that time, the staff room at that time must have been a very interesting place.

I would gather that growing up William did not have a good experience of Church and so would not have regarded himself as religious. Sadly that is more a comment on the Church than on William. Just because he would not have regarded himself as religious, there would have been a strong spiritual dimension to his life. For one thing that would mark out the artist is a strong sense of the Other, something, someone beyond ourselves.

Speaking as a complete outsider on this one, I would see the artist must have something of a sense of wonder before they ever put brush to canvas, or pen to paper. This sense of wonder, whether for the scientist or for the artist, is beautifully expressed in the Psalms of the Old Testament. I often find myself going back again and again to Psalm 8

- 4 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, ♦
the moon and the stars that you have ordained,
- 5 What is man, that you should be mindful of him; ♦
the son of man, that you should seek him out?

For William, and all those engaged in creative work, there is a losing of ourselves in the work, a giving of ourselves in the work, that brings us in touch with the Other. There is a strong tradition in the ancient Celtic Church of encountering God in and through his creation that is summed up in the title of a book I have at home, ‘Listening to the heart beat of God’.

There is a passage that that is read many times in Church comes from the opening chapter of the Book Genesis, that ancient poetic description of creation.

³¹ God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.
And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. *Gen 1:31*

I just have an image of Barbara the artist, William the poet stepping back from their work and just smiling and saying to themselves, ‘That’s it’.

So today we give thanks to God for William, as artist, as poet, as father and friend. To Rachael we offer our love and sympathy in the days and weeks and years to come For William the struggles of these past years of illness are past and we commend him to the loving care of Almighty God in fellowship with his beloved Barbara.

Another passion in William’s life was sailing, something at which I gather he was very good. And so I close with a passage that draws together his love of sailing and our hope for him and all those we love.

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!’