

Last Friday Daphne Anderson died in St James Hospital. For a lady who had lived to the age of 91 in remarkable health, having survived many another medical problem, it was to be as the result of an accident. And so in addition to the sense of loss that comes with any death of a loved one, there is the additional shock at the suddenness of our parting. For however long we have our loved ones, we never have them long enough.

We come this morning with our sense of shock, with our love, with our memories to give thanks to God for a mother, grandmother, aunt and friend. She met and married Thomas Anderson and apart from a brief sojourn on the south side they lived here on the peninsula, rearing their children Daphne and John. You will all have your own particular memories of Audrey and we bring them before God this morning in love and thanksgiving. She was very much an independent spirit, with great energy right up to the end, living life to the full supported by her daughter Audrey. For her part, she had nursed her husband Tom through cancer until his death. She is remembered as a great wife and Mum and very supportive. As with many of her generation, prayer is something that came quite naturally to her. She worked three days a week in Barnado's shop in Dun Laoghaire for many years, something characteristic of her giving and charitable spirit. One thing I only came to realise only very recently was her musical talent, proficient on the violin, she was one of the early members of the Dublin Orchestral Players. As I say, you will all have your own particular memories of Daphne Anderson – just hold them before God with love and thanksgiving this morning.

So we come to offer our thanks for the life of Daphne Anderson, for the different ways in which she has touched our lives. Her death has come in the run up to Christmas, at a time associated with family gatherings, family celebrations. So there is an added poignancy as we think back over previous Christmases and Christmas will not be the same in years to come. Those of us outside the immediate circle of family and friends come today to offer our love and support to Audrey, as well as to John and the wider family, to assure you of our prayers and support in the time to come.

We come in the face of death to set our loss in the context of our Christian faith. Tomorrow night in Church, as we gather for our midnight communion, we will throw off the purple of Advent and bring out the white of the Christmas season, as we celebrate the feast of the Incarnation, Emmanuel, God among us in the person of Jesus Christ. We will hear once again as our Gospel reading those wonderful words of John's Gospel:

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.

Standing as we are this morning in the face of death, we are reminded that darkness has not had the last word in the life of Daphne Anderson. Sickness, weakness, even death itself has not had the final say. In fellowship with Daphne, 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. I think of the words of the Christmas Carol, ‘Mary’s child’

Clear shining Light,
Mary’s child,
your face lights up our way;
Light of the world,
Mary’s child,
dawn on our darkened day.

I will close with a prayer that brings home to me the hope that we have in Christ for ourselves and for those who have gone before us in the faith.

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.