

Over the last seven years I have been in Howth, I have often been asked; ‘Do you ever hear of Doris Blennerhassett?’ This question will be followed by recollections of Doris. Then, on the occasions I called into Delgean Nursing Home in Dundalk, I would have been asked, ‘How is the Parish? I love getting the Newsletter.’ Then memories shared of the Rectory, the Parish, the people – and of course Frank. What I have come to realise is that there was a genuine affection not just for Doris as “the Rector’s wife” but for Doris as a person in her own right. There was an affection on her part for this community in which she has lived for over forty years, the people of the Parish, the neighbours on the Howth Road. Born in Glasnevin, her family had been members of St George’s Parish. A young Curate came to the Parish by the name of Frank Blennerhassett. They were married just short of Doris’ 21st birthday. So began a life long partnership as she supported Frank in his ministry in Balbriggan (where they spent 15 years) and here in Howth, where Frank was Rector for 32 years.

As I said, she is remembered with great affection in this place – as someone said to me on Sunday, ‘Doris Blennerhassett was a genuinely nice person.’ Talking to Monsignor Houlihan, the Parish of the Assumption remember Frank and Doris with affection. When I asked the family how they would want her remembered, the immediate response was, ‘A wonderful mother and grandmother.’ She, for her part, took a great delight in her family. As the family went through her belongings, they came across her Prayer Book, which had, slipped in at the back, requests for her funeral. There were the hymns we are singing today and the readings. There were some prayers she did not want used along with the prayer that is printed on the front of the service sheet.

*Calm me O Lord as thou stilled the storm.
Still me O Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease.
Enfold me, O Lord, in thy peace.*

Favourite hymns, favourite prayers tell us a lot about the person. As I read this prayer I sense a spirituality that took Doris through some of her own hard times; a spirituality that enabled Doris to support Frank through his. There is a warmth here that was apparent to so many who knew her; to her children Rowland, Wendy, Kathryn and Miriam and their families, mourning the death of a beloved mother and grandmother; to this Parish and wider community. She worked for a while as Matron in Mount Temple School – one former pupil recalling to one of Doris' children 'a wiper of tears and blotter of cut knees'.

A humanity that has enriched people in ways I would suspect Doris, in her innate modesty, may not have acknowledged. We gather today, on the day of her funeral, to thank God for Doris for all that was good and true in her life, for that simple spirituality, for the many ways in which her life has enriched our own and to commend this gentle soul to the loving care of Almighty God.

Those of us outside the immediate family circle have come today to thank God for Doris and also to show our love and support to those who will miss her most, Rowland, Wendy, Kathryn and Miriam and their families. The family I know would also want to thank the staff and community of Delgean Nursing Home for their wonderful care for Doris over these last six years and I know that Doris greatly valued their love and care. It is our hope and prayer that as you remember your mother and grandmother that the very proper sadness you feel at this time may be softened by memories of times past, of love, of

understanding; that something of Doris' faith in the face of all that life brought her way may strengthen and inspire your own.

On a day such as this we gather to give thanks for the one we have loved, to pray for those who will miss her most. We also gather in the face of death, in the face of our own mortality, to proclaim our faith that Christ is risen, that death is not the end. That is a theme that has run through the hymns, the psalm and the lessons that Doris has chosen for today. With the psalmist we have proclaimed:

2. My help | comes ~ from the | Lord, @
the | maker of | heaven and | earth.
- 3 He will not suffer your | foot to | stumble; @
he who watches | over you | will not | sleep.
- 8 The Lord shall keep watch over your going out
and your | coming | in, @
from this time | forth for | ever|more.

We have heard the words of hope as that strange and remarkable book Revelation draws to its triumphant close:

Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ Then he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. ⁷ Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

That is our hope and prayer for Doris and for ourselves this day.

Doris and Frank spent so much of their life together here in Howth. I will just close with a parable of immortality that draws together themes of the sea and of our Christian hope:

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!'

by Henry van Dyke