

I remember back in 2005 when I first came to Howth, one of my first visits to Ailsbury Nursing Home to visit Florrie Rowden. At that stage she had been living there for nearly a year following a major stroke that had rendered her immobile.

Gillian has shared her own reflections on Florrie, some of the events in her early life that helped to make Florrie the person she was. Events like the, the experience of early loss, the immobility following her stroke can have two effects on us. They can turn us in on ourselves or they can bring out a warmth and positivity. the Florrie I met in the wheelchair that afternoon was anything but inward looking. She was more keen to talk about me, my family, how we were settling in that about herself.

She had grown up on a farm near Athy and experienced the early loss of her father and other family members. And, as Gillian has reflected, family, the maintenance of contact with family were important to her. As we all know, she adored Christmas – the gathering of friends and family, the welcome, the giving were very much part of who she was.

She came up to work in Dublin. It is here she met Cecil. They settled first in Kilbarrack and then Offington and here they reared their son Alan. They became very much part of the community here in St Mary's. Florrie would have been regular in her participation in the life and worship of this place. She was never one to seek the limelight but was always there ready to work, looking after the distribution of the Review and the Gazette for many years, helping on the cake stall, helping with teas and coffee – and all of it with her cheerful and easy going manner.

She really appreciated the continuing friendship and support of her many friends in the Parish following her stroke. Those regular visits across to

Sandymount were hugely important to her – though as her friends would have said to me on many occasion she was a lovely person to visit. She and Cecil have been deeply appreciative of the wonderful care given by the Nursing Home staff and the pastoral support of Canon Ted Ardis, and latterly Rev John Marchant of Donnybrook and Irishtown

All through these last ten years, her beloved Cecil has been there; visiting, encouraging, a constant loving presence at her side, wonderfully supported by Alan and his wife Gillian. There was one time of year when he wasn't there – Christmas shopping - Gillian may have said something about body language.

There is so much to be thankful for in the life of this lovely lady as wife, as mother, mother-in-law, as friend. But however thankful we are, however strong our faith, however much we know that our loved one's time of suffering and incapacity is over, there is still that searing loss, a very proper sadness as we lose the closer presence of one we have loved, who has loved and cherished us, one who has been so much a light and strengthening presence in our lives.

And so those of us outside the immediate family circle gather around today to extend our love and sympathy to Cecil, to Alan and to Gillian, and to those who loved Florrie Rowden. You are very much in our thoughts and prayers, not just for today but for the days and weeks to come.

Florrie grew up on the land, she loved her garden and so she would have been very familiar with the cycle of the seasons, the cycle of life, of growth and death. So the themes of the passage that we read from Ecclesiastes would have been familiar to her – a time to be born and a time to die, a time to weep and a time to laugh. With that cycle of life comes an acceptance of mortality. But we do that, not in a spirit of fatalism but of hope.

On these occasions, and particularly at the funeral of a person such as Florrie who has known a period of extended immobility, I will often reflect on a passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. In this passage Paul talks very naturally of mortality, of the body wearing out and then declares:

⁴ For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. *2 Cor 5:4*

Those words, 'so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life', go right to the heart of our resurrection hope. That is our hope for Florrie this day, that all the limitations of these past few years, the immobility, the frustrations that even Florrie must have felt, the limitations of just being human – all swallowed up in life in the closer presence of Christ in the faith of whom Florrie lived and died, in whose presence may she find perfect peace.

As Florrie leaves the Church, the organist will be playing the tune of hymn 552. Verse 3 runs as follows

'Tis Jesus calls me on
to perfect faith and love,
to perfect hope, and peace, and trust,
for earth and heaven above..

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.