

Last Saturday your beloved Jennifer, mother, wife, grandmother, friend, died quietly in her own home, with those she loved and who loved her after a long and dogged fight with cancer. Tomorrow hundreds of friends, contacts made in the realm of sailing, of victim support, of CRC, of life will come to her Memorial Service in St Mary's to give thanks to God for this remarkable lady and to support you in your loss.

This evening is family time, is your time. It is a space, a precious private space, in which you can come with your own sorrow, your own memories as we commend Jennifer to the loving care of Almighty God.

You've chosen as the lesson to be read this evening that lovely passage from Ecclesiastes that was also read at Alex and Jennifer's wedding last December. It is lovely to have the link between these two events. It is a very honest passage that embraces all the highs and lows of our mortal life. It talks of the rhythm of life, a place for laughter, a place for tears, a place for laughter, a place for sorrow, a time for living and a time for dying. - but there is nothing fatalistic in its honesty. It is that honesty in the face of life that chimes with my own particular impressions of Jennifer.

Last December, as we gathered in St Mary's for that lovely wedding, we all knew, Jennifer knew that it would not be long before we were here. I found that wedding, and the celebration in the house afterwards, a lovely life affirming event. As we came to the vows, I quietly asked Jennifer would she like to remain seated. "No thank you – I'll stand." Then of course after Christmas, Jennifer announced that she wanted to go down to Ballymaloo,

quietly declaring that she was not going to sit around waiting to die.. There is a verse that runs, ‘In the midst of life we are in death’. I often like to reverse that and declare ‘In the midst of death, we are in life.’

As we gather for her funeral, you will have many memories, some very personal, dating back over many years of Jennifer as mother, grandmother, wife, as very dear friend. Hold these before God and give thanks for all that was good and true in her life. You will remember with pride her many achievements in sailing, locally, nationally and internationally, including among a string of honours and appearance in the Admiral’s Cup. At the time she was kidnapped, she demonstrated a calmness, a resilience, a determination that was remarked upon by the security forces involved in securing her release. Following that episode there was her work in the establishment of Victim Support.

Remember I said, ‘In the midst of death we are in life.’ Because another thing we are doing this afternoon is, in the face of death, affirming our own Christian faith, that death is not the end, death has not had the final say.

One service Jennifer and Alex used to attend in St Mary’s was the midnight communion service on Christmas Eve. At that service we hear each year those lovely words from St 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.

Darkness has not had the last word in the life of Jennifer. Sickness, weakness has not had the final say. In fellowship with her, we follow a Lord who knows what death, what suffering, what loss is all about; one who knew what it was like to weep and 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.

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.