

One of my early memories of my time here in Howth is of a group of ladies who sat on this side of the Church, about half way down. One of them was Joan Hutson. From the very outset I was struck by her demeanour; always perfectly turned out, the smile, the almost impish glint in the eye. Even until very recently, she was here in Church for the 9:30 whenever her health permitted it. Her attendance at worship, her faith were quite clearly a priority for her. In a world of busy-ness, of frantic activity, Joan's generation have a lesson for us in the priority we give to the things of God, the worship of God.

I remember being quite surprised in those early days when someone said to me, 'You realise Joan is 90.' Her friend Malak has shared memories of a lady who wore her age lightly. Always positive, always up for a fresh challenge. She felt at ease with all ages as they did with her. She was very accepting of people – the one thing that would raise hackles was if she felt someone was patronising her because of her age – a guide in the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam had the temerity to suggest that the stairs were a bit steep. She loved travel; she and Ted toured Europe in their car for years and her last trip to Paris was at the age of 97 – she took great pleasure going through the photographs with me of herself in Versailles, the Louvre, on the Eifel Tower.

I suppose I got to know her best as she looked after her husband Ted of over 65 years. They were both southsiders, but on marriage they crossed the Liffey and set up home here in Sutton. Here they made their home, reared their family. They became very much part of the local community and of this Parish. They shared a love of travel, of tennis, cricket, golf and gardening. She was of course no mean bridge player.

She looked after Ted for as long as she could until he required constant care. In this she was supported by her daughter Gaye. Then in turn Joan was to support Gaye in her final illness. That was the one time I saw her really down

as she mourned the passing of Gaye. In all this she was to face her own health problems. But even in this her sense of humour was always there as she showed off her purple feet, stained with permanganate. Her positive outlook on life, her gentleness, her good humour remained.

Returning to Joan as the gardener. She and Ted loved the garden and even in latter years the porch in the house was full of plants. We read as our lesson from the 15th chapter of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In this passage Paul brings together lessons of mortality and hope. He uses as his illustration one that Joan would have understood well, that of a seed.

³⁵ But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" ³⁶ Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. ³⁷ And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. ³⁸ But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

⁴² So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. ⁴³ It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. ⁴⁴ It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

As they worked in their garden together, Ted and Joan will have known the lesson of the seed. The seed, seemingly so insignificant, so vulnerable, contains within it all the potential of the magnificent plant. But before that can happen we have to let go of the seed, bury it in the earth.

An important lesson in life is that of learning to let go. A big part of that for each of us is that of periodically reassessing our priorities, what is really important in life, the place we give to God in our decisions, in our worship in our life. An occasion such as this, the funeral of one we have loved and whose

friendship and love we have valued is a reminder of our own mortality. As I said earlier, those of Joan's generation have valuable lessons to teach us in the priority they give to worship, to faith – it is so easy to lose sight of that in the busy-ness in which the seemingly urgent can displace the important.

Of course the death of a loved one involves a letting go. One whose presence we have enjoyed, whose love and encouragement has meant so much to us is no longer with us. There is a sadness in our letting go. And however strong our faith, however much we know that death is a release for our loved ones, there is still a very proper sadness on an occasion such as this as we say farewell to someone who has been so much of our lives, with whom we have shared so many memories, so much love and in this regard we think particularly of her family and close friends on this day. Those of us outside the immediate family circle have come today to assure you of our love and prayers not just for today but for the weeks and months to come as you come to terms to life without Joan.

Our hope for Joan this day is peace in the closer presence of the God she worshipped in this place and in her life. Inspired by her example and her faith let us this day dedicate ourselves afresh to the worship and service of Almighty God looking forward to that day when we shall be reunited with 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.