

Nearly six years ago, we gathered here for the funeral of Mr Peter Smeed. Today we gather for the funeral of his wife Mary, who died last Saturday at the great age of 98 in the Care Choice Nursing Home where she had been cared for over the last four years. Ten years ago Peter and Mary had moved from their home in England and set up home in Corr Castle to be close to their son Paul on the Howth Peninsula.

Like her husband, Mary had a love of life – as Paul recalled the other day, ‘She was an Essex Girl!’ An accomplished swimmer, she had swum for her county and was a qualified Life Guard, winning an award on one occasion for saving the life of a young child who had got into difficulty in a canal lock.

A day such as this, at the end of a long life, graciously lived, is a day for giving thanks; giving thanks for the ways in which this lady touched and enriched your lives, to thank God for all that was good and true in her life. So today we recall Mary Smeed, as mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, as friend.

But our thankfulness is also touched with sadness. However long someone lives, however much we realise that enough is enough, that the time has come to let our loved ones go, there is still a sense of shock, a gap in our lives that no-one else can fill in quite the same way. So today, those of us outside the immediate family circle, come to offer our love and support to her son Paul and his family.

However thankful we may be, however strong our faith may be, it is hard, particularly in a time of loss to find meaning. We can say all the right words, but we can still struggle. Where do we find hope, where do we find meaning? I often think we begin that search with each other, we begin with love in which we support each other in our loss. St Paul, talking of love, writes to the Church in Corinth:

⁴ Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ⁸
Love never ends.

1 Cor 13.4-8

So today, Paul, along with your wife Aileen, children David, Linda and Claire we, your friends and those who love you, come to offer you our love, to assure you of our prayers in the days and weeks to come.

On the wall just beside the door of St Mary's Church in Howth you will see a climbing rose. Even in the midst of winter, there always seems to be signs of life on that bush, a few leaves and buds and even the odd flower. The darkness and cold of the winter can never suppress the life of that rose. Then as spring comes the life within it will burst forth. We stand between Christmas and Easter. But before Easter comes Good Friday and Calvary – a seemingly pointless, savage death of goodness – but love, life triumphs over darkness, over death. It is in that cycle of death and resurrection that I begin my own

search for meaning, for hope. Therein lies our hope for Mary, for all those who have gone before us in the faith as we look to a Lord who knows, really knows in his own person what it was to grieve the death of his friend Lazarus, to know loneliness, suffering, death itself and triumph

So this day we not only bring our sadness at our loss before God, we also bring our memories and thanks giving for the life of Mary Smeed and all that she has meant to family and friends down through the years, her love, her friendship, her loyalty. We come to pray for her family and all those she loved; for her son Paul and his family and for all who loved her and to commend Mary Smeed to the love of our heavenly Father.