

Back in 1964, David and Muriel Robinson came to settle among us. David had come down to direct the newly established Horticultural Institute in Kinsealy. It was part of the era of Lemass and Whitaker as Ireland began to look beyond its own borders to develop its industry and horticultural sector. They had come down from Belfast and they settled in Earlscliffe in Howth. Earlscliffe had a history and tradition of its own, being the home at one stage of Provost Mehaffy of Trinity. Muriel and David Robinson began to make their own mark on it. David with his horticultural skills developed a wonderful garden which drew visitors from near and far. Muriel developed a home – first and foremost for her family - but also a place of great hospitality.

Muriel was born in Belfast moving later to Glengormley. Her father was an engineer and her mother worked as a GP. She would speak very warmly of her family life. She would also speak very warmly of the move to Howth, the reaction of some of their friends in the North to the move to this strange part of the world. There was evidently a great satisfaction in seeing the house and garden develop.

Whereas her own mother had got great satisfaction in her work as a GP, Muriel got hers from watching her family grow up, in sharing David's love of the garden, providing hospitality to the many and varied groups that would come to visit. As the family have been sharing some of their memories of Muriel, one thing that kept coming to the surface was her love of people. One phrase that really struck me was her 'confidence in human goodness.'. When asylum seekers were settled in Sutton Castle, she would gladly give lifts to perfect strangers, alone in a foreign land. Karen spoke of her visiting a traveller encampment and explaining a letter that a lady had received from the health authorities – it was just a natural thing to do.

Originally members of the Presbyterian Church, they had come to settle in St Mary's. Here Muriel became very much part of this congregation, always ready to give a helping hand, ready to help in the kitchen providing coffee for after our Sunday Service. Then in the wider community, helping with meals on wheels, even after others would have given up.

Then as her health began to deteriorate, and carers came into the house, she would be very attentive to the needs of the carers. When the time came when she needed full time residential care, she moved into Highfield, she retained her wonderful warm personality, always very appreciative of all that was done for her.

I suppose what is coming through here is a basic contentment. This is a theme that runs through both of the lessons that the family have chosen for our service today, that lovely passage from Ecclesiastes that speaks to me of a rhythm that runs through life and that lovely passage from the Sermon on the Mount in which Jesus enjoins us not to worry, not to be anxious. In that Muriel found a peace that eludes so many of us. That is a lesson that so many of us who live in this much faster, hi tech world of constant availability, 24 hours news and information have lost – that simple peace that passes understanding that I think Muriel showed us in her life.

A funeral, particularly of a loved one, is a time of taking stock. 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. Those of Muriel'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 Muriel.

Our hope for Muriel 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.