

Some time ago Bardis contacted me to talk about future funeral arrangements for her uncle Leonard and her mother, Rita Murray. Not so very long ago we gather here for the funeral of Leonard Harvey, today we gather for Rita's. Brother and sister had early associations with this area when their parents came to live on the Claremont Road. On marriage, Rita continued to live on the Claremont Road, looking after her parents. When her husband and herself retired from business they moved into Sutton Park where she continued to live until moving into sheltered accommodation in Glenageary and then into the Nursing Home near Swords.

She is remembered by her family for her love, for her hard work, her love of animals both large and small, continuing riding well into her 60's, her alertness of mind, taking up bridge in later life. Her daughter Gail will be sharing the family memories towards the end of this service.

Her latter years have been marked by decline which must have been hard for Rita herself and for the family to watch as they have loved and watched over her in her latter years. Now the time has come to let go, to release her, to commend her to the loving care of her heavenly Father. However much we may anticipate the death of a loved one, however much we see their death in terms of release, there is still that sense of loss at the death of one who has had a very special place in our hearts.

Today we gather here in St Mary's, in which Leonard's funeral took place only last January, in which there is a memorial plaque to her brother Billy, who died at Dunkirk in the Second World War. We gather to remember, to give thanks

for God for all that we have received in and through Rita as mother, grandmother, great grandmother and friend, to set our memories, our sense of loss and thankfulness in the context of our faith. We are approaching the great festival of Easter, the triumph of life over death. In this I am reminded that 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.

Outside in the grounds of the Church you can see the signs of spring, of plants coming back into life, of new life shooting up from the earth, from the stems and branches of bare bushes and trees. Something of this I think came to the mind of Paul as he wrote words of reassurance to the Christians in Corinth:

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" <sup>36</sup> Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

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

We read as our Lesson another passage from St Paul's letters to the Church at Corinth, in which Paul reflects further on the mystery of life and death. He

speaks very plainly of our mortality, he talks very plainly of the body wearing out. But just as he talks of the reality of physical decline and death, Paul talks of our new heavenly home. The words that really stand out for me are; "So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." This is our hope for Rita Murray, that all the limitations of these latter years, the frailty, along with all the limitations that go with being human are "swallowed up by life", that is our inheritance in Christ.

I will close with a prayer that brings home to me the hope that we have in Christ for ourselves and for 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.