

Christmas is normally a time of coming together, of meeting up, of exchange of gifts. But for the O'Dowd family this Christmas has been a time of loss, of separation as Roderick died quite suddenly just before Christmas.

Today, as we gather for Roderick's funeral, we remember the one we have lost. I'm sure over the last few days the family have shared many memories with a mixture of tears and laughter. In a few moments Colin will share with us the family's reflections and memories of Roderick as husband, as father and grandfather and what made Roderick the man he was. You will all have come here this morning with your own personal memories of Roderick and I invite you to hold these memories before God and give thanks to God for all that was good and true in his life.

Those of us outside the immediate family circle gather here to support you in your loss and to assure you of their continued love and support in the days that lie ahead.

Roderick's death, coming as it did in the Christmas season, carries its own particular poignancy. One of the lessons regularly read at Christmas comes from the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, in which he writes of the coming of Christ into the world

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.

Jane has just read as our lesson for today that lovely passage from Paul's 1<sup>st</sup> Letter to the Corinthians in which Paul gives us a lovely word picture of love:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

It is a picture of a love that never gives up, that keeps on loving.

As we prepare to say our final farewells, I would just ask you to hold these two images together:

of a light that no darkness can extinguish

of a love that never gives up.

As I said, this is a time of loss and separation. Someone we have loved and who has loved us is no longer with us. Roderick and the family had a clear bond of love between them. A love that has taken you through good times and bad times; through times of joy at the birth of children, grandchildren, marriages and celebrations. Like all families you will have had your times of sadness and disappointment. It is our hope and prayer that that same love will sustain you through your time of bereavement.

At a time such as this I always think of God's love towards us. God's love is a love that will never give up on us. Even when God seems distant, he is close; as we confess each Christmas he is a light that can never be extinguished.

As we commend Roderick to God this day, may you all know God's peace in the days to come as with tears and laughter you give thanks for all that was good and true in the life of Roderick O'Dowd.

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.