

I recall in my early times here in Howth calling on the house of Tom and Anne Stanley in Offington Park. I was coming looking for some advice. We went out and sat in the garden and Tom listened to what I had to say and in that gentle manner we will all associate with Tom Stanley he gave me very sound advice. We come here today for the funeral of this gentle man, Tom Stanley, husband to Anne, father to Roger, Robert, Christopher and David, brother to Ina and Helen, grandfather and friend to many. The family have already shared their memories and reflections on Tom, his life, his values, the value he placed on relationships.

I of course have come to know him best in the context of this place. He was for many years a member of Select Vestry, including a spell serving as Church Warden. You knew when Tom had something to say it was well thought out and well worth listening to. He was active in the Christian Stewardship Renewal Programmes in the past and served until very recently as Envelope Recorder. This was one of those behind the scenes jobs that does not draw much attention but one that is vital to the smooth running of the Parish Finances, a job that Tom completed with his customary efficiency and modesty.

He and Anne were regular in their attendance at worship in this place. This was a real priority for Tom. Even as the health began to fail, there was rarely a Sunday until very recently when Tom was not here to offer worship to the God he served so faithfully in everyday life. Tom was one who valued the idea of the Church as a family in which all, young and old, were welcome, in which all had a part to play. He

was very supportive of the Family Service, all that was done in the Sunday School. He and Anne were also regular participants in the Mid Week Wednesday Service and coffee afterwards. The profound discussions on matters of Church and State at the men's table would often be lightened by Tom's wry and gently humour.

Tom was one who would make himself available when simple ordinary things needed to be done, simple acts of kindness, simple acts of generosity from which so many of us have benefited and which Tom would have done as a matter of course. I remember when Rachel and I were moving into St Fintans Park, Tom was there helping to move things in

Towards the end of the First Letter to Timothy the Apostle gives his advice to the younger man:

But as for you, man of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. *1 Tim 6:11 ff*

'pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.' This seems to me to draw together so many of the memories of Tom Stanley that I came to know, that I know so many of you remember today with love and affection. Tom has fought the good fight and now is at peace.

Tom has fought a long battle with Parkinsons. He brought to that battle some of the same tenacity he brought to his rugby and his golf. He gave it his best shot and no quarter was given. But there was no rancor, no bitterness. Even in the latter stages, when he lost the independence that he had fought so long and hard to maintain, he lost nothing of his gentleness and good humour. Staff at the Bons Secours and St Francis Hospice spoke to me of how easy he was to nurse and I know Tom was very grateful for their care.

And of course alongside Tom at every stage along the road was his beloved Anne. Together they reared their four sons, Roger, Robert, Christopher and David. They have watched them grow up and taken pride in their achievements and those of their families. They have shared with them in their times of joy and in their times of sorrow. Today, those of us outside the family circle, come to offer you our love and our sympathy in your loss in the days and weeks to come. Today we pray that the sorrow you feel at this time might be softened by the very precious memories you have of Tom as husband, as father, grandfather, brother and friend and the hope that we share with Tom of a joyful reunion in the heavenly places.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. We are approaching Christmas, the feast of the Incarnation, Emmanuel, God among us in the person of Jesus Christ. Soon we will hear those lovely words from St John's Gospel:-

⁴What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Darkness has not had the last word in the life of Tom Stanley. Sickness, weakness has not had the final say. A light has gone out in our lives. But the light shines on, the light of Christ, risen, ascended, glorified. Our hope and prayer this day is life and peace for Tom in the closer presence of the God he served and worshipped, free from pain, from weakness.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world.