In November We Remember – Life will never be the same again

I write this on the weekend when the people of Kerry mourn the tragic loss of four young lives. One of my memories from the past few days is how much priests in their own parishes/communities were called upon not only to lead funeral liturgies but to be available for interviews. This happened in Donegal as well. I was proud of my clerical colleagues and what they were sharing with their people in the face of great loss.

The new Bishop of Killaloe stated recently ‘this is the road that we are asked to travel into the future. A pilgrim road, a road that offers us opportunities and challenges in preaching the message of love and hope brought by Jesus Christ’. That’s how we see our annual November Bereavement Mass in this Parish – a message of love, hope and memory.

All of us face the mystery of death. Occasionally I wonder what will my own death be like. What happens to us after death? How can I as a Priest at funeral Masses assure the bereaved that there is life after death? Every November we gather together relatives and friends of all those who in the past year have lost a loved one. We remember all those who have ‘gone before us marked with the sign of faith’.

November is a special time. For many families it is a month of Christian belief that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ give us hope. At this time we are in the heart of winter with short days and long evenings. We are reminded that eternal life is not just simply a continuation of this life. Yet the question remains – what is it? What is eternal life? What are we saying to people at our funeral masses and in our November celebrations?

Fr PJ Byrne
Parish Priest, Kilcock and Newtown Parish

A Personal Experience
Liz Byrne, Parent and Parish Worker

Aidan and I lost our only two girls; Mary Ellen aged 8 and Kerrie aged 5, along with my sister Barbara aged 20 years in September 1987.

When you lose someone you love it’s unreal! It was a life changing experience for us and all members of our family. Things have never been the same since. There is always somebody missing in your life.

No matter at what stage you lose a loved one, it is a shock. Everything goes over your head at first. You rely on love, support and help you receive from your priests, family, parish family, friends and undertaker to carry you through those first few days. They help you prepare the funeral. This is very important - that the funeral liturgy is a fitting tribute to your loved one and that you have the memory of it being so.

Then as time goes on it becomes very real – they are not present anymore – reality dawns. All the emotions you go through – confusion, anger, joy, courage, denial (in no order) and you go through them so many times in the weeks, months and years ahead; the Month’s Mind, Birthdays, Anniversaries. And when you lose a baby or a child – your life’s dreams are gone.

Those who are left behind, discover a vast ocean. Sometimes the ocean seems calm and still and then the next minute, for no apparent reason, a wave comes crashing over us. At other times the loss is so intense it is like being at sea – out of sight of land and simply tossed around. Then there are moments of quiet and serene beauty as a new truth dawns, and sometimes the grief is so overwhelming that it’s like drowning and there is no one to hear our cries and we say ‘My God, My God, why have you forsaken me’, but God hasn’t and we get the courage to try and carry on.

In our Parish of Kilcock and Newtown we are always there to help those who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Nothing is a problem when it comes to helping families who are bereaved at the time of the funeral and afterwards.

In June we have our Cemetery Masses where we remember with love and affection those who have died in the year. Those families who have lost a loved one take part in the Cemetery Masses (by doing readings and prayers). We are also there to help and comfort through loss. We have our Blessing of Graves at all our cemeteries).

It would be folly to imagine that once the funeral is over life can get back to normal again. It is not as simple as that. The feelings continue to come, often outside our control. New patterns of living to be discovered, decisions to be made, a new kind of life to be lived. We may also become aware in a sharp and painful way of our own mortality.

We in Kilcock and Newtown Parish are there to help and reassure that you are not on your own on your journey and though there may be much pain and loss we can help and accompany you and help you every step of the way.

Remembering
We all love to be remembered, But if we want to be remembered, We have a duty to remember.

Memory is a powerful thing, Wrongly used it brings death, Rightly used it brings life, And is a form of immortality. It keeps the past alive Those we remember never die They continue to walk and talk with us.

We want you to know That we haven’t forgotten you. We remember you, and your memory most definitely brings life to us today.
Practical Points for Organising Bereavement Masses

- Small core group (3) meet in September and arrange a date for the Mass usually the first Saturday in November at the Parish evening Mass.
- Compile a list of all who have died in the Parish in the previous twelve months including those who were buried in Parish Cemeteries but not necessarily from the Parish. From this list a sub-committee of seven relatives of the recently deceased is formed and a meeting is arranged around all involved in liturgy.
- A letter is sent to all the families, inviting them to the Mass. They are asked to nominate a family member to represent them in the liturgy by lighting a candle when their relative’s name is called.
- At a meeting of the sub-committee people are chosen for the following ministries: decorating the Church and creating a special atmosphere with leaves, lights and reflections; distribution of booklets (4 people); words of welcome (1); liturgy of the word (2); calling of names (3); distribution of candles (4); prayer of the faithful (6); offertory procession (6); communion reflection (1).
- A special Mass booklet is prepared for the celebration. This includes an outline of the liturgy, list of names and remembrance reflections.
- A team of volunteers are available on the night to organise the distribution of the booklets and the lighting of the candles.
- Highlight of the Ceremony is the act of ‘Remembering’. Candles are provided by the Parish (small blue or white night lights). In turn, family representative of each of our recently deceased comes forward to receive, light and place a candle in our sacred space. This takes the form of a wooden cross set in ‘soft sand’ and placed safely and securely in front of the altar. When Mass is over and the lights have been dimmed all other people who wish to light a candle are invited to do so. This is a prayerful and impressive sight.