

Eulogy for Gerry Dwyer - 12 Aug 2022

Our brother, Gerry knew from a young age that he wanted to be a Catholic priest. He left home at thirteen and studied with the Christian Brothers. When the Brothers realized that he was not going to join them, they asked him to leave. He came back to Sneem to finish his studies and settled into life with the family. I was only four when he left so, when he returned home to live with us, it was nice for me to have an opportunity to get to know him better. He was serious, studious, determined, and extremely intelligent.

Every summer, he worked at Parknasilla Hotel as a waiter. There he learned the hotel business inside and out, he enjoyed the work, and made life-long friends, some of whom are here today. Gerry witnessed many happy marriages that came from relationships originating in Parknasilla. When I was old enough to date, he gave me advice to work in a hotel, observe how people worked under pressure, and marry a man who could handle it. I listened, followed that advice, and am happy to say that it has worked so far for almost 44 years.

Gerry continued his search for a religious order that would take in a young man who did not come from a wealthy family and that would allow him to pursue his vocation. The Pallottine Fathers in Thurles, Co. Tipperary answered his call and he was ordained a priest on 7 June 1975. He said his first Mass in this church. Shortly thereafter, he was sent to Rome to continue his studies at the Gregorian University towards a masters in Economics and a doctorate in Divinity. He found his home in the Irish Pallottine House in Rome, the beautiful Basilica de San Silvestro in Capite. His life in San Silvestro with the other Irish priests was complete. He had meaningful work, hope for the future, and good friends in an atmosphere of inclusivity and comradery. Life as a priest means serving on a team and serving in different roles depending on the circumstances or the need. When one is called to serve in a different capacity or to change roles, one does so willingly. Gerry was called to serve in the Vatican in the Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops where he was able to utilize his mastery of several languages. His next call was to serve as Bursar General for the Pallottine Fathers. There he employed his expertise in financial management to help further the fiscal health of the order. The lessons Gerry learned long ago in Parknasilla Hotel were put to good use when he spearheaded the reclamation and conversion of an old building in the center of Rome into a top-class

hotel owned and operated by the Pallottine Fathers. If you are ever in Rome, we can highly recommend a stay at Hotel Ponte Sisto.

Anybody who knows Gerry well knows that his language could sometimes be considered a bit “salty”. My other brothers, Patrick, Michael and David are avid golfers and tried to get Gerry to take an interest in the game. Gerry was struggling to make sense of why any sane person would engage in an endless pursuit of a small ball on a large field. On one occasion, while attempting to play with David and Michael, he turned to them, golf ball in hand and said: “you two can take this ball and hit it as far as you can. Then you have to go looking for it. When you find it, you hit it again as hard as you can. Why don’t you just take it into a corner and flake the living you-know-what out of it!” Obviously golf was not his passion!

Gaelic games, however, was another matter entirely. Gerry’s life-long passion for football and his undying support for the Kerry team made him an excellent analyst. He understood the game well and talked in great detail about each play to my other brothers in our family WhatsApp group. The football commentators on Radio Kerry once referred to him as Kerry’s greatest fan in Italy. I think that was a fair representation. Sadly, he was not well enough to see

Kerry win the All Ireland Championship recently and return the Sam Maguire Cup to its rightful home.

Gerry would return to Sneem almost every year for a month. Some of his visits were very difficult. One was when he returned to say Mass at our father's funeral. His sermon gave solace and was kind but it was also hard-hitting and cut close to the bone when he addressed the impact of alcohol on the male population of rural Ireland. Another difficult moment for him was when he said Mass at our mother's funeral. For many priests, the relationship with his mother is the most cherished, the most sacred, the most loved. Gerry was no exception. Because of this special relationship, priests try to support each other during the loss of a mother and as many as possible show up to the funeral. Mass here in St. Michael's was concelebrated by thirteen priests and a bishop. Gerry did well delivering the homily that spoke honestly and glowingly of our mother. His normally unemotional self almost lost it twice during the service. But he maintained his composure, burying his grief deep inside. Our prayers are that he is reunited with our mother, Shelagh, our father, Dan, our brother, John, our dear sister, Ann Marie who went to her eternal rest just over a year ago, and our sister-in-law, Mary.

Visiting Sneem brought Gerry great joy. His nightly visits to Sneem's restaurants for dinner and a pint gave him an opportunity to chat with neighbors and friends. He was interested in Sneem, its economic and social development, and he cared deeply for its people. He was blessed to have wonderful neighbors at the West End. One family were kind enough to share their dog with him. Blake, the dog, loved Gerry but loved his new leather shoes even more! Blake gnawed on the shoe and had a good feed. Rather than being annoyed, Gerry recounted the story with joy. He adored dogs and was fortunate to be close to three dogs in Rome. When we visited Gerry in Rome last month, we were so happy to see his eyes light up when one of his favorite dogs jumped in his lap.

Gerry was brutally honest, a trait that sometimes can be misconstrued as uncaring. But he was far from uncaring. I remember visiting San Silvestro in 1981 and wondering where Gerry disappeared to every day after lunch. He dismissed my curiosity and ignored my questions. I found out from somebody else. Apparently, there was an elderly woman who was unable to leave her house, was ill, and had no money. Gerry would pack a lunch every day and bring it to her. He was keeping her alive. Years later, I asked him why he did not tell me what he was doing. He pointed me to the Bible, Matthew 6:3: "But when you give to the poor, do not let your left

hand know what your right hand is doing.” In subsequent visits to Rome, I learned from many others how kind he had been, how he had helped them, always quietly without fanfare.

It was fitting that he started and ended the Italian part of his life in San Silvestro. There, in the enveloping and caring atmosphere with two other Irish priests, Fr. Rory Hanly and Fr. John Fitzpatrick, he lived out his days, hampered by his disease but supported by these fine men and others. We are eternally grateful to Rory and John, to the Pallottine Fathers in Thurles and in Rome, to the people from Sneem and elsewhere who were true friends to Gerry throughout the years, to the staff of Hospice San Luca in Rome who cared for him in his final days, to Fr. Liam O’Brien, the choir and the sacristan for Mass today, and to all the people who have visited us at home, came to the church last night, attended Mass, made a contribution to the Pallottine Fathers in Gerry’s memory, or have sent messages of condolences to my brothers and me through cards, letters, the RIP.ie website, WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Viber, and other social media platforms. We are truly moved by your kindness. Never underestimate the power of your words to provide comfort in times of sadness. We hope you will join us after the funeral in Sneem Hotel.

Gerry was a closed book to many. He was very like my father in that he bottled up his emotions and shared them with few and then only in snippets, diluted, and infrequent. He did not suffer fools, conmen, charlatans, or those with rapacious ambition, all of whom he encountered in his life journey. He was so much more than what his exterior self displayed. He was a devoted son, a loving brother, an engaging uncle, a kind and true friend, a caring and compassionate priest, a brilliant mind, a person who chose to do the right thing even in the face of negative consequences for himself, courageous to a fault, a warrior for the poor and downtrodden, a child of God. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.