

The Funeral of Fionntan McGarvey

24th January 2022

What can we say to one another today? What words might bring a glimmer of light into the darkness of this family's grief, and be of some consolation to Fionntan's heartbroken parents, Lorcan and Aveen, and his brothers, Caolin and Daire, and his sister, Sorcha, or comfort his grandparents, Harry and Joan, and Mona? Are there any words that could possibly make sense of Fionntan's tragic death for his cousins and friends, his clubmates and team-mates? Perhaps, simply being here, and sharing in the helplessness and pain, says all that can be said, or needs to be said.

Even so, you look to me, as a priest of the community, to give some context to the tragedy that has befallen Fionntan, and to find words, however inadequate, that stir in us faith and courage. I can only share with you what is in my heart.

For some days now, the news media have reported on the tsunami that struck the island of Tonga, and the devastation left in its wake. At the same time, we became aware of the seriousness of Fionntan's condition. During those days, hoping against hope, but with a growing sense of foreboding, we have waited for the storm to crash over us. And now it has – leaving us, in its wake, stunned and devastated. With you, I too raise my voice and ask, “Lord, what happened to our desperate prayers for Fionntan? Surely we were not asking too much on behalf of this wonderful young man? Where are you in these the darkest of days?”

I know what our faith in Jesus Christ teaches: “God is good; life is not lost in death; we are destined for eternal joy.” However, speaking about these rich and beautiful truths of our christian faith, can, in the rawness of this moment, sound hollow. This is where the challenge of faith becomes very real; believing, and wanting to believe, what the Lord

Jesus teaches us, yet overwhelmed with anguish, and bearing the burden of that unanswerable question: “Why?”

Yet, even as I dare to challenge the Lord with my question, “Where are you in these the darkest of days?”, my eyes lift to the Crucifix, and I hear yet again the anguished cry of Jesus from that Cross, *"My God, my God, why have you deserted me?"* (Mt.27:47). And I am reminded that the cry of Jesus from the Cross, while one of deep distress, was not one of despair. He says to us in this moment, *"Trust in God still, and trust in me."* (Jn.14:1)

In the pain of this moment, in the shadow of Fionntan's death, we can only raise our eyes to the Crucifix. Christian faith does not give us, in this life, the answers to all our questions, but it does give us the conviction that we do have a future; life does not end in nothingness. God does not abandon us - Jesus is God's assurance that death does not have the last word.

There are those who say that when a person dies a star falls from the sky. A falling star is a wonderful sight – for a moment it holds our attention and then it is gone. Such was Fionntan – for too short awhile he lit our sky with his big smile, his love and his friendship, with his talent and sportsmanship. Today, we feel bereft now that the star has fallen, yet is it not true to say that we have been enriched by knowing him, as a son, as a brother, as a friend, as a teammate?

To all our young people here I offer these few words: friendship is a wonderful facet of love. Fionntan was your friend; that friendship, in your youthful enthusiasm for life, you took for granted, and rightly so. But, as a poet once observed, “love knows not its own depth until the hour of separation”. A loving friendship is the most wonderful thing in the world – that, more than anything else, makes us truly human, that alone Jesus placed at the heart of our faith, everything else is secondary.

But he also taught us that there are times when we pay a heavy price for love. That is the meaning of the cross, and this is one of those times. Yet, even in the sadness of this day, if we find the renewed sense, that in the end, love and friendship are our most valued possessions, then Fionntan has left us an amazing gift. He blessed us with his friendship; with gratitude, we will forever hold his memory dear.

“Lord,

*Fionntan has slipped now from our hands, may your gentle hands hold him, and embrace him, for all eternity. Grant him the happiness of heaven’s company. And to Lorcan and Aveen, to Caolan, Daire, and Sorcha, and all in the family circle, grant peace of mind, and fill the hearts of Fionntan’s friends, and all of us, with gratitude for life and love. “***Amen.**