



Lt Gen Dermot Earley DSM

R.I.P.

Homily of Mgr Eoin Thynne HCF at Requiem Mass

St Conleth's Church, Newbridge

26 June 2010

The illness and death of Dermot Earley has hit all of us with an appalling suddenness. It is so difficult to take in the reality of Dermot's death. We feel shock and sadness, confusion and disbelief. And while we seek consolation and understanding from the scripture readings, read for us by Brig Gen O'Boyle and Mr Brendan Ryan, our hearts and spirits are still overwhelmed by his passing. But this morning in the celebration of the Eucharist, in this Requiem Mass we thank God for sending Dermot Earley among us, and pray for his family, friends, colleagues and all who mourn his passing.

We have read and heard the tributes. We have cried tears of sorrow for the loss of a great leader, an outstanding sportsman and a true gentleman. Since Wednesday and the death of Dermot, the Earley family has been trying to come to terms with the loss of a loving father, a devoted husband, an outstanding brother an exceptional son and the best uncle in the world. This is a heavy cross to carry but we and thousands more are with you in your sadness. Our belief is that God does not send us crosses which will shatter our world and destroy our dreams without the strength to carry them.

Thomas the apostle, who struggled with the death of his friend Jesus came to accept, but could not fully understand that Jesus overcame death. This is our hope. This is what we are celebrating today.

In the Gospel we have just heard, Matthew tells us of the cure of the centurion's servant. The centurion, a Roman officer, a stranger in a foreign land – Galilee, is concerned about the welfare of his people. (Similar to our own Defence Forces personnel when they were deployed overseas, showing care and concern and providing a safe and secure environment). The centurion tells Jesus:

"I am under authority myself and have soldiers under me. I say to one man "Go and he goes, to another, Come and he comes; to another, Do this and he does it."

That straightness, that honesty of the centurion were also the hallmarks of Dermot Earley. He was fair, firm and friendly. Dermot Earley was a good man, in fact he was a great man, but to the people of Roscommon he was a MIGHTY MAN. Mighty to his family, his friends, the Defence Forces, the Gaelic Athletic Association, mighty to everyone.

Dermot had a philosophy or a Plan for Life. You will find it on the wee Prayer Card.

His first principle was: **Enjoy time with your family.**

It might seem so obvious but unfortunately it is taken for granted. The greatest influence in Dermot's life came from his home, from his parents, his father Peadar (RIP) and his mother Kitty. Peadar the school teacher in Gortaghanny was a major figure. The old traditional style máistir that people looked up to, came to for a passport, a dog licence or a gun licence. It was from Peadar and Kitty that Dermot developed a love of country, a sense of community, a sense of place. It was in the home he was taught the importance of honesty, loyalty and a value system he lived by. And the book that Peadar and Kitty used was the greatest manual of all – the shining example of their own Christian lives.

The amount of time Peadar and Kitty Earley invested in their family is obvious in Dermot, Peter, Paul, Denise and Margaret. They were always encouraging, supporting, inspiring. God knows how many football matches they attended over the years, always there for Dermot in victory and defeat waiting for him outside the dressing room or supporting him on the sideline.

In 1997 when briefing his staff before departing with the 81st Inf Bn to Lebanon he spoke of the three most important words in Ireland at the time. "Location, location, location". It was the time of the property boom. His only orders to the Battalion Staff were to consider the three other most important words "Example, Example, Example". A lot has changed in Ireland since 1997 but the currency of example is even more valuable today. Dermot Earley led by example. He gave of his best. We can see now from where his philosophy, his plan for life developed. A guide for all of us that will never become outdated.

Give the best to your work

It is no surprise Dermot rose to the highest rank in the Defence Forces. As I said he led by example. A man of the utmost integrity representing everything positive and enriching, sincere and genuine in humankind. He was a real person with an infectious form of leadership. You always felt good when in his company. Of course it started with his handshake. And that came from the heart. His strong handshake was an opportunity for everyone to connect with this 'mighty man'. He wore his heart on his sleeve. And I have no doubt the motto on the Roscommon jersey summed up his attitude to work, sport and life: "*Constans Hiberniæ Cor*" – "Steadfast Irish heart".

The Defence Forces was so much part of Dermot's life. It is great tribute to the Organisation and the Government that Dermot rose to the top. His qualities were recognised. He put a face on the Defence Forces that people could relate to. He was one of the most recognised leaders since the foundation of the State.

He often said and I quote

"the greatest reward you will ever get is the satisfaction of doing your work well and doing it to the best of your ability".

How often have we heard him say? **Give back to your community**

In his early days, Gortaghanny was the centre of his universe. From his first days in school in Cluain Bonnamh to the club Michael Glavey's his father founded and Peter and Paul played for, he was always proud of his roots. It was his parish, his home. It was where he belonged.

When he moved to Kildare he immersed himself in the local community and Sarsfield's became his second home. He gave generously in helping the young and reminiscing with older people of simpler times. He encouraged us all to do the ordinary things in an extraordinary way.

People who never met him felt they knew him. Those who met him knew they had met a friend. He had the ability to turn strangers into friends. He knew there was something of God in each one of us. No one was excluded; no one was an outsider in his company. He believed in the art of the possible.

There was a time in the West of Ireland, in many homes over the mantelpiece hung a photograph of John F Kennedy and the Pope. In Roscommon households there hangs the photograph of Dermot Earley and on either side of him are John F Kennedy and the Pope. The man is a legend, loved and revered nationwide but particularly by the people of Roscommon and Kildare. Babies have been named after him. Young men and women have joined the Defence Forces because of his inspirational influence.

Leisure Time was important to Dermot Earley. **Spend it well** he always said.

It is difficult to quantify his contribution to the GAA it is so vast. But for the Gaelic Athletic Association he would not be the man he is. He was exemplary on the field of play. His high-fielding skills, his free-taking, his leadership are well documented by the great sports writers of our time.

Roscommon people always felt better about themselves when Dermot Earley was wearing the county colours. He had the utmost respect for Galway, Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim, and loved to reserve his best performances against Mayo. Is it any wonder they carried him shoulder high off the pitch after the Connaught Final in Dr. Hyde Park when he retired in 1985?

Even as a juvenile he spent his leisure time well, playing football. In 1962 in Lisalway, Co. Roscommon, playing for Michael Glavey's in a local derby he was outstanding. He was taller, stronger, more stylish than the others. The opposition, Castlerea St. Kevin's were in trouble. At half time the only tactic that could turn this game around was hammered into the young lads in the dressing room. (I risk committing blasphemy and I know you will forgive me as I quote the mentor during the half time talk) *"In the name of Jesus will ye keep the ball away from the BIG fella"*. Even as a youngster Dermot's brilliance was noted and commented on.

He was only too aware that constant practice was necessary in order to achieve greatness. He was rarely seen without a football. Even when serving on overseas missions he brought a football with

him. In Lebanon or the Golan Heights he would practice regularly by kicking a ball into the air and fielding it. There were Arabs and Christians who didn't know in the name of God what to make of him. They thought he was a goalkeeper – an English goalkeeper!

It is well known and documented that he won practically every honour the game had to offer. I don't think it would have made any difference to him if he had won that All Ireland medal. He never spoke about his achievements. Football for Dermot Earley was not about personal glory or trophies or awards. It wasn't even about winning or losing. It was more than that. It was about the bonds of friendship that were created, it was about the detailed preparation, the physical fitness, the training, it was about the extended family of the GAA and the support offered to one another. It was about the great Gerry O'Malley calling to Newbridge to visit him in his illness where the memories of yesteryear like the primrose survive and continue to flower.

It was about fielding the high ball or the curved ball or learning to deal with in the modern game the 'dirty ball'. Sport and leisure for Dermot Early were character-forming.

Apart from Gaelic football he also excelled in rugby and played many a soccer match. When the testimonial game for Shay Brennan was held in Dublin, Dermot played for the Defence Forces in an exhibition game against Man United. The person he marked that day was none other than the late great Georgie Best. Such was the impact and robust style of play of Dermot Earley it was to be the last game of soccer that Georgie Best ever played in Ireland!

Despite all the football and sport, central to Dermot's life was his **Religion**. He believed in a God who loved him. A God who as Fr. Joe said last night "took him by the hand" when the final whistle blew last Wednesday and "lead him safely home".

He saw his faith and religion not as a collection of prohibitions emphasising the good news but as a way of life found in the words of Patrick Kavanagh in the '*bits and pieces of everyday*'. The Mass was very important to him.

In 2008, Dermot and President McAleese lead the Defence Forces Military Pilgrimage to Lourdes. They prayed at the Grotto with soldiers from all over the world. Dermot carried the cross and lit candles for his family. Little did he or any of us then know that his deep faith would be tested so much and shine through so clearly in 2010.

We are all privileged to have known Dermot Earley, some are fortunate to have served with him; his family is blessed to be part of him. We think of you, his wonderful family, in a very special way this morning as you mourn the loss of a hero. It is once in a lifetime you meet a person like Dermot Earley.

So today we might do well to consider HIS plan for life.

1. Enjoy time with my family
2. Give the best to my work
3. Give back to my community
4. Spend my leisure time well
5. Make time for God in my life

If we live according to Dermot's rule we won't go far wrong.

And may we always remember the words he spoke so many times to so many groups but especially to young soldiers and cadets:

- Your attitude is more important than your ability
- Your motives are more important than your methods
- Your courage is more important than your cleverness
- Have your heart in the right place.

As a true military professional he was always ready and prepared for any eventuality, for any cause, for any call. On Wednesday last the game went into extra time. The final whistle blew. His tour of duty was over. His service in this life is now completed.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dhílis.

Dermot Earley, may you Rest in Peace. Amen.

Mgr. Eoin Thynne HCF

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