



Joseph Mary Plunkett and Grace Gifford



Grace Gifford at Kilmainham Jail Dublin, 2 May 1916. (Image© RTE Photographic Archive) and left Joseph Mary Plunkett (image: the Irishwar.ie)

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JOSEPH MARY PLUNKETT and Grace Gifford

Joseph Mary Plunkett was an Irish Republican poet and journalist. He was born at 26 Upper Fitzwilliam Street in Dublin on the 21st November 1887, the son of George Noble Plunkett and Josephine Cranny.

Both parents came from wealthy backgrounds. As a child he contracted TB and spent part of his youth in the warmer climates of the Mediterranean and North Africa. He was educated at a Catholic University School and by the Jesuits at Belvedere College in Dublin. Later he attended Stoneyhurst College in Lancashire England where he received some military training.

Joseph took an interest in the Irish Heritage and Irish Language; he also studied Esperanto and was one of the Irish Esperanto founders in 1907.

He joined the Gaelic League and began to study with Thomas McDonagh. They were both poets with an interest in theatre and were both early members of the Irish Volunteers. In 1915 he joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood and was sent to Germany to meet Roger Casement. He successfully got a promise of a German Arms shipment to coincide with the 1916 rising. Because he was one of the original members of the IRB Military Committee he was responsible for the planning of the 1916 Rising.

Shortly before that fateful day he was hospitalised resulting in him having an operation on his neck glands. Still bandaged, he took his spot in the GPO, with several other leaders such as Patrick Pearse and Tom Clarke.

Following their surrender Joseph was held in Kilmainham Gaol and faced a court martial where he was sentenced to death. His girlfriend Grace Gifford received word that he was to die on May 4th. She purchased a ring in Dublin and persuaded a priest to let her marry Joseph. Grace and Joseph were married in the chapel at Kilmainham hours before his death. There were two witnesses, both prison guards, John Smith and John Lockerby. Joseph was executed not long afterwards with 13 other leaders.

The Irish based ballad Grace is a monologue of Plunkett expressing his love to Grace and his love for the cause for Irish Independence before his execution.

Sources:
The Irish Independent
The Irish Times

GRACE

Composed by
Frank and Seán O'Meara

*As we gather in the chapel here in
old Kilmainham Gaol
I think about these past few
weeks,
oh will they say we've failed?
From our school days, they have
told us we must yearn for liberty
Yet, all I want in this dark place
is to have you here with me*

Chorus:

*Oh Grace, just hold me in your
arms and let this moment linger
They'll take me out at dawn
and I will die
With all my love, I place this
wedding ring upon your finger
There won't be time to share our
love for we must say goodbye*

*Now, I know it's hard for you,
my love, to ever understand,
The love I bear for these brave
men,
my love for this Dear land
But when Pádraic called me to
his side down in the G.P.O.
I had to leave my own sick bed,
to him I had to go*

Chorus: repeated

*Now as the dawn is breaking,
my heart is breaking too
On this May morn, as I walk out,
my thoughts will be of you
And I'll write some words upon
the wall so everyone will know
I love so much that all I could see
his blood upon the Rose.*

Chorus: repeated



George Noble Plunkett (centre wearing hat), Countess Plunkett (to the right) and Grace Gifford (far right) in Dublin 1916. (Image© RTE Photographic Archive)



A scene from the RTE drama series 'Insurrection', (1966) featuring the marriage of Grace Gifford and Joseph Mary Plunkett (Image© RTE Still Department)