

# Emotional tributes to Ger

**Alan Jacques**

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OVER 2,000 people turned out in the sleepy village of Kilcornan last weekend to pay their final respects to Limerick mountaineer Gerard McDonnell who died tragically after his historic climb of the K2 mountain earlier this month.

Six white doves were released into the sky as part of the memorial service at Kilcornan Community Centre on Sunday to celebrate Gerard's life and his many achievements. The 37-year-old engineer, the first Irishman to reach the summit of K2 - regarded as the world's deadliest mountain - perished in an

ice avalanche less than 48 hours after entering the history books for his heroic accomplishment on August 1.

The Limerickman had been attempting to save three Korean climbers in an area of the mountain known as the 'bottleneck' at the moment of his untimely death.

During his homily, Fr Joe Noonan described Gerard as a "humble hero". "Ger could not explain his fascination with mountain climbing any other way except to say it was such a spiritual thing. He even referred to it as being an honour to die on a mountain," said Fr Noonan.

Wilco Van Rooijen, who

led the Norit Expedition to K2, arrived at Sunday's memorial service in a wheelchair. The Dutch climber is still recovering from third-degree frostbite on his feet.

Meanwhile, Cas Van de Gevel of the Norit Expedition team placed a wooden carving on the altar representing Gerard's achievement in reaching the summit of the K2 mountain. Fellow teammate Marriten Van Eck presented Gerard's grieving mother Gertie with a candle.

Aides-de-camp representing President Mary McAleese and Taoiseach Brian Cowen were also among the congregation.

JJ McDonnell paid an

emotional tribute to his brother Gerard during Sunday's memorial service. "Everything that Gerard turned his hand to he did with pride. His love of his family, friends, parish, county, province and country was clear for all to see," said JJ.

"He was 100 per cent Irish in his love and passion for culture, language, music and sport. Gerard you can pick 'em, pack 'em, stack 'em, but there is only ever going to be one Gerard McDonnell. He is irreplaceable as a son, brother, brother-in-law, uncle, partner and loyal friend. Gerard you are our hero," he said.

JJ, his mother Gertie and sisters Martha, Stephanie and Denise as well as Gerard's girlfriend Annie Starky led the mourners.

Musical tributes were played at the service by



The new Castletroy Park is set to be opened to the public tomorrow. Picture: Keith Wiseman

## Castletroy

ONE of the largest purpose built parklands in Limerick is to be officially opened to the public tomorrow, Thursday, August 21, at a cost of more than €2m.

The development of 'Castletroy Park' follows an eight-month long construction contract be-

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