

# Funeral of Fr Timothy Norris OAM PP STL

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## Homily by Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney

St. Kevin's Parish, Geebung Queensland  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Rev 21:1-5a, 6b-7; Jn 14:1-7  
+ *Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop of Sydney*  
27 Mar 2013

After the beautiful obituary we have heard about Father Tim's priestly life and as we gather here to pray for the repose of his soul and thank God for what he has achieved in the hearts and minds of generations of his parishioners, it remains for me to lead you in a few reflections on the nature and rewards of the Christian life, on the mystery of the Church and all her sacraments, especially baptism, Eucharist and the forgiveness of sins and on the indispensable role of the ministerial priest.

You cannot have a Catholic community without the lay faithful, without families. The greater the wounds to family life the greater the social dislocation and personal suffering. But just as certainly, without the ministerial priesthood to serve the lay faithful, there is no Catholic Church. Orders come, some last for centuries, many have gone and others will pass away. We have seen groups of widows, generations of hermits leading isolated lives of prayer and penance; the Benedictine monks from the seventh century, the Dominicans and Franciscan friars from the thirteenth; the Jesuits from the sixteenth and the flowering of new religious orders in the nineteenth century, especially after the revolutions, wars and persecutions in France. Bad times do not eliminate blessings. We have no guarantee any or all of these will still exist at the end time, when the first heaven and the first earth have passed away and the holy city, the New Jerusalem, comes down from heaven like a bride adorned for her husband. But the Church will always have priests. In many ages, like today and in Our Lord's time, not enough men answer the call. Sometimes there will be too many. But always and in every age priests will be there pointing to Christ, as the way, the truth and the life, reassuring their people in times of trouble, urging them to believe.

In Father Tim's own words "Christ's loving care for us is called Divine Providence. It watches over even the humblest and most despised creatures on earth. We love and trust Him in joy and in sorrow. When we have disappointments, sorrows, worries and confront tragedies like terrorism or natural disasters like tsunamis, we should not throw our love of God to the winds: it is when we need Him most. He suffered and He understands our suffering."

Father Tim was not a yes man, because in every way he was a loyal son of the Church, who defended the apostolic tradition in its entirety, when some others were tempted to soften up the tougher moral teachings and even pass quickly over some of the less seemly faith teachings of the creed.

For Father Tim Christ was always the unseen head of the Church He founded on the apostles, with Peter as the rock man; not the first among equals. He believed, with the Church, that the Heavenly Father, not flesh and blood, has revealed these foundational truths which have ensured that the Church is (in his words) "shock proof and rock proof" and designed to last until the end of time.

Our deceased parish priest left instructions that we pray for the release of his soul from purgatory and I do so out of obedience. He never made the mistake of believing everyone must be saved because he acknowledged the power of evil and the human capacity to reject the light and to continue rejecting the light. Christ's words do not allow any of us to claim heaven as another human right. The gateway is narrow and we have no assurance all will be chosen. But our good God is all wise, all knowing, as revealed in his compassionate Son who promised heaven that day to the good thief. If Father Norris needs a lot of polishing, heaven help many of the rest of us!

He loved the Mass, exemplifying and preaching that the Eucharist was a communal act of worship, lifting our hearts and minds to God. He valued the new translation of the Roman Missal because it led us more easily to the Transcendent, helping us to silence and prayer.

"When a priest says Mass" he wrote, "he is in union with Christ". "The whole Church on earth, purgatory and heaven is being offered to God the Father, honouring and giving Him glory and asking help for the living and the souls in purgatory." The work of saving souls was a real task for him.

By this stage, I suspect, the late Father Norris would be feeling that I had said enough, perhaps even too much. He knew his people, was shrewd, much more than a simple dove.

The first reading from the Old Testament told us that there is an appointed time for everything, birth and death, weeping and laughing, mourning and dancing. While I feel he had no great concerns about approaching death, I suspect that it was only in his last weeks that Father Tim might have felt there was an appointed time to retire. He wanted to die on the job and he did.

We pray for his soul. We thank God for the good he did and the thousands he helped. May he rest in peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.