



**Mass for the Dead for Cardinal George Pell
Wednesday Week 4 of Ordinary Time**

Homily

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Archbishop of Perth**

**Wednesday 01 February, 2023
St Mary's Cathedral, Sydney**

Just a few short days after the unexpected death of Cardinal George Pell in Rome a solemn Requiem Mass was celebrated for him in Saint Peter's Basilica.

It was, of course, a grand setting. The Mass was celebrated by Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, the Dean of the College of Cardinals. Many of the cardinals, and some bishops, were also present as concelebrants of the Mass and the area between the Papal Altar and the Altar of the Chair, the traditional location for funerals of Cardinals, was filled to overflowing with members of the Cardinal's family and many friends and admirers.

Cardinal Re preached the homily and Pope Francis presided over the Final Commendation and Farewell at the end of Mass.

It was, as I say, a grand setting, but what struck me most forcefully was something which reminded me of an important aspect of our Catholic faith. In its essence the funeral Mass was exactly the same as any other Mass celebrated for someone had died. There is no doubt, of course, that Cardinal Pell was an extremely significant and influential person in the life of the Catholic Church, not only here in Australia but right throughout the Catholic world.

He had been the Archbishop of our two largest cities, Melbourne and Sydney, and had occupied a position in the Vatican which many described as the third most senior position in the world-wide Catholic Church. His impact on the life of the Church will continue to be felt for a long time to come.

And yet, in death, he was accorded the same dignity and respect which is due to every Catholic who dies. That the Mass celebrated in St Peter's Basilica should, in its basic elements, be the same as one celebrated in a small country parish Church should not surprise us and certainly should not be seen as some kind of slight against the Cardinal.

It is, rather, a powerful symbol of a central truth of our faith: we are all equally brothers and sisters in the communion of the Church, and all equally children of our one Father in heaven. As Saint Paul reminds us in his Letter to the Romans, "God does not have favourites".



This is why we find, at the heart of every Catholic funeral, a focus on the mystery of death and on the Church's trusting faith in the promise of eternal life and in the certainty of God's mercy and compassion. We pray in gratitude for all the blessings which the Lord gave to the person who has died, and we certainly do that today for Cardinal Pell. We remember and give thanks for the ways in which the person who has died enriched our lives and helped us to understand the mystery of God's love, and we do this, too, in relation to Cardinal Pell. And we pray that the person who has died may encounter God's overflowing love, compassion, and forgiveness, for as the Second Book of Maccabees reminds us, *"it is a holy and wholesome thing to pray for the dead that they might be loosed from their sins"* (2 Macc 12:46). And this we also do for Cardinal Pell who would be the last one to want us to neglect this duty of love which we owe him.

"I am the resurrection and the life" the Lord says to us in today's gospel reading.

"If anyone believes in me, even though he dies he will live,
and whoever lives and believes in me
will never die.

Do you believe this?"

The answer Martha gives to Jesus' question is firm and strong: "Yes, Lord," she says, *"I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one who was to come into this world"*. It is the same answer that Cardinal Pell would have given, the same faith by which he lived his whole life. Today we pray in trusting faith that, in the words of one of the prayers from our liturgical tradition, for Cardinal Pell *life now is changed, not ended, and that now that his earthly dwelling has turned to dust he has been welcomed into the eternal dwelling made ready for him in heaven*.

Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual life shine upon him. May he rest in peace. Amen.