

## Homily at the Memorial Mass for Cardinal George Pell

Our Lady of the Rosary Cathedral Waitara NSW  
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At any funeral, one of the most remarkable experiences is listening to the eulogy of the one whose life is celebrated. For a few brief moments it is like being at the window of the person's life; something of the radical uniqueness of the person's life, their story and their journey are glimpsed, how their life was interwoven into the stories and journeys of others.

Yet, even when we hear a eulogy, we realise that the memories being shared cannot fully capture the person who is mourned. Indeed, even our own most special memories of the one we love are but glimpses of the mystery of who they are. Yes, our memories hold the presence of the one we love to us. However, there is always the profound recognition that they are more than our memories, that they were someone more than what we could ever fully know or possess by our memories.

If this be true at any funeral, the insight is accentuated as we gather in memory of Cardinal George Pell, a man of such formidable nature – without doubt a colossus in the Church in Australia and internationally, particularly since his ascendancy to the See of Melbourne in 1996. To scope the media commentary following his death is to behold a figure of towering stature on such different levels. He was in the true sense of the word, a phenomenon: by definition, “something (such as an interesting fact or event) that can be observed and studied and that typically is unusual or difficult to understand or explain fully” – not least because of a most curious coalescence of features in his character and demeanour that meant he bore the vivid projection of such diverse persons and associations. The analysis of his life, his contribution, his legacy will occupy commentary for a long, long time in the future.

The Cardinal resisted definition. My own long association with him since the late 1970s was a mixture of both affection and intimidation. He was a long-time friend of Tarrawarra Abbey; I knew him cooking me breakfast when I would return to the monastery refectory after milking in the dairy. As Auxiliary of Melbourne, Bishop Pell ordained me a deacon. At the time he had the practice of requiring the Ordinand to write his homily – largely, I think, a test of the ordinand's orthodoxy. I am happy to share that he spoke my homily in full. As Archbishop of Melbourne, he welcomed me on appointment at St Vincent's Hospital and I would enjoy lunch with him at St Patrick's Cathedral each Sunday. I knew him at Senate Meetings at the Catholic Institute of Sydney when he was Archbishop of Sydney, so nervous at his potential reaction to a line of reflection I would recommend but that he may not have shared, for it was clear that though we both enjoyed the Veech Library, we did not take out the same books. Even so, I am forever grateful for his recommendations of me to various boards and committees. I knew him pugnaciously arguing for a vision of society and Church in the public media that I may not have entirely shared; I knew him as a hospitable host when I last spent time with him enjoying morning tea in his office at the Secretariat for the Economy in Rome.

I would never have considered myself personally close to the Cardinal or, in any way, in his social circle. What he really thought of me I will never know perhaps. Yet, in these days, since his death, I have been surprised by my own reaction of loss and my personal questioning of who he was and what he meant. So many years of my own life, indeed the entire thirty years of my own priesthood, have been shaped in some real way by his presence. The Cardinal was complex, enigmatic, an unmistakable force, completely at home in the halls of power and equally at home with people living off the street. We are unlikely to see another with such an indomitable spirit in our generation. He will never be fully understood.

Indeed, each of us has an irreducible mystery of presence in the world that, though it is held in the memory of other's experience of us, is always more. Indeed, we know only too well that often enough we are a mystery to our self, let alone to others. Just as others cannot grasp the full reality of who we truly are, neither can we grasp this for ourselves. There is an essential part of each of us that resists definition.

To know ourselves as we truly are: this is the deepest quest in our life. It is also the deepest hunger of our life – to be known as we truly are. There are moments when we think yes this can be achieved, and there are moments when the distance seems all too great. This is the radical human experience, and it gives rise to that question, "Can I ever be truly known, either by myself or by others?" It is one of the central questions of our life and at the heart of all our relationships.

Our Christian understanding embraces this very question and the hunger that it represents. The entire Christian narrative reverberates with the quest to be known as I am known. As such, it rests on the fundamental premise that life is received not owned, that each of our lives is being called forth to become fully what it was intended to be, not in a random kind of way, but in response to an infinite personal love that seeks to coax our essential possibility and beauty into full disclosure. In Christian life we wonder at who we are; we seek to receive who we are; we aspire to live into who we are. Thus, over our whole journey of life we seek to become known, not just as we think we might be, or as others might think we are, but rather as we are known by an Infinite Love that has brought us and called us into being.

I don't think we ever quite achieve this. We glimpse it here and there along the way. From the Christian perspective, it is only in our death that we hear our name, just as it is - in all of its radical simplicity and yet in all its extraordinary fullness and possibility.

This is the paradox of death with which the gospel we have heard this evening invites us to consider. In the dramatic loss of identity which death appears to represent, at one and the same time something is received: our very name. "Jesus said to her, "Mary! She knew him then."

In knowing him, she also knows herself. She knows herself as she is known, as she has always been known but ever struggled to realise.

The Cardinal knows now as he has always been known. He hears his name – just as it is. In this lies his infinite freedom and his ultimate possibility.