



Funeral Mass – Rev Fr Andre Nahhas

Homily

**Most Rev Timothy Costelloe SDB
Archbishop of Perth**

**Thursday 12 January 2023
St Mary's Cathedral, Perth**

The three readings chosen for today's Funeral Mass, I think by Father Andre himself, are very beautiful and, in the case of the Gospel, rather surprising. It is not often that the story of the visit of the Magi to Bethlehem and of the escape into Egypt of Mary and Joseph together with their newborn son are used at a Funeral Mass. Perhaps though, for those who knew Father Andre well, that he would make such a choice may not be all that surprising. He had a unique way of understanding his own life and ministry. His vision, and his living out of that vision, have been a particular and special gift to the Church here in the Archdiocese of Perth.

Of course, after his ordination to the priesthood in 1983, Father Andre spent time living and working both here in Perth and in Adelaide and Melbourne as well as in New Zealand. Father Andre was ordained as a priest in the Melkite Catholic Church and generously served people from across Australia and in New Zealand who belonged to that Church and that tradition.

When Father Andre returned to Perth in 2005, he made himself available, with the agreement of his bishop, to work more directly within the parishes of the Archdiocese of Perth. He remained very proud of and deeply steeped in the spirituality of the Melkite Catholic Church and brought that richness to his ministry in the Archdiocese. When news of his death was conveyed to Bishop Robert Rabbat, the Eparch of the Melkite Church here in Australia, Bishop Robert contacted us to express his deep sorrow on hearing the news of Father Andre's death and spoke of Father Andre as "a dear priest to me personally and to both the Roman Catholic Diocese of Perth and the Melkite Catholic Church in Australia". As we gather here in the Cathedral this morning we know that we are being accompanied by the prayers of Bishop Rabbat and of the Melkite Catholic community of Australia.

In today's First Reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, we are invited to remember that the priesthood which Fr Andre sought to live so faithfully was a sharing in the priesthood of Christ. In our Catholic tradition we are taught that there is really only one priest – Jesus himself – and that he shared this one priesthood in two ways: he shares it with every baptised person, so much so that we often speak of the Church as a priestly people; and he also shares it, in a special way, with those who are ordained as priests and bishops. As we reflect on Father Andre's life this morning it is good to remember that his whole life was dedicated to putting



himself at the service of God's people, of us, so that we might really be in practice what we are in theory – a priestly people.

This invites us, I think, to ask ourselves just what being a priestly people might mean. The answer to this question can be found in looking to Jesus himself, the great High Priest as this morning's first reading puts it. In the Jewish tradition from which Jesus comes, a priest is someone who offers sacrifices in order to symbolise and bring about a healing of the relationship between God and his people. The priests of the Old Testament offered the produce of the land – animals and harvested crops – but Jesus did something much greater: he offered himself. This is what made Jesus the true priest and it is what makes us a priestly people: that we are willing, as Jesus was, to offer ourselves – our lives, our talents, our accomplishments, yes, even our sufferings, to God for the good of God's people. Father Andre was a faithful priest precisely because he did offer himself to God, generously and sincerely, by putting himself totally at the service of God's people.

So many of you here this morning know from experience just how true this was of Father Andre. You, the members of his family whom he loved and cherished so much, know this perhaps better than anyone else. But so, too, do all those whose lives have been touched and enriched by Father Andre's presence in times of difficulty, in times of joy, in times of doubt and in times of sorrow. It has been that presence in your lives which has helped you to live in a priestly way: that is, in a way that makes your care for others more central to your lives than your own desires and plans. Our Catholic tradition sees in the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd a perfect expression of his priesthood and of the role our ordained priests and bishops are called to play in our lives. The Good Shepherd, the gospels tell us, is the one who lays down his life for his sheep. Today we want to give thanks to God for all the ways in which Fr Andre generously laid down his life for others. In doing so he taught us by example how to do the same for each other – how to live priestly lives for each other.