



**31st Week of Ordinary Time
Mass for Deceased Priests**

Homily

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

St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
Thursday 8 November 2018

Who among you, having 100 sheep and losing one, would not leave the 99 in the wilderness and go off in search of the one that was lost? When Jesus first asked this question, he was talking to people who belonged to a rural culture, a rural society. They knew a lot about sheep, they knew a lot about shepherding, they knew how unreliable and how skittish sheep could be. And as Jesus put this question to them, I imagine that almost without exception, they must have been thinking to themselves: “well I wouldn’t be so stupid as to leave the 99 uncared for and go off looking for the lost one – because while I was looking for the one that was lost, the other 99 might disappear and then I might have none at all”.

The point of the story, of course, that Jesus makes clear as the Gospel unfolds, is that the way we people might think about things is very different to the way God thinks about things. While we would be calculating how much of a risk we should take in order to preserve the things that we had and not run the risk of losing everything, Jesus is reminding us that that’s not the way God thinks. God does not offer the gift of salvation on some kind of logical, rational basis. God just offers the gift of salvation freely and constantly, with no exceptions.

As we recall all of the bishops, the priests, and the deacons who have been a part of the life of this Archdiocese for so many decades, it’s good for us to remember that as each one of them walked the journey of their lives. Just as each one of us walks the journey of our lives, we have the Good Shepherd who goes out in search of us when we get lost. And it’s because of that, whenever we come to offer Mass for those who have died – and as we do this particularly during the month of November – we do so with enormous trust, and enormous confidence.

No matter what might happen to us in our lives – and what strange paths we or those we love might wander down – the Shepherd is out there going in search of us, wanting to find us, put us on his shoulders, and carry us home. That is why every time we have a funeral Mass, we entrust the person who has died into the loving mercy and compassion of God, and we always do it with confidence.



Only God knows the truth of a person's life – we do not even know the full truth of our own lives. Only God knows the truth, and God follows the journey of our life and looks at us as we journey through life with the eyes of mercy and compassion. He did that and does that for each of our bishops, priests, and deacons. He did that and does that for everybody in this Cathedral. He did that and does that for those we love. He did that and does it for everybody.

So today is an opportunity to once more renew our faith, to renew our trust in this merciful God about whom Pope Francis so often speaks. Jesus – who tells us the parable of the shepherd who goes in search of the lost one, and the other parable we heard this morning, and the parable of the prodigal son which follows it – this Jesus is the face of Father's mercy. In His words, in His teachings, in His deeds, He reveals to us the truth of who God is.

The challenge for us is to have the courage to believe that God really is as generous, as merciful, as loving, as forgiving, as Jesus proclaims Him to be.