



## **Funeral Mass – Fr Anton Hesse**

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

**Wednesday 5 August, 2020  
Our Lady's Assumption Church, Dianella Parish**

### **Opening Remarks**

The words which we will hear in this morning's first reading, chosen by Father Anton, capture very well what was at the heart of his life.

Go now to those to whom I send you and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to protect you it is the Lord who speaks.

Today, as we gather to entrust Father Anton into the Lord's hands, we do so with trust and confidence because we know that Father Anton, having heard this call from God, responded with faith, with generosity and with fidelity. With the same faith may our prayers today accompany Father Anton as he moves into the great mystery of eternal life. We thank God for the gift which Father Anton has been to so many people and we commit ourselves to God and to God's Church with the same love which filled the life of Father Anton.

### **Homily**

Although I personally did not have a chance to get to know Father Anton very well, as he had already retired from full-time ministry when I came to the Archdiocese, everyone I have spoken to about him says the same thing: that he was a kind, gentle and an assuming man, and a faithful priest. Indeed, someone told me recently that many years ago, when Father Anton was transferred from East Fremantle to Scarborough, one of the East Fremantle parishioners said to a friend who belonged to this parish that the people of Scarborough were very fortunate because they were getting a saint! Most of you have known Father Anton better than me and I am sure that since his death last week, and perhaps especially today, your memories of him will be flooding back. The details of his priestly ministry are set out in today's Mass booklet and so I will not speak of them now except to say very sincerely how grateful we must all be to Father Anton for his priestly life and ministry among us.

I am not sure how many priests have it said about them by their parishioners that they are saints, but I am sure that those who do know, in their heart of hearts, that it is something of an exaggeration. The demands of the Christian life, and therefore also of the ministerial priesthood - the high ideals to which the Lord calls us no matter what part we play in the life of the Church -



represent a goal for which we are all, I hope, striving, but to reach that goal for most of us will be the work of a lifetime. Even when the Lord calls us home there may still be some healing work for the Lord's grace to do within us to prepare us fully for the joy of eternal life.

I cannot help wondering if the rather unusual choice of Gospel reading which Father Anton made for today's Mass might not reflect his own understanding of this reality. It is a gospel passage which you do not often hear at a funeral.

The story of the encounter between Jesus and Peter on the shore of the lake after the resurrection is a story of sorrow, of conversion, of redemption, and of saving love. The three questions Jesus asks of Peter - *Do you love me? Do you really love me? Do you love me more than these others do?* - respond to the three times when Peter denied Jesus: *I do not know him; I am not his disciple; You do not know what you are talking about.*

The story of Peter, the story of a call from the Lord, of moments of great courage in responding to that call, and of moments of fragility and failure in responding to that call, is the story of each one of us and is, of course, also the story of Father Anton. But today, as we say farewell to Father Anton and entrust him to the Lord, we can do so with great confidence and joy because Father Anton's choice of Gospel reading invites us to remember that the story of Peter, the story of Father Anton, and our personal stories as disciples of Jesus are all ultimately the same story of the Lord's overwhelming love for us. The Lord does not love us because we are perfect but because we are not. The Lord does not look on us with kindness and compassion because we never fail but because we do. All he seeks is that we allow his grace to lead us back to his love.

Father Anton has now entered into the great mystery of eternal life. Our words fail us as we try to understand what Father Anton is now experiencing. Perhaps the best we can do is use the words found in the first letter of St John: *Dearly beloved ones, we are now children of God but what we will be in the future has not yet been revealed. What we do know is that when Christ appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he truly is.*

With these words in mind perhaps we would not go astray if we were to think that in entering through the gates of death into eternal life Father Anton encountered the Lord who said to him, *"Anton, do you love me? Do you really love me? Do you love me more than others do?"* And knowing something of Father Anton's life, of his fidelity and commitment, his gentleness and sensitivity, perhaps we will not go astray if we think of Father Anton saying, from the depths of his heart and with great sincerity at this most crucial moment of his life, *"Yes, Lord, I love you. Of course I love you. You know everything so you know that I love you"* And Jesus says to him, *"Come now, follow me, follow me into the joy of eternal life"*.