

# Archbishop Lori's Homily: Mass for Deceased Priests

*Mass for Deceased Priests*

*Cathedral of Mary Our Queen*

*November 20, 2017*

November is a month when we lovingly remember our beloved dead and commend them to the Lord in the Masses we celebrate and in the prayers we offer in the silence of our hearts. So it is fitting that we gather tonight to commend to the Lord of life and love our brother priests who have gone before us in faith. Ours is a solidarity of faith and prayer that spans time and eternity and thus, what we do here tonight, is of benefit to our brother priests even as we trust that they are praying for us in eternity.

For that reason, our Scripture readings this evening have Eucharistic overtones for the Eucharist, the heart of our vocation, is the meeting place of earth and heaven, of time and eternity. It is a sacred time and space in which we accompany with our prayers both the living and the dead. In this Mass, we are praying for brother priests who, like ourselves, accounted the celebration of the Eucharist as the source and summit of their lives of faith and their ministries. Let us see what these readings say to us, beginning with the Gospel.

Perhaps more fittingly proclaimed during the Easter season, this Gospel nonetheless describes how Jesus the Good Shepherd walks with us throughout our life's journey. He accompanies us, to be sure, with love and compassion but he is also walking with purpose, for along the way he opens our minds to the understanding of Scripture, leads us to see him in the Breaking of Bread. In the process transforms us into heralds of the Good News: "The Lord truly has been raised . . . !"

Could there be a better summary of our ministry and the priestly ministries of those whom we remember this evening? To be sure, each priest we commemorate, including those who died during the past year, were unique individuals – in the language of St. John Paul II, they were "unrepeatable realities"!

Yet, they shared with us, and we with them, a common ministry modeled on the Risen Lord's accompaniment of his distraught disciples. So, it was that they were present to their people in times of joy, sorrow, & routine - not merely as friends and companions but as those whose lives were dedicated to opening for people the Word of God so that it might light their path through valleys of darkness and to opening their eyes of faith so that they might recognize the Risen Lord in the breaking of bread, that is to say, the Eucharist.

As we continue to ply our ministries, we stand on their shoulders. They have left us not only with a storehouse of anecdotes and stories but more importantly they have left us with foundations upon which to build as we look to a future full of hope. Let us remember them lovingly as we commend them to the Lord by the prayer which was most central to their lives: the Breaking of Bread.

In this moment of Eucharistic solidarity with our whole presbyterate, living and dead, let us briefly recall what it means to celebrate the Breaking of Bread. For the banquet which our brother priests prepared and which we now prepare is no ordinary banquet and the food we offer is no ordinary food. Isaiah said as much when we looked ahead and saw from afar the deliverance God would bring about for all the peoples of the earth: "Behold our God to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked: let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"

Paul takes up this theme, proclaiming that while we were still weak and estranged from God, Christ died for us, opening the way for our reconciliation. We have been justified by his death on the Cross and his Rising from the dead... all of which is encapsulated, as it were, in the Eucharist. This is the sum and substance of the banquet we celebrate, a love stronger than sin and more powerful than death. This is the table that the Lord has spread before us, even as he anoints us with oil of gladness, the Holy Spirit. So when we pray for our brother priests who have gone before us, we pray not merely on our own but in the strength of Christ's redeeming love. Surely, there is no better way of expressing our appreciation both for our brothers in eternity and for one another as we share this moment in our lives and in the history of salvation.

May the Lord in his love bind us together more closely, living and dead, to the glory

of his Name and for the mission of his Church. May God bless us keep us in his love!