

Australian bishops honour Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan

A group of Australian bishops has celebrated an intimate and moving Mass in honour of Vietnamese Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, whose life of love and hope in the face of extreme adversity made him one of the most inspiring Church figures of the 20th Century. Cardinal Thuan, who died in 2002, spent 13 years in prison under the Vietnamese Communist regime, nine years of that in solitary confinement. His body lies in a Rome cemetery, in the Chapel of the Canons of St Peter's Basilica. While in prison he countered the terrible conditions and isolation with a gentle but powerful spirituality of hope, founded in the message of love of Jesus Christ. After his release from prison, Cardinal Thuan went on to be appointed as president of the Pontifical Council for Justice, Development and Peace. He died in Rome. The Church in Australia has a special link with Cardinal Thuan, whose 102-year-old mother Elizabeth and sister Anne Nguyen Thi Ham-Tieu and family live in Sydney. A number of the bishops, in Rome on their ad limina visit, took up the opportunity to honour Cardinal Thuan with Mass for the repose of his soul. The principal celebrant of the Mass, on the feast of the Annunciation, was Bishop Peter Ingham of Wollongong. Also concelebrating were Cardinal George Pell, Archbishop Francis Carroll, Archbishop Philip Wilson, Bishop Pat Dougherty and Bishop Hilton Deakin.

In his homily, Bishop Ingham said Cardinal Thuan's enduring message was one of Christian hope. "Francis bore this hope as any true priest and bishop must," he said. "He was a gentle man who had such wonderful strength." As we gather today and pray for him and for the repose of his soul, we pray also for his family who are feeling close to us today, that this prophetic man will be taken into the joy of heaven and his example will continue to inspire us to be people of great hope and heart because of Jesus who has come to us through the womb of the Virgin Mary. "Also attending the Mass was an aunt of the late Cardinal as well as a small group of Vietnamese priests and religious in Rome who had known or worked with the Cardinal.