

Barry O'Keefe Funeral

## **Barry O'Keefe Remembered for Outstanding Contribution to Public Life and to the Church**



Sydney's judiciary, lawyers, barristers, family and friends attended the Mass of Christian Burial for Justice Barry O'Keefe at St Mary's Cathedral. Government dignitaries and the Vice Chancellor of Australian Catholic University Professor Greg Craven joined family and friends as well as a large cohort of the city's leading barristers and lawyers and members of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council at St Mary's Cathedral this morning for the Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial for former NSW Supreme Court Judge Barry O'Keefe, AM QC GCSG.

Justice O'Keefe died on 24 April at St Vincent's Hospital, Darlinghurst with his wife of 52 years, Janette, his five children and some of her seven grandchildren at his bedside. He was 80 years old. This morning's Pontifical Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated by Bishop Peter Comensoli, Apostolic Administrator of the Archdiocese of Sydney who described Justice O'Keefe as "a good but always humble man" whose Christian faith had been the bedrock of both his public and private life.

"He possessed a simple, devotional prayer life - one I noticed that was marked by a special closeness to the Blessed Virgin Mary," Bishop Comensoli said in his homily. "No one who was close to our Blessed Mother is likely to get too preoccupied with himself. And this was certainly true of Barry. His was not a selfish life, but one lived generously and ever attentive to others. Marriage and family mattered; justice and dignity mattered; respect and service mattered; beauty and goodness mattered."

A former chairman of the International Group of Experts on Corruption and until his death, Chairman of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council, the former NSW Judge and Queens Counsel was highly regarded and respected throughout his long life. "I only ever once saw Barry in full legal flight: it was an impressive display of intellectual clarity and considered assertiveness," Bishop Comensoli said in his homily. "In a world where faithful Christians are often belittled for their quaint ignorant ways, the overly secularised nay-sayers of our society would do well to ask why a man of such intellectual skill and commitment to justice consciously chose to shape his life on the person of Christ."

Throughout his life Justice O'Keefe had been a man of deep reason and clear argument, and he had found belief in a good and loving God eminently reasonable and well worth arguing for, the Bishop said.



*Justice Barry O'Keefe with his wife Janette and son Philip at ACU ceremony last month where he was created a Doctor of the University*

Although His Eminence Cardinal George Pell, former Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Sydney who knew Justice O'Keefe and the O'Keefe family over many years, could not be present at this morning's Mass he sent a personal tribute from Rome and offered his condolences to the O'Keefe family and in particular to Jeanette O'Keefe, Justice O'Keefe's wife of 52 years.

Appointed Prefect for the Economy of the Holy See and Vatican City State, His Eminence is now based in Rome and in his hand-written tribute, which was read to those at today's Mass of Christian Burial by Bishop Comensoli, Cardinal Pell expressed his deep regret at not being able to be present "personally to pray for the soul of a good friend, who was a wise source of advice and a regular support; always ready to help."

His Eminence asked Bishop Comensoli to "please pass on to Janette and all the family my deep sympathy on the death of Barry," describing his friend as "a deeply believing Christian, daily Mass goer for many years, utterly loyal Catholic - an exemplary Catholic in fact, who made many important contributions over the decades to Australian public life, to the Church and internationally through his work against corruption."

Cardinal Pell also said that Justice O'Keefe's work for the Truth, Justice and Healing Council was irreplaceable. "Barry was certainly a man of talents," Bishop Comensoli said. "But I never once was left with the impression that he saw himself above the humbling need for mercy and forgiveness. Perhaps this is why Barry, in the last year of his life, became such a force for good for victims and survivors of sexual abuse at the hands of Church leaders, by accepting the unenviable role as Chair of the Truth, Justice and Healing Council. May a humbled Church in Australia be ever grateful for the gift given."

Justice O'Keefe's son, Philip O'Keefe gave the second eulogy and spoke of the private man as a father, husband, devoted grandfather, inspiration and role model. His other sons, Andrew and Roger O'Keefe gave the first and second readings. His daughters Sophie and Vanessa led the Prayers of the Faithful and the Offertory procession was led by granddaughters Katie Rose and Lily O'Keefe.

Two days before his death, Justice O'Keefe was created a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Gregory the Great in recognition of his outstanding and unstinting service to the Church. He had been nominated for this high Papal honour by Cardinal George Pell shortly before he left Australia last month. The investment was made by Bishop Peter Comensoli and Monsignor John Usher, Chancellor of the Sydney Archdiocese in a special ceremony held at the Chapel of St Vincent's Hospital.

This was the second Papal honour be awarded to Justice O'Keefe for life long contribution to the Church. In October 2010, at a ceremony at Cathedral House presided over by Cardinal Pell, Justice O'Keefe was created a Knight Commander with a Star of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

The brother of rock and roll legend, Johnny O'Keefe and father of five children including television personality Andrew O'Keefe, Justice Barry O'Keefe frequently joked that while his younger brother was the "wild one" he was the "mild one."

*Catholic Communications, Sydney Archdiocese, 2 May 2014*