

Funeral Service

Adam Cooper

St Matthew's Parish, Bridgewater (South Australia)

15 January 2026

I was greatly honoured to learn that Adam had listed me as preacher for this occasion given that we were colleagues together at Catholic Theological College for only six years. Adam had colleagues and networks from both the personal and professional dimensions of his life from which any number of preachers could have been drawn. But Adam and I had a pre-academic history. In January 2001, I was appointed assistant priest to St Mary's Geelong. For those who know Geelong, St Mary's is located directly across the road from the Lutheran church. Adam was the pastor at that time, and we met at the regular ministers' fraternal gatherings. Ecumenical relations are strong in Geelong. For those who know Geelong, the locals first profess belief in the local football club before they profess the ancient Trinitarian formula!

In his tribute to Adam, Fr Kevin Lenehan, Master of Catholic Theological College, mentioned that Adam had a scholar's mind and a pastor's heart. Adam was a gifted historian and theologian and a man of faith who always wanted the best from his students, who wanted all people to draw deeply from the well of the Christian tradition in order to come to know the mystery of Jesus, the eternal word made flesh. As a baptized Christian, as a family man and as a scholar, this was Adam's life and mission. For Adam letters after his name and lists of scholarly achievements were not worth much unless the focus was on the God we know as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When our grief is too great and words are beyond us, the Word of God is proclaimed in our midst to lift us in hope and draw us near to the great mystery and joy of the resurrection. In today's Gospel, we are reminded that God rejoices over one repentant sinner like the man who finds the lost sheep or the one who recovers one lost coin. The journey of life and faith tests us and the call of conversion (metanoia) is at the heart of the spiritual life. Adam was always conscious of his need for God's mercy given as pure gift. But Adam also had before him the vision of today's first reading from Revelation; God who comes to visit his people, who makes his home among us, who wipes away all tears because his Son

has conquered death. Today, we pray in faith that Adam dwells forever in the new and eternal Jerusalem, our home.

Adam Cooper was an exceptional scholar. He moved effortlessly between the disciplines of Church history and theology and the range of his scholarly interests and capability was extraordinary. His particular interest was the post-apostolic period and the world of the patristics. He competently covered the Byzantine period and knew with precision the various strands of theology that developed from both a western and eastern perspective. He took students to the late medieval period, and I would then take over the survey unit from just before the Reformation. Given his Lutheran background, the world of the Reformation Adam knew with his eyes closed. His other scholarly interest was the world of twentieth century theology and the great minds of this period. When discussing with lecturers' possible supervisors or readers for projects, I always said, 'Adam Cooper could easily cover that'. Before his retirement due to illness, he wanted to make a contribution to our unit on the letters of St John Henry Newman, perhaps seeing in Newman a fellow traveler who, through God's grace and the movement of the Holy Spirit, negotiated many of the hurdles and challenges of life towards new horizons.

Adam was a man of faith. He took his diagnosis with great calm and grace even though he experienced many challenging periods. When I contacted him, he would always say that he was being carried by the support and prayers of many and was receiving exceptional medical care. Just before Christmas, he sent me a message with an update, the type of update he most certainly sent to many of you. He extended Christmas blessings to the CTC community and signed off with 'Come, Lord Jesus'. The great Advent prayer would soon proclaim the one born into our midst, Emmanuel God-with-us.

Knowing Adam, he would want me to shift the focus from him to all that he believed in. Gratitude to God for the gift of life, family, friends and faith. Extraordinary opportunities for ministry and scholarship. Adam would want all of us to focus on the gift of the Word-made-flesh we celebrated at Christmas, the living Word that God speaks constantly to his pilgrim people in both joy and in sorrow. This is what Adam first received in Baptism and remained the focus of his life. As he shared in the paschal mystery of Jesus and humbly embraced the Lord's passion, Adam would want us to focus on the paschal mystery that is before us in

the liturgy, how our hearts are nourished by Jesus and how through death, our vision is drawn to the great promise and hope of the resurrection, God's glory in Christ, God's glory in the cross, God's glory proclaiming that death and suffering have been conquered forever.

May Adam rest in the peace of the angels, the joy of the communion of saints and the light of Jesus the risen Lord.

Rev. Dr Max Vodola