Several years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the war cemeteries at El Alamein in Egypt. They are quite extraordinary. One of the most moving sights in the area is the Italian cemetery, a large white mausoleum which contains nearly 5,000 tombs set into the walls of multiple galleries. Wherever possible, each one bears the soldier’s name, but many are simply marked ‘IGNOTO’ – ‘Unknown’. You see it again and again: ignoto, ignoto, ignoto...

I was reminded of that visit when looking again at the powerful words of Jesus which were read to us earlier from chapter 6 of John’s Gospel: ‘...this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.’

‘...that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me.’ Not one.

In our fast-moving and anonymous world, news of the passing of those we love tends to be a public event for a very short time. Perhaps there will be a mention in the personal columns of the paper, maybe an obituary. There will almost certainly be a funeral, of course, attended by just a few or perhaps by many people. Maybe there will be a memorial service a few weeks or months later. But then the impact of the loss, which for us goes on being so devastating, seems, as far most people are concerned, just to fade away. How easy it seems to be for everyone else to get on with their lives as if nothing had happened. How easy it is for those who have died to become, in effect, ‘ignoto’.

But not here with Jesus in John chapter 6. Here we have the assurance that no-one is ‘ignoto’ as far as he is concerned. Our loved ones are completely safe in his hands. ‘...that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me.’ Not one.

It’s easy to make promises, of course. But in Jesus Christ we have someone who really can be trusted. Because, when it comes to the stark issues of life and death, he knows what he’s talking about. I’m glad that this service takes place during the Church’s season of Easter with its potent reminder that he took death on and conquered it absolutely. Because of him, death becomes a gateway into life eternal for all those entrusted to him. We can be completely confident that he keeps track of every single one. Not one will be lost. At the last day he will raise up every single one.

Back at El Alamein, not far away from the Italian Cemetery, is the Commonwealth War Graves Cemetery. Over 7,000 graves are set out neatly on the side of a gently sloping hill. A cloister in its quiet garden lists the names of nearly 12,000 other soldiers whose bodies were never recovered. Wherever possible, just as at the Italian mausoleum, each tomb bears the soldier’s name and details. For those whose details have been lost, the words ‘A Soldier of the 1939-1945 War’ are carved onto each gravestone, together with the simple phrase ‘Known unto God’. Not ‘ignoto’, not ‘Unknown’, but ‘Known unto God’. It would have taken rather longer to carve, of course, but I have a feeling it was well worth it. Not ‘ignoto’, not ‘Unknown’, but ‘Known unto God’.

Jesus said, ‘...this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.’ May the truth of these words inspire and encourage us – now and on into the future. Amen.