



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Media Release

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Bishops to visit Rome on Ad Limina spiritual pilgrimage

The Catholic Bishops of Australia will travel to Rome in October 2011 on a spiritual pilgrimage designed to celebrate and strengthen their communion with the universal Church and the Successor of Peter, Pope Benedict XVI.

The pilgrimage is known as the “Ad Limina Apostolorum” visit – or “to the threshold of the Apostles”, and it will take place from October 10-22, 2011.

All Bishops who are charged with the leadership of a diocese, are required to make an Ad Limina visit every five years and present a report on the pastoral situation of the local Church. It is an important spiritual pilgrimage and a reminder of a local Bishop’s wider role in communion with the Bishops of the world. Due to the increasing number of Bishops in the world and the circumstances of the declining health of the late Pope John Paul II the visit was delayed two years.

The key events for Australia’s Bishops will be a visit to the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul, pastors and pillars of the Roman Church, and a personal meeting with the Holy Father.

The visit is also seen as an important part of the Holy Father’s pastoral ministry, when he as head of the College of Bishops receives his brothers with whom he exercises pastoral ministry and listens and talks with them about their mission in their diocese.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President Archbishop Philip Wilson of Adelaide said he and his fellow Bishops would be seeking the prayers of those in their diocesan community as they prepared for the Ad Limina pilgrimage.

“The Bishops wish to involve the whole Catholic community in reflection and prayer, as we prepare for this spiritually significant event,” Archbishop Wilson said.

“The Ad Limina visit confirms and celebrates that which we profess at Mass each week in the Nicene Creed when we express our belief in the ‘one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church’.”

“Our faith was handed down to us from Jesus by the Apostles and as Bishops we are charged with the enormous responsibility of continuing and handing on that tradition. The Ad Limina visit is an important physical and spiritual milestone in the carrying out of that ministry.”

While in Rome, the Bishops will visit various Vatican Congregations and other organisations.

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History and meaning of the Ad Limina visit

The article of Canon Law which prescribes the Ad Limina visit sets out two basic purposes for it:

1. To venerate the tombs of the Holy Apostles, Peter and Paul;
2. To meet with the Successor of Peter, the Bishop of Rome.

Pilgrimages to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul have been practiced from earliest Christian times. These practices continue to hold deep spiritual meaning and significance for Church communion. It is for this reason that these practices were institutionalised for the Bishops.

The pilgrimage and the veneration of the tombs express the unity of the Church, founded by the Lord on the Apostles and built upon blessed Peter, their head, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone together with His Gospel of salvation for all people.

The meeting with the Pope, the Successor of Peter, the primary guardian of the deposit of truth handed down from the Apostles, serves to consolidate their unity in the same faith, hope and charity.

It also allows the immense heritage of spiritual and moral values that the whole Church, in communion with the Bishop of Rome, has spread throughout the world to be better known and appreciated.

The forms and frequency of the meeting with the Pope have varied throughout the centuries. The essential meaning, however, has always remained the same.

The Ad Limina as a sign of Church communion in the world today

The world today is tending towards ever greater unification. The Church too knows itself to be a “sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the human race” (LG1).

So there is a crucial need to foster constant communication between particular Churches that make up the Church in Australia and the Apostolic See.

This can be best done by an exchange of information and a mutual sharing of pastoral experiences, initiatives and plans for working and living.

This communication works in two ways. On one hand there is a value in group discussion in which each Bishop can share in the spirit of collegiality, strengthening bonds of unity and instruments of service. This can be achieved through visits to various Vatican Congregations and other organisations, who are in various ways responsible for serving the Church and its mission.

On the other hand there is private conversation with the Pope, sometimes referred to as *munus* “confided to Peter alone”, which fosters a complete openness and aims to enliven the consciousness of Bishops regarding their duty to announce the Gospel everywhere.

The 15 day visit of Paul with Peter (Galatians 1:18) was a meeting that provided help for their respective ministries.

In the same way, the visits by Bishops with the Successor of Peter, the Vicar of Christ and visible head of the entire Church brings a richness of experience to the Pope’s ministry while invigorating and strengthening the ministry of each Bishop as they face the many joys and challenges of proclaiming the Gospel in the world today.

The Ad Limina visit helps remind us that while the Church in Australia is young and vibrant, it is also deeply a part of the rich history, apostolic tradition and loving leadership of the Universal Church.

An invitation from your Bishop to share with him prayerfully in preparing for this spiritual pilgrimage

The Vatican instructions on the Ad Limina make it very plain to Bishops that: “The best preparation is spiritual”.

The instruction says each Bishop will “undoubtedly sense the need to involve the entire diocesan community in reflection and prayer” on behalf of the action he is to perform for the good of the Church.

In the lead-up to next year’s Ad Limina visit, your Bishop will ask the people of the diocese to pray with him and with each other that the Ad Limina visit will be a fruitful and spiritually enlivening time for the Church, both locally and universally.

There will be opportunity for reflection as a community on our place in the “one holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church” and on the role of our Bishops in upholding that Apostolic tradition in Australia today.

Inextricably linked with that is a call to reflect on the role of each one of us, baptised into Jesus Christ, and called to be Disciples in the modern world, as active members of the Catholic Church.

In particular, during this period of spiritual preparation for the pilgrimage ahead, we call upon the Apostles Peter and Paul in our prayers.

We give thanks for their example as teachers and custodians of the faith and pray that the fire that burned in their hearts might burn in ours too.