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Bishops embark on *ad limina* visit to Rome

March 5, 2004

The Catholic Bishops of Australia are embarking on a spiritual pilgrimage to Rome this month, designed to celebrate and strengthen their communion with the universal Church and the Successor of Peter, Pope John Paul II.

The pilgrimage is known as the "ad limina Apostolorum" visit – or "to the threshold of the Apostles", and it will take place from March 14 to 28.

All bishops who are charged with the leadership of a diocese, are required to make an ad limina visit every five years. It is an important spiritual pilgrimage and a reminder of a local bishop's wider role, in communion with the bishops of the world.

Thirty-six of Australia's 44 bishops will undertake the ad limina visit, during which they will report to the Pope on the pastoral situation in Australia and visit the tombs of Sts Peter and Paul, pastors and pillars of the Roman Church.

The visit is also seen as an important part of the Holy Father's pastoral ministry, as he receives the bishops with whom he exercises pastoral ministry and listens and talks with them about their mission in their diocese.

Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference President Archbishop Francis Carroll of Canberra-Goulburn said he and his fellow bishops would be seeking the prayers of those in their diocesan community as they undertook the ad limina pilgrimage.

"We wish for all Catholics, through prayer and solidarity, to feel a part of the ad limina visit, which confirms and celebrates that which we profess each week when we express our belief in the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church'," Archbishop Carroll said.

"Our faith was handed down to us from Jesus by the apostles and as bishops we are charged with the enormous responsibility of continuing 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 also make a pilgrimage to Assisi, undertake a day of reflection at Castelgandolfo and visit 27 various Vatican organisations.

Ad Limina visit gets underway with Italian TV appearance

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President, Archbishop Francis Carroll has begun his ad limina visit to Rome by putting his linguistic skills to the test in a live appearance on Italian television.

Archbishop Carroll was the special guest on Rai International's religious program, *Cristianita*, which is broadcast on Sundays and includes a live cross to the Pope's Angelus address from St Peter's Square.

He was accompanied on the program by Bishop Mark Coleridge of Melbourne, who is fluent in Italian after several years spent working at the Vatican.

Both bishops took a series of questions from the host, Sr Myriam Castelli, on a variety of issues concerning the Church in Australia.

They touched on such topics as interfaith relations, the family and human dignity as well as issues surrounding evangelization in Australia's multicultural, multi-faith and secular society.

Following the show, Sr Myriam thanked Archbishop Carroll for appearing.

"My compliments to you on your Italian," she said.

Thirty-six of Australia's bishops are in Rome for the ad limina visit, which is a five-yearly pilgrimage to the tombs of the apostles, Sts Peter and Paul.

Their program of visits to various Vatican congregations gets underway on Monday.

A high point of the ad limina will occur on Tuesday when the bishops concelebrate Mass at St Peter's Basilica.



Left to right: RAI TV presenter, Sr Myriam Castelli, ACBC President, Archbishop Francis Carroll, fellow program guest, singer Marco Tavola and Bishop Mark Coleridge of Melbourne.

Archbishops in private audience with Pope John Paul II

March 15, 2004

Two of Australia's archbishops who met the Pope in private audience today said he appeared to be in good spirits as he discussed a range of topical issues from vocations to the family and refugees.

Archbishop Francis Carroll of Canberra-Goulburn and Archbishop Adrian Doyle of Hobart were the first of Australia's bishops to have their private audience with Pope John Paul II as part of the ad limina visit.

The private audience with the Successor of Peter is a deeply valued experience for bishops.

It is also seen as an important part of the Holy Father's pastoral ministry, as he receives the bishops with whom he exercises pastoral ministry and listens and talks with them about their mission in their diocese.

Archbishop Carroll said the 83-year-old Pontiff, who this week became the third longest serving Pope in history, appeared to be in good spirits.

"He seemed to be quite bright," he said.

"We spoke particularly about vocations and the family."

Archbishop Carroll presented the Pope with a copy of a new book on the history of the Canberra-Goulburn Diocese.

Archbishop Doyle said the Holy Father raised the question of refugees with him.

The Archbishops said they both congratulated the Pope on his 25 years as Pontiff.

The 34 other bishops in Rome for the ad limina will have their private audiences with the Pope progressively over the next two weeks.



The bishops have also begun their program of visits to various Vatican organisations, with delegations attending the Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Ecclesia Dei and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.

Bishops and all Christians need the heart and faith of the Apostles - Archbishop

March 16, 2004

The Catholic Bishops of Australia have concelebrated Mass before the tomb of St Peter in one of the most spiritually significant events of their ad limina pilgrimage to Rome.

The bishops celebrated the Mass below St Peter's Basilica with a small congregation of Australians who live and work in Rome.

The principal celebrant was Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President, Archbishop Francis Carroll of Canberra-Goulburn.

In his homily, Archbishop Carroll emphasised the need for Bishops and all the baptised to have both the heart and the faith of the Apostles Peter and Paul.

He was building on an image from Cardinal Sodano during the Pope's jubilee celebrations last year in which Pope John Paul II was described as having the Faith of Peter and the missionary Heart of the Paul.

"That set me thinking - do I have the faith of Peter and the heart of Paul? But I think I'd like more. I'd like to have the faith and heart of Peter and the faith and heart of Paul," Archbishop Carroll said.

He said Peter had a personal faith and a conviction in Jesus which is needed just as much today to continue building His Church.

"In this city, we look also to Paul - called dramatically to believe in Jesus Christ - new faith which changed the whole direction of his life. Paul's heart was also set on fire with love for Christ," Archbishop Carroll said.

Standing before the tomb of St Peter, Archbishop Carroll prayed "for the faith of Peter and the love of Peter".

"Then and only then can we be good shepherds. We will have the heart that draws the assurance of Jesus - feed my sheep," he said.

"There is a special message for us Bishops as Pastors with awesome responsibilities, but all Christians, all baptised, all disciples of Jesus must profess faith in Him - surrender our hearts in love to Him - all must be good and zealous shepherds to our sisters and brothers, to preach the Gospel and build up the reign of God."

Following the Mass, the bishops continued their ad limina program of visits to various Vatican organisations, including the Congregation for Bishops, the Congregation for the Clergy, Caritas Internationalis and the Pontifical Council for the Family.



Bishops take pilgrimage to Assisi

March 21, 2004

Australia's Catholic Bishops have taken a pilgrimage to Assisi where they celebrated Mass before the tomb of St Francis.

Archbishop Philip Wilson of Adelaide presided at the Mass which was held on the Feast of St Joseph.

In his homily he spoke of the bishop's role in the story of St Francis' conversion from nobleman to a life of poverty and holiness. When Francis threw off his clothes and stood naked in the town square preparing to follow the way of the poor, the bishop stepped forward and placed his cloak around him "to protect his human dignity",

Archbishop Wilson said.

He said the role of a bishop today remained one of protection and love and care for his people.

Before heading back to Rome the bishops, who are half way through their ad limina visit, had time to pray before the tomb of St Clare of Assisi as well as visit other significant sites, including the church of San Damiano.

The bishops have also celebrated Mass at Santa Maria Maggiore Basilica in Rome with a small congregation of Australians.

Archbishop Barry Hickey of Perth presided and said it was consoling to know that the bishops were being supported by the prayers of the Australian people as they made their ad limina visit.

"They know how important it is for their Bishops to affirm their loyalty to the Holy Father and to be united in faith with him and with the founders of the Church of Rome, St Peter and St Paul," Archbishop Hickey said.

“In this ancient and beautiful Basilica dedicated to Mary, we look to her to strengthen our faith and deepen our love for one another, because, as mother of our Saviour, she is also mother of the Church, the Body of Christ.” The Bishops concluded the weekend with a retreat day at Castelgandolfo, the Pope’s summer residence. They will resume their meetings with Vatican congregations this week.



Bishops host reception for Curial officials

March 22, 2004

Australia’s Bishops have hosted a reception for some of the Vatican’s top curial officials, including a number of Cardinals, as a formal thank-you for their hospitality during the ad limina visit.



Among those attending the reception were the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops, Cardinal Re, the President of the Pontifical Council for Migrants and Itinerant People, Cardinal Hamao, the Prefect of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments, Cardinal Francis Arinze and the Secretary-General of the Synod of Bishops, Cardinal Schotte.

The Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, Dr John Herron and his wife Jan were also present.

Australian Catholic Bishops Conference President, Archbishop Francis Carroll delivered a short speech in which he thanked the Curial officials for their warm hospitality during the ad limina visit.

“We have enjoyed very well the visits to the various congregations and we thank you for the warm welcome we have received,” Archbishop Carroll said.

The Bishops are continuing their program of meetings with congregations this week and are also continuing their round of private audiences with Pope John Paul II.

Their spiritual pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles will again become the focus this week when they celebrate Mass at St Paul’s Outside the Walls, the site of the tomb of St Paul.

Bishops continue spiritual pilgrimage to the threshold of the Apostles

March 23, 2004

Australia's Catholic Bishops have continued their spiritual pilgrimage to the tombs of the Apostles, with a Mass at the great basilica of St Paul's Outside the Walls in Rome.



The principal celebrant of the Mass was Archbishop John Bathersby, of Brisbane.

The Mass, together with the Mass at the tomb of St Peter, was one of the spiritual highlights of the ad limina Postularum visit - "to the threshold of the apostles".

In his homily, Archbishop Bathersby referred to St Paul as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

He prayed that the Bishops and all people would continue St Paul's great evangelizing work "in what we so proudly call the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit".

St Paul's was built over the burial place of the Apostle and consecrated in 324. The building of the first place of worship over St Paul's tomb has been attributed to the Emperor Constantine, with a larger basilica erected by later emperors. Destroyed by fire in 1823, it was rebuilt on the same foundations and consecrated by Pope Pius IX.

The Bishops' ad limina visits to Vatican congregations have continued, with meetings today on canon law matters. Private audiences with the Holy Father are also progressing with some of the NSW Bishops having had their audience.

Also scheduled this week are visits to congregations for Laity, Culture, Justice and Peace, Migrants and Evangelisation of Peoples.

The Bishops are due to attend a dinner hosted by the Beda College and will tomorrow celebrate Mass at the Church of St John Lateran.

Bishops host reception for Australians in Rome following John Lateran Mass

March 24, 2004

Australia's Bishops have celebrated Mass at St John Lateran Church, which is regarded as the oldest and first among the four great patriarchal basilicas of Rome.

Archbishop Adrian Doyle of Hobart was the principal celebrant at the Mass in the ancient Church which dates back to the Emperor Constantine in the early 300s and has been destroyed and rebuilt many times.

The Mass was attended by a small congregation of Australian priests, religious and lay people who live and work in Rome.

Following Mass, the Bishops held a reception for the Australians in Rome at the Irish College.



Earlier, various Bishops attended meetings with

Vatican congregations for Laity, Culture, Cor Unum, and Justice and Peace.

Today's Mass was the last of the big public Masses to be celebrated by the Australian Bishops during their ad limina visit.

The five-yearly ad limina pilgrimage is expected to conclude with a general audience with Pope John Paul II on Friday.

Australian bishops honour Cardinal Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan

March 25, 2004

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.

Archbishop Carroll's address to the Holy Father

March 26, 2004

Most Holy Father,

On behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference here present before you and the Catholic people of Australia, I am honoured to offer you greetings of reverence and affection. In our own name as your brother Bishops and that of the Priests, Deacons, Religious and Lay Faithful entrusted to our pastoral care we pledge our loyalty to you as the Successor of St Peter.

We assure Your Holiness of our constant prayer that you would be strengthened in body and refreshed in spirit as you continue at great personal cost to show your solicitude for all the Churches. Last October some of us were privileged to be here in Rome as you were honoured for the 25 years of your Pontificate. We again express our

admiration and gratitude for your long years of faithful service and of your inspiring leadership of the Church Universal.

In particular we are deeply grateful for the individual attention you have given to us in our private audiences and for this fraternal meeting.

In Australia, both the Church and the nation still treasure the special gift you brought us in your two Papal visits to our land. We thank you for the memorable visit in 1986 when you criss-crossed the length and breadth of our vast island-continent, bringing a message of encouragement and challenge to all, especially our indigenous peoples. You returned a second time to gift us with the grace of Australia's first Beata, when you beatified Blessed Mary MacKillop, Mother Mary of the Cross. That action has brought many blessings to our country. We and many other Australians hope and pray for a further gift, the canonization of Blessed Mary.

Our last quinquennial visit coincided with the Synod of Oceania. We thank you for calling us together in that fraternal gathering and for your subsequent Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Oceania" which continues to encourage and guide us in our mission. As we celebrated the Great Jubilee of 2000 and entered the Third Millennium of Christianity, we were strengthened and challenged by your personal example and inspiring words. Your call to a new evangelization has been heard and we seek to respond to it with energy and enthusiasm.

We appreciate your constant efforts for world peace, your promotion of social justice and your eloquent calls for compassion towards the poor and disadvantaged. In the secular society of Australia, we endeavour to uphold the same values - the sanctity of human life, the sacredness of marriage and family and the basic human rights of all. We pledge ourselves to continue to bear witness to the message of the Gospel, the truths of Catholic Tradition and the social teaching of the Church.

Following your lead, we seek to do this within the multicultural and multi-faith environment of Australia in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation, interfaith dialogue and of Christian witness and service to all in our Australian society. In all our pastoral efforts, Your Holiness, we are supported and enlightened by your example and teaching. We will continue to follow your Petrine leadership, strengthened by the bonds of collegial unity and ecclesial communion. Please confirm us, Your Brothers in the Faith.

Most Holy Father, we humbly ask you to address us and confer on us and all the Faithful of our Diocesan Churches, Your Apostolic Blessing.

26 March 2004

+ Francis P. Carroll,
President, Australian Catholic Bishops Conference.
Archbishop of Canberra and Goulburn.

Pope commends Australian bishops on social justice and urges strength against secularism

Pope John Paul II has used his ad limina address to the Australian Bishops to acknowledge the leadership of the Catholic Church in Australia in defence of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and indigenous peoples, while urging strength in the face of growing secularism.

The Pontiff's address was the culmination of a two week visit to Rome by the Australian Bishops in which they delivered their five-yearly reports on their dioceses, visited various Vatican congregations and undertook spiritual pilgrimages.

The Pope urged the Bishops to be fearless in their efforts to combat secularism in Australia and he particularly called for a renewed emphasis on inspiring Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays.

He expressed appreciation for the work of priests and Religious in Australia and said he was sure the Bishops' initiatives to "promote a culture of vocation" would bear fruit.

The Pope stressed the importance of family life and noted a particular concern at "the growing trend to equate marriage with other forms of cohabitation".

"I am pleased to acknowledge your steadfast efforts to uphold the uniqueness of marriage as a life-long covenant based on generous mutual giving and unconditional love," he told the Bishops.

"It is the Bishop's particular task to ensure that within civil society - including the media and entertainment industry sectors - the values of marriage and family life are supported and defended."

The Pope acknowledged “the noble contribution the Church in Australia makes to the attainment of social justice and solidarity”.

“Your leadership in the defence of the fundamental rights of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and the developmental support offered to indigenous Australians, are shining examples of the ‘commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being’ to which I have called the whole Church.”

The Pope concluded his message by bestowing his Apostolic Blessing on the Bishops and the priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful of their dioceses.

Pope John Paul II’s Address to the Australian Bishops on their Ad Limina Visit

Your Eminence,

Dear Brother Bishops,

1. “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord” (1 Timothy 1:2). With fraternal affection I warmly welcome you, the Bishops of Australia. I thank Archbishop Carroll for the good wishes and kind sentiments expressed on your behalf. I warmly reciprocate them and I assure you of my prayers for yourselves and those entrusted to your pastoral care. Your first visit “ad Limina Apostolorum” in this new millennium is an occasion to give thanks to God for the immense gift of faith in Jesus Christ which has been welcomed and treasured by the peoples of your country (cf. “Ecclesia in Oceania,” 1). As servants of the Gospel for the hope of the world, your coming to see Peter (cf. Galatians 1:18) affirms and consolidates that collegiality which gives rise to unity in diversity and safeguards the integrity of the tradition handed down by the Apostles (cf. “Pastores Gregis,” 57).

2. Our Lord’s call to “come follow me” (Matthew 4:19) is as valid today as it was on the shores of Lake Galilee more than two thousand years ago. The joy and hope of Christian discipleship mark the lives of countless Australian priests, Religious, and faithful men and women who together strive to respond to Christ’s call and bring his truth to bear on the ecclesial and civic life of your nation. Yet it is also true that the pernicious ideology of secularism has found fertile ground in Australia. At the root of this disturbing development is the attempt to promote a vision of humanity without God. It exaggerates individualism, sunders the essential link between freedom and truth, and corrodes the relationships of trust which characterize genuine social living. Your own reports unequivocally describe some of the destructive consequences of this eclipse of the sense of God: the undermining of family life; a drift away from the Church; a limited vision of life which fails to awaken in people the sublime call to “direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them” (“Fides et Ratio,” 5).

In the face of such challenges, when the winds are against us (cf. Mark 6:48), the Lord himself calls out: “Courage! It is I! Have no fear” (Mark 6:50). Remaining firm in trust, you too can dispel apprehension and fear. Especially within a culture of the “here and now,” Bishops must stand out as fearless prophets, witnesses and servants of the hope of Christ (cf. “Pastores Gregis,” 3). In proclaiming this hope, which springs from the Cross, I am confident that you will lead men and women from the shadows of moral confusion and ambiguous thinking into the radiance of Christ’s truth and love. Indeed, it is only by understanding humanity’s final destination—eternal life in heaven—that the multitude of daily joys and sorrows can be explained, enabling people to embrace the mystery of their own life with confidence (cf. “Fides et Ratio,” 81).

3. The Church’s witness to the hope that she holds (cf. 1 Peter 3:15) is especially powerful when she gathers together for worship. Sunday Mass, because of its special solemnity, the obligatory presence of the faithful, and its celebration on the day when Christ conquered death, expresses with great emphasis the Eucharist’s inherent ecclesial dimension: the mystery of the Church is made present in a most tangible way (cf. “Dies Domini,” 34). Consequently Sunday is the “supreme day of faith,” “an indispensable day,” “the day of Christian hope!” Any weakening in the Sunday observance of Holy Mass weakens Christian discipleship and dims the light of witness to Christ’s presence in our world. When Sunday loses its fundamental meaning and becomes subordinate to a secular concept of “weekend” dominated by such things as entertainment and sport, people stay locked within a horizon so narrow that they can no longer see the heavens (cf. “Dies Domini,” 4). Rather than being truly satisfied or revitalized, they remain entrapped in a senseless pursuit of the novel and deprived of the perennial freshness of Christ’s “living water” (John 4:11). Though the secularization of the Lord’s day understandably causes you much worry you can, however, draw comfort from the faithfulness of the Lord himself who continues to beckon his people with a love which challenges and calls (cf. “Ecclesia in Oceania,” 3). In urging the dear faithful of Australia—and in a special way the young people—to remain faithful to the celebration of Sunday Mass, I make

my own the words found in the Letter to the Hebrews: “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,... not neglecting to meet together... but encouraging one another” (Hebrews 10:23-25).

To you as Bishops I suggest that as moderators of the liturgy you give pastoral priority to catechetical programs which instruct the faithful about the true meaning of Sunday and inspire them to observe it fully. To this end I refer you to my Apostolic Letter “Dies Domini.” It outlines the pilgrim and eschatological character of the People of God, which can so easily be overshadowed today by shallow sociological understandings of community. As a remembrance of a past event and the celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord amidst his people, Sunday also looks to the future glory of his return and the fullness of Christian hope and joy.

4. Intimately linked to the liturgy is the Church’s mission to evangelize. While the liturgical renewal, ardently desired by the Second Vatican Council, has rightly resulted in a more active and conscious participation of the faithful in the tasks proper to them, such involvement must not become an end in itself. The “purpose of being with Jesus is to go forth from Jesus, in his power and with his grace” (“Ecclesia in Oceania,” 3).

It is precisely this dynamic that the Prayer after Communion and the Concluding Rite of the Mass articulate (cf. “Dies Domini,” 45). Sent by the Lord himself into the vineyard—the home, the workplace, schools, civic organizations—disciples of Christ find no room for “standing idle in the marketplace” (Matthew 20:3) nor can they be so deeply immersed in the internal organization of parish life, that they are distracted from the command to evangelize others actively (cf. “Christifideles Laici,” 2). Renewed by the strength of the Risen Lord and his Spirit, Christ’s followers must return to their “vineyard” burning with a desire to “speak” of Christ and to “show” him to the world (cf. “Novo Millennio Ineunte,” 16).

5. The “communion” that exists between a Bishop and his priests demands that the well-being of the presbyterate be close to every Bishop’s heart. The 1998 Statement of Conclusions (Interdicasterial Meeting with a representation of the Australian Bishops) noted, with good reason, the great dedication of the priests serving the Church in Australia (cf. No. 19). In expressing my own appreciation of their tireless and unassuming service, I encourage you always to listen to your priests, as a father would listen to a son. In a secular context such as yours it is of particular importance that you help your priests to appreciate that their spiritual identity must consciously shape all their pastoral activity. The priest is never a manager or mere defender of a particular point of view. In imitation of the Good Shepherd, he is a disciple seeking to transcend his own personal limitations and rejoice in a life of intimacy with Christ. A relationship of deep communion and friendship with Jesus, in which the priest habitually talks “heart to heart with the Lord” (Instruction “The Priest, Pastor and Leader of the Parish Community,” 27), will nurture his quest for holiness, enriching not only himself but the entire community he serves.

It is in embracing the universal call to holiness (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:3) that the particular vocation to which God summons every individual is found. In this regard I am sure that your initiatives to promote a culture of vocation and to treasure the various states of ecclesial life, which exist so that “the world may believe” (John 17:21), will bear fruit. As for the young men who generously respond to God’s call to the priesthood, I again affirm that they must receive your every assistance as they strive for a life of simplicity, chastity and humble service, in imitation of Christ, the Eternal High Priest, of whom they are to become living icons (cf. “Pastores Dabo Vobis,” 33).

6. The contribution of consecrated men and women to the mission of the Church and the building up of civil society has been of immeasurable worth to your nation. Innumerable Australians have benefited from the selfless commitment of Religious to pastoral ministry and spiritual guidance as well as to education, social and medical work, and care of the elderly. Your reports attest to your admiration of these men and women, whose “gift of self for love of the Lord Jesus and, in him, of every member of the human family” (“Vita Consecrata,” 3) so enriches the life of your Dioceses.

This deep appreciation of consecrated life is rightly accompanied by your concern for the decline in Religious vocations in your country. A renewed clarity is needed to articulate the particular contribution of Religious to the life of the Church: a mission to make the love of Christ present in the midst of humanity (cf. Instruction “Starting Afresh From Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium,” 5). Such clarity will give rise to a new *kairos*, with Religious confidently reaffirming their calling and, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, proposing afresh to young people the ideal of consecration and mission. The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, embraced for the love of God, splendidly illuminate the fidelity, self-possession and authentic freedom necessary to live the fullness of life to which all men and women are called. With these sentiments I again assure Religious Priests, Brothers and Sisters of the vital witness they provide by radically walking in the footsteps of Christ.

7. Dear Brothers, I am pleased to acknowledge your steadfast efforts to uphold the uniqueness of marriage as a life-long covenant based on generous mutual giving and unconditional love. The Church's teaching on marriage and stable family life offers saving truth to individuals and a sure foundation upon which the aspirations of your nation can be anchored. Incisive and faithful explanation of Christian doctrine regarding marriage and the family is of utmost importance in order to counter the secular, pragmatic and individualistic outlook which has gained ground in the area of legislation and even a certain acceptance in the realm of public opinion (cf. "Ecclesia in Oceania," 45). Of particular concern is the growing trend to equate marriage with other forms of cohabitation. This obfuscates the very nature of marriage and violates its sacred purpose in God's plan for humanity (cf. "Familiaris Consortio," 3). Raising families according to the splendor of Christ's truth is a sharing in God's work of creation. It lies at the heart of the call to promote a civilization of love. The deep-seated love of mothers and fathers for their children is also the Church's, as is the pain experienced by parents when their children fall victim to forces and trends which draw them away from the path of truth, leaving them disorientated and confused. Bishops must continue to support parents who, despite the often bewildering social difficulties of today's world, are in a position to exercise great influence and offer broader horizons of hope (cf. "Pastores Gregis," 51). It is the Bishop's particular task to ensure that within civil society—including the media and entertainment industry sectors—the values of marriage and family life are supported and defended (cf. *ibid.*, 52).

8. Finally I wish to acknowledge the noble contribution the Church in Australia makes to the attainment of social justice and solidarity. Your leadership in the defense of the fundamental rights of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and the developmental support offered to indigenous Australians, are shining examples of the "commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being" ("Novo Millennio Ineunte," 49) to which I have called the whole Church. Australia's growing role as a leader in the Pacific region presents an opportunity for you to respond to the pressing need for a careful discernment of the phenomenon of globalization. Vigilant concern for the poor, the abandoned and the mistreated, and promotion of a globalization of charity will do much to indicate a path of genuine development which overcomes social marginalization and favors economic benefit for all (cf. "Pastores Gregis," 69).

9. Dear Brothers, with affection and fraternal gratitude I offer these reflections to you and assure you of my prayers as you seek to shepherd the flocks entrusted to you. United in your proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, go forward now in hope! With these sentiments I commend you to the protection of Mary, Mother of the Church, and to the intercession and guidance of Blessed Mary MacKillop. To you and to the priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful of your Dioceses, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.