TO THE CLERGY AND FAITHFUL OF OUR HOLY EPARCHY
A PASTORAL LETTER
CONCERNING THE COMMONWEALTH POSTAL SURVEY
ON SAME SEX “MARRIAGE”

"In the beginning was the Word..." (John 1:1)

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
Peace be with you.

"Natural desire was bestowed with a view to marriage; it was given with a view to the procreation of children, not with a view to adultery and corruption." (St. John Chrysostom. Homily II on Ephesians)

THE POSTAL SURVEY
Most, if not all, registered on the Commonwealth of Australia electoral roll will have by now received a postal survey concerning same sex “marriage”. At present, marriage in Australia is defined as being between one man and one woman, a lifelong union to the exclusion of all other persons. There is now a proposal to alter that definition so that it extends to members of the same sex. Marriage would thus be possible between two men or two women.

Despite widespread misunderstanding, the postal survey is not a referendum. You are not being asked to vote on the issue but rather to express an opinion. However, your opinion, one way or the other, will be part of what many will regard as a definitive, national consensus that should be considered in future legislation. Your opinion counts. I would urge each eligible person to mark the survey paper and return post it as soon as possible.

For us as Christians, who desire only what is good for our society and for our fellow citizens, our opinion must surely be in favour of the present definition. In other words, it is difficult to see how a person with an informed conscience, could support the “Yes” option.

MARRIAGE
Marriage as the union of one man and one woman is at the very core of our Christian Faith and our family-based society. “The love of husband and wife is the force that welds society together. Men will take up arms and even sacrifice their lives for the sake of this love.” (St John Chrysostom. Homily XX, On Ephesians)

Of particular concern is the protection of the rights and freedoms of those who oppose the change of marriage’s current definition. Overseas, we have seen business people dragged into court for refusing to offer professional services to same-sex wedding ceremonies. Why should things be any different in Australia. Already, even before a completed survey, the Attorney-General of the Northern Territory has proposed removing all legal protections of faith communities, in this and other areas.

THE NO OPINION DOES NOT EXCLUDE
To hold the No opinion is not to judge the sincerity of those who speak of same-sex love. To hold the No opinion is not to judge the personal worth of those who are attracted to their own sex. However, to hold the No opinion is to believe that marriage between a man and a woman, and the family that arises from that union, are fundamental to the stability of our society.
For many there is a struggle between Faith and pragmatic experience. Many have homosexual friends or family members who are in irregular relationships. However, our affection for friends, and our love for even our own flesh and blood, should not lead us to condone that which is wrong in itself.

AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE
The devil is in the detail. And, thus far, very few details have been offered as to the consequences of a new definition of an age-old institution. Will we see another “phobia” added to the ever growing list of topics of which discussion is currently not permitted? If we grant parliament the power to alter the definition of a fundamental human institution, what will be next suggested and what will next be considered possible? Why should special interest groups stop at same sex marriages? Who will safeguard our freedom to preach and practice our faith as well as to speak out our opinion without being labeled as “bigots or hatemongers”? Will parents remain the prime educators of their children and have the right to determine what their school-age children are taught about marriage, gender and sex?

THERE IS MORE TO COME
I would urge that in these coming days, each person eligible to take part in the postal survey, examines the two positions with great diligence and with much prayer; and as you reflect on the arguments for and against, keep in mind that it is now increasingly clear that so-called “marriage equality” is simply the beginning. There is more to come. Already in some foreign jurisdictions there are moves in this direction, including proposals to force Christians and other believers to solemnize such “marriages.” It is quite possible that after a successful Yes “vote” any continued opposition to, or criticism of, same sex “marriage” could be criminalised as a form of so-called “hate speech.”

Sacred Scripture (see Genesis 2:22-25; John 2:1-11; Revelation 19:7-9), especially the words of our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the constant tradition of the Apostolic Churches, together with the historic witness of secular society, are diametrically opposed to anything but a definition of marriage as between a man and a woman. For us as Christians there can be but one choice, and that is No.

PRAYER AND FASTING
We are all familiar with the significance of forty days, found both in Sacred Scripture and the ancient practice of the Church. I would ask that, during the forty days between 27 September and 7 November, each of us keeps the Wednesdays and Fridays as days of prayer and fasting. Sacred Scripture often reminds us that some things can only be achieved by prayer and fasting. Also, we might choose additional penitential acts to observe on other days.

OUR UNFAILING GUIDE
Dear Brothers and Sisters, in the midst of the noise, the abuse and the misinformation, let us place ourselves under the unfailing intercessions and guidance of the Blessed Theotokos, our Lady, the Wedding-Guest in Cana of Galilee.

With prayers assured, and with my paternal blessing,

Given in Sydney on the Twenty-Six of September, the Feast of St. John the Evangelist (a.k.a. The Apostle of Love), in the Year of Our Lord Two Thousand and Seventeen.

* Robert Rabbat, DD
Melkite Greek-Catholic Eparch of Australia and New Zealand.