



The Holy See

PASTORAL VISIT IN AUSTRALIA

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE BISHOPS IN ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL**

Sydney (Australia), 26 November 1986

*Dear brother Bishops,*¹ The moment has finally come for this meeting, to which I have been looking forward with a sense of expectation and joy. "For – to use an expression of Saint Paul – God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus". There exists between us a bond which expresses in a personal and collegial way the communion – the *koinonia* – that characterizes the entire life of the Church. In this bond of grace and love I greet each one of you, and in you I greet each particular Church in this land. At this point of my pilgrimage I wish to thank you most sincerely for your invitation and for all the work you have done in preparing this visit, especially for the spiritual preparation undertaken in each diocese. I pray that through God's grace there will be abundant fruits in Christian living. With gratitude to you for your generous and dedicated service of God's People in Australia, and for your solicitude for the whole Body of the Church throughout the world, I share your joys and concerns in the task that the Lord has entrusted to each one of you. In you I embrace the priests, the men and women religious, the Catholic laity, the young, the old, the sick, the poor and all those who look to the Church for that word of life and law of love which lead to salvation in Jesus Christ.² Indeed it is to the Church that we too, "successors of the Apostles... sent to continue throughout the ages the work of Christ", must look if we are to understand the true meaning of our episcopal ministry. Ours is a mission of service to the ecclesial community and to the world, in which the Church like a pilgrim in a foreign land proclaims the Death and Resurrection of the Lord until he comes. The form and content of the service are determined by the unchanging nature and mission conferred on the Church by her divine Founder, the blessed Son of God who, at the moment of his Ascension addressed his Apostles, and therefore all of us, with these words: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... and teaching them... and behold, I am with you always, to the close of the age". The New Covenant between God and man established in Christ's blood is proclaimed and made present in the community built on the Rock that is Peter and upon the foundation of the Apostles. Together in the College of Bishops we share the ministry of fostering the unity of God's people in faith and charity. Together we are accountable to Christ for this responsibility of ours. In the communion of the Church the role of the bishop, as also the specific role of the Successor of Peter, is defined by the command and the power which Christ gave the Apostles and their successors to teach all nations, to sanctify them in the truth and to give them a shepherd's care.³ Today I have this opportunity to speak to all of you about our common hopes and concerns. My first desire is to join you in thanking our heavenly Father for the Church

in Australia. To God above all are due the vitality of your local Churches and the fidelity of your people. "We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks; we call on your name and recount your wondrous deeds". You have been called to be bishops of the Church in Australia at a very special time for the ecclesial community. The Second Vatican Council has been an extraordinary grace for the Church in Australia and throughout the world. You are witnesses of the forces of renewal which the Holy Spirit has raised up among your people through the teaching and through the very experience of the Council. You are witnesses of the deeper awareness that the faithful have of belonging to a living community of faith and charity which requires an active and responsible sharing of all the baptized in her life and mission. Together with a renewal of ecclesial structures there is a deeper spiritual and theological understanding of the mystery of the Church, which is a mystery of grace and redemption for humanity. The mistakes which have also accompanied the post-conciliar time of development in the universal Church are also known to us all. To the extent that there is any degree of culpability in these mistakes, this should be acknowledged and be a reason for repentance. In any event such mistakes call us to humility and ever greater vigilance; they can be helpful in protecting us from complacency and any temptation to neo-triumphalism. Yet there is nothing that can nullify the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that was poured out on his beloved Church through the Second Vatican Council. The recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops has rightly underscored therefore the need for a new application of the Council to the urgent spiritual needs of our times.⁴ Your own pastoral experience shows how quickly unbelief and moral indifference can make inroads into a society built on Christian traditions. While on the one hand you can verify a ferment of new energies and commitment on the part of many groups and persons within your local Churches, you have also been able to individualize the signs of a levelling out of Catholic life on the part of some to the point where they accept a completely secular outlook as the norm of judgement and behaviour. I refer among other aspects to the incidence of divorce and abortion and to the documented fall in religious practice. You yourselves have spoken to me about all these things. Among the priorities of a renewed endeavour of evangelization there has to be a return to the sense of the sacred, to an awareness of the centrality of God in the whole of human experience. The proximity of the second centenary of the Church's presence in this continent constitutes a challenge and a grace-filled opportunity for genuine renewal within the Church and for a new approach to the growing number of people without any religious affiliation. In this latter context, initiatives such as the Catholic Enquiry Office deserve warm support and encouragement. As bishops you realize that "unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain; unless the Lord watches over the city the watchman stays awake in vain".⁵ This means that in her service to society, the Church in Australia must not overlook the capital importance of the universal call to holiness which, as the Council reminds us, "the Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached... to all his disciples, regardless of their situation". Such holiness of life requires listening to the word of God, a prayerful response from a converted heart, a joyful sharing in the life of the ecclesial community, obedience to Christ's commandments and a willing service of those in spiritual and material need. Elements of a Catholic spirituality which deserve to be acknowledged are appreciation of the life of grace, prayerful meditation on the Scriptures, faith-filled devotion centred on the Eucharist, and a proper use of the Sacrament of Penance. I would urge you to do everything possible to implement in your local Churches the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "[Reconciliatio et Paenitentia](#)". We know that the Sacrament of Penance is greatly needed in the Church today and that its use must be revived. We know too that this revival depends above all, after God's grace, on the zeal and the fidelity of the bishops of the Church.⁶ In a special way bishops are servants of the faith through their teaching office. In communion with the Successor of Peter it is their role to make clear the content of the faith as "teachers endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe

and put into practice". This is a sacred trust which requires evangelical vigilance and courage. It is extremely important that the Deposit of Faith be transmitted in its purity and entirety to future generations. The young especially cannot be expected to adhere wholeheartedly to the Gospel message unless it is presented in a clear and certain way. They recognize that the faith of the Church is a matter not merely of general attitudes to life. It is a matter of the divinely revealed word of God. The Catholic School system, of which the Church in Australia is rightly proud, was and is a response to the Church's right and duty to provide an integral human religious and moral education. The sacrifices which the hierarchy, the members of religious congregations and Australian Catholic parents have been willing to make in this cause clearly stand to indicate the conviction of the value of such education for the transmission of the faith, and for the application of the Christian message to the realities of life in society. I wish to commend you and all in Australia who are striving to continue this tradition in the face of increasing difficulties. I gladly take note of the excellent work being done by the Catholic Teachers Colleges, and of the profound commitment of Australian men and women religious and members of the laity to Catholic education and to the extensive Confraternity of Christian Doctrine programmes. Your leadership in this field, both individually and through the organs of the Bishops' Conference, is a precious service to the Church's vitality.⁷ The complex question of catechesis has caused you great concern in the past decades, and is of concern as well to many Catholic parents in Australia. This is a problem which affects large sectors of the Church, as witnessed by the attention given the matter in the recent Extraordinary Synod of Bishops. As teachers of the faith in this post-conciliar period we must do everything possible to ensure that in both content and method our catechesis effectively presents the life-giving word of God. This was clearly expressed by Pope John XXIII on the opening day of the Second Vatican Council when he stated: "The greatest concern of the Ecumenical Council is this; that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be more effectively guarded and taught". Much of a positive nature has been acquired in these years in the field of catechetical methods. The recent Synod nevertheless felt the need to call for the provision of sure guidelines, especially in relation to content. Initial steps are being taken to prepare a "catechism or compendium of all Catholic doctrine regarding both faith and morals" to serve as "a point of reference for the catechisms or compendiums that are prepared in the various regions". I thank you as of now for the interest and cooperation you will give to this important ecclesial endeavour, and I express the hope that together with the whole Church you will recognize its value for preserving the authenticity of the Christian message through all ages until the Lord comes again.⁸ In your service to the faith and holiness of the portion of God's people entrusted to you, you fully recognize how important it is to give special attention to the spiritual and human needs of your priests and of the religious who so closely and generously collaborate with you in the apostolate. As true spiritual fathers – and, at the same time, with brotherly concern for all – you are always ready to listen, to understand, to encourage, forgive, correct, inspire. You know the joys and difficulties of such a task, and how important it is for the well-being of the Church in your land! Appropriate programmes of continuing formation for priests and religious will meet genuine needs of the Church. Another aspect which I wish to commend to your special care is that of promoting the proper conditions in which vocations to the priesthood and to the religious life can develop. Much depends on the Christian formation received in the home and parish. Much also depends on the witness of priests and religious who show by the joy in their hearts that the call to follow Christ in a special vocation is a most fulfilling ideal. Above all, much depends on the prayer of the entire Christian community, for we have the explicit command of Christ to "pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest". This, together with the appropriate formation of candidates to the priesthood and religious life according to the directives of the Council and the guidelines issued by the Holy See in the years since then, will ensure the necessary conditions for cooperating with the gifts which the Holy Spirit abundantly pours out on your local Churches.⁹ I have just now met representatives of the men and women religious of this country. I was indeed happy to be able to acknowledge publicly the extraordinary contribution of religious to the

Church's life in Australia in the past and today too. They have been active and close collaborators of the hierarchy, especially in the fields of education and health care, as also in other pastoral and social services, and in the effort to build a social order based on justice, love and peace. On their behalf I speak to you, the bishops, of the encouragement and special pastoral service which you are in a position to give them, with the aim, above all else, of strengthening them in the specific charism of their religious consecration. Your relationship with them requires esteem and respect for the life and spirit of each Institute, and a willingness on your part to be personally close to each community. I realize that in Australia the relations between bishops and religious are particularly cordial and beneficial. I wish to encourage you to continue in that policy. All are called to work together to build up the local Church in union and harmony, each according to the gift received.¹⁰ One area of our solicitude for God's people which concerns us deeply as pastors is that which refers to family life, and human life issues. There is no need to repeat here what you well know as experienced pastors of your people: that the family as an institution needs the concerted pastoral and loving care of the Church. I have been encouraged on learning the extent of your interest in this matter and on being informed of the many practical and effective pastoral programmes which are in use here in Australia. The Christian concept of marriage and the family is being opposed by a new secular, pragmatic and individualistic outlook which has gained standing in the area of legislation and which has a certain "approval" in the realm of public opinion. The Church's views on marriage, family life, and life issues in general, far from being a manmade doctrine or a partisan position, are bearers of a saving truth for society and for individuals. It is necessary to make the Church's position known in all its truth and value, in honest dialogue with the forces present in your cultural world. In the dialogue between faith and culture the rightful role of competent members of the laity needs to be encouraged and respected, and they themselves need to feel the guidance and support of their pastors. In the defence of life and in promoting Natural Family Planning you will know how to elicit the cordial and mutual collaboration of the various groups and organizations involved in these areas. With respect for the legitimate multiplicity of approaches and natural methods, it is your task to promote a collaboration that will help to offset any confusion or hesitation regarding the challenges to be faced. In the particular area of advances in biogenetics the Holy See, as you know, is preparing an official document, after extensive consultation, in the first place with the world's bishops' conferences. It is my hope that before long this document will be available and that it will constitute a sure point of reference for the entire ecclesial community, and indeed for all those who in Australia and elsewhere are involved and its ethical implications. This too is an area in which it is important for bishops not to neglect the specific teaching authority which is theirs according to their consecration and mission, always in the bonds of unity, charity and peace with the Bishop of Rome.¹¹ There are so many other themes of which I might speak in order to rejoice with you in considering the growth of God's kingdom in your midst. More than anything else my purpose here has been to encourage you in our common apostolic faith and in the communion that unites us, thus fulfilling the ministry which Christ entrusted to Peter. A bishop's task is certainly not a light one. He has been invested with a grave responsibility. But our trust is in Jesus Christ, "the chief Shepherd" of the Church. In him we have the strength and courage to remain faithful until the day of judgement. In your episcopal ministry you are never alone. United with each other and with the Roman Pontiff in collegial union and love, you share a common calling. The sense of harmony and collaboration you have achieved within your Bishop's Conference constitutes a "holy union of energies in the service of the common good of the Churches". I know that you will always be able to count on each other's prayers and fraternal support, and I assure you of my own desire to be always at your service. In accordance with Christ's will for the good of his Church I ask all of your people to remain united with you their pastors, "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". On my part I am grateful for your fidelity to the Holy See and that of your people, and I pray that this visit too will strengthen the bonds between us in the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church. In my prayer I entrust you to the loving protection of Mary, Mother of the

Church. May she intercede for you and for the needs of the Churches over which you preside and which you serve. And with her help may we ourselves stand fast in the holiness and truth of her Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. © Copyright 1986 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana

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