



# SOWING<sub>IN</sub>TEARS

Lenten Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of New South Wales  
to the Clergy, Religious and Laity in response to the  
Royal Commission on Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

*“Those who are sowing in tears will sing when they reap” – Psalm 125:5*



LENT 2013

# Brothers and sisters in Christ,

## The Body of Christ is wounded

Lent words are 're' words: re-pent, re-turn, re-cover, re-pair, re-new. All are called to repentance, not just the great sinners, because all are affected when any member is sinful or suffering. The Body of Christ is wounded.



Yet for all the bruised purple, Lent is a season of hope. It ends not with death but with rising from the dead. As the Holy Father reminds us this Lent, our faith means we can look beyond present ills with joyful hope to the fullness of Christ's victory, won by His perfect obedience (Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2013*, n. 4).

Against the backdrop of this Lenten paradox – of tears and joy, Cross and Resurrection – the Church in Australia has been rocked by child sexual abuse. As one prominent lay commentator observed: “Like every community, the Catholic Church is a Church of sinners. Its spiritual rhythms repeat the ancient biblical cycle of failure, repentance, penance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Yet even in a Church that knows a lot about sin, some acts of wickedness still retain their capacity to shock. The sexual abuse of minors by priests – men traditionally called ‘Father’ – is one such kind of wickedness. So is the failure of bishops – shepherds, in the ancient image – to guard the flock against predators, especially predators from within the household of faith.” (George Weigel, *The Courage to be Catholic*, pp1-2)



As the Catholic Bishops of New South Wales, we would like to reflect with you upon the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse that these failures in our Church and in other institutions have occasioned. The terms of reference for the Royal Commission recognise that “children deserve a safe and happy childhood” and that institutions like the Church can help that to happen. But sadly children have sometimes been violated by those who should care for them and leaders have sometimes failed to respond appropriately.

We must not put our heads in the sand about any of this, or try to minimise or explain it away. The fact is that our Dioceses have all known cases of child abuse. Even if many of these are ‘historic’ cases, and even if we have improved the way we respond, the damage has been done and there is a public perception that the Church has not addressed these issues adequately. This has in turn damaged the credibility and mission of the Church.

# Challenges raised by the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission is to be welcomed as an opportunity for victims to obtain a just hearing, for processes within institutions to be scrutinised, and for the whole community to understand abuse better and find ways forward. The Church in Australia has established a Truth, Justice and Healing Council to ensure we cooperate fully with the Royal Commission. There are three things we should keep in mind as the Royal Commission progresses ...

First, these terrible sins and crimes, and their mishandling by Church authorities, have done *great damage to the victims and their families*. Here we Bishops repeat and make our own the apology Pope Benedict XVI made during World Youth Day in Sydney. Calling for renewal of the whole Church in Australia he paused to acknowledge “the shame which we have all felt as a result of the sexual abuse of minors by some clergy and religious in this country”. He said he was “deeply sorry for the pain and suffering the victims have endured ... These misdeeds, which constitute so grave a betrayal of trust, deserve unequivocal condemnation.” He urged us to work together to combat this evil and to ensure that victims receive compassion and care, perpetrators are brought to justice and all young people enjoy a safe environment (*Homily of Pope Benedict XVI, St Mary’s Cathedral Sydney, 19 July 2008*).

As leaders and as a community of faith we must listen to people’s hurt and respond with humility and compassion. We must continue to proclaim the preciousness of every child and young person and to insist that all abuse is contrary to the laws of God, the Church and the state. We must repent where there has been institutional failure and resolve to do better in the future.

Secondly, *child abuse is not the whole story of the Church* – far from it. The Catholic Church has long played an important role in our society. Holy priests and religious have worked tirelessly for the glory of God and the good of their people. Vast numbers of people are supported by the Church’s activities in parish life, education, welfare, healthcare, ministry to young people and migrants, aged care, service to the poor and marginalised. There is great faith and compassion amongst our pastors and people. We should not lose sight of this amidst the current consciousness of failures.

Thirdly, the current crisis is *an opportunity for purification of the Church* – a Lenten return for each one of us personally and all of us collectively. This Lent, and the years of the Royal Commission ahead, should be a time of reviewing past performance and examining the whys and wherefores; of prayer and penance; and of improving our act on many levels.



# Some practical things we can all do

Our Dioceses will cooperate fully with the Royal Commission, police and other relevant authorities. With the help of the Commission report we will try to get to the bottom of the causes both of abuse and of failures to respond to it appropriately. We know we must re-examine our attitude to children and vulnerable people and how we can keep them safe; the ways we attract, discern and form vocations; how we appraise, develop, supervise and support those in ministry; ways to identify and best respond to any hint of misconduct; how we bring justice and healing to victims; ways to work best with civil authorities. Further concrete measures will emerge in the months ahead.

As well as these structural measures we need to consider spiritual ones. Lent is a season for *doing something to realign our hearts and minds on God's*. Tears of shame and sorrow must be the beginnings of spiritual renewal. As we pray on Ash Wednesday: "We entreat you, O Lord, that through works of penance and charity we may turn away from harmful pleasures and, cleansed from our sins, may become worthy to celebrate devoutly the Passion of your Son." And so this Lent and going forward *we call for prayer for the following intentions:*

- the success of the Royal Commission
- justice and healing of victims
- wisdom and compassion for leaders and carers
- repentance by perpetrators
- grace for those tempted to lose faith or hope
- safety for all young people
- consolation for all affected.



The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference calls on all the faithful to join them in *observing the Fridays of Lent in 2013 as special days of penance in the wake of the abuse crisis*, by such means as prayerful reading of the Holy Scripture, a holy hour of prayer and petition before the Blessed Sacrament, and by traditional acts such as fasting and abstaining from meat. As your Bishops in New South Wales we undertake to lead you in these efforts and to continue to make a holy hour ourselves beyond Lent. We invite clergy and religious to join us in giving this lead and redoubling their prayers for this intention.



After Lent is over we ask the people of our Dioceses to continue to join their pastors in this spiritual response to our spiritual and moral failures, through regular participation in Mass, Holy Communion and Confession, and by praying daily for spiritual and moral renewal in the Church. The *Hail Holy Queen* might be an appropriate daily prayer as both abuse victims and the Church pass through this 'vale of tears'. There will be periodic prayers of the faithful in Mass for these intentions.

Wounds in the Body of Christ, even ones for which we are not personally responsible, will only be healed by our cooperation with God's grace in acts such as these.

Hail Holy Queen, Mother of Mercy!  
Hail, our life, our sweetness, and our hope!  
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve,  
to thee do we send up our sighs,  
mourning and weeping in this valley of tears.  
Turn, then, most gracious advocate,  
thine eyes of mercy toward us;  
and after this our exile show unto us  
the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus;  
O clement, O loving, O sweet virgin Mary.

Pray for us, O holy Mother of God:  
that we may be made worthy of the  
promises of Christ.



## Supporting each other at this time

Lent began with us hearing the Prophet Joel declare: "Before the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, lament. Let them say: Spare your people, Lord! Do not make your heritage a thing of shame." (Joel 2:17) Faithful priests, religious and lay leaders risk being ashamed and demoralised at this time and so need encouragement. As Bishops we undertake to make this a priority.

The Royal Commission will enable some people to raise at last issues from their past. We encourage all victims of abuse to contact the police. Assistance is also available from each Diocese. We recommit ourselves to justice and compassion for victims and their families. We know our clergy and people want the same.

We ask priests and religious to assist those lay people who are dispirited by appropriate preaching and pastoral care. Notwithstanding our failures, God will not allow the Church to fail in her pastoral and evangelical mission. To the best of our ability, we must encourage and support each other in seeking and doing God's will in hard times.

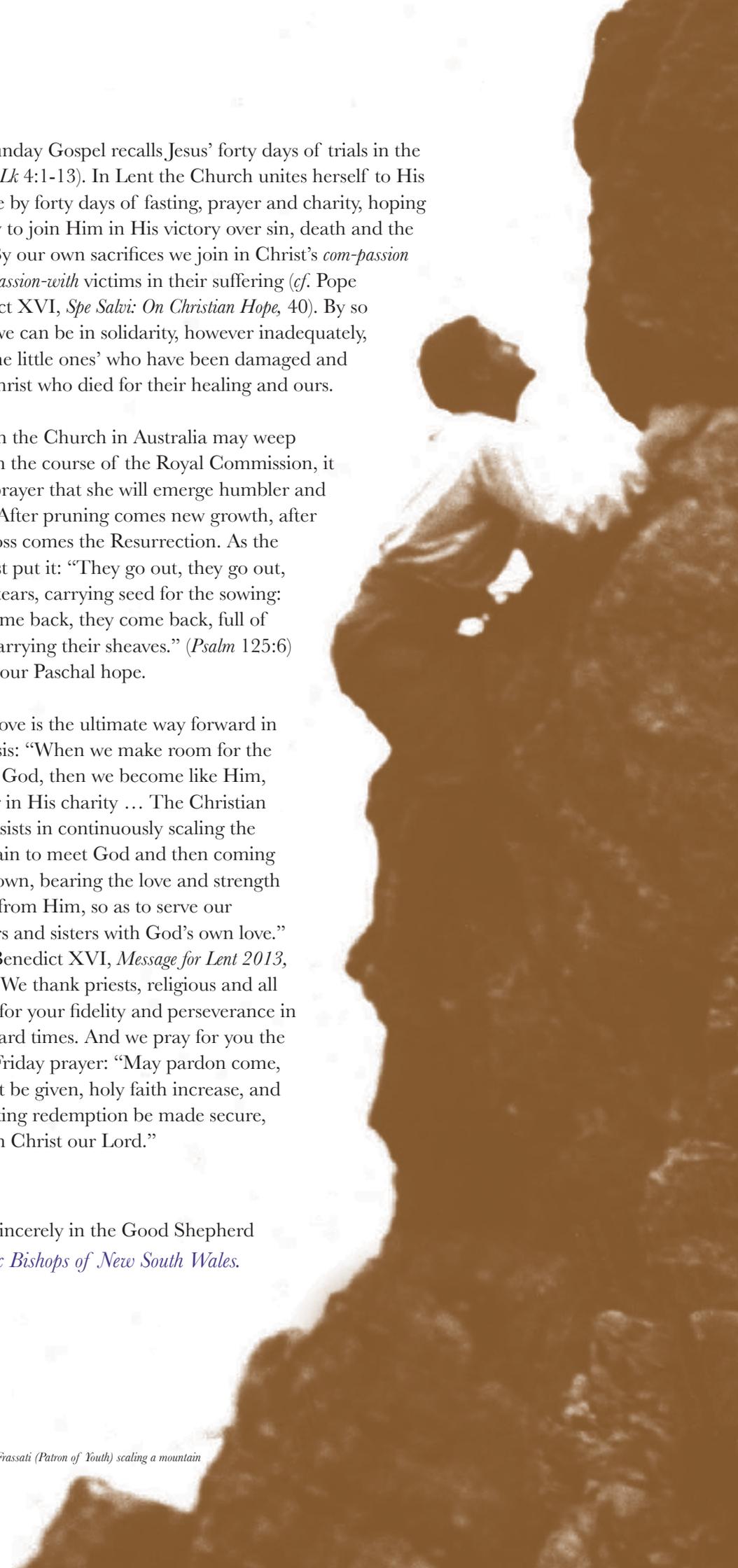
# Love: The ultimate response to this crisis

Our Sunday Gospel recalls Jesus' forty days of trials in the desert (*Lk* 4:1-13). In Lent the Church unites herself to His struggle by forty days of fasting, prayer and charity, hoping thereby to join Him in His victory over sin, death and the devil. By our own sacrifices we join in Christ's *com-passion* – His *passion-with* victims in their suffering (*cf.* Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi: On Christian Hope*, 40). By so doing we can be in solidarity, however inadequately, with 'the little ones' who have been damaged and with Christ who died for their healing and ours.

Though the Church in Australia may weep through the course of the Royal Commission, it is our prayer that she will emerge humbler and holier. After pruning comes new growth, after the Cross comes the Resurrection. As the Psalmist put it: "They go out, they go out, full of tears, carrying seed for the sowing: they come back, they come back, full of song, carrying their sheaves." (*Psalms* 125:6) This is our Paschal hope.

God's love is the ultimate way forward in this crisis: "When we make room for the love of God, then we become like Him, sharing in His charity ... The Christian life consists in continuously scaling the mountain to meet God and then coming back down, bearing the love and strength drawn from Him, so as to serve our brothers and sisters with God's own love." (Pope Benedict XVI, *Message for Lent 2013*, 2 & 3). We thank priests, religious and all of you for your fidelity and perseverance in these hard times. And we pray for you the Good Friday prayer: "May pardon come, comfort be given, holy faith increase, and everlasting redemption be made secure, through Christ our Lord."

Yours sincerely in the Good Shepherd  
*Catholic Bishops of New South Wales.*





+ George Card. Pell

George Cardinal Pell  
*Archbishop of Sydney*

+ Michael McKenna

Most Rev. Michael McKenna  
*Bishop of Bathurst*

+ Anthony Fisher

Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP  
*Bishop of Parramatta*

+ Julian Porteous

Most Rev. Julian Porteous  
*Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney*

+ David L. Walker

Most Rev. David Walker  
*Bishop of Broken Bay*

+ Gerard Hanna

Most Rev. Gerard Hanna  
*Bishop of Wagga Wagga*

+ Terence Brady

Most Rev. Terence Brady  
*Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney*

+ John Woods

Rev. Mgr John Woods  
*Administrator of Canberra & Goulburn*

+ Peter Ingham

Most Rev. Peter Ingham  
*Bishop of Wollongong*

+ Peter Comensoli

Most Rev. Peter Comensoli  
*Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney*

+ Geoffrey Jarrett

Most Rev. Geoffrey Jarrett  
*Bishop of Lismore*

+ Ad Abikaram

Most Rev. Ad Abikaram  
*Maronite Bishop of Australia*

+ Michael Kennedy

Most Rev. Michael Kennedy  
*Bishop of Armidale*  
*Apostolic Administrator of Wilcannia-Forbes*

+ William Wright

Most Rev. William Wright  
*Bishop of Maitland-Newcastle*

+ Max L. Davis

Most Rev. Max Davis  
*Military Ordinary of Australia*



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