



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

THE PRESIDENT

3 October 2021

His Holiness
Pope Francis
Apostolic Palace
VATICAN CITY

Holy Father, dear brother:

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:2).

In the name of all the members of the Plenary Council of Australia I send greetings to you as we begin our first of two assemblies. We had hoped to meet in person in Adelaide at this time last year, but the pandemic made that impossible. It has also meant that, even after a one-year postponement, we have to hold the first assembly in a wholly online environment which, with three hundred members and others in attendance, will have its challenges. Yet if the Risen Lord can walk through locked doors he can also move through the doors of technology to breathe the Holy Spirit upon us (cf John 20:19-22).

We are convinced that the Plenary Council is the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Spirit who inspired the Bishops’ decision, the Spirit who has sustained the process of consultation and discernment since then, and the Spirit who will shape the work of this first assembly and all that lies beyond. “Come Holy Spirit” is the cry that rings out as we begin the work of this assembly.

We are deeply conscious that the Plenary Council takes its place within the universal Church. A powerful sign of that is the assent which you yourself gave to our request to celebrate a Plenary Council. Another sign has been the way in which the dicasteries of the Holy See, most especially the Congregation for Bishops, have accompanied us on our journey so far.

The Church in Australia is at a point when we will have to face the truth of our situation with eyes wide open and make bold decisions to ensure that the future is according to the mind and heart of Christ. At a time when we are under pressure and in some ways diminished we will have to imagine and enact new ways of mission rather than retire to some self-protective world.

Our ardent hope is that the Plenary Council will be a gift not just for the Church in Australia but for the Church around the world. Pope St John Paul II described the Second Vatican Council as “the great grace given to the Church in the twentieth century” (*Novo Millennio Ineunte*). For us, the Plenary Council is the great grace given to the Church in Australia at the dawn of the twenty-first century.

Therefore, in the grace of communion, we now seek the Apostolic Blessing of the Successor of Peter, just as we sought your assent when the journey began and will seek your assent again when the decisions are made and the decrees decided.

With the deepest respect and affection, I remain
Yours sincerely in Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Coleridge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

+Mark Coleridge
Archbishop of Brisbane
President