



## **BEGINNING THE JOURNEY TO LENT: A WORD FROM ARCHBISHOP MARK**

### **FOR THE SUNDAY BEFORE ASH WEDNESDAY**

*Greetings of peace to you all as we look towards Lent and to Easter that lies beyond.*

Last December, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse handed down its final report, as you know. Like the Australian Government and many other institutions, the Catholic bishops of Australia and leaders of religious institutes are currently studying the final report and its recommendations.

In the long years since the tragedy of child sexual abuse within the Catholic community became known, the Church has committed to policies, procedures and structures to respond better to survivors of abuse and their families, to establish professional standards for all ministers and Church workers, and to safeguard children and vulnerable people in every way. For the Church, as for other institutions, this has involved gradual learning and development, and so it will continue to be.

Through these years, Australia's bishops and other Church leaders have often expressed their sorrow and have offered their apology for what has occurred in the past – the harm suffered by victims, the instances of cover-up, the failure to believe survivors' stories and to respond with compassion and justice, and the distress that many still experience. Our apologies have at time seemed too little – not because they were insincere but because trust has been broken. So we stand firm in our resolve to ensure that the abuse of children never happens again in the Catholic Church and to build new bonds of trust.

With the Royal Commission concluded, our country and our Church enter into a new moment. We are calling upon the Catholic community in Australia to embrace the new moment by beginning this penitential season of Lent with three days of fasting and reparation. Ash Wednesday, the Thursday following and the Friday following. So Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. Now these are spiritual practices which express our desire for God's reconciling and healing grace. Through fasting, we stand in solidarity with the victims of abuse whose much deeper hunger is for healing and

peace in their lives. Through reparation, we make amends for the sin of those in the Church who abused children or failed to listen and act when they should have.

The days of fasting and reparation in sorrow for child sexual abuse and for the healing of victims will be marked by prayer – in our homes and in our Catholic communities. *The bishops have produced special resources for these days, and they have been distributed to the parishes for use far and wide; they will also be available on the Archdiocesan website.* Please take to heart the importance of these days in preparing the *whole* Church to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission and to make the great journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter. We can't undo the past. But we can, with God's help, make the future better.

Archbishop Mark Coleridge