



8th February 2024
ROME

Dear Friends

Warmest greetings from Rome.

I am writing from the Salvatorian General House on the Via Conciliazione where I have been staying. As you know I am attending the Congress for the Ongoing Formation of Clergy in my capacity as a Member of the Dicastery for Clergy.

Early this morning those attending the Congress met with Pope Francis in the Paul VI Hall, Vatican City. The audience commenced at 8am. Pope Francis seemed in good health. As always, he gave some pearls of wisdom, “Remember”, he said, “priests are called to be shepherds who listen to their people not shop managers.” He offered some very human and pastoral insights into the capacity for us to be open to others, to walk with our people, to be tender and merciful. He stressed that we must be merciful, always merciful, with those in our care, especially the poor. For those who hear confessions, he said, “people come to receive the mercy of God, not a class in theology. Be merciful.” He encouraged us to guard against those who have all the answers and those who lack the capacity to truly, and respectfully listen to the reality of peoples’ lives. Being a priest is a special duty, a sacred task, and we should model our lives after the heart of the Good Shepherd. When I greeted him, I said I was Gregory from the Diocese of Sale, Australia and he smiled and said, “you’ve come along way – *a lontana da Roma*”.

There are over 900 participants in the Congress from across the globe. Each day has been modelled on the synodal process of prayer, reflection, sharing and listening, and developing responses to key questions regarding formation, issues clergy face in diverse settings. Various speakers have addressed the Congress bringing their expertise, experience and wisdom to the issue of formation. There have been moments of truth telling and honest reflection on the needs of clergy across the globe. It has been a salient reminder that we are clay in the hands of the potter God (Jer 18).

In my presentation on Wednesday, I focussed my input through the lens of our Diocese and other Dioceses across Australia. We are blessed in Sale that for so many years ongoing formation for clergy has been a core focus of care, education and fraternity in our presbyterate. I was able to share the dimensions of our annual ongoing formation program and to celebrate the fraternity which exists in accompanying our people. I addressed the need to ensure ongoing formation of clergy is understood in three ways: 1) It is a life-long journey of all the baptised and clergy; 2) Ongoing is relational and emerges from the experience of daily ministry; 3) Ongoing formation requires dialogue of partnerships – bishop, priest, diocesan leadership, CLAM and the people whom we serve, and experts from various fields. I suggested the

perennial question Jesus posed to Simon Peter and the disciples, “Who do you say I am? (Mt 16:15) is a question placed before us every day for ministry and for our contemplation, “Who do you say I am?” Our response will determine how we are to be, to serve and come to the fulfilment of our heart’s desire in Christ who is our true identity.

Other speakers have addressed the care of clergy, the necessity to remain vigilant in safeguarding formation, the place of contemplation to respond to the call of our hearts desire, and particular attention to human formation upon which intellectual, spiritual and pastoral lives are built.

The experience of meeting people from so many dioceses across the globe is a powerful reminder of the Church universal.

This visit has enabled me to begin to understand and appreciate what being a Member of the Dicastery for Clergy means. The mission of the Dicastery includes seminary formation, ongoing formation, seminaries and matters concerning the conduct of clergy. It is an exciting time to be appointed to the Dicastery, especially following the success of the Congress. I have met with the Cardinal Prefect and others who have extended a warm welcome.

I have met with Sr Nathalie Becquart from the Synod Office and shared some of the developments that are emerging in our Diocese. She was very interested to learn of our approach and the ministry of Brother Tony in facilitating so many levels of engagement. She informed me of her own observations and the movement of the Holy Spirit who begins to stir new initiatives, approaches and renewing the Church through the synod process.

I have also visited the Office for the Holy Year – Pilgrims of Hope. It is a beautiful image for the Church in such a fractious time in the world.

Tomorrow, I have been invited to meet with Her Excellency Ambassador Chiara Poro (Australian Embassy to the Holy See). Chiara is a very important link representing the Australian Government to the Holy See. She is always very welcoming, open to discussion and has a real interest in the mission of mercy toward refugees and asylum seekers.

I want you to know that as I approached the altar at the beginning of the Opening Mass at the Chair of St Peter inside the Basilica, I intentionally carried you with me bringing all our joys, hopes, worries and sufferings to the heart of the Church and before the Source of Love.

I shall be home soon, so I look forward to returning and beginning our Lenten journey.

May Our Lady of Perpetual Help keep you and our Diocese close to her son.

With every peace and blessing from the Eternal City.

+Greg