My dear People,

Next Monday, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse will commence a final intensive review of the Catholic Church in Australia. This hearing will run for three weeks, and will involve some 60 witnesses, from victims, experts, leaders (clergy, religious and lay people) and bishops. While the Diocese of Broken Bay has not been summoned, our Vicar General, Very Rev Fr David Ranson, has been called as a witness because of his recognised academic expertise with this issue over many years.

Unlike the public sessions held to date relating to the Church, this hearing will not be a case study of a particular set of facts or events. Instead, it will inquire into the Church’s structures, culture and governance and what relevant aspects these have to the occurrence of child sexual abuse in Australia and the response to survivors.

Two key questions will be asked by the Royal Commission: What has the Church done, and is doing, to address the occurrence of abuse by clergy, religious and Church workers, and the manner in which victims have been responded to by Church leaders; What are the underlying causes that have led to the occurrence of abuse and a failure of response, and how are they being addressed now and into the future?

The coming few weeks will be a traumatic time for many individuals, and a difficult and bruising time for all Catholics, as again we will be brought to face the loss of innocence and trust amongst our most treasured and vulnerable. The evidence of the extent of abuse that has occurred within the Church will be shocking, and no institution, including our own Diocese, will be immune to the evidence. But these next weeks, as well as the months and years ahead, will also offer a real impetus to work all the more diligently to ensure the works and activities of the Church are trustworthy places of safety and goodness for all. I have strongly supported the important work of the Commission since its establishment. As challenging as it has been to look deeply into the institutional failings of our Church, it holds nothing to the pain and suffering of those whom we have failed. As a Diocese, I believe we have sought to address the implications of our Church’s difficult history through building a culture of renewed responsibility and accountability. Nonetheless, we remain at the foot of the Cross, sorrowful for the evil that has occurred but hopeful for the good to be done.

My chief prayer over the weeks ahead will be to hold up to the Lord all of you who have experienced, either personally or in your families and local communities, the evil of abuse, or have been confronted with the failures of your faith leaders. May I humbly acknowledge that you too, can be the eyes and ears of Christ in your communities, ever present for those who may again feel the pain of our failings and need support. Across our local communities, please join me in prayer that true healing and reconciliation will flourish, and that those who are in pain may come to know the heart of Christ, whose love is unfailing.

Yours sincerely in Christ Jesus,

Most Rev Peter A Comensoli
Bishop of Broken Bay

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