



### **Vox Episcopi – The Voice of the Bishop**

16 February 2022

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings and blessings from Rome!

The streets and cafes are a lot quieter from my previous visits here as some health restrictions are still in place.

Although I have studied in Rome and lived and worked in the Vatican for a number of years, there is always something very special about returning here, visiting and praying in the Papal Basilica of St Peter in the Vatican which holds such a unique position in the Christian world.

The number of pilgrims is growing slowly each day that I have been here, and it is hoped that as people gain more confidence and the effects of the pandemic begin to stabilise, the large numbers of pilgrims usually seen at any time during the year either

queuing in St Peter's Square or souvenir shopping in the side streets will soon return.

Hopefully many people will start to plan for pilgrimages to our holy places, including Rome, as the Church prepares for World Youth Day in 2023 and the Holy Year in 2025. Might we also begin to consider how as a Diocese we will approach these milestones?

St Peter's is one of four Major Basilicas in Rome, but it is considered one of the holiest Catholic shrines. It is here we find St Peter's burial site.

Although we knew St Peter the Apostle died a martyr in Rome and a church had been built over a small shrine believed to mark his burial place, it was not until 1968 that St Paul VI announced that the relics of St Peter had been "identified in a way which we can hold to be convincing," after the bones were discovered following excavations of the necropolis under St Peter's Basilica, which began in the 1940's near a monument erected in the fourth century to honour the great Apostle.

A visit to St Peter's Basilica provides an opportunity to marvel at the amazing Renaissance engineering feat, the magnificent artworks and sculptures, sit quietly in prayer in one of the many chapels in the massive interior or to join a Vatican Scavi Tour to see the Tomb of St Peter. I always find my visit to be a moving experience.

The Vatican is also the home of Pope Francis, the Apostolic Palace being his official residence.

This week, along with many clergy and laity from around the world, I attended the Symposium Priesthood at the Vatican.

Esteemed church leaders and academics gave rich and wide-ranging presentations – including reflections on tradition and new horizons; Trinity, mission and sacramentality; the challenges of formation; the missionary spirit and the culture of Vocation.

Pope Francis gave the opening lecture and spoke to us on *Faith and the Priesthood Today*. The Symposium has provided much to reflect upon, discuss and share with you when I return.

I also managed to catch up with the Australian Ambassador to the Holy See, Ms Chiara Porro.

The youngest ambassador the Vatican has ever welcomed as part of its diplomatic core, Ambassador Porro was keen to hear “first-hand news from home” and how we have coped during the pandemic and lockdowns. We also discussed the question of Religious Freedom which is another hot topic for us in Australia, and in many parts of the world.

I will be returning to Broken Bay at the end of next week. Please be assured that I remember you at Mass and that I have prayed for you, your families and loved ones before the altar at St Peter’s.

With my prayers and blessing

+Anthony