



Archbishop's Message
Archbishop Christopher Prowse

The Living Source

The great liturgical Solemnities of Pentecost and the Most Holy Trinity draw us into the heart of our shared Christian belief.

All Christian prayer begins by acknowledging God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus spoke so often of his Father who he described as "Abba". He promised the Holy Spirit that was given at Pentecost.

It took the early Church several centuries to articulate our fundamental belief in one God existing in three persons. We must articulate our treasured beliefs but the Mysteries of our Faith are so deep they cannot be contained in theological statements.

Turning to stories can help us understand these ancient and precious faith Mysteries.

I offer one possible story.

For some years I lived as a student in Rome not far from the Tiber River. Many times when I crossed the river I would look down and often said to myself, "If only this river could talk!" For well over 2,000 years there have been urban settlements on the banks of the Tiber around what is now called Rome.

On one long weekend, a priest friend from Italy invited me to his home in the Tuscan Hills.

Soon after we arrived he took me to the source of the Tiber River. Here I could see the birthplace of this most famous of rivers. From rock formations there were two little fountains coming out from the earth. The gushing water was pristine clear and abundant. A nearby sign stated, "Here is born the river, sacred to the destiny of Rome".

In contrast to the polluted Tiber in Rome, the source of this river was a natural spring. One could drink from this water, the area was lush green forest.

It is a kind of symbol of the origins of our faith we celebrate in these high Liturgical solemnities.

Whatever may be said of our tepid and fractured response to the Christ event over 2000 years of Church history, we know these Easter Mysteries continue to be our living source of hope and healing. As we travel the river of our Trinitarian faith life between the first and the second comings of Christ, we know in conversion and repentance that it is the Holy Spirit who leads us. Let us keep this in mind with the forthcoming Plenary Council.

On these Solemnities we return once again to THE source of our faith, Jesus. "From his breast shall flow fountains of living water". (John 7/38)

CATHOLIC VOICE

ARCHDIOCESE OF CANBERRA AND GOULBURN



It was a privilege to spend time last weekend with much-loved priest Fr Francis; he is a gracious man and engaging company. Wagga Wagga was served well by him and Bishop Mark Edwards will also do a sterling job. We wish him well.

EDITOR: Felicity de Fombelle
catholic.voice@cg.org.au

A bishop with farm-boy charm

BY FELICITY DE FOMBELLE

THE new Bishop of Wagga Wagga will need "the Wisdom of Solomon" to tackle the challenges in the diocese, says his predecessor Archbishop Frank Carroll.

The issue of change in the church has divided the diocese, he said.

Fr Francis, as he prefers to be called, said it was dreadful that the post had been vacant for more than three and a half years and appointee Bishop Mark Edwards would have a "very tough job".

An unassuming man with a farm-boy charm, Fr Francis spoke to the Catholic Voice from his aged care home in Wagga Wagga where he has lived for two years.

The country boy considered retiring to his hometown of Ganmain but decided against it for two reasons; there is no doctor and "everybody would know my business before me. That's how small towns work."

Ordained at 23, Fr Francis was appointed Bishop of Wagga in 1967 at the age of 36. He served until 1983 when he took the helm at Canberra-Goulburn before retiring in 2006.

Fr Francis turns 90 on September 9 and while he has had a couple of stints in hospital he feels and looks well and keeps up with church affairs.

In a wide-ranging interview, the man who goes back further than any Bishop in Australia voiced his support for Pope Francis, his distress at the scourge of sexual abuse and his hopes for a Plenary Council that is open to change.

Bishop Mark Edwards will be installed as the 6th Bishop of Wagga Wagga on July 22. He turns 61 on June 14. Fr Francis plans to be at the installation Mass.

"I look forward to having a good talk with him (Bishop Mark), not that anyone would take any notice



Fr Francis at his aged care home in Wagga Wagga.

of me," Fr Francis chuckled.

Asked what advice he would offer, Fr Francis said: "He'll have to be an open listener. He probably knows the scene a bit anyway but he needs to understand the situation.

"He'll need the wisdom of Solomon I think. It'll be a very tough job. I'm glad he has seminary experience."

Fr Francis said he had heard talk that a number of priests had knocked back the position and suggested it may have been "because of the divided nature of the diocese."

"It certainly wouldn't have happened in my day," he added. "If a priest was asked to do something you automatically did it. But bishops are put under a microscope these days. The culture has changed a lot."

While it had been "dreadful" that locals had been without a bishop for almost four years, Fr Francis said he was pleased with Bishop Mark Edwards' appointment.

"I met him briefly once at an annual dinner for retired Bishops but

we haven't chatted," he said.

"I'm glad he's coming in with enthusiasm and a cheerful attitude. I hear very good things. I think he'll be a good listener. I have listened to a few of his talks and like his enthusiasm."

Armed with an iPad and new mobile phone, Fr Francis has been "shopping around" for online Mass during the lockdown and said not having visitors had been hard.

Two siblings, Rosie and Barry,

have died while four are in Ganmain; brothers Peter and Paul on the land and sisters Lelia and Kathleen in town. They are regular visitors along with a handful of friends from Canberra.

"Normally we have two Masses a week and I concelebrate from the pews but we haven't been able to go to Mass," Fr Francis explained.

The delay to the Plenary Council has been a setback, he said, adding he was disappointed with how it has been set up and that people would not be given a greater say.

"Each diocese should have had a synod beforehand to prepare people for the Council," Fr Francis said.

"Some people have pulled out altogether. Somebody told me only five parishes here in Wagga took it on which is pretty awful."

Heavily influenced by Vatican II, which he watched from the sidelines in Rome while studying canon law, Fr Francis spoke candidly about the fractures in the church around renewal.

"Some people don't want anything changed," he said. "I suppose that's the way they were brought up. So anybody who wants to change is a troublemaker."

"Yet I found when the Vatican II changes came in the vast majority were delighted with them. I always tried to set up a Vatican II church and that is still one of my visions today."

The eldest boy in a football-mad family and town, Fr Francis still keeps up with Aussie Rules. He supported Carlton when relative Tom Carroll played in the early 1960s (nicknamed "Turkey Tom" because his family farmed turkeys near Ganmain) and later switched to the Sydney Swans, reporting the team had slipped a bit over the last couple of years.

"You're brought up with sport in Ganmain," Fr Francis laughed. "You get a football for your first birthday."

"If it was a sport I used to play it and in the seminary it was a release. I enjoyed the seminary, mostly because of the companionship and sport. I was just 16 when I went there and 23 when I was ordained so we all had a lot of growing up to do."

Asked about his achievements, a modest Fr Francis points to his continuing efforts to implement a Vatican II church and his contribution to Catholic education. Broulee's Carroll College is named after him.

"Most schools are named after saints but this one is named after a sinner," he quipped.

As the lunch bells sounds, it is time for this gracious priest to reach for his walker and head to the dining room.

"A roast lamb is pretty hard to beat," he says with a twinkle in his eye.

Ever the country boy, he stops to add: "My brothers are still producing champion fat lambs."

Fr Francis on ...

Cardinal Pell: "He was a lightning rod for a lot of things in the church. In a sense whether he was guilty or not guilty was not the question but the media made it the question. A lot of people still won't believe (the High Court decision) one way or the other. It's been an absolute tragedy for the church." Sexual abuse by clergy: "We all made mistakes. We have handled it very badly. I hope the lessons have been learned. I remember

even as a bishop I used to shudder as I heard their (clergy) comments. They weren't convinced it was our doing. We got too far away from the gospel attitude to it all."

Pope Francis: "I'm a great fan and applaud the freshness he has brought to the church. He reflects his background. He has a genuine interest in the poor and is a great gift to the church. I hope he can lay the foundations for his ilk to

take on his way of doing things. If he gets the right people in the right places he's got a fighting chance."

The Vatican: "It was a great experience going to Rome but when you came out it was like leaving the bubble. There is a little bubble there that has little contact with the outside world. Pope Francis has confronted it. Many of them are good people, it's the culture that is the problem and that has to be

changed as even good people are influenced by it."

Australian church: "In some ways we are travelling badly and people are leaving in droves. Yet I used to visit parishes and come home physically exhausted but uplifted by the goodness of people so it's a mixture. I'm hoping the Plenary Council will open up things a bit, give a breath of fresh air to the place."

F-grade cricket and a Bridge fanatic

BY FELICITY DE FOMBELLE

IT was the string of missed phone calls from the Apostolic Nuncio that told Bishop Mark Edwards a new appointment was on the cards.

“My phone was flat so I charged it and went to work in my office,” the former teacher said.

“At noon I checked my messages and had missed calls from Archbishop Adolfo Tito Yllana at 9am and 10am and a text message at 11am. The Nuncio doesn’t ring very often so I had a fair idea.

“I was absolutely shocked and delighted. The welcome and openness from the people in Wagga Wagga has been deeply moving.”

Bishop Mark’s installation Mass will be on July 22 with the Nuncio

assisted by Sydney Archbishop Anthony Fisher and Apostolic Administrator Archbishop Christopher Prowse.

A composed and considered man, Bishop Mark said it was wrong that the diocese had been without a bishop almost four years.

“It’s been an enormously long time and I thank the people of Wagga for their faithfulness and perseverance,” he said. “I’m very keen to go and look forward to dedicating what I have left of my life to being with the people.”

A frank Bishop Mark said he understood there were challenges in the diocese and would approach the role with an open mind.

“I’m not that enamoured with labels like conservative and pro-



Bishop Mark Edwards

gressive,” he said. “The right terms are faithful and unfaithful, loving and unloving. The question is, are you prepared to grow?”

“My hope for the church and clergy is to build us as a faithful and flexible and merciful body.”

Born in Indonesia where his

father Graham worked for the Shell oil company, Bishop Mark attended primary schools in Adelaide and Darwin before the family settled in Melbourne. High school was Mazenod College run by the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

“I was in Year 12 and filling out my university preferences and then I thought, what do I really want to do next year,” Bishop Mark explained.

“I thought, this school has been wonderful and I’ve had great priests as teachers. It would be good for others to have that experience.

“But that would mean someone has to join the Oblates. I didn’t think I’d be a great teacher but the congregation were just starting to send men to begin a mission in

Indonesia where I was born.

“I thought I could join the Oblates and be a missionary in Indonesia, but didn’t they then send me to become a teacher!”

Bishop Mark has also been a seminary rector and his education and seminary experience will stand him in good stead at Wagga with its 31 schools and Vianney College seminary.

The enthusiastic bishop enjoys cricket (he played F-grade at university) and is a Bridge fanatic.

“I started bridge at uni and almost failed first year because I was playing 20 to 30 hours a week,” Bishop Mark confessed.

“I didn’t play for 25 years and since I’ve gone back I’m loving it. It’s good intellectual fun.”

A dozen Dads and a cubby

IT takes a village to raise a child and a small army of Dads to erect a cubby house at Holy Trinity’s Early Learning Centre (ELC) in Curtin. A lack of space prevented the 60 preschoolers from having a cubby but Fr John Woods agreed it could go on adjoining parish land. A dozen ELC Dads signed up for the job last Saturday.



Cardinal Pell and the Commission

BY DENIS O'BRIEN

The recent release of the unredacted Royal Commission reports into the Archdiocese of Melbourne and church authorities in Ballarat enables an assessment of the behaviour of Cardinal Pell who served in the church hierarchy in both places.

Does the Commission’s narrative provide a basis for levelling against him the criticism that has rightly been made of other church leaders who failed to deal appropriately with child sexual abusers? I suggest it does not.

The Ballarat report is mainly concerned with how church authorities responded to abuse perpetrated at Christian Brother schools by certain priests.

It discusses Pell’s involvement with offenders, Fitzgerald and Dowlan. Complaints were made about Fitzgerald when Pell was an assistant priest at Ballarat East in 1973.

The main complaints concerned Fitzgerald taking Grade Three boys to an annual camp where they swam naked and his practice of kissing boys as they left school for the day. Pell heard about this behaviour.

However, the Royal Commission accepted his evidence that he had no jurisdiction over the Christian Brothers.

“It was not unreasonable for Father Pell, as a diocesan priest, to believe it was not for him to raise the conduct of Brother Fitzgerald with the provincial,” the report

concluded.

As an old boy of St Patrick’s College, Pell took a particular interest in the college. In his evidence he said that in the early 70s he heard things about Brother Dowlan, who was a teacher at the college.

He agreed with Counsel Assisting the Commission that this included sexual misbehaviour with boys. Pell raised the matters with the chaplain of the college who told him the Brothers were looking into Dowlan.

Pell later heard Dowlan had been moved from St Pat’s and expressed regret he did not do more.

In relation to evidence given by witness BWF to the Commission that BWF visited St Patrick’s presbytery next to the cathedral and complained to Pell about Dowlan, the Commission accepted Pell’s evidence the visit did not occur.

The Commission did, however, accept evidence by witness Timothy Green that in late 1974 he told Pell in the changing room at the Ballarat swimming pool that Dowlan was touching little boys.

Pell gave evidence that he had no recollection of the conversation. A friend who Mr Green said was with him at the changing room said in his statement that he did not recall being with Mr Green.

In relation to the diocese of Ballarat, the Commission’s report focusses on the knowledge of Bishop Mulkearns and the College of Consultors of allegations and complaints made about four priests.

The two priests relevant to any

commentary concerning Pell are Monsignor John Day and Gerald Ridsdale.

Canon Law provides for a bishop to appoint a group of priests as his College of Consultors to help him govern the diocese. Consultors do not have the authority to appoint, remove or transfer a priest – that authority rests with the bishop.

After returning to Australia in 1971 from his studies in Rome and his doctorate in church history at Oxford, Pell was appointed assistant priest at Swan Hill, some 230km from Mildura, where Day was the parish priest.

Pell told the Commission that, in his six months at Swan Hill, he heard rumours about paedophilia activity by Day.

The Commission makes no adverse finding against Pell in relation to Day.

Ridsdale was a shocking serial sexual abuser who destroyed countless young lives. Sadly, Bishop O’Collins, the predecessor of Bishop Mulkearns, could have stopped Ridsdale in his tracks when around 1962 he received a complaint about Ridsdale sexually abusing a young boy in Ridsdale’s first appointment as an assistant priest at Ballarat North.

O’Collins failed to stand him down or take steps to deal with his offending.

Pell lived in the same presbytery as Ridsdale for nine or 10 months when they were both assistant priests at Ballarat East in 1973.

In evidence Pell said he heard

about Ridsdale taking groups of boys on camps and, while he thought this imprudent, he also thought a large group would guard against any wrongdoing.

Pell was a new member of the College of Consultors when in July 1977 the minutes of its meeting recorded Ridsdale’s promotion from administrator of the Edenhope parish to parish priest.

In his evidence Pell accepted that Vicar-General Monsignor Fiscalini, who was also at the meeting, knew by this time of complaints about Ridsdale.

Pell maintained, however, that there was no discussion of the issue at the meeting. The Commission concludes in its report that “it is likely” Pell knew of Ridsdale’s sexual transgressions by then but the report gives no basis for that conclusion.

At the September 1982 consultors meeting which Pell attended the minutes recorded that Bishop Mulkearns advised it had become necessary for Ridsdale to move from Mortlake and negotiations were under way to have him work with the Catholic Enquiry Centre in Sydney.

When the Commission put the minutes to Pell, he agreed that, by the time of the meeting, three of the consultors knew of Ridsdale’s offending in Mortlake. But he strenuously denied he had any such knowledge and did not recall any reason given by Mulkearns for the move.

The Commission’s report exten-

sively examines the evidence of the meeting and rejects Pell’s evidence that paedophilia was not mentioned and that the true reason for Ridsdale’s move was not given.

The Commission concludes it is “implausible” that Mulkearns did not inform those at the meeting of at least complaints of sexual abuse of children having been made about Ridsdale.

However, the three other consultors who gave evidence to the Commission about the meeting similarly said they had no knowledge that Ridsdale was being moved because of child sexual abuse. The wording of the minutes is consistent with the notion that Mulkearns was announcing to the meeting a decision he had already made.

Nothing in the Ballarat report convicts Pell for failures of leadership, especially when one properly understands the role of consultors.

On the other hand, the conclusion reached by the Commission that the bishop was autonomous and he alone was the decision maker about his priests is clearly correct, as is its further conclusion that the hierarchical structure of church authority revealed by the report had potential for mismanagement and abuse of power.

• Denis O’Brien was chief lawyer of the Truth Justice and Healing Council during the Royal Commission. NEXT WEEK: Part Two examines the unredacted reports about the Archdiocese of Melbourne.