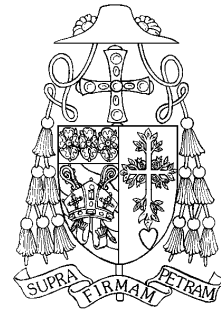


13 March 2009

***To the Priests & Deacons of the Diocese:  
On the Letter of the Holy Father Pope  
Benedict XVI to the Bishops of the Church,  
10 March 2009.***



BISHOP'S HOUSE  
P O BOX 1  
LISMORE, NSW 2480

Dear Fathers and Deacons,

Three days ago Pope Benedict wrote a Letter to your bishop and to all the bishops of the Catholic world following the reactions of great controversy consequent upon his remission of the excommunication of the four bishops consecrated in 1988 by the late Archbishop Lefebvre.

I wish personally to pass a copy of this Letter on to you for your reflection upon it, because I believe that it touches upon matters of great moment in the present life of the Church that affect us all. The controversies and disharmony within the Church in these past forty years have not been kind to many of us, ordained to priestly service as great change and confusion engulfed our western societies and consequently affected the Church. We have all been part of the Church's struggle on the one hand to be faithful to her Lord and the great tradition of the faith, and on the other to embrace the new orientations set out in the sixteen principal magisterial documents of the Second Vatican Council, entirely consistent and in continuity with that tradition.

In his Letter the Holy Father writes very personally, clearly been taken aback by the vehemence of his critics, especially those from within the household of faith. What had he done? In a gesture of healing he had reached out to a stigmatized but not insignificant minority of Catholics whom many in the Church would be pleased to keep beyond the pale, and that bitterness has now been poured over him. So he wrote with a humble explanation of his action and awareness that his knowledge of some aspects was imperfect, with the instinct of a true pastor concerned for the peace and unity of the flock of Christ.

I believe that this moment has brought to the fore as no other in recent times a critical question: that of the understanding and interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. Was it to be seen as a rupture with all that went before, so that nothing in the Church's life and teaching was to be exempt from change, indeed a process of continual mutation to fit in with the perceived demands and approvals of contemporary thinking and behaviour? Or is the Council and the subsequent life of the Church to be understood in unbroken continuity with the Church of all ages, passing also through our particular 'modern' stage of her long journey through time towards her Lord, united as ever in one faith, one hope and one love, always one in her doctrine, her worship and her sacramental life? It is this question which the Holy Father, with all the affirmation of faith, seems to me to be helping us to understand.

As you read this significant 'encyclical' Letter to the bishops, I ask you and those in your pastoral charge to join with me in praying especially for the Holy Father at this time, more than simply as we are all in duty bound, with a real spiritual solidarity and gratitude: for his Apostolic leadership, his pastoral charity and fidelity to the truth, and the deep wisdom and humility with which he speaks and acts for the good of all the Church.

Yours devotedly in Christ our Lord,

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Most Revd Geoffrey Jarrett,  
*Bishop of Lismore*