

Pope commends Australian bishops on social justice and urges strength against secularism

Pope John Paul II has used his ad limina address to the Australian Bishops to acknowledge the leadership of the Catholic Church in Australia in defence of refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and indigenous peoples, while urging strength in the face of growing secularism.

The Pontiff's address was the culmination of a two week visit to Rome by the Australian Bishops in which they delivered their five-yearly reports on their dioceses, visited various Vatican congregations and undertook spiritual pilgrimages.

The Pope urged the Bishops to be fearless in their efforts to combat secularism in Australia and he particularly called for a renewed emphasis on inspiring Catholics to attend Mass on Sundays.

He expressed appreciation for the work of priests and Religious in Australia and said he was sure the Bishops' initiatives to "promote a culture of vocation" would bear fruit.

The Pope stressed the importance of family life and noted a particular concern at "the growing trend to equate marriage with other forms of cohabitation".

"I am pleased to acknowledge your steadfast efforts to uphold the uniqueness of marriage as a life-long covenant based on generous mutual giving and unconditional love," he told the Bishops.

"It is the Bishop's particular task to ensure that within civil society - including the media and entertainment industry sectors - the values of marriage and family life are supported and defended."

The Pope acknowledged "the noble contribution the Church in Australia makes to the attainment of social justice and solidarity".

"Your leadership in the defence of the fundamental rights of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and the developmental support offered to indigenous Australians, are shining examples of the 'commitment to practical and concrete love for every human being' to which I have called the whole Church."

The Pope concluded his message by bestowing his Apostolic Blessing on the Bishops and the priests, deacons, Religious and lay faithful of their dioceses.