



Homily on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Official Establishment of the Michaelite Fathers in North Ryde, Australia, October 11, 2025
Bishop Joseph Dabrowski, CSMA

His Excellency Bishop Danny Meagher, Father Anthony Casamento, Superior of the Michaelite Fathers Pacific Vice Province, Michaelite and diocesan priests, consecrated religious, brothers and sisters in Christ:

It is with deep joy and gratitude that I join you today to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the official establishment of the Michaelite Fathers here in Australia. This silver jubilee is not simply a date on the calendar—it is a moment of grace and an invitation to join the Michaelites in thanksgiving.

Today, we look back not only on those 25 years, but also further, to the very first presence and ministry of the Michaelite Fathers on this continent. Starting to live and minister in a new country is never easy; it involves learning a new language, new traditions, customs, and the way the local Church ministers.

I once heard a story about one of the young Michaelite priests, newly arrived in Australia, still learning the ropes. He was sent to an English-speaking parish for his very first weekend. He didn't know a word of English. The pastor, wanting to give him something simple to do, said to his associate pastor, "Send him to take up the collection. He can enjoy being among the people, and people will enjoy seeing a young priest. Just teach him a short phrase so that when people drop their money in the collection basket, he can say something like, 'God bless you. God bless you.'"

So, the young Michaelite priest went up and down the aisles, happily repeating the phrase he had mastered to perfection. But people, instead of smiling, began bursting into laughter.

After Mass, the young Michaelite priest asked the pastor in confusion, "Father, why did the people laugh when they gave money for the collection?"

The pastor replied, "Because the associate pastor was supposed to teach you to say 'God bless you,' but instead he taught you something else. All through the collection, you were saying to people, 'O God, you can give more! O God, you can give more!'"

The beginning is never easy. It requires humility, sacrifice, patience and yes, at times a good sense of humour. And that, I think, is also the Michaelite Fathers' story in Australia: perseverance, creativity, hard work, humble presence, and the ability to laugh even when things weren't easy.

This year, the universal Church celebrates the **Jubilee Year of Hope**. Pope Francis has invited us to be “*pilgrims of hope*” (Pope Francis, *Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee 2025*, §3), and this theme resonates beautifully with the life and mission of the Congregation of Saint Michael the Archangel here in Australia and Papua New Guinea.

From your very beginnings, dear Michaelite brothers, you have been called to be missionaries of hope—to carry Christ, who is our hope, into the lives of those entrusted to your care.

Earlier this year, I had the privilege, together with Fr. Peter, of leading 54 pilgrims from my diocese to Rome for the Jubilee. As we walked down the Via della Conciliazione toward St. Peter’s Basilica, we saw groups of pilgrims from every corner of the world, each one carrying a cross. Some were led by children, others by the elderly, still others by someone in a wheelchair.

That image touched me deeply: the Cross of Christ carried by so many different hands is a visible sign that the hope we proclaim belongs to every person and every nation.

Christ is our hope. And in Him, no one is excluded.

This conviction inspired **Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz**, the Founder of our Congregation. He entrusted his community to the protection of St. Michael the Archangel under that courageous cry of faith: *Quis ut Deus?* , “Who is like God?”

Blessed Bronisław looked around him and saw a society seduced by ideologies and oppressed by addictions, by physical and spiritual poverty. He knew—as we still know today—that a future without God is a path to emptiness. His response was not despair but hope: “*Even in the darkest night, there is a star that shines—the hope that God is with us.*” (Blessed Bronisław Markiewicz, *Writings*, cited in the Michaelite Archives)

The very name *Michael* is a proclamation: *Who is like God?* It is heaven’s cry against pride and selfishness, reminding us that only God is worthy of our love and service.

And yet, our culture often proposes a different mantra: *Who is like me?* We live in a world that too often bows down not before God but before the idol of self. We hear it in countless ways: *Me first. My body, my choice, my freedom—without responsibilities. My desires above all.* The language of “I, me, mine” is so dominant that it often obscures the voice of God.

But our faith calls us to live not the cult of self, but the call to love and serve God alone—to proclaim not “Who is like me?” but always, with courage, “Who is like God?” To serve God before self, to live in humility, to bear the Gospel wherever the Lord calls.

This has been your mission here, on this continent: faithful service, never drawing attention to yourselves but pointing always to God.

Twenty-five years ago, the Michaelite Fathers’ house was formally established here in North Ryde. But the mission had begun much earlier, with the first Michaelite missionaries who arrived over 50 years ago on this continent. They came with little, but they came with faith—young, full of energy, and good-looking!

Today, we celebrate the abundant fruits of your labour: flourishing parish ministry wherever you serve, your engagement in schools and education, and your inspiring witness to young people. Families are strengthened by your pastoral presence. Vocations are nurtured by your example.

I myself had the privilege, about 24 years ago, to visit the Michaelites in Papua New Guinea and here in Australia. In PNG, I saw priests walking rough roads to reach small communities, celebrating Mass in humble chapels, sharing the daily lives of the local people. Here in Australia, I witnessed steady, faithful service—patiently building communities one family, one child, one soul at a time.

I remember well Fr. John Bieniek, Fr. Zdzisław Kruczek, Fr. Stanisław Kluk, Fr. Paweł Kopczyński, and Fr. Marek Okarma, when I visited Fr. Marian Cięciwa and Fr. Bogdan Świerczewski in Papua New Guinea. Those experiences left a lasting impression on me: the Michaelite Fathers are not afraid of hard work, not discouraged by small beginnings, but persevering with trust in God's providence.

Blessed Bronisław believed that society cannot be renewed without faith, and that young people must be formed in the virtues of temperance, faith, hope, and charity. For these reasons, he opened homes for orphans, founded schools, launched a printing press, and published a Catholic newspaper. His vision was holistic—mind, body, and spirit.

For him, proclaiming “Who is like God?” was not about arguments but about forming a generation who would live for God, not for themselves. That passion continues in you.

When you catechize children, sit in the confessional, bless families in their homes, celebrate the sacraments, or visit the sick, you are forming disciples who witness by their lives that only God is worthy of our love.

This mission is not yours alone. Today, we also give thanks for people who have walked this journey with you—priests and laity side by side, carrying the mission forward.

Think of the St. Michael Mission Society and countless collaborators whose prayer, fundraising, and service have supported the mission in PNG and here in Australia. From chocolate lambs at Easter to medical supplies for the missions, and even the containers still being filled with supplies today—these are concrete signs that hope grows when we work together.

St. Paul tells us in today's second reading: *“The word of God is not chained”* (2 Timothy 2:9). He wrote those words from prison, yet this did not discourage him, because he knew the Gospel was spreading.

We, too, may sometimes feel the limits of resources, the pressures of secular culture, or our own human weaknesses. But the Word of God cannot be chained. Every time a Michaelite Father ministers, every time a layperson shares faith at work, every time a child makes the Sign of the Cross—the Word of God is alive and bearing fruit.

In today's Gospel, ten lepers are healed, but only one returns to give thanks. Gratitude transforms his healing into salvation. Gratitude always sends us forth. Jesus tells the grateful leper: *“Stand up and go”* (Luke 17:19).

So too it is with us today. Gratitude for the Michaelites' service moves us to share the Good News in our daily lives.

Australia, like the rest of the world, faces many challenges: secularism, family life under pressure, young people searching for meaning, and newcomers longing to be welcomed.

The Michaelite Fathers, working in the charism of Blessed Markiewicz, offer countercultural values so that together we can be artisans of God's love and mercy.

This Jubilee Year reminds us that hope is not a vague feeling but is founded in Jesus Christ. To be pilgrims of hope is to walk with Him and bring others along.

Each of us has a role to play:

Priests—continue to serve with zeal and dedication.

Families—live your faith joyfully and faithfully at home.

Young people—be courageous in following Christ.

Together, we are called to proclaim with our lives: *Who is like God!*

Dear friends, as we mark this silver jubilee, we are also invited to renew our commitment to service and mission. The Church needs each one of you. You are not only recipients of ministry—you are missionaries of hope.

So let us go forward, renewed in hope, filled with gratitude, and united in mission. With Blessed Bronisław and St. Michael as our guides, may we always proclaim with courage and joy:

Who is like God!

Amen.