



*To Mr John Lochowiak
Chairperson
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council*

I send cordial greetings and best wishes to you and the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the visit of Saint John Paul II to Alice Springs. I assure you of my spiritual closeness as you reflect on the many ways in which Almighty God has blessed your community through that historic visit.

This anniversary affords me the happy opportunity to express my deep esteem for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and for your ancient cultural heritage. Uniting my voice to that of Saint John Paul II, I encourage you in his words: "Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear. Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children. Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost." For when you share the noble traditions of your community, you also witness to the power of the Gospel to perfect and purify every

society, and in this way God's holy will is accomplished. I pray that this occasion will provide an opportunity to deepen your love for Christ and for one another, offering a convincing and tangible sign that we are "no longer strangers and sojourners, but... fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (*Eph 2:19*).

Commending you and all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the intercession of Saint Mary of the Cross McKillop, I willingly impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of joy and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 29 November 2016

Francis