



Speaking the truth in love

Eph 4:15

7 April 2020

**STATEMENT FROM MOST REV. ANTHONY FISHER OP
ARCHBISHOP OF SYDNEY**

I welcome today's exoneration of Cardinal George Pell in a unanimous decision of the High Court of Australia.

The Cardinal has always maintained his innocence and today's decision confirms his conviction was wrong.

I thank the judges for their meticulous review of the facts and the detailed judgment setting out the reasons for acquittal. After reviewing all the evidence before the Court of Appeal, the High Court identified "a body of evidence that raised lively doubts as to the commission of the offences" and concluded that there was a significant possibility "that an innocent person has been convicted".

I am pleased that the Cardinal will now be released and I ask that the pursuit of him that brought us to this point now cease.

This has not just been a trial of Cardinal Pell, but also of our legal system and culture. The Cardinal's vindication today invites broader reflection on our system of justice, our commitment to the presumption of innocence, and our treatment of high profile figures accused of crimes.

I recognise that the past failings of the Church to protect children have contributed to public anger directed at the Church and its leaders. I know that it is only by our sustained action seeking justice for all survivors of child sexual abuse and exhibiting best practice in safeguarding all vulnerable people that healing will occur and trust be restored.

Some will struggle with today's decision. Cases like these can reopen the wounds of survivors of abuse so that they feel like they are on trial too. But justice for victims is never served by the wrongful conviction and imprisonment of anyone. I hope and pray that the finality of the legal processes will bring some closure and healing to all affected.

For Catholics – lay, religious and clergy – I know that this has been a time of trial also. I pray that your faith may not fail and that you receive the grace and courage to continue serving God and His people.

In this Holy Week we look forward to Easter as a time of hope and new life for all impacted by child sexual abuse, by the Pell trial and the coronavirus pandemic. I join His Eminence in praying for all affected.



Most Rev. Anthony Fisher OP, DD BA LLB BTheol DPhil
Archbishop of Sydney