

One Heart, Two Homelands

(Bishop Karol Kulczycki's speech in Polish Hill River)

We have gathered here not only to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Father Leon Rogalski's arrival in Australia, but also to express our gratitude to God and to all those who have served the Polish community in Australia over these 150 years. Allow me to remind you—and myself—of the words of a very well-known folk song. I would say it is the unofficial anthem of the Polish diaspora:

“Góral, do you not regret leaving your homeland, the spruce forests, the mountain meadows, and those silvery streams? And the Góral looks to the mountains, wipes away his tears with his sleeve, for the mountains must be abandoned for bread, sir, for bread. Góral, do you not regret...”

This song originated in the second half of the 19th century and, to this day, fills the hearts of Poles living abroad with a certain nostalgia. Many of us here today could perhaps add these words: - ***Oh yes, sir, we do regret it... But for our families, for our children, we left our country to ensure them a decent life here on Australian soil.***

Many of us have lived in Australia for many years. Your children and grandchildren live and work on this land. Australia has become our second homeland. As Mr. Adam Polański wrote in his poetry collection: we have here “one heart, two homelands”. Each of us has a life story that brought us here to Australia, and today to Hill River, to celebrate this significant anniversary of ministry among Polish emigrants.

The first settlers from Poland came here in search of freedom and bread, as Poland did not exist on the world map at that time. However, Father Leon Rogalski did not come here for those reasons. His arrival was driven by concern for Polish emigrants. He dedicated his life to serving your ancestors, strengthening their faith, fortifying their hope, and bringing Christ into their hearts.

This anniversary, which we celebrate today, is not only an expression of our gratitude for Father Leon Rogalski's service, but also a gesture of thanks to the Jesuits, who, in their care for the Polish community, invited Father Leon to serve in Australia. This anniversary is also a wonderful opportunity to thank God for filling Polish priests with His calling to dedicate their lives and provide pastoral care for the Polish community in Australia.

I would like to express my gratitude, through Father Wiesław Słowik, to all the priests, brothers, and sisters who, concerned for the spiritual well-being of the Polish diaspora in Australia, came here to serve with their ministry.

I extend my best wishes to the Polish community gathered here: may this place, the cradle of Polish pastoral ministry in Australia, be a source of strength for your faith and hope that God does not leave you alone. He is with you in moments when your heart is filled with nostalgia, and the words *Góralu, czy ci nie żal* echo in your head. Yes, there is sorrow, Lord, sorrow, but with you, Lord, walking through life is easier.

This land, this country has opened its borders to you. Now, you have one heart and two homelands. Here, you can share your Polish heritage and the faith that God has planted in your heart.