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A Word of Hope for the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Victims

Saint Paul in the midst of his tribulations gives us hope by saying, "*We are* hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; ... struck down, but not destroyed. ... Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:8, 9, 16-18)

It was truly unbearable to see so many fellow Australians suffer in such a horrific way on this solemn day of our history. To have one life lost in a fire is a tragedy, let alone hundreds of children, youth, elderly and whole families as was the case this week with the worst bushfires Australia has witnessed. The prayers, sympathy and support of the Coptic Orthodox community in Australia go out to all our fellow Australians who have been affected by this disaster. The outpour of solidarity and support of many Australians from all walks of life towards the needs of those who are suffering and in mourning gives all of us great hope. Hope as Saint Paul says that we may be hard pressed on every side, but we are not crushed, we may be struck down, but not destroyed. Let us be united together as a nation and offer every assistance to those in need and not lose hope. Our hope is in Christ, the Saviour of the world. He is our comfort and our source of hope in the midst of the darkness. It is through Him that light will shine once again on this great nation.

We pray to our Almighty God to strengthen us all to rebuild what has been lost, and strengthen the lives of those who suffer and mourn for their loved ones.

My prayers are with every family and individual who have been affected by these bushfires, and my Diocese will do everything within its capacity to assist whether it be through counsellors, financially and also through offering food and clothing. I pray that our God and Saviour Jesus Christ may bestow His comfort and peace upon all.

Donations will be collected at Coptic Orthodox Churches within the Diocese of Melbourne over the next three Sundays to assist our fellow Australians who have been affected by this tragedy.

Suriel
Bishop of Melbourne