

Transcript

Archbishop- Elect Patrick O'Regan

Thank you address to the people of the Diocese of Sale

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Dear sisters and brothers,

These thoughts have ended up a little longer than I might have imagined.

When I first came here I was given an egg timer and the suggestion was that a homily should never go any longer than it takes for the egg timer to finish.

One of our priests even made the suggestion that, well actually, it didn't have to go that long even.

Well, I'll get out of this by saying that this is not a homily, and I won't mind if you don't persevere to the end.

Short version is simply this: I'd like to say thank you, first, to our good God,

for God's extreme and utter faithfulness; and second, thank you to God's holy people

in the Diocese of Sale.

If I imagined it at all, I'd imagine I'd be doing something like this in about 14 years' time, as my time as Bishop of Sale came to an end. God's ways are not our ways. I feel incredibly torn today.

There are many things for all of us that seem unreal and surreal at the moment. Well for me, this is one of them.

I feel torn because it's been my privilege to be with you for the last five years, and to see the hand of God work among you.

And even at times, even assisting the hand of God. In this short video clip, I wish to say farewell.

But before I do, my first thought is to say thank you. Now surprisingly, I don't actually remember much about my ordination day as Bishop, except there were lots of people and it was a most hopeful day.

If things were other, we'd have a better chance to say goodbye and thank you, and I do hope that we will be able to do that in the coming months, that I shall be able to come back for that Thanksgiving mass.

In my first days in the diocese, you made me welcome.

A stranger from afar, you looked after me, and you made me welcome.

You've taken the gospel to your heart, and I thank you very much for that.

I'd never been to Sale before, but thanks be to God, you've taught me how to become a Bishop and how to be a Bishop in Sale, and for that I give thanks to you and to our good God.

Pretty much the first day I was here, I said to Father Peter Slater that God is good, good indeed.

And I'm delighted to say that I've never found a reason yet to stop saying that.

Well, we've been able to do a few things over these last five years.

The makeup and the composition of our diocese has also changed quickly in these last five years.

When people ask me, "What's good about the Diocese of Sale?"

I always say three things, and the first is the people.

It has been a rich blessing to me to be able to work with so many good and extraordinary people who give of their very best each and every day to make a difference

to bring about the kingdom of God, to be of service to their neighbour.

And that's right across the diocese.

Each of our 27 parishes in all of our schools and in all the different sectors, there are people making an extraordinary difference and bringing hope.

And I think that's why our gathering for our plenary council preparations have gone so very well.

During that we've learned so much about how to do things.

Some of the things we might have forgotten about such as listening not only to one another, but also to ourselves and to, above all, God, and what God is asking of us at this time.

Sure, we haven't got all the answers yet, but I've think we've been shaped by the questions and buoyed by the process to have a confidence. It has given us direction; it has given us hope.

Already the Plenary Council has borne much fruit.

Now the second is the great diversity we have, whether it's from Phillip Island right through to Mallacoota, whether it's the rugged diversity of the Dargo hill country or the richness of Wilsons Promontory and everything in between, we have a geographical diversity.

We've got a diversity of every kind in the sizes of our parish to the activities, the people that make them up.

There's a richness there which does make forging an identity a little bit harder but just as important.

The third thing I like is that it's the size.

It's been possible for me to get round to each and every parish several times, not only for formal parish meetings and confirmations but lots of other special occasions.

With its 27 parishes, we can do that, and invariably I meet the most extraordinary people.

It's often been said that we don't get the opportunity to choose the times in which we should like to live.

What we do get to choose is our response. And this is certainly the case we've experienced with the coronavirus, for example. We may not have control over the cards we're dealt, but we do have control over responses we make.

And what is the extraordinary thing I've found here in the Diocese of Sale is that there are so many people who respond in faith, and that is the gift that makes the difference to everything, to them, and especially when it is joyfully proclaimed.

One of the first things you might remember that Pope Francis did was he wrote to us in a wonderful document which I like to go back to so often called the Joy of the Gospel. I'd like to think that in my time here I've tried to capture a little bit of all of that and at the same time being challenged by all of that means to us.

In a changing world, we are people who make a difference, and the joy of the gospel is one of those things that assists us in doing that. In one of my first masses here, there was one of our own Jane Mitchell songs.

I think it's called, and apologies if I got the details wrong Because You're Here, or something, but the words struck me strongly.

It begins by remembering our story, our first years even before we were a diocese, beginning in Tarraville.

And then there's the refrain that says "Because you're here, the story will be told."

I meet so many people that because they're there continues to be done so.

I knew that when I came here that I was joining an already existing stream.

In fact, it's a mighty river of faith.

And I was hoping to contribute to it, and I think that I have. I do hope that the last five years have been something of a time of hope, a time of joy, a time where we can indeed lift up our hearts.

I should like to ask forgiveness for the times I haven't lived up to your expectations or mine or what is required of the role.

I certainly don't pretend to think that I've always got everything right; I haven't, I know.

But I know that I've made many mistakes, and I hope that I've learned from most of them.

When I came here to Sale, there were many wonderful greetings, one of which came from the Bishop of Geraldton at the time, Justin Bianchini.

He sent me this wonderful Irish poem, it's too long to quote here, but it's something that buoyed me up and continues to do so, just a few phrases.

It said, "*The will of God will never take you*

"where the grace of God cannot keep you,

"where the arms of God cannot support you,

"where the richness of God

cannot supply your needs,

"where the power of God

cannot endow you with love."

Extraordinary words, great poem, because that's my experience, and it gives me some comfort as I set forth to start over once again.

I know that this is a starting over again for all of us, and the timing of this move is difficult with the coronavirus and everything else.

And I think we're learning that this is not a time of darkness, but a time to learn to do things differently and discover that God indeed is at the centre of all things.

I can say that it can be easy in this role as being bishop to live in a bubble where somehow you can avoid the ordinary slings and arrows of ordinary life.

I hope that I haven't lived in a bubble since I've been here because there are lots of people that make sure I get out of it,

and I'd like to say thank you for doing that.

When I was baptized on Sunday, the 26th of October, 1958 in St. John's Church in Perthville New South Wales by good old Father Jimmy Gallagher, I was given a mission: To be a disciple of Christ and a joyful messenger of His good news.

When I was ordained a priest on Friday, the 2nd of September, 1983, that mission deepened. When I came among you on the 26th of February, 2015, again, that mission deepened.

And right along the way in every move, it's been a move to follow, to call wherever that might lead.

Pope Francis reminds us that to be a disciple means we are to be missionary disciples, and we need to keep on listening to where that call is and where it leads.

I might have a few gifts that I've been able to share with you over these last five years, please God.

But I must confess there's one gift that is not mine.

And even though I've had to do it many times, it never gets any easier, and that is saying goodbye.

And that's precisely what I don't want to do today.

I want to say thank you, because as a Eucharistic people, we know that we are shaped in our being to be a people who say thank you, and we direct our prayer to God and we ask God to bless us.

We give our simple gifts of bread and wine, and they are changed for us into the most extraordinary gift of the body and blood of Christ that we are called to be.

Each day of being a disciple is a giving of a simple gift of our life back to God, allowing God to transform our lives by His Holy Spirit.

My prayer at the end of each day is simply, *"Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit."*

Some people ask me why I chose the motto that I chose.

It's a quote from Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians, and it means that God may be all in all.

Quite simply, I know that placing God at the centre of all things and seeking that God be all in all sums up my mission, and it's the true place of human happiness and deepest meaning.

In other words, everything is mission.

That's the goal of the whole of our activity of our lives.

I hope and pray that in all the activities and meetings and prayers and masses and all the other things in the last five years, I've actually sought to do that, to put God at the centre of all things so that God might be all in all.

Nowhere does it say that this is easy, by the way, but everywhere does it say that it is necessary.

It's not always given to us to see the fruits of our labor. After all, we're in the seed-planting business, because God is the one who brings the grace so that while I'm a little sad that I'm not going to be here to see some of the fruitfulness of the many projects that have started, I am confident that God is at the centre of all things, and in God's good time, they shall grow.

The coronavirus has been a real blow. It's going to take a while for us to get back on our feet, and the restoration phase will be longer than the first quick first lockdown phase.

I would like to call upon your goodness and generosity once again to have the eyes of faith, the hands of hope, and those legendary generous hearts to revitalize our parish and hopefully, that day will be very soon.

Yes it is going to take time, a lot of time, but that's on our side.

What gives me strength to begin again or start over is my own experience of the faithfulness of God.

When I look back over my life, I see the shaping hand of God and Mary MacKillop's famous saying to see the hand of God in everything is something that speaks to me deeply, and relying on the utter faithfulness of God, I know that God will never leave us and will always lead us to be where we can be the best instruments of God's wonderful gift of grace.

You might remember that I've often talked about Father Michael Casey's book on Grace, 'cause I'd love to recapture the vocabulary of grace.

And I hope that grace will always be at the centre or what we're doing. Strangely, we often think that what we do is more important than what God does.

May God's grace be yours in abundance, but make sure you give it away generously. I'd like to pay a special thanks to my close collaborators, especially the clergy.

Dear friends, you ought to be rightly proud of them. They are wonderful. To those in the Chancery and the Catholic education office and the other agency of the Diocese, thank you for making me look so good, maybe too good.

And thank you to the 123,000 Catholics that make up the people of God in this place.

Thank you.

So my dear sisters and brothers, as I take leave of you today, it is with sadness.

As they say, grief is the price you pay for love.

But it is with a heart full of thanksgiving to God and to you, God's holy people in the Diocese of Sale, I thank you.

May you always be able to see that God is good, good indeed. May God bless you.

Please pray for me. I'm speaking to you today from Saint Mary's Cathedral in Sale, under the patronage, our diocesan patronage of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

May she who has guided us in this diocese since 1887 continue to do that.

And may she who is the first and most perfect disciple lead us to Him who is our life.

God bless you and thank you.