

Homily for Chrism Mass
St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat Cathedral,
Monday, March 25, 2024

The opening hymn for our Mass today was “Together, we build our place.” The chorus speaks of our being called to be the hands of Christ as we build a place for everyone.

We are called to be your hands, we are called to be your feet,
Called to reach out with your love to everyone we meet,
Be strength to all the broken, light to all who seek our face,
To walk your ways, to live each day. Together, we build our place.

After the hymn, we had people from many parishes come forward with photos and other symbols of their parishes. They came from all around our diocese. Each one brought something from their place. Then they put the photos and symbols together. As they did this, they were showing how “Together, we build our place”. They came from their local communities. They came together representing a community of communities. They came together representing our diocese of Ballarat, a community of communities, from the Murray to the sea.

This week we mark the 150th anniversary of our diocese. On March 30, 1874, Pope Pius the Ninth issued a decree that was the beginning of our diocese of Ballarat. The Pope’s decree described the boundaries of the new diocese. “For the Diocese of Ballarat, we define as the boundaries the 144th degree of longitude as far as the sea and the Murray River, and that boundary which separates Victoria from the Diocese of Adelaide, or from the Colony of South Australia, in such a way that the same Murray River will be the northern boundary and the sea will be the southern boundary.” 150 years later, we continue to echo the Pope’s words in describing our diocese today. Our diocesan vision statement begins with the words, “We are a community of communities from the Murray to the sea.”

As we gather today for this Chrism Mass, we’ve come from many places. I pay tribute to the faith of people in the local communities throughout our diocese. I also pay tribute to the faith of people throughout the 150 years, people who have laid the foundations of the parishes and schools and hospitals and social services in our diocese today. I give thanks for all who have served our communities in good times and in times of struggle.

As we look back on our history, we acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses. We celebrate the achievements. We also recognise the failures to live our Christian faith to the full. The anniversary is a chance to take stock of where we are now. It's also a chance to look ahead and consider how we can live as a truly Christian community, sharing the good news of Christ, in the years to come.

As part of our ceremony today, we'll be renewing our commitment to Christ and our commitment to serving one another – as lay people, as religious, as deacon, as priests, as bishop. I pray that this Mass will bring us fresh inspiration in our faith and in our service.

We'll be blessing the oils used in the celebration of baptism and confirmation and ordination and the anointing of the sick. May the blessing of the oils bring a blessing on us and on all the people of our diocese. May we find new strength as we recall the gift of our baptism. May we be filled anew with the gifts of the Holy Spirit as we recall our confirmation. May the priests be renewed in their ministry as they recall their anointing in ordination. May we find healing of the wounds in our community as we bless the oil to be used in the sacrament of healing.

We're called to be the hands of Christ, we're called to be his feet,
Called to reach out with his love to everyone we meet,
Be strength to all the broken, light to all who seek God's face,
To walk Christ's way, to live each day. Together, we build our place.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR