

In Faith and Hope and Love (1 Corinthians 13:13)

***Remarks from Bishop Mark Freeman
Ordained bishop and installed as 9th Bishop of Ballarat
Solemnity of St Joseph
19th March 2026***



I want to begin by adding my voice to the acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and, indeed of all the lands which form what we call the Diocese of Ballarat.

As I join you in the life of this local Church and begin this ministry among you, I humbly acknowledge the people who continue to struggle because they have experienced abuse in their engagement with the Diocese of Ballarat. To victim survivors, your families and the communities so deeply affected by the experience, I pledge my readiness to listen, to learn and to support everything that enables healing and deep peace in your lives.

I wish to acknowledge and greet all the People of God in this diocese, those who were able to be present here in the Cathedral and, in a very special way, all of you who are joining this celebration via Livestream. Already, I have experienced your deep faith. I ask you to teach me how to be your bishop. Every time I have begun a new appointment, I have said to the community that you are the people whom God has given me to love. As I begin this new ministry among you, I say the same to the whole diocese, people and priests of Ballarat – *You are the people whom God has given me to love*. As I received this ring during today's Mass, I made that commitment with all my heart.

As many will know, my episcopal ring is made from the wedding rings of both my parents, George and Mary. They loved me into life. They loved me through life. They taught me what it is to commit yourself in love, to have faith and to live with hope even in the darkest moments. I feel sure that, from their place in God's presence they are watching over me and guiding me to love you all with the same deep love I experienced from them.

Many members of my immediate family are here today. Thank you for the love and support you have given me over the years. You have kept me real and grounded me in

life. I'll need you to keep in touch so that I don't get too full of myself. With my family there are many friends who have journeyed with me over the years, especially those who join us today (many also via livestream) from the parishes I have been part of in more recent years, especially Launceston and Bellerive-Lindisfarne. I need you all to keep me grounded and in touch with Christ.

I am humbled and encouraged by the priests who have concelebrated this Ordination Mass - from the Ballarat diocese, from the Archdiocese of Hobart and several priest-friends I have met along the way. Pray for me, challenge me and don't be afraid to call me to order!

Likewise, the presence of so many bishops does me honour. Thank you, Archbishop Comensoli, for ordaining me and for breaking open God's word for us today. Thank you to our Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Charles Balvo for your presence and for reading the Papal Mandate. Your kindness and assistance since that fateful day when I refused to answer a facetime call from an unknown number, has been very much appreciated. Thanks Archbishop Tony Ireland, one of the co-consecrators today. The few short months we have worked together in Tasmania have given me some good tips about how to be a diocesan bishop. Thank you for your support, especially over the weeks since 18th December. I want to acknowledge and thank Archbishop Porteous for his presence today and to give a call out to my dear friend and mentor, Archbishop Adrian Doyle who is joining us via livestream.

The other co-consecrator is well known to you all, Bishop Paul Bird. I suspect the smile that has been growing for weeks now is still radiant. It is an honour to succeed you as Bishop of Ballarat. It's a vibrant local Church that I have been called to serve as bishop. It has been cared for and guided by a true servant leader. You have set the bar high, and I thank you. (I acknowledge and am honoured by the presence of the other emeritus Bishop of Ballarat, Bishop Peter Connors. We might have to identify you both as "E1" and "E2").

To all who have prepared for and have participated in the Ordination Mass today, I am deeply grateful. So many have shared their gifts to enable us to give praise and thanks to God so beautifully and worthily: Musicians, cantors and choir members, readers, servers, sacristans, those responsible for the décor and all the other ministries. I will be forever indebted to those of you who have worked so hard behind the scenes to make all this happen today.

Thanks to our ecumenical sisters and brothers who have honoured us with your presence. I look forward to working with you in the years ahead. Thanks to the various civic leaders and representatives. I look forward to participating in the life of the wider community of Ballarat and all the places covered by this diocese.

Necessarily, my words today are of gratitude and appreciation. We are only just getting to know each other. When I was very young, I chose today's Gospel passage (John 21:15-

19) as the gospel for my ordination as a priest. The idealism of that choice has worn off over all these years. These days, I believe I have a realism about what it might mean to allow the Lord to ask, *do you love me?* Now I am old (or at least older) I willingly stretch out my arms to be led to where I didn't expect to go. I am willing because I know that I do not take this journey alone. We will journey together, and we will journey with our Christ.

I conclude these remarks by quoting Pope Leo XIV (after all it was his choice that brought us together today!). These words come from his homily for the Jubilee of the Synodal Teams and Participatory Bodies (26th October 2025): *The supreme rule in the Church is love. No one is called to dominate; all are called to serve. No one should impose his or her own ideas; we must all listen to one another. No one is excluded; we are all called to participate. No one possesses the whole truth; we must all humbly seek it and seek it together.*

Let's do all this out of love – for our God, for each other and for our neighbour. And let's do it together “in faith and hope and love!”