



Homily of Bishop Rene Ramirez RCJ

on the occasion of his

Installation Mass

as the Ninth Bishop of Sandhurst

30 July 2026

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When we look back on our lives, we can often see that God was guiding us all along. Even when we did not understand where the road was leading, He knew!

Today, I would like to speak about two stories: first, something of my story, the unexpected journey through which the Lord has brought me here; and then our story, my hopes for the Diocese of Sandhurst and the journey we now begin together.

I entered the seminary in the Philippines when I was sixteen. My formation was not always straightforward. There were moments when I was uncertain whether I should continue. I also completed three years of practical training in three different communities, because my superiors thought I needed to learn more about obedience. They were probably right!

I was ordained a priest on 27 June 1998 in my hometown of Gapan, Neuva Ecija.

Years later, while working in the Philippines, I suffered my first heart attack at forty-five years old. I subsequently had another heart attack here in Australia during COVID-19, and a third during a flight between Los Angeles and Chicago. So, I have had three heart attacks in three different countries. I do not recommend collecting countries in this particular way!

In spite of all that, who would have imagined that I would be asked to become a bishop? I was ordained an Auxiliary Bishop of Melbourne on 1 February 2025. Then, after barely eighteen months, I was asked to become your shepherd here in Sandhurst.

Yet here I am, and here we are

My story has taught me on simple lesson: we can trust the Lord. God sees what we cannot see. He knows the road ahead, including its unexpected turns. He can work through our strengths, our weaknesses and even our damaged hearts. Nothing entrusted to him is wasted.

Today, my story becomes part of **our** story – the story of God's people here in Sandhurst. Today's Gospel shows us where that story must begin.

Saint Matthew tells us that Jesus travelled through the towns and villages, teaching, proclaiming the Good News and healing the sick. When he saw the crowds, he was moved with compassion because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Jesus did not see a problem to be managed. He saw people. He recognised their weariness, their wounds and their hunger for God. His compassion moved him to act.

This Gospel inspired my episcopal motto: *Zelus et Misericordia* – Zeal and Mercy.

These words express the sacred heart of Jesus. His mercy allows us to feel the suffering of His people. His zeal moves Him to draw close, proclaim the Kingdom and bring healing.

How fitting that I begin my ministry as Bishop of Sandhurst here in this Cathedral dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This Cathedral reminds us what kind of Church we are called to be: A Church whose life flows from the heart of Christ – a heart burning with love for the Father and overflowing with mercy for His people.

This cathedral was also central to Saint Hannibal Mary Di Francia, the founder of the Rogationists. When he encountered people living in terrible poverty, he recognised in them the crowds who were harassed and helpless. He heard the command of Jesus: “Ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest.”

For Saint Hannibal, this prayer demanded a response. He prayed for holy workers and became a labourer himself. When we ask the Lord to send workers, we must also be prepared to hear Him say, “I am sending you.”

And so, what might the Lord be asking of us here in Sandhurst?

I enter a story that has been unfolding for more than 150 years, written through the faith of generations, the ministry of the clergy and religious, the witnesses of families, and the quiet service of many whose names may be known only to God.

During my previous time in this Diocese, I saw the faith, generosity and resilience of its people. Much has been done and much continues to be done. I come with gratitude for what I have inherited and with respect for those who have carried the Church’s mission through changing and sometimes difficult circumstances.

Together, I hope we can build upon these foundations and become ever more deeply centred on Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit is so present and active among us. We want to listen more attentively – in prayer and Scripture, through the wisdom of the Church, and in the lives of our people. Instead of preparing our plans and then asking the Holy Spirit to approve them, let us allow him to guide us from the beginning. Any genuine renewal of this Diocese will come through his power, not through our efforts alone.

Guided by the Spirit, we will give priority to evangelisation. This is at the heart of the Church’s mission: helping people rediscover and encounter Jesus Christ. Much good work is already happening throughout Sandhurst. Let us build upon it so that our parishes become ever more missionary – becoming more invitational and accompanying people, supporting families, forming young disciples, and reaching those who no longer feel connected to the Church.

This mission also calls for the best leadership we can offer; leadership grounded in prayer, generous in service, courageous in decision-making and accountable to the people entrusted to our care. We will recognise and form the leaders already among us – clergy, religious and laypeople – and work together with trust. Every baptised person has received gifts from the Holy Spirit and has a part to play.

Guided Liturgy will remain at the heart of this renewal. Beautiful and prayerful celebrations lead us into a deeper encounter with Christ, nourish us with His grace and send us out to proclaim him.

I ask you to share in this vision: a Diocese led by the Holy Spirit, centred on Christ, committed to evangelisation and strengthened by prayerful and courageous leadership. Let us give this mission of zeal and mercy a chance to take deeper root among us.

I know that change can be unsettling. We rightly honour the faith and sacrifices of those who came before us. We also recognise that our circumstances have changed. Some communities are becoming smaller, and our connection with younger generations has weakened. Faithfulness sometimes asks us to respond with fresh courage.

The renewal we seek will grow through prayer and discernment. Some efforts will succeed; others may not. We will learn together. I will sometimes make mistakes, and I ask in advance for your patience and forgiveness. When we believe that something is inspired by the Holy Spirit, let us give it a genuine opportunity to take root and bear fruit.

Today, I entrust myself to you as your bishop. I come with hopes and dreams, but also ready to listen and learn. I will need your prayers, your honesty, your experience and your willingness to work with me.

My story has just brought me here. Your story began long before I arrived. Today, by God's providence, these become **our story**.

With gratitude for the Augustinian foundations of this diocese, we entrust our journey to Mary, Our Lady of Good Counsel. May she helps us listen to the Spirit, trust her Son and follow wherever he leads.

May the Lord of the Harvest raise up holy and courageous workers from among us here in Sandhurst – and give us the courage to realise that we are the ones he is sending.

Zelus et Misericordia. Zeal and Mercy

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

Now and forever. Amen.