Bishop Anthony’s homily
given at his Mass of Installation
4 March 2010, St Patrick’s Cathedral, Parramatta

Your Eminences and Excellency, Your Graces and Lordships, my
brother priests and fellow religious, Premier, distinguished guests,
brothers and sisters in Christ:

The white wool of Dominic is not unprecedented in this part of the
country. When Australia’s first Dominican, Christopher Vincent
Dowling, arrived in Sydney in 1831 as official Catholic chaplain to the
colony, he was promptly locked out of the Hyde Park presbytery by the
previous incumbent, John Joseph Therry.

The popular but impetuous Fr Therry was no team player. One day,
when Fr Dowling was preaching a sermon on fraternal charity, Therry
dragged him from the sanctuary, only to come to his senses and fall to
his knees begging pardon.

On another occasion the two of them, fully vested, engaged in a public
tug-o-war for the collection box. And on a third, it is alleged Therry
sent three heavies to beat up Dowling in front of St Mary’s and steal
his hat and watch!

Thereafter, with the connivance of the Governor, the meek Dominican
escaped to the relative safety of Western Sydney, where he served as
chaplain to Windsor and the Hawkesbury – an area encompassing
most of what we now call the Diocese of Parramatta.

He established a Catholic school at Windsor and, with the help of his
friend John Macarthur, a Catholic chapel at Camden.

Australia’s first Catholic bishop, John Bede Polding, arrived in 1835
with a Dominican companion, Fr James Corcoran. This put an end to
Therry’s terrorism and Polding rewarded Dowling’s patience by giving
him the care of everything north of the Hawkesbury, including what we
now call Maitland-Newcastle as well as all of Queensland!

The other Dominican then took charge of the West where the pastoral
challenge was growing: only about one in six Catholics was Mass-going
and most had not been to Confession for years.
He got the first Catholic church started at Windsor, but was killed in a horse accident before it was completed. I am proud Dominicans were around here so early, even if they were mugged, exiled or trampled by horses for their troubles! I trust you will be gentler with this one ...

Many other priests and consecrated women and men have played their part in the history of Western Sydney over the past two centuries and so it is with great optimism and affection that I greet the priests and deacons, religious and seminarians of the diocese tonight.

It is a privilege to join the labourers in this particular vineyard of the Lord. In this Year for Priests we are especially conscious of what a precious gift is the priesthood and how much we need to strengthen priestly identity and support each other.

My brother priests: be assured of my desire to pray with you and for you, to listen and learn from you, and to work closely with you in our joint mission to Western Sydney.

What is that mission? Jesus chose tonight’s First Reading as his mission statement (Isa 61:1-3; Lk 4:16-19) and, unlike so many, his was anything but spin.

He chose a text full of promise: of evangelisation, healing, liberation, vindication, blessing ... But behind such hopes were real people who were suffering or searching, crying out for consolation. It’s those who’ve had bad news who are most hungry for good: the poor in spirit or resources, the powerless, ignorant or sinful.

So at the beginning of his public ministry Christ identified himself as the One who delivers us from every evil, from anything opposed to true human happiness.

To the victims of unemployment, family breakdown, prejudice or other injustice in Western Sydney the Church recommits herself tonight to bring Good News, to bind up broken hearts, to proclaim freedom from the many kinds of captivity and God’s favour for the little ones.

In our second lesson we heard St Paul’s anxieties for the Ephesians of his time (Eph 4:11-16), lest they be tossed to and fro, not by poverty and powerlessness so much as fashion and falsehood, and so be at the mercy of a culture of lies and death.
Christ’s gift in this situation, he explains, is to send apostles and pastors, preachers and teachers. Their mission is simple: to consecrate people in that truth and unite them in that love for which Jesus prayed in our Gospel (Jn 17:11,17-23).

This is why evangelisation, preaching, religious education and formation are core in every age: for every successor of the apostles since Paul has had the mission of building up the Church in truth and love.

The Church, like her God, is ever ancient, ever new. In every generation she faces both perennial challenges and novel ones. At the dawn of this millennium, Pope John Paul II called us to a trusting optimism, neither underestimating the problems nor responding with stock solutions.

“We shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person,” he observed. “It is not a matter of inventing a new program. The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and the living Tradition ... centred on Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity and with him transform history.” (Novo Millennio Ineunte 29)

That transforming life must be expressed in concrete initiatives and the advent of a new bishop occasions a fresh look at our activities. But the inspiration for 21st Century Western Sydney must be the same as for 1st Century Ephesus: Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever (Heb 13:8).

Like every age and place before it, the Diocese of Parramatta today has its particular needs and gifts. This is a young diocese, canonically and demographically. By comparison to the median age of its people – in their early 30s – I’m already an old guy!

With so many young families and young adults, with new parishes, schools and outreach every year, so much is possible. There is every reason to have ‘a trusting optimism’. Add to its youthfulness the ethnic diversity of this Diocese and it is like World Youth Day, every day, here in Parramatta – if perhaps a little less intense!

The novelty of this very building, that houses the bishop’s cathedra or chair, attempts to express the ever-newness of the Church, even as the neo-gothic spire and medieval Madonna reflect its continuity with more ancient tradition.
It is, in fact, the fourth church on this site since the days of those first Dominicans and it too will evolve as the 21st Century unfolds. We are not either a pre-Vatican II or a post-Vatican II Church, either Roman or Australian, either a Western desert Church or a Western suburbs one: we are the Catholic Church, embracing all time and space and cultures, Nicæa and Vatican II, Rome and Australia, the bush and the city.

With full heart I give thanks to Almighty God for calling me to serve Him and His people as religious, priest and bishop of such a Church.

I record my gratitude to His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, for the confidence he has placed in me and the blessing he has given me as I take up this new charge. It was his Nuncio, Archbishop Lazzarotto, who communicated the mandate to “Go West Young Man”.

In humble affection and gratitude I pledge tonight my fidelity to the Holy Father and his successors and the communion of the bishop, clergy and people of this Diocese with the See of Rome and the Church throughout the world.

I also thank Cardinal Pell who as my ordinary taught me so much and as my Metropolitan has installed me tonight. He is a man of big mind and heart and a great leader in our Church in Australia and beyond.

To the bishops and clergy of Sydney who have turned out in such numbers and to the parishioners of Watsons Bay, a special thank-you: it has been an honour to live and serve with you as auxiliary bishop and parish priest these past 6½ years.

Tonight we pay particular tribute to my predecessor, Bishop Kevin Manning, for 12 years of splendid service to this Diocese. He will long be remembered as a humble man of God and a good shepherd of God’s flock in Parramatta, for his passion for the Catholic faith and solid administration, for his bridge-building to people of other faiths and his campaigns for justice for workers, asylum seekers, women and migrants.

He raised this cathedral out of the ashes of its predecessor. I thank you Bishop Kevin for handing over with the pastoral staff a Diocese in such good shape!
I am grateful to have the support tonight of Archbishop Wilson, President of the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference, with so many of Australia’s archbishops, bishops and clergy.

I also salute my Dominican brothers, including the Provincial Fr Kevin Saunders, Bishops O’Grady and Cardone from the Solomon Islands and Father Richard Finn from the English Province, as well as Provincials or representatives of many religious congregations.

I was delighted to learn that there are some 53 religious congregations represented in the Diocese of Parramatta, for the Church today desperately needs more faithful and wise religious, whose consecration speaks of a head-over-heels joy in the Lord.

We are also honoured tonight by the presence of representatives of other Christian communities and religious traditions. I echo Cardinal Pell’s welcome to you all, and also to our Premier, Kristina Keneally, who with John Watkins were our partners and friends through World Youth Day, former Premier Nathan Rees, and the several federal and state MPs, mayors, councillors and other civic dignitaries.

Just as the first Dominican worked with Governor Dowling and John Macarthur, I look forward to working with the leaders of our civil community and economy in support of the dignity of every human person from conception to natural death.

In a special way, I thank Almighty God for the gift of my dear parents, Colin and Gloria, who have been for me such a powerful example of married love these 50 years past.

If much of my life has been and will be devoted to the defence and support of human life and love, it was first in my own home, the domestic church, that I heard the Gospel of Life and Love proclaimed.

Tonight I am blessed also by the presence of my dear brothers and sisters, my extended family and so many friends, some of whom have come great distances to be here: thank-you all for loving me so well.

I greet those who lead or serve in our diocese’s parishes, agencies and ministries, such as education, welfare, pastoral care, health and aged care through whom the Church makes such an important contribution in this region as throughout Australia.
I am well aware of the enormous challenge for those in the field in ensuring these are truly Christian, missionary works. We must not let the secularising tendencies of the contemporary world infect our hearts, mute our voice, blunt our contribution.

Rather than accommodate the culture we must be a leaven; rather than follow the opinion-makers we must give a lead; rather than reconstructing our beliefs by focus group we serve God and Australia best by being true to our faith, our values, and so our better selves.

Lest we slide back to those days when only one in six Catholics west of Sydney regularly attended Mass and few knew God’s gift of Absolution, we must be the new Therrys, Dowlings and Corcorans for Western Sydney.

Tonight, therefore, I ask you, the people of the Diocese of Parramatta, not only for your personal support for me, but also for your constant prayers that together we may discern God’s will and for your constant efforts that together we may follow that holy will.

Pray and work with me to proclaim the Paschal mystery, not just in this present season but in season and out of season. Christ Crucified and Risen is the key not only to the mystery of God but to our own mystery; his life and teachings and abundant grace are the secret to happiness in this life and the one sure way to the Father in the next.

To all the People of God of the Diocese of Parramatta I say: thanks be to God for you! Thank you for your great welcome to me. These wonderful celebrations that you have organised are a sign of your love for God and his Church and your willingness to work with your new bishop.

As I take up my new office tonight, reflect upon God’s personal calling to each one of you, to build up his Church and to make this world a better place. Join me in saying yes, unconditionally, to God.

What a privilege it is to be a Christian in these most challenging and graced of times! Let us show the people of Western Sydney the deep joy of being a Catholic today, the hope it brings, the abiding love for God and neighbour.

There are many young people here tonight, not just under this roof but in our Cathedral extension on the grassy area outside to my right. You
must be my right hand men and women, not just tonight but in the years to come!

Examine your hearts now: God is calling some of you to join the adventure of the Gospel through the priesthood or consecrated life. Others will serve through marriage and family, or through a committed single life as heralds of the new evangelisation.

Whatever his plan, God will do great things with you if you let Him! At World Youth Day Pope Benedict told you that “Our world has grown weary of greed, exploitation and division, of the tedium of false idols and piecemeal responses, and the pain of false promises.

“Our hearts and minds are yearning for a vision of life where love endures, where gifts are shared, where unity is built, where freedom finds meaning in truth, and where identity is found in respectful communion. This is the work of the Holy Spirit!”

So never let the world sell you short, my young friends and old. Never buy the lies that nothing is true, all is relative, our ideals illusory, our good works in vain. Jesus Christ is the hope of Western Sydney!

For this you were made, for this we all came into the world: that we might be consecrated in the truth, sanctified in goodness, glorified in beauty. Pray for me, then, as I will for you.
A word of thanks
A word of thanks to all those who have made tonight such a beautiful act of worship of God: our Master of Ceremonies, Fr Peter Williams, our Cathedral Dean, Fr Wim Hoekstra, thedeacons, seminarianservers, ushers and other helpers.

High praise is due to Bernard Kirkpatrick, the several choirs and musicians, for their splendid music: they have drawn from the Church’s treasury ancient and new, and raised our spirits to God.

I also thank those such as the Installation Committee, led by Bishop Manning, the Vicar-General, Fr Bob McGuckin, my secretaries and so many others who have worked behind the scenes to bring us all together tonight and provide for our liturgy and the reception that follows.

I thank all of you who have joined us in this celebration.

Above all, we give thanks to God the Father for sending us His only Son, Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, to whose terrible Passion and glorious Resurrection we look forward in this season of Lent.

What an exciting new opportunity this is, to serve you, God’s people in Western Sydney, as priest, teacher and shepherd! I promise to put my heart and soul into that task. I entrust my ministry to the protection of Mary, Help of Christians and Queen of the Most Holy Rosary.

With her, pray that I might always be true to my motto from our Second Reading: speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15).