

Sixtieth Anniversary of Avila College

Most Rev. Anthony J Ireland DD STD EV VG

Welcome to each and every one of you to St Patrick's Cathedral—this mother church of the Catholic community in Melbourne. Today, this sacred space echoes with the voices of daughters of the Church—*Ecclesiae Filiae*—the students, staff, alumnae, and friends of Avila College, gathering to mark sixty years of Catholic education, formation, and mission.

St Patrick's is more than a grand building. It stands on land rich in memory and mission. It is a place where saints have prayed, where lives have been shaped, and where vocations have quietly been born.

Just around the corner, in Brunswick Street, a little girl named Mary MacKillop was born—she would grow up to become Australia's first canonised saint. She prayed in this cathedral often, and as a young woman she sat in the same pews that you occupy today.

And, right across the road, at St Vincent's Hospital, Dr Mary Glowrey, a pioneering medical professional and religious sister, lived out her calling to heal and to serve. She trained and worked there, and she, too,

prayed in this cathedral. Her life of compassion and courage continues to inspire, and her cause for canonisation is now officially underway.

So when you sit here today, you sit not as tourists in a historic place, but as pilgrims in the company of saints-in-the-making — women who once prayed where you pray, who listened for God's voice just as you do, and who found the courage to say 'yes' to their calling.

Avila College was founded in 1965 by the Presentation Sisters — women of vision, strength, and deep faith. Inspired by the charism of Nano Nagle, they lit a lantern in Mount Waverley that continues to shine brightly through each student, each graduate, each staff member, and through each act of service in the community. Their mission was not just to teach young women, but to form each one as a daughter of the Church — *Ecclesia Filia* — capable of leadership, wisdom, and love.

Today, sixty years on, we give thanks for that mission. And we ask: How will we "be the legacy" for those who come after us? What will we hand on? What will we build with the gifts we have received?

In today's first reading, the prophet Zechariah gives us a joyful image: "Sing, rejoice, daughter of Zion, for I am coming to dwell in the middle of you." What a beautiful line for this moment. For sixty years, God has been dwelling in the middle of Avila College — in your classrooms, your conversations, your acts of kindness and courage. The Lord rejoices in you.

And in the Gospel, Jesus tells us what it means to belong to him. When told that his mother and brothers are outside, he responds: "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" Then he says, "Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

To belong to Jesus is not about biology or blood lines. It's about receptivity. It's about love. It's about discipleship. And that's the real meaning of *Ecclesia Filia* — which is not just a motto, but a calling. To be a daughter of the Church is to be someone who listens to the Word of God, who allows it to shape her choices, her dreams, her future.

Young women of Avila, today you sit in pews once occupied by Mary MacKillop and Mary Glowrey. You are embraced by the legacy of the Presentation Sisters, by

sixty years of students who have walked before you, and by a Church that believes in you. You are not only the future of the Church — you are its vibrant present.

Avila's theme for this anniversary year is "Be the legacy." That isn't just about looking back. It's about choosing now the kind of person you want to be. What you do today — how you live, how you love, how you serve — will ripple into the future. It will shape lives you may never see.

So today, be pilgrims. Not tourists admiring a cathedral, but seekers asking how God is calling you to live. Ask the great ones — Mary of Nazareth, Mary MacKillop, Mary Glowrey, and Nano Nagle—to walk beside you. Ask them to help you discover your personal purpose. Ask for the gifts of wisdom, courage, compassion, and faith.

You entered this Cathedral singing, "Christ Be Our Light." May that be your prayer always — especially in moments of doubt or difficulty. And when we go forth today singing the Avila College Hymn — remember its proclamation: "Lord you hold us in the palm of your hand, no darkness is stronger than your light."

Happy sixtieth anniversary, Avila College. *Ecclesiae*
Filiae — daughters of the Church— be courageous and
be the legacy.