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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Funeral Homily for Archbishop Robert Fortune Sanchez January 26, 2012**

ALBUQUERQUE – Thursday, January 26, 2012 - IMMEDIATE RELEASE—

Archbishop Michael Sheehan, Bishops, Religious, Deacons, Priests, Laity, family members of Archbishop Sanchez: I sincerely express my condolences to you all. And I welcome everyone to our Cathedral as we celebrate this funeral Mass for our beloved Archbishop Robert Fortune Sanchez. Present here this morning are over a thousand persons, and I suppose there are a thousand stories that could be told about Archbishop Sanchez, but I am here to share my story. I thank Archbishop Sheehan who has always honored the person, work, and memory of Archbishop Sanchez for the privilege of sharing this homily. Jesus said: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” To be human is to know loss in all its pain and sorrow. Sometimes the best we can do is to acknowledge our grief and lean on God’s unfailing, comforting love to get us through our sorrow.

Last week, Friday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, I was having lunch with my Deacons when my brother who lives in Norman, Oklahoma, called me to tell me the breaking news that Archbishop Sanchez had died. Like the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the first moon landing, the events of 9/11, we all will always remember where we were and what we were doing when we heard of the Archbishop’s death.

I remember another defining moment in my life when I received the news that “Bobby” [as we used to call him] had been appointed Archbishop of Santa Fe. I was the pastor of my first parish, St. Alice, Mountainair, and upon hearing the news I jumped into my car, drove to San Felipe Parish, and then didn’t quite recognize Fr. Sanchez because he had shaved off his full moustache and long side burns!

The next 19 years were full of new life for the Archdiocese in terms of Liturgy, Search, Cursillo, Hispanic Ministries, Priests’ Senate, Native American Ministries, Youth Ministry, the establishments of new parishes, including Risen Savior, my parish, in Albuquerque, as well as all he did on the national and international levels. He was a

natural and charismatic leader who energized individuals and groups to live up to their potential.

He was also a dedicated teacher. He guided many students at St. Pius X high school and he always took time to share his passion of many subjects, especially the history of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe. Always the teacher, one time while we were playing tennis, and I was way ahead of him in the match, he called for a time out and proceeded to instruct me on how to play my backhand, improve my serve, and hit a stronger shot!

Archbishop Sanchez was also an excellent homilist. As you might have observed, homilists have one or two major themes, and most homilies are just a variation of those main themes. Archbishop Sanchez' one and only one theme: Gratitude. In private conversations, meetings, homilies, he always was giving thanks. He literally would say, "thank you, thank you, thank you."

Today is our opportunity to, publicly, and officially say: thank you Archbishop Sanchez for all you did for 19 years for the entire People of God. This funeral will finally put an end another 19 years, years of seclusion. You are now home, in your Cathedral, with your family, friends, people, and God. Welcome home!

This is a funeral Mass where we pray for the departed and especially ask for pardon and forgiveness for our sins because we are keenly aware of own mortality. One day a woman came into my office and told me she knew my sins. How is that possible, I asked, I don't even know you. God has given me this gift, she answered, and I just ask God and he reveals others sins to me. Fine, I will be seeing my confessor tomorrow, come back in two days and reveal the sins I will have confessed. Two days later the woman came to my office; I asked her to tell my confessed sins, and she said I asked God to tell me your sins, but he said: I forgot them.

Can we be like God who loves and forgives completely and unconditionally? Can we take the example of Jesus who taught us to forgive others as we hope to be forgiven? Will we stop judging, hating, looking for revenge, and instead be compassionate, understanding, and merciful? Can we take up Archbishop Sanchez's motto on his coat of arms and be Instruments of Peace? Can we take the example of Jesus and be humble servants of the Lord? Will we quit living in the past and realize that God is doing something new and exciting now, here, with each one of us?

The Beatitudes express faith and hope in spite of suffering ranging from poverty to persecution. Suffering is not good in and of itself. Jesus teaches us that suffering will not last and that it will be transformed into ultimate joy. It is because of this good news of hope rooted in faith that Jesus proclaims his hearers to be blessed. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. We all experience times come in our lives when someone deeply wounds us with words or actions. It is in those times that our Lord calls us to extend mercy rather than mete out our version of retribution

and justice. This gift of mercy is not only something we offer others, it can be a gift we give ourselves. Like giving ourselves permission to grieve, we find lasting, deep contentment when we forgive ourselves and others for the hurtful things we have willfully done.

My fondest memory of Archbishop Sanchez will always be his contagious smile. Even to the end he never lost that smile that began with his eyes, mouth, and stretched between his two big ears! Dear friends, embrace joy and happiness by following Jesus no matter what others think. Because when we do, we will realize this very last promise from our Lord: “Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.”

Monsignor Richard Olona  
Pastor, Risen Savior Catholic Community  
Albuquerque, NM--END