



PASTORAL LETTER

Second Sunday of Advent, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Earlier this year, Pope Francis made the unexpected announcement that there will be an extraordinary Jubilee Year, commencing this Tuesday, 8th December, and concluding next year on the Solemnity of Christ the King. The Holy Father said that the Jubilee Year “shall be a Holy Year of Mercy” and that we should “live this Year in the light of the Lord’s words: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’”ⁱ.

Pope Francis wants the celebration of this Holy Year of Mercy to be “a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God”ⁱⁱ for all believers. It is his wish that the Jubilee should be “a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective”ⁱⁱⁱ.

What strikes me is this: it is the tangibility of God’s mercy that Pope Francis wishes us to experience. The Holy Father wants us to experience and know, in a very personal way, God our Father’s desire to be close to us in every moment of our life. For the mercy of God is expressed in the Father’s will to constantly embrace us, his children. God our Father longs to embrace us, in our loveliness and in our ugliness, in our goodness and in our sinfulness. The Year of Mercy is a reminder to us then, that no matter what wrong we have done or sin we have committed, there is always the possibility of starting over again and discovering the wonder of the love and mercy of God.

Experiencing the closeness of God our Father is, for Pope Francis, the way in which our faith will be strengthened and we will be able to be more effective witnesses to our faith. Therefore, this Jubilee Year is intended to be a precious time of formation for us to play our part in the Church’s work of evangelisation and in her mission to bring the Gospel of mercy to each person.

Another important aspect of this Holy Year is the acknowledgement that mercy is something all of us should be practicing towards others in our daily lives. This is especially so if we have experienced the blessing of God’s mercy in our own life. Information and resources will be provided throughout the Jubilee Year of Mercy which will promote the corporal and spiritual works of mercy^{iv} that we are encouraged to undertake, works that put our faith into action and make God’s mercy a reality in our lives and in our world.

A notable and traditional element in the celebration of a Jubilee Year is the opening of a special Holy Door in a Cathedral or in the Church of a major pilgrimage shrine. The Holy Door represents Jesus Christ who said “I am the gate for the sheep... Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture”^v. During the Jubilee Year, the faithful are encouraged to make a pilgrimage to a Cathedral or shrine and enter through the Holy Door in order to pray and seek God’s mercy for themselves and for their loved ones, living and dead. This should be accompanied by each pilgrim celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation, receiving Holy Communion, making a

profession of faith and praying for the Holy Father's intentions for the good of the Church and of the entire world. In this way, said Pope Francis "the Holy Door will become a *Door of Mercy* through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instils hope"^{vi}.

This coming Tuesday, the Holy Father will open the Holy Door of St Peter's Basilica in Rome. Then next Sunday, 13th December, the third Sunday of Advent, he will open the Holy Door of the Basilica of St John Lateran which is his Cathedral, the Cathedral Church of the Bishop of Rome. On that same day, Bishops around the world will open a Holy Door in their respective Cathedrals "as a visible sign of the Church's universal communion"^{vii}. I too will open a special Holy Door on that day in our Cathedral in Leeds during the 11:00am Mass. I would like to invite you to make your pilgrimage at some time during this coming Jubilee Year, if it is possible for you to do so, to our Cathedral and to enter through its Holy Door.

In order for us to experience the closeness of God our Father and be embraced by Him, we can use one of the many opportunities that there will be in the Cathedral and in parishes all over the diocese during, Advent, Lent and throughout the Jubilee Year to go to confession in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I know that for many people, the thought of going to confession is not an easy one. Often the reason for this is not because a person has a fear of going to confession itself but rather a fear of not knowing how to put into words what it is that they want to say. This is particularly so if it has been a long time since their last confession. If that person is you, please, do not be afraid! It is you whom God our Father wishes to welcome and embrace with His loving mercy.

In this holy season of Advent, as we prepare to celebrate the mystery of God's love at Christmas, I pray that all of us will "Prepare a way for the Lord"^{viii} and open the doors of our hearts to His mercy and forgiveness. In experiencing the mercy which God our Father has shown to us in the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ, may we desire to show that same mercy to all those we encounter in our lives and so become, "Merciful like the Father"^{ix}.

Yours devotedly in the Lord Jesus Christ

+*Marcus*

✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on the 30th November 2015 and appointed to be read in all Churches and Chapels of the Diocese on the Second Sunday of Advent, 5th/6th December 2015

ⁱ Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis, St Peter's Basilica, Rome, 13th March 2015

ⁱⁱ Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, 1st September 2015

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} *The Corporal Works of Mercy*: Feed the hungry, Give drink to the thirsty, Clothe the naked, Shelter the homeless, Visit the sick, Visit the imprisoned, Bury the dead. *The Spiritual Works of Mercy*: Admonish the sinner, Instruct the ignorant, Counsel the doubtful, Comfort the sorrowful, Bear wrongs patiently, Forgive all injuries, Pray for the living and the dead

^v John 10:7-10

^{vi} *Misericordiae Vultus*, §3, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, April 2015

^{vii} Ibid., §13

^{viii} Luke 3:4

^{ix} *Misericordiae Vultus* §13, Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, April 2015