



Jesus Shows Us the Face of the Father's Mercy: A Pastoral Letter for the Year of Mercy 2015-2016

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's Mercy". With these words Pope Francis invited everyone to take part in a special Jubilee Year of Mercy. It will begin on this year's Solemnity of Mary's Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2015 and end on next year's Solemnity of Christ the King, November 20, 2016.

Mercy is "the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness," the Holy Father wrote in *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy) instituting the Year of Mercy.

What is the Holy Father asking us to do during this special year? Two things: first, to make a good personal confession and secondly, to commit ourselves to perform works of mercy.

How are these connected? Well, it's important for us to experience the loving and forgiving mercy of God in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, a graced encounter that brings inner healing, peace and joy. Once we have tasted God's mercy ourselves, we are moved often to share that gift with others who have needs both material and spiritual.

So I am inviting each Catholic to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation—to go to Confession—at least once during the Year of Mercy. Pope Francis continually reminds us that we may tire of asking God for pardon and mercy, but he never tires of showing us mercy.

Then, in gratitude for God's forgiveness let us show mercy to those in need. I am inviting each Catholic of our Archdiocese of Ottawa who is able to do so to perform sometime during this special year one corporal work of mercy and one spiritual work of mercy.

The corporal works of mercy are well known: to feed the hungry; to give drink to the thirsty; to clothe the naked; to shelter the homeless; to visit the sick; to visit the imprisoned; to bury the dead. We are asked by Christ to recognize him in anyone in need: "Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of the least of these my brethren, you did for me" (Matthew 25.40)

The spiritual works of mercy are less well known but they are also important for the spiritual vitality of our faith community: to instruct the ignorant; to counsel the doubtful; to admonish sinners; to bear wrongs patiently; to forgive offences willingly; to comfort the afflicted; to pray

for the living and the dead. The first three may require a special level of authority, competence or even extraordinary tact. The latter four are ways for us to express in daily living our life as disciples of Jesus.

Pope Francis has given each diocese the privilege of designating a Door of Mercy in the cathedral church. Traditionally such a sacred door represents the passage to salvation as well as the entryway to God's mercy. There are seven permanent Holy Doors in the world, including the one at Notre Dame Basilica in Quebec City. These doors are normally sealed from the inside and are opened during jubilee years when those who travel to the Holy Door or Door of Mercy on a spiritual journey—known as “pilgrims”—can enter through them to gain a plenary indulgence connected with the jubilee.

On December 8, Pope Francis will usher in the Year of Mercy by opening the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica. The following Sunday, December 13 churches throughout the world will open designated “doors of mercy”.

In Ottawa, we will bless our special Door of Mercy in Notre Dame Cathedral on December 8 at special 7:30 PM Mass marking our cathedral's patron Mary Immaculate and formally open it to pilgrims at the 9 o'clock Mass on Sunday morning, December 13.

Pilgrims are encouraged to pass through this special door during the Year of Mercy, thinking not only of God's mercy for each of us but also of ways they can be charitable to those around them.

After passing through the designated door, pilgrims are called to complete their pilgrimage by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation and Holy Communion, professing the faith by reciting the Creed and praying for the Holy Father's intentions. They can do this to obtain an indulgence for themselves or for one of the deceased. More information about indulgences and how to share in these spiritual riches is available at each parish and details are posted on the archdiocesan website (catholicottawa.ca).

I hope that many Catholics, including those who have become distant from the church, will make a pilgrimage to pass through the Door of Mercy at Notre Dame. You are invited to do this individually or with fellow parishioners, members of a parish or Catholic association (prayer groups, Cursillo-Challenge, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Women's League, etc.)

Let us invoke Mary's intercession that many may come to know more deeply the joy of God's compassion and loving forgiveness and be able to pass it on to others in good works during this Year of Mercy.



✠ Terrence Prendergast, S.J.
Archbishop of Ottawa