

PASTORAL LETTER

AM I GROWING IN GOD-LIKE MERCY?

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

We are now half-way through the Jubilee Year of Mercy, called by Pope Francis. It is important to ask ourselves: 'Am I growing in God-like mercy in my daily life?' The answer to this question will reveal our answer to the more basic question: 'Am I seeking experiences of God's mercy for my life?'

Am I seeking God's mercy?

The best way to deepen in appreciation for God's mercy is to reflect upon the life and teaching of Jesus, the Son of God, he is the face of God's mercy. His miracles, for example, revealed how God feels for and heals the sick, the blind and the crippled - both physically and psychologically. When he raised to life the only son of the widow, showing God's feeling for those who grieve. He reflected God's concern for the poor and others in need.

Jesus revealed God's mercy in the starkest terms when he forgave sins. The climax of God's forgiveness was revealed by the agony of Jesus writhing on the cross as he gave his life for the forgiveness of all our sins.

Jesus revealed God's mercy, too, when he called us to 'repent and believe the good news' [Mark 1:15]. He warned us against the rejection of God which results in the eternal separation from God called 'hell'. As with the repentant thief dying alongside him, Jesus taught that our merciful God forgives even at the moment of death.

Jesus instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation so we can all experience God's mercy in our personal lives. He not only forgives: he restores our personal relationships with himself, and the blessings these bring.

As this stage of the Holy Year, we need to ask ourselves honestly: 'Have I reflected on the life and teachings of Jesus to reflect on God's mercy?' 'Have I expressed my personal needs to the merciful Jesus in daily prayer?' 'Have I celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation?' If the answer to this last question is 'no', we need to ask: 'Has my faith become luke-warm?' 'Has my personal relationship with Jesus so weakened that I am no longer sensitive to the ways I offend him by not living daily as fully as he taught?'

The indulgence of God

Pope Francis has called us to recognise also the *indulgence* of God towards us. He reminds us that God wants to help us change so as to draw close to our loving Father through Jesus.

God does everything possible, short of violating our freedom, to help us deepen in the kinds of personal relationship which bring ever greater blessings for our lives.

God indulges by offering the power of the Risen Christ through the Body of Christ, his Church. Our fellow members, the Saints in heaven, also help by sharing with us their holiness - which is also the result of their cooperation with Christ's power.

We can draw on this power through the Church in different ways. One Pope Francis has made possible for this Holy Year is by pilgrimage through the Door of Mercy in the Cathedral of every diocese across the world. Those who undertake such a pilgrimage as a sign of personal and communal journey towards holiness can receive a Plenary Indulgence by

confessing their sins, receiving the Eucharist, and praying for the Holy Father and his prayer intentions.

In practice, it can be difficult for Catholics across the Diocese to go on pilgrimage to the Bunbury Cathedral. Therefore, as Bishop, I declare three parish churches as churches of pilgrimage, each with its Door of Mercy. These are

- Our Lady's Assumption Church, Mandurah
- St Joseph's Church, Manjimup
- St Joseph's Church, Albany.

I encourage every parish to make a Year of Mercy pilgrimage.

The sick and elderly

The home-bound and those living in special care facilities because of their frailty can gain the Plenary Indulgence by consciously offering their sufferings to God, receiving Holy Communion, and praying for the Pope and his intentions.

Am I growing in God-like mercy?

Jesus taught that we need to reflect to others the mercy of God we receive ourselves. Pope Francis challenges us whether we practice corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

An examination of conscience

Pope Francis' challenge invites us to ask ourselves honestly

- Am I more respectful of others' reputations, and repeating gossip less?
- Do I seek the good of others more, and make judgements based on negative comments less?
- Am I talking to family members, friends and others about God's mercy more?
- Do I invite anyone else to come with me to Mass? To the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- How have I helped the hungry or thirsty? The homeless refugee or the naked? Perhaps through a parish ministry or Project Compassion?
- Have I spent time with the sick or anyone imprisoned by an addiction?
- How have I responded to someone who is depressed or discouraged or grieving?
- How do I respond to the lonely and the homebound?
- Is there anyone I have not forgiven for hurting me? Anyone I have hurt and not sought forgiveness?
- How generously do I listen if anyone needs to talk?

Conclusion

Let us all renew our participation in the Year of Mercy by reflecting on the meaning of the life of Jesus in the gospels, praying for needs and celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Let us allow ourselves to experience God's indulgence by going on pilgrimage through the Door of Mercy.

And let us be messengers of God's mercy to everyone we contact in our daily lives.

God bless you all

Bishop Gerard Holohan

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