



PASTORAL LETTER ON THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

TO: The Priests, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Diocese of Clogher and to All People of Goodwill

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This is the third time this year that I have written a short pastoral letter to you. The first was in January when I invited you to walk with Pope Francis and the entire Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, in discerning the Church's response to the vocation and mission of the family in the contemporary world. The second was in May in the period before the referendum when we reflected on marriage and the dignity of all people, regardless of sexual orientation or situation in life. Today, I write about a related matter: an urgent call to contemplate the great mystery of God's mercy, that 'wellspring of joy, serenity and peace'¹.

I write because Pope Francis is urgently inviting us all to share in a special time for the Church – a Year of Mercy. He says that he wants us, as the People of God, 'to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives'². The Year of Mercy will begin on 8 December next and last until the feast of Christ the King in November 2016. It will be a Jubilee Year, like Jubilee 2000 and other Holy Years.

Jubilee Years usually happen only once every twenty-five years. In fact this Extraordinary Jubilee Year is only the third such event in the history of the Church. Why has the Bishop of Rome decided to make such a bold and unusual decision? He has given us the answer: he wishes it to be an extraordinary time, 'to entrust the life of the Church, all humanity and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future'³. He wants us all

¹ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction for the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, par. No. 2.

² *Misericordiae Vultus*: No. 3.

³ *Misericordiae Vultus*: No. 5.

as Church to reach out to every person, bringing to them all the tenderness and love of God. He speaks of the ‘balm of mercy’ reaching everyone, both those who are believers and those who are distant from the Church, showing that the kingdom of God is already present in our midst.

Of course this will be a challenge to us. However, the recent Synod on the Family has offered us a number of reminders of the need for mercy in our Church and in our world. Indeed, those of you who generously answered my invitation to participate in the Synod on the Family consultations at diocesan level earlier this year touched on a great many of those issues – all of which invite us to discover again and again the great gift of mercy, to evoke mercy, to be agents of mercy, to make known the forgiveness that Jesus Christ brings to the world.

The level of engagement with the Synod on the Family showed us that there is a willingness to meet challenging questions. We are now called on in this Holy Year to ask how generous we are in showing mercy to others – ‘Happy the merciful: they shall have mercy shown them’ (Mt. 5:7).

Encouraged by this experience, you are all invited to attend one of the **Gatherings** that the Clogher Pastoral Support Group has organised across the diocese, beginning on 17 November, to introduce the Year of Mercy and to begin to shape it in your parishes. Gatherings are organised at Combined Pastoral Area level, groups of parishes – similar to what happened during the Synod on the Family consultations. While there will be events at diocesan level, each parish – as a community of all God’s people - is invited to shape its own response to the invitation to God’s mercy. The format of these gatherings will be prayerful, warm, welcoming, and will enable participation so that all of us who together form the Church locally as the People of God can deepen our awareness of the Father’s mercy and the need for us to bring the message of mercy to everyone in our Church and our world.

A feature of each Holy Year is the tradition of opening a Holy Door in the major basilicas in Rome. On 8 December, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door at St Peter’s. However, a unique feature of this Holy Year is that the Pope has asked for a **Door of Mercy** to be opened in every cathedral of the world on Sunday 13 December - the same day when he opens the one in his cathedral of St John Lateran in Rome. I will gladly do so at St Macartan’s Cathedral in Monaghan on that day. I invite all of you, as individuals, families, parishes, schools or communities, to make a pilgrimage to our Cathedral this year and to make the Door of Mercy there the goal of that journey. This practice of pilgrimage represents the journey each of us makes in life. Jesus shows us the steps to attain our goal on that journey: ‘Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven’ (Lk. 6:37).

The season of Lent during the Jubilee Year will be a special time for the celebration and experience of God’s mercy, as we re-discover the merciful face of God the Father. Pope Francis has asked that a special **24 Hours for the Lord** initiative be observed throughout the world overnight on Friday / Saturday 4/5 March 2016. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is to

be at the centre of our actions so ‘that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God’s mercy’⁴. Further details of this initiative will be finalised nearer the time.

Pope Francis keeps before us the image of the members of the Church journeying together – a community of God’s people walking together in faith, hope and love, ‘bringing to every part of the world, to every diocese, to every community and every situation, the light of the Gospel, the embrace of the Church and the support of God’s mercy’⁵. It is in that spirit that I warmly invite you all to take part in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, beginning with a generous level of participation at the gatherings and events over the coming weeks and months.

Let us pray....

Lord Jesus Christ,

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,

So that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord;

and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,

proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,

and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy;

you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever, Amen.

- (from Pope Francis’ Prayer for the Jubilee)

+ LIAM S. MacDAID

Bishop of Clogher

3 November 2015.

⁴ *Misericordiae Vultus*: No. 17.

⁵ Pope Francis, ‘Remarks at the Final General Congregation of the XIV General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (on the Family), Saturday 24 October 2015’.