

Diocese of Nakuru



A PASTORAL LETTER

MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS

TO THE PRIESTS,
CONSECRATED PERSONS
AND THE
LAY FAITHFUL OF NAKURU
IN THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY,
2016



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1. “Merciful and gracious is the Lord, slow to anger, abounding in mercy” (Psalm 103:8). The Jubilee Year has ancient roots in the Jewish tradition as seen in Leviticus 25. Every fifty years there was to be a Jubilee Year and this was a time for forgiveness. It was a reminder of God’s providence and mercy; it was also a call to come back to the right relationship with one another and with God.

2. The Holy Father Pope Francis, called for the Jubilee Year to begin on 8th December 2015 to 20th November 2016. He wrote an official letter to begin this year entitled *Misericordiae Vultus*, which means “the Face of Mercy.” He says: “At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 3). Pope Francis saw the need for the Church and her members to live out the loving mercy that God has for us (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 10).

3. A year of mercy doesn’t make God more merciful or more inclined to forgive. God cannot change. It is we who must change (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 3). What we need is a revolution of tenderness and a spirit of mercy. This spirit of mercy will be attained if we first forgive. This calls us to become stronger and more effective witnesses of the faith we proclaim. In answering the question why humanity is in need of mercy, Pope Francis said: “Because humanity is wounded, deeply wounded. Either it does not know how to cure its wounds or it believes that it’s not possible to cure them. It’s not just a question of social ills or people wounded by poverty, social exclusion, or one of the many slaveries of the third millennium. Relativism wounds people too: all things seem equal, all things appear the same. Humanity needs mercy and compassion” (*The Name of God is Mercy*, 13).

4. Pope Francis makes a difference between being a sinner and being corrupt. “Corruption is the sin which, rather than being recognised as such and rendering us humble, is elevated to a system; it becomes a mental habit, a way of living. We no longer feel the need for forgive-

ness and mercy but we justify ourselves and our behaviours... the corrupt man is the one who sins but does not repent, who sins and pretends to be Christian, and it is this double life that is scandalous” (*The Name of God is Mercy*, 77). On the other hand, sinners are “... open to forgiveness, their hearts felt their own weakness, and that small opening allowed the strength of God to enter. When a sinner recognises himself as such, he admits in some way that what he was attached to, or clings to is false (*The Name of God is Mercy*, 78). When asked what one should do during this Year of Mercy Pope Francis responded: “He should open up to the mercy of God, open up his heart and himself, and allow Jesus to come toward him by approaching the confessional with faith. And he should try and be merciful with others” (*The Name of God is Mercy*, 93).

5. During this Year of Mercy, there are many activities that we can do so as to make it a fruitful year. One significant activity is that from the evening of March 4 through the evening of March 5, the faithful across the world have been asked by the pope to participate in the “24 hours for the Lord.” This shall be a moment for a full-day offering the sacrament of reconciliation, Eucharistic adoration and prayer.

6. *Go to Confession:* During the Year of Mercy everybody is encouraged to go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The confession is for every person who has broken faith with God in some way. During the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has granted extraordinary powers to all priests to forgive sins normally reserved to the bishop such as abortion. “...sin is more than a stain. Sin is a wound: it needs to be treated, healed” (*The Name of God is Mercy*, 24). Recognising ourselves as sinners is a grace (cf. *The Name of God is Mercy*, 30).

7. *Perform Works of Mercy:* We are called to be doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:22). The works of mercy consist in corporal works of mercy which means we have to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome strangers clothe the naked and spend time with the sick and those in prison. Then we have the spiritual works of mercy which comprise caring for souls and the spiritual welfare of our fellowmen, counselling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant,

admonishing sinners, comforting the afflicted, forgiving the offences, bearing wrongs patiently and praying for the living and the dead (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15).

8. *Go on Pilgrimage:* Mercy requires dedication and sacrifice. It requires that we reject sin, selfishness and destructive desires (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 14). We remember that life is a pilgrimage and the human being is a viator, a pilgrim travelling along the road, making his way to desired destination. “This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 14). It will be beneficial if one can go on pilgrimage to a shrine. In the diocese we have organised several pilgrimages, namely, to the Cathedral Church of Christ the King, to the Marian Shrine in Subukia, to the Uganda Martyrs Shrine in Namugongo and a pilgrimage to Rome, Assisi, Turin, Lourdes and Fatima. I encourage as many people as possible to participate in these pilgrimages.

9. *Walk through the Holy Door:* I opened the Door of Mercy at the Cathedral Church of Christ the King so as to allow the faithful the opportunity of walking through the Holy Door. The doors themselves symbolise Christ who is ‘the gate’ to eternal life (John 10:9). It is a symbol of walking from sin to grace and from death to life, acknowledging Christ as the way to the Father. “May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God’s mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us” (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 14). I exhort all the parishes to make an effort to make a pilgrimage to the Cathedral Church of Christ the King within this year and enjoy the graces obtained therein. Many other activities have been lined up to help us enjoy a deeper experience of the love and mercy of God. I encourage all to spare time to engage in as many of these activities as possible.

10. *Obtain Indulgences:* Indulgences are an ongoing manifestation of God’s mercy in the world freeing us from every residue left by the consequences of sin and enabling us to act with charity and grow in love (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 22). “Hence, to live the indulgence of

the Holy Year means to approach the Father's mercy with certainty that his forgiveness extends to the entire life of the believer" (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 22). One can receive plenary-full or partial remission from temporal punishment for sins obtained for both the departed loved ones and for ourselves. Conditions for indulgence require complete detachment from sin, reception of the Eucharist, making a good confession on that day or proximate day, praying for the intention of the Holy Father and being in a state of grace by the time the work of the indulgence is completed. During this time we are encouraged to pray the rosary and read the scripture. The scripture is the word of God and the story of God in time. It traces the history of God's dealing with men and women, recalling his merciful provision for humanity from Eden to Calvary and beyond. God's mercy cannot be understood apart from the Bible. Pope Francis recommends that we should read Micah, Isaiah and the Psalms (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 12).

11. Read Conversion Stories: For us to understand the mercy of God, it is better that we read conversion stories that witness to the fact that we are called to conversion and how the now revered saints grappled with a life of conversion. St Augustine's Confessions is an ideal book to read. We also recommend reading Pope Francis' book 'The Name of God is Mercy'.

12. Pray the Divine Mercy Chaplet (cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 24): The Divine Mercy Chaplet comes loaded with more promises and graces than the Year of Mercy itself. This can be prayed after communion, at the bedside of the sick and dying and during the Hour of Mercy at 3.00 pm every day.

13. Forgive those Who Have Hurt You: Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves (Mt 18:22-55; cf. *Misericordiae Vultus*, 9).

14. Missionaries of Mercy: During this year, there are specific priests mandated to hear confessions and have been granted "the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See." In commissioning the Missionaries of Mercy on Ash Wednesday, Pope Francis said:

"Before us there is not sin, but the penitent sinner – a person that feels the desire to be accepted and pardoned." In this way, we are given an opportunity to come out of our cycle of sin and to be renewed. Rev. Fr John Kipruto Kangogo, a priest of this diocese, was one of those commissioned by the Holy Father in Rome. He will continue to promote the spirit of God's mercy in the diocese through preaching retreats and presiding at the sacrament of reconciliation. He is specially mandated by the Holy Father to absolve the following sins:

1. "Profaning the Eucharistic species by taking them away or keeping them for a sacrilegious purpose;"
2. "Use of physical force against the Roman Pontiff;"
3. "Absolution of an accomplice in a sin against the Sixth Commandment of the Decalogue;"
4. "A direct violation against the sacramental seal by a confessor."

15. May this year be a special moment of grace in the life of each one of us; inviting us to run headlong into the mercy of God – ever patient and ever abundant. Let each one make this a personal prayer: "Have mercy on me, O God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me" (Psalm 51:1-2).

Given at the Cathedral Church of Christ the King, Nakuru on 22 February, in the year 2016, Feast of the Chair of St Peter the Apostle.

Rt. Rev. Maurice Muhatia Makumba
Bishop of Nakuru

PRAYER OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.*

Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.

Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:

“If you knew the gift of God!”

*You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven
by God.*

*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.