

Diocese of Hallam

Pastoral Letter

**To be read at all Masses on the weekend of
Gaudete Sunday
12/13 December 2015**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

Today is often referred to as Gaudete Sunday. The name is derived from the Latin text of the entry antiphon for today's Mass: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near." From the beginning, the liturgy today is an invitation to be joyful and upbeat because the anniversary of our Saviour's birth is very near.

Today, however, we have an added reason to be joyful. Last Tuesday our Holy Father, Pope Francis, inaugurated the Jubilee Year of Mercy at St Peter's Basilica in Rome with the opening of the Holy Door. This weekend, the cathedrals of the world and many places of pilgrimage open their own holy doors to complete the opening celebrations for the year and as a "visible sign of the Church's universal communion".

It is no accident that Pope Francis has launched the Year of Jubilee at this time in the Church's year. Our preparations for, and our looking forward to, celebrating the birth of Jesus once again and the Year of Jubilee are intimately linked. Pope Francis explains the link in these words:

"Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him.

... Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father: Jn 14:9. Jesus of Nazareth, by His words and His actions, and His entire person reveals the mercy of God." MV1

During this Year of Jubilee, Pope Francis, I think, has three wishes for us. Firstly, it is his hope and desire that each of us be personally touched by the mercy of God and experience it at first hand in the coming year. He wants us all to experience for ourselves the loving and merciful embrace and tender kiss of the Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The wonder of the love and mercy that the son experienced in the story on his return is at the heart of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. So, during this Year of Jubilee I would encourage you, especially if you have not celebrated the Sacrament for a while, to approach without fear and experience this gift for yourself. I am reminded of a seasoned missionary in my

early days of ministry who would encourage the congregation to celebrate the Sacrament with the phrase, ‘The longer you have been away, the more welcome you are. There is no sin that is greater than the infinite mercy of God. And when God forgives, he forgets’.

Secondly, he wants us to share with others what we have first received. Mercy is something that should find a place in our daily dealings with one another through what is traditionally known as the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It is an invitation to put our faith in Jesus into action. Pope Francis writes,

“It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy ... Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in His preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as His disciples.” MV15.

Finally, he calls us all to be missionaries of mercy. We probably all know someone who, for whatever reason, feels that they are outside the mercy of God. The words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus on the cross to those who had plotted His death and carried out His execution shows us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. Indeed, “the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds, and extends to everyone, without exception”. MV14. It is this message that we are being asked to bring to those who need to hear it most.

Meanwhile, we continue our Advent journey preparing to celebrate with joy at Christmas the Father’s merciful love in giving us His Son.

Yours sincerely in Christ, the Redeemer

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