

Diocese of Shimoga

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Pastoral Letter for the Jubilee Year of Mercy

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings from Mallige Mane

INTRODUCTION

As you all know Pope Francis will solemnly inaugurate the Jubilee Year of Mercy on 08 December 2015 and the year will end on 20 November 2016. The purpose of this jubilee is for all of us to realize that the central message of the Gospel is Mercy, so that we ourselves would experience it more deeply and show it to others in daily life. As Pope Paul VI says: "The whole of our Christian life is continuous encounter between our human misery and God's infinite mercy." That Divine Mercy most perfectly expressed in Jesus who offers love and mercy to the sinner. "Mercy is what love looks like when it turns towards the sinner."

PRAYER AND SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

In our diocese a significant focus will be the Sacrament of Reconciliation which is a sacrament very dear to Pope Francis. "Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy with their own hands. For every penitent it will be a source of true interior peace" (Misericordiae Vultus). In order to help all of us grow in our appreciation of the powerful sacrament of God's love and mercy, I am asking that you celebrate this sacrament with greater regularity and

even consider going to confession on at least a monthly basis, if not oftener, during the Year of Mercy. I also ask the priests of our diocese to offer more opportunities to celebrate this sacrament of mercy in our parishes. In addition to their regular times for confession, once a week each parish will have an evening “Prayer Hour for Mercy” throughout the Jubilee Year. There would be Eucharistic Adoration and the opportunity to go to confession. Since it is in the evening, families could also attend and spend some time in prayer together. This will be an opportunity to receive mercy, but also to pray for all of those throughout our diocese in need of God’s mercy, especially those who may feel they cannot be forgiven. We may also consider inviting those who feel far from God and the Church to this holy hour; a simple invitation may be all that it takes. 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. Many of those issues highlighted by the Synod 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. 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).

THE DOOR OF MERCY

To mark this Jubilee Year the Holy Door will be opened in St. Peter’s Basilica, along with the other major basilicas of the city. Pope Francis has asked that a Holy Door of Mercy be opened in every cathedral throughout the world. Pilgrims are invited to enter through the Holy Door as a sign of repentance and a desire to renew and recommit to their faith. A Holy Door will be created in our cathedral and I invite you to come and receive the special graces that are associated with this pilgrimage. The Door of Mercy at the Cathedral Church will be opened following the prescribed rite on **14 December 2015 at 6 PM** followed by the

Holy Eucharist. All priests, Religious and the lay faithful are invited for this special and significant event. The door of Mercy at the Our Lady of Health Shrine, Harihar will also be opened on **16 December 2015 at 6 PM**. These doors will be kept open on all the days between 6 AM to 6.30 PM. Priests will be available for the Sacrament of Reconciliation on these days.

PILGRIMAGES AND PLENARY INDULGENCE

I invite all of you, as individuals, families, parishes, schools or communities, to make a pilgrimage to our Cathedral or the Harihar Shrine 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 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’

Pope Francis has announced that a plenary indulgence will be granted to those who enter the door and fulfill certain spiritual conditions. In order to fully appreciate the nature of this indulgence, Pope Francis states, “In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives our sins, which he truly blots out; and yet sin leaves a negative effect on the way we think and act. But the mercy of God is stronger than even this. It becomes *indulgence* on the part of the Father who, through the Bride of Christ, His Church, reaches the pardoned sinner and frees him from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling him to act with

charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin.”. To gain this “indulgence” the Holy Father asks that after passing through the Holy Door of Mercy, the pilgrim also celebrates the Sacrament of Reconciliation, attends Mass, makes a Profession of Faith and reflects on the gift of God’s mercy. Even those who are deceased, imprisoned, and the homebound, will be able to gain the merits of this Indulgence.

SPIRITUAL AND CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

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.

Pope Francis also encourages us to rediscover the richness of the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. The Corporal Works of Mercy are acts in which we meet a person’s material or physical needs (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, bury the dead). The Spiritual Works of Mercy are acts of compassion in which we respond to a person’s emotional or spiritual needs (counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, pray for the living and the dead). Pope Francis states, “It is my burning desire that, during the Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty and to let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy.” He also has granted the Jubilee

Indulgence to anyone who performs one of these Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. “Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence.”

CONCLUSION

My dear brothers and sisters, it is my hope that this Jubilee Year of Mercy will be a time of healing grace for our diocese. Pope Francis has often referred to the Church as a field hospital ready to treat the casualties of war. Our faith teaches us that we have an enemy who is always engaging in spiritual warfare and this often creates misery in our world and in our own personal lives. We are wounded by sin and need God’s healing mercy. We may be wounded but we can always be healed in God’s love. Pope Francis states, “The Church’s first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself servant of this love and mediates it to all people, a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of oneself. Consequently, whenever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.”(MV12) It is my hope and prayer that throughout this Jubilee Year of Mercy people will find in our parishes, diocese and in each one of us, an “oasis of mercy”. In being transformed by mercy, may we become witnesses of mercy by bringing healing and hope to the world.

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’ . 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. A particularly important responsibility falls on our priests and religious to be generous in leading our people in this Year of Mercy. A separate bulletin will soon be sent out detailing all the programmes that will be organized.

I wish to conclude with one last quote from Pope Francis which expresses what I believe this year will be all about. “In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God’s mercy. She knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great hope and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God’s mercy by contemplating the face of Christ.” (MV, 25) During this Jubilee Year of Mercy let us all contemplate the loving face of Christ, for mercy is what love looks like when it turns toward the sinner.

May Mary the Mother of Mercy intercede for us.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



✠ Francis Serrao SJ

Bishop of Shimoga

