

**Pastoral Letter of the Bishop of Nottingham
appointed to be read at all Masses
celebrated on the Third Sunday of Advent
Saturday 12 / Sunday 13 December 2015**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I warmly commend to you the Jubilee Year of Mercy, called by Pope Francis, which began last Tuesday on the Solemn Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, and which continues until the Solemn Feast of Christ the King next November. The Holy Father has asked Catholics all over the world to focus more attentively in their daily prayer on God's mercy, as it is revealed to us in the person, actions and teaching of Jesus, so that we might become a more effective witness to others of this mercy. It's a recognition that, while the Church has always preached mercy, the world has not always heard the message.

What a wonderful challenge Pope Francis sets before us! First of all, to open our own lives more and more to the mercy of God, in personal prayer and in our more regular celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is the grace-filled experience of God's mercy, forgiveness and healing. So that, as a consequence, we might be more authentic witnesses to, and ambassadors of, that mercy – in the way we relate to others in our daily lives, and in our concern for the needs of our brothers and sisters throughout the world.

He asks us in this Year of Mercy to pray for a deeper personal awareness and conviction of God's mercy because the truth is that many of us still struggle to believe in God's merciful love, struggle to accept that he forgives our sins because he really loves us. This is why Pope Francis reminds us: 'when faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive' (*Misericordiae vultus*, 3).

The Holy Father makes the point that the world is greatly in need of people who are convinced of God's loving mercy, and who, by God's grace are living lives guided by his mercy and compassion. So he wants us to be those people who can help ensure that the 'balm of God's mercy' reaches everyone. This Year of Mercy is designed to help us to see more clearly that, if we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ, then mercy is a central aspect of our sharing in his mission, to be 'merciful, like the Father' (*Luke 6.36*).

You will have seen Pope Francis opening the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica in Rome last Tuesday and, before that, in the Cathedral of Bagui in the Central African Republic. He has asked that there be Holy Doors of Mercy in all dioceses throughout the world. To walk through the Holy Door is an expression of our desire to open our hearts afresh to God's love and mercy, and to be welcoming to all who may walk back into our churches in response to this Year of Mercy. It is also a gateway through which we are encouraged to go out and bear witness to God's mercy in the way we live our daily lives and relate to others.

Holy Doors of Mercy were opened in our Saint Barnabas' Cathedral last Tuesday, in a very beautiful ceremony celebrated by so many people, of all ages, from across the Diocese. This weekend I have asked that three other significant churches in our Diocese should open Holy Doors: these are Mount Saint Bernard Abbey, Holy Cross Priory in Leicester and, for the benefit of our young people, The Briars Youth Retreat Centre in Crich.

Everyone is most welcome throughout the Year, as an expression of their deeper conversion to Christ's mercy, to arrange a personal visit or a group pilgrimage to one of these churches, so as to pass through one of these doors and gain a plenary indulgence. Details of how to obtain this indulgence are published at each of these churches.

I have also encouraged parishes, chapels, chaplaincies, convents and schools throughout the Diocese, this weekend, to identify a 'door' that might be decorated for this Year of Mercy to help raise our awareness of God's mercy in our own lives, and of our calling to share that mercy with others. The Holy Father is encouraging us, as individuals and as parishes, to live out more consciously the Church's corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

The corporal works of mercy are: to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, visit the sick and the imprisoned, bury the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy are: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, care about sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear wrongs patiently, and pray for the living and the dead.

Throughout the Year there will be diocesan resource material available for use in parishes, chaplaincies, convents and schools, and many opportunities for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation throughout our Diocese. Details will be advertised in your parishes, as well as on our diocesan Year of Mercy website, www.bemerciful.co.uk

So if you know of someone who has not been to Mass or confession for some time, please do let them know about the events of the Year of Mercy, and perhaps offer to accompany them to church and sit with them. Please assure them that they are always welcome, and that they will be treated with love and respect, and gently guided through the experience of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

I ask everyone to join me in praying each day the Year of Mercy Prayer, at home, in school and college, in work and in church. Year of Mercy wristbands, designed to help remind us of the corporal works of mercy, can be ordered through parishes and schools.

This Third Sunday of Advent is when we begin in our Mass to anticipate the joy of the Feast we shall soon be celebrating, the Birth of Christ Jesus. May this Christmas be a time when many people may feel encouraged to return to the practice of their faith in our parishes and chaplaincies, and experience there the joy of knowing God's merciful love.

May our loving and merciful Saviour bless you and all your loved ones. Please pray for me and I will pray for you.

Rt Rev Patrick McKinney

Bishop of Nottingham

**Bishop's House
Nottingham**

December 2015