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Missionaries of Mercy

Lenten Pastoral Letter for the Jubilee Year of Mercy

Dear Friends,

This Lent, 2016, we are in the midst of a special Jubilee Year of Mercy. Pope Francis is calling each of us to deepen our baptismal vocation. We are being sent forth to be 'missionaries of mercy' in a world which desperately needs the Good News of the Gospel.

As we enter into this special Jubilee, let us first ponder the Word of God, so as to become credible and joyful witnesses.

Two parables are especially worthy of our reflection - The Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan.

1. Let us repent and change our hearts!

But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Luke 15:28

As we ponder the Word of God we cannot avoid examining our own hearts. If we honestly face our sins and limitations and confess them, we will open ourselves to the grace of God. If it is just up to us then we are in real trouble!

Think of the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Jesus uses the image of a father's love to illustrate God's mercy. The human bond between a father and son is one that reaches deep into the heart. It is a love that is often beyond words.

In this image, the son who was 'lost' has begun to turn his life around. From deepest darkness and shame, he returns to the embrace of his father's love. The parable has so many meanings for us but it firstly calls each of us to confess that we are in need of God's mercy. We are all sinners. A deep acceptance of this is the critical first step. We begin our Jubilee Year of Mercy by honestly examining ourselves before God and, like the Prodigal Son, repenting of our sins.

An extraordinary blessing of our Catholic tradition is that forgiveness, healing and mercy are readily accessible in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In his recent book, *His Name is Mercy*, our Holy Father reminds us precisely why this Sacrament is so vital for our souls.

If you are not capable of talking to your brother about your mistakes, you can be sure that you can't talk about them with God, either, and therefore you end up confessing into the mirror, to yourself. We are social beings; forgiveness has social implications; my sins wound mankind, my brothers and sisters, and society as a whole. Confessing to a priest is a way of putting my life into the hands and hearts of someone who in that moment acts in the name of Jesus. (21-22)

No wonder the Holy Father is constantly reminding us of the need for the Sacrament of Penance as a regular feature of our own faith journey. Pope Francis gives the lead through personal witness!

So pray and confess for mercy



- Intentionally pray the Lord's Prayer/Our Father and make a personal act of contrition each week during the Year of Mercy.
- Explore the Sacrament of Reconciliation times locally and attend, especially in your own or nearby parish
- Make a list of ten ways you have felt / received the Mercy of God in your life - give thanks!

2. Boldly take risks to act for mercy now!

But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. Luke 10:33

Renewed and refreshed by the experience of honestly placing our own lives before the Lord's mercy, we are called to spread mercy, especially to the needy and to those who 'lose out' in our society.

The 'door' the parable of the Good Samaritan takes us through is one of direct action and concrete acts of mercy. In this parable Jesus uses the image of a foreigner to illustrate what mercy truly means. The neighbours we are commanded to love and show mercy towards include those who are not of our own faith or nationality, and gives first preference to those on the margins of our Church and society.

In Melbourne there are many people showing us the way forward to undertake this action. Let us imitate and join with these witnesses of mercy. Blessed are they who 'walk' with others rather than 'talk' at them. If anything is going to evangelise others, it is such witness!

So pray and act for mercy

- 'Remember those in prison as though you were in prison with them' (*Hebrews 13:3*). Keep those in prison, their families, those who work with them and those who minister to them, on your personal prayer list. Pray and learn more about Catholic Prison Ministry. They do not 'pass by'. Prisoners are very often the 'poorest of the poor' - caught up in a tragic spiral of violence. Respond from your heart. Support the St Vincent de Paul Society, the lay association with the sacred mission of 'clothing the naked', feeding the hungry and sheltering the homeless. Volunteer as a member of your local Vinnies.
- Give generously this Lent to Caritas Australia's Project Compassion Appeal.
- Continue to reach out and seek justice and healing for indigenous people.
- Offer hospitality and compassion to refugees as they struggle to adapt to their new situations.

A final reminder: The Jubilee Year of Mercy is a moment of Grace for Melbourne Catholics. Let us take up these two simple challenges of this Lenten Pastoral Letter:

Repent and change our hearts!

Boldly take risks to act for mercy now!



Mercy and tenderness are not optional extras in Catholicism but its very soul. Thank God, Pope Francis is continually calling all of us - as disciples - to reach out and show mercy, especially to those on the peripheries of our lives and our culture.

A final thought: Are we as Catholics merciful and tender enough with each other in our communities and parishes?

During Lent may we continue to encourage our wonderful parishes and people who minister and witness daily to the tender mercy of our God.

Let us walk together and 'walk faster' on a grace-filled pilgrimage in the Holy Year of Mercy. We are sent by Jesus to be missionaries of mercy to all our sisters and brothers.

I wish you the blessing that Lent will speak to us - Jesus in our heart, mind and deeds.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

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ARCHBISHOP OF MELBOURNE