



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
 appointed to be read
 in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
 on 15th November 2015, the Thirty-Third Sunday of the Year

GOD'S MERCY

Dear Friends,

Earlier this year, Pope Francis announced an extraordinary Holy Year, a Jubilee of Mercy beginning on 8th December, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and ending on Christ the King, 20th November 2016.¹ The aim of the Holy Year is to proclaim and to receive the loving-mercy of God, Who is *dives in misericordia*, 'rich in mercy'. God has created every single person and He longs to enter into a transforming relationship with them as their loving Father. In the fullness of time, He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, Who by His life, death and resurrection conquered sin and evil, sickness, suffering and death. Jesus continues to offer this Good News of salvation to anyone in need, to the poor, captives, the blind and downtrodden.² This is why He calls sinners, you and me, to be disciples within His Body, the Church. He wants us to change. He wants to free us from the misery of sin and to help us fulfil our potential. He wants to make us holy and to bring us one day to heaven.

You can read the Holy Father's reflections on the Holy Year in *Misericordiae Vultus*, the 'Bull of Indiction' available on the Vatican web-site. Based on this, I want to announce here some plans of our own, although the intention is not to host lots of initiatives. The real purpose is to invite all of us, clergy and people, to have the right attitude, to open ourselves to receive God's mercy, and to manifest that Divine mercy to others.³ In the Diocese, I wish to encourage our clergy over these next months to preach often about the tender love of God for frail humanity.⁴ A help is the new liturgical cycle in which the Sunday readings will be taken from the Gospel of Luke. St. Luke is often called 'the evangelist of mercy' for his account of the Lord's parables of mercy: the Good Samaritan, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost (or prodigal) son. I wish too to encourage all our people to respond to God's

mercy, to undertake a review of life, to acknowledge sins and to receive more frequently – say, once a month - the Sacrament of Reconciliation. There's nothing like a good confession with the joy of meeting one-to-One our Saviour, Jesus Christ!

For the Holy Year, two diocesan shrine churches will be established: St. John's Cathedral, Portsmouth and St. Edmund's, Abingdon. Parishes, schools, groups and individuals may book and go on pilgrimage to these churches. In them, pilgrims can walk through a 'Holy Door' and thus, by the specified prayers and the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, obtain the Jubilee plenary indulgence. The custom of crossing the threshold of a Holy Door is rich in meaning as a renewal of baptism. Jesus Himself is the Door,⁵ the Way to heaven, the means to communion with the Father and the Holy Spirit. To pass through the Holy Door is to profess our faith in Him, to cross from this world to the next and to leave behind the old way of life, restored to the holiness of our baptism.⁶ To help with this, a Rite of Pilgrimage will be provided, but this can be supplemented by the wide range of other resources now becoming available through the CTS and on the internet.

During the Holy Year, there will be special diocesan events for the sick, for catechists and for schools. I'll be taking 100 of our young to Poland to meet Pope Francis for World Youth Day. I hope too, as a permanent reminder of the Jubilee, that 'Caritas Diocese of Portsmouth' will be launched. But in *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Holy Father asks us particularly to develop further the *virtue* of mercy, that is, charitable actions that put mercy into practice. The Catholic Tradition speaks of seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy.⁷ The corporal works include feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, burying the dead, visiting those in prison, and above all, giving alms to the poor. The spiritual works comprise giving instruction, advising the doubtful, comforting the sorrowful, admonishing sinners, praying for others, bearing wrongs patiently, and – this one can be hard - forgiving those who insult us. To all these works, we might add: care of animals and creation, and the support of human life from conception to natural death. Parishes and schools are the two principal agencies of the diocesan mission and so I wish to ask our schools especially, within and beyond their existing charitable works, to help us all reflect more deeply on the meaning for today of these works of mercy.

Pope Francis urges us to live the season of Lent 2016 "more intensely, as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy."⁸ He recommends "missions to the people" to beckon people back to the throne of grace. In particular, he asks us to undertake "24 Hours for the Lord" on the Friday and Saturday before the Fourth Week of Lent. After consultation with the Chapter of Canons and the Council of Priests, I have decided to invite each Pastoral Area of the Diocese to designate one church in which there will be 24 hours of Eucharistic Adoration and prayer, with a rota of priests available at designated times to hear confessions. Indeed, I hope that one lasting grace from the Holy Year will be a renewal of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. I will write more about this in the New Year.

At the end of the papal Bull, the Holy Father asks the prayers not only of St. Faustina, apostle of mercy, but of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Mercy, she who treasured Divine mercy in her heart and who, in the home of Elizabeth, sang: "The Almighty has done great things for me" for "His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear Him."⁹ During the Holy Year, I urge you to sing or say often the *Salve Regina*, the *Hail Holy Queen* prayer. You could say it also in the Bidding Prayers at Mass instead of the customary *Hail Mary* or at the end of Mass. Indeed, as we look forward to the Holy Year ahead, let us pray often that this Mother of Mercy will unite us ever more closely with her Son, Jesus Christ, Whose Heart abounds in mercy and love.

In Corde Iesu
+ Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth.

¹ See Pope Francis *Misericordiae Vultus. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* (11th April 2015), available online at www.vatican.va (November 2015). "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 (n. 3)."

² See Luke 4: 16-22. "Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, 'rich in mercy' (Eph 2: 4), after having revealed his name to Moses as 'a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness' (Ex 34: 6), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the 'fullness of time' (Gal 4: 4), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. Jn 14: 9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God" (*Misericordiae Vultus* 1).

³ As Jesus said, "Happy the merciful; they shall have mercy shown them" (Mt. 5: 7).

⁴ "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness" (*Misericordiae Vultus* 2).

⁵ John 10: 7.

⁶ See John Paul II *Incarnationis Mysterium. Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000* (29th November 1998) available online at www.vatican.va (November 2015).

⁷ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2447; cf. *YOUCAT Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* 450-451.

⁸ See *Misericordiae Vultus* 17.

⁹ Luke 1: 46-55.