

INAUGURATION OF JUBILEE OF MERCY 13 Dec 15

Today we inaugurate the Jubilee Year of Mercy announced by Pope Francis last April. The Pope himself launched the Jubilee Year on Tuesday last, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, by opening the Holy Door and celebrating Mass in St Peter's in Rome. We have just opened the Holy Door in this Cathedral to mark the beginning of the Jubilee Year in Kilmore diocese. And Holy Doors will be opened in the central Church in each of the other three deaneries later, date, in St Anne's Church, Bailieborough and St Patrick's Church, Ballinamore on Sunday next, and St Clare's Church, Manorhamilton the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord.

The Pope's vision for this Holy Year is that it's a time of grace. It's a time to discover, or rediscover, God as someone who is real in our lives. God is not just a force or an energy or a vague abstraction. God is a **person**. In his homily last Tuesday, Pope Francis said: "To pass through the Holy Door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father, who welcomes everyone and goes out **personally** to encounter each of them." God is a **person**, who is described in scripture

as, "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness". God revealed the vast dimensions of his love for humanity in Jesus Christ, who is the human face of God - or as Pope Francis says in his letter announcing the Jubilee: the face of Mercy.

Many of us grew up with an image of a God who was harsh and vindictive. If you disobeyed him he would get you. For many of us he was more like a stern policeman, watching our every move to catch us out, than a loving Father. If we heard the parable of the Prodigal Son in those days we found it easier to sympathise with the elder son, who always obeyed his Father's wishes, than the younger one who wasted his property in debauchery. We felt the older son was hard done by and we could understand his anger with his Father for giving a party for his waster of a brother who had come home in rags.

Pope Francis wants us to discover the God who is like the Father in that parable. The Father who misses the Prodigal Son, who is always on the lookout for him. The Father who rushes out to meet him as soon as he catches a glimpse of

him in the distance. The Father who throws his arms around him and welcomes him home, who puts a ring on his finger and throws a party to celebrate his return.

The problem we have about discovering this God is that we don't think of ourselves as the younger son. We don't really believe that we are sinners. It's only someone who recognises their own sinfulness who is going to be able to say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. The great sin of our age is the denial of sin. To discover the God of Mercy we must first experience God's mercy, and to experience God's mercy we must acknowledge our sinfulness. We do that at the beginning of every Mass, but it can become a formula, a ritual, words without meaning. The Jubilee Year is an invitation to a deeper knowledge of ourselves leading to a deeper knowledge of God.

You might recall that our Pastoral Plan encourages us to respond to Pope Francis' invitation to exercise pastoral ministry **in a missionary key**. In other words everything we do must have a missionary dimension. It must be geared to bringing the message of Christ to others. This is also very

much the case where the Jubilee Year is concerned. The Pope wants each of us to have a profound experience of God's mercy, not just for ourselves, but so that we can share that experience with others. He wants us to be witnesses in our lives, actions and attitudes to the mercy and love of God. He says the Church itself must be a witness to the Father's mercy. He has taken concrete action himself to make this happen by simplifying the process for marriage annulment. That's a very practical step to make it easier for some people who should be free to marry to do so and to return to full communion. That it now available for those who need it.

There will be many events in the course of the next year to celebrate God's Mercy and help us to experience it in our lives. The renewal of the sacrament of Penance will be an important part of our celebrations. The sacrament Confession is the great sacrament of God's mercy. There we meet Christ to receive healing and pardon for our sins. The Holy Father has spoken strongly about the importance of priests being understanding and compassionate in Confession. Here in the Cathedral there will be Confessions all day on Wednesday week, 23rd of December. There will be

similar opportunities throughout the diocese in the days ahead and indeed throughout the year ahead. In this year of grace bear in mind the words of Pope Francis:

"Let us not forget that God forgives all, and God forgives always."

And finally his prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy:

Father, Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with his anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy;
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen