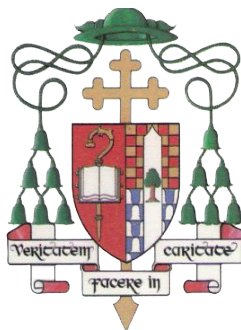


Pastoral Letter to the people and the priests of the Diocese of Killala.



Merciful like the Father.

Holy Year. Jubilee of Mercy.
December 8th 2015 to November 20th 2016.



Holy Door before Opening,
St. Muredach's Cathedral

My dear Priests and People,

Pope Francis has decided that an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy should be celebrated from December 8th 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, until the Feast of Christ the King, November 20th 2016.

Announcing the Jubilee, Pope Francis reminds us that "Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man" and "Mercy is 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". (M.V.2.)

What is a Holy Year?

In the Roman Catholic tradition, a Holy Year, or Jubilee is a great religious event. It is a year of forgiveness of sins. It is a year of reconciliation between adversaries, of conversion and of experiencing the liberating love of God.

The kernel of a Holy Year is that by walking through a Holy Door, going to Confession and praying for the Pope, we, sinners, are welcomed back into the life of Christ and the Church, with our sins fully forgiven.

What is a Holy Door?

There are five Holy Doors in the five major Basilicas in Rome. The Pope or his representative opens these doors and closes them at the end of the Holy Year.

Pope Francis has decided to make the experience of going through a Holy Door available to all of us without having to go to Rome. He has asked that "in every cathedral a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year." (M.V.3.) These Doors will be opened on the Third Sunday of Advent both in Rome and in every diocese as a visible sign that the Church throughout the world is one. (M.V.3).



Door of Mercy. An Open Door. St. Muredach's Cathedral

The Door of Mercy in St Muredach's Cathedral, Ballina, will be opened, therefore, on Sunday, December 13th 2015 at 11am and close on November 20th 2016.

What does the Door of Mercy mean today?'

It means that everyone is welcome in the Church and should feel at home there.

An open door is a sign that everyone who comes to the door is welcome to enter. One day, when Jesus was asked where he lived by someone he met on a road in Judea; "Come and see, he replied; so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him the rest of the day." (Jn 1. 38-39). The open Door of Mercy makes this invitation of Jesus real for us today. It is as if he is saying to us; 'why don't you come in, see where I live and stay for a while. You are most welcome.'

By making this year a Year of Mercy Pope Francis is also saying to each one of us; no matter how long it is since you were inside a church; no matter how far removed from the Church you feel yourself to be; no matter how unworthy you think you are, you are most welcome. Furthermore, he is saying to us that in the Church we will find the mercy of God. "It is indeed my wish that the Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened" (Letter to Archbishop Fisichella)

What can I do?

By walking through the open Door of Mercy in any cathedral we become conscious of the openness of God to all of us, of the welcome which God wants to extend to us. We become conscious too that, as we walk through this open door, we are pilgrims on the journey

The Logo

The motto Merciful Like the Father (from the Gospel of Luke, 6:36) serves as an invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure. The logo is the work of Father Marko I. Rupnik. It is an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon His shoulders the lost soul.

The logo has been designed in such a way so as to express the profound way in which the Good Shepherd touches the flesh of humanity and does so with a love that has the power to change one's life.



through life, open at all times to the unconditional love and mercy of God and open to others, especially those in need and on the margins of society. Our openness to the mercy of God may ultimately lead us to being open to that mercy as it is expressed in Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

What can I do if I can't get to a cathedral?

Pope Francis has shown a special concern for those who cannot go to a Door of Mercy; "I am thinking of those for whom, for various reasons, it will be impossible to enter the Holy Door, particularly the sick and people who are elderly and alone, often confined to the home". (L.A.F.) He says that by accepting their suffering and receiving Holy Communion they can share the benefits of those who walk through the Holy Door in any cathedral.

Mercy

Mercy is not confined to a Holy Year or to walking through a Holy Door. Mercy is a way of life for a Christian. "Wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy", the Pope says (M.V.12). If mercy was a way of life for everyone, fear would vanish, terrorism would not exist and freedom would reign supreme.

In short, as Pope Francis says, "This is the opportune moment to change our lives. This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched. May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy" (M.V.19).

+John Fleming

Bishop of Killala.
November 1st 2015.
Feast of All Saints.