



Diocese of Port Pirie

Chancery

PO Box 1206, Port Pirie, Sth Australia, 5540
Email: diocoffice@pp.catholic.org.au

Phone: 08 8632 0550

Fax: 08 8632 0599

Pastoral Letter to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

“Ambassadors of Mercy”

The Jubilee Year 2015 – 2016

Dear Brothers & Sisters

Pope Francis has declared a Jubilee Year of Mercy to commence on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception this year, 8th December 2015, concluding on the Feast of Christ the King on the 21st November 2016.

What is a Jubilee Year? It goes back to the Book of Leviticus where a Jubilee Year of thanks and celebration to God was to be celebrated every fifty years. The Year began with a blast from a ram's horn, in Hebrew *Yobhel* and hence our word “Jubilee”. In a Jubilee Year in ancient Israel, debts were to be forgiven, slaves released, fields allowed to go fallow and the people of Israel were to engage in times of worship and village celebration. It is not clear that all these observances were followed. In the year 1300 Pope Boniface VIII declared a Jubilee Year for the Church to take stock of itself, and focus on its meaning and mission. Jubilee Years were then meant to follow every twenty-five or fifty years, and that has happened, by and large. In recent years the time between Jubilee Years has varied. Since the time of Blessed Pope Paul VI Jubilee Years have been sixteen, nine, eight and seventeen years apart, and this one is now sixteen years since the Jubilee Year of 2000.

As is clear from so many of his utterances, Pope Francis wants the Church to come to grips with its need to proclaim the mercy of God to all peoples. The mystery of mercy, the Holy Father tells us, “is a well-spring of joy, serenity and peace. Our salvation depends on it. 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.”

The Holy Father prays that during this special time for the Church we might be ambassadors of mercy to our community, to our brothers and sisters. He encourages us to be people with zeal for the Lord's mercy, rejoicing in the forgiveness of God for ourselves and for humanity which today is so much in need of hope and new beginnings. We come to know God and His infinite love for us, Pope Francis says, through Christ. And so we are called to be like Christ and to let Christ be in us.

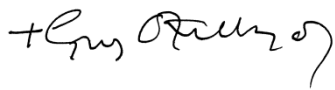
Pope Francis wants a Church open to the poor, reconciling and inviting. He is passionate that so many people simply do not realise the love God has for them. As Saint John says in his Letter, “Think of the love that the Father has lavished on us, by letting us be called God's children; for that is what we are”. How many in our world live without knowing that! Pope Francis talks of “a cascade of tenderness” of God's mercy towards us. He is trying to break open the parable of the Prodigal Son with his Prodigal Father, the one who waited and waited and then ran to embrace the sinner.

A special diocesan committee has been working on preparing resources for us as a diocese to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Mercy. We are being urged to imitate the symbolism of the Holy Door. We are invited to pass through the Holy Door, symbolising that we leave the past and its personal failures behind, and walk through into a new phase of our lives. To live this Jubilee Year well will require us to renew ourselves, to reach out to others, to aspire to live at a deeper level of our spirituality, to look to see how we are modelling ourselves on the example of Christ.

The activities in our parishes should encourage special occasions, for moments that are spiritual and missionary and geared to others. We should try to allow the Word to be broken open in us as we study some Scripture, and meet in prayer, pray the rosary, spend time before the Blessed Sacrament.

May all the other people in our towns and regions see us as ambassadors of mercy, people given heart by the love of God for us, and wanting to share it with all.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ', written in a cursive style.

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

2nd December 2015