



Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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Memorandum to the Diocese

A Holy Door: What Does It Mean?

Dear Brothers & Sisters

The following information may be of help to people in the diocese concerning the Holy Door and the beginning of the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

We Catholics are not reluctant to use the word "Holy". We say it every day in Mass when we speak the words of adoration of the angels before the throne of God as they chant "Holy, Holy, Holy". (Rev. 4:8) We also talk of Holy Water, the Holy Fire in the Easter Vigil, Holy Communion, Holy Thursday, Holy Saturday, Holy Pictures, the Holy Souls, a Holy Year – and now a Holy Door! In some ways this reflects our belief in the Incarnation, that all things have been restored in Christ. "All creation rightly gives You praise..." as we say in the Mass. Natural symbols can speak to us of the presence of God. The deeply spiritual priest-scientist, Fr Teilhard de Chardin, wrote a famous work, "The Hymn of the Universe". All creation is singing God's praise.

Hence Catholics are not loathe to see ordinary natural objects as reflecting the presence of God, and therefore Holy.

The practice of the opening of a "Holy Door" in Rome to mark a special year, apparently began late, when Pope Martin V ordered such a ceremony in 1423. The practice grew in later Jubilees, so that when the special Holy Door was opened in the Pope's cathedral in Rome, other Holy Doors were opened in the various Roman basilicas. That will happen this year also, on the Third Sunday of Advent.

It is somewhat different this time in that Pope Francis has asked that every cathedral in the world, every Mother Church of a diocese, have its special Holy Door opening ceremony to mark the Jubilee Year of Mercy. In our diocese we want to spread that further, asking that each of our parishes looks at some way of marking the event of the Jubilee Year with the opening of the Holy Door in their parish church. We don't need a new door to be knocked in! Just take one of the present doors and decorate it for the occasion.

We are asking all our schools to do the same at the beginning of the school year next February. The children can go through their own "Holy Door" to usher in a New Year, a Holy Year, and become "ambassadors of mercy".

The diocese will be distributing a suggested Prayer Service for this occasion. After the prayers are said and the blessing given and the Holy Water sprinkled, the door is opened and the priest leads his brothers and sisters into the church.

As Pope Francis says, "On that day, the Holy Door will become a door of mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God, who consoles, pardons, and instills hope. His hope is that the church of every diocese "will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal". Thus the Jubilee will be celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches of the world as a visible sign of the Churches universal communion". The Jubilee Year concludes on the Feast of Christ the King, the 20th November 2016. On that day the Holy Door is sealed as we thank God for His mercy and entrust the life of the Church and the entire cosmos to the Kingship of Christ. The Pope's desires for this Holy Year are expressed so strongly. "How much I desire that the Year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy which everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is always present in our midst". Pope John Paul II had this reflection on the Holy Door. "To pass through that Door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord....it is a decision which resumes freedom to choose and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life".

In the Gospel of Saint John Jesus says "I am the gate. Those who enter through me will be safe: they will go freely in and out and be sure of finding pasture....I am the gate of the sheepfold". (John 10:8)

Various of our rituals begin at the church door. In some places that is where the priests or deacon welcomes the parents of a child to be baptised. The priest will often greet the bride and groom at the door of the church. Catechumens are greeted at the door in the Rite of Acceptance. And it is better practice followed in most churches that the priest will greet the coffin of the deceased at the door of a church to commence the funeral liturgy.

We have all had disgraceful moments in our lives, so let us leave them behind as we walk through the Holy Door in our church at this Jubilee Year, and move into the hope that we might minister God's mercy and acceptance to all our brothers and sisters.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read '+ Gregory O'Kelly', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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