

PASTORAL MESSAGE

SUNDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2016

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is the 24th Ordinary Sunday of the Church Year. Although there is nothing “ordinary” about the mysteries we celebrate each Sunday, the green vestments and the rhythm of the year remind us of the pattern of life. The end of summer and our children returning to school at the beginning of September reminds of this reality also.

Today we listen to a well-known passage from the Gospel of Luke. (15:1-32). The stories of the prodigal son, the lost sheep and the lost coins are symbols of things we have lost, or people who are lost, or ideals that have been lost in the turmoil of everyday living. The challenge of the gospel is to rediscover what has been lost and share our joy when it has been found.

Last year, Pope Francis declared a Year of Mercy in the Church. His message was clear. “No one lies outside the mercy of God”. He used a Holy Door in St. Peter’s as a sign of the welcome God offers to all those who feel lost through whatever circumstances of their lives. He asked for Holy

Doors to be opened in named churches throughout the world with the invitation to “come and see” to receive a welcome from those who worship there. Five Holy Doors have been dedicated in this Diocese: St. David’s Cathedral, Belmont Abbey, St. Mary’s Bridgend, St. Mary’s Merthyr and St. Mary’s, Newport.

Doors invite us to go out as well as enter in. This is the second message of the Year of Mercy. The woman looking for the lost coin is a symbol of all in the household of the Church who know family members, friends or neighbours who no longer practice their faith. We may also know people who have never been part of any Church but are sincerely seeking to do what is good and right in their lives. Have we ever invited them to “come and see”?

In the coming week, our five churches in the Diocese which have Holy Doors will host a meal to which people are invited. It is often easier to come to a reception or a meal than to a formal church service. Each church will offer what it thinks best and the invitation to each parishioner is to invite one other person to attend. The evening will conclude with a short prayer and the invitation to pass through the Holy Door. Many people will light the universal symbol, which is a candle. Most will want to pray for someone or some things.

The Sacrament of penance is also a gift when it is offered in an accessible way.

Parishes throughout the Diocese have been supplied with invitation cards which parishioners are asked to invite people to this event. All parishioners are asked to support this venture with their prayers and try to repeat it when inviting participants to join the RCIA in the Autumn.

The three parables in today's gospel all finish on a note of joy. "Rejoice, your brother was lost and is found". "There is rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner". "Rejoice, I have found the drachma that was lost". Often, people are asked by researchers why they do not go to Church". The reply all too often is "Because no one has invited me" or "Because I do not feel welcome". This initiative by the Diocesan Evangelisation Team is an attempt to bridge that gap – but it depends on the support of our parishes.

With every blessing.

Yours devotedly

+George Stack