

ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF
PASTORAL LETTER
ON THE YEAR OF MERCY
ARCHBISHOP GEORGE STACK

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

‘Miserando atque Eligendo’ are the rather enigmatic words of the Episcopal motto of Pope Francis. They are variously translated as: ‘Lowly but chosen’; By having mercy and choosing him; through pity and choosing him. They are taken from the commentary of the great 7th century English saint Bede the Venerable on the call of Matthew the tax collector by Jesus. The full passage is written in chapter 9 of that gospel: *“Jesus therefore saw him, and because he saw him by having mercy and choosing him, said to him ‘Follow me’. And he got up and followed him”*.

That complex sentence contains a deep truth about our relationship with God – and perhaps more importantly God’s relationship with us. It is through the eyes of mercy that, like Matthew, we are forgiven and chosen to share in God’s life through Jesus Christ. Even though we may feel unworthy and even unforgiveable, the measure of God’s love for us is the measure of our need for forgiveness, even when we do not realise it ourselves. How far does the love and mercy of God stretch? ‘This far’ says Jesus, with arms outstretched on the cross.

These thoughts take us to the mind and heart of the life and ministry of Pope Francis. They are summed up in the word ‘Mercy’. The Year of Mercy, which he will open in Rome on 8th December, will be a gradual unfolding of the mystery of God’s love and mercy and an invitation to each person to enter into the realm of mercy. Pope Francis will open the Holy Door at St. Peter’s this Tuesday, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The sealed Holy Doors of the other basilicas in Rome will be opened throughout the month of December. The Holy Door at St. David's Cathedral will be opened on 13th December to inaugurate the Holy Year in the Diocese of Cardiff. Four other churches have been designated as places of welcome and pilgrimage in different parts of the Diocese. These are: Belmont Abbey, St Mary's Merthyr Tydfil, St. Mary's Bridgend and St. Mary's Newport. Each one will have a 'Holy Door' through which pilgrims are invited to enter, remembering the words of Jesus:

'I am the door; if anyone enters through me he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture' (John 10:9).

'The Light of the World' is the title of a famous picture by William Holman Hunt, painted in 1853. It is often referred to by words from the Book of Revelation chapter 3 verse 20 : *'Behold I stand at the door and knock'*. There are two sides to every door. In this picture the door is closed, with no handle on the outside. It can only be opened from within. Jesus does not impose. Does not demand. Does not restrict our freedom. He waits to be invited in. *'If you hear my voice and open, I will come and we will sit side by side, and share a meal together'*. (verse 3:20) An image with which we will become familiar in the year ahead is that of the Holy Year logo. This illustrates Jesus taking on his shoulders the lost and the strayed. According to that illustration, He does not just take us on his shoulders, but merges his life with our life so that the two become one. A profound reflection on our sharing in His life through Baptism, Holy Communion and Reconciliation. The merging of the eyes illustrate the truth that Christ sees with the eyes of Adam and Adam, which is the whole human race, is enabled to see with the eyes of Christ. We see the meaning and purpose of our lives as life lived through and with and in union with Christ.

In one way these thoughts and prayers may seem complex and remote. In another they are profoundly simple as we celebrate them each time we receive Jesus in Holy Communion. We receive Him in that Sacrament. At the same time and in the same Sacrament we are received by Him into lifelong

communion with God in that divine encounter. “The Body of Christ. Amen. I believe.”

To help deepen our understanding of the yearlong process, which is the celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, your parish will have received copies of the small booklet ‘A Pilgrimage Companion for the Year of Mercy’. It contains short meditations such as ‘Jesus Christ, Face of the Father’s Mercy’, ‘The Holy Spirit and Baptism’ and ‘The Corporal Works of Mercy’. This booklet will make an excellent personal companion to daily prayer in seeking to understand the meaning of Mercy in our own lives and in relation to others. In addition there will be in each church in the Diocese a banner depicting the Holy Year logo ‘Merciful like the Father’ as a focus for our public prayer, adoration and celebration of the Sacrament of Penance. The Holy Door, like all doors, does not just open to welcome people in. It also opens to allow us out to share what we believe and have received with others. That message, too, is part of the Year of Mercy and the call to Evangelisation so near to the heart of Pope Francis.

With every blessing for this season of Advent, in which we prepare for the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Yours devotedly

+George Stack

Archbishop of Cardiff

To be read and distributed in each church and chapel on the Second Sunday of
Advent – 5th/6th December 2015

