



INAUGURATION OF THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY

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“Blessed are the merciful: they shall have mercy shown to them” (Matt 5:7).

On December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Pope Francis will inaugurate, in St Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the Jubilee Year of Mercy by opening the Holy Door.

Here in our archdiocese on that same day, the feast of our cathedral and of our archdiocese, we will mark the commencement of this special year at the Mass in the Cathedral at 12.10pm. And then, in accordance with the wishes of the Holy Father, our own Holy Door will be solemnly opened in the Cathedral at the Vigil Mass on Saturday, December 12.

On the same weekend a number of churches which have been designated as special places of pilgrimage for the Holy Year will also open their Holy Doors. The names of those parishes will be communicated to you all soon.

These ceremonies will mark the beginning of our journey, as an archdiocese, along the pathway set out by Pope Francis in the letter he wrote to announce this wonderful initiative (*Misericordiae Vultus – MV*). In that letter he calls on the Church and on each of us who, together, constitute the Church, to *“echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, help and love” (MV25).*

Ever since his election in 2013, Pope Francis has placed the theme of mercy at the heart of his ministry. He would tell us, I am sure, that he has done so because he has experienced the joy of God’s mercy in his own life. In accepting his election to the papacy we are told that he said quite simply, *“I am a sinner but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of Our Lord Jesus Christ”*. In this Jubilee Year we are all invited to recognise that what is true for Pope Francis is also true for us.

If it is true that our sins distance us from God – that this is our doing and never God’s doing – it is also true that God is like the Good Shepherd in the gospels, who never tires of going in search of us, ready to place us on his shoulders and bring us back – to our true selves, to each other, and to God. It is God’s mercy, which for Pope Francis is intimately connected with God’s compassion, God’s patience and God’s loving kindness, which is at the heart of the Gospel. *“Jesus Christ”,* he says, *“is the face of the Father’s mercy” (MV1).*



This is why Pope Francis invites us, during this Jubilee Year, to *“have our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze”* so as to *“experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity”* (MV8). For us in Australia there are echoes here of our own recent Year of Grace, which called us all to *“contemplate the face of Christ”* and *“start afresh from him”*. Now Pope Francis is asking us to gaze very specifically on the merciful face of Christ, for it is there that we see the revelation that *“God is love”* (1 John 4:8). As Pope Francis writes, Jesus *“is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously...Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion”* (MV8).

The opening of the Holy Door in our Cathedral and in the other churches is a deeply symbolic gesture. It seeks to issue an invitation to everyone, whether they can visit the Cathedral and the other churches or not, to open their hearts to the gift of divine mercy, compassion and forgiveness.

As the Pope writes, *“by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God’s mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us”* (MV14). Whether we cross that threshold literally or in our hearts the gift is the same. We can be transformed, and in being changed ourselves we can be God’s instruments of mercy and compassion in the lives of others.

I encourage you all to embrace with eagerness and enthusiasm this wonderful Year of Mercy which is Pope Francis’s gift to us all. Visit the Cathedral and enter through the Holy Door if you can. Alternatively visit one of the other specially designated churches in the archdiocese.

Be on the alert for the many initiatives which local parishes, Catholic schools, Archdiocesan Agencies and other Catholic communities will be promoting.

Gaze on the face of the merciful Jesus in your prayer, as the Pope urges us to do. Dare to believe that God really does love us as much as Jesus tells us he does.

And in the words of Pope Francis, *“never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort”* (MV25).

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