



Closing of the Holy Door (Jubilee Year of Mercy) Homily

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St Mary's Cathedral, Perth
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Next Sunday, in Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Francis will solemnly close the Holy Door and bring to a conclusion the Jubilee Year of Mercy. He has asked that in preparation for this all cathedrals and churches throughout the world which have a Holy Door, including those in Rome, should close these doors this Sunday. In doing so the Pope is inviting us, in the last week of the Jubilee Year, to turn our attention to Rome, reminding us that as Catholics we belong to our local parish, which is part of the diocese, whose bishop, priests and people are members of the Catholic Church, brothers and sisters together, in and through our communion with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope.

This decision of the Pope invites us to reflect on what it actually means to belong to the Church and, in this Jubilee year, to do so with the idea of mercy at the heart of our thinking. Pope Francis, in launching the Year of Mercy, made the statement that Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy and our constant teaching as a Church is that we, the Church, are meant to be the living, on-going presence of Jesus in our world. This means, I think, that we can say quite clearly that we the Church are called through our commitment to and communion with Jesus, to be the face of the Father's mercy in our own time and place.

The mystery of God's mercy, forgiveness and compassion is both deeply encouraging and at the same time very unsettling. If we don't know personally how much we need the mercy of God in our own lives, I would suspect that it is because we don't actually know ourselves very well. Pope Francis is famous for many things but one of them is his answer to the question put to him soon after he was elected: *Pope Francis, who are you?* His reply is in one way a standard Christian response to such a question but in another way a remarkable insight into Pope Francis's own self-understanding. *"I am"* he said, *"a sinner upon whom God has looked with mercy"*.

This evening, I want to invite each one of us to reflect on this. Do I really see myself, and really believe myself to be, a sinner? Am I brave enough to acknowledge this truth? It is an important question. In the Gospel tradition, Jesus only seems to be able to bring healing and hope to those who recognise their own desperate need, and their own inability to do anything about their situation. *"Lord, let me see again"*; *"Lord, if you want to you can heal me"*; *Lord Jesus, have pity of me"*; *Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom"*. How can we open ourselves to God's healing and restoring and forgiving Spirit if we don't recognise our need for this divine gift?

All this is true, but it is equally important to remember that, as Pope Francis puts it, God has looked on us with mercy. We often pray for things which we don't get. This is because such



things may not be in harmony with God's plan. But when we pray for mercy we are asking for something God has already given, continues to give, and wishes to increase in us. Remember the words of Jesus in St Luke's gospel: *If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!* (Luke 11:13).

All of this points to the consoling aspect of the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The challenging and unsettling part of the Year of Mercy comes from the Pope's insistence, which is of course an echo of the Gospel, that we have to be ready and able to be the face of God's mercy, and the bearer of God's mercy, to others. This will require generosity of spirit, largeness of heart and constant compassionate patience. It will require us all to engage in what Pope Francis speaks about so often: the art of accompanying each other on our journey of faith.

To recognise ourselves as sinners, not only in the past but also today, is to recognise that our life is a journey towards the goal of Christian perfection that we are unlikely to fully achieve until we enter into eternal life with the Lord. We will have our ups and downs, our moments of certainty and our moments of doubt, our periods of spiritual consolation and our periods of emptiness and spiritual sadness, our times of deep fidelity to our calling and our times of infidelity and betrayal. What the Lord asks of us is that we walk together, encouraging each other, helping each other to open our lives to the power of God's grace, assisting each other to recognise the signs of God's presence in our lives, and in all these ways strengthening each other so that, in God's time, we will be able to take whatever steps we need to take to align our lives more and more to God's divine plan for us.

This is the gift the Year of Mercy has offered us. As we bring this year to a conclusion with the closing of the Holy Door we pray that this gift will continue to enrich us so that we, in our turn, can enrich the lives of others, especially those we love.