

**JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY
OPENING OF THE HOLY DOOR IN THE
CATHEDRAL
DECEMBER 2015**

The season of Advent, which prepares us for the Coming of our Saviour, is a season of new beginnings. It is a season that challenges us to throw off the lethargy of indifference and sin and actually *run* towards the feast of God's love and mercy, revealed to us at Christmas.

The prayers of Advent are full of this image of *running* towards the Lord. They ask that we run with loving *desire* - like the shepherds and the magi - to greet the Lord at his first Coming in the stable at Bethlehem.

They ask that we run with *hope*, like the apostles, the prophets, the martyrs and all the saints, to greet the Lord at his Second Coming when he will establish his eternal Kingdom of justice and peace.

This year, Advent is specially blessed. Today, across the world, the Church begins the Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by our Holy Father, Pope Francis. During this year he asks us to *gaze attentively* at the mystery of mercy and to practice it in our daily lives.

So what is mercy?

Mercy is, first and foremost, God's action towards us. In this season of *our* running towards *the Lord*, mercy is *his* running

towards *us* with his indulgent love and forgiveness. He is like the Father in the parable of the prodigal son who runs joyfully towards his son who had returned to him after years of selfish indulgence.

Pope Francis tells us that the word *Mercy reveals the very mystery of the Holy Trinity*. Jesus Christ, who is the Mercy of the Father made visible, hurries towards us in the power of the Holy Spirit to meet us..... at Bethlehem in the flesh, at the end of time in glory, everyday on the altar and in the confessional in the form of a Sacrament.

He desires to be united with us! And this is the true joy and peace of being a

Christian: to know that we are loved forever by God, in spite of our failures and sinfulness – a love which is begun not by us, but by God himself.

Second, although God is the *initiator* of mercy, he asks *us* to co-operate with the mercy he offers to us.

How do we do this?

In the Gospel, we heard the voice of John the Baptist preparing the people to receive God's Son and his Gospel into their lives. To the tax collectors, he says: *Exact no more than your rate.* To the soldiers: *No intimidation! No extortion.* And he tells those who have much to share with those who have nothing.

In other words - we can only receive mercy if we are showing justice and mercy to others.

Pope Francis asks that during this Year we should both reflect and act on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in order to: *reawaken our conscience....so that we can know whether or not we are living as the Lord's disciples.*

These works of mercy are in the Lord's teaching:

The corporal works of mercy: giving food and drink to the hungry and thirsty, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, visiting the sick and those in prison, burying the dead.

The spiritual works of mercy: helping the doubtful, sharing the faith with others, lovingly correcting sinners, comforting the afflicted, forgiving others, being patient with those who hurt us, praying for the living and the dead.

John the Baptist also reminds us that before we share the Mercy of God with others, we must first prepare to receive God's Mercy into our own hearts. That means personal conversion – a radical change in the direction of our lives. And it begins with the sacrament of Confession. There our hearts are purified, healed of their wounds, lightened of their burdens – so that we might become more like the merciful and loving heart of our Saviour.

As your bishop, and as a fellow penitent, and one who can witness to the joy of receiving God's forgiveness and mercy in this Sacrament, I want to invite each of you to go to Confession during the course of this Year of Mercy – and especially if you have not made your confession for a long time. Those liberating words of absolution, spoken by the priest, *I absolve you of your sins*, are spoken to each one of us personally personally by the Lord, through his priest. Pope Francis, also a fellow penitent, reminds us that the Lord *never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart*.

Yes, God in his great mercy throws open wide the doors of his heart to us. That image of God's openness is symbolised

by the two Holy Doors that have been opened in the Diocese today – one here in the Cathedral and the other in the National Shrine of Our Lady in Walsingham. These will be privileged and indulgenced places. In visiting them as pilgrims, we will experience God’s indulgent Mercy in answer to all the prayers we bring.

The Holy Year began as we celebrated Our Lady’s Immaculate Conception- her preservation from original sin as God prepared her to be his Mother. She who receives God’s Mercy - not as forgiveness but as protection from sin – becomes for us the Mother of Mercy. Through her, the Divine Mercy has entered our world and changed it for ever. During this Year, let

**us place ourselves in the hands of our
immaculate and merciful Mother. May
Mary, who ran who ran to bring the
Gospel of Salvation to her cousin
Elizabeth, teach us how to run towards
the Lord and rediscover his merciful love,
made incarnate in the manger at
Christmas. Only then can we truly show
God's Mercy and justice to all.**