



diocese
of limerick
our catholic community

**Letter from Bishop Leahy to be read out at all Masses
Saturday/Sunday, 5-6 December, 2015**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As you probably know, Pope Francis has called for a Year of Mercy that will begin this Tuesday, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and will last until the Feast of Christ the King next year, 20 November 2016.

Mercy is one of the great themes of Pope Francis' life and teaching. Just a few days after he was elected Pope, half-jokingly but also making a serious point, Pope Francis told of a conversation he once had with a woman well over eighty years old. It was just after he had become bishop in Argentina and was at the end of a long day of hearing confessions. As he was leaving the Confessional, the woman approached him. He looked at her and asked if she wanted to go to Confession. When she replied she did, he said, "but if you haven't sinned...". The woman replied, "We all have sins". The then young bishop continued, "But perhaps the Lord does not forgive them" to which the woman replied with conviction: "The Lord forgives all things". Bishop Bergoglio as he then was went further and said, "But how do you know that?". He was amazed at her reply: "If the Lord did not forgive everything, the world would not exist". On the basis of this conversation that he recalled just a few days after being elected Pope, Francis said, "Let us never forget this word: God never ever tires of forgiving us! The problem is that we ourselves get tired. He never tires of forgiving, but at times we get tired of asking for forgiveness".

So the first thing the Pope wants from this Holy Year of Mercy is that we all rediscover the immense merciful love of God. God's mercy is there uniquely for each one of us – for you, for me, for the person next to you. No one, no situation, no family is outside God's mercy.

In our Diocese we will have a programme of events for the Year of Mercy. I will write each month on some aspect of it. As part of our Diocesan celebrations, I will be opening a Holy Door of Mercy in St. John's Cathedral at the 12 noon Mass next Sunday, December 13th. You are welcome to attend. The Door will be open for the duration of the Year of Mercy. I hope that during the

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"Come and see the works of God tremendous his deeds among us" – Ps. 66 (65)

Year many will come on pilgrimage to the Cathedral and pass through that Holy Door. Let's remember, of course, that it opens both inwards and outwards! We are called "in" to God's great mercy in order to go "out" to show mercy to the world in our day-to-day relationships with others. I will write again on the Holy Door next month.

The Pope has provided us with a motto for this year: "Be merciful like the Father". These words come from Jesus himself (*Lk 6:36*) when he asks us to reflect God the Father's immense mercy in our words and actions.

Pope Francis remarks that sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. This year ahead gives us a chance to focus on mercy and open our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which modern society itself creates. The "fringes" of society aren't just those far away from me. Each of us can create "fringes" in our own family, neighbourhood or Diocese.

The Pope invites us to make of this Holy year a time of particular attention to the Word of God. I hope our reading of the Acts of the Apostles in the Diocese in preparation for the Synod will assist us.

Again, the Pope invites us to be careful this year in the way we talk and judge situations. As he puts it, "The Lord asks us above all *not to judge* and *not to condemn*. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip." The Pope explains that "to refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him or her any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment, our presumption to know everything about him or her."

But the Pope also says it's not enough not to judge and to condemn. This is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to forgive and to give.

One final point. This coming Tuesday also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council. It was an amazing event that still provides the compass to guide the Church. It is not by chance that Pope Francis is beginning the Year of Mercy on this anniversary. I have written a pastoral letter entitled, "*Let's Remember, Let's Review, Let's Renew: The Second Vatican Council: Fifty Years On*". It will be available on the website. A

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small number of printed copies are available. If you are interested in having a copy, please ask the priest for one.

Above all, let's make a big effort together to enter into the Year of Mercy that will be celebrated all over the world. It is a particular gift for us in the Diocese of Limerick as it is in this Year of Mercy that we will be celebrating the Diocesan Synod. Practising mercy will be a great preparation for the Synod.

Let's pray for Pope Francis as he so often asks us to do.

With kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Brendan Leahy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+ Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick

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