



Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux

Office of the Bishop

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December 1, 2015

My dear People of God in the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux:

As we celebrate this second Sunday of the holy season of Advent, I would like to joyfully draw your attention to the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy that begins on Tuesday December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of Immaculate Conception, and ends November 20, 2015, the Solemnity of Christ the King. The Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis is meant to highlight in a very special way the Church's mission as a witness of mercy. It is a time to receive and experience God's love manifested in his mercy for us and through us to others. Please allow me to share a few words from the Holy Father: *"We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness. At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective."* (*Misericordiae Vultus*, nos. 2-3)

I personally welcome the Holy Father's invitation during this Holy Year of Mercy to both receive the Father's Mercy ourselves, and also to share the Father's Mercy with others. Jesus Christ is the Face of the Father's Mercy, and as his disciples you and I can reflect on the merciful face of Jesus Christ, and then reflect this mercy of Jesus Christ to others. I find Pope Francis' invitation into all that this Year of Mercy will be both hopeful and exciting.

In anticipation this season of grace, Pope Francis requested that at each Cathedral in the world a Holy Door be designated and closed only to be opened to mark the beginning of the Year of Mercy. Throughout the Year of Mercy, all who pass through it are not only reminded of God's love and mercy, but may also obtain a plenary indulgence by fulfilling the requirements to obtain the indulgence. More information on obtaining the indulgence will be provided in the near future. The celebrations of the opening of the Holy Doors, for the Year of Mercy will take place on Sunday, December 13, 2015 at the 9:00 a.m. Mass at St. Francis de Sales Cathedral in Houma and at the 11:30 a.m. Mass at St. Joseph Co-Cathedral in Thibodaux. All are invited to these celebrations that formally inaugurate the Holy Year of Mercy in our diocese. In addition, there will be several activities and resources in your parish and throughout the diocese to

enable you experience and to be a witness to others of God's mercy. I encourage you to participate as much as you possibly can.

Pope Francis further writes: *"Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. ... The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope."* (Misericordiae Vultus, no. 10)

My greatest hope for us during this special Year of Mercy is that each one of us will be "Merciful like the Father", which is the motto for the Year of Mercy. My prayer is that we will all be forever changed by our renewed encounter with the Father's Mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation and other prayerful activities, and through our forgiveness offered to others and additional acts of mercy during this year in a greater way we might be the merciful disciples of his that Jesus calls us to be.

I take this opportunity to again thank you for your faith, and to wish you a blessed Advent Season and fruitful Jubilee Year of Mercy. I remain,

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Shelton J. Fabre". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of a small cross symbol.

Most Reverend Shelton J. Fabre
Bishop of the Diocese of Houma Thibodaux