

TO: ALL THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS & LAY FAITHFUL OF OUR DIOCESE

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

As declared by Pope Francis, the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy will span from 8th December 2015 to 20th November 2016. The significant theme of this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy is 'Be Merciful like the Father' (Lk 6:36). Mercy and Compassionate love of God is what characterizes the life of our Holy Father. He lives it by reaching out to the fringes of the society and invites all, through his homilies and writings to follow the same. This theme is not something new to the Church, but it is a way of reviving this fundamental quality of Christianity.

When we speak of God the quality that comes out of the Scriptures is Mercy: God is known as one who responds to the suffering and to the need of His people. It all began with God's coming to the aid of the Israelites in their affliction and suffering in Egypt (cf. Ex. 3:7-10). From that point onwards God showed his Mercy to his people whenever they were in pain and he gave them hope. His mercy is not something reserved for a heavenly future, but takes the form of practical action in relieving the suffering of this life (cf. Ps 146: 5-9).

When the people were suffering in Babylon as exiles, through Prophet Jeremiah God said: '... I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you ... plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope ... I will hear you ... I will be found by you, ... I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations ...' (29: 10-15). The people experienced the fulfilment of this prophecy during their lifetime.

The salvation history reached its climax when God sent his son to save us: 'Jesus Christ is the face of Father's mercy' (MV 1). Jesus through his being, doing and teaching revealed the Father's infinite mercy to the world. Mary our Mother sang a song of praise in which she remembers God's history of merciful actions on behalf of downtrodden people (Lk 1: 46-55). His mercy was also shown to Elizabeth and Zechariah (Lk 1:67-79), Simeon (Lk 2: 29-32) and Anna (Lk 2: 36-38) in the Infancy Narratives.

Jesus understood his mission as that of compassion and relief of suffering (Lk 4:16-21). In his public ministry he responded with mercy to the cry of the suffering and the needy, the poor and the politically suppressed, the social outcasts and the sinners, the sick and his enemies (Mk 5:19; 6:34; 8:1-10; 9:22; 10:47-48; Mt 9:27; 15:22-32; 17:15; 20:30-31; Lk 7:13. 40-43; 13:10-17; 17:11-19; 18:13. 38-39; 23:34. 40-42). The three parables of mercy in Lk 15 help us understand how God shows his mercy to his people. The parables of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:21-35; cf. 5:48) and the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 29-37; cf. Lk 6:36) show our responsibility to imitate Father's mercy. We would be judged by our mercy towards our brothers and sisters (Mt 25: 31-46). The NT bears witness to the mercy the first Christians practiced in their lives, particularly in the Acts of the Apostles. The Epistles invite the Christians to live this mercy that Jesus has shown us (eg., Rom 9:15-18; 11:30-32; 12: 6-8; Heb 2:17; Phil 2:2; Jas 3:17; 1 Pet 2: 9-10).

Throughout the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, four holy doors of mercy would be opened in the diocese to make available to people graces and indulgences, namely, at the Cathedral, Wahacotte, Nuwara Eliya and Hatton. This would facilitate all our faithful to make pilgrimages to these churches with proper dispositions. Those who have proper dispositions of repentance and conversion, each time they visit they will receive a plenary indulgence. It is received through their participation in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Eucharist and prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father (Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be).

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I, therefore, exhort all our clergy, religious and lay faithful to observe the following in our parishes, Religious Institutions, Catholic Schools and homes for a meaningful and fruitful celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy:

1. Mini pilgrimages are encouraged to the closest church which has the holy door of mercy.
2. Special programmes and devotions to be organized at the parish level during the season of Lent. The Lenten Season is to be considered a 'privileged moment' to highlight divine mercy. The true meaning of fast and abstinence should encourage the faithful to share with the poor and the suffering.
3. '24 hours for the Lord' with priests available for administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the Fourth Week of Lent in keeping with the suggestions of the Holy Father.
4. Every parish should have a well-organized mission on the theme of God's infinite mercy.
5. In order to study in depth the theme of mercy in the Bible, bible study and prayer groups should be formed. The Word centred communities should focus on Scripture passages that highlight this theme in their gatherings.
6. Identifying and catering for the needs of the poor and the marginalized in order to bring them solace and relief.
7. All our faithful must engage in works of mercy, particularly in corporal works of mercy such as visiting the sick in hospitals and neighbourhoods with prayer assistance, visiting the house-bound and the elderly. Parish level visits to institutions of charity, such as, homes for elders, children's homes and houses for destitute, organising whatever assistance that could be rendered to the inmates such as *Shramadana* and collection of dry rations.
8. That every Sunday the faithful be encouraged to offer some dry rations or school requirements, to be collected during the Eucharistic celebration for distribution among the poorest of the poor in the parish.
9. Visiting the fallen away Catholics and those who have no easy access to Sunday Eucharist, with special concern to assist them spiritually.
10. Every parish must organize a parish level mission-action plan for a meaningful celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.
11. All clergy, religious and lay faithful to make a personal commitment to be merciful and compassionate in all their relationships with one another and with those whom we have offended or with those who have offended us. To do this we need to draw closer to the Word of God and listen to him in silence (MV 13).
12. Exhorting, encouraging and helping the families to live the reality of mercy in the Husband-Wife, Parent-Children and other relationships.
13. Persons involved in the formation of children like parents, guardians, teachers, catechists, in-charge of orphanages, etc., make an extra effort to show mercy and compassionate love towards those under their care.
14. Make available catechetical material for children and youth to experience and share mercy.
15. Explore and imitate the ways and means Our Beloved Apostle, Saint Joseph Vaz used as the model of mercy.