

Dear People of God in the Geraldton Diocese

In announcing this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis stated “How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in Mercy, so that we can go out to every human man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God!”

Pope Francis therefore is calling us to both experience deeply the mercy of God and to share it generously. We could be doing nothing else more important this coming year. Because it is so easy to have a very narrow understanding of the word mercy, I want first to break open briefly its meaning in Sacred Scripture. It is so rich. It is much more than a pleading for mercy from God. Different words, particularly in the Old Testament, describe it as an instinctive attachment of one person for another, as compassion, as tenderness, as kindness. These feelings have their seat deep within - in the maternal bosom, in the heart and in the bowels. All this describes how mercy moves people deeply, leading them to respond to others needs.

I like very much the translation of the ‘Benedictus’ that we use for our daily Prayer of the Church, where mercy is described as ‘the loving kindness of the heart of our God’ (Lk 1:78). No wonder Pope Francis has often said “Not to be afraid of showing tenderness”. It is being God-like to others.

The greatest story Jesus told to describe the mercy of God was the story of the *Prodigal Son* [also known as *The Forgiving Father*]. This merciful and ‘crazy’ (in human terms) God, is just waiting and wanting that we keep turning to him, no matter what we may have done. Even if we have selfish motives in turning to God, like the Prodigal Son, we still get the huge welcome, the great embrace, the great celebration from our Forgiving Father.

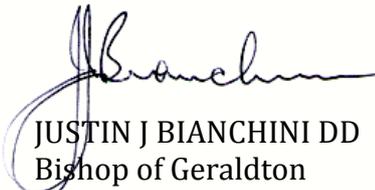
This story is the most powerful and central of all the stories that Jesus told. Yet it is small in comparison to what Jesus did to show us God’s mercy - his frequent forgiveness of our sins and above all his rejection, and indescribable suffering and death on the cross to claim for us that mercy.

Yes, as Pope Francis began his letter, “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy”.

During this year let us all take time to ponder this face, this mercy, and experience it again and again. This will colour all that we do, and help us, even compel us, to share in practical ways that mercy with all sorts of people around us. When anyone receives mercy from another, it is a special way of experiencing the amazing mercy of God.

All of this Year of Mercy I believe can be summed up in the one line of 1 John 4:11 “My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another.”

So in the Geraldton Diocese let us take up the call of Pope Francis to enter fully into this very special Year. I encourage one and all to take part in the special events organised in the Diocese and in our Parishes, but even more to look to how God daily shares his mercy, his kindness, his tenderness with us, and how we can be instruments of that mercy to those around us.


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Bishop of Geraldton

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