

## **Jubilee Year of Mercy**

### **Homily at Mass for the opening of the Holy Door.**

**Most Rev. Philip Boyce, O.C.D.  
Bishop of Raphoe  
St. Eunan's Cathedral. 13 December 2015.**

A source of joy and hope for us today is the Jubilee Year of Mercy which has begun, and the opening of the Holy Door through which we have just entered into the Cathedral.

The opening of the Holy Door is a symbol of how God our heavenly Father, opens wide the arms of his mercy to welcome repentant sinners and receive them back into his friendship. To receive this mercy in full measure, we need not travel to Rome and enter the Holy Door in one of the Major Basilicas there. Pope Francis has decreed that for this Extraordinary Jubilee Year there be a Holy Door in every Cathedral church in the world and also in other shrines or places of pilgrimage in each Diocese. Therefore, a Holy Door will also be opened next Sunday, 20<sup>th</sup> December, in the Franciscan Friary church in Rossnowlagh at 11 a.m. and in the Capuchin Friary church in Ards at 5.30 p.m. This gives many people in our Diocese (or indeed visitors or pilgrims from outside the Diocese) the easier possibility of passing through the Jubilee Holy Door to obtain the mercy of God.

God's mercy is his attitude towards those who are weak and suffering, towards those who are sinners and ask for forgiveness. It is his love that stoops down to all who are poor and in any need. And who can be poorer than the person who is caught up in sin and has lost God's friendship? Faced with human misery of all kinds, God displays his merciful love.

The Holy Year of Mercy is therefore a time for us to be pilgrims walking through the Holy Door to receive God's mercy. We then become better, more authentic Catholic Christians ourselves, and, in our turn, we ourselves become merciful, as our heavenly Father is merciful, and even kind to the ungrateful and selfish (cf. Lk. 6: 35-36).

We learn to forgive others the wrong they did against us just as God forgives us, in the Confessional, the offenses we commit against him. And forgiving others is not easy. It costs, it is a sacrifice. Yet with God's grace we can do many things that otherwise would seem to be impossible. Others may have offended us. But to offend God is something far more serious. Yet God is willing to forgive, if we repent, no matter how grave our sin may be. As Pope Francis said: "God's mercy will always be greater than any sin" (Mis. Vultus, 3).

Jesus himself has said that he has come “not to call the righteous, but sinners” and that God “desires mercy, and not sacrifice” (cf. Mt. 9:13).

The way of the Church has always been the way of mercy and forgiveness. The Church pours the balm of God’s mercy on all those who ask for it with a sincere heart. Her voice goes out to all near and far, to her faithful sons and daughters, as well as to those who have gone astray, to those on the margins, to those trapped in sin or those who seem to have lost the faith of their youth or childhood . She repeats the words of invitation of our Saviour:”Come to me all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden light” (Mt. 11: 28:30).

Going through the Holy Door is in itself not an automatic or magical way of receiving God’s forgiveness and mercy. We go through the Holy Door which is a symbol of Christ himself, who said:”I am the Door; if anyone enters by me, he will be saved” (Jn. 10:9). It was a coincidental and indeed providential sign that the Holy Door in our Cathedral has inscribed over it in stone the words: “Is mise an doras; I am the Door.” We enter through Christ to go to our heavenly Father, to receive his merciful love, to learn to become merciful ourselves.

This passage through the Holy Door, through Christ, leads in a special way to the Confessional. It is through the grace of a good personal Confession, through the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation, that God’s mercy flows upon us most abundantly. After his Resurrection, Jesus gave his disciples and all ordained priests the gift of peace and the power to forgive sins. He appeared to the Apostles, breathed upon them and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn. 20: 22-23).

Many have experienced the sense of peace and even of joy that descends upon the soul after a good and humble confession. The Year of Mercy is a golden opportunity to go to confession regularly or to return to it after being away for a while, away even for a long time.

Moreover, the Church grants special Indulgences for the Holy Year of Mercy. “God’s forgiveness knows no bounds” (Mis. Vul. 22). Even when our guilt is forgiven and blotted out in confession and our friendship with Christ is restored, sin always leaves a negative effect in our soul. We can still feel attracted to things of this world and love our own comfort and pleasure more than we love God. This too has to be purified. The ‘eternal punishment’ of sin is removed in confession, but this unhealthy attachment to ourselves and to created things has still to be purified either here on earth or in purgatory. An indulgence that we gain removes this temporal punishment either in part or in whole. Therefore, we can see how important it is to receive Indulgences. It means that we shall have less to be purified when we go to purgatory. A plenary Indulgence purifies us completely, making us ready to see God.

We gain a partial Indulgence through all our good works 'carrying our daily cross with faith, being charitable to others; helping the poor; visiting the sick; instructing others in the faith, bearing wrongs patiently; and so on. When we go through the Holy Door, we should also perform the prescribed works to obtain the Indulgence: go to Mass that day, go to Confession within 8 days; say an Our Father and a prayer for the Pope's intentions. The Indulgence may be for yourself or applied for a soul in Purgatory.

May Our Lady, Mother of Mercy, be near us during this Jubilee Year of Mercy. No one experienced God's mercy to the extent that she did because she was preserved from original sin and never offended God in any way. May she lead us to her Divine Son, fount of mercy and love. Amen.