

Be merciful like the Father

We had an enjoyable celebration at the Cathedral on December 8th to mark the beginning of the Jubilee Holy Year of Mercy. You can see it recorded on the Diocesan Website for the Year of Mercy, www.bemerciful.co.uk. The special Holy Door was blessed and opened in the Cathedral and some Prayer Cards were given to each parish priest to give out to parishioners. The Bishop asked that the prayer on the Card be prayed at every Mass in our Churches during this Holy Year.

On the third Sunday of Advent, we were asked to bless and open a Door of Mercy in each of our churches. As I said in the first Teaching, as we **enter through** our Door of Mercy we are symbolising our entering into the presence of God, with a desire to shed our sins, and embrace the mercy of God. And as we **pass out** through the Door of Mercy into our day to day lives, we live a converted life, seeking ways to engage in spiritual and corporal works of mercy so that as many people as possible experience the merciful face of our Father in heaven.

In the First Teaching, I explained how I was working to a seven year plan which was to gradually lead the parish to an outreach, to **a mission beyond the parish** into the wider neighbourhood – and if it can be ecumenical, all the better. And it seemed to me that the Holy Spirit is at work because, with perfect timing, this Year of Mercy gives a shape, gives an inspiration to our discernment as a parish as we seek out what form our outreach should take this summer. I wonder what works of mercy we will be led to be engaged in around our three towns, making a difference to the lives of many in Shirebrook, Warsop and Bolsover in the coming summer. **How will we show them the face of the God of mercy?** So, let us look at the spiritual & corporal works of mercy as our guide, just as the Pope and our Bishop have asked us to do.

Remember what is meant by **the word “mercy”** in the context of the Bible and our Christian tradition. Very often the words “compassion” & “mercy” seem to be inter-changeable. What is meant is a deep down feeling of loving kindness & friendliness towards another, a gut wrenching, heartfelt feeling towards the needy other. This mercy is unmerited by the receiver. So, we have an image of our Father in heaven, who seems to bend down to his creation in condescension, including to you & me, and descends to us in our need by sending his Son Jesus to us. As Jesus said of himself: *to have seen me is to have seen the Father*. [John 14: 9.] Despite every human infidelity against God, the Father concerns himself again & again and opens his heart to humanity, to you & me, even though humanity's rebellion deserves a just punishment. This graciousness of God exceeds all human expectations & bursts every human category. This is the mercy we, both individually and as a Church Community, are called to experience for ourselves through the power of the Holy Spirit in moments of prayer, scripture reflection and celebrations of the Sacraments. This is the mercy we, the members of the Church, are called to bring to others in the name of Jesus Christ.

We will look at the **spiritual works of mercy** in more detail on another occasion. You can see these listed on the accompanying sheet. For now, we'll look some practical ideas on the corporal works of mercy: **a. Feed the hungry:** We have the **Tea & Natter** group which meets in St. Joseph's Church Rooms every second Tuesday. On the second Saturday of the month in St. Teresa's Hall we have **the Café**. Both these events provide an environment for local people to meet socially, have a bite to eat and make new friends. Loneliness & isolation are one of the hungers of our culture. Volunteers are always needed to help with these two events. **Faire Share & Tesco's** have teamed up to arrange for Tesco's [& Waitrose] left-over food and clothes to be given to charities engaged in what we call corporal works of mercy. [See <http://www.fareshare.org.uk/>] **The Trussell Trust** is another Christian based organisation whose mission statement reads: *Bringing communities together to end hunger and poverty in the UK by providing compassionate, practical help whilst challenging injustice*. [See: www.trusselltrust.org.] One British Charity, founded by Catholics, who raise funds to feed & educate children is **'Mary's Meals'**. [See: www.marysmeals.org.uk] Every day they feed over 1million children. Currently, the UK Government is doubling every donation made to this charity. A final example: we could make sure that we offer Fair Trade tea and coffee after Mass and at parish events. [See <http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/en/buying-fairtrade>.]

b. Give drink to the thirsty: Raise funds for charities such as **'Water Aid'** that provide clean water and sanitation. [See www.wateraid.org/uk.] They have the same arrangement with the Government as with Mary's Meals. If someone becomes temporarily homeless in our parish, do you know where they can get a drink, use the toilet etc. whilst their circumstances are sorted out? The Christians Centre in Shirebrook and the Salvation Army can often be a first port of call. Could we do something to help?

c. Clothe the naked: We can donate decent clothes that we don't need to '**Sharewear**' [sharewearclothingscheme.org] or to a charity shop. We could support campaigns like the '**International Clean Clothes Campaign**' that helps workers in the garment industry fight for better pay & working conditions – & let retailers know that you are concerned. [See: <http://www.cleanclothes.org>.]

d. Visit the sick: Our parish Ministers of the Eucharist visit regularly those whom we know are sick, as do other individuals, quietly of their own initiative. Deacon Barry Dickinson based at St. Philips in Mansfield organises volunteers from our parishes to visit the sick in Kings Mill Hospital every week. Would you like to be part of this team, and join the parishioners who already do this? Contact St. Philip's Presbytery and leave a message for :**Deacon Barry on 01623 623458**. The small **hospital in Bolsover** lies in our parish. Would a group of parishioners like to explore the possibility of volunteer visiting this hospital regularly, drawing up a weekly rota? Perhaps it is possible to team up with what is already organised? Let us be aware of invisible forms of illness & disability, of the needs of people with depression, mental illness, or families with a child with a disability, help them to be welcomed, included and supported by the parish.

e. Shelter the homeless: There were approximately 40 homeless people in the NG20 area during this last year. **The Christians Centre** in Shirebrook have given out emergency tents to some of these whilst a more long term solution is sorted out by the local authorities. **The Lighthouse Homes project** should be opening in Shirebrook sometime in February [in the former Pub/Hotel next to the Christian Centre.] There will be plenty of opportunities for volunteers to work there with its variety of activities, to help the men in residence back into work and into their own accommodation. See <http://lighthousehomes.org/> for more information. I visited their place in Rotherham last year with Amanda Fell from the Christian Centre. I am fully supportive of this project. Working with others, especially fellow Christians, is a powerful witness to the neighbourhood. **Pope Francis** has challenged us to house a **Refugee family**. A parishioner is finding out more details about this and will let us know soon. **HOST** is an organisation which promotes international friendship & understanding by arranging for international students at British Universities to meet UK residents in their homes – for example at Christmas. Their website: <http://www.hostuk.org/>. And then there's "**Night Stop**" part of the De Paul Trust [inspired by St. Vincent De Paul] which offers temporary accommodation for young people. There is a Night Stop on Talbot Street in Nottingham. Buxton and Leeds are two other nearest centres. [See: <http://www.depaulnightstopuk.org/>]

f. Visit the imprisoned: We do not have a prison nearby. But there may be **aftercare** for prisoners and **care for families** with relatives in prison. **Prison Chaplaincies** may be able to advise. A list of Prison Chaplains in the Diocese can be found on pages 117, 118 in the new Diocesan Year Book. There is a need to learn more about **people trafficking** and other forms of modern slavery. And, we could make more of **Prisoners' Sunday**, usually on a Sunday in November.

g. Bury the dead: Our newly formed **Bereavement Group** which organised the Memorial Service on the last Sunday of November is one way of responding to this last work of mercy. More volunteers are always welcome to come along to meetings and help with the planning of Funerals. There is a need to attend to **the Cemetery at St. Joseph's**, to mark the unmarked graves, to develop a maintenance free environment with areas to sit and reflect for the benefit of parishioners, and friends & relatives of the bereaved. We need to keep vigilant about parliamentary activity concerning **assisted dying** and press politicians to fund good **palliative care** for all who need it. Is there anyone in the parish dying alone? If so, what can be done to support them. Perhaps a Pilgrimage to the grave of **Mother Mary Potter** and the Cultural Centre will guide us to respond well to this final work of mercy.

What does this list tell us about mercy? What does it tell us about our responsibility as a parish? Remember, this Session is about **taking action** with the corporal works of mercy as a normal part of our ministry as members of the Body of Christ. **What more can we do in the parish during this year?** As you go through the ideas that emerge from the group, pick one that could work in the parish. Then, put a plan together involving other members of the community. Remember to give Fr. Jonathan a copy of the **one work of mercy** you decided on as a possibility for the parish and your **suggested plan of action** for the Parish Office & the PPC to consider.

Let us conclude with what **Bishop Patrick** said on December 8th in the Cathedral: *May our walking through the 'Doors of Mercy' during this Jubilee Year, be an expression of our deeper desire, not to hide from God because of our sins, [like Adam & Eve] but instead, to open our own lives more and more to God's mercy, [like Mary, the Mother of Jesus & our Mother] especially, for us, in the healing Sacrament of Reconciliation. May they also be doors through which we go out into the world as ambassadors of God's mercy & compassion, bearing witness to his mercy in the way we try to live our lives and relate to others!*

That's it for now. God bless you. Fr. Jonathan.