

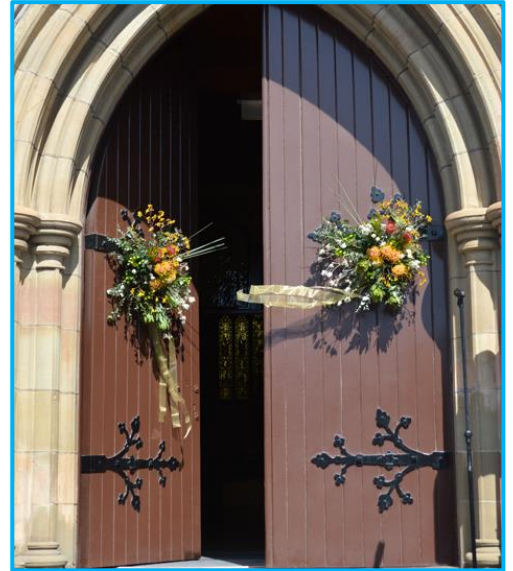


Diocesan e-News

YEAR OF MERCY THANKSGIVING MASS

The Jubilee Year of Mercy commenced with the opening of the Holy Door by Pope Francis at St Peter's Basilica in Rome on December 8 last year. Pope Francis also asked that dioceses and churches around the world establish their own Holy Doors for pilgrims to pass through and the Ballarat Diocese celebrated the opening of the Holy Door at St Patrick's Cathedral on December 13, 2016.

On the Feast of Christ the King, November 20, 2016 Pope Francis closed this same door at St Peter's Basilica, concluding the Year of Mercy. In his homily Pope Francis, said that while the year of special prayers and gatherings had ended, people should "ask for the grace of never closing the doors of reconciliation and pardon, but rather of knowing how to go beyond evil and differences. "Even if the Holy Door closes, the true door of mercy, which is the heart of Christ, always remains open wide for us."



The Jubilee Year was brought to a close in local churches on the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary time, a week prior to the closing of the Holy Door at the Vatican.

In the Ballarat Diocese, a Mass of Thanksgiving for the Jubilee Year of Mercy was celebrated on Sunday, November 13, 2016 at St Patrick's Cathedral at 10.30am. Bishop Paul Bird CSsR was the main celebrant for this Mass and Fr Justin Driscoll, Administrator of the Cathedral Parish concelebrated.

The Cathedral Choir ably led the many hymns and introduced the new Mass setting, "Mass of Renewal" to the congregation. During Mass there was also RCIA dismissal and the 25th anniversary celebrations of the Cathedral Family Groups. Morning tea was served in the Hall following Mass and was very well attended.

Many thanks to those who assisted with the preparation and celebration of the Mass and morning tea.

Photos from the Mass are on the diocesan website <http://www.ballarat.catholic.org.au/services-and-agencies/dsp-default.cfm?loadref=235>

Julie Boyd- Pastoral Ministry Office

Bishop Paul's Homily can be read below:

On the 8th December last year, Pope Francis opened a special door at St Peter's Basilica in Rome. It's called the "Holy Door". It's the door that is traditionally opened at the start of a Holy Year. As he opened that door last December, Pope Francis was marking the start of what he called a Jubilee Year of Mercy. It was to be a time to focus on this key quality of God, the quality of mercy.

People don't always think of God as merciful. I came across a book that presented various pictures that people might have in their minds when they think of God. This included an image of God as a policeman. Some people might have this kind of image, seeing God as being like a policeman waiting to catch them out in doing something wrong. The

sketch for this image showed God as a British bobby up in the clouds, wearing an old-style British bobby's helmet. God as policeman was looking down on the earth and saying: "Ullo, ullo, ullo!"

Having presented this image of God as policeman, the book went on to explain that this is not really a helpful image. If we view God as always trying to catch us out, it would make for a very anxious life on our part. But this image does not convey a true understanding of God. God is not like a policeman in the sky. God is not someone who wants to make us constantly anxious lest we do the wrong thing.

The book then went on to present some of the descriptions of God that we find in the Scriptures. These are in fact much more positive and encouraging. For example, we have a scene in the Book of Exodus. Moses goes up the mountain of Sinai in the early morning and God comes down from heaven to meet him. God speaks to Moses and expresses who God is: "A God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness".

The true God is a God of tenderness and compassion. God is someone who draws near to us with kindness. God is a God of mercy. This is the first lesson of the Holy Year. The second lesson is that we are called to be merciful ourselves. We are called to be merciful like our heavenly Father.

Pope Francis highlighted this quality of mercy as essential for the Church. He said: "It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of the Church's message that the Church live and testify to mercy." In fact, he said, every gathering of Christians should provide an oasis of mercy for people who are finding their life something of a desert as they struggle with the burdens of daily living. He said: "Wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes and communities, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy."

We are now drawing towards the conclusion of this Holy Year. Next Sunday Pope Francis will close the Holy Door in St Peter's to mark the end of this particular year of jubilee. But this does not mean the end of mercy. The Scriptures tell us very clearly that God's mercy endures forever. We're coming to the close of the Jubilee Year and the Holy Door will close. But the door of God's mercy is always open. And we're called to keep our hearts open as well – open to receive God's mercy and open to show mercy to one another. We're called to continue in the spirit of mercy in the days and years ahead.

As we continue our Mass now, we continue to celebrate this key point of our Christian faith. We give thanks that God is so merciful to us, a God of tenderness and compassion. We pray that we might be merciful to one another as God is merciful to us.

Bishop Paul Bird CSsR