December 8, 2015

To the People of the Diocese of Syracuse

Dear Friends:

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.” With these words our Holy Father, Pope Francis, begins the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Misericordiae Vultus. With these same words I happily greet you.

On the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8th, the patronal feast of our diocese, we will begin the Year of Mercy, the theme of which is: “Merciful like the Father” (Lk 6:36). Pope Francis describes this time as one in which “the Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God’s mercy” and a time “dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us” (MV, 25).

Pope Francis’ Call to Mercy

Mercy is not blind tolerance or justification of sin. Like the words, actions and person of Jesus Christ, mercy presumes sin and denounces it. It is precisely in this way that it loves the sinner and calls him to conversion so that he can experience the grace of God and participate in his divine life. Thus, mercy is a person, Jesus Christ, and it is found both in him and in his Church, particularly in the sacraments.

During this Jubilee Year the Holy Father is calling us to contemplate the mercy of God, to recognize that the Father’s mercy is greater than any sin, to ask for and receive his mercy, and to be merciful to others. In other words, the Holy Father is calling us during this extraordinary moment in the life of the Church to encounter God’s mercy and to extend it to others. Therefore, our focus in the Diocese of Syracuse during the Year of Mercy will be: Mercy Encountered, Mercy Extended.

Mercy Encountered

In Misericordiae Vultus, Pope Francis says that we can encounter God’s mercy first by reacquainting ourselves with the sources of mercy: the Scriptures, the teachings of the Church, prayer, and the sacraments. Moreover, he reminds us that we can encounter the Father’s mercy primarily by celebrating the Sacrament of Penance, and also by obtaining a jubilee indulgence, making a pilgrimage to the Holy Door of Mercy at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, rediscovering and reflecting on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, turning to the example of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the saints, and living Lent in a more intense way this year.

Mercy Extended

The Holy Father says that we extend God’s mercy by taking part in the New Evangelization and proposing the theme of mercy again and again with new enthusiasm. Furthermore, he says that we extend God’s mercy by putting the corporal and spiritual works of mercy into action, by obtaining an indulgence for someone who is deceased, by taking part in ecumenical discussions and actions with regard to mercy, and by reaching out to those on the peripheries, spiritually, with regard to irregular situations and by inviting them back to the embrace of the Church, our mother.
Year of Mercy in the Diocese of Syracuse

Our diocese will offer many diocesan wide opportunities for encountering and extending the Father’s mercy. Among these opportunities, this year I will open the Holy Door of Mercy at the 9:45 am Mass at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception on December 13th. I will close the Holy Door of Mercy next year on November 6, 2016, at the 9:45 Mass at the Cathedral. Also, I will designate four special days of pilgrimage this year to our Cathedral on which I will invite a different region of the diocese to come and join me in celebrating the infinite mercy of God. Moreover, we as a diocese will celebrate the Church’s universal campaign, “24 Hours for the Lord.” on the Friday and Saturday before the Fourth Sunday of Lent. As the rest of our plans for the Year of Mercy unfold, they will be publicized in The Catholic Sun and on our diocesan website and social media. To learn more about the Year of Mercy, the Holy Door, or find additional resources and a calendar of events, please visit the diocesan website: www.syracusediocese.org and click on the Year of Mercy icon on our homepage.

May this year be for all of us a time grace in which we turn to the Lord more deeply. I pray that Mary, Our Lady of Mercy, will accompany each of us along the way.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. Cunningham
Bishop of Syracuse