**YEAR OF MERCY LENTEN JOURNEY**

***Ash Wednesday and First Week of Lent***

*Scripture for this week*: “Rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Joel 2:12-13

*Reflection:*

When our hearts are properly disposed, our Lenten observances help us to refocus our attention on God, to restore our relationship with God. Jesus teaches us, in scripture, to do good privately, to pray privately and tofast with a sense of Joy. What is this true fasting to which God calls us?

This rather is the fasting I wish...

Setting free the oppressed,

Breaking every yoke,

Sharing your bread with the hungry,

Sheltering the oppressed and the homeless... Isaiah 58:6-7

Is His Holiness, Pope Francis not calling us to this same truth as he takes the whole world into a Blessed Year of Mercy? Is he not asking us to take our focus off ourselves and place it on others as he encourages us to live the *Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy?*

*Let us ponder for a moment what Mercy is.*

* Mercy is the kind, sympathetic and forgiving treatment of others.
* Mercy is a deep awareness of another’s suffering that leads to a desire to help.
* Mercy is the kind smile that makes another feel loved or cared for.
* Mercy is a kind word or a listening ear for those who are struggling.
* Mercy is the desire to bear wrongs patiently and not strike out.
* Mercy is the kindness of visiting those who are sick or alone and lonely.
* Mercy is the generosity of sharing food with those in need.
* Mercy is comforting and supporting those who are sorrowful.
* Mercy is helping with clothing for those in need.
* Mercy is the courage to help others who have lost their way with God.
* Mercy is praying for the living and the dead.
* Mercy is going out of your way for another, a drive, a phone call, a visit, shovel the pathway.

During this first week of Lent, let us take a quiet moment to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to lead us in reaching out remembering Jesus’ words, “Whatever you do for one another you do for Me.”

May God in his infinite Mercy, gift us with His Compassion, Discernment and Wisdom to live our lives well this week.

God within me I adore You.

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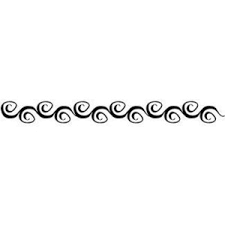
***Second Sunday of Lent***

Let Us Ponder: *A door opens in the centre of our being*

*And we seem to fall through it into the immense*

*depths which, although they are infinite*

*are all accessible to us.* Thomas Merton

As we recognize our Call to follow Jesus as People of Mercy, God raises within us the realization that a Life of Mercy is not just a busyness of doing. It is truly a Way of Life as sons and daughters of God. It means consciously -‘ opening the Door of our Hearts so that we come to understand that our heart-door opens inward to the inherent goodness seeded in us at birth, and opens outward to the world where we bring this goodness and share it with others. When we enter the Door to our Hearts and go inward, this non-physical door allows us to move beyond where we presently are in our beliefs, emotions, attitudes and actions. By so doing, our spiritual growth evolves and our union with the Holy One matures.’ (Joyce Rupp: Open the Door: A Journey to the True Self)

GOD’S OPENED DOOR

“Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.” Matt.7:7

This is a promise of God to each of us. The gift of God’s presence and the power of His help are always there for you and for me. We have only to ask, and then reflect on all the times God has touched our lives with His compassion, love and mercy. In the midst of all our life problems, the door has always been opened to us. Have we dared to go through?

This week we are called to spend quiet time with our God each day, if possible. Allow ourselves each day, time to enter into the stillness of God’s presence if only for a short time. Open the Door of Your Heart and sit quietly with God. It is from this stillness with God and the awakening of our souls that we will hear God’s invitation to take what we have, and continue to receive from Him, to give to others: to be his hands and feet, heart and voice in our homes, parishes and communities. In this way we truly will be People of Mercy.

*Prayer:*

God our Heavenly Father, help me to perform works of mercy in my daily life this week and bring the Good News of the Gospel to all whom I meet through my actions of mercy and love.

Assure me of your protective presence each day this week and when I become tired, confused or frustrated help me to come to you for help.

May every seeking footstep of mine, take me through your doorway of love.

I open the door of my heart to you

My God within me, I adore you.

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***Third Sunday of Lent***

*Scripture for the week*: “*My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a heart contrite and humbled, O God, you will not spurn.”* Psalm 51:19

*Reflection*: We begin Lent with really good intentions by making resolutions. If those resolutions have fallen by the wayside, we may be feeling badly because we all want to be faithful in following Christ on our Lenten journey. Perhaps we come to near the middle of Lent with the feeling that we have empty hands.

Have we done everything perfectly that we set out to do? Perhaps not

Have we been as kind and merciful as we intended to be? Again, maybe not.

Have we appreciated our own soul and the souls of our neighbours as God calls us to? Sadly not.

Have we been faithful to quiet time for prayer that we may hear the voice of God within us? Not really. So busy!

God tells us not to worry and holds out his hand to our discouraged and humble hearts

*A Time to Pause*:

Let us take a moment to renew our intention to be instruments of God’s Love and Mercy in our world this Lent. Weak though our efforts may be, they are precious in the sight of God. Let us rely on God who enlightens our hearts and gives joy to our spirit. Like the apostles, let us recognize the risen Christ among us and let our hearts be filled with Joy in the wonder of the Lord’s presence within us.

During this Lent God listens deeply to our stories of human frailty, our works of human kindness and our desire to be people of humble and contrite hearts. At the same time, he encourages all his followers to be deliberate in searching for what will enhance the relationship of Love that flows between God, ourselves and our neighbour.

Let us gently renew our faith in God who can take what little we have to give and multiply it.

*Prayer of Mercy*: Response: Make me Merciful O Lord.

Help me, O Lord that I may hold others up to you in prayer... R

Help me, O Lord, that my hands may be merciful in serving another...R

Help me, O Lord, that my voice may be merciful in giving encouragement to another...R

Help me, O Lord, that my heart may be merciful in comforting the lonely....R

Help me, O Lord in forgiving those who have hurt or betrayed me...R

Help me, O Lord in asking forgiveness from ones I have hurt...R

Help me, O Lord in opening the Door of my Heart to you ...R

May this week of Lent be very life-giving, to all of us, as we continue to open the Door of our Hearts to our God who wants only to love and companion us on our journey with Him.

“*I love those who love me, And those who seek me diligently find me...” Proverbs 8:17*

My God within me, I adore You.

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***Fourth Sunday of Lent***

*Let us ponder*: “If we don’t accept Jesus in one another, We will not be able to give Him to others.”

Mother Teresa

In the world in which we all live we experience so much that is unmerciful. Often we experience situations in this world where we insulate ourselves against the pains and calamities of others.

The Mercy that Jesus teaches is not humanly derived. He says in Matt.6:14 “If you forgive people their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” As I read, reflect and pray in quiet preparing these Lenten Reflections in this Year of Mercy, I have found my understanding of Mercy becoming a much deeper reality for me. Recognizing God’s Mercy given to each of us in our lives helps us realize that we cannot receive Mercy and forgiveness from God unless we repent. And we cannot claim to have repented of our sins if we are not merciful towards the sins of others.

In this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis urges us to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This invitation is a blessed opportunity for us to come to our gentle God and share with Him our sins and failings. The human heart can become heavy and hardened over time. God, through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, gives us a new heart .Conversion is first of all a work of the Grace of God who calls our hearts to turn to Him. God gives us the strength to begin anew. The human heart is converted by looking on Him whom our sins have pierced.

Receiving and reverencing God’s mercy is key in motivating our expressions of mercy. It frees us to be sensitive to other’s needs and take action to supply them. God is our model of Mercy, and we are to reflect His mercy in our actions towards our fellowmen.

*Mercy Toward Each Other*:

The New Testament teaches us that Mercy, in our relations with one another, must become our way of life not just in this Year of Mercy but always. When we can say, with St. John of the Cross, “God is the centre of my soul” and when we choose to live from that centre and only that centre then and only then will Mercy become a Way of Life for us.

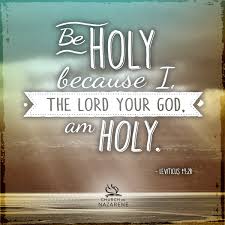
In Ephesians 4:2-3 Paul exhorts us “...lead a life worthy of your calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

St. Paul also teaches us, ‘Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.’

*Spiritual Practice*: Humbly ask God to heal any shame you have experienced in your life. Spend time alone allowing yourself to appreciate the wonder of your soul.

My God within me I adore you.

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***Fifth Sunday of Lent - A TIME TO PONDER DEEPLY***

*Scripture*: “*You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy*.” Leviticus 19:2

Speaking to his weekly general audience in St. Peter’s square just one day after launching his global Jubilee Year of Mercy, the pontiff said that “only a merciful church shines.” The Holy Father stated further that in our era of deep changes, the church is called to offer its particular contribution, making visible the signs of the presence and closeness of God.

It is true that this Jubilee Year is a special time called by the Catholic Church to receive blessing and pardon from God and remission of sins. He stated that “the necessary work of renewal of the church’s institutions and structures is a means that must bring us to make alive and enlivened the experience of God’s Mercy that alone can guarantee a church that is a city upon a hill that cannot remain hidden.”

National Catholic Register.

He called the Jubilee a “privileged moment” in which the church “may learn to choose only that which God loves most - forgiving His children, having mercy on them, in order that they may , in turn . forgive their brothers and sisters, shining as torches of God’s Mercy in the world.” He is calling the Ecclesial Church to be a lighthouse for all God’s children extending mercy, forgiveness, love and welcoming.

Remember the whole church is called to conversion and holiness. *We are the Living Church.*

It is by living our lives and offering our own Christian witness in our everyday occupations that we are called to become holy: each of us in the condition and state of life in which we find ourselves. Every state –religious, married, single leads us to sanctity, if lived in communion with the Lord and in the service of one’s neighbour.

Prayer refrain: I open the Door of my Heart to you.

* Banish my fear, O Lord. Be my light and my strength...R
* Help me, O God, to live with you in a new way...R
* Precious Saviour, you gave yourself for others. Guide me in my service to others...R
* Help me O Lord to come to you for forgiveness and mercy...R
* Renew my trust in you my God...R
* Gracious God, please turn my mourning into dancing...R
* Loving Jesus I offer you my suffering as my prayer today...R
* Help us Lord in the Catholic Women’s League to be witnesses of forgiveness and mercy...R

Every prayer of petition becomes a prayer of thanksgiving and praise as well, precisely because it is a prayer of Hope. We put our lives in the hands of God. There we are safe and loved.

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***Sixth Sunday of Lent***

*Reflection*: Since the beginning of Lent until now we have prepared our hearts by penance and charitable works. This coming Sunday (Passion/Palm Sunday) we will gather together to herald with the whole church the beginning of the celebration of Our Lord’s Paschal Ministry, that is to say, his Passion and Resurrection. With all faith and devotion, let us commemorate the Lord’s entry into the city for our salvation, following in his footsteps, so that, being made, by his grace, partakers of the Cross, we may have a share also in his Resurrection and his Life.

But before reaching this great joy of Easter, we still have to walk the painful path of betrayal, suffering and harrowing death of Jesus. “Having loved his own who were in this world, he loved them to the end.” (Taken from Sunday Missal March 20th and 24th)

Suffering naturally leads to questioning. Why do I suffer? Why do others suffer? How can suffering be overcome? Is there any meaning to suffering? These are difficult and sometimes very frustrating questions. In his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering) Pope Paul II reminds us that suffering is part of human existence from birth to death and he counsels us that Love is the richest source of the meaning of suffering which always remains a mystery. He says that reducing suffering to a single solution does not do justice to its complexities.

The suffering of Christ redeems suffering itself and opens up the possibility that the sufferer can share in the redemptive work of Christ. St. Paul teaches us in 1 Corinthians 1:18: *“For the word of the Cross is folly to* *those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* Suffering encompasses every aspect of our being, physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual.

If we open the Door to our Hearts and invite God into our suffering situations, and those of our families and communities, and unite these sufferings to those of Christ, we are actually offering them to God as our prayer. In turn, God transforms our suffering and ourselves as he unleashes love in our hearts allowing us to embrace our own afflictions and reach out to each other. He invites us to live from our souls as people of compassion, love and mercy. Now our suffering is a participation in the Mystery of Christ, who does not explain the abstract reasons for suffering, but says *“Follow Me! Come! Take part through your suffering in this work of saving the world, a salvation achieved through my suffering on the cross.”* (On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering, Feb.11, 1984, 26)

During this week of Lent let us praise and thank God for his Redemptive Suffering. Let us be present at our parish services asking God to help us grow in love and mercy towards ourselves and others. Let us take advantage of quiet moments when we can just be in silence allowing God an opportunity to touch our hearts and souls.

*Prayer*: Refrain: Sacred Heart of Jesus, we place our trust in You.

* We are yours, dear Lord, please heal our brokenness...R
* For our families, our parishes and our community members and the burdens they carry...R
* For all priests and bishops and the Holy Father who have been given the task of leading the church...R
* For those who seem to have abandoned all hope and are in need of your love and mercy...R
* For the grace to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation and begin anew...R
* For responsible governments called to rule in peace, mercy and justice...R

My God within me, I adore You.

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***Holy Thursday to Easter Sunday***

*Scripture: Holy Thursday*

While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them saying*, “Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”* (Matthew 26: 26-28)

Jesus’ gesture at the Last Supper is the ultimate thanksgiving to the Father for His love, for His mercy. “Thanksgiving” in Greek is expressed as “Eucharist”. That is why the Sacrament is called the Eucharist: it is the supreme thanksgiving to the Father, who so loved us that He gave us His Son out of love. Therefore, the Eucharistic Celebration is much more than a simple banquet: it is exactly the memorial of Jesus’ Paschal Sacrifice, the mystery at the centre of our salvation. Eucharist is the summit of God’s saving action: the Lord Jesus, by becoming broken bread for us, pours upon us all His mercy and His love so as to renew our hearts, our lives and our way of relating to Him and others. Jesus was not satisfied with just being with us, His desire was to be within us. *Lord Jesus may we recognize you in the breaking of the bread and receive Holy Eucharist with humble gratitude.*

No sooner was the Passover Meal completed and Jesus entered into His Passion and Death.

Matt: 26:14-15: “…then one of the Twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, *“What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?”* They paid him thirty pieces of silver.

Matt: 26:67 “Then they spat in his face and struck him, while some slapped him.”

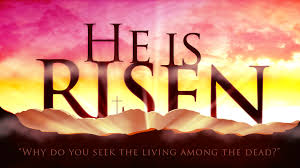
Matt: 27:26 “He had Jesus scourged, and handed him over to be crucified.”

Matt: 27:50 “And Jesus gave up His spirit.”

After such humiliation and suffering, Jesus died for us...to save us, to sanctify us. In His infinite love and mercy, He died on the Cross for us!

My God within me, I adore You.

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***Easter Sunday: HE IS RISEN***

“They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day...” (Acts 10:39)

“Your love is stronger than death. Your divine love breaks through the prison of death and destruction and becomes manifest again in your risen body. O Lord, who will ever be able to understand the heart in which your divine love became flesh! Again I look at you. You rose from the dead and now appear to me. You say to me, *“Peace be with you,”* and you show me your wounded hands and your wounded side. Yes, the wounds of your cross are visible on your risen body. I look up at you and know that the marks of your totally self-giving love have found forever a place in the glorified body with which you are ascending to your Father and mine.” (Henri J.M. Nouwen, Daily Lenten Meditations and Prayers)

My God within me, I adore you.

Patricia Moore, Spiritual Development Committee sub-chairperson

Ontario Provincial Council