



## BISHOP OF HAMILTON

November 20, 2016

*Solemnity of Christ the King*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the *Jubilee Year of Mercy* draws to a close, I am struck by what a gift it was to have experienced this period of special reflection on the inexhaustible mercy of God. In calling the Church into this Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has shown himself to be greatly attuned to a profound need of the Church and the world. How deeply the People of God long to encounter God's mercy anew! And how desperately our world needs an outpouring of God's mercy for all!

Of particular significance during this Jubilee Year were the various Holy Doors, thresholds through which the faithful were called to pass, symbolic of their desire to enter into the heart of God – the source of all mercy and compassion. The Holy Doors were a special gift of this Jubilee Year, and they give us a way to reflect on this year of God's great mercy.

As part of my duties as President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, I was in Rome on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception when Pope Francis opened the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica and inaugurated the Jubilee Year of Mercy. I was deeply moved to witness Pope Francis pass through the Holy Door, followed by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. As I passed through the Holy Door moments later with brother bishops from around the world, the intentions of our Diocese passed through with me, as I prayed that the Year of Mercy would be for all of us a special time of encounter with the tenderness and compassion of God.

In addition to St. Peter's and the other Papal Basilicas, Pope Francis called for Holy Doors at every Cathedral and other designated churches around the world. When I returned to the Diocese, I had the privilege of blessing and opening our own Holy Door in the Cathedral Basilica of Christ the King. I was astonished by the number of the faithful who joined in this celebration, standing shoulder to shoulder in McNally Hall, then passing through the Holy Door in waves until the entire church was full. It was a tremendous experience of God's mercy for all. Many busloads of Parishioners from across the Diocese made pilgrimages throughout the year to pass through the Holy Door, and many more visited the Sacred Heart Parishes designated as pilgrimage sites for the Jubilee Year. What a testament to the deep desire for mercy that exists among the People of God!

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In his letter outlining the jubilee indulgence associated with passing through a Holy Door, Pope Francis took the extraordinary step of naming the threshold of each jail cell a Holy Door of Mercy. Pause for a moment to consider what this must have signified to prisoners - those confined not only by their physical surroundings but also by the circumstances that brought them to prison. God's mercy is truly endless, available to each and every one of us, without exception, condition, or limit. As Pope Francis often expresses, God never tires of forgiving; it is we who tire of asking for God's mercy. What a beautiful testament this is to the liberating force of divine mercy!

God's merciful compassion extends also in a special way to the poor, the hungry, the homeless, the vulnerable and those on the margins. In Hamilton's downtown core, a special ministry of mercy was realized this year, when St. Patrick Parish and neighbouring St. Patrick Catholic Elementary School partnered to open the *De Mazenod Door*. This outreach effort, named for St. Eugene de Mazenod, founder of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, extends compassion and welcome to the needy through meals, conversation, and friendship – it is a door through which the corporal works of mercy flow! “*For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*” (Matthew 25:35) The *De Mazenod Door* itself was declared a Holy Door of Mercy for the balance of the Jubilee Year, and I pray that God's graces will continue to bless all of those who seek his mercy there.

I was also very impressed to see students in the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board who created their own doors of mercy – old wooden doors, taken and painted with various themes, scripture verses and other expressions of God's mercy. These doors were featured in our Year of Mercy youth rally, the school board's Bishop's Dinner, and various other events – constant reminders that God's mercy is open to all who seek it.

The Church provides us with so many rich and beautiful symbols through which the mystery of God can be encountered, but this image of the door endures. Our world is too often filled with doors that are closed. But we know by faith that no door is closed so tightly that Christ cannot open it. “*Knock, and the door will be opened for you.*” (Matthew 7:7)

At Pentecost, fear led the disciples to lock the door to the upper room. Nevertheless, Christ entered and stood among them, offering the gift of his peace – his first gift to the Church. As the apostles were sent forth to evangelize the world, let us also go out bringing God's mercy to all! Let us continually enter more fully into the mystery of Christ, *who is himself the door of the Father's mercy* - the way we all must travel to enter into the saving mystery of God.

At the close of this extraordinary year, we turn to Mary, the Mother of Mercy. Through her intercession may we be led to ever closer union with her Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Father's gift of mercy to the world.

Sincerely in Christ and Mary Immaculate,

*+Douglas*, OMI

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI  
Bishop of Hamilton