



Pastoral Letter

To Be a More Visible and Dynamic Catholic Church, a Place of Mercy

2015-2016 Pastoral Priority



The Good Samaritan (Jean Restout, 1692-1768)

His Excellency Serge Poitras
Bishop of Timmins

For several years now and after reflection on the needs of the Diocese, the Diocesan Pastoral Council has proposed to the Bishop a priority, a theme, to guide and unify pastoral activities for the months to come. In 2013-2014 we sought to put ourselves “*On the Way with Jesus*”, by taking our inspiration from his encounter with the disciples of Emmaus. Last year (2014-2015), with the theme “*To Become a More Visible and Dynamic Catholic Church*”, we looked at the Church that Jesus founded as his visible Body in the world. Every baptized person is called to take his or her faith seriously, to transform him or herself, as Mother Teresa suggested. We have become more aware of the work that the faithful have done in the name of their faith that has changed the world.

In this context, last October, I began the pastoral visit of the Diocese. This was an excellent opportunity to appreciate how our Church is always visible and dynamic in our milieu. We discovered that many people are involved in the service of the faith ... faith proclaimed, faith celebrated, faith lived. They take care of the youth, the poor, the sick, the elderly. For their part, young people from our Catholic schools are also involved. Here I think about the volunteer work that many of them do within the framework of their general formation or during their preparation for Confirmation; they are aware of the problems or difficulties people experience both here and elsewhere; they have learned to give of themselves, for example, the aid project in Jamaica undertaken by secondary students.

This year (2015-2016), the Diocesan Pastoral Council wants to expand last year’s momentum. They want to do this by taking into account two significant events: the first is the Holy Year of Mercy promulgated by the Pope that will begin in December; the second is the celebration of the centenary of our diocese that will begin January 7, 2016. The pastoral priority has therefore been formulated as follows: “**To Be a More Visible and Dynamic Catholic Church, a Place of Mercy.**”

Through the present Letter, I hope to offer a few elements of reflection for its implementation.

I- Mercy

The word ‘mercy’ (*miseriordia* in Latin) can be understood from two Latin words: ‘*miseria*’ (misfortune, adversity) and ‘*cor*’ (heart). It can be defined as a ‘*heart that cares about the misery, the difficulties of others*’, a ‘*heart that is sensitive to the misfortunes*’ of others.

To proclaim the Holy Year of Mercy, our Holy Father Pope Francis, on April 11, 2015, published the bull *Vultus Misericordiae* (The Face of Mercy) where we find an invaluable teaching. I will be referring to it. The Pope himself also refers to Pope John Paul II’s encyclical, *Dives in misericordia* (November 30, 1980).

- 1- Our God made himself known to be merciful. This is how he presented himself at his first encounter with Moses. (Ex. 3: 7- 10) :

Then the LORD said, “I have observed the poverty of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their

sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

Our God is not a far away being, seated on a throne, isolated in an egotistical happiness. On the contrary, he *sees* misery, he *hears* the cries, he *understands* the suffering, he *comes down* to save. He truly is Love. (I Jn 4: 8) Deeply attached to his people, he is interested in their concrete situation. He sees their misery and does everything possible to free them from it. Moses becomes his instrument for this purpose.

The prophet Hosea describes this love: *“My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”*(11: 8-9). Like parents who are moved to the core by the suffering of their children, God allows himself to be touched by the miseries of his people and he wants them to live!

- 2- The mercy of God is expressed in the forgiveness of sins. The Lord forgave when the people adored a golden calf instead of the true God. He described himself to Moses this way: *“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation”* (Ex 34: 6-7). God acts as parents do: the latter disapprove of their children’s bad conduct that has negative consequences for themselves and for others, but they still love them and hope that they will do better. God rejects the sin that destroys humanity but still loves his children. Indeed, he distinguishes the action from the person, the action that he detests and the person whom he loves.
- 3- God invites humanity to enter into his attitude of mercy. For example, through the prophet Amos, he denounced materialistic egoism, the indifference of the rich: *“Alas for those who lie on beds of ivory, and lounge on their couches, and eat lambs from the flock, and calves from the stall; who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and like David improvise on instruments of music; who drink wine from bowls, and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph!”* (Amos 6: 4-6). Reproach still current: we can still live in a closed world, in our comfort zone, centred on our own pleasure and unconcerned about the misery of others. This danger lies in wait for individuals, just like groups and even countries!
- 4- God also denounced pastors insensitive to the misfortunes of their sheep. *“You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and*

harshness you have ruled them. So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd; and scattered, they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep were scattered, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill; my sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with no one to search or seek for them.” (Ex 34: 4-6).

- 5- The Lord shows the true path that must be taken in order to be like him. *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say: Here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” (Is 58: 6-11).*

6- **Spiritual Applications:**

- a. Allow oneself to become filled with the merciful face of our God. Re-read and meditate on the excerpts from the Word of God cited in the preceding paragraphs.
- b. Pray Psalm 103: a song to merciful God!

*Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.
Bless the LORD, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—
who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
who satisfies you with good as long as you live
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
The LORD works vindication and justice for all who are oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel.
The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger forever.
He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
as far as the east is from the west, so far he removes our transgressions from us.
As a father has compassion for his children,
so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him.
For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.
As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field;*

*for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more.
 But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting
 on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children,
 to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments.
 The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.
 Bless the LORD, O you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding,
 obedient to his spoken word.
 Bless the LORD, all his hosts, his ministers that do his will.
 Bless the LORD, all his works, in all places of his dominion.
 Bless the LORD, O my soul.*

- c. Pray Psalm 51: *“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.”*
- d. Thank the Lord for his mercy toward you.
- e. Read and meditate on the bull *Vultus Misericordiae* of Pope Francis.
- f. Read and meditate on Saint John Paul II’s encyclical *Dives in misericordia*.
- g. We might think about whether we have entered into God’s attitude of mercy. Are we closed into our own comfort zone? Are we sensitive to the misery of others?

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



«The heart needs spiritual nourishment to live and grow. And in this journey, there is also need of a guiding light making it discover obstacles in the way. »

II- Jesus, face of the mercy of God

In the bull *Vultus Misericordiae* (VM), Pope Francis presents **Jesus as the face of the mercy of God**. “*Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. ... Through his words, his gestures and his whole person, Jesus of Nazareth, reveals the mercy of God.*” (VM 1). That is not surprising since the name of Jesus means: “*Yahweh saves*”. Let us take time to contemplate his face.

- 7- Jesus came “*to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind” (Lk 4: 18). Examples of his mercy abound in the Gospel: “*Jesus had just then cured many people of diseases, plagues, and evil spirits, and had given sight to many who were blind.*”(Lk 7: 21); the chapter 15 of Saint Luke reveals a God full of mercy, who leaves to find the lost sheep, the lost drachma, who welcomes the prodigal son. Therefore we can go to Jesus, presenting him with our burdens: “*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.*” (Mt 11: 28).*
- 8- The Pope examines the attitudes and actions of Jesus: “*Jesus, seeing the crowds of people who followed him, realized that they were tired and exhausted, lost and without a guide, and he felt deep compassion for them (cf. Mt 9:36). On the basis of this compassionate love he healed the sick who were presented to him (cf. Mt 14:14), and with just a few loaves of bread and fish he satisfied the enormous crowd (cf. Mt 15:37). What moved Jesus in all of these situations was nothing other than mercy, with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest need. When he came upon the widow of Nain taking her son out for burial, he felt great compassion for the immense suffering of this grieving mother, and he gave back her son by raising him from the dead (cf. Lk 7:15). After freeing the demoniac in the country of the Gerasenes, Jesus entrusted him with this mission: “Go home to your friends, and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (Mk 5:19).*

The calling of Matthew is also presented within the context of mercy. Passing by the tax collector’s booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose – against the hesitation of the disciples – to become one of the Twelve. Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: miserando atque eligendo. This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my Episcopal motto.” (VM 8)

- 9- Through forgiveness, Jesus frees us from the greatest misery, that of sin (Mt 9: 1-7). He shows that he has this power by healing the paralytic. Today in his name, the Church, through the ministry of priests, exercises this ministry of forgiveness, of mercy.

- 10- Jesus invites us “*to be merciful, just as your Father is merciful*” (Lk 6: 36), all the more so will we be judged on our acts of mercy (Mt 25: 31-46). “*Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy*” (Mt 5: 7). Saint John extends this invitation: “*If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?*” (I Jn 3: 17). The Pope summarizes this in this way: the mercy of God is ‘*the beating heart of the Gospel*’ (VM 12).
- 11- To go deeper into the message of Jesus, I invite you to meditate on an enlightening Gospel passage: **the parable of the Good Samaritan** (Saint Luke 10: 25-37). To begin with, I recall the context in which it was pronounced.

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’

Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

- 12- The context that precedes the parable is very revealing. In fact the lawyer poses an essential question: “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” That is the most serious question: is there eternal life or does our existence end with death? If God exists and he offers to share his life and eternal happiness with us, our present life has even greater value. In fact, faith in eternal life does not disconnect us from our present life but shows us its full value. What we experience on this earth has repercussions on eternity. Our present life is in fact a preparation for eternal life. In order to understand this, the most telling image is that of a pregnant woman; she carries within her a child that one day will be born into an autonomous existence; the woman well knows that for her child to be in good health, she must be attentive to her own nourishment and to the activities she does so that the child is not negatively affected; thus her present choices have repercussions on the future life of her child. It is the same for each of us. Who we

presently are, is preparation for who we will eternally be. We generate ourselves for eternal life.

- 13- Therefore the lawyer's question is not about secondary things but on what is essential. What is fundamental in order to obtain eternal life? Jesus invites him to look at what God has already revealed in the Law, in what we now call the Old Testament. The lawyer finds: "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.*" Therefore, what is essential consists of a single act (to love) that in fact corresponds to the very nature of God. (*God is Love* : I Jn 4:8) We must first of all love God then love our neighbour as ourselves. This last aspect corresponds to the Golden Rule that we know well: "*Do to no one what you yourself hate*" (Tobias 4: 15), or "*Do to others whatever you would have them do to you*" (Mt 7: 12). Do not do the wrong that you would not like to endure; do the good that you would like to receive from others. If we thought about this rule more, the world would be in a better place. Furthermore, Jesus will open this rule to greater fullness. For his disciples, it is not only about loving others as ourselves but loving them as he has loved us: "*Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another*" (Jn 13: 34), in a free and complete gift!
- 14- Jesus confirms the correctness of the lawyer's answer: "*You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.*" To describe who is our neighbour, Jesus offers us a pearl, an extraordinary text, the parable of the Good Samaritan. At the beginning, we see an injured man. Bandits have stripped him, beaten him, abandoned him, leaving him half dead along the road. Two people pass by ... a priest and a Levite (servant for liturgical worship). They see him but look away and do nothing to help him. In our times they would be accused of "failing to provide assistance to a person in danger". Obviously they have done nothing wrong since they did not steal from or injure the traveller; but they did not do for him the good that they could have done. We call this a sin of omission ... to not do the good that we are able to do. Why did this priest and this Levite do nothing? They obviously had a misconception of God. They think to honour him is to give him liturgical worship and they ignore his call for charity. In order to honour God, we must also love those whom he loves. "*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. These you should have done, without neglecting the others*". (Mt 23: 23)
- 15- For the Jews, a Samaritan was a foreigner, an enemy, someone from whom nothing is expected. Saint Luke uses a beautiful adjective to describe him: "moved with pity". Strictly speaking, the Samaritan is 'moved to the core'. This is the reaction, the feeling that people have when misfortune touches members of their families or their friends. They suffer in their own stomach!
- 16- This Samaritan allows his plans to be disturbed: he stops his trip; he picks up the injured man, takes care of him (wine and oil), leaves him with the innkeeper, invests some money and assures that he will pay any additional expenses on his next trip. He is a remarkable model of generosity.

- 17- The first Christians recognized the face and mission of Jesus in this figure of the Good Samaritan. A first indication is found in the adjective used to describe his feeling; ‘*seized with compassion*’. The same word is used only to describe Jesus, ‘*moved with pity*’ (Mt 9: 36; 14: 14; 15: 32; 20: 34; Mk 6: 34; 8: 2; 9: 22; Lk 7: 13; 15: 20). In addition, we can easily interpret this parable as a summary of the history of Salvation ... driven by love, Jesus takes wounded humanity on his shoulders and offers medications that are the sacraments (oil and wine). He entrusts humanity to the Church ... the inn that welcomes and takes care of all ills. At the end of time, Jesus will return to reward all those who have done good to others.
- 18- With this parable Jesus also offers a unique teaching. The neighbour is not a category of people divided in circles that gradually spread out (family members, friends, fellow countrymen, members of the same religion ...) The neighbour is each one of us, when we come face to face with the misery of another person. We are invited to look at that person’s suffering, to be aware of it, to have compassion, to get involved, to give of ourselves. In this same sense, the Book of Proverbs says: « *Do not withhold any goods from the owner when it is in your power to act. Say not to your neighbour ‘Go, come back tomorrow, and I will give it to you’, when all the while you have it* » (3: 27-29). « *Do not let your hand be open to receive, but clenched when it is time to give* » (Si 4: 31).
- 19- Jesus also recalls the dual commandment that we cannot separate one from the other. I cannot love God who is invisible without loving neighbour who is visible (I Jn 4: 20-21). I cannot authentically love neighbour without loving God. The Lord is the model who inspires me. He is also the source that enables me to leave my egotism and go beyond my limits.
- 20- *Spiritual Applications* :
- a. Meditate on the figure of Jesus, face of the Father’s mercy.
 - b. Express my love for his Sacred Heart: “*O Sacred Heart! O Love Divine! Do keep us near to thee. And make our love so like to Thine, that we may holy be. Heart of Jesus hear! O heart of Love Divine! Listen to our prayer. Make us always Thine.*” (traditional hymn)
 - c. Recognize in Jesus ‘my’ saviour, the one who came to meet me in ‘my’ own misery. What has he saved me from in the story of my life (sin, illness, difficulties ...)?
 - d. Name and pray for people who have shown mercy to me:
 - My parents.
 - My spouse.
 - My children.
 - Colleagues at work.
 - People who have helped me during difficult times.



Help me, Lord, to see the difficulties of others and open my eyes to their needs!

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



“If you light a lamp for someone else it will also brighten your path.”

Help people help themselves.
Enrich your own life and enrich the lives of others.

III- The faces of misery

Jesus identifies with people in need: “*I was hungry and you gave me food*” (Mt 25: 35). In our desire to be a **more visible and dynamic Catholic Church, a place of mercy**, we are invited to identify the different forms of misery that exist in our milieu, in our families, on our streets, in our parishes, our country, the world. The Pope tells us that “*Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life.*” (VM 10)

I begin with a misery that doesn’t spontaneously come to mind but which is nevertheless fundamental ... the absence of God.

21- One of the greatest forms of misery today is religious indifference, rejection of God, lack of love toward him.

- a. The lawyer raised the question of eternal life and of the path to arrive there. This question is asked of us again today, even if in our superficial and troubled world we risk no longer hearing it.
- b. Many people today are interested in genealogy in order to learn about their origins. We can do the same thing in order to understand the meaning of human existence. We are not the fruit of chance ... we have been created by Someone who loves us and who wants to share his life with us forever. The meaning of life, our origin, our destiny, our true happiness is found in God. “*The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for.*” (Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 27)
- c. If we forget God, we deprive our life of its meaning. In Jeremiah, the Lord recalls this: “*They have forsaken me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*” (Jer 2: 13) Jesus takes up the same teaching again: “*Yet you do not want to come to me to have life.*” (Jn 5: 40)
- d. To understand this drama, I make use of an image. Someone finds an eagle’s egg, brings it to his henhouse and gets a hen to sit on it. When the little eaglet develops, its great wings disturb its neighbours. The owner cuts the wings and the eaglet no longer bothers anyone. No longer being able to fly, he is miserable because he is made for flying and can no longer do it. So it goes for the human being who is made for God and union with him. When the human person is deprived of God, his wings are cut. He is prevented from reflecting on what is essential, he is overwhelmed by a tireless search for diversions, in “*broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*”
- e. The parable of the Good Samaritan can be interpreted in the same sense: “*A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead*”. These bandits can represent the Enemy of humanity, the one who, from the beginning, has done

everything to distance humanity from God, to strip humanity from its connection with him. It limits humanity to the horizons of this material world.

- f. In the parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus again speaks about a thief that he describes this way: *“A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”* (Jn 10: 10) Many years ago I read an enlightening text by the Venerable Pope Pius XII who brought to mind this same thief: *“The enemy discourages the young by extinguishing the flame of the highest ideals; he deprives children of innocence, reducing them to little fanatics revolting against God and man ... When you will see the poor deprived of their greatest hopes and some of the rich locked into stubborn egoism; when you will be saddened by homes where the spouses moan with cold because the fire of love has been extinguished, you will say: There, the thief has come; there the enemy has come to steal, to cut throats, to kill and to bring unrest and death.”* (Allocution, March 27, 1953).

22- Spiritual Applications:

In fidelity to the Gospel, we are understandably sensitive to love for neighbour but that should not make us forget love for God.

At the heart of his many activities, Jesus found time to meet his Father in prayer. He also wanted the Temple to remain a *‘house of prayer’*. (Mt 21: 13) He explicitly confirmed the commandment: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind.”* (Lk 10: 27-28)

- To be Catholic is not only to love others. It is also to love God. Parents, godparents, Catholic educators, priests have the responsibility to help the young to establish, to re-establish, to deepen their connection with the Lord. They should teach them how to love God. *“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* (Mt 10: 37) *“Whoever loves me will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him.”* (Jn 14: 23)
- Each of us might wonder: How do I show my love for God? How much time do I allow for personal prayer, for reading his Word, for reflection? To deepen this aspect we can read the magnificent *Treatise on the Love of God* by St. Francis de Sales.
- Love for God is shown in daily language through respect for his Name and sacred things.
- Love of God is also expressed through respect for Sunday, the day devoted to him through religious practice, reception of the sacraments, especially Eucharist and Penance. Participating at Sunday Mass is also a way to make the Catholic Church more visible and dynamic.

- Love of God is also shown through maintenance of the parish church. Many people are generously committed to assuring its upkeep so that it is a place worthy of the Lord who lives there in a very special way in the tabernacle. The faithful appreciate their church for its beauty, its cleanliness, because it inspires prayer.
- We have the freedom necessary in order to express our faith. In fact we live in a country that guarantees religious freedom. In its preamble, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms recognizes the “*supremacy of God*” and in article 2, “*freedom of conscience and religion*”. The Declaration of the Rights of Man adopted by the United Nations in 1948 stipulates: “*Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.*” (n. 18) Let us keep our political leaders in our prayers so that we can continue to publically express our faith in God.
- Many of our brothers and sisters do not have this freedom to express their faith because they live under regimes of persecution. The Christian faith remains the most persecuted in the world. Let us pray for our brothers and sisters who suffer because of their faith, some even at the cost of their lives. Let us also think about the Egyptians who were decapitated by the Islamic State. Let us support people and groups who work for respect of religious freedom here and worldwide.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Freedom in expressing your faith!

In addition to this fundamental misery that constitutes indifference to and rejection of God, as well as the lack of love toward him, there are other kinds of misery that we encounter every day and that we can help to relieve. The Church and each one of her members should be a place, an instrument of mercy.

The misery of sin can be relieved through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. One proverb says: “*For every sin, mercy.*” God welcomes each one of his children, no matter what they have done. He re-establishes them in his friendship, in their dignity. I dealt with this subject in my Lenten 2015 Pastoral Letter (“*Repent, and believe in the Gospel*”).

The Catechism lists the corporal and spiritual works of mercy (n. 2447) that the Pope himself also mentions in *Vultus Misericordiae* (VM 15).

23- **The corporal works of mercy** : They are inspired by the text on the Last Judgment (Mt 25: 31-46).

a. Feed the hungry

In our time many people still suffer from hunger, even in our generally affluent cities. Some families, the elderly or single persons do not have the resources to nourish themselves adequately. Many volunteers are committed to relieving hunger: some give food or money, others collect the food or distribute it according to need. Our youth discover this poverty close to them that they often did not know about. There are generous people in all parishes. Different organizations work in this area: I’m thinking about the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, local services like the Lord’s Kitchen in Timmins, the food banks.

On the world scale, other organizations procure quality food, potable water and basic hygienic conditions. Rich countries share their resources with developing countries, in situations of war or natural disaster (floods, earthquakes ...) when their infrastructures are destroyed. As soon as the devastation is known, many of the faithful support campaigns for this purpose.

b. Shelter the homeless



Some people live in dilapidated housing. Itinerants live on the street, destitute in the cold. The faithful help these people to put a roof over their head. Others make repairs to apartments, others work in hostels and offer health services, human contact, re-education, where necessary.

c. Clothe the poor

Some people do not have enough clothing. Generous people donate what they no longer use. Volunteer centres collect clothing, clean them, offer them at a modest price or at no cost in order to respond to the needs of people in respect for their dignity. This incredible work is supported by the collaboration of many people and financial grants.

d. Visit the sick and imprisoned

Illness is a difficult time that brings questions and creates anxiety. The sick have a great need to be listened to in their suffering, their worry. Their family members, their friends give them time and keep them in their prayers. Many of the faithful regularly visit the sick, especially when they no longer have a family. Hospital staff provides care with competence and dedication. They see the whole person who is ill, not only their illness or a file number.



Illness can be physical or mental and both require accompaniment. Some people who are sick go through periods of depression or even become suicidal which requires special care. Seriously ill patients in palliative care or in the terminal phase of their illness need even more human and spiritual support.

Volunteers, in connection with pastors, assure spiritual care ... a time for prayer, Holy Communion, They are also offered the Sacrament of Reconciliation or the Sacrament of the Sick.



Others help handicapped people. They visit them, bring them food, accompany them on outings. Some care for the elderly in the loss of their independence, providing them with the most humble and necessary services.

Prisoners also need support. They have committed crimes more or less serious. They are helped to again find meaning for their lives, their human dignity. Many rediscover the Lord.

There are still other forms of prison: addictions to alcohol or drugs. Many volunteers work to accompany people in their efforts toward re-education, social re-insertion. Police, ambulance attendants, therapists are often faced with restricted situations ...

Nor can we forget the forms of slavery that persist in today's world; prostitution, economic exploitation, abuse. The faithful intervene in these difficult situations.

e. Welcome pilgrims, travellers, migrants.

Today's society is highly mobile with the ease of various means of transportation. Tourism is an excellent opportunity to discover other people, other cultures, other riches. A reciprocal spirit of openness is required. In some places, committees have been established to welcome new residents into the city or parish.

People have to leave their country for political, economic and religious reasons. Mechanisms are put in place to welcome them.

f. Bury the dead.

We are regularly confronted by death, the death of those close to us or death caused by natural or human catastrophes.

The human person is more than an animal. The human being must be surrounded with respect, even in death. Many people devote themselves to this area. Parish teams accompany the bereaved, visit funeral homes and offer appropriate liturgical celebrations that lead to Christian hope.

Others work for a dignified burial, adequately maintaining the cemetery that remains a sacred place, a memorial to our dear ones who have passed on, a space open to God with the reminder of the Cross. Many express their attachment to their deceased family members through mass offerings for their intention.

24- The Spiritual Works of Mercy

a. Instruct : The great responsibility for the formation of intelligence and personality belongs in the first place to parents. They work at this with devotion, perseverance, patience, hope.

Many people collaborate in education to help children discover the world they live in, to find the profession that will enable them to live and be useful. There is also concern for young dropouts or adults who want to acquire specific formation. We know that it is easier to give someone a fish than to teach them to fish. Nonetheless, the latter aspect is the most respectful option for human dignity.

Instruction also leads to faith ... openness to the mystery of God, of the universe, of vocation. True educators accompany young people in their deep questioning and propose the perspective of faith to them.

b. Console, comfort

A day does not go by when we don't meet someone who is experiencing difficult times. After Jesus approached the disciples of Emmaus and listened to them (Lk 24: 15), many of the faithful gave of their time to listen to others and to open up paths of hope to them. They kept them in their prayers so that the *God of all comfort* would touch them. (2 Cor 1: 3).



c. Forgive trespasses

Human life is sprinkled with difficult situations: misunderstandings, hatreds, exploitation, violence. The spontaneous reaction might be to turn to vengeance, the law of an eye for an eye.

Many people discover the strength of forgiveness in the face of all kinds of injuries (physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual). The *Our Father* reminds us of the necessity for it. Many people help in reconciliation for couples, families, neighbourhoods, nations. In this sense, I highlight recent steps in the process of reconciliation with our First Nation brothers and sisters.

d. Correct sinners

The Lord invites us not to judge, not to condemn (MV 14). This means that while seeing the wrongdoing, we do not lock the person into a negative image. We leave a door open for progress, change and improvement. This is what parents do. They see the wrong that their child has done and they continue to love him or her and differentiate between their child and the child's action. This is how the faithful act. They see the wrongdoing, but they do not reject or condemn the person. On the contrary, they open up to the person a path of freedom, of fulfillment.

It is quite an art to maintain the requirements of what is good and to accompany a person on his journey, even if he is weak. This is about proposing the Gospel and its path of perfection. As with young people, the school does not decrease the academic requirements so that everyone passes; on the contrary, the school accompanies young people in their efforts toward competence.

e. Support with patience

We live with human beings who by definition are limited. Everyone has their limitations, their faults. Every person has to work at correcting them without being discouraged.

We also learn to accept the limitations of others ... among spouses, in families, among brothers and sisters, among colleagues at work.

Sometimes support means 'enduring, waiting patiently' but also 'giving support'.

f. Pray for the living and the dead

The faithful pray for one another. They thank the Lord for the people placed on their path, for those who treat them well. They intercede for those who hurt them. We know that the Lord has an effect on hearts.

We also pray for those who have died, that their purification come to an end and that they appear before God in eternal happiness.

These corporal and spiritual works of mercy are within the reach of every member of the Church. The young, like the old, priests like the laity, parents just as their children, the sick like people in good health, can all be attentive to others and be instruments of mercy in their daily lives.

Among the situations that experience great difficulties today, I highlight the family. This subject is of great concern to the Church, to such a point that the Pope convened a Synod on it. The first phase of reflection took place last Fall. In October 2015 there will be a second step to look at the lives of couples today, the separations, the divorces, reconstituted couples, blended families. Let us keep the Fathers of the Synod in our prayers so that the Holy Spirit accompanies them in their reflection, that the light of the Gospel illuminates and inspires pastoral approaches. Let us pray for families, that in their hurts they feel the presence of the Lord. Let us give thanks for the life that our families assure and for the vital service that they provide to society.

Other situations of misery concern our faithful: respect for life from conception to its natural end, work, violence, peace in the world. Many of the faithful are committed to helping in these areas.

25- *Spiritual Applications:*

- a. Works of mercy are present in our daily lives as they have been in the lives of our predecessors, our ancestors. When we celebrate the centenary of our diocese it will be good to look at our history and be reminded of the families and people who made the mercy of the Lord visible by responding to the multitude of needs that arose. In this line, we can thank the men and women religious who in relation to their total consecration to the service of God and his kingdom, decisively contributed to the domain of education, of health, of help for the poor. Many charitable organizations are still acting in the same sense.
- b. It would be interesting if each church or family home or school made a **mural of mercy**. Images of people could be displayed on it who, in the name of their faith, expressed or are expressing the mercy of the Lord in one way or another such as I mentioned previously. A mural with two aspects, the one historical, the other, present day.
- c. We could do an inventory of current resources around us to fill these different corporal and spiritual needs. We could thank volunteers who invest time and energy in regard to these needs.

- d. Each of the faithful can commit to becoming a “*place, an instrument of mercy*”, by getting involved more fully in relieving such and such a misery, through prayer, through time, through monetary support, through encouragement of volunteers.
- e. Young people at school learn the joy of giving and of service. They could give witness in the parish of their charitable commitment.
- f. Volunteers could also give witness at school of their charitable commitment.
- g. In our attention to the miseries, to those living on the outermost fringes of society (*situations of instability, suffering, injury*) (VM 15), let us keep our hearts open on the world. The Catechism invites us to look at poor nations that we can help with direct aid and also through the reform of institutions, through the full development of human society. (*Catechism* n. 2438-2442).
- h. Let us ask the help of the *Blessed Virgin, Mother of Mercy*, as she is proclaimed by the beautiful hymn, *Salve Regina*.
- i. Let us again say the prayer that the Holy Father proposes for the Year of Mercy.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



At the end of this Letter, let us be challenged by the face of our God who is Love and Mercy, as he so well demonstrated in the history of salvation and through sending his beloved Son. In his wake, many faithful, of every age, from every social condition, from every era, have allowed themselves to be transformed and become his instruments. I still meet them every day and I thank them for showing the face of a *more visible and dynamic Catholic Church, a place of mercy*.

With my blessing.

✠ Serge Poitras
Bishop of Timmins

September 15, 2015, Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows



Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee of Mercy

*Lord Jesus Christ,
you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father,
and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”*

*You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy:
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error:
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved, and forgiven by God.*

*Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing,
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed,
and restore sight to the blind.*

*We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy,
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.
Amen.*