

"From the heart
of the Trinity, from the
depths of the mystery
of God, the great river
of mercy wells up and
overflows unceasingly.
It is a spring that will never
run dry, no matter how
many people draw from
it. Every time someone
is in need, he or she can
approach it, because the
mercy of God never ends."
Pope Francis (MV, 25)

From the Director

During 2014 and 2015 leaders, teachers and staff in Catholic schools of Broken Bay Diocese embarked on an exploration of Pope Francis' vision for the Church as set out in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 'Joy of the Gospel'.

This journey of formation, which goes by the title *God's Mission: Joy of the Gospel*, has offered a 'renewing lens' to existing plans and activities in schools.

2016 is the final year of this three-year process, thematically continuous with *Evangelii Gaudium* and accented by the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

This year is an opportunity to invite the whole school community – staff, students and their families – into this vision of gospel joy and mercy, in concert with the efforts of parishes and the wider diocesan community.

I commend this booklet to you as a resource for the journey.

Mr Peter Hamill

Director of Schools

Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Broken Bay





God's mercy can make even the driest land become a garden, can restore life to dry bones."

Pope Francis (Easter message, 2013)

Joy moments along the path

2013

Pope Francis releases *Evangelii Gaudium*. At Broken Bay CSO a seed is sown, an idea takes shape, an initiative is born: *God's Mission: Joy of the Gospel*—a three year formation process for schools.

2014

CSO staff and school leaders lay the groundwork. Pope Francis' *Joy of the Gospel* begins to be known and read, with the aid of web resources and staff development sessions, including a January Leadership Forum, REC/AP days, CSO Spirituality Day, staff meetings. Pope Francis' emphasis on missionary discipleship resonates naturally with previous Diocesan focii on 'discipleship' and 'mission,' and with Bishop Peter's present focus on 'evangelisation.'

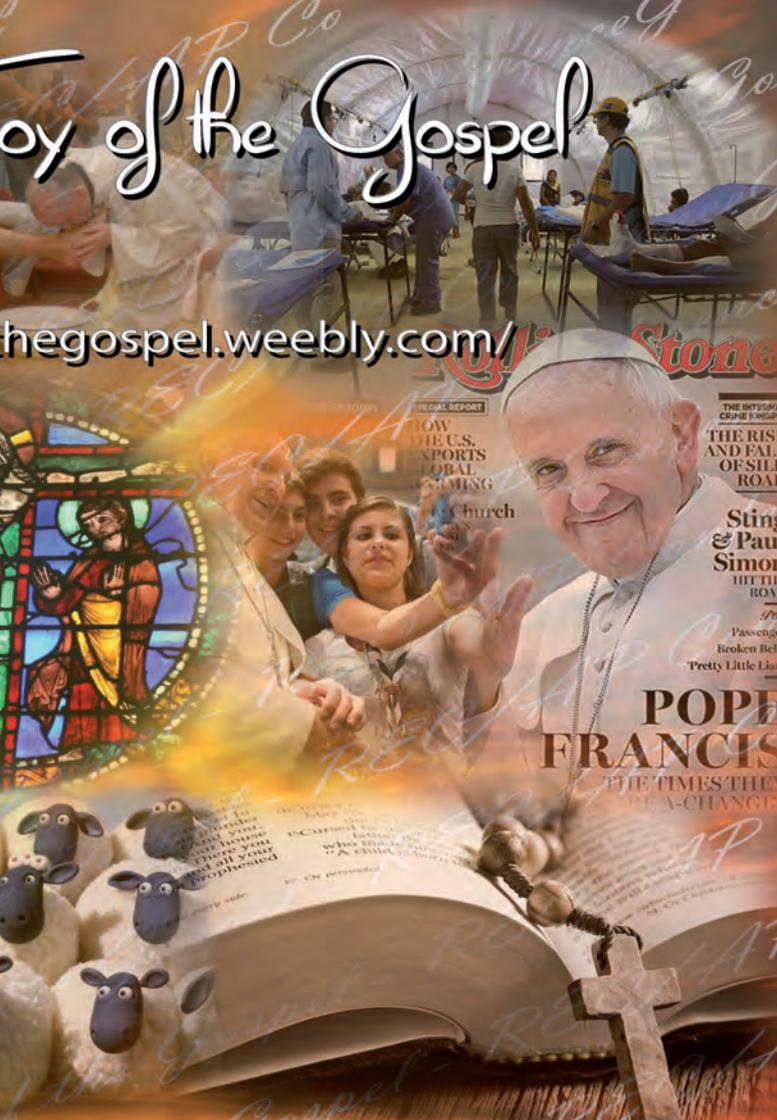
2015

Input continues for school leaders who now share the vision of *Joy of the Gospel* with their teachers through staff development days, newsletters, prayer and contemplation, discussion, *Joy Notes*, videos, guest speakers. Parents and students are also receiving a taste of *Joy of the Gospel*. In 2015, with the help of a life-sized image and a creative blog, Pope Francis goes on tour through Broken Bay schools! dbbjoytour.blogspot.com.au



Joy of the Gospel

thegospel.weebly.com/



2016

Share the Joy as a whole school community

So what's ahead?

Within this booklet lies a mini-feast of suggestions for praying, discussing and enacting mercy and joy:

- Beautiful images and quotes for personal reflection.
- Exercises for pondering sacred Scripture.
- Tools to discern God's grace at work in daily life.
- Brief pieces to stimulate group discussion.
- Activities for highlighting mercy as central to the Christian life.

Read it at home. Use it in the classroom. Break it open at staff meetings. Include it in parent reflections. Offer it to parish groups. Incorporate it into sacramental preparation and World Youth Day plans.

In these deceptively brief pages, there is 'something for everyone' in the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

BRIEF & POWERFUL

*Blessed are you,
Lord our God,
who brings us to this
place in our lives,
to this moment in time,
in which to love you
and serve you.*

What are my hopes and dreams for this new year?
What gifts and blessings do I bring to the adventure?



Where do I find that prayer?

A quick-reference guide for busy people

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Gaze upon the face of Christ

Pause. Come apart. Be still.

Clear your head-space. Quieten your mind, your body.

Look upon the Jubilee logo. (*View it at www.im.va*)

Spend time gazing, reflecting upon this beautiful and intriguing artwork. Ask yourself:

What might I be seeing?

..... Deepen your gaze.

What might I be hearing?

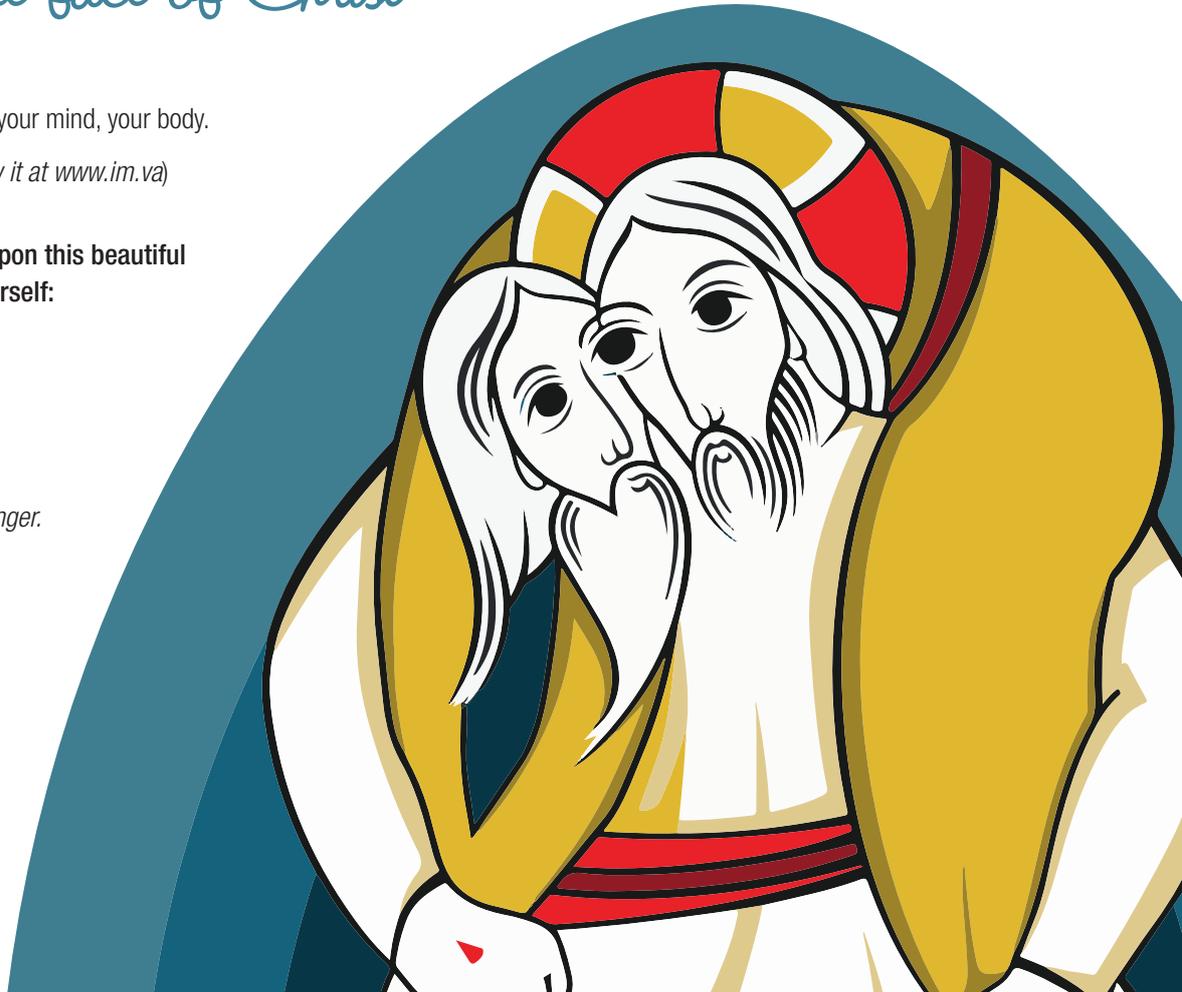
..... Keep gazing, deeper, longer.

What am I feeling?

What does Jesus say to me in this moment of contemplation?

How do I reply?

..... Is there something that Jesus is asking me to do?



Merciful shepherd

The official Jubilee logo is the work of Fr Marko Rupnik, SJ.

“The logo has been designed in such a way so as to express the profound way in which the Good Shepherd touches the flesh of humanity and does so with a love with the power to change one’s life.”

“It represents an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon his shoulders the lost soul.”

The logo draws us to contemplate the Incarnation, the unity of Christ’s human and divine natures.

In particular, look at the eyes. What do you notice?

“Christ sees with the eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ. Every person discovers in Christ, the new Adam, one’s own humanity and the future that lies ahead, contemplating, in his gaze, the love of the Father.”

Source: www.im.va



“Evangelisers thus take on the ‘smell of the sheep.’” (EG, 24)

MERCY: *What is it?*

Mercy is the Divine response to the cry of distress.

God, forever faithful and compassionate, is moved by the predicament of his people and seeks to save them, to draw them out of isolation, to relieve their pain and restore them to wholeness.

Scripture abounds with the cries of people in distress: those in grave danger, perhaps afflicted by physical or mental illness, trapped in poverty, grieving the loss of loved ones, abandoned, lost, far from home, fearful, sinful, uncertain of the future.

Time and again in the Old Testament, in both masculine and feminine imagery, we see the face of a tender God turned towards those who are in need of comfort, rescue, healing.

God who is merciful uplifts on eagles' wings, cherishes, nurtures, teaches, protects and does battle on behalf of the children of Israel. God signals personal, active presence through messengers, angels, cloud, fire. God raises up leaders and responds to hunger and thirst with lifegiving rains, water from rock, manna and miracles.

In the person of Jesus, God enters history and into the human predicament in an extraordinary way.

Time and again in the Gospels we see Jesus, the incarnation of Divine Mercy, encounter human struggle, searching, suffering. He sees, hears, notices the cry of the individual in the crowd. He is moved with compassion, at times with great sighs and tears.

His aching heart moves him to act. Filled with the power of the Spirit he responds with healing words and deeds. He encourages, challenges, praises, forgives. He spends himself in service, in teaching, and is unafraid of robust engagement with the 'other'.

In a culminating act of Spirit-led fidelity Jesus surrenders his own life into the hands of the Father whose love is stronger than death.

Thus is Scripture a love story; the story of a faithful, compassionate, merciful God who gathers a people to himself in order to bless and heal all humanity.

We in turn, then, ought to show mercy to our neighbour in imitation of our Creator and Redeemer.

For Christians, mercy has a name, a face, a voice: Jesus Christ.

**FOR REFLECTION: What is my response to this page?
Where does it take me in my understanding of mercy?
What insight can I share?**

Mercy has a name, a face, a voice: Jesus Christ



Students from Broken Bay schools share their skills with a Cambodian village, building houses for local families.

Our merciful God

In the Old Testament

“I led them with cords of human kindness ... I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” (Hos 11:4)

“The Lord your God is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness.” (Zep 3:17)

“But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me.” (Ps 86:15-16)

In the New Testament

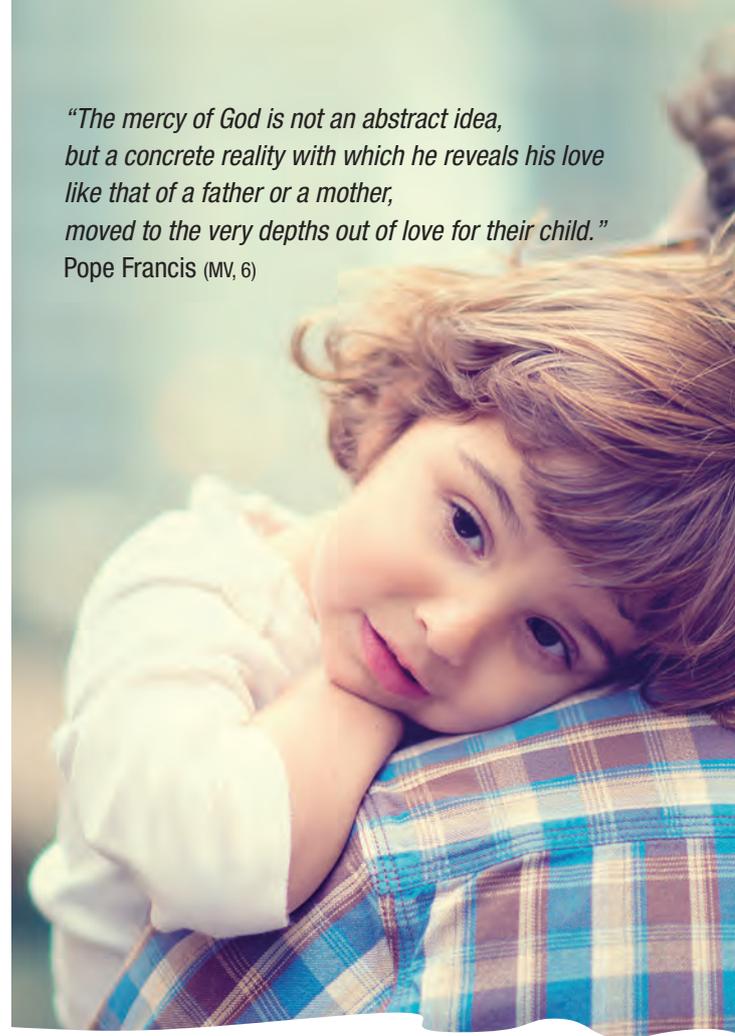
Mt 19:13. The disciples try to prevent little children from coming to Jesus. But Jesus says, *Let the little children come to me.*

Mk 2:1-12. Jesus heals a paralytic man in response to the faith and determination of four stretcher-bearers who lower their friend through the roof, right above Jesus' head.

Jn 8:1-11. Condemned for her sin and humiliated in public, Jesus protects a woman from an angry group and invites her to grasp a fresh start to life.

Lk 24:13-35. The risen Jesus befriends two grief-stricken disciples on the road to Emmaus.

“The mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality with which he reveals his love like that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child.”
Pope Francis (MV, 6)





Wrestling with God's Word

Here is one way to meet the God of mercy in Scripture:

Ponder the Text

Read the Old Testament texts at left. Let them wash over you for some minutes.

Then take any one of the Gospel scenes. Read the passage from your bible. Read again, aloud. Notice the detail. Savour each word, phrase. Imaginatively enter the scene. Live in the shoes of one biblical character. In what way are you personally drawn into the character's dialogue and interactions?

Engage with the Text

Don't tip-toe, enjoy a robust interaction with the text. Remember: the Word of God is not meant to be a divine monologue; it invites *dialogue*. God wants you as a lively conversation partner. Is there something that *bothers* you about the Scripture? Talk to God about it! Exchange insights with a friend. Respectfully and prayerfully debate differing interpretations.

Pray the Text

In what way do I sense God speaking to me through these sacred words? What desire wells up within? Which word or phrase continues to resonate? What response is being asked of me?

Live the Text

After having listened, explored and wrestled with the Word of God, how am I different? What impact will this have on my day, my life, my relationships, this moment?



*“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you.”
(Jer 1:5)*

Compassionate womb-like love

The Hebrew root for *rahāmîm* — which means ‘compassions’, ‘tender mercies’ — takes us to the word *reḥem*, which means ‘womb.’

Thus God is *rahûm*, compassionate, merciful. God acts with a maternal womb and loves with the intensity of a woman who loves her own child.

God hears and is moved by the distressed cry of the little one, the vulnerable, the poor.

Starting with the mothers in our midst, ask:

What insight do you bring to this powerful image?

What does it mean to love with womb-like love?

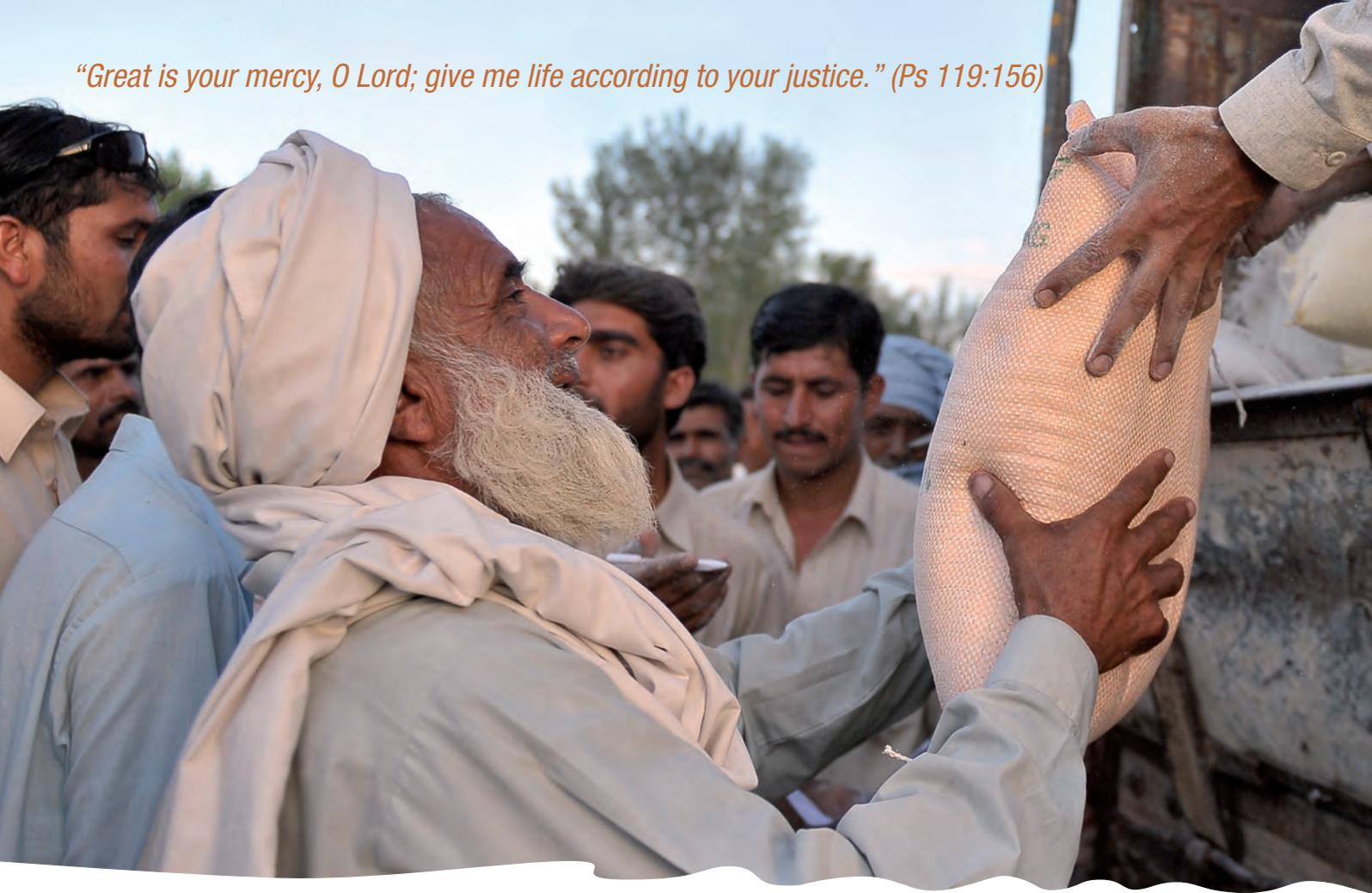
Nurturing? Protective? Sacrificial? Enveloping? Held-within?

What are the joys and struggles of this way of loving?

Invite all gathered, men and women, to share their perspective.



“Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your justice.” (Ps 119:156)



Faithful love, freely given

Another Hebrew word that signifies mercy is *hesed*, which can be translated as steadfast love, loving kindness, even loyalty.

Thus mercy is not simply an instinctive movement of goodness but a conscious, freely-willed response, a choice made because it is the right thing to do. Our God is relentlessly faithful, pursuing an enduring love relationship with us, no matter how many times we stray.

Starting with the fathers in our midst, ask:
What insight do you bring to this view of mercy?

Talk about the place of duty and concrete action in the practice of mercy. Name some of the joys and struggles in this loving path.

Invite all gathered, women and men, to share their perspective.





Mercy

What does it look like?

Sound like?

Feel like?

What does mercy look like, sound like, feel like? What kinds of words and gestures express the compassion, tenderness and fidelity of our merciful God?

Think about all the ways you communicate: speech patterns, non-verbal cues, actions. How fluent are you in the language of mercy?

Ask:

How merciful am I in my actions, my thoughts?

Do I readily look for the good in the other?

Do I honour my promises?

Do I readily say 'I'm sorry'?

Do I utilise the power of smiles, warm expressions, direct eye contact?

Do I show empathy? Can I walk in the shoes of another?

And what kinds of words, gestures, facial expressions communicate the opposite? Am I stuck in judgmental habits that cause people around me to feel 'unsafe'—scoffing, sarcasm, critical comments, gossip, bullying?

Create an environment of mercy

Immersing our children, our students, in an environment of mercy doesn't just happen. We create that loving space.

Teachers, parents, draw your students and children into active discussion:

What is our experience of mercy in the classroom, playground, school environs?

How merciful are our homes, neighbourhoods, parishes?

How merciful is our society, our nation, our global community?

What can we do to improve the levels of mercy in the world we inhabit?
Be practical; e.g., start with your own speech habits.

Remember: mercy starts with us. One person can make a difference.
Do I really believe this?





*“With my whole heart I cry;
answer me, O LORD.”
(Ps 119:145)*

Cry of the heart

"Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me,

or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust." (Ps 143:7-8)

Pocket prayers for every occasion

The Psalms are prayers that plumb the raw depths of the human heart, in all its struggles, rejoicing and searchings.

Birth, death, sickness, loneliness, abandonment, recovery, celebration, war, peace. Psalms are about life!

The Hebrew psalmist expresses something profoundly visceral. It is a cry felt in the guts, intuitive rather than rational: "All my bones shall say, O Lord, who is like you?" (Ps 35:10).

Discover the power of the psalms. Read them often. Learn favourite verses by heart, and let them roll off your lips when most needed. Make the psalms your own, and have them handy as a resource in that critical moment of joy or sorrow.

Ten Psalms of mercy

Ps 25	To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul...
Ps 41	Happy are those who consider the poor...
Ps 42	As a deer longs for flowing streams...
Ps 43	Vindicate me, O God, and defend my cause...
Ps 51	Have mercy on me, O God...
Ps 57	Be merciful to me, O God...
Ps 92	It is good to give thanks to the LORD...
Ps 103	Bless the LORD, O my soul...
Ps 119:81-88	My soul languishes for your salvation...
Ps 136	O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good...

*More: Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee
see www.im.va*



*"It is my burning desire
that, during this Jubilee,
the Christian people may reflect
on the corporal and
spiritual works of mercy."
Pope Francis (MV, 15)*

The Works of Mercy

Catholic tradition refers to the “works of mercy”—that is, actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbour in his/her physical, material, emotional and spiritual need.

The bodily works of mercy

To feed the hungry

To shelter the homeless

To clothe the naked

To visit the sick

To visit the imprisoned

To bury the dead

To give alms to the poor

The spiritual works of mercy

To instruct

To advise

To console

To comfort

To forgive

To bear wrongs patiently

To pray for the living and the dead

(Cf. CCC, 2447)

Reflection

I pause, becoming attentive to my self, my surrounds, my God. I give thanks for the blessings of this day.

I ask the Lord God for a deeper appreciation of the works of mercy.

**I read a scripture text to help focus my thoughts.
E.g., Mt 25:34-36; Rom 12:15-19.**

Taking one work at a time (from the list at left), I reflect:

Where is this work active in my life?

Absent or dormant in my life?

To which work am I drawn? Shy away?

Which work am I good at? With which do I struggle?

In prayer I talk with Jesus about my thoughts, memories and feelings as I move through this reflection. I honestly express my desires, concerns.

I choose one work of mercy and resolve to grow in that area of service.

Closing prayer: *Our Father*

Time for a mercy break?

Late-morning. A lot has happened already and the day is far from over. You reach for that coffee. A tea bag.

In the Year of Mercy, infuse this moment with mercy. Take a moment for your heart. And lungs! Take a deep breath. Breathe.

Remember our God whose Spirit fills us with the breath of life.

Be kind to yourself. Acknowledge the pressures and challenges of this day, as well as your own courage, goodness, perseverance.

Forgive yourself.

Extend this gift of compassion to another. Who can know what pressure he/she is under? What wounds might be at work. What might be happening at home.

Allow mercy to flow into your conversation, speaking words that are gentle, freeing, forgiving. Not judgmental. Certainly not gossip.

Take a break. Breathe. Love.





How to give a meaningful apology

No one is perfect. We make mistakes. The art of apology is something we all need to master. It is one of the great skills for being human! Here are five tips:

1. *Messed up? Fess up!* Own your actions rather than try to explain them away. Express genuine remorse for the hurt and offense caused.
2. *Avoid saying “I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings, but…”* Leave the ‘ifs’ and ‘buts’—they just undermine the rest of the apology. Place yourself in the shoes of the other. Simply and clearly name the impact of the action on the other, even if unintended.
3. *Make amends, as appropriate to the situation.* Express your sincere intention to respond differently in future.
4. *Focus on the issue at hand.* Resist the temptation to drag up past wounds or deflect the issue. Don’t expect your apology to elicit immediate forgiveness. Healing and reconciliation take time. A meaningful apology is a brilliant start.
5. *Have confidence.* A sincere apology is a sign of strength, not weakness. Despite the difficulty that has occurred, your apology is a step in healing and strengthening the relationship. You are responding from your goodness and dignity. The other party must take responsibility for how he/she responds. You take responsibility for your part.

Share your thoughts on this subject. Offer your best tip for offering a meaningful apology.
Better still – give it a go! Is there someone who needs to hear you say sorry, and to know that you mean it?



Mercy in marriage

It happens in every family: there are times when our intimate relationships become a battlefield, and the 'field hospital' of mercy is urgently needed.

If mercy is not administered, the effects can be dire. In extreme cases families have such deep emotional wounds that members go to their grave without having spoken for forty years.

When we're wounded by another, it is especially hurtful if that other is someone close to us and on whom we rely for acceptance and love. Love makes us vulnerable, and when it is betrayed, even in seemingly minor ways, like a careless comment or thoughtless gesture, the wounds can cut deep.

Our sensitivity sets us up for further hurt. We start to examine everything from the perspective of the injury. Thus even minor

wounds, when left unresolved, can easily multiply into major breaches of relationship.

The only way to break the cycle of injury and resentment is via forgiveness. Forgiveness is not an emotion; it's a process we go through and a decision we make. It is something we can either embrace or resist.

Whether or not forgiveness is followed by reconciliation, forgiveness itself is a choice for spiritual freedom and emotional liberation. Forgiveness allows us to conquer the destructive impact of resentment in our lives. But it's not easy. Pride and self-righteous anger weigh in to discourage us from pursuing it.

Which is why mercy begins with God. When we are convinced of our own need for God's mercy, our hearts are opened to offer that mercy to others. Mercy is a grace that springs from the heart of Christ. Mercy is the vital disposition that enables forgiveness to occur in a wounded heart. And when we surrender ourselves to divine mercy, forgiveness flows readily. From there, reconciliation is possible.

Mercy is the grace. Forgiveness is the action. Reconciliation is the result.

In this Year of Mercy, let mercy begin at home.

Source: smartloving.org



*“The Church is called to be the house of the Father,
with doors always wide open.” Pope Francis (EG, 47)*



Design a door!

The Jubilee of Mercy began with the opening of the Holy Door of Mercy in St Peter's Basilica on 8 December 2015. Likewise, Dioceses around the world each opened a Holy Door—the Door of Mercy—in the Cathedral or in a church or shrine of special significance. In the Diocese of Broken Bay Bishop Peter Comensoli has opened Holy Doors at several parish churches, beginning at Our Lady of the Rosary Cathedral, to inaugurate the Jubilee Year.

In keeping with this symbolic action, why not designate a Door of Mercy in your own home or school?

Pick a door that is a regular part of your life's activity.

Perhaps it is the front door of your home. This place of entrance and exit, with all its comings and goings, is a holy site. It is where children are kissed good bye, guests are welcomed, where you cross the threshold from the personal to the public domain, and return. Can you remember the very first time you entered this door? What important memories does it represent?

Perhaps it is the door of your classroom or the gate of your school, where doors and gates represent not only boundaries and security, but thresholds leading to a place of shared values, faith, solidarity, mission.

Choose a door that will become the Door of Mercy. Name it. Mark it. Decorate it. Commission it. Use it. Talk about it.

Most importantly, enter into the life of mercy that it signifies.

Did you know?

In observant Jewish homes, doorposts are marked by a *mezuzah*, a small parchment, contained in a decorative casing, on which is written the verses of Dt 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. "*Hear, O Israel: the LORD is our God, the LORD alone ...*" Invite Jewish friends to explain this practice to you. Allow your own faith to be enriched by another tradition.

"Keep these words in your heart ... Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (See Dt 6:6-9)



Design a pilgrimage

The Jubilee Year of Mercy is a year of pilgrimage. Pilgrim groups will descend upon Rome for the Jubilee Year. Great crowds of young people will make their way to Krakow, Poland for World Youth Day. Dioceses around the world will devise their own pilgrim routes.

In all this wonderful activity and movement, let's treasure the paths that are closest to us—the pilgrimage of daily life, the highways and byways of our home town and, most profoundly, the journey of the heart.

Our local communities are more than geography, they are neighbourhoods of grace—where people of faith and goodwill live, work, play, pray. There abounds the mystery of God's love.

In this Jubilee of Mercy, chart a pilgrimage through your graced neighbourhood. Map it out carefully. Which sacred places will you walk to, pausing to reflect and pray? Think not only of churches and Christian shrines, but also:

An aboriginal sacred site, a synagogue, a mosque, a meditation room, a cemetery, an ANZAC memorial ...

A hospital, a youth refuge, a pregnancy support centre, a food van, a place of action-for-justice ...

A beautiful spot of natural beauty: by trees, by water, with a view, with a story ...

Design a pilgrimage. Know your neighbourhood. Visit its sacred places, its vibrant people. Rejoice in God who lives among us!

Trust in pilgrim companions

“We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another.

This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God's face.”

“Trusting others is an art and peace is an art.”

Pope Francis (EG, 244)



*Journey
of the
heart*

"I invite you to join me as we make this pilgrimage of grace through the coming year, so that we may all become ambassadors of Gospel mercy." (Bishop Peter A. Comensoli)



Eat with your family, not with your smart phone.

(Paraphrase of Pope Francis' message, 11/11/15)

Table tips

Consider your home, office, class, staff room ...

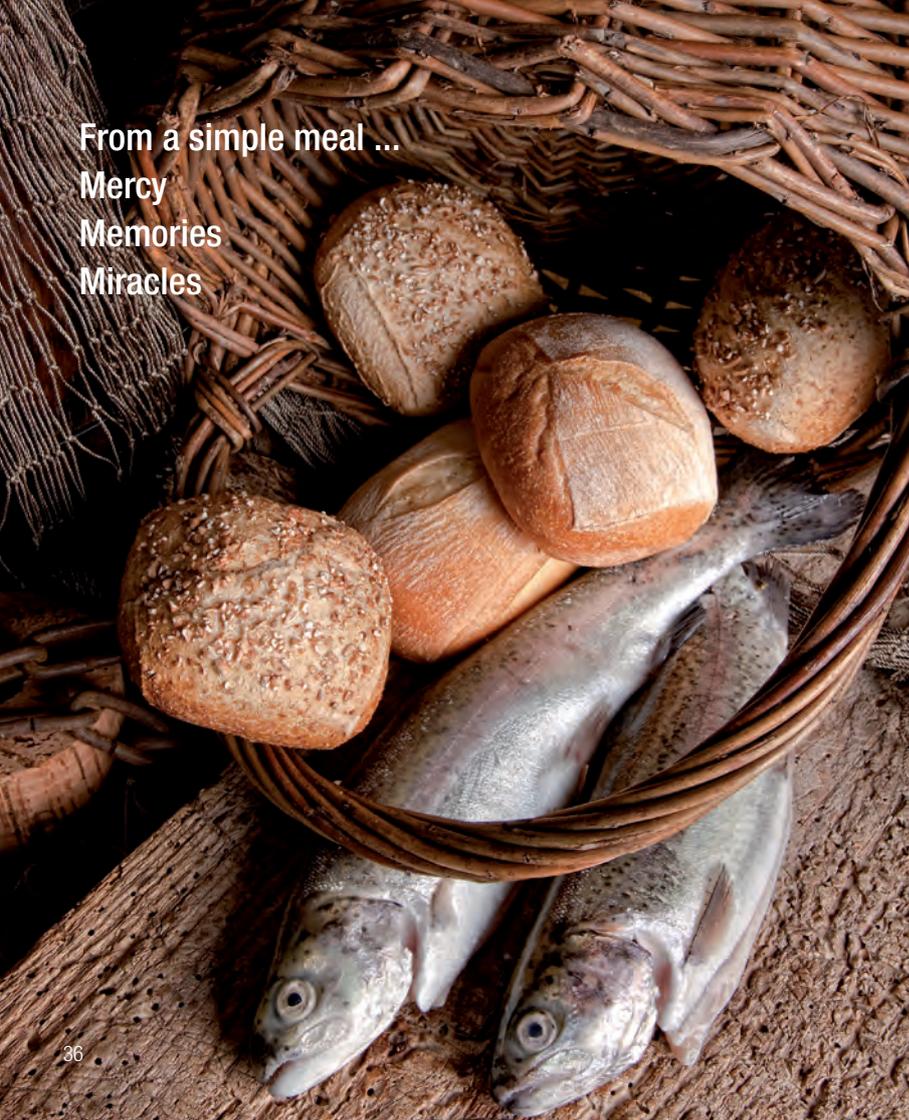
Think of school lunch hours, family dinners, parish picnics ...

Give your best mealtime table tip for sharing joy, smiles, healing, reconciliation, companionship, support, encouragement, aid, condolences, prayer. Here are a few for starters:

- Show up! Just be there.
- Light a candle.
- 'Say grace.' Pause. Pray a blessing. Thank God for this food, this company, this moment.
- Make other-centred conversation; listen intently.
- Invite responses to a simple, meaningful question: *What was good about my day? What was not so good?*
- Include an empty chair to remember and pray for an absent member.
- Share a simple meal: bread/rice, water. Teach your children about simplicity, and the needs of others.
- Use food as a means of intercultural education and sharing.

Over to you!

From a simple meal ...
Mercy
Memories
Miracles



Mealtime mercy

The sharing of food and hospitality is a central gesture of reconciliation in Middle Eastern cultures. Much of Jesus' ministry occurred in the context of meals.

Jesus loved a good feast! He was noted for spending time at table with his followers and all kinds of people, including those outside or on the edges of the group.

Consider the wedding feast at Cana (Jn 2:1-11), the feeding of the five thousand (Jn 6:5-14), the woman who anointed Jesus' feet (Lk 7:36-50), the Last Supper (Mk 14:22-26), breakfast on the beach with the risen Jesus (Jn 21:9-14).





*“Among the privileged names
that Islam attributes to the Creator
are ‘Merciful and Kind’.
This invocation is often
on the lips of faithful Muslims.”*

Pope Francis (MV, 23)

Hospitality & the heart

Mealtime hospitality is part of the life and mission of our Broken Bay Diocesan community.

Interfaith and ecumenical dialogue has occurred through the sharing of Ramadan Iftar Dinners with Muslim friends, Shabbat Dinners with Jewish friends, and home-based encounters with families of other Churches and other religions.

Think, too, of the tremendous amount of outreach that occurs through St Vincent de Paul, Caritas, Catholic Mission, school immersion programs and many other works that have provided food, shelter and enabled lifegiving meal-experiences for people.

Talking points:

Describe a time when you reached out to another through the sharing of a meal. What did you give, and what did you receive?

What conscious meal efforts could you make during this Year of Mercy?

People of the Book

"If you could see my Bible, you would not be particularly impressed. What – that's the Pope's Bible? Such an old, worn-out book! I love my old Bible, which has accompanied me half my life. "

Pope Francis

(Prologue to Youcat Bible, German edition, 2015)

Parables of Mercy

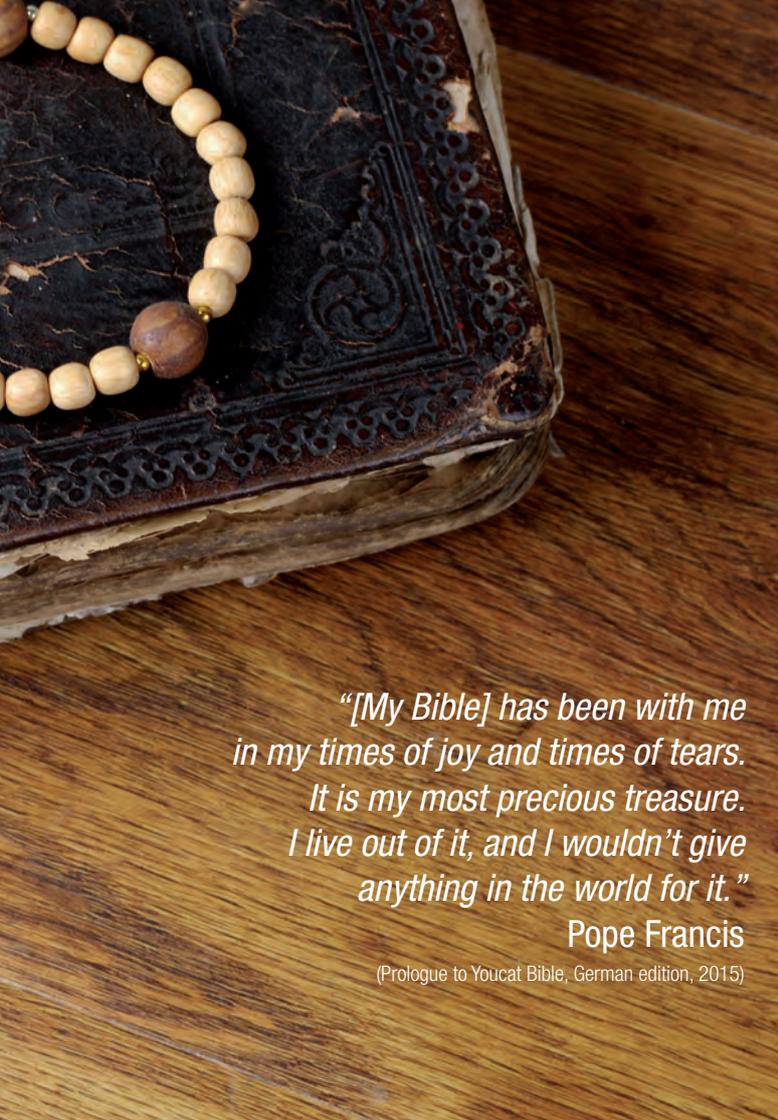
Rather than talk about mercy in the abstract, Jesus told stories of mercy in action.

Examples from the Gospel of Luke:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|
| Lk 7:36-50 | The Two Debtors |
| Lk 10:25-37 | The Good Samaritan |
| Lk 15:1-10 | The Lost Sheep and Lost Coin |
| Lk 15:11-32 | The Merciful Father |
| Lk 16:19-31 | The Rich Man and the Beggar Lazarus |
| Lk 18:1-8 | The Pharisee and the Publican |

Select a parable and use it as the focus for *lectio divina* (see steps at right).





*“[My Bible] has been with me
in my times of joy and times of tears.
It is my most precious treasure.
I live out of it, and I wouldn’t give
anything in the world for it.”*

Pope Francis

(Prologue to Youcat Bible, German edition, 2015)

Slow, gentle sacred reading

Lectio divina, or holy reading, is a way of approaching Scripture, listening with the ‘ears of the heart’. Here is one suggestion for entering into this time-honoured tradition of slow, gentle, sacred reading.

Prepare:

I take a moment to centre myself.

I give thanks for God’s love, for the blessings of this day.

I hold my Bible with reverence, conscious of the generations who have lived and died for these precious texts.

I pray for the grace of a listening heart. I ask that I may truly enter into an encounter with the living Word of God.

Then:

I **READ** the Scripture text, slowly, savouring each word, phrase.

I read again, this time aloud.

I **PONDER** these sacred words, noticing how a particular word or phrase speaks to me.

I **PRAY** a prayer arising from my conversation with the Word, allowing it to shape my relationship with God.

I **REST** quietly in the presence of God, grateful for whatever gain has been made.

“Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.” (Jn 4:15)



The thirst to be known, loved

“Weary from his journey, Jesus does not hesitate to ask the Samaritan woman for something to drink. His thirst, as we know, is much more than physical: it is also a thirst for encounter, a desire to enter into dialogue ... Jesus is patient, respectful of the person before him, and gradually reveals himself to her. His example encourages us to seek a serene encounter with others. To understand one another, and to grow in charity and truth, we need to pause, to accept and listen to one another. In this way, we already begin to experience unity. Unity grows along the way; it never stands still. Unity happens when we walk together.”

Pope Francis (Homily, 25 Jan 2015)

Prepare

I take a moment to centre myself. I light a candle and give thanks for God’s love, conscious of the blessings of this day.

I pray for the grace of a listening heart. I ask that I may truly enter into an encounter with the living Word of God.

Enter the story

I read Jn 4:7, 9-15 (or other verses selected from Jn 4:1-30)

I imagine the scene: a meeting place—the village well. A place of lifegiving encounter, where not only water is drawn but conversations are enjoyed, community is formed, potential spouses

are introduced. It has been so for generations, right back to the time of Jacob who met his love Rachel at this well, and of whom legends are told about his miraculous strength in removing the stone from the well (see 4:12).

Here at this well a man from Judea meets a woman from Samaria. At first the woman is terse, mocking. Yet as Jesus speaks of the gift of living water her personal thirst for understanding is quenched; the powerful religious imagery held out speaks to her heart of faith.

I place myself in the scene, attentive to the interaction, sensing the emotions. I experience Jesus’ desire to reach the woman, and her relief to be known, heard, respected, loved.

Ponder, Pray

I take my time with the text. I notice the little things. I delight in a detail. I savour a word, chew, digest. I ruminate with the text. In silence I ponder its questions, its lifegiving power.

What word/phrase/image especially touched me during these moments of reflection? I share this with those gathered. Or with Jesus, in the silence of my heart. In what way is our merciful God speaking to me, to us, at this time?

Conclude with praise and thanksgiving

I give thanks for whatever insight, grace, gift I have received.

“Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” (Eph 3:21)



*They recognised him in
the breaking of the bread.
(See Lk 24:31)*

Befriended by mercy

“Let us think too of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus: their sad faces, their barren journey, their despair. But Jesus does not abandon them: he walks beside them . . . Patiently he explains the Scriptures . . . and he stays to share a meal with them.

Pope Francis, 7 April 2013

Prepare

I take a moment to centre myself. I light a candle and give thanks for God’s love, conscious of the blessings of this day.

I pray for the grace of a listening heart. I ask that I may truly enter into an encounter with the living Word of God.

Enter the story

I read Lk 24:13-35 (or selected verses from this text)

I imagine the scene: two friends and followers of Jesus, companions to one another on a dusty journey, headed *away* from Jerusalem, *away* from the place of the traumatic events that have just occurred.

I place myself in the scene, sensing my companions’ feelings of pain. Grief. Loss. Confusion. Abandonment. Guilt. Fear. Anger. Brokenness. I remember the words of the Hebrew psalmist: *The Lord is near to the broken-hearted (Ps 34:18).*

I see Jesus enter the scene. As I walk along I sense the change in the dynamic, the glimmers of hope, the dawning of light as the Scriptures are explained. Figures from the ancient tradition, such as Moses and Elijah, make their presence felt.

I experience the disciples’ wonder and joy at the breaking of bread and their recognition of Jesus.

I join them on their hurried journey *towards* Jerusalem, back to what was a place of pain, and which now holds light and promise and possibility. . .

Ponder, Pray

I take my time with the text. I notice the little things. I take delight in a detail. I savour a word. I chew. I digest. I ruminate with the text. I ponder in silence.

What word/phrase/image especially touched me during these moments of reflection? I share this with those gathered. Or with Jesus, in the silence of my heart.

How is our merciful God speaking to me, to us, at this time?

Conclude with praise and thanksgiving

I give thanks for whatever insight, grace, gift I have received.

“Glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.” (Eph 3:21)



Finding God in all things

Four centuries ago, a Spanish soldier recuperating from a war wound invented one of the most treasured spirituality tools in Catholic tradition.

Saint Ignatius of Loyola is best known as the founder of the Jesuits, a male religious order. However religious life was not his initial focus. Rather, he developed a spirituality for lay people—a means by which ordinary folk, without theological training, could learn to recognise and discern the movement of God's grace in their lives using simple exercises such as the Awareness Examen (at right).

So what does this have to do with the Year of Mercy?

When we learn how to become attentive to the workings of God in our daily lives, we become sensitised to who we are before God and others. We know ourselves to be loved, and blessed. We are grateful. And, through the joy and gratitude of being loved, we come to understand, with compassion, our wounds and brokenness.

In short, daily practice of the Examen opens us to the merciful God, who walks with us every moment of our lives.



Awareness Examen

Five steps to *living* my day

- **I give thanks**
I acknowledge that all life is a gift from God.
What am I grateful for today?
- **I ask for the help of the Holy Spirit**
What grace do I need at this moment?
- **I retrace the steps of my day**
I ponder: where was God at work in my life today?
- **I talk with Jesus**
I talk with Jesus about the joyful and sad experiences of my day and about my response to them.
- **I look to tomorrow**
How will I act tomorrow, in ways lifegiving to myself and others?

In many of the exercises in this booklet, we walk through the stories of Scripture. Here we walk through the story of my life; for this too is a place of holiness and grace.

Practise these steps regularly with your children at home, with your students in class. Teach them that God dwells in their lives. Teach them to be *attentive* to God who walks with them.

Learn more about the Examen:

- Michael Hansen, SJ. *The First Spiritual Exercises: Four Guided Retreats*. Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2013.
- canisiusspirituality.org.au [Go to 'Ignatian Spirituality']
- godsmissonjoyofthegospel.weebly.com [Go to Resources]. Also at this site: short videos for introducing the Examen to the classroom.

A Mercy Examen

I give thanks

After reading one or more of the texts (on the right), I stand before Jesus in gratitude for the many ways I have been blessed with lifegiving water.

I ask for help

I become aware of a grace I most need, desire. For what am I thirsting? Where I struggle to find the words, I ask the Holy Spirit to express the yearning that is deep in my heart.

I retrace the steps of my day

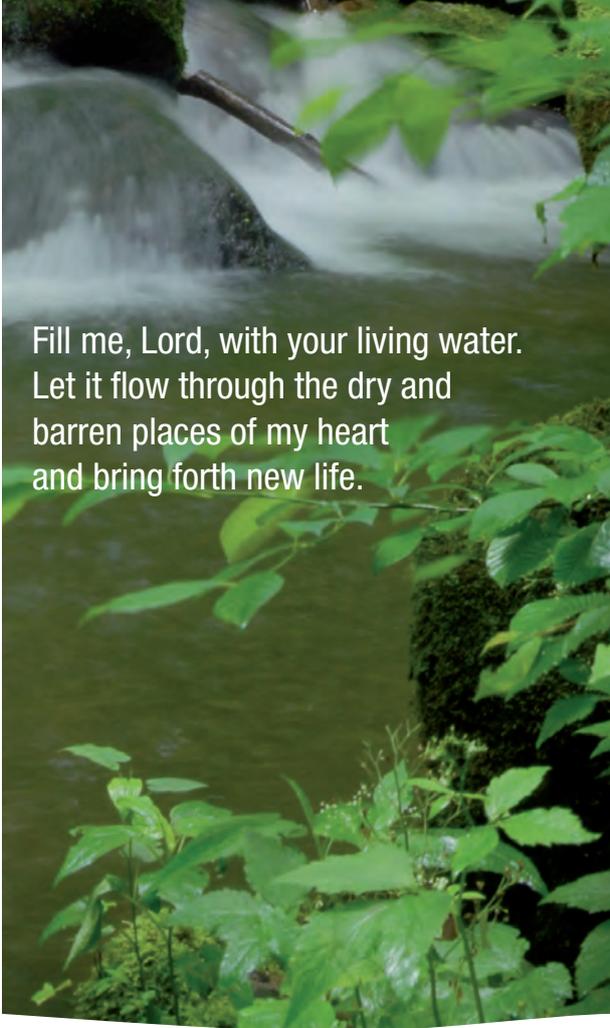
I think back over my day (my week, my year), sifting it for signs of God's tender and faithful presence. Were there times when I received, or rejected, love?

I talk with Jesus

I talk with Jesus about what was revealed above, sharing my heart, with all its desires, goodness, wounds, fears, concerns.

I look to tomorrow

I commit myself to a lifegiving action flowing from my prayer. It might be an act of kindness and service. It might be to adjust my behaviour, consult a spiritual guide, receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or to more consciously participate in the Eucharist and live out my Baptism.



Fill me, Lord, with your living water.
Let it flow through the dry and
barren places of my heart
and bring forth new life.



Prayer Texts for the Mercy Examen

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.” (Ps 42:1)

“I will pour water on thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.” (Isa 44:3)

“When Jesus saw the crowds he had compassion for them, because they were harrassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” (Mt 9:36)

“As Jesus passed by in a crowd, the blind man shouted, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Those who were in front sternly ordered him to be quiet; but he shouted even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’” (See Lk 18:35-43)

“Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.” (Jn 4:14)

“Baptism is God’s most beautiful, and magnificent gift ... We call it gift, grace, anointing, enlightenment, garment of immortality, bath of rebirth, seal, and most precious gift.”

*(St Gregory of Nazianzus, Oratio 40, 3-4;
cited in Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1216)*

*“In the desert we rediscover the
value of what is essential for living.”*

Pope Francis (EG, 86)



Walking mercifully with the earth

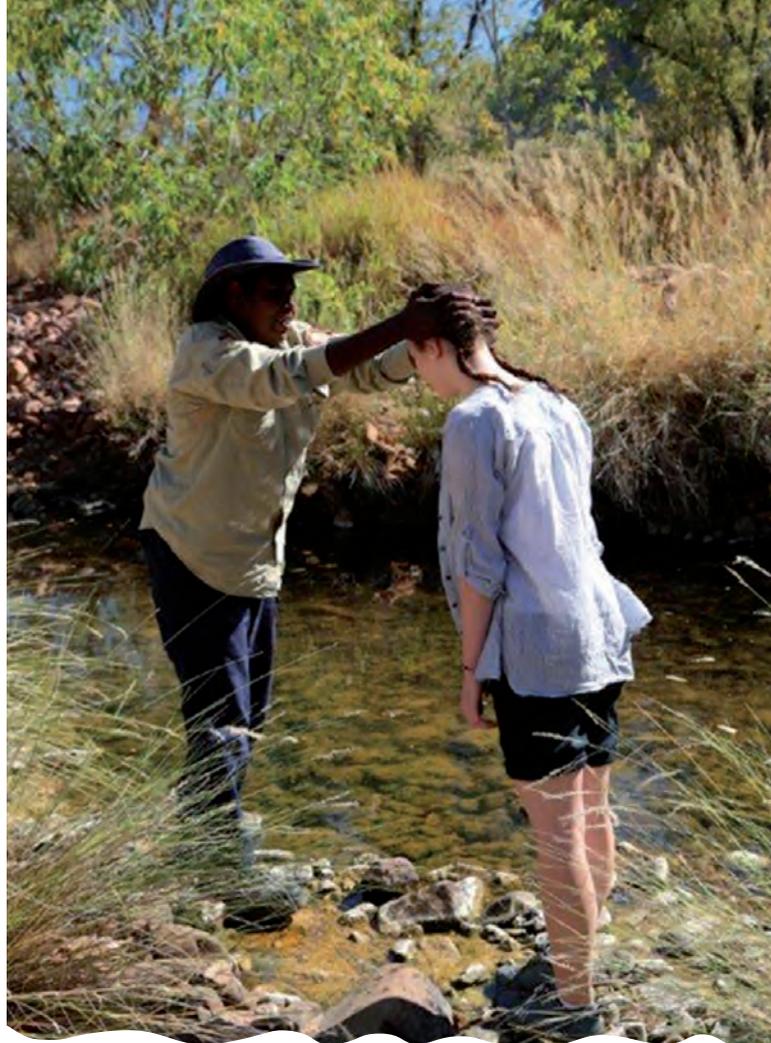
“Saint Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty.

“Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.”

Pope Francis (*Laudato Si'*, 12)

*"You shall be
like a spring of water,
whose waters fail not."*

(See Is 58:6-11; MV, 17)



Mercy & Justice

We live in tense times. We are painfully aware of great acts of injustice and violence, sometimes committed in the name of religion:

Terrorism, war, persecution for one's religious or cultural identity, sexual abuse, domestic violence, corporate greed exploiting the earth and the vulnerable, corruption in the workplace, in politics, in professional sports.

Where is the place of mercy in the face of evil, abuse and violent wrongdoing? Can mercy translate into a robust, proactive response? Or does it become sidelined as a pious word, a panacea for the sentimentally religious?

What is my initial reaction to such questions? Acknowledge the strength of those reactions.

Now pause; take a deep breath. Take a step back. What does our tradition say? Sit with a prayer text, such as those on the right.

Revisit this difficult subject matter, prayerfully pondering it before offering a second response from those depths.

Was there any difference between my two responses? Continue to probe this topic, honestly, but gently.

"Steadfast love and mercy shall meet. Goodness and truth will embrace." (Ps 85:11)

"Great is your mercy, O Lord; give me life according to your justice." (Ps 119:156)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." (Mt 5:42-44)

"A merciful heart does not mean a weak heart. Anyone who wishes to be merciful must have a strong and steadfast heart, closed to the tempter but open to God."

Pope Francis (Message for Lent, 2015)



*“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted,
and saves the crushed in spirit.” (Ps 34:18)*

return as far as you can

“A king’s son was at a distance of a hundred days journey from his father. His friends said to him, ‘Return to your father.’ He said to them, ‘I cannot.’ His father sent word to him and said, ‘Go as far as you are able, and I shall come the rest of the way to you.’” (Jewish Midrash on Hosea 14:2)

“So [the son] set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.” (Lk 15:20)

Coming home, in small steps

It happens. We want to keep in touch, but things get busy. We get tired. Frustrated. We become distant. We stop trying. We forget what to say. One day it dawns: we’re not going to church. Not going to the sacraments any more. Not talking to God very much. Or perhaps we’re just going through the motions. It’s not that we don’t care, it’s just that—

How do we begin the journey back? The same way we lost touch—small steps.

A small step might be to read this book. To learn how to pray the Examen. Talk with a helpful friend or spiritual guide. Talk to Jesus. Make a resolution.

Or, just take the plunge—front up to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and start afresh!

There are many ways to begin the journey home; and it begins with a single step.



*“The prodigal son was always in his father’s heart,
even though he had left him ... God is always waiting for us;
he never grows tired.”*

Pope Francis (Divine Mercy Sunday, 7 April 2013)





Reconnecting

with Christ and the Church in the
Sacrament of Reconciliation

Abundant mercy is God's liberating gift at the heart of the Gospel. Yet the subject of forgiveness of sins has always been associated with embarrassment, controversy and difficulties. We see this even in the bible stories about Jesus! (See Mk 2:1-12)

The Jubilee Year of Mercy is an opportunity to face honestly into this gift and its challenges, in the context of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Above all, the Jubilee Year of Mercy is a year in which we are invited to *experience* this Sacrament afresh.

4-5 March 2016 will be a particular point of focus. During a period designated "24 Hours for the Lord" parishes throughout the world will offer people an experience of prayer and reflection, including Eucharistic Adoration and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. School communities are encouraged to liaise with their parish about provisions being made locally in this regard.

Further information at: dbb.org.au

*"The confessional must not be a torture chamber
but rather an encounter with the Lord's mercy
which spurs us on to do our best."*

Pope Francis (EG, 44)

"Maybe someone among us here is thinking, My sin is so great... I don't have the courage to go back, to believe that God can welcome me and that he is waiting for me, of all people. But God is indeed waiting for you; he asks of you only the courage to go to him."

Pope Francis (Divine Mercy Sunday, 7 April 2013)

"God is joyful! And what is the joy of God? The joy of God is forgiving; the joy of God is forgiving! ... Here is the entire Gospel! Here! The whole Gospel, all of Christianity, is here! ... Mercy is the true force that can save man and the world from the 'cancer' that is sin, moral evil, spiritual evil ... What is the danger? It is that we presume we are righteous and judge others."

Pope Francis (Angelus, 15 Sept 2013)



Reflect on these words of Pope Francis. What thoughts, questions, memories, emotions do they draw to the surface? Talk with Jesus about this. Speak with a trusted friend or spiritual guide. What 'next step' is invited by your conversation?

Prayer

God of mercy, transform me,
that my eyes may be merciful,
that I may marvel at the beauty of my neighbour's heart.

Transform me, O God,

that my ears may be merciful,
that I may be attentive to those in need.

Transform me, O God,

that my tongue may be merciful,
that all I proclaim is in love and peace.

Transform me, O God,

that my hands may be merciful,
that I use them to serve my neighbour.

Transform me, O God,

that my feet may be merciful,
that my pilgrim journey leads me to compassion.

Transform me, O God,

that my heart may be merciful,
ever open to the joy of your presence.

May Your mercy, O God,
rest upon me and transform me into Yourself,
for You are my all.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.

Amen



St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, pray for us.

*From the Australian Prayer for World Youth Day
www.wyd.org.au
See also the official Jubilee Prayer at www.im.va*

On Mary's watch

"Let us ... entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she might turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey."

Pope Francis (13 March 2015)

"Mary was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love.

She is the friend who is ever concerned that wine not be lacking in our lives.

She is the woman whose heart was pierced by a sword and who understands all our pain.

As mother of all, she is a sign of hope for peoples suffering the birth pangs of justice.

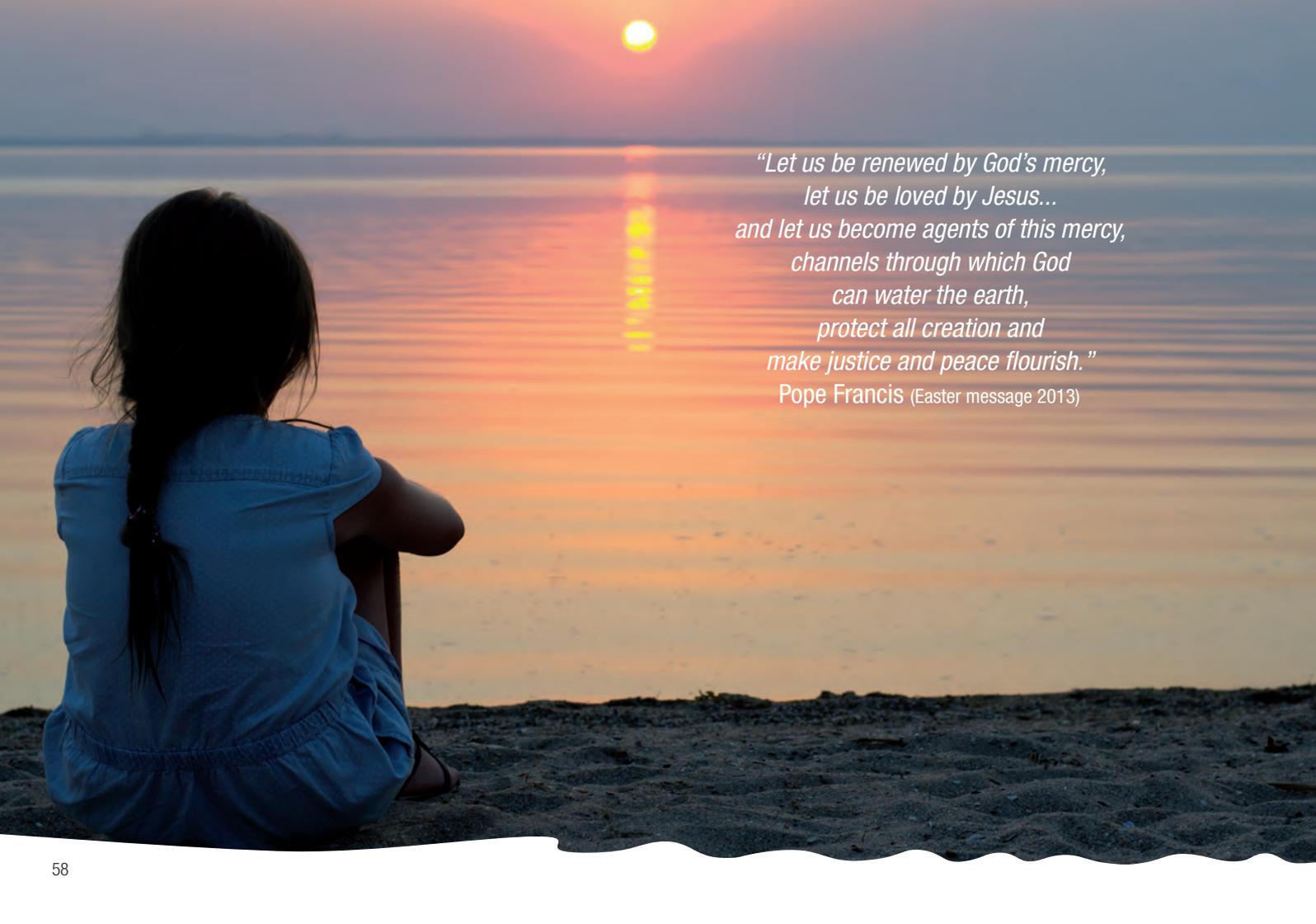
She is the missionary who draws near to us and accompanies us throughout life."

Pope Francis (EG, 286)



*"Whenever we look to Mary,
we come to believe once again
in the revolutionary nature of
love and tenderness."*

Pope Francis (EG, 288)



*“Let us be renewed by God’s mercy,
let us be loved by Jesus...
and let us become agents of this mercy,
channels through which God
can water the earth,
protect all creation and
make justice and peace flourish.”*
Pope Francis (Easter message 2013)