

CELEBRATING GOD'S MERCY

A SERVICE FOR THE YEAR OF MERCY



We are glad that you are with us for this Celebration of God's Mercy.

The service has been organised in response to Pope Francis calling for a Year of Mercy. He has personal experience of needing that mercy and this has led him to want to ensure that other people encounter it too.

Pope Francis says,

“How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!”

In our own Diocese, Bishop Séamus Cunningham has echoed the Pope's call. When he opened the Year of Mercy here he said,

“Do not let yourself be trapped by these ways of thinking. God's mercy is for all people and he wants everyone to come to him with trust and confidence. The mercy of Jesus is kind and understanding; now is the time; it is never too late; he forgives all things. Let his gentle healing put your worries to rest.”

We are all here with different worries and concerns. We may wonder if we are doing the right thing being here! We might think that we have done things that are so wrong that God can never forgive us. But, we can follow the example of Pope Francis, Bishop Séamus and many, many other people who know that they are sinners but who, through their sin and weakness, have come to know the generous and unfailing love and mercy of God.

So—relax—and be at peace... This is a time for us to be in solidarity with each other and to know God's deep love for each one of us whatever burdens and cares we bring with us today.

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Welcome

Opening Sign of the Cross (*one form of the opening responses*)

The Sign of the Cross is often used to start and finish a time of prayer. We remember the love that the Holy Trinity pours out on humanity...

Leader We gather in the name of the Father

**All Who created the universe –
who created our galaxy –
who created our planet –
who created me (us) –
from love
and for love.**

Leader We gather in the name of the Son, Jesus Christ,

**All Who was divine
but humbled himself to live among men and women –
hearing their stories
seeing their joys and their sorrows,
walking with them
and showing to the sad, the broken and the lost
what God's love and mercy for them looked like.**

Leader We gather in the name of the Holy Spirit:

**All Who flows from the heart of the Trinity
bringing God's love and mercy
into the hearts of men, women and children
so that they learn that they are loved and forgiven
and can share that love and mercy with others.**

Leader And so we gather – (*making the Sign of the Cross*)
in the name of the Father...

and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All Amen

Scripture Reading

The Word of God teaches us about the mercy of God.

Our Readings come from

Parishes have chosen up to three short readings:

- The Lost Sheep/Coin
- Woman taken in adultery
- Healing of leper
- Heart of stone to heart of flesh

We always end with “Come to me all you who labour and are overburdened...”

A refrain has been sung between the readings to help people to assimilate what they have heard.

Song

Reflection

Fr XXX opens up the Word of God and reflects with us on what it might mean in our own lives.

What does my stone represent for me?

We reflect on our stone and how this represents some of the burdens or pains— or sins we are carrying....

We bring these concerns to our Lord and ask him to help us to be with us as we invest our stones with the meanings that speak most to us.

We will then symbolically bring those burdens and place them into water/ hand/ etc.

Music as we bring our burdens to God.

Music has varied from 'Come back to me with all your heart' to 'Woza Nomthwalo Wakho' (Come, Bring Your Burdens to God)

The stones are placed onto an image of the hand of God. People receive in turn a small "Mercy stone" and prayer card.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

Leader Merciful and compassionate God,
 we lay into your hands the burdens we carry.
 We ask that you help us to bear what cannot be changed
 with fortitude and trust that you are in it with us—
 to work with courage to remedy
 and change the things that we can –
 and ask that you give us the wisdom to know the difference.
 Pour out your blessing upon us as we prepare to leave –
 knowing that you go with us –
 and that those who have shared this time with us
 will continue to pray for us in the months ahead.
 We ask this in Jesus' name.

All Amen

Reader Let us pray now in the words Jesus himself gave us:
All Our Father, who art in heaven,
 hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come.
 Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread;
 and forgive us our trespasses
 as we forgive those who trespass against us;
 and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
 Amen.

Priest May the LORD bless you, and keep you;

 May the LORD make his face shine on you,
 and be gracious to you;
 May the LORD turn his face toward you, and give you peace.”
 And may God’s blessing be upon us all
 The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

All **Amen.**

Closing Song

*Options as to what people had at the end were –depending on space once hymns were added:
a page on what to do in Confession and/or “What the logo means”. Several have had the following to explain how the open-ended service will continue...*

THE PRAYER GOES ON...

There are now several other opportunities on offer.

THE SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

We have several priests with us this evening.
They are skilled confessors and are available for confession,
 or, simply, for a confidential chat
If you are uncertain about what to do, do not worry.
The priest will guide you gently through the process.
Cards are available with words that might be useful.

The main thing to remember is that
 the priest is acting in the person of Christ—
the same Jesus who loved and showed so much mercy
 in our Readings earlier tonight.

LISTENERS

Experienced listeners are available at the back/ side of the church.

They are happy just to give you space
to talk about something that is burdening you this evening.
There are signs at the ends of the pews where they are sitting.
The conversation will be in total confidence
unless the listener has concerns about your well-being.

ANOINTING

This is a beautiful sign of God's love for you.
They will be happy to chat with you
and to then anoint you as a sign of God's desire to bless and heal you.

PRAYER STATIONS

Around the church you will see various "Stations"
with stands and items to look at or hold or read.
These can help you to pray in ways you may not have tried before
but which you might enjoy and find helpful.
Simply stroll quietly around the church
and try one or more of them for yourself.

REFRESHMENTS

Teas and coffees are on offer in the church hall.
Please call in and enjoy the hospitality!

Thank-you for coming to this service Celebrating God's Mercy.

We hope that it has been a blessing to you.

Have a safe journey home.

The following prayers have been used in some places between the “reflective homily” and the laying down of the stone. They would be read as people contemplated their stone (not printed in booklet) with quiet music played underneath opening up to a short refrain after each.

Merciful God –

We have come together tonight with our own worries and concerns.

Each of us is different –

but together we are surrounded by love and support

that makes us able to bring those needs to you

in confidence that you love us

and never abandon the children of your heart.

Compassionate and loving Father,

for some of us, the word “father” does not go together with compassion or love –

and for some of us the place where such a father should be is a gaping void.

In solidarity with each other,

we pray for the painful memories some of us are carrying tonight –

for memories of violence or cruelty that has harmed our ability to build relationships easily –

for memories of absence – or wishing for absence...

We pray also for fathers who are not able to show love –

through their own bad experiences –

or because they are separated from their children.

(pause)

For all these needs, loving Father, we pray

Lord ...

Loving and Triune God –

the God who is a loving, merciful relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, some of us have come because our own relationships have failed.

We may have tried to find love in all the wrong places and with the wrong people.

Some of us have married – and survived separation and divorce – and feel alienated from the Church by our sense of failure.

Some of us have remarried and are separated from the sacraments – and feel pain and tension between practising our faith and living with our spouse.

All of us struggle in some way with relationships – with our families...

with work colleagues...

with people in the Church...

with??

In solidarity with each other,

we pray for the muddles and the messes of our relationships

and for the wisdom and understanding that might help us as we work to move forward.

(pause)

For your mercy and compassion in our relationships, we pray.../ Lord...

Lord Jesus, you came to set us free – from sin and despair,

but some of us here tonight are not free.

Some of us are bound by addiction – our own – or that of someone close to us.

Some of us are bound by patterns of behaviour that are destructive – of anger and violence – anorexia and other eating disorders – of self-harm – of self-imposed isolation from others...or...

Some of us are bound by relationships that are cruel and damaging – but are unable to see a way out of them.

Some of us are bound by voices from the past – which tell us that we are stupid – failures – no-hopers... and some of us are bound by such voices in our present.

(pause)

As people seeking the hope-filled freedom you came to bring, we pray...

Lord...

Healing Lord, you touched the sick people you met in your earthly life and cured them –

and continue to reach out to touch those in need.

Some of us here carry illnesses –

some very recent and acute –

others that we have lived with for long years.

Some of us have recently had a worrying diagnosis – or are waiting for test results.

Some of us care for people with physical illness – or disability – or psychiatric illness –

or the consequences of age and increasing frailty – or dementia.

And though we love them dearly, Lord, sometimes we feel exhausted – and overburdened –

and even resentful at times.

(pause)

In all the challenges of sickness and disease, we pray...

Lord...

Leader Catholics have a special love for Mary who is sometimes called the Mother of Mercy. She shared Jesus' suffering and he has entrusted her to pray with and for those in need – we will pray this prayer asking her to join her prayers to ours as we say:

Hail Holy Queen... *(would print in booklet)*

And now, we go back to the stone. What has it come to mean to you? What is the burden that you would like to ask Jesus to share with you – to make it more bearable – so that you know that he is walking alongside you – sometimes even carrying you in the darkest times?

When you feel ready, come and place it into the hand on the banner on the floor (into water? onto a cairn?) – knowing that it is Jesus inviting you to do this – and that each of us is supporting the others in our shared prayer tonight.

You may feel that you are not ready to let it go – in which case, hold on to it until you are. When the time is right, you might put it in the garden – or at a cemetery – or into a river or the sea...