

Divine Mercy



Fourteenth Festival Letter of
✠ Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

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My 14th Festival Letter - for AD 2016

An essential truth often repeated in the Bible is that all blessing comes from God. The scriptural formula *blessed is* occurs 26 times in the Psalms, 8 times in the Book of Proverbs, and at least 10 more times in other places in the Old Testament. In Hebrew, the word *beraka*, or “blessing,” signifies the praise offered to God in response to His amazing goodness. In the New Testament the Greek word *macarios* also indicates the blessing and sheer joy experienced by those who accept the *Good News*. Utter dependence upon the God revealed in the Scriptures and incarnate in Jesus Christ is the foundation for all true blessing in human existence. The *blessed* are called happy because they respond in praise and thanks to God’s acts, especially God’s gracious gift of mercy.

As Pope Francis has taught, Jesus “is the merciful face of the Father.” Jesus came into the world to save sinners. His death on the cross is the perfect atonement for all human sin. As Saint Paul observed: *We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Rom 3:23), or as Saint John pointed out: *If we say we have not sinned, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.* (1 John 1:8). Only our Blessed Lady, uniquely predestined by grace to be the Mother of God, was a sinless disciple. Everyone else, even the most heroic among the saints, have known sin. For this reason, the Church has been called “an ark for sinners,” a community of faith, that Christ has redeemed from sin, rescued from death, and in his great goodness destined for eternal bliss.

“God manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy” (Pope Francis). Lured by this gift of mercy, we must ourselves be merciful. As Jesus himself proclaimed: *Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy* (Matthew 5:7). In this well-known Beatitude, given at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus insists that in order to be forgiven, we must be forgiving. As we say in the Lord’s Prayer: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us*. It is never enough just to recognize Jesus as Lord and Savior. We must also accept the authority of his teaching and try to imitate his challenging example. As Christians, we know God’s mercy, and so all our lives we must continue to learn how to be more merciful to others. Peter once asked Jesus, *How often must I forgive my brother? Seven times?* Jesus answered, *Not seven times, but seventy times seven* (Matthew 18:21). The Gospel of Luke records a similar teaching: *Even if they sin against you seven times in a day, and seven times come back to you and saying “I repent,” you must forgive them* (Luke 17:4).

All human judgement is at best provisional, and only God who perfectly reads the heart can perfectly judge. While it is clearly necessary for civil magistrates to punish the guilty, for teachers to assign grades, for parents to teach their children to take responsibility for their choices, and even for the Church to occasionally discipline its members, when human beings take on the Divine role as ultimate judge, they assume a responsibility that is not theirs. It is also a foolish and a heavy burden to keep a strict account of the faults of others, to cling to the memory of every offence, and to live in antipathy towards certain individuals or even whole groups. When a relationship can be healed, Christians should be willing to take the first step towards reconciliation. When, however, what has sometimes been called a “toxic relationship” is the sad reality, perhaps the best path is to charitably avoid all

contact. In any circumstance, hatred is always a corroding acid that hurts us more than the person we hate.

Mercy towards others, on the other hand, wins us peace of heart. Believers living in this imperfect world, should perhaps just say a brief prayer for their perceived enemy, and then “let go and let God.” As Saint Paul taught: *Therefore do not pass judgement before the time, but wait until the Lord comes, who will bring to light things hidden in darkness and disclose the motives in mens’ hearts, then each man’s praise will come to him from God* (1st Cor 4:5).

The centrality of mercy in the Christian life was dramatically reemphasized within the Catholic tradition through a series of powerful visions experienced in the 1930s by Faustina Kowalska, a Sister of Saint Mary of Mercy, who served in convents in Poland and Lithuania. A vision of Jesus “as the King of Divine Mercy,” wearing a white garment with red and pale rays emanating from his heart was revealed to this religious sister. The Lord told her: “Paint an image according to what you see, with the inscription *Jesus I trust in you*. The Lord further revealed “that the soul that will venerate this image will not perish,” and that the painting “should be solemnly blessed on the Second Sunday of Easter,” which henceforth should also be called “the Feast of Mercy.” In a subsequent vision some years later, Sister Faustina was given the Chaplet of Divine Mercy prayer, the purpose of which was to obtain mercy, to trust in Christ’s mercy, and to show mercy to others. Jesus also told Sister Faustina: “I do not want to punish aching humanity but desire to heal it, pressing them to my merciful heart.” On April 20, 2000, Pope John Paul II canonized Saint Faustina and affirmed her inspired message to the Universal Church. He said of her: “The message she brought was the appropriate and incisive

answer to the questions and expectations of human beings of our time.”

Recently, Pope Francis has invited the entire Catholic Church to observe a special *Holy Year of Mercy*, beginning on December the 8th, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and concluding on November the 20th, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King. His Holiness strongly encourages all the faithful, but especially those who may have fallen away from the practice of the Faith, to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation and know that they will be warmly welcomed home. The Holy Father has also recently simplified the procedure for marriage annulments, and so those seeking this form of healing after a broken marriage should be encouraged to contact the Diocese. The Pope has, as well, especially enriched this Holy Year with indulgences, including a special Plenary Indulgence.

In the Diocese of Peoria, our local observance of the Holy Year will begin on *Gaudete Sunday*, December the 13th, 2015. On that day, the Diocese will dedicate Holy Doors in the Cathedral and at five other churches and chapels. Throughout the Holy Year, a Plenary Indulgence may be gained by the faithful who enter these doors, under the usual conditions, that is within about 20 days before or after, of prayer for the Pope’s intentions, sacramental Confession, and reception of the Eucharist. The designated sanctuaries should make ample provision for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Guided by pastoral prudence and in consultation with one another, I encourage all pastors and chaplains to make additional and varied times available for Confessions, especially on the Wednesdays of Lent. Frequent reference to God’s mercy in preaching, and the encouragement of daily Mass, Adoration, and the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy should also characterize the pastoral

program of this Holy Year. Where it is safe and possible, the specially designated churches and chapels should also remain open throughout the day to help the faithful encounter the Lord of Mercy not only through the Sacred Liturgy but also in prayer, devotion, and contemplation. Since geographically our Diocese is large and since extensive renovations in the Cathedral will continue for most of the coming year, I encourage pilgrims to pass through the Mercy Doors located throughout the Diocese.

These locations will be at:

Sacred Heart Church, Peoria

Saint Pius X Church, Rock Island

The Shrine Church of the Most Holy Rosary, La Salle

Saint Robert Bellarmine Chapel, St. John Paul II Newman Center, Normal

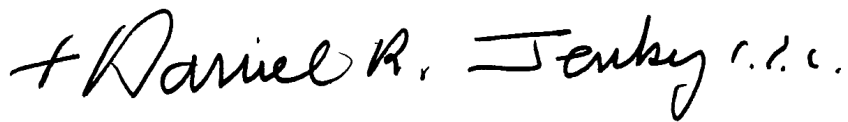
Saint John Catholic Chapel, Newman Center, Champaign

While these sanctuaries and all the churches and chapels of the Diocese will offer a variety of spiritual programs, a highlight will certainly be the celebration of Mercy Sunday on April 3, 2016, which is the Second Sunday of Easter. I ask my Vicars Forane to work with the clergy, religious, and laity in their area to prepare a common celebration at central locations. Our Diocesan Offices of Family Life and Evangelization will make available resources to help bring the Holy Year into all our homes, parishes, schools, hospitals, and religious houses. The *Catholic Post* and www.cdop.org will offer suggestions, guides, and pastoral plans to help make the promise of this Mercy Year a reality.

Anticipating the *Year of our Lord 2016*, I am issuing this my 14th Festival Letter on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, the patroness of our Diocese and the revered title of our Cathedral. We rejoice in the knowledge that no human being is more in debt to the

grace of God than is Our Lady. No taint of original sin was ever allowed to touch Mary, because Jesus was to receive the fullness of his humanity entirely from her. While the rest of us are saved by grace from our sins, Mary was saved by grace from sinning. Jesus was the Son of God and the Son of Mary. He lost none of his Divinity when the *Word became flesh*, and he lost none of his humanity when he ascended to the right hand of the Father. Our Lady is therefore the preface to all the Lord's merciful works of grace. Mary is also the first and the greatest of all the Lord's disciples. In the Communion of Saints, Mary continues to pray with and for Christ's Holy Church. As we begin this special *Holy Year of Mercy*, it is a blessing and a consolation for us to remember that Mary is rightly revered as the Refuge of Sinners and the Mother of Mercy.

December the 8th, AD 2015

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

✠Most Reverend Daniel R. Jenky, C.S.C.
BISHOP OF PEORIA

Festival Letter 2016 – Calendar

In the early centuries of Catholic Christianity, when calendars were uncommon and often imprecise, a bishop would send out an annual “Festival Letter” to announce the proper dates for observing the fasts and feasts of the Liturgical Year. It was not uncommon to also use such a letter as a means of instruction for the faithful. I have established this custom in our Diocese both to foster a greater love for the liturgy and to afford myself an additional opportunity for teaching.

Dear brothers and sisters, the glory of the Lord has shone upon us and shall ever be manifest among us, until the day of His return. Through the rhythms of times and seasons, let us celebrate the mysteries of our salvation.

Let us recall the year’s culmination, the Sacred Easter Triduum of the Lord: His Last Supper, His Crucifixion, His Burial, and His Rising, celebrated between the evening of Thursday, the 24th of March, and the evening of Sunday, the 27th of March.

Each Easter, as on each Sunday, Holy Mother Church makes present the great and saving deed by which Christ has conquered sin and death.

From Easter are reckoned all the days we keep holy:

Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent, in the Year of Our Lord 2016, will occur on the 10th day of February .

Ash Wednesday and Good Friday are days of fast and abstinence. In commemoration of the Lord’s death on the cross, all Fridays of Lent are days of obligatory abstinence. Abstinence from meat is also recommended on all the Fridays of the year.

The annual Chrism Mass, during which the priests renew their ministerial commitment, will be celebrated in the Cathedral on Tuesday of Holy Week, the 22nd of March.

No other activities or pastoral responsibilities, except the need to tend to the dying, should keep a priest from attending the Chrism Mass. I also invite the faithful of our diocese to join us for this celebration as they keep their priests in prayer.

The Church will keep her most solemn night of vigil and prayer to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ on Saturday, the 26th of March. According the ancient and universal practice of the Church, the Easter Vigil may not begin until after nightfall. In Central Illinois, sunset is estimated to begin at 7:17 P.M. CDT in Peoria (7:09 P.M. CDT in Danville and 7:21 P.M. CDT in Moline). The Easter Vigil at the Cathedral will be celebrated at 8:15 P.M.

On Divine Mercy Sunday on the Second Sunday of Easter, the 3rd of April I have asked my Vicars Forane to work with the clergy, religious, and laity in their area to prepare a common celebration at a central location for the conclusion of the Novena of Divine Mercy which will begin on Good Friday, the 24th of March.

The Ascension of the Lord will be commemorated on Sunday, the 8th of May, according to the decision of the bishops of the Illinois Province. Pentecost, the joyful conclusion of the Great Fifty Days of Easter, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 15th of May.

Any Catholic in a state of serious sin is obligated to approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once between Ash Wednesday and Pentecost Sunday. All Catholics are especially urged to confess their sins during the penitential season of Lent, during Advent, before the great festivals, and regularly throughout the year.

In a special way our Divine Savior gave the Church the gift of the Sacrament of Holy Orders to make present the Paschal Mystery for all people of every time and place. This year, the Diocese of Peoria will celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Orders in several ways.

On Sunday, the 22nd of May at 10:30 a.m. in the morning in the Cathedral, I will ordain a man to the transitional diaconate. On Saturday, the 28th of May at 10:30 a.m. in the morning, I rejoice to ordain a new priest for service to our Diocese.

I invite and encourage the clergy, consecrated men and women, and lay-faithful to join with me at these great celebrations. All priests and deacons serving in the Diocese of Peoria are expected to participate in the Ordination of Priests. Except the need to tend to the dying, no other pastoral duty or personal obligation is of greater importance than welcoming our new brothers to our presbyterate.

Likewise, the Pilgrim Church proclaims the Passover of the Lord in the feasts of the Holy Mother of God, the Apostles, and the Saints, and in the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed.

In the Year of Our Lord 2016, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, the spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary, will be celebrated on Saturday, the 19th of March.

The Solemnity of the Annunciation of the Lord will be celebrated on Monday, the 4th of April.

The Assumption of the Virgin Mary is celebrated on Monday, the 15th of August, and is not a holy day of obligation this year.

The Feast of Saint Crescent, whose relics are solemnly enshrined in Corpus Christi Church, Galesburg, is celebrated on Saturday, the 27th of August.

The Feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, Doctor of the Church and Patroness of our diocesan vocations program, is celebrated on Saturday, the 1st of October, and has been raised to the rank of a liturgical feast in our Local Church.

The Solemnity of All Saints, a holy day of obligation, is celebrated on Tuesday, the 1st of November. The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed is observed on Wednesday, the 2nd of November.

The Solemnity of Christ the King, on which we celebrate the Solemn Closing of the Year of Mercy, will be celebrated on Sunday, the 20th of November.

The Church will celebrate the beginning of the new liturgical year of grace and prayer on the First Sunday of Advent, the 27th of November, in the Year of Our Lord 2016.

In the Year of Our Lord 2016, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary is celebrated on Thursday, the 8th of December, and is a holy day of obligation as well as the Patronal Feast of the Diocese of Peoria.

The Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Patroness of the Americas, is celebrated on Monday, the 12th of December.

Christmas will be on Sunday, the 25th of December.

The Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God, is celebrated on Sunday, the 1st of January in the Year of Our Lord 2017.

To better enjoy the infinite treasury of merit won by our Divine Saviour, in accord with the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum* and the *Ceremonial of Bishops*, “the diocesan bishop in his own diocese may bestow the papal blessing with the plenary indulgence, using the proper formulary, three times a year on solemn feasts, which he will designate....”

As Bishop of Peoria, I am happy to bestow such blessing with the plenary indulgence during the Year of Our Lord 2016 at the end of Holy Mass for the great Solemnities of Easter Vigil, Pentecost Day, and Christmas Eve.

Further, to enhance the devotional life of the faithful and the liturgical life of our parishes, I have encouraged a return to the practice of Rogation Days to mark the change of seasons. I have requested the Holy See to confirm these days as part of the official calendar of our local Church. Pending their confirmation, I encourage pastors to observe these Rogation Days in the Diocese of Peoria:

January 22nd to coincide with the national day of prayer and fasting for the dignity of human life.

June 23rd to pray for healthy growth and good weather, associated with the Nativity of St. John the Baptist

September 13th to highlight the fruits of the harvest, associated with the Triumph of the Cross

December 7th to highlight the family, associated with our patronal feast of the Immaculate Conception.

To Jesus Christ, who is, was, and who is to come, the Lord of all time and history, be endless praise, for ever and ever. Amen.