

PASTORAL LETTER on the occasion of the proclamation of the Holy Year of Mercy in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church

Sunday, 29 November 2015, 11:43

Dearly Beloved in Christ! Together with the Universal Church we are entering into a time of special grace -The Holy Year, which, according to the will of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, will last from 8th. December 2015 to 26th November 2016.

This year, which is also called an Extraordinary Jubilee Year, has been dedicated by the Pope to God's mercy. This is a time of God's special blessings, to undertake a pilgrimage to a Cathedral in our Local or Universal Church. This is a time for healing the wounds of body and soul, a return to God - a rediscovery of Mercy. Standing on the threshold of the Jubilee Year, let us reflect on how we accept God's Mercy, how we live it and how we testify about it to ourselves, our neighbors and all people so that we may take advantage of the many spiritual fruits of this fertile time.

When God desired to reveal himself to man, to introduce us to Himself and reveal the truth about Himself, he described Himself, first of all, as The Merciful God. Revealing His glory to Moses at Sinai, the Lord said of himself: "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Ex. 34: 6). God, the Father has poured upon us his merciful love in his Son Jesus Christ. This is what our Saviour taught when he said to his disciples, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (Jn. 3, 16). Being a Christian is to first of all believe in God's mercy for ourselves,- to believe in God's love. The Evangelist John emphasizes this sharing of faith saying, "So we know and believed the love that God has for us" (1 Jn. 4, 16).

An important aspect of this Holy Year is an invitation to everyone to receive God's mercy. It is given to us, - the Church, by the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of God's love. To personally accept and live this mercy we turn to the Holy Mystery of Penance or Reconciliation. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world this Sacrament is almost forgotten, rarely preached about and even more rarely gone to. The reasons for this sad state of affairs are many, but in the first place there is less knowledge and experience of God's presence and as a consequence, a loss of a sense of sin. Our great desire is that the faithful of our Church use the Year of God's Mercy to rediscover, appreciate and experience more frequently the Source of Mercy, which the Lord has revealed to us sinners in the Mystery of Penance. This appeal I direct to Pastors who have a duty to administer the Mystery to the faithful. I also appeal particularly to those baptized persons who call themselves Christians, but rarely confess and therefore have no ability to live God's mercy and to receive God's love.

A particular requirement of anyone who experiences this Holy Year is to share God's mercy. Our motto this year will be the words "Merciful like the Father" that resonate from the call of our Lord Jesus to his disciples: "Be merciful, as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6, 36). These words remind us that the gift of mercy that we ourselves receive from Our Lord requires us to be merciful to our neighbours. In this way we not only express our gratitude to God for His mercy on us, but reveal to our neighbours the face and gracious presence of God in this world, a world that is so frequently scarred by human suffering, loneliness, fear and hopelessness. Faithful of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, no matter on which

continent of globe they live, feel the suffering and pain of millions of citizens of Ukraine caused by an unjust war against us. Therefore, we must use every opportunity that presents itself to be merciful.

I call upon all our faithful to remember the Church's teaching on specific works of mercy for the soul and the body, for individuals and for the wider community, showing all the love and creativity and drawing on our faith to implement them in everyday life. Mercy washes away our sins, transforms our hearts and our lives and brings us closer to God through a transformation - to become more like Him. Our mercy should primarily be directed to our family members and neighbours, so that in the words of, Pope Francis the door of every home becomes "the door of mercy". Let us be attentive to the needy members of the parish community, which for us is the Family of God: there must never be people who feel forgotten, abandoned and overlooked in their needs. Since love has no boundaries, acts of mercy have to go out and meet poor people, regardless of their nationality, social status, religious affiliation or political preferences. Let all who meet us through our sincere interest in them, good words and effective help, feel the presence of the Merciful Father.

Another of our duties this year is to become witnesses of God's mercy. Our faith teaches us to see the opportunity so that we may exercise our Evangelical vocation to witness the wonderful works of God's mercy in the world. Our brothers and sisters in our native land have always remembered this vocation. We recall how they witnessed Christ before the torturers and unjust judges in difficult times of persecution. So today - when Ukrainian soldiers and those who support them physically and spiritually have become remarkable witnesses to the strength of love in the face of external aggression. All our faithful in Ukraine and throughout the World are called to become tireless evangelists of God's mercy, which has so clearly and generously manifested itself in the history of our Church and people. Indeed, the experience of salvation in times of persecution and the power of God's love that still animates and leads our people is given to us not only for ourselves, but also as a sign of hope for a lost and fearful world. This sign, which is our history, speaks more with God's than human words: "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever" (Ps. 125: 1) and "But I will sing of your might; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been a fortress for me and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love" (Ps. 59, 17-18). So do not be silent about God's great works, the works of the Lord's mercy on us, so that all people, among whom we live, know that - He is our God, our salvation, and having recognised this, they will come closer to God in their hearts and in their works.

In this Holy Year let us place ourselves and the world under the Protection of Mary the Mother of Mercy. "God is in its midst, it will not be shaken" (Ps. 46, 6) - these words of the psalmist are found in Saint Sophia – Holy Wisdom Cathedral in Kyiv, from which flows the spring of our forefather's faith. They express the abiding confidence of our people in God's mighty protection for the city and the country through the unstoppable prayers to our Heavenly Intercessor depicted on the "Indestructible wall", The Kyiv Oranta.

Our people in different parts of Ukraine and the world venerate the Virgin and beg her help through miracle-working icons. This year, with much love let us focus our thoughts and our pilgrim steps to the princely city of Yaroslav, a city, near the western border of Ukraine and Poland, where in the territory of the Przemysl - Warsaw Archeparchy we find our ancient and miraculous Icon of the Virgin -

"Doors of Mercy". God in His providence has chosen the Most Holy Virgin as the "door" through which He came to mankind in His Only Begotten Son, incarnate through the power and action of the Holy Spirit.

May this same Spirit may fill our hearts with God's love and mercy. May it transform our lives, making us a images of the presence and work of our merciful Father in the world. May we be accompanied this year by The Most Holy Virgin - Mother of Mercy, and all the saints and righteous of the Ukrainian land - faithful witnesses of God's mercy and God's love!

The blessing of the Lord be upon you!

+Sviatoslav

Given in Kyiv

At the Patriarchal Sobor of the Resurrection of Christ

On the feast of the Priest-Martyr Josephat, archbishop of Polotsk

25 November 2015

We oblige all Pastors to read this Pastoral Letter to the faithful after every Divine Liturgy on Sunday 13 December 2015