



**Most Rev Michael McCarthy**  
**Bishop of Rockhampton**



**PASTORAL LETTER**  
**TO THE PEOPLE**  
**OF THE DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON**  
**LENT 2016**

**(To be read at Masses on Weekend 6/7 February)**

**My dear people,**

**Let the Mercy of God wash over you:**

The Gospel of Mark tells the story of Jesus who healed the man from the territory of the Gerasenes. Jesus sent him home to tell his story with the instructions, '*Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord in His mercy has done for you.*' (Mark 5:19) **He allowed God's mercy to wash over him before he told everyone.**

**How I have recognised Mercy**

Recently, you may have been aware, I had surgery on my shoulder for a torn tendon and I thank you for your prayers. This has required many weeks of inactivity, pain and very limited mobility. I came to realise how helpless one can become through an injury. During these past weeks, through the doctors, nurses, the staff of the Mater Misericordiae Hospital, the ministry of the people of CentacareCQ, I received tremendous pastoral care which I will value for the rest of my life. I appreciated all who visited and assisted me during this period of recovery. For me, the confronting moment was when being transferred to the Rehabilitation Ward, I realised my frailty. The words of the pastoral care visitor during the first day in the Rehabilitation Ward at the Mater Hospital struck me, '*Let people assist you.*' These words were as if they came from the Father, '***Allow God's mercy to wash over you.***' I was helpless and all I could do was to receive. For me, these past few months have been a graced time when God, through his human angels, allowed me to be bathed in his mercy.

**The little works of Mercy**

I have been your Bishop for nearly two years and I continually admire what I call *little works of mercy* that happen throughout our Diocese. I have noticed the little packages arriving in western mail boxes, a voucher to buy some food for the family, a visit from one of our school people, a meal prepared for a family with sickness or hardship, a ministry visit from the people of CentacareCQ like I experienced. Added to these *little works of mercy*, include welcoming a newly arrived family from overseas and assisting with housing and getting employment, a hospital visit, catching up with an elderly neighbour and assisting with some chores. These *little works of mercy* were abundant after the cyclone and the flood earlier last year. I invite you this Lent to participate in the *little works of mercy* and support our fellow human beings through difficult times and especially through bereavement, sickness and those who have lost their job.

We follow in the footsteps of Jesus who told many stories of mercy translated into practice. We recall the parable of the Good Samaritan who found an injured person on the side of the road and bathed the injured person with kindness and *little works of mercy*. **The mercy of the Father.**

### **Icon of Mercy – Jesus the Good Shepherd**

I received for an Ordination gift, an Icon of Jesus the Good Shepherd. I am delighted that during this Year of Mercy, this Icon will travel to every parish in the Diocese. Please welcome this Icon of Jesus the Good Shepherd into your communities and let it find a special place in your hearts. I invite you to gaze upon the face of the Shepherd, look into the Shepherd's eyes and imagine yourself being the one found and loved by Him, carried and then brought back to the flock. Imagine the joy of the Shepherd as He finds you. The Shepherd is there for you especially during drought, unemployment, illness, bereavement, hurt, pain, and tragedy. It may be a long time since you connected with the Shepherd but He is there for you and lifts you up and carries you joyfully on His shoulders. I invite you to bring your family and your relatives and friends and gaze on this **Icon of Mercy**. **As you pray, let the mercy of God wash over you and your family and friends.**

### **24 Hours for the Lord**

At the invitation of Pope Francis we will celebrate *24 Hours for the Lord* beginning around 5 pm on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> March until around 5 pm on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> March. I invite you to put some time aside and to gather in your parish churches. Today many activities compete for our time but I ask you to devote this personal time to your God.

There will be times of prayer, reflection, meditation and an opportunity to experience God's Mercy. We are all invited to experience the love of the Father through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is the Sacrament of Mercy, and to personally experience the profound words of the Church spoken by the priest, *'I absolve you from your sins'...* *'Go in peace.'* Like the little lamb that the Shepherd finds and restores back to the fold, the Shepherd restores us back to our community as we are forgiven by our God. **There is a great relief when we let God's mercy flow over us.**

## **The Church of Mercy**

Cardinal Walter Kasper in his book, *Mercy*, says, 'A Church without charity and without mercy would no longer be the Church of Jesus Christ.' When we reflect on these words during the 24 Hours for the Lord, we hope that our mandate to be a living Church of Jesus Christ in the Diocese of Rockhampton will be renewed. May our whole Diocese find new ways of being a Church of mercy and compassion. May we assist each other in our faith communities, the people of our Diocese, so that through us they may once again experience God's abundant mercy. Let us not forget our brothers and sisters in overseas countries through the works of Caritas and the weekly Project Compassion during the Sundays of Lent.

## **Lenten Program 2016**

For the first three Sundays of Lent, a reflection prepared by our own Liturgical Office will be available to assist us as we prepare for the *24 Hours for the Lord*. This will be the Diocesan Lenten Program for 2016 as it will enable us as a Diocese to concentrate our focus on God's mercy and how God wants to change our hearts by allowing mercy to flow over us.

## **Easter to Pentecost**

For the many years, I have found the Scripture readings from Easter to Pentecost a rich tapestry of faith. These readings excite me for their energy and how the people of the early Church proclaimed the Risen Christ and how, through the Holy Spirit, the mercy of God reached and flowed over so many people. Our Diocese has produced a reflection, *Keeping Mercy Alive – from Easter to Pentecost*. **Let us capture their enthusiasm and allow the mercy of God to flow over us and our people.**

## **Conclusion**

Let us listen to Pope Francis as he says in his Lenten letter to the Church, '*Let us not waste this Season of Lent – so favourable a time for conversion.*'

May God bless you and all you love this Lenten Season, and may Mary, the Mother of the Church, and Saint Joseph guide us.

May our hearts be open to Christ who keeps knocking on them and who asks us to allow the mercy of God to flow over us. **May God's abundant mercy flow over us.**

*+ Michael McAuley*

**Bishop of Rockhampton**