

Catholic Parish of the Good Shepherd

Hurunui District, Catholic Diocese of Christchurch



Divine Mercy Sunday 3 April 2016

freed from death & living in love

Whether the papacy of Pope Francis be long or (as he predicts) short, after just two years it is already possible to name the great themes of his papacy. Within days of his election he was emphasising mercy as the central and essential place of encounter between God and humanity. In his first major written work *The Joy of the Gospel*, Francis speaks of the mercy of God more than thirty times, and later this year, on the December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he will open the doors on an extraordinary year of Jubilee, the Year of Mercy.

In a human lifetime most people only have the opportunity for one or perhaps two Years of Jubilee since these only occur every half century. There are exceptions and a pope can call an "extraordinary" Jubilee year as Pope St. John Paul did in 1983 to mark the 1950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The year 2000 was by right a Jubilee year and I reasonably expected that to be my last, but thanks to Pope Francis the Jubilee doors of the major Roman basilicas will ritually be broken open again in December giving me another opportunity for the abundance of graces that flow through a Jubilee year to those who are open to receiving this divine generosity.

Today's Gospel reading finds the disciples together "in the evening of that same day [the day of the resurrection], the first day of the week".

It is impossible to imagine the diverse and mixed emotions of this little gathering. We know they were fearful since "the doors were closed...for fear of the Jews". But they would have had other reasons to be fearful as well.

This group included Peter (the one who denied the Lord), the three who fell asleep when Jesus needed their company and prayer, and the rest who ran for cover instead of remaining alongside their suffering Lord. Now the women had come from the tomb with the news that he was alive.

Certainly this news was all they could have hoped for. But they would also have felt deep shame and guilt at their lack of fidelity. The return of Jesus would surely highlight their failures. And so in fear and embarrassment they gathered. The doors were closed. But despite this physical barrier of the door, and their personal obstacles of sin, Jesus now stood among them. Because of the triumph of God over death, there are now no insurmountable obstacles to the presence and mercy of God. The risen Jesus is now with us.

Jesus spoke. His word broke through their doors of shame and guilt. His words melted the armour of sin surrounding their hearts. The one they had abandoned said to them: "peace be with you". And then, in case they had missed the mercy and love in his greeting, he said to them again "peace be with you".

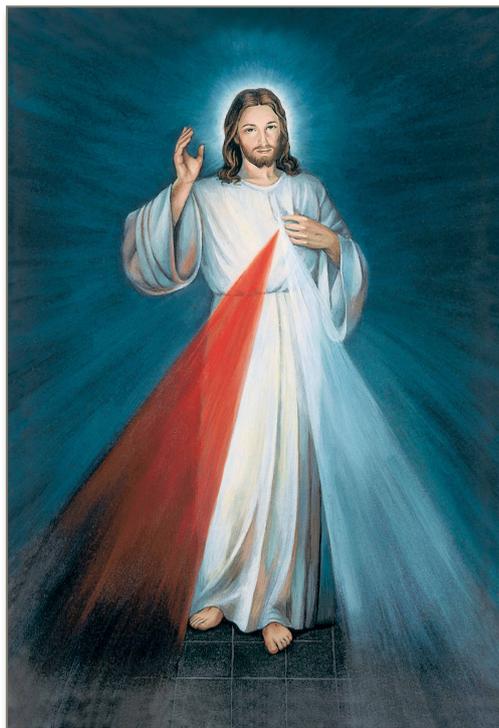
This divine greeting healed their sin. Their guilt and embarrassment, their shame, was now transformed into joy by the healing power of His presence and His greeting.

Every time we gather to celebrate the Mass we gather in shame and guilt. We are sinners. At the start of every Mass we "acknowledge our sins". We do not do this to make ourselves feel bad, to beat ourselves up or to undermine our self-esteem. Instead our purpose in acknowledging our sins is that we might prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries: yes we are sinners, but God's love and mercy is more powerful than any sin.

Personal self-esteem is never a human achievement. The esteem we seek is always God's gift. I am not loveable because I do loving things, or because I act and speak in certain attractive ways. I am loveable simply because God loves me. This awareness is the ultimate experience of mercy. This is real love and such true love gives real freedom.

In the Jubilee year of 2000, Pope John Paul initiated this Sunday, the Second Sunday of Easter, as Divine Mercy Sunday. In his homily on that first Divine Mercy Sunday, as he canonised a Polish nun Faustina Kowalska as a saint of the Church, he proclaimed:

"It is important then that we accept the whole message that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the



Church will be called "Divine Mercy Sunday". In the various readings, the liturgy seems to indicate the path of mercy which, while re-establishing the relationship of each person with God, also creates new relations of fraternal solidarity among human beings."

Helen Kowalska was born in Poland in 1905. She died as Sister Faustina in 1938. In 1931 she was living as a religious in the convent of the Congregation of Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy in Cracow, Poland. In February of that year she had a powerful and very real experience of Jesus calling her to spread the word of his overwhelming mercy for every human person. In response to this experience she painted a picture of a gentle Jesus reaching out in love to all who seek to be free from the burden of sin.

During the pontificate of fellow Pole Pope John Paul II, the life of this quiet nun and her mission was made known by the pope to the world. The first words of John Paul to the world, immediately after his election as pope were "do not be afraid". Fear exists in any person who is not experiencing the mercy of God in any moment. It is significant that on this day in 2011, Divine Mercy Sunday, Pope Benedict named John Paul as "Blessed". Last year on this day, Divine Mercy Sunday 2014, Pope Francis proclaimed Pope John Paul as a saint of the Church.

Some Catholics responded to news of the life of Sister Faustina and her response to God with scepticism. Others embraced fully her message and spread word of her image of the merciful Jesus and her trust in him.

It is easy to be sceptical about an individual's personal experience of Jesus. Perhaps this is because we do not trust our own personal experience of the power of God made known to us. Maybe we feel as though such personal experience of Jesus no longer happens?

I would suggest that anyone who speaks about the love and mercy of Jesus is on sound ground. This message is as necessary today as ever. If we are honest with ourselves we are very aware of our own sin and need for God's forgiveness.

St Faustina wrote beautifully of the mercy of God as a fountain of love gushing over all who acknowledge their frailty and need for God. This fountain of forgiveness cleanses all who turn back to God.

This is the Easter life of Baptism. In the waters of baptism, and in the Sacraments of the Church through which these waters continue to flow, God continues to deliver us from all that entombs us.

J.O'C

Interested in returning home to the Catholic Church? Catholics Returning Home, a four-week programme for non-practising Catholics interested in renewing their life in the Church starts soon. It will run from early May until early June at 7.00pm at the following locations: Sundays at Waimakariri Parish, Mondays at Timaru Parish, Wednesdays at Papanui Parish. You are most welcome to join us. For more details phone 0508 HOME NOW [0508 466 366] or visit www.catholicshomenow.co.nz

Hours of mercy - Jesus youth initiative In the light of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, the Jesus Youth movement is initiating 50 days of Eucharistic Adoration across New Zealand from Easter till Pentecost. Jesus youth Christchurch is hosting "Hours of mercy" for 7 Saturdays. When:- April 2nd till may 14th (Saturdays only) 8am to 8pm Where:- St Teresa of Lisieux Parish, Riccarton Sign Up Online at www.hoursofmercy.org.nz or contact 022 693 6195 Do try to find some time with Jesus, our Eucharistic Lord through the "Hours of Mercy" initiative."

Rosary House Spiritual Life Centre Prayer and Reflection Day *Mercy – God's loving kindness.* Saturday 9 April 10.30am – 2.30pm at Mary Potter Centre, 442 Durham Street North. Bring own lunch. Facilitator: Sr Mary Catherwood. **Noticing God's Presence** Using scripture for reflection, group response and personal prayer (experience *lectio divina*). Tuesdays 12, 19 & 26 April 10.30-11.30am at Mary Potter Centre, 442 Durham Street North; session repeated at 7.30-8.30pm at 22 Gracefield Avenue, Central City. Facilitator: Sr Mary Catherwood.

Pro-Life Facts The Right to Life Annual General Meeting will be held in Christchurch on Wednesday the 13th of April at 7:30 p.m. at Christ the King Parish Centre, 90 Greers Rd, Christchurch. This year, Jane Goodwin, who is the Advanced Care Facilitator at the Canterbury District Health Board and is opposed to euthanasia, will be the guest speaker. Members and supporters welcome. For more info on pro-life issues, visit www.righttolife.org.nz.

Event: Antioch Camp Date: 15th – 17th April Venue: YMCA Wainui Camp Antioch is an annual Camp run by CYT for Yrs. 11-13. An opportunity for young people to grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ with inspiring talks, testimonies, games, small groups, opportunity to celebrate the sacraments, praise and worship and MORE. Online Registration <http://www.cyt.org.nz>. Cost \$85 per person. Contact Sinead at CYT

Mass for Life will be held at St Mary's Pro-Cathedral on Monday 4th April at 7.30pm. All welcome.

WYD in Christchurch Dear parishioners, on July 29th to August 2nd Catholic Cathedral and Marian Colleges are hosting a Companion event to the World Youth Day in Krakow for the Secondary School Colleges in the South Island. We are anticipating 240 students of Catholic Colleges will attend this event that includes Pilgrimage, Service, Catechesis and Worship. This is a unique opportunity for the Youth (16-18years) of our Catholic communities to come together and share their faith experiences. Please keep these students in your prayer as they are preparing themselves for this journey. As we move closer to this event, we will be asking for donations to ensure that costs are reduced for families and no one is excluded from participating. To keep up what's happening see our Facebook page: World Youth Day 2016.

Accessing support for those affected by the recent earthquakes With recent significant earthquakes in the area, some people may be feeling anxious, stressed or upset. Catholic Social Services are happy to be first port of call for people if you (or people you know) are suffering. 03-379 0012 or email c.s.s@clear.net.nz

Strength to Strength Thursdays April 7, 21 and May 5th 7.30pm – 9.00pm Christ the King Parish Centre, 90 Greers Road, Christchurch. A three session DVD series designed to give practical help to those wishing to pray more in their daily lives. Inspired by the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Ideal for the Year of Mercy. Filmed in an engaging and humorous way with a TV studio audience. Each session lasts approx. 40 mins with midpoint group questions & prayerful reflections.

The Liturgical Year an 18 hour 9am-4pm course from Monday 18 April to Wednesday 20th at The Catholic Education Office, Barbadoes Street, CHCH. Contact Wendy at WClark@chch.catholic.org.nz or 03 353 0757 or visit www.chch.catholic.org.nz/tci for more information.

Let us continue to pray for the happy repose of the soul of Bishop Barry Jones, and pray too that all those involved in the process of appointing his successor will be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Halswell Catholic Women's League will be celebrating their 60th Jubilee on the weekend 15-16 April 2016. Any Past Members please contact Shirley McNeill to register your interest: Ph: 322 6515 or sj.mcneill@xtra.co.nz

LADIES LUNCH get together. All catholic ladies and their non-catholic lady family members including preschool children are warmly invited to the home of Anne Murphy, 11 Leslie St, Culverden township on Wednesday, 13th April at 12 noon. Please bring a small plate of food. Any queries Anne 3158489

LOOKING TO OUR FUTURE. If you did not receive a brochure in the mail over the last week this means you are not on our parish roll. Having your name on the roll is important for many reasons, including sacramental preparation, visitation etc. If you are not on the roll please send your name, address etc to Sarah at catholicurunui@gmail.com or 03 319 8730

EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION Every three years each parish renews the list of those who serve as Extraordinary Ministers of Holy Communion for the parish. I invite you to recommend to me the names of those who you consider suitable to serve in this important ministry. Let me know names before Sunday 10 April. Thank you. Fr. John

This is how the newness of God appears to the women, the disciples and all of us: as victory over sin, evil and death, over everything that crushes life and makes it seem less human. And this is a message meant for me and for you dear sister, for you dear brother. How often does Love have to tell us: Why do you look for the living among the dead? Our daily problems and worries can wrap us up in ourselves, in sadness and bitterness... and that is where death is. That is not the place to look for the One who is alive! Let the risen Jesus enter your life, welcome him as a friend, with trust: he is life! If up till now you have kept him at a distance, step forward. He will receive you with open arms. If you have been indifferent, take a risk: you won't be disappointed. If following him seems difficult, don't be afraid, trust him, be confident that he is close to you, he is with you and he will give you the peace you are looking for and the strength to live as he would have you do.

Pope Francis.
Easter Vigil Homily 2015



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Catholic Hurunui

I realise that very few parishioners are able to understand the life of a priest. In a culture where busyness is esteemed as a virtue it is rarely appreciated that the real business of a parish priest is not parish administration at an office desk, or (especially in the Hurunui) driving from one church to the next for weekend Masses. The central ministry of a priest is in sharing the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of parishioners in companionship and through the celebration of the sacraments. The most burdensome work of a priest's day emerges when the historical tensions in families and between neighbours and rural communities play out in parish life. The heart of my ministry as a priest is lived when I wake well before dawn concerned about a parishioner's relationship breakdown, or in prayer prompted by the cancer that threatens to take the life of a parishioner prematurely. Most of my priestly worry is caused by parishioners who see negativity, gossip and back-biting as an acceptable alternative to Jesus' explicit instruction to love and to forgive without counting the cost. The tragedy is that while the Easter reality offers us the pathway to life, we most often settle for an annual Easter holiday that has more to do with church and chocolate than love and liberty.

www.foodforfaith.org.nz