**Advent: Time for Mercy!**

 Advent is a way of preparing ourselves for God coming into our lives each day. During the four weeks of Advent we try to make room for God; to invite God into our daily lives. It can be easy to overlook this season as we prepare for Christmas and the holidays. With the growth of technology we no longer have to wait … we can become impatient if our computer takes a few minutes to upload! Advent reminds us of the importance of waiting and the importance of hope. This is the time to remember what Christians really look forward to and the preparations we must make. This season of advent is a perfect time to help us to prepare not just for the coming of Christ but to become part of this New Year of Mercy which begins on the 8th December.

 Pope Francis has demonstrated mercy in both his words and actions since he became Pope and it is no surprise that he has chosen this theme, mercy. These opening words, “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.”  *Misericordiae vultus* sets the tone for the entire document and this is the mystery of our Christian faith. This advent we invite you on this journey of mercy, who is mercy, what is mercy, where there is mercy, how there is mercy and why there is mercy.

It was Pope Paul VI that said at the closing of the second Vatican council, “On the face of every human person, especially those marked by tears and suffering, we can and most see the face of Christ’. Pope Francis wish is that this Year, experienced also in the sharing of divine mercy, may be “dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us.

**Receive the daily messages on the Veritas website and social media platform from the first Sunday of Advent through Christmas Eve. Read and reflect on the weekly blog also.**

**Suggested Resources**

1. The Church of Mercy by Pope Francis- This book is packed with wisdom on mercy, teachings and short snippets of homilies and addresses.
2. Misericordiae Vultus- Pope Francis
3. Pope Francis Words of Mercy and Joy
4. The Quality of Mercy- Anna Burke. In this short book Anna Burke ponders the nature and quality of mercy in this considered book of reflections.
5. The second greatest story ever told- Fr Gaitley. This books shows how the lives of many Saints and their stories all interconnect and mean something today.
6. [Mercy in the City: How to Feed the Hungry, Give Drink to the Thirsty, Visit the Imprisoned, and Keep Your Day Job](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0829438920/ref%3Das_li_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1789&creative=9325&creativeASIN=0829438920&linkCode=as2&tag=lotohianbera-20&linkId=ARAFK3K6BB6VUZD7)- Kerry Weber-Great. This books shows how we can incorporate service and charity into our everyday lives.

Mercy and Beatitude

**Day 1**

Pope Francis said "wait for the Lord because with the Lord there is mercy, and redemption, where the Lord is there is mercy”.

As you reflect on these words, consider where you might need the virtue of patience and ask yourself where do you find the Lord in your life today.

**Day 2**

Do Justly, Love Mercy, Walk Humbly- (Micah)

Today practice the virtue of humility. Where in your life do you need to show humility and walk humbly with the Lord?

**Day 3**

**‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.’ Matthew 7:12**

**Today notice any negative feeling you have towards others and yourself, take a step back and reflect on how you would like to be treated today and take it on yourself to do this for someone you meet today or have not met in a while.**

**Day 4**

It strikes me there is something greater than judgement. I think it is called mercy. Sebastian Barry, The Secret Scripture

Today think about ways you have judged others or listen to yourself throughout the day and hear that voice of judgement, pray for the strength to hear the voice of mercy.

**Day 5**

**Psalm 23:6** “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.”

Throughout the course of the day recite this psalm as you continue with your day and before you go to sleep, light a candle, sit in a quiet place and reflect on what the words have meant for you today.

**Day 6**

**Lamentations 3:32** “But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies.”

Today remember a loved one you have lost, use today to remember the happy times and perhaps do something in honour of their memory, light a candle, plant a seed, write a letter and tell them how much you miss them but also how you plan to embrace life in their memory. Ask God for strength and support. Consider the words from the poet Mary Oliver- That time I thought I could not go any closer to grief without dying.

I went closer, and I did not die. Surely God had His hand in this?

**Day 7**

I think we too are the people who, on the one hand, want to listen to Jesus, but on the other hand, at times, like to find a stick to beat others with, to condemn others. And Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think — and I say it with humility — that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy.  — Homily on March 17, 2013

Pope Francis considers that the Lord’s most powerful message is mercy, in what way can you see this power of mercy working in your life and the world today.

**Day 8**

Jesus' attitude is striking: we do not hear the words of scorn, we do not hear words of condemnation, but only words of love, of mercy, which are an invitation to conversation. "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Ah! Brothers and Sisters, God's face is the face of a merciful father who is always patient. Have you thought about God's patience, the patience He has with each one of us? That is His mercy. He always has patience, patience with us, He understands us, He waits for us, he does not tire of forgiving us if we are able to return to Him with a contrite heart. "Great is God's mercy," says the Psalm.  — Angelus on March 17, 2013

How do you need to forgive today? Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do, maybe you can find a way to forgive today, if not leave the person and burden you are carrying with the Lord.

**Day 9**

In the past few days I have been reading a book by a Cardinal ... Cardinal Kasper said that feeling mercy, that this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient. ... Let us remember the Prophet Isaiah who says that even if our sins were scarlet, God's love would make them white as snow. This mercy is beautiful. — Angelus on March 17, 2013

 Today read Pope Francis letter on Mercy and reflect and pray with it.

**Day 10**

In today's Gospel, the Apostle Thomas personally experiences this mercy of God. ... Thomas does not believe it when the other Apostles tell him: "We have seen the Lord." ... And how does Jesus react? With patience: Jesus does not abandon Thomas in his stubborn unbelief ... He does not close the door, He waits. And Thomas acknowledges his own poverty, his little faith. "My Lord and my God!": with this simple yet faith-filled invocation, he responds to Jesus' patience. He lets himself be enveloped by Divine Mercy; he sees it before his eyes, in the wounds of Christ's hands and feet and in His open side, and he discovers trust.
— Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013

Reach out to someone today who feels abandoned by the Lord and allow them to respond in their own way and time to the mercy of God.

**Day 11**

I am always struck when I reread the parable of the merciful Father. ... The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about [his wayward son], and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach. ... God is always waiting for us, He never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence and hope — always!— Homily on Divine Mercy Sunday, April 7, 2013

Read the story of the Prodigal Son and reflect on where you feel lost in your life, praying that you will be able to find the Lord waiting for you just like the Prodigal Son.

**Day 12**

“Situations can change; people can change. Be the first to seek to bring good. Do not grow accustomed to evil, but defeat it with good.” ― [Pope Francis](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7034628.Pope_Francis), [The Church of Mercy](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/40166804)

An eye for an eye... makes the whole world blind-Gandhi

**Day 13**

“To be faithful, to be creative, we need to be able to change. To change! And why must I change? So that I can adapt to the situations in which I must proclaim the Gospel. To stay close to God, we need to know how to set out; we must not be afraid to set out.” ― [Pope Francis](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7034628.Pope_Francis), [The Church of Mercy](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/40166804)

People change, life changes and with this change we must learn to adapt and grow. Today consider one thing you would like to change about yourself, start with a small act such as practicing the art of gratefulness.

**Day 14**

“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](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7034628.Pope_Francis), [The Church of Mercy](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/40166804)

Today visit or call that friend who you trust and because of them know the real gift of friendship.

**Day 15**

“God thinks like the shepherd who lays down his life in order to defend and save his sheep.”
― [Pope Francis](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7034628.Pope_Francis), [The Church of Mercy](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/40166804)

Reflect on the story of The Lost Sheep and write a letter to someone who has helped you in some way. The year of Mercy Logo is a shepherd holding his sheep.

**Day 16**

[The confessional is not a torture chamber, but the place in which the Lord's mercy motivates us to do better.](http://www.azquotes.com/quote/101188)-[Pope Francis](http://www.azquotes.com/author/5099-Pope_Francis)

Sometimes by just getting something of our chests is a huge step to freeing us and allow us to breath. Go on a walk and visit a place of nature, the sea, a park, a canal and hear what the philosopher Kierkegaard once said: ‘Above all, do not lose your desire to walk. Every day I walk myself into a state of well-being and walk away from every illness; I have walked myself into my best thoughts.

**Day 17**

“Maybe some of us don’t like to say this, but those who are closest to the heart of Jesus, are the biggest sinners, because He looks for them, he calls to all: ‘Come, come!’ And when they ask for an explanation, he says: ‘But, those who have good health do not need a doctor; I have come to heal, to save.’” October 22, 2013

Mind your health, what is your diet like? Do you get enough exercise? Focus on the positive.

**Week 1**

**An Embrace**

How can we forget the image of Pope Francis embracing and kissed a man suffering from a rare disease called neurofibromatosis, a painful and disfiguring skin condition. Pope Francis showed his compassion by embracing a second man with a severe facial deformity. Photos of the Pope hugging both men touched the hearts of people across the world.

For many, their embrace recalled the image of Jesus healing lepers. The pope who took the name Francis also reminds us of the love shown to lepers by St. Francis of Assisi. Above all, the Pope’s embrace reminds us of God: This is the way God loves us – in all our pain, in all our sorrow, and in all our struggles.

This week ask yourself what you can do to follow the example of St Francis by reaching out to others. There are many kinds of embraces and gestures you can give:

* An invitation to chat with someone who is rejected in your local community
* An email, call or text to someone who is sick
* A kind word to somebody who may be lonely
* A demonstration of patience with someone you don’t like or get on with

This week, don’t be afraid to embrace!

**Forgiveness**

 “And I look out and I see paralysed men and women, paralysed congregations, paralysed ministries and I want to cry; ‘Your sins are forgiven. Rise, take up your bed and walk!’ And I treasure those moments of intrusion, when the heavens are torn apart and the Spirit descends and I rise from the water and I know there is hope” (William Loader).

How many of us find it easy to say ‘It does not matter’, or ‘I forgive that person’ but yet not really mean it? How many times has our faith being tested and challenged and as we come into conflict with ourselves and others how do we react?
The story of the paralysed man Mk 2:1-13 is one of the many conflict stories in Mark where Jesus is challenged by the religious authorities. They are not happy that he is forgiving sins because as far as they are concerned, only God can do that. It is easy for them to use the words of forgiveness, but how many of them can heal the paralysed man and let him walk and how many of them can also forgive themselves and others? When Jesus talks about forgiveness he means it. The faith of the paralysed man’s friends was a great example of trust in Jesus

**This Week:**• Read and reflect on the Story of the Paralysed Man, Mk 2:1-13.

• Read this extract on what Pope Francis said on forgiveness: http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/01/23/pope\_francis\_god\_always\_forgives\_everything/1119557

• Light a candle for someone who you need to forgive or for someone you may have hurt and say a prayer for them.

**Going to Mass should be a life changing event**

Pope Francis spoke about how important it is for all Catholics to go to Mass. ‘Going to Mass and receiving the Eucharist should make a difference in the way Catholics live’, he said. What does Pope Francis mean? He is telling us that people should not go to Mass just to be seen. It is not a place to go because it is a habit that we do or we just go to meet people we know. It is much more than that. The Church should be a place where we can go to remind ourselves to reach out to the suffering, to know that we are forgiven and, with God’s grace, to forgive others. Pope Francis said, ‘A celebration could be perfect from an aesthetic point of view, it can be beautiful, but if it does not lead us to an encounter with Jesus Christ, it risks not giving any nourishment to our hearts and lives.’ Both of these points remind us that there must be unity between going to Mass and living our everyday lives.

This week, let your visit to Church be a life changing event by engaging in some of the following activities:

• Read the Readings and Gospel for the day in advance and reflect on what they have to say to you right now

• Growing your spirituality is a conscious, internal effort. Spend time this week research a saint who you would like to learn about. What aspects of their spiritual life do you admire? How can you make this a part of your own faith journey?

• The body is just as important as the mind when it comes to the spiritual, so take some time this week to get out running, taking a hike or cycle.

In the longer term, consider taking up some of the following activities

• Volunteer in your local church. What can be done? Visit your parish website for details or ask your Priest.

• Mass should be the focal-point of your prayer life, so get involved in some prayer groups and find a way of prayer that suits you.

• Take up meditation. This alone time with God gives you the chance to gain insight that will strengthen your relationship

**The Sacrament of Confession**

Pope Francis said: “We find peace, relief when we judge ourselves rather than others. ‘Who am I to judge’ is recognizing our sin, having mercy on others”. When we point a finger at someone, there are three fingers pointing back at us. Pope Francis posed the following questions in his recent booklet, Safeguard your Heart:
• Do I only turn to God when I’m in need?
• Do I take attend Mass on Sundays and holy days of obligation?
• Do I begin and end the day with prayer?
• Am I embarrassed to show that I am a Christian?
• Do I rebel against God’s plan?
• Am I envious, hot-tempered, and biased?
• Am I honest and fair with everyone or do I fuel the “throwaway culture?”
• In my marital and family relations, do I uphold morality as taught in the Gospels?
• Do I honour and respect my parents?
• Have I refused newly conceived life? Have I snuffed out the gift of life? Have I helped do so?
• Do I respect the environment?
• Am I part worldly and part believer?
• Do I overdo it with eating, drinking, smoking and amusements?
• Am I overly concerned about my physical well-being, my possessions?
• How do I use my time? Am I lazy?

• Do I want to be served?
• Do I dream of revenge, hold grudges?
• Am I meek, humble and a builder of peace?
(Source: http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1500884.htm)

**This week:**

Try and go to confession this week, as Pope Francis said: “Confession is meant to be a sincere moment of conversion, an occasion to demonstrate trust in God’s willingness to forgive his children and to help them back on the path of following Jesus”.

**Keeping Christ in Christmas**

This time of year is an extra busy time for people. Many of us are preparing to travel home for Christmas, and enjoy time off work/school. Stores are busy, the streets are crowded, and decorations and lights are sparkling all over. Christmas music is playing on the radio, friends and families meet up, and there is always last minute Christmas shopping to be done.
While much of this is part of life, we must ask ourselves the important question: How can we keep Christ in all of this? Why not spend some time in these busy days praying for the homeless and doing a random act of kindness for them. Pope Francis asked us in a twitter message, ‘When we meet a person truly in need, do we see the face of God?’ This week let’s keep Christ in Christmas by seeing the face of God in all we meet.

**This week**• Take time to reflect and spend time with Christ

• Keep a “Blessing Bags” in the car (or backpack, purse) when you encounter homeless people. http://homesweetroad.com/blessing-bags-backpack-homeless-checklist/
• Encourage students/families and friends to donate a shoebox of items that the homeless can use. A small gesture like this can go a long way.

In this Jubilee Year, may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love . May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: “Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (*Ps* 25:6).

“For his mercy endures forever.”