

Dear brothers and sisters, have you begun to experience the joy of being at the start of your 50th Anniversary Jubilee Year? You don't need to answer that. By divine providence, this year almost exactly coincides with the Jubilee Year of Mercy declared by Pope Francis which begins on December 8th. November is also the "month of the dead" when we remember and pray for those who have died and gone before us. We did not really need the monstrous events in Paris and Beirut to remind us of our own mortality, and we stand in sympathy with those who have suffered these horrible violations.

This time of year the Lord also reminds us about the "last things" – death, judgement, heaven, hell, and purgatory – and in these things is revealed God's plan for our salvation, that God wants to share with all of humanity his own abundant eternal life and happiness, beginning now on Earth. The Word of God today speaks to us of the "end times" – the end of the world but also the end of our own lives – and through these realities there runs a thread of struggle within us. It is a tug-of-war between my will / our will and God's will.

As we live and go about our daily lives, we cannot help but feel oppressed by all the pessimism rampant in the world. Consider all that is happening of violence, inequality, in the environment, the economy, finance, employment, social unrest, and family life. There is yet another thread, a golden thread, running through everything, and it is the HOPE carried by the Church, and most notably these days by Pope Francis in his words and especially his example.

Pope Francis insists that God is all about MERCY. What is mercy, exactly? Mercy is a love that is given freely, gladly, and generously, especially when it is not deserved. So I make a big mistake putting you off terribly, but you love me anyway. That is mercy. You have reason to be critical of your priests, yet you love them and are kind to them anyway. That is mercy.

Mercy is the attitude of God towards us all. "But Father", you might say, "the Lord tells us today through the prophet Daniel: "Some shall awake to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Well, yes, but we have everything to do about that "either... or..." ending to our life story. It is not God who will send us to Heaven or Hell, and if we still think that, we are quite wrong. The truth is that we will send ourselves to the one or the other.

When we die and find ourselves face to face with Almighty God, his Presence will be so radiant and breathtakingly beautiful that we will finally understand fully and clearly just how warm, kind, humble, generous, merciful, and tenderly loving God is. In that moment of truth we will be delighted that we loved God in all of our neighbours through life, or else we will be ashamed to the degree that we did not love God in all of our neighbours throughout our life.

This just makes perfect sense, though, doesn't it? After all whenever we are face to face with each other – husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, any person to any other person – and when we look deeply into one another's eyes, we are glad that we are kind to one another or we are embarrassed that we are not kind to one another. Right? Say "Yes Father!"

This is not rocket science! There is only one door / gate to our heart. When we open the gate and show mercy to another, then because the gate is open we are able to receive mercy. When we open the gate of our heart to forgive someone, then the gate is open and we are able to receive forgiveness. But when we close the gate of our heart and refuse to forgive someone, then the gate is close and we can no longer receive forgiveness ourselves. When we close the gate of our heart to refuse to show mercy to anyone, then the gate is slammed shut and we can no longer receive mercy ourselves.

For these reasons we can be so grateful that we are only at the beginning of our Jubilee 50th Anniversary Year here at St. Thomas à Becket Parish. We all have until next October to reflect and to do. Every time we come here and gather together as Church we are served by God an abundant banquet of his living Word for us to take to heart and to ponder as Mary did in her heart. We can wonder: "How

does this connect to my daily life, personal life, family life, and to my work or professional life, or to my life as a student or as a retiree, or as someone who is sick or in pain or lonely?” “Lord, what does your Word to me, to us, have to do with anything?”

As we wonder, as we question, the Holy Spirit can turn on the lights to illumine all the hidden recesses of our mind, heart, psyche, and soul, all the details of our lives and of all our relationships with others, with the environment, with the material world, with work and play, with our mental, physical, and spiritual hygiene.

If we don't wonder, don't ask, we make it tough for the Holy Spirit to show us anything. The more we desire to know, the more we look, the more we ask, the more we look up towards God, the more the Holy Trinity can make connections within us. St. Paul even taught that when we are so distressed that we cannot find words to pray but only moaning and groaning within us, God understands and eagerly responds to us.

One of our most difficult struggles as human beings is our struggle to notice, to see or to hear God's response to us. God's language with each of us is unique because each of us is also unique. It is amazing to realize that God goes so far as to adapt Himself to us so that we can no longer be afraid but trust in Him, but God also needs us to accept to adapt ourselves to Him. To learn to notice God's responses to us we need the constant willingness to be attentive, to listen, and to expect with expectant hope, to wait patiently as long as it takes.

I have never understood why so many people hang up the phone so quickly. I manage to get to the phone by the third or fourth ring but the caller has already hung up. It's the same with doorbells. Even when in a rectory I got to the door within 10 seconds the caller was already gone. Sometimes I would go outside and look on every side for the caller and the person was already so far away I was puzzled how they could have gotten so far so quickly after ringing the doorbell. What is happening to us as human beings and our inability to live in the present?

God wants every human being to be like the Psalmist and be able to say from personal experience and conviction: *(with emphasis and conviction)* “**The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup... I keep the Lord always before me... He is at my right hand and I shall not be moved. My heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body also rests secure.**” We have all experienced some of this closeness with God, and He wants us to have even more. How do we get closer to God? How does that happen exactly?

While each of us is unique there are similarities. You can share your experiences with one another... that's what Church is for. That's what being Christians together and not isolated is all about. As we share our experiences with one another we can discover that some people contemplate the light shining on the face of Jesus in the company of Mary by meditating on the Mysteries of the Holy Rosary. Some pray with the Word of God, opening the Bible in their prayer corner every day – reading a little, pondering a little, being quiet – letting God speak, some come to Holy Mass during the week in addition to Holy Mass on Sunday, and some pray all the time, even while commuting by car, train, bus, or airplane. Even commuting isn't time wasted when we remember that God is always *always* present.

You don't need to have been in the seminary for six years like priests to be able to pray because praying is quite simply visiting with God. That's it. Visiting with God, and visits with God take all kinds of shapes for all kinds of durations. The key in prayer is to be attentive to our guest as we would do with any human guest when we want to be a good host. So in prayer we try to pay attention to the mysterious Presence of the Holy Trinity, we pay attention to the face, the beautiful, kind, loving face of Jesus, we attend to the Word of God as it bounces around in our mind, our psyche, our heart, our spirit,

even our body, stirring up thoughts, feelings, ideas, understandings, realizations, resolutions, convictions, changes of heart, mind, and attitude.

So, we have this gift from God of a whole year to reflect about walking with the Lord, or not walking with the Lord; about being kind to others, or not being kind to others; or walking with the weight of the whole world on our shoulders even though Jesus is already carrying the world on his shoulders.

When I was in the seminary there was this marvellous old professor priest who one day when he say us with particularly long faces pointed at us and with grave warning told us: “Be careful! You are all in grave danger of succumbing to a severe psychological disorder called the PLOM Syndrome! What is the PLOM Syndrome? It is that grievously destructive complex of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes because of which you find yourself moaning and groaning to anyone who would listen: “Poor Little Old Me!” Hence, we risk sinking into the slimy pit of PLOM.

When that happens, brothers and sisters, LOOK UP! LOOK AROUND! There are all around you people who care! There are others around you unable temporarily to care for you but they provide you with the opportunity to care for them!

Why does Pope Francis in his words but especially in his example insist so much that we go out to the peripheries, to the fringes of life and society, where people are pushed aside, or dumped, or left out by others, or they feel ignored or rejected or left out by others? Because THAT’S WHERE THE JOY IS! In every caring human encounter, God is there, because God is love, and “*where love is, God is*” (*Title of short story by Leo Tolstoy*). By God’s design there is no true or lasting joy except in the exchange of love that takes place in loving encounters.

The sadness and heaviness and misery in our lives comes about because there are near to us at home, in our workplace, in our classroom, in our neighbourhood, and even in our church people suffering quietly in agony inside and we don’t even notice. The Holy Spirit wants to help us to notice them so that we can taste the joy of Jesus when we reach out in an effort to care and, trying to connect, we encounter them. That’s where the joy is.

Brothers and sisters, I must warn you. Our culture tries frantically to deprive us of that joy by isolating us in so many ways, not the least dangerous of which is pornography on the Web and almost everywhere around us, making our minds, imaginations, hearts, and spirits sick with distortions of God’s design for our human tenderness and sexuality. Fears, worries, greed, competition, and hate all converge to isolate us from others. Even the greatest bully is only a frightened, insecure, miserable human being trying to push dangers away. We must keep our heads up, our eyes and ears open, our minds awake, and our spirits vigilant.

We can all do better, we can all be better. Jesus wants to have his own JOY in this Jubilee Year and for the rest of our lives.... (PAUSE)....

The most important homily is the one that is going on within you right now.... (PAUSE)....

Continue this homily with the Holy Spirit... with Jesus... with the Father... with Mary, Joseph, St. Thomas à Becket, and all the saints.... (PAUSE).... Amen?