

Cardinal Seán O'Malley – Year of Mercy
Convocation for Clergy – October 20, 2015

It is good to be with all of you today, gathering together as priests of the Archdiocese. In the midst of our busy schedules, and I am aware that there are many demands on your time and efforts, I appreciate your taking the time for this fraternal gathering.

The Church is blessed that Pope Francis has given us the gift of the upcoming Year of Mercy, which begins on December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. Mercy encompasses reconciliation, which the world is in great need of today. From our local communities to distant nations, strife and calls for vengeance disrupt our relationships and stand in the way of Jesus' call for us to love one another as God loves us, to love our neighbor as ourselves. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes clear that the Samaritan is the one who gives serves as a witness to God's love, by showing mercy to the neighbor who others passed by.

The call to Mercy is a call to care for the elderly, the sick, the estranged, the poor and those suffering from mental illness. We are all aware of the challenges faced by families and individuals who strive to provide for the needs of autistic children, of loved ones who suffer the all too often devastating effects of addictions, of immigrants who seek to work and establish themselves as productive, contributing members of our communities but live with the fear of sanction and restriction for the offense of being here among us.

At the Chrism Mass, the reading from Isaiah presents us the scripture that Jesus chose for his first sermon, at the synagogue at Nazareth – “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me and has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a jubilee year of the Lord.”

At our ordination we were anointed with the same oil, the same Spirit. Jesus came into the world to manifest the merciful face of the Father. The Catholic priest is called Father because we are called is to allow people to see in us an image of Christ revealing the Father's mercy.

The world is hungry for mercy, our people are hungry for mercy. The devotion to the Divine Mercy that began in Poland some seventy years ago has been embraced by Catholics all over the world. The devotion to Padre Pio is also extraordinary and is a reflection of his two fold ministry: administering the sacrament of reconciliation through hearing confessions and the pastoral care of the sick at the hospital he founded. It is clear

Cardinal Seán O'Malley – Year of Mercy
Convocation for Clergy – October 20, 2015

that Pope Francis' imagery of the Church as field hospital has captured people's yearnings.

As we pray and reflect on pastoral priorities, we need to consider how God's mercy is one of the most attractive attributes of the Church. When we are able to communicate a spirit of hospitality and mercy, then people will be attracted to our churches and our parish communities.

Turning a crowd into a community is the challenge. We need to be close to our people and let them know we care about them, even in the midst of their problems and pain. Pope Francis is calling on us to embrace a missionary conversion which leads the Church towards an outward movement, moving away from being centered on itself. Our conversion must be at the same time fraternal and social, a missionary conversion to come out of ourselves, to look for those who have strayed, for those who used to be with us but now are absent. The lost sheep becomes the priority of the Good Shepherd and that must become our priority.

The missionary conversion encourages a reform of structures that directs all efforts toward a commitment to a style of openness, closeness and compassion, and also a renewed emphasis on the proclamation of the kerygma – the proclamation of the Father who loves us unconditionally, who delivers His Son for our salvation, and who is risen so that we can enter into communion with Him.

The culture of encounter and the art of accompaniment must characterize this missionary conversion which finds a special opportunity in the Year of Mercy. We must present the image of the merciful Father. We must practice mercy with each other, our brother priests and bishops. In moments of weakness we can all be so quick to criticize, to be cynical, to complain. We must practice mercy with each other.

We must be men of reconciliation in a world that is beset with polarization. We want to invite people to draw closer to Christ and to one another. The extreme individualism of our culture isolates people and promotes choices and options that are self-destructive and alienating. Solidarity and community are the antidotes to so many of our social problems, and as priests we have a privileged opportunity to build community among the people we serve.

Mercy and grace are inner realities that require us to pursue the personal journey inward, in order to be able to be men of mercy for others. Our life of personal prayer and reflection is central in the process of a missionary conversion.

Cardinal Seán O'Malley – Year of Mercy
Convocation for Clergy – October 20, 2015

It would be foolhardy to try and run the Boston Marathon without training, and so it is impossible to exercise real ministry without our own personal conversion. It is of great importance that everything we do, no matter how routine, how banal, how incidental, becomes an act of love.

To be good confessors we must be good penitents who know that we are sinners but that our God never tires of forgiving us and giving us another chance. To be good confessors we must know how to forgive, to let go, to be merciful in our relationships with our relatives, our fellow priests, our bishops, our parishioners. We cannot be channels of peace if mercy cannot flow with in us. Our world craves mercy and reconciliation, let us try to prepare our hearts so that our ministry can truly reflect the heart of the Good Shepherd who is willing to risk all for the lost sheep.

During the Year of Mercy we must speak about forgiveness and the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We must challenge our parish communities to embrace the corporal and spiritual works of mercy that remind the world that Jesus washes the feet of His disciples so as to give us an example, to warn us to stop fighting over the first places at table and start fighting over the towel of service.

At the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Fr. O'Leary now has a group of young adults going out with food and blankets for the homeless in the neighborhoods downtown. These young people are being transformed by the experience of being an expression of God's mercy in His Church. Many parishes have started St. Vincent de Paul Societies to help their parishes focus on the works of mercy and to connect the Church's social Gospel with the Eucharist.

The Year of Mercy is an opportunity for the Church to renew our sense of mission and purpose. It is also an opportunity for us, the ordained, to deepen our own pastoral conversion, to be men of mercy. As priests we must learn to love as Christ loves. How does Christ love us? He loves us, first, while we are still in sin. He does not wait for us to merit His love, He loves us first.

As priests we cannot wait for people to love us and be kind to us, in order that we can reciprocate. No, we must love first, and love those who are hard to love, who don't love us in return or do not seem to deserve our love. Like a parent, when we must love them first, we become the merciful face of the Father. Then we become spiritual fathers to our people.

Praise the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.