


Novena of Grace in honour of St. Francis Xavier

4th March to 12th March in St. Michan's Church



Saturday, 5th March
We remember our recently deceased and give thanks to God for them.

Sunday, 6th March
We welcome back the children who were baptised during 2015. They are the future and we celebrate with them.

Tuesday, 8th March
A time for healing
Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help us with the grace of the Holy Spirit

Thursday, 10th March
A time for forgiveness
When I call, answer me, O God of justice; from anguish you released me, have mercy and hear me!

There will be no weekday evening Masses in Church Street during the Novena

Mercy
The Novena starts on Friday, 4th March 2016 at 7:30pm Mass and continues until Saturday, 12th March 2016 at the following times:
Monday to Friday – 7:30pm Mass
Saturday – 6pm Mass
Sunday – 12noon Mass

Bishop Eamon Walsh will join us on 12th March for the final evening when we will have the blessing with the mission cross of St. Francis Xavier.

Saturday, 12th March 2016

Bishop Eamonn Walsh

Why a Year of Mercy?

Pope Francis in launching the Year of Mercy said: 'I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy so that we can go out to every man, woman and child, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God; may the balm of mercy reach everyone both believers, and those far away as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already in our midst' (107)

'God's mercy endures forever'

God's mercy is a mark of God's power rather than a sign of weakness. We are called to show mercy because mercy has been shown to us.

The need for mercy today

Today we are so focussed on justice that the practice of mercy tends to be on the wane.

'However without a witness to mercy life becomes pointless and sterile as if sequestered in a barren desert; the time has come for the Church to take up

the joyful call to mercy once more. It is a time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and the struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope.

The word and concept of mercy seems to cause uneasiness in man who, thanks to the enormous developments of science and technology, never before known in history, has become the master of the earth and has subdued and dominated it (Genesis 1.28). This dominion over the earth sometimes understood in a one sided and superficial way seems to have no room for mercy (page 117).

People's reaction to this

This is why many individuals and groups, guided by a lively sense of faith are turning, I would say, almost spontaneously to the mercy of God (page 117).

It is absolutely essential for the Church and the credibility of her message that she herself lives and testifies to mercy (page 119).

In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the word that comes to us. In this way it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle.

Marks of the Year of Mercy

The Motto for the year is: *'Merciful like the Father'*;

May the whole year be a conversion for people belonging to extreme groups, criminal organisations and any form of corruption. We should remember that God's anger lasts for a moment but his mercy is forever. Experience has shown that justice alone will result in its own destruction. That is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness (Page 139). God's justice is his mercy given to everyone as a grace that flows from the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Name of God is Mercy

The central parable for the Year of Mercy is Luke 18: 9- 14, the Pharisee and the Publican. God's mercy is for everyone. The first step towards that mercy is acknowledging that we are in need of mercy, desire it and humbly come to the Lord. We should never tire of seeking God's forgiveness because he never tires of forgiving. We have to remember that God forgives us not with a decree but

with a caress. For some people even the desire to seek forgiveness even if not able to ask for it is sufficient to be a recipient of God's mercy. Pope Francis illustrates this by referring to Bruce Marshall's Book: *'To Every Man a Penny'*. In the story, Father Gaston is with a dying soldier who in conscience, could not seek forgiveness for what he said he enjoyed, his womanising all his life, and if he got the chance again he would do the same, and the priest said to him - well, are you sorry that you are not sorry? And he said: I am. Pope Francis says that was sufficient of an opening for absolution.

Time for the Church to show Mercy

This is a time for the Church to show her maternal side.

'She does not wait for the wounded to knock on her doors, she looks for them on the street' (Page 4).

The Church is meant to be a field hospital, treatment is given to the most wounded, warms people's hearts with its closeness and nearness. (Page 6).

Mercy is God's identity card (Page 7).

Mercy is connected to God's faithfulness for God cannot give up on his own, and he bases that on Ezekiel 16:63. (Jerusalem is cared for by the Lord but she decks herself in beauty and becomes a harlot but because she is God's people the Lord will not abandon her.

It reminds me of the old prisoner saying: 'The Ma never gives up on me'.

Pope Francis emphasises that shame is a grace. When we feel the mercy of God we feel a great shame for what we have done but also for letting down the one who loves us so much. Pope Francis uses the phrase: *Miserando atque eligendo*, and he uses the word *Misericordando*, which is a new word that he has as meaning Mercy.

He said in choosing Matthew the tax collector, Jesus mercied him by choosing him. He continues by referring to a Fr. Enrico Pazzoli, a Salesian priest who was notoriously good in confession, but he once said: Lord forgive me if I have forgiven too much but you are the one who gave me the bad habit. (Page 11)

Pius XII said that we live in an age that has lost its sense of sin.

It was Cardinal Biffi who said: G K Chesterson once said that when man ceases to worship God he does not worship nothing but worships everything'. (Page 14)

Then he tells the story of this man who is in a complicated relationship that he cannot get out of but he wants the priests blessing and he said 'I know you cannot absolve me but I have sinned by doing this and that but please give me a blessing'. This is a religious mature man (Page 16)

Gift of Confession

Pope Francis was asked was it not enough to tell God on my own that I am sorry, to which he said: that is like talking to a mirror. Confession means putting my life in the hands and heart of someone else who acts in the name of Jesus. (Page 20). He gives an illustration of Ignatius of Loyola at the Battle of Pampalona. There was no priest available on the battle field and Ignatius thought he was dying so he confessed to another soldier even though he knew that he could not absolve him but he needed to face another person and say his sin because he felt that need so strongly.

The Eastern Church have a lovely way of putting the stole over the head of the Penitent with the Confessor putting his arm around the shoulder illustrating that this is an encounter with God's mercy.

Against himself Pope Francis tells the story of a grandmother who asked him, when he was Auxiliary Bishop of Buenos Aires for confession, as he was rushing out to a Confirmation Ceremony, to which he said, I will if you have sins. She said we all have sins. As he was going to hear her confession, she said, 'If the Lord did not forgive everything our world would not exist'.

Pope Francis quotes a Dominican priest Father Ambonio Royo who said: When I have found myself before a blocked door I have always tried to find a crack, just a tiny opening so that I can pray open the door and grant forgiveness and mercy' (Page 23). This is the challenge for every Confessor to look for that little opening.

Pope Francis goes on to say sin is not like a stain going to a dry cleaners. Sin is a wound that needs to be treated and healed. He returns to the whole notion of shame, saying anyone who confesses does well to feel shame for his sins because shame is a gift, a grace we ask for, it is good practice because it makes us humble.

In the theme of looking for the smallest opening, Pope Francis quotes Bruce Marshall again - his novel, *To Every Man a Penny*, where the man, as already said, he could not say I repent because I would do it all again but then he says are you sorry that you are not sorry. The young man answered impulsively, yes - I am sorry that I am not sorry. In other words he apologises for not repenting. The door was opened just a crack, allowing absolution to come in.

Prisoners

I have a special relationships with people in prison deprived of their freedom; I have always been very attached to them precisely because of my awareness of being a sinner. I always ask the question - why them and not me? I always remember Peter and Paul, they were in prison. Peter betrayed him and yet he was the one that he chose (Page 39)

Why are we sinners? Thanks to the Book of Genesis and Revelations we have the account of original sin which is basically mankind's rebellion against God. It happened at the origin of mankind. God turned this on its head by sending his Son among us and allowing us to share in his life. So from the guilt of our forefathers, it becomes known in the Exultet as - o felix culpa. It resulted in our redemption from our sins and it healed the wound.

Attitude for a good confession

The essential ingredient is a sense of humility, recognising our need of forgiveness, our emptiness, our wretchedness, our need of God's mercy. Pope Francis contrasts this to the arrogance of the person who may present as a good Christian and who illustrates it by talking of this person who regarded his maid as somebody who was there for him as almost a lesser life and saw no inconsistency in that and in his faith. He said this is an arrogance and is the opposite of the shattered heart mentioned by the Church Fathers (Page 42).

He then goes on to talk about the Prodigal Son, how the Father resembles God in all his mercy. He quotes: 'A father waiting at the doorway who sees us when we are still far off, who is moved and who comes running towards us, embraces us and kisses us tenderly. When the son started blaming himself he did not let him speak, he interrupted him and just embraced him.

The Church as a Field Hospital

The Church that goes forth, it exists where there is combat. It is not a solid structure where people go to receive treatment for full or small or large infirmities. It is a mobile structure that offers first aid and immediate care so that its soldiers do not die. (Page 50)

I hope the Jubilee will serve to renew the Church's deeply maternal and merciful side. A Church that goes forth towards those that are wounded, who are in need of an attentive ear, understanding, forgiveness and love. (Page 50)

Called to be Shepherds not Scholars of the Law

If we don't see ourselves as sinners, we will not feel the need for mercy. There can be a sense of self-sufficiency and no need of mercy. Should we confess routinely the same sins all the time and not try to change then we see confession as a bit like a dry cleaning, licking the wounds and keeping them open. We should keep trying with God's help and remember there are no situations that cannot be got out of.

He gave an illustration of a mother who prostituted herself to pay for her children's food. She came to a food bank at Christmas and Pope Francis as Bishop addressed her as Signora - to which she said that respect and dignity shown her meant so much, she was not being judged. Pope Francis said who am I to judge people? You cannot define a person by their physical tendencies or whatever. Jesus does not condemn neither do I condemn you is the message.

Jesus said to the woman, 'Did anyone condemn you?', and she said 'no'. 'Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more'. He put mercy before the letter of the law and the letter of the law at the time was that the person be stoned. He criticises those who hide behind the letter of the law as we see in Matthew 23. Once people lose the sense of awe of God's mercy and love we lose our sense of our own salvation. (Page 69) The humility of knowing that I need and desire God's love and mercy. You must remember that no one is hopeless 'for some people either because of their condition in which they find themselves or because of the human drama that they are living, a small step, a small change means a great deal in the eyes of God. (Page 68) Pope Francis illustrates this when talking about the woman who had to prostitute herself but used always pray to the Madonna for a long time for a job that would allow her to change her life. In the course of her business she met this man who wanted to be her partner for life and not just a client. In a roundabout way, her prayer was answered. Pope Francis asked her - do you intend to get married, and she said she was afraid to even ask him for fear of scaring him off. So a small gesture is very big in the eyes of God.

He speaks about other small gestures that are big in the eyes of God and these are the mothers and wives who line up in front of the jails at the weekends to bring food and presents to their sons and husbands. They undergo the humiliation of being searched, but they don't disown their own son or husband - it is small but it is a great gesture in the eyes of God. (Page 69)

We are Sinners Yes, Corrupt No

Everyone has a public value and, for example, teachers and the prophets regarding the Old Testament, they are looking after the orphans, the widows

and the strangers. They can be no justice without forgiveness. Otherwise we are in a society of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. He then comes back to a theme of prisoners, mercy and justice, regarding prisoners. I am not suggesting that you open the doors, but you must find a way of helping them to pick themselves back up. 'Sometimes we prefer to shut a person in prison for his whole life rather than to try to rehabilitate him and help him find his place in society. (Page 76).

Corruption

Corruption is a way of living. Sin can lead us along a slippery slope to a state of corruption where a person, tired of seeking forgiveness, gradually get to a point where they believe they don't need it any more. He illustrates this by example of people's practises and business, double lives, but gradually the way of life becomes a condition and seems perfectly ok to them.

Sinners by contrast recognise themselves as such e.g. the publican and the tax collector: Peter 'Yes Lord you know that I love you' and when Jesus went on to choose him. We need to pray in this Holy Year of Mercy so that God can find his way into the heart of the corrupt and grant them a grace of shame, the grace of recognising themselves as sinners In need of his forgiveness '(Page 81. 'Mercy never tires of forgiving us because mercy is the name of God. '

Wedding Feast of Cana

Pope Francis speaks of it as transforming the water that was to be used for ablutions, for cleansing, and purifies it into making it something on a much higher level. When asked where people learn mercy, he says the family is the first place to learn mercy.

Mercy and Compassion

Mercy is divine and is to do with the forgiveness of sin whereas Compassion is not to be indifferent but to be empathetic. He says, 'Jesus felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd'. Compassion has its origin in the Greek word for internal organs - the maternal womb, it is a visceral love. God loves us in this way with compassion and mercy. The overabundance of God's mercy is what he calls God's logic.

He concludes again by quoting the old woman - 'without mercy the world would not exist'. (Page 9).

Works of Mercy

- Feed the hungry

- Give drink to the thirsty
- Clothe the naked
- Shelter the traveller
- Comfort the sick
- Visit the imprisoned
- Bury the dead

Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

Friday, 11th March 2016

Fr. Bryan

This evening I would like to take some time to tell you where I come from. My great grandmother, Mary Boylan, lived in this parish and married her first husband William Kelly at this altar. He was the clerk in this church at that time. When William died, Mary married her second husband in my St. Paul's Church on Arran Quay and their daughter Margaret, my grandmother was born on this day, 11th March 1916. We are all good at situating ourselves in our family – *Who am I? Who do I belong to? Where do I belong?* We all share and breathe the same air.

But go back to April 1916 when all hell broke loose on the streets around us. The first the Capuchins heard of the Rising was a “startling burst of fire” almost outside the door of St. Mary of the Angels Church, on Church St on that Easter Monday morning, April 24th 1916. They were just finishing their midday meal when all this began to happen. This was also following what would have been a busy time for the priests and the brothers in the Friary with the Easter ceremonies. No doubt they were looking forward to some rest during these next few days.

Fr. Columbus (Murphy) tells of rushing outside to meet walking wounded and a doctor ministering to a man shot in the arm. There were some accounts of soldiers of the Sixth Cavalry Regiment taking gun powder to the Phoenix Park and coming under fire at the Four Courts. At this stage, no one seemed to have any idea that the beginnings of a rebellion was taking place. Later, he learns of a small boy, John Francis Foster (aged 2) being killed in his pram outside the Father Mathew Hall. The Hall seems to have become a flash point as the week

progresses as members of Cumann na mBan tend to people's injuries in the Hall and the more seriously injured are taken to the Richmond Hospital.

Frs. Columbus and Aloysius (Travers) are on duty that week supplying Mass in both Jervis St Hospital and Gloucester Street Convent so they are making their way over each morning through the chaos. Fr. Columbus gives a very comprehensive account of the noise of incessant gunfire, the blast of cannon fire, and the eventual destruction of many buildings in Dublin City Centre and indeed O'Connell Street. He also risks serious injury and even his life to perform his priestly duties to those killed and injured.

As the week wears on and the casualties increase, the priests from Church St continue to be involved in the relief work. This is perhaps because they are on the ground where the action is happening, also because they are hi-visibility in their religious habits. They endeavour to be honest brokers in ministering to those killed and injured and their families. Fr. Columbus in his memoir tells of how on April 29th Padraig Pearse formally surrenders the GPO Garrison "To avoid further slaughter" and Columbus travels with Elizabeth Farrell, a Cumann na mBan nurse, who attempts to convince Edward Daly at the Four Courts Garrison that Pearse's surrender was genuine. This then spreads to the other Garrisons over the next few days. Fr. Aloysius and Fr. Augustine (Hayden) mediate negotiations between the British authorities and Thomas MacDonagh (Jacob's Biscuit Factory) and Éamonn Ceannt (South Dublin Union) for the peaceful capitulation of the men and women under their command.

When the leaders were imprisoned in Kilmainham gaol and court martialled, the Capuchin priests were called upon to come to minister to them and give them spiritual support. They were taken by car very late each night and driven to Kilmainham gaol where they would meet the prisoners individually. By extension, they made themselves available to some of the families of the men too, and they also ministered to some of the women prisoners, most of whom were members of Cumann na mBan. Fr. Columbus' memoir speaks of Countess Markievicz who was in Kilmainham gaol at the time of the executions and asked to receive instruction in the Catholic Faith, she was then later received into the Church.

The executions began on May 3rd 1916 when Fr. Aloysius heard the last confessions of Padraig Pearse and Thomas MacDonagh. He was ordered from Kilmainham Jail before they were executed. Later following protests, the priests were allowed to remain present for the executions to complete the administration of the Last Rites of the Church. Tom Clarke was attended by Fr. Columbus.

On the 4th of May, Fr. Aloysius notes in his memoir that Fr. Augustine Hayden ministered to Joseph Mary Plunkett, he also ministered to Michael O'Hanrahan, and William Pearse. Fr. Columbus Murphy ministered to Edward Daly. Fr. Albert Bibby, and Fr. Sebastian O'Brien were also in attendance that night.

On the 5th of May, Fr. Augustine was in attendance for John McBride.

On the 8th of May 1916, Fr. Augustine was in attendance at the executions of Éamonn Ceannt, Con Colbert, and Michael Mallin. Fr. Albert Bibby was in attendance for Seán Heuston.

Finally, on May 12th Fr. Aloysius ministered to James Connolly (both before in Dublin Castle, and then in Kilmainham Gaol) and was in attendance at his execution. He notes that Fr. Eugene McCarthy of James's St and chaplain to Kilmainham, ministered to Seán MacDiarmada earlier but Aloysius then attended to him after the shooting.

Having read through some of the accounts Frs. Columbus and Aloysius (Aloysius much later ministered to Jim Larkin before his death in 1947). It shows to me the commitment, the bravery, and the selflessness of these priests who were primarily pastors of souls in their ministry. They were on hand night and day to try to bring pastoral care and hope to the many people who were deeply affected by the violence and chaos of the Rising. I've no doubt that they were also moved by the bravery of the 1916 Leaders who were executed.

Humanly speaking, reading their accounts, I am also moved by how they stayed sane following what must have been a deeply stressful time for them seeing the things they did. Today those of us in ministry will be involved at times in critical incidents and we have structures in place to help us in our pastoral ministry. In the days following the executions for example, Fr. Columbus travels to Dundalk to give a two-week Parish Mission. He pens his memoir in the following months as a way of recording the week that was. I also believe he writes it to help him cope with what must have deeply ingrained itself in his soul – as it has done on the soul of Ireland and indeed the world.

It is important to note that the priests from the Pro Cathedral attended the GPO to give pastoral and spiritual support to the men and women there and the clergy in James's Street looked after volunteers on that side of the city. Joseph Mary Plunkett married Mary Gifford in St. James's Church on the day before his execution. All the priests confirm that the leaders of the Rising requested the Last Rites and Confession while in prison. Padraig Pearse asked

for assurance that his fellow volunteers had received the sacraments and when the priests confirmed that they had, he is said to have replied *"Thanks be to God for that"*.

In the Capuchin memoirs, the friars reported that the volunteers went to their executions seemingly unafraid, since they believed they had taken part in the Rising for the glory of God and the good of their country.

Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

Thursday, 10th March 2016

Fr. Richard/Fr. Bryan

Many of you may remember Fr. Godfrey in Church – a great apostle of the confessional. Often he would go out to the church and spend hours in the confessional *"just in case"*. One day he came in from the confessional to the sacristy laughing. When I asked why he was laughing, he told me that he was hearing confessions and when he pulled back the slide a little voice said *"Bless me father for I have sinned. This is my second confession..."* The confession was going great until it was obvious that the little girl had forgotten something. Then Fr. Godfrey said he heard a second voice whisper something. He asked if there someone else in the confessional and the little girl piped up that it was her best friend Rebecca and that she goes everywhere with her to help her when she forgets things. Oh, and Rebecca is going to confession next!

My advice is not to get in your way!

God who waits for us in Reconciliation is the God who knows everything and forgives us before we say a word. God waits for us to come to him so that we know that we are forgiven.



In the sacrament of reconciliation we receive the grace necessary for our growth – poured out upon us. And since our sins affect more than ourselves, this grace poured out on others. Sin impacts on more than one and grace heals more than one. Grace is the life of God living in me. Mercy is God's invitation to discover the truth of who we really are.

This evening I invite you to let go of your fears about confession. God sees the truth of who we could become – that's God's judgement. And remember that priests too go to confession because they know their need of God's mercy, forgiveness and grace.

Recently Pope Francis brought the remains of Saint Pio and Saint Leopold Mandic to Rome as part of the celebrations for the Jubilee Year of Mercy because he said the "*Capuchins know they are sinners*".

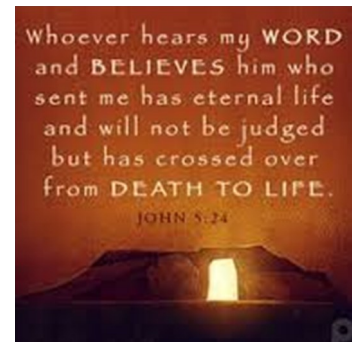


The priest is simply the instrument of God's grace

Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

Last evening we held a Healing Service and the evening before we discussed Mercy and Grace – the two sides of the one coin. Throughout the Novena we have been focusing on Mercy as this is the Jubilee Year of Mercy.

This evening however, the Gospel appears to be a Gospel of judgement (John 5:17-30) – *he has entrusted all judgement to the Son*. Our image of God is human so we think of a God who seeks out our mistakes so that God can punish us.



But judgement of God is the essence of what we are called to be and God invites us into the truth of the judgement. We shouldn't be afraid of the judgement of God. It is our call to live in the fullness of who we can be. We are called out of darkness to walk in the light. But we all know that when we are used to being in the darkness, it can be difficult to see in the light. The light can hurt our eyes and it takes time for us to adjust to it.

We are called to
deeper depths of love
deeper depths of kindness
deeper depths of compassion
deeper depths of light

Sometimes we prefer darkness but the darkness makes us less than we can be. When we see our truth we can be overcome with shame. But God wants us to walk with him in the light. Sometimes we try to hide. But we know who we are.

What a human being is before God, that is the truth and it's OK. The Judgement of God brings freedom. It takes the burdens of sin and lays them before God for his mercy. God's mercy is always the same and God's grace is living within us.

God is not a condemning Judge but a saving Judge. The Lord does everything possible to save us.

Tomorrow evening we will have a Reconciliation Service during our Eucharistic Celebration. The Sacrament of Confession, Reconciliation will be available for everyone, so let us begin again in grace and mercy. Each of us can say of ourselves – *I am a sinner in need of God's grace*.

Tuesday, 8th March 2016

Fr. Bryan

In the Gospel this evening, we have the scene at the sheep pool which was a haven for people who were ill, have disabilities and are poor.

The understanding was that when the waters of the pool were disturbed, the first person in to the pool was cured. The belief was that the waters were disturbed by an angel sent by God but the cripple in our Gospel text was never quick enough to respond to the stirrings in the pool. He waited and waited and waited until 38 years passed.

Jesus sees his predicament and asks the question

– *“Do you want to be well again?”* The reality is

that he may be happy in his misery. He may be able to make a living from his begging and a cure would mean he would need to find a new way to earn a living.



Later in the Gospel we discover that he is not happy and goes about telling everyone who exactly cured him. As a result Jesus had to go into hiding to get away from the angry crowd.

Pope Francis reminds us in his book *“The Name of God is Mercy”* that mercy is available to all but not everyone is open to mercy.

Today is the Feast of St. John of God and I am reminded of my time as a hospital chaplain. The nursing and medical staff are wonderful people and we worked alongside them offering spiritual support. Many years ago, some saw the Sacrament of the Sick, or *“The Last Rites”* as the end – the last step before dying! One day while I was on duty in the Cardiac Ward, a patient called me over. He was bored and looking for someone to chat to, to have a bit of banter with. We were chatting away when I spotted a mother and daughter enter the ward. Here I was standing at the end of the hospital bed in my habit with my prayer-book in my hand but the patient was hidden from their sight. They clutched each other as they paled, assuming he was dead! The stigma still remains but healing is for everyone and is given when asked for. Anointing coupled with the skills of the medics often bring patients back to health.

Hospitals are wonderful places for healing and restoring health but in the middle of it all are the chaplains. This evening, Fr. Richard and I will anoint you praying this prayer with each of as you come forward:

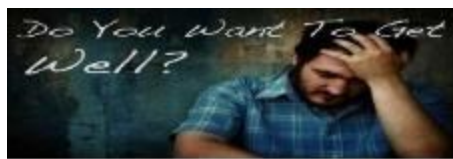
**Through this holy anointing
may the Lord in his love and mercy
help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit.**

R. Amen.

Then anointing the hands:

**May the Lord who frees you from sin
save you and raise you up.**

R. Amen.



John 5:7

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

Monday, 7th March 2016

Fr. Richard

Grace and Mercy – our faith stands secure on these two poles. They are the foundations but we have little idea what they mean.

GRACE we often see as gifts from God – favours received through the Novena of Grace or our prayers answered. As Christians we are called to live a life of grace. God lives in our hearts – lives in my heart, lives in your heart.

Every Christian has been touched by the grace of God – God breathing his life into us. If the grace of God were taken away, we would die. We hardly ever notice our own breath until we have a cold or cough, but without breath in our bodies we would die.

Novena in Honour of St. Francis Xavier – MERCY – 14

The Novena of Grace is a chance to take time to remind ourselves of God in our lives. Nothing happens without God. His love is always present to us. God's grace doesn't change.



The second foundation is MERCY. God knows we need mercy. God is active in our lives inviting us into a deeper relationship – inviting us to draw closer. During the Novena we are changed, we are forgiven and we are renewed.

Mercy is God active in our lives. Sometimes we think of the mercy of confession and somehow see the priest as being better or greater than the person coming to confession. But in fact, in the sacrament of confession we have a conversation between two sinners – and God. Grace and mercy to the penitent through the priest. The grace of God moves through all of us, even through those who sometimes wreck our heads!

The gift of the cross is that we see how much we are loved. The open arms of Jesus are a constant reminder that we are invited home, invited back.

Beyond the petitions we touch the gift of remembering that we are children of God and that we are temples of God and that the mercy of God is visible through us. We can find it difficult to change but grace and mercy invite us to change and to grow.

God is like marriage. Two individuals fall in love and slowly the two become one. Over time, they grow more and more like each other. This is supposed to happen! And the same is true for us. When we enter into relationship with God and as we deepen that relationship, we grow closer and closer to God and in time we become more like God.

Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

Today's Gospel is aimed at those judge others, to wake them up so that they can see more than one side of the story.

We know the story of how the younger son squandered everything on having a good time and then fell on very hard times, penniless and reduced to eating leftovers and tending pigs. It was a shameful job for any Jew to be reduced to tending pigs. We are told that he came to his senses. A chink of light must have touched his heart and moved him to reconsider his situation. He resolved to go home and apologise to his father. He had his speech ready. He knew what he wanted to say. He knew what had to be said but he never needed to speak it out.

The father in this story is like God. He doesn't need to hear his son's words. He responds to his movement back home and welcomes him 'tenderly'. As Pope Francis reminds us in this Jubilee Year of Mercy, **'The Name of God is Mercy'** and that is what we witness in this story of a father and his two sons. Two sons who behave in very different ways and two sons who need the tender mercy of the father.

And whatever we say about the father in this story, equally applies to mothers throughout the world. How many times have each of us had an argument with our mothers and then after a period of silence and not getting on with each other, our mothers come back and say "can we be friends again?" The moment she asks the question, we feel a weight lifted off our shoulders and a sense of joy and relief at the reconciliation between us.

We always have to come back to the father, to the loving parent. The return of the sinner is the loving response of a merciful God.

Today, on Mother's Day, I am reminded of quote
"mothers loved us before they saw our faces". (author unknown)

This quote reminds me of so many mothers and it is infinitely true of God. God loves us regardless.

On this Mother's Day, we give thanks for all the children who were baptised in the parish in 2015. Each family received an invitation to return to this historic home of their faith and we welcome those who were able to join us.

You are Invited

to a parish celebration of your child's baptism

For over 1000 years, people have been baptised in the Parish of St. Michan.

Your child is now part of a very proud heritage and "stands on the shoulder of giants".

Congratulations

6th March 2016 at 12o'clock in Halston Street



Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

Saturday, 5th March 2016

Fr. Bryan

If you think about the Gospel we have just heard, the father spends a lot of his time running after his sons!

The younger son finds his way back but the older son is also in need of God. He is portrayed as the dependable, on-board and reliable but he is also angry and jealous. We can understand him feeling aggrieved.

The father is the most important character. Reflecting on this Gospel the father's actions are God-like – in fact, God equals the Father. Remind ourselves of the false images we might have of God. Then look at this Gospel and see how the father behaves. He's not waiting at home with his arms folded ready to scold his son. Instead he goes each day to the edge of the property looking out for his son and when he sees him a long way off, he runs to embrace him tenderly.

Novena in Honour of St. Francis Xavier – MERCY – 17

He is merciful and compassionate.
He actively seeks out his son.
He puts clothes on him
He arranges to have a feast, a celebration

When he puts the coat on his back, he is telling him that he is no longer poor.

The ring reminds him that he is an heir and the sandals on his feet are an indication that it is right for him to be home and back in the family.

With the older son the father also has to make the move to reach him, to encourage him and to include him in the family event.

The father does not judge either son. He does not hold anything against either of them. He accepts them as they are – his children.

When did the father forgive his son? NEVER.

He didn't need to forgive because he never condemned them in the first place. There is no judgement. There is no punishment.

But that does not mean that we can do what we like without responsibility.

In the Gospel, the older son still had to go to the father to express his upset and the father reached out to him to encourage him to join in the family celebrations. The younger son learned his lesson and needed to come home to say sorry and return to the family.

It is the same for us. There are times when we too need to take responsibility for our decisions; a call for us to be contrite and ask forgiveness.

When we are exposed to this life-giving mercy – we want to go back!



*But while he was still a long way off,
his father saw him and was filled with
compassion for him; he ran to his
son, threw his arms around him and
kissed him.*

Friday, 4th March 2016

Fr. Bryan

When we were preparing the Novena, we decided to take the theme of this **Jubilee Year of Mercy**.

We chose readings to help us reflect on 'love' and today we heard an extract from St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

*If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love,
I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing.
If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are,
and knowing everything, and
if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains,
but without love, then I am nothing at all.
If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and
if I even let them take my body to burn it,
but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.*

What I say to you is:

*If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without God,
I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing.
If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are,
and knowing everything, and
if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains,
but without God, then I am nothing at all.
If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and
if I even let them take my body to burn it,
but am without God, it will do me no good whatever.*

God is love

In the reading, we heard the words of St. Paul first and then replacing the word 'love' with the word 'God' we hear a stronger message which is for all of us to take on.

In the English language there is only one word to describe love but in other languages there are a number of words and each one describes a different kind of love. In Greek, there are four words-

- Storge describes a liking, a familiarity, the natural love that exists within families.
- Philia describes the love between friends who are as close as brothers and sisters. The American city Philadelphia, the city of 'Brotherly Love' takes its name from this Greek word.
- Eros is the word for 'being in love', the 'lovey-dovey' love, the love which draws a couple together in a physical, loving relationship – the case when cupid's arrow pierces one's heart and there is nothing to be done but follow the heart.
- Agape describes 'God' love which is the love that exists regardless of changing circumstances. This is the deep down love, the senseless love that walks the road of life with us.

Over the nine nights of the Novena, we will relearn and rediscover that God's other name is **LOVE** and when we follow this kind of love, we are the happiest we can ever be. With this kind of love we can approach God without fear, confident of his love for us – regardless!

Saint Francis Xavier pray for us. Saint Michan pray for us.

