

What is the Door of Mercy?

“I AM the door, anyone who enters through me will be safe...
and will find pasture”.

The Gospel of St John 10:9

To understand the ‘Door of Mercy’ we need to look at the tradition of the Holy Year and the opening of the Holy Door in St Peter’s Basilica, Rome. The tradition has biblical origins associated with the concept of the ‘Jubilee’ recorded in the book of Leviticus (25:10-14). The tradition of the Holy Year was first introduced in the 1300’s and usually occurs every twenty five years. It is a special year of grace in the Church and pilgrims are invited to go on pilgrimage to Rome and pass through the Holy Door; a symbol of entering into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, who said “I am the door” (John 10:9).

In recent times Pope Pius XII called a Holy Year and opened the Holy Door in 1950, Pope Paul VI in 1975 and Pope John Paul II, now Saint John Paul II, in the year 2000. Sometimes, to celebrate a special occasion, the Holy Door was opened outside the twenty-five year cycle, as Pope John Paul II did in 1983. This is known as an Extraordinary Holy Year (or an Extraordinary Jubilee Year). Pope Francis has announced an Extraordinary Holy Year – a Year of Mercy – from 8th December 2015 to 20th November 2016 and has opened the Holy Door in Rome, which he has calling the ‘Door of Mercy’. The theme of ‘Mercy’ is very dear to Pope Francis’ heart and he believes that *“mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope”*.

For the first time in the history of the Church, as well as opening the Holy Door – the Door of Mercy – in Rome, Pope Francis has invited each Diocese (each local church) to open its own Holy Door: a Door of Mercy. He hopes that many pilgrims unable to travel to Rome will enter through these Doors of Mercy in their own dioceses and experience *“the love of God who consoles, pardons and instils hope”*. Bishop Noel Treanor decided that St Patrick’s Parish, Donegall Street, Belfast, which is celebrating its bicentenary 1815-2015, should host the Door of Mercy for the Diocese of Down and Connor. He has also agreed that Clonard Monastery, Belfast, should host a similar door to mark the 150th anniversary of devotion to the icon of the Mother of Perpetual Help.

The Door of Mercy in St Patrick's Church is to the right-side of the main entrance facing St Patrick's and will be accessible at the following times throughout the year from 14th December 2015 to 20th November 2016:

Mon-Fri	10.30am-8pm	(Masses: 10am; 1pm)
Sat	10.30am-7.00pm	(Masses 1pm; 7pm)
Sun	8.30am-7.00pm	(Masses: 8am; 10am; 12noon; 7pm)

Entering through the Door of Mercy is symbolic of entering into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ and allowing our lives to be touched and transformed by the mercy of God. Whether your faith is strong or fragile, opening your heart to God and entering through the Door of Mercy can become a moment of grace: an encounter with the Merciful Father. The Church sometimes refers to this moment of grace as 'an indulgence'. Pope Francis makes clear that this is not 'a reward we merit' but it is a grace that God gives, "*It becomes indulgence on the part of the Father who, through the Bride of Christ, his Church, reaches the pardoned sinner and frees him from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling him to act with charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin*".

Those unable to make the pilgrimage physically (the housebound and imprisoned) can make the pilgrimage online via the diocesan website www.downandconnor.org.