

**The Archbishop's Pastoral Letter for Lent 2016
(Unofficial translation)**

“Merciful like the Father”

Dear sisters and brothers!

This year, Lent is special. Falling as it does in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which we began to celebrate together with the whole Church on December 8th last, this Lenten season directs the light of God’s mercy more powerfully than ever upon us. During these forty days of penitential preparation for Easter, we are called on to reflect on our journey with God and with our fellow human beings; to review the state of our faith and prayer life; to be attentive to the needs of our brothers and sisters; to open up to God. One of the most beautiful images for this time of conversion is to be found in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15, 11-32). It tells the story of the young man who was tired of living in the comfort of his loving father’s home. Instead, he wanted to discover the “world” and find happiness elsewhere, convinced as he was that life would be so much more pleasant far away from his home and from his father. And at first, everything worked out smoothly, he never once regretted leaving home; he was enjoying himself without a care in the world. Until, of course, the day his money ran out, as did those he had believed were his friends, and he had to earn his living as a swineherd. At that point, he took stock of himself; after much thought, he decided to return to his father to ask to be taken on as a hired labourer. The wonderful part of this story is how the father reacts: not only is he not angry about his son’s departure, but on the contrary longs unceasingly for his homecoming, and when he sees him from afar, runs out to meet him, takes him in his arms, scarcely listens to his explanations and throws a big party to celebrate his return.

When we transpose this parable into our own lives, it speaks to us first and foremost of God’s infinite mercy. God is there, waiting for us, day after day; indeed, he even runs towards us to embrace us with his love and mercy. That is the way God is, we might say, that is God’s way with us human beings. This year, Lent calls us to be particularly open and receptive to God’s mercy, to allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by it and to truly experience his love.

An especially good opportunity for doing so is provided by the sacrament of Reconciliation, which I warmly invite you to receive during this Lenten season. The point here is not that we should stand accused, or that our conscience be burdened, or that we be reprimanded for all our wrongdoing - and if we are really honest with ourselves, we have to admit that we may not be as perfect as we might wish to seem, whether to ourselves or to others.

No, the main point here is not about guilt ; it is about allowing each and every one of us to be touched by God’s mercy, tangibly, through the beautiful words « forgiveness of sins »

spoken by the priest. In this way we realise that God takes us seriously, that each of us counts as an individual in his eyes, that he enfolds each of us in his love. Let me urge you once again: go to Confession! Open up to God's mercy! Let God love you!

The Lenten season is not solely a call to be open to God's mercy, but also to perform works of mercy ourselves. As well as the seven spiritual works of mercy, Church tradition recognises the seven corporal works of mercy: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, caring for the sick, visiting the imprisoned, burying the dead, and giving alms to the poor. Many of these works are, it is true, performed by various Church and State institutions. But much more than that is at issue here: we are called to truly open our hearts to the needy, to be profoundly touched by their distress, to consider how we - I - can consciously relieve another person's pain, how I can create a space for them in my own life and in society, so that they feel accepted. As Christians, we are specifically challenged, precisely at a time when so many people are knocking on Europe's doors seeking safety in our homeland. Have they all of a sudden lost their right to live as human beings in our midst? We cannot maintain that God is supposed to be merciful towards us, if at the same time we close our hearts, doors and borders to others.

My dear brothers and sisters! This Year of Mercy coincides with our celebration here of the 350th anniversary of the election of the Virgin Mary, Comforter of the Afflicted, as Patron Saint of the city of Luxembourg. This jubilee is anything but irrelevant to the present Holy Year. On the contrary, in Mary we recognise and call on the Mother of Mercy, "Mater Misericordiae". Ever since that day when the Luxembourgers entrusted themselves specifically to Mary's protection and advocacy, they have experienced over the centuries how she constantly accompanies and protects us and our country. So the jubilee of Our Lady, Comforter of the Afflicted, should be a time of grace for us all, during which we may turn afresh to Mary, entrust to her the concerns and renewal of our Church in Luxembourg, confide to her the problems of the world. She is our constant companion, leading us ever towards her Son, Jesus Christ, who radiates God's mercy toward us, so that we in our turn may become as merciful as our Father in Heaven!

Luxembourg, on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2nd February, 2016

+ Jean-Claude Hollerich

Archbishop of Luxembourg