

DAY OF RECOLLECTION FOR EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION AND READERS

Saturday 14 November

THE YEAR OF MERCY AND THE EUCHARIST

SESSION I

Opening prayer (from Vatican website)

My thanks to Bishop Pat for inviting me. Who I am and what I do...

We are having this day of recollection as the Church throughout the world is preparing to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second Vatican Council. One of the most important, and earliest, things which the council did was to call, in its early document on worship and liturgy (1962), *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, for the liturgy to be renewed and revised: this led very directly to the ministry which you carry out in parishes and elsewhere. I think it is probably something intended at days like this that the Church should thank you for what you do and affirm you: you enrich the life of the Catholic Church. Those of you who are ministers of Holy Communion in particular should remember that you act with the direct commission of the archbishop, not your parish priest; your role is a symbol of the corporate life of the diocese shown in the place where the Church has its most profound sense of identity: the celebration of the Mass. It is only with the archbishop's commission that you are given the authority to handle the things of God, to distribute the Body and Blood of the Saviour to the people of God. Thanking you for what you do should, I hope, give you some confidence that what you do is valued and important. Similarly for those of you who are readers: the Council called for people to hear more of the Bible at Mass, both on Sundays and weekdays; it also affirmed that Jesus is present in the Mass not simply in the consecrated elements but in the Scriptures, in the Word of God. You too, therefore, handle the things of God and help to make him present in the lives of the faithful; you too act in the name of the Church when you read at Mass; you're not simply doing so as an individual. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* insisted that we encounter Christ in four ways during our celebration of the Mass: first, in the consecrated elements of bread and wine which become the Body and Blood of Christ; second, in the whole community of the people of God; third, in the Word of God, the readings from the Bible, which are proclaimed; and finally in the person of the priest.

Pope Francis has chosen to mark the golden jubilee of the end of the Council with a special jubilee Year of Mercy. This is going to be very important in the life of the whole Church, and I don't want to forestall the things that are going to take place or examine in detail the themes of the year. But I do want today use the year as a theme for looking at your ministry in the light of the Mass, the Eucharist, the things that I would like to share with you. There is a real sense in which you are *ministers of mercy*; I suppose this is clearest if you (and I realise not all of you do) take Holy Communion to the sick and housebound, but it is true in all that you do. What does the idea of mercy, and the imminent year of mercy, mean for how we experience the Mass, the Eucharist?

If you read the Catholic media you will know that part of what it already means is focussed on one specific issue: how we support with mercy those whose lives show signs of damage and sin in such a way as to prevent them, under current discipline, from being able to receive Holy Communion, particularly those who have divorced and remarried without having their first marriage annulled. Important as this is, I am not going to talk about this now. I do think, as I shall examine in due course,

that there are times when people should be excluded from the Eucharist; but we tend rather to get bogged down in the above issue.

But at this stage I want to look at what happens at Mass, at every Mass, to see how God's mercy can be discerned, perhaps in ways new to us. When we gather for Mass we are not simply praying, or simply recalling past events: we enter a new sphere of existence outside normal time and space. The experience is unique.

We get so used to the Mass that we often don't think about its structure and the meaning of things which happen...

- **The Penitential rite**

Some of you may remember, or have more recent experience of, the introductory rites of the old Mass used before 1970, what we now call the Extraordinary form of the Roman rite. Then the priest and the altar server, at most Masses, made a general confession to each other, in Latin, on behalf of others; now we all join in an expression of sorrow for our sins at the beginning of most Masses. It's worth taking a bit of time, as ministers lay and ordained, at how we do this. Is it an effective symbol of the mercy of God? It seems to me that at most Sunday Masses there are often two things which get in the way of this: the first is that like much of what we do in the Mass it can be a bit hurried. Perhaps priest and people want to 'get on with it', to get the whole thing underway. Is there a proper period of silence when we can actually reflect on our sins? Are the words of the rite said too quickly? If it is one of the 'Lord have mercy' forms, are there pauses between the invocations? The other problem is perhaps something we can't do much about – it often isn't a reflective 'space' at the beginning of Mass because a lot of people are arriving late for Mass. Perhaps in the year of mercy in our communities we could think about ways in which these things could be addressed – perhaps by having a longer period beforehand.

Of course the penitential rite at the beginning of Mass (which in any case is sometimes left out) is not a substitute for going to Confession. For all of us, lay and ordained, reflecting about how we use the sacrament of reconciliation should be part of what the year of mercy is about. Some claim, although I think the reasons are much more complex, that one reason people go less often to confession, or not at all, is because of the penitential rite at the beginning of the Mass; but really the two are meant to complement each other.

- **The liturgy of the Word**

As I said earlier, Vatican II insisted that the Bible at Mass is one of the ways in which Jesus is present. So we read from a proper lectern, books of readings used at the lectern are meant to be worthy and in bishop's Mass he kisses it, at the pope's Mass he blesses the people with the book. We are meant to treat the Word of God with physical reverence; that's why it is so appalling if people can't hear what is being read. The Bible speaks to us so much of God's mercy and loving kindness; perhaps in this coming year we can make time to reflect on particular passages which do this – the psalms, which we sign or say responsorially at Mass, the beautiful poetry of the prophets, the passionate language of St Paul in his letters, the teachings and parables of the Lord in the gospels. For priests and deacons how we preach about God's mercy is something we need particularly to have in our minds.

It is interesting, and as far as I am aware entirely coincidental, that the Jubilee year of Mercy coincides with the year in our Sunday lectionary cycle when most of our Sunday gospels come from the gospel of Luke. This is because Luke contains some of the most distinctive parables of Jesus

which speak to us of God's mercy, such as those of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son; in Luke God is shown so clearly as the God of the poor and the oppressed, the God praised in Mary's *Magnificat* which the Church sings or says every day at Evening Prayer. So our gospel readings this year from Luke should speak with particular power of God's mercy and loving kindness.

One part of the liturgy of the Word which perhaps we don't think about very much is the Bidding prayers. The specific intentions, drawing perhaps on particular situations of suffering in the world or in our local parish communities, inspired too by the scripture readings, can speak powerfully of God's mercy and love; and yet so often any good intentions here are undermined if the Bidding prayers are simply too long and verbose. Sometimes prayers written by children can make the point succinctly; but at other times we perhaps try to do too much and the intercessions end up being longer than the homily. As lay ministers and readers I think you should have a role to play in this, but you also need support and guidance.

Special material has been produced for scriptural reflections for the year of Mercy, including a special edition of the Gospel of Luke. At the end of today's day of recollection details of this will be given to you from the latest newsletter from our Centre for Catholic Formation in Tooting.

- **The Eucharistic Prayer**

In every Mass, of course, the theological climax is the Eucharistic prayer when we believe that the elements of bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus. We enter into the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross, the ultimate expression of God's mercy, the act which reconciles humanity and God, the act by which we are enabled to be deified, as the early Greek theologians put it. The atoning death of Jesus on the Cross makes present and real the mercy and kindness of God. I want to share with you some words of the Canadian theologian Janet Martin Soskice, in her book *The Kindness of God* – she is referring to how God is present with the people of Israel in the book of Exodus:

'God here dwells among his people with the intimacy of the tabernacling God of the Exodus...a new family of brothers and sisters...this tabernacling of God with men and women is both now and not yet: a promise of the presence, love and beauty of a God who desires to be one with humankind...' (p.187)

God being with us expresses his mercy and kindness. The doctrine of transubstantiation, for which our forbears made such sacrifices in Britain and Ireland, expresses so beautifully the mercy and kindness of God. God makes his home with us on the altar when this miracle takes place in the Eucharistic prayer.

In terms of how we can show the importance of this by how we celebrate the Mass some of the same things can be said as we did about the beginning of the Mass. In this country (unlike much of the rest of the world) people are expected to kneel in the second part of the Eucharistic prayer; this does demonstrate clearly the reverence we want to show. The meeting of God and humanity, of heaven and earth, demands a different posture. Again, noise can be an issue; the use of bells can demonstrate how we 'change gear' at this stage in the Mass.

- **The Sign of Peace**

Mercy is in many ways about reconciliation. When we forgive someone, when we are engaged in an act of mercy: that is what we receive from God. Of course, forgiveness must never be cheap or casual. Often authentic forgiveness will be genuinely costly and difficult. In the liturgy of the Roman Church

just before we receive Holy Communion we are invited to engage in a physical act of reconciliation and mercy: the exchanging of the sign of peace. Again in the old Mass this physical ritual had become remote and stylised: now it is intended to be something real and clear. Of course many have a problem with it, and sometimes it can get out of control. Sometimes when we are at Mass we want to focus on our personal relationship with God, we don't want to be too aware of other people around us: but the sign of peace compels us to challenge that. We are always part of the wider Church – we are never alone. In contemporary Britain rampant individualism and selfishness constitute one of the most serious moral issues – our society is 'dog-eats-dog'. The sign of peace challenges this and symbolises God's mercy, which we are all called to show other people, even if they irritate us. Some of you may know that in some early Church liturgies, and in those of other Christian communities, the sign of peace comes in the middle of the Eucharist, before the Offertory. Pope Emeritus Benedict once wrote that he preferred that as it meant that people might be reverent before just before Holy Communion. I can see his point, but on the other hand having the Sign of Peace just before Holy Communion has a strong symbolic meaning. St Paul tells us that if we have something against one of our brethren we should not take our gift to the altar until we are reconciled, and the Sign of Peace is intended to re-establish a community based on mercy at the heart of the most important time in the Mass, if we take it seriously. Perhaps at Mass during this year people could be invited to make a special effort at the Peace to try and be reconciled to someone (or some people) we might find particularly difficult in the community (I realise for clergy this might be rather a big task).

- **Holy Communion**

For most people who come to Mass, the point in which they participate most deeply in what is going on is the time when they receive Holy Communion. This point in the Mass, in which the ministry of most of you as special ministers is most clearly visible, is therefore the point in the Mass where we hope people will experience God's mercy and loving kindness; this is why the issue of exclusion at this point is so sensitive. When we receive the Body and Blood of Christ at Mass, we enter into a foreshadowing of the banquet of the kingdom of God, the 'breaking-in' of that kingdom. Again, how do we make the way in which we give and receive Holy Communion an effective sign of God's mercy? As with other parts of the Mass, the jubilee year perhaps gives parishes the opportunity to think about how this is done. Here are some suggestions. The first is not one you might expect but I think it is important. Our bishops in their 1998 teaching document *One Bread, One Body* show an encouragement to parishes and other communities to show symbolically what we are doing in the fullest possible way by giving people Holy Communion under both kinds, after proper preparation. I find it surprising that there are so many parishes still in this country where this doesn't happen – and it seems to be down to the whim of the parish priest. OBOB is still an important teaching document so perhaps as special ministers you could try to make it better known. The Council asked for permission to be given for Communion under both kinds for a reason – it wasn't a mistake or an aberration.

Of course if you are a special minister you will know that one issue that is always around, and it is important for symbolism and how we depict the coming of God's mercy when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ, is this: do we receive Holy Communion devoutly and with reverence?

Accusations of sloppiness and disrespect are sometimes made: what can we do about it? In my experience special ministers are very aware of the issues and take their role seriously: often the problems are logistical, to do with basic crowd control, the layout of the church, the behaviour of children and so on. Noise is often part of the problem. Physically the idea of a rather disordered procession of people can be powerful symbolically; we are not an ordered, regimented group but a damaged community in need of healing and strength and I always resist people who say that we

should have stewards or ushers telling people to come up to Communion row by row, as happens in some places. But perhaps we could get people to think about what they are doing; music and singing during Communion shouldn't simply be a backdrop to drown out the noise. Again, we do not have to be apologetic about the different ways in which people are allowed to receive Holy Communion in this country (tongue or hands) but we should make sure people are properly taught (hands being clean, etc). If what we do is to be an effective sign of the mercy of God then we should be able to participate in it without distractions or worrying about whether people know what they are doing.

In our churches the Mass does not exist in isolation. In two ways the Eucharistic presence of Our Lord in our midst, a sign of God's mercy and loving kindness, carries on all the time.

The first thing about which special ministers should be particularly aware is the Reserved Sacrament. Somewhere Blessed Paul VI talks about the tabernacle as the 'beating heart' in our churches. While there is an endless and largely inconsequential debate these days about where the tabernacle should actually be – in the place formerly occupied by the High Altar, if it is not there any more *or* in or near a side chapel. What matters more to me than the position of the tabernacle is how we treat it; how we make it the focus for prayer in the church. Lighting, signs of reverence such as genuflecting, the veil etc. – these make a difference. The presence of the tabernacle, of Jesus himself, also demands that perhaps particularly in the year of mercy we should think about how often we keep our church buildings open. People often come into an open church seeking mercy and kindness; a locked church is such a counter-symbol, whatever our anxieties about safety and security.

In my parish we are very blessed because every weekday after the morning Mass we have a Holy hour of Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. This happens partly because of the charism and rule of one of our religious orders, but it has also become a key daily event in the life of the parish. In the quiet and stillness of the Church before the monstrance on the altar, all can come in and encounter the mercy and kindness of God. If you don't have daily Exposition in your parish, why not suggest it for the Year of Mercy?

I made the point earlier that the Year of Mercy, quite by chance, coincides with the Year of Luke in our Sunday lectionary. One of the most powerful and beautiful scenes in Luke, which shows us so much of God's mercy, is one of the great Resurrection appearances of Jesus: his encounter with the disciples on the road to Emmaus in chapter 24. As you know the key moment is the point in the story when in the house the disciples recognise the Lord 'in the breaking of bread.' This has always been, therefore, a sign of how we encounter the Lord in the Mass. We encounter the Lord of mercy, of loving kindness, in the Mass, the Eucharist. This year gives us all the opportunity to deepen this experience, to be led ourselves to encounter him in our lives, and to help our brothers and sisters do so as well.

Conclude session by reading account - Luke 24: 13-35

SESSION II Eucharistic communities of mercy and resistance

I was asked by Archbishop Bowen to become Dean of Studies of the diaconate programme at the beginning of 1999. I had never taught theology before and it was a few years since I had studied myself, but one of the things which really helped me early on was a new book which had just been published by the American theologian Bill Cavanaugh, entitled *Torture and Eucharist*. All these years later it is still one of the most exciting theological books I have ever read, never losing its freshness, appeal and ability to challenge. For a day of recollection for Eucharistic ministers it's perhaps worth sharing something about the book with you, especially as we prepare for the Year of Mercy which has been set up by the Holy Father.

The context for Cavanaugh's book is the Latin American country of Chile during the dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in the years following his military coup in September 1973; as it happened, as you may recall, at about the time the book was published here in 1999 the general was held in England under house arrest for some months as a Spanish judge tried to have him extradited to stand trial. Cavanaugh focuses on the ways in which the Pinochet regime waged a war of terror on its own people by rounding up, torturing and murdering thousands of people opposed to its rule; the detail is horrific and the book is not for the faint-hearted. He then shows, drawing on detailed research and personal interviews, how gradually the Catholic Church in Chile developed into an effective opposition to the government, working with the poor who suffered most from Pinochet's Friedmanite economic policies and the families of people who had been abducted and tortured (in the Archdiocese of Santiago a special *Vicaría de Solidaridad* was set up to do this. What has this to do with the Eucharist? The key is in the idea of the *body*. Cavanaugh portrays the torture regime as the State's 'para-liturgy', designed to remove bodies from the community, indeed to break down the community itself and eliminate any dissent. So the bereaved could not mourn properly or bury their dead, because bodies were not recovered.

By contrast through persecution the Christian community becomes more disciplined as the real and visible Body of Christ, made real through the Mass, the celebration of the Eucharist. In the midst of terrible suffering and crimes against humanity, the Church is actually strengthened; people's faith is deepened. One of the climaxes in Cavanaugh's narrative is the point in the early 1980s when some Chilean bishops excommunicated all those involved in the carrying out of torture (arguably including Pinochet and the other members of the *junta*). The torturers weren't named: the bishops expected people to look to their consciences. This act is in the tradition of the great Church Father St Ambrose, Bishop of Milan in the late 4th century, who famously excommunicated the Emperor Theodosius because he was responsible for the deaths of thousands of people during the siege of a Greek city. There is a painting by Rubens of him barring the emperor from his cathedral. Theodosius did public penance and after some months was re-admitted to Holy Communion.

For Professor Cavanaugh the Eucharist challenges and overturns secular concepts of history and politics – it sets up a 'counter-culture' based on the reign of Jesus Christ, the coming of his kingdom. The Church so centred on the Eucharist, the Mass, becomes a centre of resistance over and against the powers of evil, expressing the victory which Jesus has won through his death on the Cross—he draws on St Augustine (particularly *The City of God*) and the riches of the Christian theological tradition. I can't do justice to the book this afternoon – Christmas is coming, and the paperback edition of the book is not expensive (about £32).

The whole history of persecution and martyrdom in the Catholic Church shows how Cavanaugh's view of the Eucharist is correct – indeed he draws parallels with the accounts of early Christian

martyrs. For Catholics in Britain and Ireland this is even more poignant, since in penal times, when the Mass was illegal, simply coming together for the celebration risked the lives of priest and laypeople, in secret rooms in English country houses or on Mass rocks in Ireland; the Mass celebrated there was a profound symbol of the mercy and loving kindness of God in the midst of persecution.

This is not simply about a persecuted community maintaining its identity, or even a community trying to help those who are suffering: it is primarily about right belief, what we call ‘orthodoxy’. The Mass was the Mass in penal times because of distinctive Catholic beliefs about it – about the Sacrifice of the Mass and about Transubstantiation. In Britain and Ireland from the 1680s until Catholic emancipation the State systematically excluded Catholics from public life and the professions by requiring of office holders that they swear a *Declaration against Transubstantiation*, an explicit denial of the doctrine. We can see why: Catholic belief about the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist was a threat to the power of the Crown, and of the State. Catholics did have different loyalties. God and earthly powers were in conflict.

Now we don’t live in England or Ireland in penal times, or in the Chile of thirty or forty years ago. Nevertheless we are increasingly aware of ways in which the Catholic community is at odds with the prevailing life, culture and values of this country, shown through consideration of morality and an awareness that most people in this country do not practice the Christian faith and seldom go near a Church. Serious moral issues divide us from others and set us apart: the sanctity of human life, the treatment of refugees, the nature of marriage, the place of religion in schools, nuclear weapons, attitudes towards the dying, worsening poverty and deprivation...the list is a long one. As we grow more and more aware of these things which define us as Church, so we need as a community to become clearer in our identity, in our discipline as disciples of Christ. This ought to be more straightforward for us because of our history of persecution: we don’t aspire to be part of the ‘Establishment’.

The Eucharist, the Mass, has to be at the heart of this renewal, and the Jubilee year of Mercy gives us a tremendous opportunity as clergy and lay ministers to deepen our own faith and support others in our congregations. If, for example, parishes show hospitality to refugee families as the Holy Father has asked us to do, this is an expression of God’s mercy and loving kindness which has to be rooted in the Mass, the Eucharist, helping us to become communities of resistance over and against earthly powers, helping us to become more vividly the Body of Christ, to be more visible ‘as Church.’ This can be reflected in the ways in which we celebrate the Eucharist – drawing in our reflections on the sufferings of those whom we are trying to support. It can also be reflected by rooting our social and charitable action in contemplative prayer before the Tabernacle or the Monstrance.

A good example of how this can be done is to be found in the *Catholic Worker* communities founded in the United States in the 1930s by the Servant of God Dorothy Day – there are two such communities here in England, one of which in north London was visited last year by Cardinal Nichols and the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury. These communities exist to give unconditional support to the poorest people in our society and to witness for peace and against war. Dorothy Day made sure that if possible communities were to have chapels with the Blessed Sacrament reserved, and Mass celebrated regularly, to root the community’s work in the sacramental life of the Church, a vivid sign of the mercy and loving kindness of God. Some, of course, may find this challenging: but giving a lead, deepening the community’s awareness, is something all of us should try to do, not just clergy. Members of the *Catholic Worker* communities (such as the Passionist priest Fr Martin Newell, who also trained at Womersley with Fr Liam and myself), along with other members of Catholic peace groups, are frequently arrested for non-violent protests at nuclear weapons sites, other armed forces

installations, recruitment offices and arms fairs, and sometimes what they do involves prayer and celebrating the Mass.

I want to put two more images before you which express what this Eucharistic faith can be about – both have disturbing sides to them, but also signs of hope.

You may recall that in May of this year Pope Francis beatified Óscar Romero, Archbishop of San Salvador in central America, martyred while celebrating the Mass in March 1980. The Mass, of course, the expression like every Mass of God's mercy, as we have tried to examine today, polluted by a blasphemous murder of the celebrant, a devoted pastor of his people, a killing motivated, as the Church has declared, by 'hatred of the faith', *odium fidei*. But I don't want to dwell on his martyrdom but on another incident in his ministry, depicted very vividly and horrifyingly in the Raúl Julia film *Romero* which some of you may have seen.

Early on in his ministry as archbishop, in the summer of 1977, a Jesuit priest, Fr Rutilio Grande, and two laypeople were murdered near the village of Aguilares. Not long after the village was occupied for a month by soldiers. They killed a number of people and desecrated the village Church, shooting open the Tabernacle and scattering consecrated hosts on the floor of the Church. After they left Blessed Óscar went to the village and celebrated a Mass of Reparation in the church. In his homily he said:

'It is my lot to gather up the trampled, the dead, and all that the persecution of the church leaves behind. I have come to recover a profaned church, tabernacle and people. Your sorrow is the Church's sorrow....You are the image of the divine one who was pierced. ¹ It is the image of all the populations that, like Aguilares, are pierced through, and outraged. But if your suffering is done with faith and is given a redemptive meaning, then Aguilares is singing the precious stanzas of liberation. For when they look on him whom they have pierced, they will repent and will see the heroism and will see the joy of those whom the Lord blesses in their sorrow.....Let there be no animosity in our heart. Let this Eucharist, which is a call to reconciliation with God and our brothers and sisters, leave in all our hearts the satisfaction that we are Christians...let us pray for the conversion of those who struck us...of those who sacrilegiously dared to lay hands on the sacred tabernacle. Let us pray to the Lord for forgiveness and for the due repentance of those who converted a town into a prison and a place of torment. Let the Lord touch their hearts...'² After the Mass the archbishop led a Procession of the Host, carrying the Monstrance, in the piazza outside the church.

The terrible incident shows what hatred for the faith is all about. Desecrating the Blessed Sacrament and murdering the poor were two sides of the same coin. I think we have encountered similar incidents in recent years in attacks on Christians and Christian churches in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East. But for all the horror, Blessed Óscar's message is one of hope, a prayer for the conversion of the sinners. Now that the Holy Father has beatified him, in time for this Jubilee Year of Mercy, we have more opportunities to learn of his teachings, life and death.

The second image is also of a place of worship. It is the chapel of St Michael in the big refugee camp in Calais, known as the 'jungle'. You probably know that Archbishop Peter went there a couple of

¹ The first reading at the Mass was Zechariah 12:10-11.

² Extracts in Brockman, op.cit. p. 62 -63 and Romero *The Violence of Love* (San Francisco: Harper Row 1988); the full text (in Spanish) is in R. Cardenal, I. Martin-Baro and J. Sobrino (eds.) *La Voz de la Sin Voz: La Palabra Viva de Monseñor Romero* (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 1980), pp.207ff.

months ago and the BBC broadcast part of *Songs of Praise* from the chapel in August. It was built by Ethiopian and Eritrean Christians among those in the camp, and it is dedicated to St Michael the Archangel because, to quote one of those who constructed it, **'he is there to protect us all.'** It is made of corrugated iron and grey canvas – the refugees were helped by local French Christians and charities. The Oriental Orthodox Divine Liturgy is regularly celebrated in the chapel; it is a sign of Christian hope, important now as conditions worsen as the weather deteriorates. The point it is - it is chapel, where the Eucharist is celebrated. A sign of how the Eucharist, properly understood, expresses God's mercy and loving kindness. Like Blessed Óscar Romero's words I quoted earlier, it is a sign of hope, an inspiration to all of us as we all try to deepen the Eucharistic faith of one another and of our brothers and sisters in the Church in this imminent year of mercy.

Together with the details of material available from our CCF there will be handouts at the end of the day simply showing pictures – some illustrations from the Mass illustrating the points I made this morning, and some of the images from my talk this afternoon: a Mass rock, the scene from the film *Romero* when the archbishop goes into the desecrated church, and the chapel in Calais.

We will shortly bring together our reflections, together with our love for the God of mercy, into our celebration of the Mass with our Bishop, making real God's mercy.

Closing reading – Banquet of the kingdom, Isaiah 25:6-9

Thank you for your attention and may God bless you in your ministry in the Church in this part of our archdiocese.