

eternity. Throughout the ages, Christians have taken part in pilgrimages which unite us on Earth but also foreshadow our destination of heaven. I encourage pilgrimages to be carried out by individuals, families and parishes to the six designated churches in our diocese.

From July 25 to July 31, 2016, World Youth Day will be held in Krakow, Poland. Auxiliary Bishops Witold Mroziewski and Octavio Cisneros and I will join youth from Brooklyn and Queens on this pilgrimage.

In September of 2016, I will lead a diocesan pilgrimage to Assisi and Rome, and the Holy Land to follow where the Merciful Redeemer was incarnate and where, through Mother Church, He still dispenses grace and mercy.

This year's pilgrimage to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, on Saturday, October 25, 2016, will also have a special character as together we go to ask the intercession and guidance of the Mother of Mercy.

Lastly, the diocese will sponsor a pilgrimage, the date of which is yet to be determined, to the National Shrine of the Divine Mercy in Stockbridge, Mass., where through the intercession and experience of St. Faustina, the Gospel of Mercy has come to so many hearts. Indulgences may be obtained on all of these pilgrimages.

Other Means of Observance

On Sunday, December 27, 2015, Holy Family Sunday during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, we will begin the second year of our three-year Diocesan Evangelization and Renewal Springboard Plan entitled *The Joy of Encountering Christ: The Family's Hope*. You can read the entire plan, including the six goals, on our Diocesan Website at www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org.

The eight catechetical themes of the Jubilee of Mercy and the events which we have planned here in the Diocese of Brooklyn relating to our Springboard Plan are defined and organized to assist parishes, families, and individuals to grow in faith and to assist in encountering Christ more authentically. The eight catechetical

themes are:

- Celebrating Mercy
- Psalms of Mercy
- Parables of Mercy
- Mercy in the Fathers
- Saints in Mercy
- Mercy in the Pope's Teaching
- Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy
- Confession: The Sacrament of Mercy

Although each of our School of Evangelization events and opportunities will develop the themes of the Jubilee of Mercy, one major event stands out. As the catechetical centerpiece for the Jubilee of Mercy, the Annual Evangelization Congress will be held on Saturday, January 30, 2016, at the Immaculate

During this Year of Mercy, we are called to recognize the Merciful Father as our own and to share that good news with others.

Conception Center, Douglaston, from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. A snow date will be announced soon. Last year, over 500 people attended the Congress, and we expect many more this year. The theme, Celebrating Mercy, will be presented in a variety of workshops. Mass will be celebrated, and exhibitors will be present to display materials. A light breakfast and lunch will be served as well. I encourage each of you to attend and gain wonderful insights that can be shared with others.

Please go to www.meetmein.church and www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/yearofmercy (Get Involved In Your Faith) to register for events, courses, and other opportunities for lifelong formation. Workshops will be offered in English, Spanish, Creole, Polish and Mandarin.

Also during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, we will begin a three-year process of spiritual renewal through small groups called ARISE. It will be offered by our parishes in English, Spanish, and Creole and, perhaps, other languages as well. Sponsored by RENEW International throughout

the United States and the world, ARISE is arranged in five seasons during the next three years, with six sessions for each season. More information will be provided shortly. Already, 20 pastors have committed their parishes to this initiative during the first round of Information Sessions. Please consider joining a small faith sharing group when the opportunity presents itself.

A Tribute to Mercy

There is another area which comes to our attention during this Year of Mercy; namely, the Marriage Tribunal of the Diocese of Brooklyn. Our Holy Father has already issued a decree, trying to facilitate the declaration of nullity for marriages by shortening the period for those who are able to

prove with solid grounds the invalidity of their marriages.

An annulment is never to be considered divorce. In fact, civil divorces must take place before any annulment can be obtained. An annulment declares that the marriage never received sacramental status for Catholics or valid status for non-Catholics, because something was lacking in the consent or the attitude of one or both of the partners.

The indissolubility of marriage has been reaffirmed by the recent Synod on the Family, but at the same time it recognized that many people who are divorced and remarried wish to participate in the life of the Church but think themselves outside of God's mercy and forgiveness. The Diocesan Tribunal makes every effort to streamline its processes and, as always, makes an annulment available at a minimal charge, or at no charge for those who are not able to give a donation for the administrative work involved.

The Works of Mercy

The Jubilee Year, this Year of Mercy, reminds us that we must

be active in showing mercy. Many of us learned in our Baltimore Catechism about the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy and how important they are to the lives of Christians.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church tells us, "The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, and comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.

The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses of fraternal charity. It is also a work of justice pleasing to God."

During the Jubilee of Mercy, I am proposing that we take up a special collection for assisting the refugees of the Middle East and Africa, who are presenting a challenge to relief organizations. It might even be possible before the Jubilee of Mercy ends to sponsor refugee families in the parishes of our Diocese in Brooklyn and Queens.

The current fearmongering regarding security concerns notwithstanding, I personally know, as the former resettlement director for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, that the security checks given to refugee families is more than sufficient to protect our Nation against terrorist infiltration.

There are many other practical ways to fulfill what we know to be the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Looking for ways to do so during this year will enable us to show mercy to others.

Conclusion

A Holy Year, this extraordinary Year of Mercy, offers us an opportunity to put out into the deep recesses of God's mercy. It is beyond our imagining the love that God has for us, which He shows us in His mercy. During this Year of Mercy, we are called to recognize the Merciful Father as our own and to share that good news with others.