



A Pastoral Letter
On the Opening of the Holy Year 2025
To be read at all Masses on Sunday 29th December,
Feast of the Holy Family

My dear brothers and sisters,

On Christmas Eve, Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of Saint Peter's in Rome for the Jubilee Year 2025. The Church celebrates a jubilee every 25 years, drawing on the Biblical tradition of a year celebrated to manifest God's mercy by freeing the imprisoned, writing off debts and re-setting relationships by a universal pardonⁱ. The Church now commends such a moment of grace to us so that we might be moved to seek forgiveness for our sins; conversion of life; and reconciliation with our neighbour. Pope Francis writes: "*Now the time has come for a new Jubilee, when once more the Holy Door is flung open to invite everyone to an intense experience of the love of God*"ⁱⁱ.

Tens of millions will travel to Rome as pilgrims and in this Shrewsbury Diocese, I have established the Cathedral and Saint Joseph's Eucharistic Shrine in Stockport as places for local pilgrimage. The Gospel tells of the pilgrimage made by Our Lady and Saint Joseph which became the joyful mystery of finding Jesus in the Templeⁱⁱⁱ. Today we reflect how our pilgrimage to Mass each Sunday - invites us 'to seek and find anew' the same Jesus present in the Mystery of the Eucharist. The Holy Father prays this year will be such a renewed encounter for us all "*a moment of genuine personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the door of our salvation ...*"^{iv}.

Pope Francis has placed hope at the heart of this Jubilee celebration. He writes, may this be "*A Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, hope in God. May it help us to recover the confident trust that we require, in the Church and in society, in our interpersonal relations, in our task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation*"^v. Christian hope is ultimately the hope of Heaven, for nothing less corresponds to the longing placed in the human heart. The Catechism explains: "*Hope is the theological virtue by which we desire the kingdom of heaven and eternal life as our happiness, placing our trust in Christ's promises ...*"^{vi}. As Saint Augustine so memorably wrote of this hope: "*you have made us for yourself, O Lord, our hearts are restless till they rest in you*"^{vii}.

This hope does not lead us to care less about our present lives or this passing world, rather it leads us to care more, much more! The fact that this world is the way to another, “the life of the world to come,” charges the whole of our lives with new purpose. Pope Francis gives practical examples of how this supernatural hope opens the door to see our lives and our world anew. This, he writes, enables us to untiringly seek peace in a world threatened by war and conflict; to be open to the gift of life in countries witnessing an alarming decline in the birthrate, since the desire of young people to give birth to new sons and daughters is born of hope; this same hope brings us closer to the sick and the elderly and helps us see in a new light the plight of the poor and most vulnerable, of prisoners, exiles and refugees. The hope we have received, insists Pope Francis, leads us to forgive others, for while forgiveness cannot change what happened in the past “*it can allow us to change the future and live different lives, free of anger ...*”^{viii}.

In inviting us to seek the Jubilee Indulgence for ourselves and for our loved ones departed, Pope Francis reminds us that we are never alone in our struggle to reach the goal of Heaven. We are united in the Mystical Body of Christ with all those striving on earth, with those being purified in purgatory and with all the saints who have reached everlasting happiness. With the help of their prayers and the indulgence of the whole Church, the Holy Father points to the hope of final purification which we call ‘purgatory’. For - in the face of the sins and repeated failures that you and I confess - we dare hope for that holiness which is necessary to share the joy of Heaven. As Pope Benedict beautifully wrote, before Christ’s gaze all falsehood will melt away as “the holy power of his love sears through us like a flame, enabling us to become totally ourselves and thus totally of God”^{ix}.

Together in this pilgrimage, in the company of Our Lady, Saint Joseph and all the saints may we be such ‘pilgrims of hope.’ In time and for eternity, may we find His love and mercy.

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

ⁱ Cf. Leviticus 25: 8-55

ⁱⁱ Spes non Confundit No. 6

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Lk. 2: 41-52

^{iv} Spes non Confundit No. 1

^v Spes non Confundit No. 24

^{vi} Catechism of the Catholic Church No. 1817

^{vii} The Confessions of Saint Augustine’ 1,1

^{viii} Spes non Confundit No. 23

^{ix} Spe Salvi No. 47