

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Bishop Johnston has named this cathedral one of three pilgrimage sites for this jubilee year of hope. Every twenty-five years the Catholic Church especially celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Those who are able travel to Rome and enter the four major basilicas through doors opened only for this occasion. As we pray for the health of Pope Francis during his hospitalization, we are grateful that he has authorized bishops around the world to designate pilgrimage sites where people who cannot travel to Rome can more easily participate in aspects of the jubilee. In our diocese Bishop Johnston has named the basilica at Conception Abbey, where Benedictine monks live in community and form many of our diocesan seminarians; the Co-cathedral of St. Joseph, dear to our history as a diocese; and this Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, first dedicated in 1883.

People visiting any of these three sites this year may gain a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions. An indulgence is a grace that remits punishment for sins already forgiven. To understand this concept, consider a child who commits an offense: parents may offer both forgiveness and punishment. The same is true of all God's children. After we've been forgiven, we still face punishment, but an indulgence removes it. The Church offers many opportunities for plenary indulgences throughout every year. They are attached to some act, such as singing the *Te Deum* on New Year's Eve, or the *Veni Creator* on New Year's Day—both of which we do here—or in this jubilee year, making a pilgrimage to a designated site. To obtain a plenary indulgence, the person performs three additional actions: going to confession, receiving communion, and praying for the Holy Father. Pervading all these actions is perhaps the most difficult requirement: excluding all attachment to sin, even venial sin.

In this cathedral we have already honored the holy year in several ways. At the direction of the Holy See we joined other cathedrals around the world and celebrated a solemn opening of the year on Holy Family Sunday, right after Christmas; we gathered at our statue of Mary, seat of wisdom, near the parking lot, and processed behind a cross to the front door. That cross now stands in our sanctuary as a sign of this special year of grace. This week we've placed there a candle bearing the coat of arms of Pope Francis, to encourage prayers for his health. We have also been singing each week the hymn composed for the jubilee year, "Like a Flame my Hope is Burning." You can find it by using our online participation aid. Pick up your phone, go to our website, click on "Today" and then on "Worship Aid". You'll see all the congregational music there, links to the readings, and other useful information. You'll also find the jubilee hymn.

The jubilee year blooms with the hope that stems from forgiveness. Several readings today use the image of a tree. Jesus says, "Every tree is known by its fruit." If you're bearing good fruit, you're a good tree. We heard the same image in the Book of Sirach: "The fruit of a tree shows the care it has had; so does one's speech disclose the bent of one's mind." And in the psalm, our cantor sang, "The just will flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a Lebanon cedar. Planted in the house of the Lord, they will flourish in the courts of our God. Still bearing fruit when they are old, still full of sap, still green." Let us spend this jubilee year in hope, with religious practices that bear good fruit.