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Ash Wednesday, February 10, 2016

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As I reflect on this past Year for Consecrated Life, the message that stays with me is the call to remain faithful to our calling, the call that each one of us has by our baptism. This also is the call of the Season of Lent, to grow in love, in hope and in faith, as we prepare to renew our baptism at Easter. Jesus invites us during this season of grace to return to our original “yes” of baptism and to experience the Lord in a new way, especially in His mercy and forgiveness.

During this Year of Mercy, let us consider again this great gift that God gives us, namely, His mercy. The Lord offers us His forgiveness constantly and He also helps us to receive it. God’s Spirit dwells in our hearts and helps us become aware of our wrongdoing, so that we can be freed of the sinfulness that clings to us. If we let the Lord enter our hearts, we begin to discover God’s desire that we be saved and freed from our sins. We also see into God’s heart and realize that it is the heart of a Father who loves His children and wants them to live in goodness and in happiness. God opens us to the limitless horizons of His mercy.

Within our Church, we have the opportunity to enter into the heart of God and embrace his loving mercy. Through the Sacrament of Penance, we are drawn to know God’s love, to seek the One who helps us change our life, to be encouraged by the One who gives us the strength to move forward. We celebrate the experience of the prodigal son, being embraced by a Father who loves us, forgives and heals us, and restores us as a child of God.

As a result of experiencing and witnessing God’s merciful love, we are given the grace of Christ to be hopeful people even in the midst of lives that may be marked by anxiety, fear or discouragement. We can be renewed by His Mercy and live lives of honesty, compassion, forgiveness, hospitality, and service. We can become a person ready to nourish hope wherever we find ourselves, in our families, our parishes and our communities. From my own celebration of the Sacrament of Penance, I experience a real sense of the Lord lifting me from my sinfulness and giving me a real sense of being freed, a sense of being loved and a sense of deep renewal.

I am asking every parish to provide ample opportunity for celebrating the Sacrament of Penance and every parishioner to consider celebrating this Sacrament during this Year of Mercy. I hope and pray that this Season of Lent will provide an opportunity for all to know the wonderful, amazing Love and Mercy of God.

Sincerely in Christ,

† Brian Joseph Dunn
Bishop of Antigonish