



# CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF TIKOLOHO E KATHOLIKE EA ISIFUNDABHISHOBHI SASE

# JOHANNESBURG

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## PASTORAL LETTER

### 2017. A YEAR OF DEVOTION TO MARY In the Archdiocese of Johannesburg 1 January 2017 to 27 December 2017

Both the Holy Father, Pope Francis and the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference have not declared a Prayer Theme for the year 2017. The Archdiocese of Johannesburg takes advantage of this gap and proposes that 2017 be officially declared "*The Year of Devotion to Mary*" in the Archdiocese. The Marian Year will run from The Solemnity of Mary, the Holy Mother of God (1 January, 2017) to the Feast of The Holy Family (27 December, 2017).

In the Catholic tradition, Mary has always been understood as the "shortest route" to Christ Jesus. This is so because at incarnation, she became "indissolubly joined to Christ" (Mother of the Redeemer, 1.3). But this was all in God's plan who wanted His Son to be "born of a woman" called Mary (Gal.4.4). Mary, therefore, occupies a "special place" in God's design for humanity. She is at the very core of this plan. And the plan was simply that, through the death on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son, men and women be destined to become adopted sons and daughters of God, the Father. God's plan is to redeem all humanity and lavishly give his "glorious grace" to all.

It was this Mary, "blessed among women" and "full of grace" who was God's unique choice to be the mother of His Son in order to accomplish His plan to save His children.

An aspect of Mary's life we seek to highlight in this Pastoral letter is her experience of hardship, pain and suffering. It was her deep-rooted faith, her unwavering trust in God's promise that gave her endurance and the ultimate victory over her plight. In many ways, a great number of people in our own communities face on a daily basis, a variety of hardships. There are people who suffer deprivation and hunger who live in shacks with virtually no amenities. Children born in these make-shift "houses" are born in conditions of extreme poverty. Mary herself gave birth to Jesus in a stable. There are many families without a fixed address, without a stable home, who are pushed around by the powerful land-owners.

There are also economic migrants, hapless refugees and stateless children who are forced to move constantly because they have no identity documents. This calls to mind the anxiety and the flight of Mary, Joseph and Jesus into Egypt for Herod sought “to kill the child” (Mt. 2.13).

It is therefore with confidence that all those who suffer abuse, discrimination, rejection and deprivation can join Mary in her Song of Praise, (Magnificat) to God, who has looked with favor on His people, who trust in Him. They recall with gratitude that He is “rich in mercy” (Eph. 2.4) and that He scatters “the proud in their conceit” (Lk. 1.50). Mary’s Song of Praise becomes a constant refrain that liberates, resuscitates, “lifts-up the lowly and fills them with good things” (Lk. 1.52). *The Year of Devotion to Mary* seeks to bring the lived experience of Mary into sharp relief so that we too can blend our varied experiences with hers and draw inspiration, strength and courage from her firm and unshakable “*fiat*” (yes).

Those who are diseased, impoverished, exploited, imprisoned, rejected or over-burdened can see their predicament through the prism of Mary, the Mother of Mercy. Mary is also the Mother of Sorrows. When her only Son was despised, spat upon, rejected and hanged on the Cross, “a sword pierced her soul”. Pain consumed her. She shared in the “act of self-emptying” with her crucified Son. She stood beneath the cross until her Son died. This, according to Vatican Council was part of God’s plan. (Lumen Gentium ... Mother of the Redeemer 18. 1-18.3). In spite of a mother’s pain, Mary persevered because “she believed” (Lk. 1.45). She believed that nothing was impossible to God. She was steadfast. In the end she triumphed. Hence all generations call her blessed. A sterling model for all mothers, for all believers, for all pilgrims.

*We declare 2017 the Year of Devotion to Mary* to coincide with the building of the Monument of Mercy, at the invitation of Pope Francis. **The project of the Shrine of Mary, the Mother of Mercy, is dedicated to Our Lady.** We hope it will become a place of prayer, of God’s consolation, a spiritual refuge and a house of mercy to all the pilgrims.



Archbishop Buti Tlhagale o.m.i.  
Magaliesberg  
1<sup>st</sup> January, 2017