



PILGRIMS OF HOPE, JUBILEE YEAR 2025

BISHOP ALAN MCGUCKIAN, SJ DIOCESE OF DOWN AND CONNOR



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace! As we stand on the threshold of 2025, we begin a special Jubilee Year in our Church. Pope Francis has called this Jubilee Year ‘Pilgrims of Hope’. It’s an invitation to renew our hope, a hope which comes from knowing that God loves each one of us, whoever we are. My deepest prayer is that this year will draw us all closer to the Heart of Jesus, where we find the source of true peace and transformation. The dawn of this New Year brings with it not just the usual promise of fresh beginnings, but the extraordinary grace of a Jubilee – a time when we are called to renew our relationship with God and with one another in profound ways.

The idea of a Jubilee comes from the Old Testament and was known as a year of the Lord’s favour. A Jubilee Year was a time for a fresh start; debts were cancelled, property was returned to its original owners, and because crops weren’t planted, even the land was able to rest. It was also a time of freedom: prisoners and slaves were freed, and land was given to those who didn’t have any. When Christ announced his mission he said that he had come to bring a Jubilee.

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim liberty to the captives; recovery of sight for the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”
(Luke 4:18-19)

Christ began his mission with the great hope of bringing the healing, justice and freedom of the Jubilee, a mission to which we are all invited to contribute to. In a troubled world that appears besieged with crisis after crisis and conflicts flaring up across the world, we could become downhearted and disappointed. It is precisely at times like this that we are invited to be full of hope, and to bring the love of Christ into the despair we find around us.

St Paul expresses it perfectly, writing to the Romans:

“Hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us”
(Rom 5:1-2.5).

As people of faith, we hold a hope in our hearts that comes from God and not from ourselves. With that hope we can bring the love of Christ into our world.



As we enter this Jubilee Year, I invite each of you to hear afresh the commandments of Jesus; ‘to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and strength’ and ‘to love your neighbour as yourself.’ We can make 2025 a year when people notice something different about us – not for our own glory, but for the glory of God. Imagine our parishes and wider communities transformed by the profound practice of Christian love. When we truly love God with our whole being, and genuinely love our neighbours as ourselves, we become catalysts for the renewal of our world.

Renewal in Prayer

Renewal begins with our own journey toward holiness. Let me propose a regular spiritual practice:

- Daily Prayer: Creating space each day to rest in the Heart of Jesus. There are many reasons and ways to pray, but at the root of prayer is always the desire to be open to God’s presence and His offer of love. The daily prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus recommended by Blessed John Sullivan is one I encourage you to adopt for this Jubilee Year which is also the 350th anniversary of the apparitions of the Sacred Heart to St Margaret Mary in Paray-le-Monial.
- Weekly Mass: Gathering as a community to be nourished by Word and Sacrament. Sunday Mass is the greatest single expression of our communion with Christ and his Mission in the world.
- Monthly Confession: Experiencing God’s mercy and beginning anew. To make a choice of regular Confession will be a great boost to our spiritual lives.
- A pilgrimage. I encourage you to make a *Pilgrimage of Hope* with others from the Diocese. Whether joining our Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes or Knock, visiting the Lourdes Grotto in Moneyglass or St. Mary’s Chapel Lane, participating in Saul Sunday, or making a thoughtful visit to St. Peter’s our Diocesan Cathedral.



Renewal in Action

The Heart of Jesus has a special love for the poor, and so must we. This means not only contributing financially but also giving of our time and ourselves and simply being present to those who are lonely or struggling.

Love, flowing from our closeness to the Heart of Jesus, becomes a beacon of hope in our world. Here in our Diocese of Down and Connor, we have a unique opportunity to make this Jubilee Year truly memorable. Let us support one another on this journey, remembering that every small act of love brings us closer to the Heart of Jesus and closer to one another.

The recent Synod invites us to think of ourselves in new ways as disciples of Jesus, and of our parishes as centres for his ongoing mission. We live in a broken world that cries out to hear the Good News of salvation that Jesus brings us. Each one of us has his or her part to play as persons of prayer, as channels of reconciliation, and as 'artisans of a new humanity'.

We will find in His Heart the strength, courage, and grace to love as He loves, to serve as He serves, and to bring hope where it is needed most.

With every blessing for the Jubilee Year,
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+ Alan M c Guckian SJ

Bishop Alan McGuckian SJ

The Jubilee Prayer

Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.

Amen

Prayer of Blessed John Sullivan SJ

I believe in God, I hope in God, I love God

I am sorry for having offended God.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe in your love for me.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I believe you love me now.

Sacred Heart of Jesus, I place all my trust in thee.



My Jubilee 2025 Commitment is to

