

At Pope Francis' request, the coming of Advent ushered in a Year of Mercy. It wasn't the popes intent to just create a nice slogan for posters or a theme for a new parish program, he actually wants Catholics to focus on being more merciful this year – actually be more forgiving, more understanding in the months to come.

What does that look like? Well in the larger scheme of things it means admitting that most Moslems don't mean you any harm; that most people trapped in poverty would love to be able to make things better for themselves; that most police are honest and honorable civil servants.

It means admitting that people with different political views than yours can still be patriots and that people who disagree with you might have some good points to make. It means recognizing that – if for no other reason than I am part of it – my family isn't perfect and neither is my circle of friends, associates and co-workers. It means remembering that most of the things they do or say really aren't about me or intended to annoy me. It means trying to be a bit more understanding and a bit more forgiving of the folk around me.

And the year of mercy means humbly acknowledging that as I fumble me way through life I need the mercy other show me and especially the offer of mercy from God himself. Gathering here tonight is about more than getting ready for Christmas it's about making a good start on living out the year of mercy.