



JUBILEE OF MERCY MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



Announcement of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

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On 13 March, 2015, Pope Francis announced inside Saint Peter's Basilica that there will be the celebration of an extraordinary Holy Year. This Jubilee of Mercy will begin with the opening of the Holy Door in Saint Peter's on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, 2015, and will conclude on 20 November, 2016, on the Solemnity of Christ, the King of the Universe. Already, at the beginning of this year, the Holy Father had said, "This is the time of mercy. It is important that the lay faithful live mercy and bring it into a wide spectrum of social situations. Take action!"

The announcement of the Holy Year was made on the second anniversary of Pope Francis' election, during the homily at the penance service at which the Holy Father opened the *24 Hours for the Lord*.

This initiative, sponsored by the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, promotes a day of opening churches throughout the world to invite people to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation.

The theme of the *24 Hours* this year is taken from the letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians: "God who is rich in mercy" (Eph 2:4)

The inauguration of the upcoming Jubilee will take place on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Ecumenical Council Vatican II in 1965, and will therefore take on a special significance as prompting the Church to continue the work begun by Vatican II.

During the Jubilee, the Gospel passages for the Sundays in Ordinary Time will be taken from the Gospel of Luke, who is known as the "evangelist of mercy". Dante Alighieri described him as the "*scriba mansuetudinis Christi*", the "narrator of the meekness of Christ". The parables about mercy in the Gospel of Luke are well known: the straying sheep, the lost drachma, the merciful father.

The official and solemn announcement of the Holy Year will take place with the pronouncement and publication of the Bull of Indiction in front of the Holy Door on the Sunday of Divine Mercy, the feast instituted by Saint John Paul II and celebrated the Sunday after Easter.

In ancient times, among the Hebrews, the jubilee was a year declared to be holy that occurred every 50 years, during which equality was supposed to be restored “among all the children of Israel, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom. On the other hand, the jubilee year was a reminder to the rich that a time would come when their Israelite slaves would once again become their equals and would be able to reclaim their rights. ... Justice, according to the Law of Israel, consisted above all in the protection of the weak” (St. John Paul II in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* 13).

The Catholic Church began the tradition of Holy Years during the pontificate of Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. Boniface VIII planned for a Jubilee every century. Beginning in 1475 – to permit every generation to experience at least one Holy Year– the ordinary Jubilees began to be celebrated every 25 years. An extraordinary Jubilee, in contrast, is called for due to some particularly important circumstance.

The number of ordinary Holy Years celebrated up to this point is 26. The last one was the Great Jubilee of 2000. The practice of calling for extraordinary Jubilees dates from the 16th century. The most recent extraordinary Holy Years, in the past century, were those of 1933, called by Pope Pius XI for the 19th centenary of the Redemption; and that of 1983, called by John Paul II in honor of the 1,950 years since the Redemption.

The Catholic Church has given a more spiritual significance to the Hebrew jubilee. This consists in a general pardon, an indulgence open to everyone, and in the chance to renew our relationship to God and to our neighbor. The Holy Year thus always becomes an opportunity to deepen faith and to live with renewed vigor as Christian witnesses.

With the Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis places the merciful God who invites everyone to return to him at the center of our attention. Our encounter with God inspires the virtue of mercy.

The inaugural rite of the Jubilee is the opening of the Holy Door. This is a special door that is opened only during Holy Years, and which remains walled shut the rest of the time. The four Major Basilicas in Rome each have a Holy Door: Saint Peter’s, Saint John Lateran, Saint Paul Outside the Walls, and Saint Mary Major. The rite for opening the Holy Door symbolically expresses the idea that during the Jubilee the faithful are offered an “extraordinary path” towards salvation.

The Holy Doors of the other basilicas will be opened after the opening of the Holy Door in Saint Peter’s Basilica.

Mercy is a theme very dear to Pope Francis, who already chose as his motto “*miserando atque eligendo*” when he was first made a bishop. This is a citation taken from a homily by Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on the Gospel episode of the vocation of Saint Matthew. Bede writes: “*Vidit ergo Iesus publicanum et quia miserando atque eligendo vidit, ait illi Sequere me*” (Jesus saw a publican, and because he looked at him with mercy and chose him, he said to him: Follow me). This homily is a tribute to divine mercy. A translation of the motto could perhaps be “With eyes of mercy”.

In the first Angelus after his election, the Holy Father said: “[F]eeling mercy, ... this word changes everything. This is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world

less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient” (Angelus 17 March, 2013).

In the Angelus of 11 January 2015 he stated: “There is a great need for mercy today, and it is important that the lay faithful live mercy and bring it into a wide spectrum of social situations. Take action! We are living in the time of mercy; this is the time of mercy”. Once again, in his message for Lent 2015, the Holy Father said: “How greatly I desire that all those places where the Church is present, especially our parishes and our communities, may become islands of mercy in the midst of the sea of indifference!”

In the Italian text of the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* the term ‘mercy’ appears no less than 31 times.

Pope Francis has entrusted the organization of the *Jubilee of Mercy* to the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization.