

THE YEAR OF MERCY -HOW TO LIVE OUR POPE FRANCIS' JUBILEE YEAR- This past year, Pope Francis called for an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. The Year of Mercy begins on December 8, 2015 (the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception) and ends on November 20, 2016 (the Solemnity of Christ the King). The idea of celebrating a Jubilee Year brings some natural questions:

- **What is a Jubilee Year?**
- **Why did Pope Francis call for a Jubilee Year?**
- **How to receive God's mercy?**

Here are the basics:

What is a Jubilee Year? The idea of a Jubilee Year has a very deep history, both in the life of the Church and in the Old Testament. Most people are familiar with the idea of a Sabbath Day: a day of rest based on God's resting on the seventh day of creation (Saturday for Jewish people, Sunday for most Christians). The Jewish people also celebrate Sabbath years, which occur every seventh year. And, following seven Sabbath years (on the fiftieth year), they celebrated a Jubilee Year. Jubilee Years were celebrated during the first year of a Jewish king's reign as well. During the Jubilee Year, the Jewish people were instructed to forgive debts, free those enslaved to them as a result of debt and to give back land that was paid due to debt. The idea was that the Jewish people would act in this way to remember the mercy they had received from the Lord. In the history of the Catholic Church, a Jubilee Year was not celebrated until the year 1300. At that time, Europe was heavily afflicted by plague and war, and the people of Europe made pilgrimage to Rome seeking repentance for their sins. At this time, Pope Boniface VIII declared the first Jubilee Year in the Church to provide mercy to the people of the faith. Since then, 25 Jubilee years have been celebrated by the Church, usually 25 or 50 years apart (there is no exact consistency). Pope John Paul II called for the Great Jubilee Year in 2000. Pope Paul VI called for one in 1975, and Pius XII did so in 1950.

So, then — why did Pope Francis call for a Jubilee Year? Most people quickly notice that 2016 isn't divisible by 25, like almost every other Jubilee Year. That's why it's called an Extraordinary Jubilee Year: It is not on an ordinary year. Pope Francis has a great conviction about mercy, and he wanted to make sure the Church received and lived out God's message of mercy (note, this is the first time a Jubilee Year has not been divisible by 25).

Four days after his Papal election, Pope Francis said this: "I think — and I say it with humility — that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy" (Homily, March 17, 2013). Pope Francis has called for a Year of Mercy to help the Church recognize a simple but dynamic relationship: We are able to give mercy to others if we are able to receive mercy from God. (Read that two or three times to let it sink in.) That's why the motto for the Year of Mercy is "To be merciful like the Father." To put it in Pope Francis' own words: "I present, therefore, this Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us...She knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ. The Church is called, above all, to be a credible witness to mercy..." (Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy [Misericordiae Vultus], para. 25). For Pope Francis, mercy is not simply one theme of the Church: It's the primary way in which we receive the Lord and give him to others. This is why he's commissioned the Pontifical Council of the New Evangelization to run the Year of Mercy. Mercy is to be witnessed and used in evangelization.

Three Ways to Receive God's Mercy:

1. Live Lent More Intensely!

"The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God's mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father!" (Misericordiae Vultus, para. 17).

2. Go to Confession

"Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the center once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy with their own hands. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace" (Misericordiae Vultus, para. 17).

3. Travel through Holy Doors

"The Holy Doors of the other Papal Basilicas will be opened. On the same Sunday, I will announce that in every local church, at the cathedral — the mother church of the faithful in any particular area — or, alternatively, at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance, a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year. At the discretion of the local ordinary, a similar door may be opened at any shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion. Every Particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal" (Misericordiae Vultus, para. 3).

14 Ways to Show God's Mercy to Others: Pope Francis turns to the great tradition of the Church on how to show others God's mercy. "It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples" (Misericordiae Vultus, para. 15, emphasis added).

Here are the seven corporal works of mercy:

- to feed the hungry
- give drink to the thirsty
- clothe the naked
- welcome the stranger
- heal the sick
- visit the imprisoned
- bury the dead

Here are the seven spiritual works of mercy:

- to counsel the doubtful
- instruct the ignorant
- admonish sinners
- comfort the afflicted
- forgive offences
- bear patiently those who do us ill
- pray for the living and the dead

Prayer of the Holy Year of Mercy

Lord Jesus Christ, You taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, that whoever sees You sees God. Show us your face and we will be saved. You are the visible face of the invisible Father, the God who manifests His power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church of the risen and glorified Lord, be Your visible face in the world. You willed Your ministers be clothed in weakness, that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error: let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, loved and forgiven by God. Send Your Spirit to consecrate and anoint us, that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord. May Your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed and restore sight to the blind. We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, You who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.