

December 8, 2015 - November 20, 2016

Jubilee

HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

December 8, 2015, is a very important day in the Catholic Church. First, it is the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is also the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. And it is the date for the beginning of the Jubilee Holy Year of Mercy.



Earlier this year, Pope Francis announced, in a homily at a penitential liturgy during Lent, that there would be a Year of Mercy. He spoke of God the Father truly being rich in mercy as the Pope reflected on the Gospel story of the woman who washes

the feet of Jesus with her tears and dries them with her hair (Luke 7:36-50). Pope Francis pointed out the connection between the love of the sinful woman and the merciful love of Jesus for her. Love and forgiveness are simultaneous.

With that, Pope Francis announced an Extraordinary Jubilee that has at its center the Church's mission to be a witness to the mercy of God. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy.

"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"
(Luke 6:36).



On the Second Sunday of Easter, April 11, 2015 – Divine Mercy Sunday – the official letter announcing the Jubilee of Mercy was released, titled *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy by Francis, Bishop of Rome, and Servant of the Servants of God*.

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

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In this letter, Pope Francis states that mercy is "the beating heart of the Gospel" (12). The Church is called to live and testify to mercy. The Corporal Works of Mercy, based on Matthew 25: 31-46, teach us how to live that message and command of Jesus. (For suggestions on ways to practice the Corporal Works of Mercy, link to "[With My Family: The Corporal Works of Mercy](#).")

You may be wondering, what exactly is a Holy Year. Here are some FAQs that may help to explain the Jubilee Holy Year of Mercy.

What is a Jubilee Holy Year?

There is a long tradition for a Jubilee year, going back to the Hebrew people, as seen in Leviticus 25:10: "This fiftieth year you shall make sacred by proclaiming liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you," The Jubilee year was a time of great joy as well as a year of pardon. During a Jubilee year, debts would be forgiven, slaves and prisoners set free, and the land restored to its former owners.

The current Catholic tradition of the Holy Year began in 1300, with Pope Boniface VIII. In 1475, the celebration of an ordinary Jubilee year was changed from every fifty years to every twenty-five years, so that each generation would be able to celebrate at least one Holy Year. The last ordinary Jubilee Year was observed in 2000.

There is a strong spiritual significance to a Jubilee Holy Year. It is considered a time of pardon, and a plenary indulgence is given to renew our relationship with God and neighbor. Most important, it is a time to deepen our faith and renew our commitment to Christian witness. A pilgrimage to a sacred place, normally Rome, is usually part of a Jubilee Year.

A pope can also call an Extraordinary Jubilee Holy Year, as is the Year of Mercy, for a special occasion. Pope Francis called for this Jubilee Year to begin on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The Pope sees a great need to keep the vision of Vatican II alive, that all Christians “bear witness to their faith” and be a “living sign of the Father’s love” in the world (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 4).

What is a Bull of Indiction?

There are several types of papal documents such as encyclicals, apostolic letters, decrees, and constitutions. The papal “bull,” from the Latin *bullā*, comes from the word for the leaden seal that was applied to the document. Today, a Papal Bull is an apostolic letter with a seal. The Pope always uses the title of Bishop of Rome and Servant of the Servants of God in issuing a papal bull.

The Holy Doors

The rite that begins the Jubilee Holy Year is the opening of the Holy Door. This massive door to Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome is only opened during a Holy Year. The opening of the Holy Door reminds us of the words of Jesus, “I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved . . .” (John 10:9). “The Door of Great Pardon,” as these bronze doors are called, tell the story of humankind’s sin and redemption through the mercy of God.



All four major basilicas in Rome have Holy Doors that are open during the Holy Year. St. Peter’s Basilica is the first one to open, and then the Holy Doors at Saint John Lateran, Saint Paul Outside the Walls, and Saint Mary Major. The Pope traditionally opens the Holy Door at Saint Peter’s. He will sometimes designate a cardinal to open the Holy Door at the other basilicas.

Pilgrimage

Thousands of pilgrims flock to Rome during a Jubilee Holy Year to enter through the Holy Doors. There is a special indulgence offered to Catholics who make this journey to Rome. Since most Catholics are not able to make a pilgrimage to Rome, the Pope allows each diocese to designate a special Holy Door in the diocese. Most often, this is one of the doors to the cathedral. It can also be a designated door at a special church in the diocese.

Jubilee Indulgence

During a Jubilee Holy Year, Catholics may gain a plenary indulgence. A plenary indulgence is a total remission of the temporal or worldly punishment due to sin. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* states that an indulgence, in its primary sense, signifies the kindness and mercy of God. But in the special sense of a plenary indulgence, it is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, the guilt of which has been forgiven.

The requirements for this plenary indulgence are going to confession, receiving communion, saying a prayer for the Pope, freedom from all attachment to sin, and visits to the four basilicas in Rome during the Holy Year. For this Holy Year, you may gain the indulgence by going through the Holy Door in your local diocese — you do not have to travel to Rome. The other requirements still remain for the plenary indulgence.



Jubilee Holy Year: The Year of Mercy

A Jubilee Holy Year is a very joyous time in the Church. This is the year to celebrate a generous and rich gift from God our Loving Father: the gift of mercy.

In the next article, suggestions for practicing mercy and celebrating the Year of Mercy in daily living will be provided. Be sure to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Mercy.



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