

## CELEBRATING MERCY

### A. THE LITURGICAL YEAR

1. The Holy Year of Mercy coincides with Year C of the cycle of readings in the Lectionary: a cycle particularly rich with the theme of penance. Throughout the year, we will be called to walk the path of conversion that leads to Easter, the supreme event of reconciliation with the Father. The homily will play a key role in the liturgies of this season, but no less important will be brief exhortations and the prayers of the faithful by which pastors, together with their collaborators, will help the celebrating assemblies enter into the mystery of the Father's mercy celebrated eminently in the sacrifice of his Son. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 12)**
2. Sunday should also give the faithful an opportunity to devote themselves to works of mercy, charity, and the apostolate. To experience the joy of the Risen Lord deep within is to share fully the love which pulses in his heart: there is no joy without love! **(Pope John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 69)**
3. Lent is a privilege time when the church is called to give even greater witness to the merciful face of the Father, especially in penitential liturgies and in the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. For this reason, on Friday, March 4, and Saturday, March 15, local communities, and particularly parishes, shrines, and churches more centrally located and/or hosting a larger number of regular visitors, are encouraged to participate in an initiative called "24 hours for the Lord." Similarly, a special penitential liturgy will be celebrated at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome on March 4. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 12)**
4. The celebration of the Holy Week, and especially of the Easter Triduum, must also be prepared carefully during this Jubilee Year. Indeed, the liturgical language used in these ceremonies, consisting of the words, signs, symbols, and gestures proper to them, especially the veneration of the cross on Good Friday, makes visible the mystery of the love and the justification of the Father revealed in the sacrifice of his Son for the whole human race. As the celebrate Holy Week and the Easter season, pastors must not fail to reveal the image of the Father who saved us and continues to save us. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 14)**
5. The feast of the exaltation of the Cross: "For centuries, the cross has stood as a symbol of the most horrific kind of punishment, and, in a certain sense, it still does. The cross thus stands as a special sign, and all the more should it do in this Holy Year, especially in lands and churches afflicted by violence and oppression because of their faith in the Crucified and Risen Christ. The cross is also a sign of the great mercy of the Father who, for love of mankind, offers his Son as a sacrificial victim for the sins of mankind. For this reason, it stands as the primary symbol of this Holy Year. In each community it is fitting, especially on this feast day and throughout the liturgical year, that, with due respect for liturgical norms, the cross in the presbytery or in the

church hall be decorated in such a way that it stands as an eminent sign of God's mercy and Christ's victory over death and, for this reason, remains a reference point for communal prayer and private reflection. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 15)**

6. On the Friday following the Second Sunday after Pentecost, which occurs on June 3 in this Jubilee Year, the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus. This Solemnity summarizes the very mystery of Christ, the totality of his being, his very person considered in his most intimate and essential core: the Son of God, uncreated wisdom; infinite charity, the principle of salvation and sanctification for the entire community. The 'heart of Jesus', therefore is the seat of the Father's mercy who has opened the infinite treasures of his love and patience toward mankind.

Accordingly, this feast day, which has a wide appeal in popular piety, must be celebrated with particular solemnity in this Holy Year as it calls the people of God to conversion and reparation for sins. During this extraordinary Jubilee Year, Pope Francis wishes to entrust all priests to the 'Heart of Christ' as we celebrate the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the institution of this solemnity by Pope Pius IX in 1856. It is opportune for each diocese and community to promote times to pray for priests on this feast day, as priests are the primary ministers of divine mercy but also men who need to experience the mercy of the one and only Father. During the prayers of the faithful at Mass, special intentions should be included for priests, as well as one of the intercessory prayers at both morning and evening prayers on that day. On this day, in the cathedral churches of respective dioceses, prayer vigil should be promoted as well as extended periods of time for Eucharistic Adoration with the explicit intention of the Church's ordained ministers. Both priests and laypersons are invited to take part in these services. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, pages 16 - 17)**

## **B. CELEBRATING THE SACRAMENTS**

The specific vocation of pastors and sacred ministers is to make visible, particularly through the celebration of the sacraments and the words and gestures of the liturgy, the Father's mercy and his care for each of his children expressed in the gift of sacramental grace.

The Eucharist, the 'source and summit' of the Church's life, is for that reason also the main point of reference for all the celebrations and activities taking place in this extraordinary Holy Year. It is the culminating point of the mercy received in the Sacrament of Reconciliation through a participation in the body and blood of Christ with the entire community of the baptized. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 20)**. "in the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.....Its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power.....applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit" **(CCC, 1365 – 66)**.

Efforts should be made in this Holy Year to involve the entire People of God in the liturgical celebrations: children, young people, adults, elderly, disabled, prisoners, and everyone in a way that each feels seriously and peacefully involved in the mercy of God manifested in the

Eucharistic celebration. The general calendar of the Jubilee foresees in each and every diocese various initiatives and celebrations that encourage the prayerful participation of every cross section of the one People of God. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 21)**

Besides the Holy Eucharist, special mention should be made of the Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and the Anointing of the Sick. The Sacrament of Reconciliation takes on even greater relevance in the Holy Year of Mercy. In the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick, administered with particular care to those preparing to leave this world and meet the Father, particular emphasis should be given to the dimension of expectant hope for the beatific vision of the God who has not come to condemn but to forgive. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, pages 19 - 20)**

#### **C. ACTS OF PENANCE**

Of similar importance is the Act of Penance which takes place during the introductory rites of the Mass, the three forms of which should receive full use with due regard for the liturgical season. At this moment, the assembly is called to beg God's mercy, each for his or her own sins. It should be performed without haste and in due silence, giving the faithful sufficient time to recognize their sinful condition and the firm assurance of God's infinite mercy. The Act of Penance concludes with the priest pronouncing the absolution. The people of God should be reminded that this rite does not have the same force as that of the sacrament of Penance, but rather prepares to receive the latter. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, pages 21 - 22)**

#### **D. THE PRAYERS OF THE FAITHFUL**

Prayers of the faithful should include specific intentions invoking God's mercy, as well as prayers for priests who are the primary dispensers of God's gift of mercy. The prayers of the faithful must be formulated on the basis of the true and authentic needs of the Church and the entire world, but also on those of the local community. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 22)**

#### **E. THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYERS FOR RECONCILIATION**

During this Holy Year, in accord with the principles and directives regarding the seasons and feasts of the liturgical year, it is commendable to place higher value on the Eucharistic Prayers for Reconciliation I ("Reconciliation: the return to the Father") and II ("Reconciliation with God: the Foundation of Human Harmony"). In fact, these Eucharistic prayers, especially in their prefaces and in the development of the entire anaphora, make clear the mystery of the Eucharist as the sacrifice of reconciliation and the supreme testimony of the Father's mercy, a sign of his eternal covenant to be lived out in marvel and joy that man has rediscovered salvation. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, pages 22 - 23)**

Among the Mass settings and prayers “for various needs” and the options for votive Masses, some make explicit reference to the mercy of God that has always been, and always will be, available to those who honor him (see Ps. 103:17). Among these settings, special attention should be given to the Masses *for Reconciliation, for the Forgiveness of Sins, for Peace, as well as the Mystery of the Cross, the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, and the Mercy of God.* . **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 25)**

#### F. PRAYING AS ONE

In order to celebrate the Lord’s mercy, we must also pay attention to the prayers that accompany the Christian life of the many faithful and constitute a major part of the Church’s liturgy. These also will be important means of experiencing God’s mercy and helping us live that mercy as fully as possible. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 27)**

- i. **Liturgy of the Hours:** The communal recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours will make a positive contribution to the Holy Year, especially when it comes to the two hinges: Morning Prayer and Evening Prayers. The Church beautifully begins her daily prayer with these words: “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me” (Ps 70:2). The help we beg of God is already an extension of his mercy toward us. He comes to save us from the condition of weakness in which we live. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 27).**
- ii. **Eucharistic Adoration:** The Holy Year also provides an opportunity to deepen our appreciation for the value of Eucharistic Adoration in individual communities, during which we pray for mercy and peace before Our Lord present in the Sacrament. This prayer, with due respect for the silence proper to it, can be accompanied by occasional scriptural readings that speak of the Lord’s mercy, or excerpts from commentaries by the Church Fathers. While the Blessed Sacrament is exposed, prayers, songs, and readings should be chosen and executed in such a way that the faithful continuously direct their devotion toward Christ the Lord. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 28 - 29)**
- iii. **Ecumenical and Interreligious Prayer:** In *Misericordiae Vultus* 23, the pope recommends that particular attention be paid to the Ecumenical and interreligious nature of the Jubilee Year so that significant steps can be made toward mitigating, and one day to eliminating completely, every prejudice toward our sister churches and other religious confessions in the search for unity, mutual respect, and peace in the hearts of all peoples. Therefore, fifty years after the promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non – Christian Religions) at the Second Vatican Council, we are called to deepen our awareness of the necessity to pray for the gift of unity among Christians and for peace and brotherhood among all religions. It is good,

especially at Cathedral churches, to organize celebrations of the Word with brother Christians of the other confessions and moments of mutual exchange and dialogue with members of other religions. **(Celebrating Mercy, Pastoral Resources for Living the Jubilee, page 29).**

- iv. **Popular Piety:** It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God; Fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence.
  
- v. **Pilgrimage:** The practice of pilgrimage takes on special significance in the Holy Year insofar as it represents the journey each of us must make in life. Even to reach the Holy Door in Rome or the Door of Mercy in any particular diocese, everyone, according to his or her abilities, will have to make a “pilgrimage”. “This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God’s mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us” (Misericordiae Vultus, 14). Thus in every diocese it is commendable to designate some destinations for pilgrimages, such as the cathedral church, a shrine, or other places particularly meaningful to the people’s sense of Christian piety and where the bishop has decreed that a Door of Mercy be opened. Pilgrims are encouraged to make at least a part of this journey by foot to signify the sacrifice and commitment needed to convert and taste with greater enthusiasm the joy of reaching the ultimate goal, Christ our Lord.

Other spiritual exercises that are recommended in the celebration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy are: Veneration of the Crucified Christ, The way of the cross, Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, The Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, and the Prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy.