

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy



Reflections at the Doors of Mercy

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The photograph of Pope Francis at the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica was taken by Max Rossi of CNS.

All photographs in this booklet of the Doors of Mercy in the Archdiocese of Atlanta were taken by Michael Alexander and first appeared in The Georgia Bulletin; the newspaper of the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Pope Francis' Year of Mercy Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him. Show us your face and we will be saved. Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money; the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things; made Peter weep after his betrayal, and assured Paradise to the repentant thief. Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman: "If you knew the gift of God!"

You are the visible face of the invisible Father, of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy: let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified. You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness in order 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 and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may 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 for ever and ever. Amen.

The Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy

On April 11, 2015 which was Divine Mercy Sunday, Pope Francis issued a Papal Bull of Indiction announcing an *Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy* beginning December 8, 2015 and running until November 20, 2016. The Papal Bull is entitled *Misericordiae Vultus* (The Face of Mercy) and is taken from the first sentence in the document, “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy.

The Holy Father’s announcement says, “We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of Mercy...Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” (#2)

The theme of the Year of Mercy is “Be Merciful as your Father is Merciful” (Luke 6:36). The focus of the year is for us to, “Gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives.” (#3).

There are many opportunities for us to participate in the Year of Mercy so that we may grow spiritually stronger and more effective in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

“The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (#25) By actively participating in this Jubilee Year of Mercy we can become those credible witnesses!

The Holy Door



During Jubilee Years it is the custom of the Church to designate Holy Doors through which the faithful may pass in acknowledgement of God's love and mercy and to obtain a partial or plenary indulgence. In all Jubilee Years a Holy Door is designated at St. Peter's in Rome and in most years Holy Doors are established within each diocese. For the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Archbishop Gregory has designated seven churches with Holy Doors in the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception
Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church
Our Lady of the Americas Catholic Mission
Cathedral of Christ the King
St. Philip Benizi Catholic Church
Monastery of the Holy Spirit

A holy door or *porta sancta* was first used in the fifteenth century as a ritualistic expression of conversion. Pilgrims and penitents passed through a Holy Door as a gesture of leaving the past behind and crossing the threshold from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, and from darkness to light. Even today these rituals are associated with prayer, pilgrimage, sacrifice, confession, and indulgences.

The Holy Door only finds meaning when the believer associates the door with Christ. Jesus is the Door! In the words of Pope Francis, “There is only one way that opens wide the entrance into the life of communion with God: this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation. To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth: ‘This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter’ (Ps 118:20).”

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception



Pope Francis announced an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, which began on December 8, 2015. In his Papal Bull *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV), which announced this Year of Mercy, the Holy Father exhorts us to be a Church of Mercy saying, "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith." (MV #1)

As a Christian people, we "are called to gaze more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives." (MV #3). This attentive gaze means we are to reflect on the reality of mercy and contemplate what it means for the Church. To assist the faithful with this reflection Holy Doors have been established in the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

The concept of mercy is often be distilled down to the remittance of deserved punishment or the extension of forgiveness. This interpretation of mercy is far too simplistic. The Church's understanding of mercy goes much deeper. Meister Eckart wrote that, "God's highest work is mercy and the highest work that God ever performed in all creatures is mercy." St. John Paul II taught, "The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and Redeemer." Cardinal Walter Kasper in his book *Mercy* stated that, "Mercy expresses God's essence... therefore we must describe mercy as the fundamental attribute of God."

What an astounding concept, that mercy is the most stupendous and fundamental attribute of God. Yet we hear consistently that God is love. Which is it, is God mercy or is God love? In reality, God is both. God is fully and totally love and his extension of unmerited love to us is his mercy. The very act of God loving us, which is completely unmerited, is an act of supreme mercy.

The Church must express this same mercy in her life and in all of her works for "mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life."(MV #10) During the Year of Mercy we should rethink what it means to be merciful and strive to "Be merciful as the Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36), through constant acts of love for all, even those who do not merit our love.

Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus



As a Christian people, we "are called to gaze more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives." (MV #3). This attentive gaze means we are to reflect on the reality of mercy and contemplate what it means for the Church. To do this we must understand the constituent components of mercy. Mercy is far more than just withholding punishment for someone who deserves it or giving forgiveness to someone who has wronged us. Mercy is multifaceted and contains so much more!

The Hebrew word *Hesed* (pronounced 'Ch-sed') describes one key component of mercy. *Hesed* literally means 'unmerited loving kindness, friendliness and

favor.' The idea of Hesed is that *all* humans want to have lives of dignity and happiness. Dignity means being treated justly and receiving what is due to any person simply for being human. This means having the basic necessities that allow us all to live in humane conditions; things like food, shelter, clothing, medical attention, etc. It also includes having the means for sustaining life, like access to work and pay for the work we do.

In Hesed, happiness does not mean fleeting sensations of well-being or pleasing emotions, but rather a genuine understanding of self and of reality; including the knowledge of the great reality that we are each a child of God. Happiness extends to feeling joy at the accomplishments, qualities, and talents of others and their place in the human family.

Merciful, loving kindness is more than just a thought or a feeling; it moves us to action. Mercy leads us to having greater sensitivity to others and a strengthening of our determination to do whatever is necessary for them to attain authentic dignity and happiness. Mercy that is not demonstrated, isn't mercy at all! Mercy shown to others reflects the mercy of God, who desires that we all live in dignity and happiness.

Holy Vietnamese Martyrs Catholic Church



Pope Francis is exhorting all Catholics to "gaze more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives." (MV #3). Previously we looked at one aspect of Mercy – having and showing merciful loving kindness for one another. This means we are to seek for one another those things that permit a dignified and happy life.

Now we consider another aspect of Mercy. This second component of mercy can be described by the Latin word *Misericordia*, meaning to feel great pity and compassion in the heart for the suffering or misfortune of others. This is the form that mercy takes when confronted with the suffering of others. This heartfelt compassion extends well beyond those who suffer common misfortunes in life. In a very particular way, it encompasses all of the poor; those throughout the

world who lack the basic necessities of life such as food, security, fresh water, shelter, clothing, education, and medicine.

Like loving kindness, Misericordia cannot simply be a 'feeling.' It must have a transformative power that prompts us to action. It demands that we strive to take every action possible to remedy the suffering of others. Through charity, we can eliminate suffering superficially and temporarily, but only justice can permanently eradicate suffering by addressing its root cause.

So, we can see that Mercy is comprised of: 1) a desire for all humans to have dignity and happiness and 2) a desire for the eradication of suffering that so many people endure. Mercy stands on these two desires, and for us to be people of Mercy we must embrace them both.

Our Lady of the Americas Catholic Mission



Thus far, we have reflected on the dual aspects of Mercy: *Hesed*, which is loving kindness shown to one another and *Misericordia*, which is to feel great pity and compassion in the heart for the suffering or misfortune of others. From an academic or theological perspective, it can be interesting to ponder these two methods of showing Mercy. It can also be wondrous to contemplate the *Hesed* and *Misericordia* shown to us by our loving God. However, as Christians we cannot be content with mere academic or theological reflection. The Christian is always called to action.

As a Christian people, we have a special responsibility to communicate mercy to the world. The life of a Christian is in many ways intended to be a life of service, and naturally, there are many different ways to serve depending on our gifts and skills. However, regardless of our talents we should all strive to serve by demonstrating authentic mercy in our lives and, by

doing so; hopefully inspire others to do the same. The mercy we extend to others, whether it be kindness or compassion has to be motivated by an intention for the good of the other person. To extend mercy to gain an advantage over someone, pay off a debt or have a feeling of self-satisfaction of just how ‘good’ we must be is to negate the spiritual quality of mercy. The extension of mercy must always be primarily for the benefit of the other person. That is not to say we cannot feel good about ourselves or accept the gratitude of others for merciful actions, it is simply those cannot be the main motivation for our extending mercy.

“Be Merciful as your Father is Merciful,” is the theme of the year of mercy but actually it is the theme of our salvation. Jesus tells us that at the end of our lives we will face a judgment, essentially an exam that we must pass to enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt 25:31-34). The really good news is that he has also given us the answer to the exam. In the Gospel of Matthew 25:35-46, Jesus tells that our salvation depends on our individual response to human need. Essentially, Jesus tells us we will have to answer the question, ‘did you show loving kindness or pity and compassion to those who were in need?’ Clearly, he meant what he said and he is calling us from reflection into concrete action. Therefore, the vocation of every Christian is to act, to see those in need and, with a merciful and joyful heart, come to their aid.

Cathedral of Christ the King



A Deacon friend of mine describes Mercy as, “Where God’s love meets the chaos and pain of the world.” That is a very good description of Mercy. Whether we are showing kindness or compassion to another person, we are simply a vehicle through which God’s love meets the chaos and pain of that person’s life. What a wonderful and true explanation.

However, how should we extend mercy, how should we show it? It is interesting that name of the fifth book of the New Testament, the first that follows the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John is “Acts.” This book describes the actions or “acts” of the early Christian community. The Gospels tell us of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus and the book immediately following the Gospels tells us how we are to respond. We are to **act!**

As Catholic Christians, we can each be a beacon of mercy to the world, yet we can all do it differently. Our Christian vocation is something God has personally entrusted us, fully cognizant of our gifts, limitations and sinfulness. Realizing that the Holy Spirit uses our strengths to guide and animate our love and compassion for others, despite all of our weaknesses and failings, should be a great source of joy.

We can act with merciful loving kindness when we develop a higher sensitivity to what we see and hear in our communities. Many people do not live lives of dignity or happiness; in fact, some may be on a trajectory that leads far away from dignity and true happiness. Our task is to meet them where they are with patience, understanding, and love, guiding and encouraging them without judgment or condemnation.

Acting with heartfelt compassion is easy when the person in need is a local widow, an orphan, the jobless, a victim of domestic abuse, or anyone who suffers through no fault of their own, but our compassion is not meant to be local or contingent. We live in a suffering world where over half of God's children, our brothers and sisters, struggle to live day to day. It is a world in which tens of thousands of children die daily for want of food, water, medicine and sanitation. It is a world where people make bad choices, just as we have all made bad choices.

Jesus never tells us to only help those in your neighborhood, the people that we know, the people that make good choices or those with whom we agree. He teaches to just help and let God sort out the rest. Loving kindness and Merciful compassion demand that we never close our eyes to the needs of others, regardless of the situation.

St. Philip Benizi Catholic Church



As Catholics, we are all called to be Ministers of the Gospel; to live out our Baptismal promises by engaging in the joy of service and through the example and courage that we give to others so they may reach beyond themselves in living lives of mercy.

Pope Francis is exhorting us to this “ministerial” action during the Jubilee Year of Mercy and beyond by rediscovering the "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 and bury the dead." (MV #15). These are the works of mercy; these are the works of salvation, for in Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus plainly tells us that our response to human need is the basis for our salvation.

For many of us, engagement in ministry leads to a temptation to try to do it all. This can lead to a very superficial ministry in which we take many actions but very little is accomplished. We can flail about with programs, activities, meetings and discussions but ultimately mercy is never dispensed, no dignity is attained, no happiness increases and no suffering is eliminated. We as Catholics must realize that we can only do what we can do today because we are limited; we are not only spiritual but also corporeal beings. No matter what our skills, desires, or capabilities, we can only do what we can do today.

However, there are two sides of that coin. On one side, 'We can only do what we can do today' but the other side of the coin demands that *we must do what we can do today*. We have an obligation to help the Church be the Church of Mercy each and every day.

We can do that by integrating mercy into every aspect of our lives and relationships. The result is that ministry is not about what we do, but rather, who we become. Through prayer, contemplation and effort we can continue to be formed and transformed into a people that can be merciful as the Father is merciful, and in doing so help in some small way to lead others to active lives of mercy.

Monastery of the Holy Spirit



In the Church, we sometimes hear the funny saying, ‘What I want is justice for the other person, but I want mercy for me!’ We all chuckle because we know it is true. We know that our human nature makes us desire justice (as we see it) and punishment for others, but we want mercy – forgiveness for ourselves. Who in their right mind desires punishment for ourselves! Therefore, we tend to view mercy and justice as two things that are in opposition, as if justice contains no mercy and mercy is the avoidance of justice. Fortunately, that is not how God sees things!

In the Papal Bull announcing the Year of Mercy, Pope Francis wrote, “If God limited himself to only justice; he would cease to be God and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. However, mere justice is not enough.

Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone risks destroying it.” What Pope Francis wants us to see is that in day-to-day relationships, both between God and us and between each other, mercy is an important element of justice and justice must be dispensed with mercy.

To help clarify this, we can see a global awareness of mercy combined with justice in the growing rejection of the death penalty. Think also of efforts that are being made to help ex-prisoners regain a place in society after their debt has been paid. In fact, mercy within justice when expressed by aiding prisoners to develop a skill and find work more easily following their release keeps them from being left on the margins of society and lowers rates of recidivism. That is not to say those who have committed serious crimes should simply be released; not at all. However, it does mean that for the good and dignity of the human person and for the benefit of society, mercy in the form of education and training should be combined with justice.

This same mercy/justice relationship exists in our life in Christ. God forgives us of even the most awful sins we commit, he offers us new possibilities for life, he showers his abundant mercy on us. Knowing how merciful God is in dispensing justice should inspire us to do the same, whether when directed toward the incarcerated, or more often, in our relationship with family, friends and those around us.

Indulgence for the Year of Mercy



The Jubilee of Mercy, which is a season of grace, offers the possibility of obtaining a plenary indulgence through works of mercy and charity culminating in passing through a Holy Door of Mercy. These pious exercises will accompany the prayer and celebration of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist as concrete signs of conversion and “immersion” in the Mercy of the Father (*Jubilee of Mercy*, p 7).

An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins, whose guilt is forgiven. To receive the plenary indulgence during the Year of Mercy Catholics need to do the following:

- Pass through the Door of Mercy at one of the churches.
- Make a profession of faith in the church (either the Apostles' or Nicene Creed).
- Pray for the pope's intentions and the pope himself.
- Meditate on mercy while receiving Communion during a period either 20 days before or after visiting the pilgrimage church.
- Participate in the sacrament of penance during a period either 20 days before or after visiting the pilgrimage church.

The Nicene Creed



I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Questions for Reflection

1. In what way have I seen God's mercy at work in my life?
2. How does love manifest itself through mercy?
3. Are there people in my life who are in need of merciful kindness and compassion?
4. Are there obstacles within me that prevent me from showing genuine mercy to others?
5. How can I resolve to be more merciful to others, sharing kindness and compassion?
6. Who is the most merciful person that I know and how do they show that mercy?

My Own Personal Reflection on Mercy

EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

DEC. 8, 2015 - NOV. 20, 2016



"IT WILL BE A HOLY YEAR OF MERCY."

-POPE FRANCIS

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