



## ***The Jubilee Year of Mercy*** **CWL Provincial Convention**

*18 June 2016*

### ***Introduction***

At the outset, before offering some reflections on the Jubilee Year of Mercy we are celebrating, I would like to express my enormous gratitude to all of you for being joyful Catholic women of faith, unafraid to confront the often difficult situations in the Church and society – and for all that you have done and are doing in the local Churches of British Columbia, in your parishes and communities, as well as in the wider Church in Canada.

I also especially commend your unwavering efforts to foster a culture of life from conception to its natural end. Today this is clearly evident in your firm commitment to offset the social and spiritual ravages of euthanasia and assisted suicide which will, tragically, soon be legislated in our beautiful country. Your practical and prayerful initiatives to improve the access and availability of palliative care are symptomatic of the wise approach you take to engaging in the public square as Catholic women. In this you are a model for all of us.

At times you challenge us – and rightfully so, even if it makes us a little uncomfortable – as we all struggle to foster greater lay participation in the life of the Church. But you do so with love, a love that we need to show to the world as Christians if together we are to bring the Gospel of Christ to those on the margins of our families and communities.

Now on to the Holy Year

### **1. *What Is a Holy Year or Jubilee?***

Where does the idea of a holy year come from? Did Jesus start such a practice?

#### ***1.1 Old Testament***

Celebrating a special year, what was called a jubilee, is an ancient Jewish custom (cf. Lev 25:8-13). The Prophet Isaiah, quoted by Jesus in the synagogue at Capernaum said this: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to those in captivity; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Is 61:1-2).

For the Jewish people, this “year of the Lord’s favour” was to be a year of rest and restoration when captives were set free, debts were paid, and the land was not sown or harvested. The Jubilee existed because the land was the possession of the Lord God, and its current occupiers were merely tenants. If someone has been compelled to sell his land or his house, he would regain it, and if someone had contracted debts and, being unable to pay them, was compelled to



place himself in the service of the creditor, he could return debt free to his family and regain all of his property.<sup>[11]</sup>

Such a Jubilee occurred every 50 years – at the end of 7 cycles of 7 – the 50<sup>th</sup> year. This fiftieth year was sacred – it was to be a time of freedom and of celebration when everyone would receive back their original property, and slaves would return home to their families.

It was a type of “general pardon”, by which everyone was allowed to return to their original situation, with the cancellation of all debts, the restitution of land, and the opportunity for freedom to be enjoyed once again by the members of the People of God: a “holy” people, where regulations such as that of the jubilee year served to combat poverty and inequality, guaranteeing a dignified life to all and an equitable distribution of land on which to live and from which to draw sustenance. The central idea is that the land originally belonged to God and has been entrusted to man (cf. Gen 1:28-29), and therefore no one may claim exclusive possession, thereby creating situations of inequality.<sup>[12]</sup>

## ***1.2 Jesus***

Jesus himself alluded to this custom in his discourse in the synagogue in Capernaum when he read from Isaiah (ch. 61) and said that the reading was fulfilled in him (cf. Lk 4:16-21). It contains the line that Jesus was “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (Lk 4:19) – an allusion perhaps to what we would later call a “holy” year. That’s why this text is so frequently invoked on such occasions.

## ***1.3 Church History***

But how did this Jewish custom come into the life of the Church?

In the year 1300, Pope Boniface VIII began the tradition of proclaiming a Jubilee year to encourage people to return – not property or slaves – but to a life of holiness. To show this externally, he granted an indulgence to those who made a pilgrimage to Rome to pray at the tombs of the Apostles. It was an extraordinary success, with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims.

He had intended that the Jubilee should be celebrated only once in a hundred years. But soon a later Pope was urged to celebrate a jubilee sooner, so that every generation would have an opportunity to celebrate a Jubilee. He set the time frame for every fifty years.

Following the Jewish tradition, the number 50 was specially associated, already in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century with the idea of remission (of sin).

But then in 1470 Pope Paul II decreed that the Jubilee should be celebrated every twenty-five years, and this has been the normal rule ever since. The three most recent were in 1950, 1975 and the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.



A Jubilee or Holy Year is a year of forgiveness of sins and also the temporal punishment due to sin, what is commonly called the “time in purgatory.” It is a year of reconciliation between adversaries, of conversion and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

A Jubilee can be “ordinary” if it falls after the set period of years, and “extraordinary” when it is proclaimed to commemorate some outstanding event, a recent practice.

Pope Pius XII declared the Marian Year of 1954 a “Little Holy Year” to mark the centenary of the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Pope John Paul II proclaimed a Holy Year marking the 1500 years of the Redemption in 1983 and a Marian year in 1987.

The current Holy Year of Mercy is an “extraordinary” holy year.

## 2. *Ceremonial of the Jubilee: Holy Doors*

The most distinctive feature in the ceremonial of the Jubilee is the un-walling and the final walling up of the “holy door“ in each of the four major basilicas in Rome which the pilgrims are required to visit: St. Peter’s, St. Paul Outside the Walls, St. John Lateran (the Cathedral), and St. Mary Major.

The doors are opened by the Pope or his delegate at the beginning of the Jubilee and then sealed up again afterwards. Previously, the rite included the use of a silver hammer (for removing the concrete at the opening) and a silver trowel (for sealing it again after the Jubilee). The Pope would pound on the wall, which would then be set to collapse. This ritual sometimes caused injury to bystanders, so for the Great Jubilee of 2000, Pope St. John Paul II simplified the rite considerably, opening and closing the door by pushing it with his hands.

## 2. *Holy Doors in Rome*

Pope Francis opened the first holy doors this time in Africa, but then in Rome, at St. Peter’s, on December 8. Why this date? For two reasons.

First, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception is the great sign of God’s pre-eminent redeeming love showed to Mary. “After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. So he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4), choosing her to be the Mother of man’s Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God.”<sup>[31]</sup>

Secondly, because, the Pope said, it linked, “separated by 50 years, the beginning of the Jubilee with the conclusion of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council.”<sup>[41]</sup> “The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way.”<sup>[51]</sup>



## ***2.1 Holy Door at the Cathedral and Abbey***

We have two holy doors, and other Dioceses have theirs, in response to the Pope's request that the sign of the Holy Door be present in every particular Church, so that the Jubilee of Mercy could be experienced by everyone.<sup>[6]</sup> In Vancouver, we opened ours, as happened around the world, on December 13. "Every Particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal. Thus the Jubilee will be celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches as a visible sign of the Church's universal communion."<sup>[7]</sup>

## ***2.2 Symbolic Meaning for Us***

What the Pope said at the opening the Holy Door at St. Peter's expresses well the symbolism of the doors:

This Extraordinary Year is itself a gift of grace. To pass through the Holy Door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them. It is he who seeks us! It is he who comes to encounter us! This will be a year in which we *grow ever more convinced of God's mercy*. . . .In passing through the Holy Door, then, may we feel that *we ourselves are part of this mystery of love, of tenderness*.<sup>[8]</sup>

The door must protect, of course, but not reject. The door must not be forced but on the contrary, one asks permission, because hospitality shines in the freedom of welcoming, and dims in the arrogance of invasion. The door is frequently opened, in order to see if there is someone waiting outside, perhaps without the courage nor, perhaps, the strength to knock. How many people have lost faith, do not have the courage to knock at the door of our Christian heart, at the doors of our churches.... And they are there, they don't have the courage, we have taken away trust: please, may this never happen. A door says many things about the house, and also about the Church.<sup>[9]</sup>

## ***Doors of Our Churches/Communities***

And as the door of God's mercy is always open, so too must the doors of our churches, our communities, our parishes, our institutions, our dioceses, be open, because this is how we can all go out to bring this mercy of God. The Jubilee signifies the great door of the mercy of God but also the small doors of our churches, open to allow the entrance of the Lord – or often the exit of the Lord – who is a prisoner of our structures, of our selfishness and of so many things.<sup>[10]</sup>

"What is the name of the door of God? Jesus! He lights up all of life's doors for us, including those of our birth and of our death. He himself affirmed it: 'I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture' (Jn 10:9). Jesus is the door that lets us go in and out."<sup>[11]</sup>



When we pass through that Door it is good to remember that we must also keep the door of our heart wide open. I am before the Holy Door and I ask: “Lord, help me to thrust open the door of my heart!” The Holy Year will not be very effective if the door of our heart does not allow the passage of Christ who urges us to go toward others, in order to bring him and his love. Thus, as the Holy Door stays open, because it is the sign of the welcome that God himself holds for us, may our door, that of the heart, also be always wide open so as to exclude no one. Not even he or she who bothers me: no one.<sup>[12]</sup>

In his gentleness, the Lord never forces open the door of our heart; he too asks permission to enter that sanctuary. The Book of Revelation says: “Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Rev 3:20). The Jubilee is a freely offered gift, and its graces likewise are to be freely received. During this Holy Year, the Church wants us to become ever more convinced that we are recipients, beneficiaries of God’s mercy.

### 3. *Why a Holy Year of Mercy?*

This is the first extraordinary jubilee which marks not a saving event but a theme – God’s overflowing mercy: “From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people approach it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends.”<sup>[13]</sup>

#### 3.1 *From the Pope’s Own Experience*

I [Antonio Spadaro] ask Pope Francis point-blank: “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?” He stares at me in silence. I ask him if I may ask him this question. He nods and replies: “I do not know what might be the most fitting description.... I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

The Pope continues to reflect and concentrate, as if he did not expect this question, as if he were forced to reflect further. “Yes, perhaps I can say that I am a bit astute, that I can adapt to circumstances, but it is also true that I am a bit naïve. Yes, but the best summary, the one that comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” And he repeats: “I am one who is looked upon by the Lord. I always felt my motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo* [By Having Mercy and by Choosing Him], was very true for me.”<sup>[14]</sup>

Mercy, then, has been the Pope’s *leitmotiv* since the beginning of his papacy. Already in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The Joy of the Gospel,” which continues to be the programmatic outline for his pontificate, he offers a meaningful expression of the very essence of the Extraordinary Jubilee: “Such a community [the Church] has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of its own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy.”<sup>[15]</sup>



### ***3.2 In Continuity with St. John Paul II***

It was an intuition of St. John Paul II that this time in the Church was one of Divine Mercy, an intuition gleaned from the writings of St. Faustina Kowalska. He also introduced the Feast of Divine Mercy.<sup>[16]</sup>

### ***3.3 Mercy Tells Us “Who” God Really Is***

This Jubilee is a privileged moment for contemplating *who* God really is. His name is Mercy, as Pope Francis’s book *The Name of God Is Mercy* tells us. “One cannot comprehend God without his mercy.”<sup>[17]</sup>

“It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way.”<sup>[18]</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas’ words show that God’s mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. For this reason the liturgy, in one of its most ancient collects, has us pray: “O God, who reveal your power above all in your mercy and forgiveness.”

The Church is being called to meditate more on “what pleases God most.” What is it that “pleases God most?” Pope Francis asks: “Forgiving his children, having mercy on them, so that they may in turn forgive their brothers and sisters, shining as a flame of God’s mercy in the world. This is what pleases God most. . . . God’s joy is forgiving, God’s being is mercy.”<sup>[19]</sup>

### ***Old Testament***

In Sacred Scripture, the Lord is presented as a “merciful God.” This is his name, through which he unveils, so to speak, his face and his heart to us. As the Book of Exodus recounts, on revealing himself to Moses he defined himself in this way: “the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (34:6). We also find this formula in other texts, with certain variations, but the emphasis is always placed on mercy and on the love of God who never tires of forgiving (cf. Gen 4:2; Joel 2:13; Ps 86 [85]: 15, 103 [102]: 8, 145[144]:8; Neh 9:17).

The Lord is “merciful”: this word evokes a tender approach like that of a mother toward her child. Indeed, the Hebrew term used in the Bible evokes the viscera or even the maternal womb. Therefore, the image it suggests is that of a God who is moved and who softens for us like a mother when she takes her child in her arms, wanting only to love, protect, help, ready to give everything, even herself. This is the image that this term evokes. A love, therefore, which can be defined in the best sense as “visceral.”<sup>[20]</sup>

In short, the mercy of God is not an abstract idea, but a concrete reality through which he reveals his love as that of a father or a mother, moved to the very depths out of love for their child. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this is a “visceral” love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy.<sup>[21]</sup>





## *Mercy Embodied in Jesus*

### *His Actions*

Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. . . . Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.<sup>[22]</sup>

[Mercy] is the fundamental feature of the face of Christ: that face that we recognize in the various aspects of his existence: when he goes to meet everyone, when he heals the sick, when he sits at the table with sinners, and above all when, nailed to the cross, he forgives; there we see the face of divine mercy.<sup>[23]</sup>

Throughout his life Jesus responded with mercy: he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and fed the hungry. He grieved when his friend Lazarus died, accepted patiently the human weaknesses of his disciples and forgave those who crucified him.

Jesus, seeing the crowds of people who followed him, realized that they were tired and exhausted, lost and without a guide, and he felt deep compassion for them (cf. Mt 9:36). On the basis of this compassionate love he healed the sick who were presented to him (cf. Mt 14:14), and with just a few loaves of bread and fish he satisfied the enormous crowd (cf. Mt 15:37). What moved Jesus in all of these situations was nothing other than mercy, with which he read the hearts of those he encountered and responded to their deepest need.<sup>[24]</sup>

Encountering the multitudes, proclaiming the Gospel, healing the sick, being close to the least, forgiving sinners, Jesus made visible the love that is open to us all: none excluded! Open to all without borders. A love that is pure, freely-given, absolute. A love that culminates in the Sacrifice of the Cross. Yes, the Gospel is truly the "Gospel of Mercy", for Jesus is Mercy!<sup>[25]</sup>

As the Innocent One is about to die for us sinners, he pleads to the Father: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk 23:34). It is on the Cross that Jesus presents the sin of the world to the mercy of the Father: the sin of all people, my sins, your sins, everyone's sins. There, on the Cross, he presents them to the Father. And with the sin of the world, all our sins are wiped away. Nothing and no one is left out of this sacrificial prayer of Jesus.<sup>[26]</sup>

### *His Teachings*

Jesus not only embodied compassion and mercy in his ministry, above all in his sacrificial Death on the Cross, he taught us about the mercy of the Father, especially in his parables.

In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with



two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.<sup>[27]</sup>

### ***3.4 That We May Experience Mercy in Ourselves***

“To experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has come in search of us because we were lost”<sup>[28]</sup>: this is another main purpose of this Holy Year.

How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!<sup>[29]</sup>

“It is necessary to recognize ourselves as sinners, so as to strengthen within us the certainty of divine mercy. ‘Lord, I am a sinful man; Lord, I am a sinful woman: come with your mercy’.”<sup>[30]</sup>

The Pope believes that the whole Church is in need of mercy for we are all sinners, and he wants us to be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering God’s mercy as a gift and as a commitment. And, at the same time, as beneficiaries of mercy, “we are all called to give comfort to every man and every woman of our time.” He does not want us to “forget that God forgives all, and God forgives always.”<sup>[31]</sup>

We have this Holy Year to experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has come in search of us because we were lost. A Jubilee to receive the warmth of his love when he bears us upon his shoulders and brings us back to the Father’s house. A year in which to be touched by the Lord Jesus and to be transformed by his mercy, so that we may become witnesses to mercy.<sup>[32]</sup>

### ***3.3 Church Is Called To Witness to Mercy***

This Holy Year is also to be “a special time for the Church; a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”<sup>[33]</sup>

In a homily at First Vespers for Divine Mercy Sunday, Francis answered the question, why a Jubilee of Mercy today? And, he answered this is in his typical straightforward way:

Simply because the Church, in this time of great historical change, is called to offer more evident signs of God’s presence and closeness. This is not the time to be distracted; on the contrary, we need to be vigilant and to reawaken in ourselves the capacity to see what is essential. This is a time for the Church to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be a sign and an instrument of the Father’s mercy (cf. Jn 20:21-23). For this reason, the Holy Year must keep alive the desire to know how to welcome the numerous signs of





the tenderness which God offers to the whole world and, above all, to those who suffer, who are alone and abandoned, without hope of being pardoned or feeling the Father's love. . . . Here, then, is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favourable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone, everyone, the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>[34]</sup>

The Church is in need of this extraordinary occasion. I am not saying: this extraordinary occasion is good for the Church. I am saying: the Church needs this extraordinary occasion. In this era of profound changes, the Church is called to offer her particular contribution, rendering visible the signs of the presence and closeness of God. The Jubilee is a favourable time for all of us, because by contemplating Divine Mercy, which overcomes all human limitations and shines in the darkness of sin, we are able to become more certain and effective witnesses.<sup>[35]</sup>

### ***Mercy is the Mission of the Church***

The proclamation of mercy, of God's merciful love offered to everyone, is the mission of the Church. As St John Paul II reminds us: "The Church lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy... and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior's mercy."<sup>[36]</sup> It is the content of all evangelization, new and old.

"The theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father."<sup>[37]</sup>

"A living and vivifying experience of God's mercy[, which] alone can guarantee that the Church is that city set on a hill that cannot be hid (cf. Mt 5:14). Only a merciful Church shines! Should we forget, for even just a moment, that mercy is 'what pleases God most, our every effort [at institutional and structural change] would be in vain."<sup>[38]</sup>

Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church "has an endless desire to show mercy."<sup>[39]</sup>

The Church's mission is, therefore, to proclaim God's mercy, "the beating heart of the Gospel."<sup>[40]</sup> "Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that her primary task . . . 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, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ."<sup>[41]</sup>

The mercy that we receive from the Father is not given as a private consolation, but makes us instruments that others too might receive the same gift. There is a wonderful interplay between



mercy and mission. Experiencing mercy renders us missionaries of mercy, and to be missionaries allows us to grow ever more in the mercy of God.<sup>[42]</sup>

In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. . . . Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who<sup>[43]</sup> made mercy as an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (Mt 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year.

## **How Are We to Respond to the Call to Mercy? “Doing Jubilee”**

How, then, as the Church and as individual disciples, are we to respond to this mission of mercy? “The mercy that we receive from the Father is not given as a private consolation, but makes us instruments that others too might receive the same gift. There is a wonderful interplay between mercy and mission. Experiencing mercy renders us missionaries of mercy, and to be missionaries allows us to grow ever more in the mercy of God.”<sup>[44]</sup>

### ***As Church***

The Church – our local Church, our parishes, our schools, our organizations and movements – are being called to open their doors, to go out to meet God’s children on the path of their lives, at times uncertain, at times downtrodden, and to invite them to know the closeness of God, and to offer them the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.<sup>[45]</sup> Just as the door of God’s mercy is always open, so too must be the Church’s doors, both literally and figuratively. Only if we open the doors can we go out to bring God’s mercy to others and can others come in to share in our experience of his forgiving love.<sup>[46]</sup>

As communities, we cannot bottle up the gift of mercy we have received. We must open our doors to see who is waiting outside, perhaps without the courage or the strength to knock, because they fear our harsh judgment or rejection. But the true Church “has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of her own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy.”<sup>[47]</sup>

After all, we are as Church but servants at the door of God’s mercy.

### ***As Individual Disciples***

Like the crowd in the Gospel who posed questions to John the Baptist, as individual disciples we, too, ask, “What should we do?” (Lk 3:12), what should we *do* to mark the Jubilee Year? The response of the Baptist was immediate. He invited the crowd to act justly and to look after the needs of those in need (cf. Lk 3:13-14). We, however, are asked to make a more radical commitment. More than ever, we are being reminded to be instruments of mercy, knowing that we will be judged on this. The joy of crossing through the Door of Mercy must be accompanied by our commitment to give practical and concrete witness to acts merciful love.<sup>[48]</sup> “Mercy and forgiveness must not remain as pleasant words, but must be made manifest in daily life.”<sup>[49]</sup>



## ***Not judging and condemning***

The Lord asks us above all *not to judge* and *not to condemn*. If anyone wishes to avoid God's judgment, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgment and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment and our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to forgive.<sup>[50]</sup>

## ***Forgiving others***

Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle's exhortation: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26).<sup>[51]</sup>

How often have I heard: "Father, I can't forgive my neighbour, a coworker, the lady next door, my mother-in-law, my sister-in-law". We have all heard this: "I can't forgive". But how can we ask God to forgive us, if we are unable to forgive? Forgiving is something great, yet forgiving is not easy, because our heart is poor and with its efforts alone we cannot do it. However, if we open ourselves up to welcome God's mercy for ourselves, in turn we become capable of forgiveness. So often I have heard: "I couldn't see that person: I hated her. But one day, I drew close to the Lord and I asked him to forgive my sins, and I forgave that person too". These are everyday matters. And this opportunity is close to us.<sup>[52]</sup>

## ***Works of Mercy\*\****

"In this Year of Mercy we too can do this work of acting as mediators of mercy through the works of mercy."<sup>[53]</sup>

As well as emphasizing God's offer of merciful love to every person, and the Church's mission to bring that mercy to them, the Holy Year is also the time for us to rededicate ourselves to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us.<sup>[54]</sup>

"Merciful like the Father" is the "motto" of this Holy Year, and it sets the agenda of each of us personally: to become more merciful. It is, therefore, a time for us to practice more intentionally the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Our own experience of mercy becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us.



In this Holy Year, we are to open our hearts ever wider to those living on the outermost fringes of society. We are being called to heal their wounds with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity. We are to open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and we are compelled to heed their cry for help.

We answer this cry by practising more intensely and deliberately the corporal and spiritual works of 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.

These works remind us that faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbours in body and spirit: by feeding, visiting, comforting and instructing them. On such things will we be judged. For this reason, I expressed my hope that “the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy; this will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty, and to enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy” (*MV*, 15). For in the poor, the flesh of Christ “becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us” (*ibid.*). It is the unprecedented and scandalous mystery of the extension in time of the suffering of the Innocent Lamb.<sup>[55]</sup>

### ***Corporal Works of Mercy***

The corporal works of mercy to which we are called reflect what Jesus did. We, too, are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, visit the sick and the imprisoned, and bury the dead.

In each of these “little ones,” Christ himself is present. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: “as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love.”<sup>[56]</sup>

### ***Spiritual Works of Mercy***

And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy:

- instruct the ignorant
- counsel the doubtful
- admonish sinners
- comfort the afflicted
- forgive offences
- bear wrongs patiently
- pray for the living and the dead.<sup>[57]</sup>

Moreover, we will be asked if we have helped others to escape the doubt that causes them to fall into despair and which is often a source of loneliness; if we have helped to overcome the



ignorance in which millions of people live, especially children deprived of the necessary means to free them from the bonds of poverty; if we have been close to the lonely and afflicted; if we have forgiven those who have offended us and have rejected all forms of anger and hate that lead to violence; if we have had the kind of patience God shows, who is so patient with us; and if we have commended our brothers and sisters to the Lord in prayer.<sup>[58]</sup>

## ***Going to Confession***

Another important sign of the Jubilee is *confession*. Approaching the Sacrament by which we reconcile ourselves with God is equal to directly experiencing his mercy. It is finding the Father who forgives: God forgives everything. God understands us even in our limitations, and he even understands us in our contradictions. Not only this, but He tells us with his love that precisely when we recognize our sins he is even closer and he spurs us to look forward. He says even more: that when we recognize our sins and we ask for forgiveness, there is a celebration in Heaven. Jesus celebrates: this is his mercy: let us not be discouraged.<sup>[59]</sup>

The Lord continually offers us his pardon and helps us to accept it and to be aware of our wrongdoing so as to free us of it. For God wants not our condemnation, but our salvation. God does not want to condemn anyone! One of you might ask me: “But Father, didn’t Pilate deserve condemnation? Did God want that?” No! God wanted to save Pilate as well as Judas, everyone! He, the Lord of Mercy, wants to save everyone! The difficulty is in allowing him to enter our hearts. Every word of the prophets is a passionate appeal full of love which seeks our conversion. This is what the Lord says through the Prophet Ezekiel: “Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked... and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” (18:23; cf. 33:11), that’s what pleases God!<sup>[60]</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God’s mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. 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, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.<sup>[61]</sup>

## ***Closing 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 of you, Lord Jesus, 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.

<sup>a</sup>J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

<sup>[1]</sup> Cf. Francis, General Audience (10 February 2016).

<sup>[2]</sup> Francis, General Audience (10 February 2016).

<sup>[3]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 3.

<sup>[4]</sup> Francis, General Audience (16 December 2015).

<sup>[5]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 4.

<sup>[6]</sup> Cf. Francis, General Audience (16 December 2015).

<sup>[7]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 3.

<sup>[8]</sup> Francis, Homily (8 December 2015).

<sup>[9]</sup> Francis, General Audience (18 November 2015).

<sup>[10]</sup> Francis, General Audience (18 November 2015).

<sup>[11]</sup> Francis, General Audience (18 November 2015).

<sup>[12]</sup> Francis, General Audience (16 December 2015).

<sup>[13]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 25.

<sup>[14]</sup> Francis, Interview with Antonio Spadaro (2013).

<sup>[15]</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

<sup>[16]</sup> Cf. Francis, Address to the Parish Priests of the Diocese of Rome (6 March 2014).

<sup>[17]</sup> Francis, Angelus (8 December 2015).

<sup>[18]</sup> St. Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 30, a. 4.

<sup>[19]</sup> Francis, General Audience (9 December 2015).

<sup>[20]</sup> Francis, General Audience (13 January 2016).

<sup>[21]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 6.

<sup>[22]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 1.





- <sup>[23]</sup> Francis, Angelus (8 December 2015).
- <sup>[24]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 8.
- <sup>[25]</sup> Francis, General Audience (6 April 2016).
- <sup>[26]</sup> Francis, General Audience (6 April 2016).
- <sup>[27]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 9.
- <sup>[28]</sup> Francis, Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015).
- <sup>[29]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 5.
- <sup>[30]</sup> Francis, General Audience (9 December 2015).
- <sup>[31]</sup> Francis, Homily at Penitential Vigil (13 March 2015).
- <sup>[32]</sup> Francis, Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015).
- <sup>[33]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 3.
- <sup>[34]</sup> Francis, Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015).
- <sup>[35]</sup> Francis, General Audience (9 December 2015).
- <sup>[36]</sup> St. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 13.
- <sup>[37]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12.
- <sup>[38]</sup> Francis, General Audience (9 December 2015).
- <sup>[39]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 10.
- <sup>[40]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12.
- <sup>[41]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 25.
- <sup>[42]</sup> Francis, Jubilee Audience (30 January 2016).
- <sup>[43]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 9.
- <sup>[44]</sup> Francis, Jubilee Audience (30 January 2016).
- <sup>[45]</sup> Francis, Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015).
- <sup>[46]</sup> Cf. Francis, General Audience (18 November 2015).
- <sup>[47]</sup> Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.
- <sup>[48]</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily at Opening of the Holy Door at the Lateran Basilica (13 December 2015).
- <sup>[49]</sup> Francis, General Audience (16 December 2015).
- <sup>[50]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 14.
- <sup>[51]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 9.
- <sup>[52]</sup> Francis, General Audience (16 December 2015).
- <sup>[53]</sup> Francis, General Audience (27 January 2016).
- <sup>[54]</sup> Cf. Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 25.
- <sup>[55]</sup> Francis, Message for Lent 2015.
- <sup>[56]</sup> St. John of the Cross, *Words of Light and Love*, 57.
- <sup>[57]</sup> Cf. Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15.
- <sup>[58]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15.
- <sup>[59]</sup> Francis, General Audience (16 December 2015).
- <sup>[60]</sup> Francis, General Audience (3 February 2016).
- <sup>[61]</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 25.