Mercy at the center

The invitation by Pope Francis for the Jubilee

The Jubilee celebrates the 50th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, as the Year of Faith (2012-2013) marked the 50th anniversary of its opening. From Pope Benedict XVI to Pope Francis, the Catholic Church speaks with one voice to proclaim the Gospel in a new language, as initiated by the Council Fathers and prompted by the Holy Spirit a half century ago.

The address by Pope Paul VI, during the last general meeting of the Second Vatican Council on December 7, 1965, giving the **Good Samaritan** as the model for the renewal of the Church, is an important reference for understanding the meaning of what we experience during the Holy Year. “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36): each of us needs to personally obey Christ’s call and live accordingly, together as a missionary people proclaiming God’s love and tenderness.

In this perspective, the Pope hopes that this **Jubilee is also occurring in local Churches**, in a decentralized manner, and that initiatives are complementary. Therefore, each diocese has had the opportunity of opening a Door of Mercy, particularly in Marian Shrines.

Regarding the Roman Calendar (see www.im.va), in addition to the major events planned such as the one for volunteers actively involved in the works of mercy on September 4 or for detainees on November 6, the Pope plans to symbolically visit the “existential peripheries”, hoping that bishops and priests will do the same throughout this Holy Year, to witness the spiritual conversion through gestures of forgiveness, support, help and love.

This will also be an **invitation to Judaism and Islam** to continue discussions on the common basis of mercy. Citing a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (Exodus 34:6), the Hebrew Bible uses the word “rahamim”, which evokes the maternal womb, the place from which life comes. The Hebrew word “hesed” is also used in the scriptures to express other aspects of merciful love, faithfulness, kindness, goodness and solidarity.

“Making space for the Lord so that he can come and change me”

The love of God is inexplicable, “it is something that no theologian can explain. One can only feel and cry with joy,” said the Holy Father during a morning Mass, emphasizing the Gospel of the day, which described the healing of the royal official’s son. This man believed that Jesus had the power to heal his son and set out to find God. Faith means “creating a space for love” that is the power of God, Pope Francis added brightly: “**it’s the power of the one who loves me, who is in love with me and who wants to rejoice with me.**”

“This is faith,” he concluded, “making space for the Lord so that he can come and change me”. We will first experience this in the sacrament of reconciliation, in the heart of all our tears, on the occasion of the Holy Year of Mercy, to then become humble and joyful witnesses.

During the great persecution of the Christ’s Church in many countries from Pakistan to Nigeria through Libya, Syria and Iraq, Saint Peter’s successor will feed his sheep in many tribulations. May this Jubilee “**bring comfort to every man and woman of our time**”, as Pope Francis wants, recalling that “God forgives all, and God forgives always” (homily of March 13, 2015).

Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, “that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our year-long journey with an open heart, to receive the indulgence of God, to receive the mercy of God.” More broadly, we all have the opportunity to give up the certainty of feeling “just” and constantly judging others, to abandon the pride that pushes us to always be right, to love and forgive generously. As Pope Francis said in the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, *Misericordiae Vultus* (no. 20), based on Psalm 50: “God’s justice is his mercy”.

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