

THE
Year
OF
Mercy

INSPIRING WORDS
FROM

Pope
Francis

POPE FRANCIS
EDITED BY DIANE M. HOUEK



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PRAYER OF POPE FRANCIS FOR THE JUBILEE

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.



CONTENTS

Introduction	~ Opening the Doors of Mercy ~ <i>vii</i>
Chapter One	~ Crossing the Threshold of Mercy ~ <i>1</i>
Chapter Two	~ Jesus, the Face of Mercy ~ <i>15</i>
Chapter Three	~ Mercy in Scripture: Only Say the Word ~ <i>25</i>
Chapter Four	~ Not Judgment but Forgiveness: The Light of Mercy ~ <i>39</i>
Chapter Five	~ The Cross: No Greater Love ~ <i>57</i>
Chapter Six	~ Mercy and Resurrection: Our Eternal Hope ~ <i>69</i>
Chapter Seven	~ Mary: Mother of Mercy ~ <i>81</i>
Chapter Eight	~ The Church: The Place Where We Meet Mercy ~ <i>95</i>
Chapter Nine	~ Sacraments: Signs of God's Mercy ~ <i>111</i>
Chapter Ten	~ Vocation: Called to Show God's Mercy ~ <i>125</i>

Chapter Eleven ~ Ecumenism: Going Outside
the Doors ~ 135

Chapter Twelve ~ The Works of Mercy: Bringing
Everyone Inside ~ 147



INTRODUCTION

~ Opening the Doors of Mercy ~

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an *extraordinary Jubilee* that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (cf. Lk 6:36).

—24 HOURS FOR THE LORD, ST PETER BASILICA,
FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2015

From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis has made mercy his hallmark. It's no surprise, then, that he declared a special year dedicated to the contemplation of mercy. This is an extraordinary Jubilee Year beginning on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and ending on November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe.

We have a general understanding of a “jubilee” as a special anniversary, often in increments of decades. We speak of jubilee wedding anniversaries, often twenty-five or fifty years. The Old Testament concept of Jubilee is rooted in the Sabbath ritual, a time of rest and special blessings. The best description is found in the book of Leviticus:

You shall count off seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the period of seven weeks of years gives forty-nine years. Then you shall have the trumpet sounded loud; on the tenth day of the seventh month—on the day of atonement—you shall have the trumpet sounded throughout all your land. And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

Many Catholics will remember the Great Jubilee declared by Pope St. John Paul II honoring the beginning of the third millennium since the birth of Christ. This continued a tradition in the Church begun in the Middle Ages. Jubilee years were declared through the centuries to mark special occasions, to encourage pilgrimage to Rome and other holy places, and to give people a way to find special blessings through God's forgiveness.

As the following pages will show, what's extraordinary about the Year of Mercy is that Pope Francis wants us to realize that God's mercy and grace surround us not just in special times and places but always and everywhere. This special year is a time to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary, to be surprised by God's mercy when we least expect it.

One of the interesting rituals of the Church's jubilee years is the opening of a special "Holy Door" at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, at other major basilicas, and in cathedrals and even parish churches throughout the world. People were encouraged to go on pilgrimage to these holy places and to obtain special blessings by going through the Holy Doors into the church or cathedral. But Pope Francis makes it clear that we are called to cross the threshold of the church in the other direction as well, to go out into

the world as missionaries, as evangelists, as signs of God's loving mercy in the world.

The reflections in this book are arranged to accompany you through this Jubilee Year of Mercy. Although not divided into days, weeks, and months, the chapters follow the liturgical year in a logical progression.

Beginning during the season of Advent, we reflect on the life of Jesus and the many ways he revealed the merciful face of God to all those whom he encountered.

At the beginning of the new year, we spend time with the Scriptures, especially the Gospels. The parables of mercy in Luke's Gospel, the psalms, the Beatitudes, and the last judgment parables in the Gospel of Matthew all give us inspired ways to understand the importance of divine mercy.

During Lent, we're encouraged to reflect on the concepts of judgment, justice, forgiveness, and mercy. Holy Week brings us to contemplation of the cross of Christ, a powerful meditation on the depths of divine mercy. We then celebrate the resurrection and Mary.

Through the long stretch of ordinary time, we reflect on the ways the Church becomes for us the place where we can encounter mercy. The sacraments, particularly the sacrament of reconciliation, are privileged moments of

meeting our merciful God. When we know this mercy in our own lives, we are called to bring it to everyone we meet. This is the meaning of vocation.

Pope Francis is especially concerned about the way the mercy of God moves us toward unity and the painful divisions that still exist among faiths and within the various expressions of Christianity. He hopes that this Year of Mercy will move us toward healing those divisions through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, we come to a focus on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Beginning with the feasts of All Saints and All Souls and ending with the Solemnity of Christ the King, this final month of the Year of Mercy forcefully reminds us that works, not mere words, are the responsibility of every Christian.

As you reflect on these passages, let them challenge you to extend this Year of Mercy into a lifetime of following Jesus Christ and being merciful as the Father is merciful.

—*Diane M. Houdek,*
editor