

A Jubilee Year of Mercy

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The Jubilee Year of Mercy will begin as Pope Francis opens the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica on December 8, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Church will then take her first steps on a year-long pilgrimage of contemplating God's mercy and living out that mercy to others. The year will close on November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe.

The year begins, the pope notes in his bull of indiction, *Misericordiae Vultus* (Face of Mercy), on the fiftieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council. Noting the significance of the Council, Pope Francis recalls the use of the words mercy and charity at the beginning and end of the sessions. In his opening address to the Council, Pope John XXIII said, "The Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine on mercy." And in the closing remarks, Pope Paul VI said, "We prefer to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature of this Council."

Pope Francis writes that God has shown mercy throughout salvation history. To Moses, he revealed himself as "a God merciful and gracious." In sending his Son, the Father shows mercy. "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy," *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV) begins. Explaining God's mercy, the pope states, "being merciful is concretely demonstrated in his many actions throughout the history of salvation where his goodness prevails over punishment and destruction" (MV, 6).

The heart of the Gospel, Francis emphasizes, is mercy. To be a Christian disciple is to be motivated by and to live out of God's deep mercy and compassion. Pope Francis' hope for us during this holy year is to profoundly attune ourselves, and to grow, in God's love and mercy. Both of these are qualities of what it means to be a disciple, to live out faith daily.

Providing characteristics of God's mercy as lived out by Jesus, Pope Francis states, "The signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion."

Not only is God a God of mercy, but Jesus' life was one marked by daily living out of mercy. God calls all disciples to live out God's mercy as well. Pope Francis emphasizes that, though God is invisible, Jesus makes visible God's mercy. God enters the world not to condemn it but to show deep mercy to all he encounters, Pope Francis notes, but we also need to share and show mercy to all who are marginalized.

Practically, Pope Francis offers some ways to contemplate and live out mercy in the forthcoming holy year. One



Pope Francis: Jesus is the face of God's mercy.

way is to mediate on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Another way is to participate in the Sacrament of Penance. Because living mercy is about opening hearts to one another, Pope Francis suggests growing in our knowledge of other world religions. He also invites us to get to know people of other religious traditions and to understand the ways they pray, worship, and show mercy. Pope Francis, finally, encourages us to pray Mary's prayer of mercy, the *Salve Regina*. All of these practices and prayers allow us to mark this holy year as one focused on being disciples of mercy.

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