

Annual Ozanam Talk 2016

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The Year of Mercy

In April 2015, on the Vigil of the Feast of Divine Mercy, Pope Francis proclaimed an “Extraordinary Jubilee Year” starting on December 8th. 2015, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, and closing on the Feast of Christ the King Sunday November 20th 2016. This Jubilee Year would have “Mercy” as its focus.

The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy is an invitation to all Christians to draw closer to Jesus who is “the face of the Father’s mercy”. By drawing closer to God in prayer and through undertaking acts of mercy, we hope to share in God’s transforming love with every person and creature, especially those who are living in poverty.

The first Jubilee Year was proclaimed by Boniface VIII in 1300 and was to be held every hundred years. Over the years this changed to every fifty years and then every twenty five years. There have been twenty seven Holy Years to date.

What does mercy mean?

In the words of our Holy Father,

“ Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”

In Psalm 103: 13 we read

“As tenderly as a father treats his children, so the Lord treats those who fear him.”

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus embodies mercy and love in each of his actions and words, especially with people who are living on the margins. Mercy is revealed to us through the Resurrection, when the Lord brings our salvation.

Why has Pope Francis called a Year of Mercy now?

Pope Francis has proclaimed a Year of Mercy to bring us to the heart of Christianity “Just as God is merciful,” says the Holy Father, “so we are called to be merciful to each other.” *Misericordiae Vultus*.

The Year of Mercy also reminds us of the Second Vatican Council, which commissioned the Church to reflect on God’s merciful heart. The Church needs to live and preach the Gospel of mercy, hosting sinners, treating everyone’s weaknesses with mercy, A Church without mercy is not a Church of Christ.

The Year of Mercy is intended to further the teaching on the encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

How is the Year of Mercy related to *Laudato Si'*?

Laudato Si' is an encyclical about God's mercy. Pope Francis is inviting us to see how God creates and redeems all the earth out of infinite mercy, and we are called in turn to care for creation. We are invited to look honestly at the state of our planet, to see how it is "beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. All over the world, we see how floods, droughts and storms are becoming frequently more extreme, and it is often the most vulnerable people who are hit hardest.

Mercy is a common thread which runs throughout the world's religious traditions. Indeed, the Year of Mercy is open to all religious people "to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better" *Misericordiae Vultus*.

In Judaism, the Torah (the Old Testament) teaches of the mercy of God who redeems the people of Israel

In Islam, of all the ninety nine names of Allah in the Qur'an, there are two names which appear again and again : 'Merciful and Compassionate'.

In Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, the term **ahimsa** means empathy or compassion and is referred to the avoidance of any form of violence which would harm another living creature.

As Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'*, all of us can co-operate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents. People of all faiths and none have gifts to offer in bringing mercy to our common home.

"The Doors of Mercy"

Throughout this year of mercy we will often hear the expression 'The Holy Door'.

A Holy Door was first used in the fifteenth century as a ritualistic expression of conversion. Pilgrims and penitents would pass through a Holy Door as a gesture of leaving the past behind and crossing the threshold from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light.

The Holy door of St. Peter's Basilica was opened by the Pope, then the Holy doors of the three other major papal basilicas in Rome. This was followed by the opening of holy doors of every diocesan cathedral throughout the world.

Mercy is at the heart of our faith; the Jubilee of Mercy reminds us that God “delights in mercy”, (Mi 7:18), and so should we. Throughout Scripture, God is referred to as merciful and loving. We receive mercy from God, and this enables us to return this gift to others. You, as members of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, practise this on a daily basis.

Sometimes a given individual cannot perform all of these acts due to lack of knowledge or lack of experience/tact in handling any given situation. Everyone can perform some of them.

If we wish to experience the Mercy of God we must practise it towards others and in this, you members of the S.V.P. are experts.

Your life is a life of mercy-a life dedicated to helping others. It is a spiritual life demonstrating a strong ability to empathize with others with compassion, words and actions. You provide help when the going gets tough and that is when you, the tough, get going! So many others talk about mercy while you act on it.

The Logo

The official logo for the Jubilee Year, which was designed by Father Marko Rupnik, shows Jesus carrying a man on his shoulders. Father Rupnik says that this is Jesus as the Good Shepherd, carrying Adam on his shoulders, Jesus carries us, in our weakness, to the home of his Father. The background colours, the ‘mandrola’ go from dark to light, from the night of sin to the light of day

During this year let us recall two famous writers - one a bard and the other our present Pope:

“The quality of Mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.”

William Shakespeare

“Let us be renewed by God’s mercy on a daily basis, let us be loved by Jesus, let us enable the power of his love to transform our lives, too, and let us become agents of his mercy.” Pope Francis.

