



THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

'Be merciful just as your Father is merciful' Luke 6:36

What is a Holy Year?

Holy Years have been part of the life of the Church for the last thousand years. Most recently we have had a Year of Faith, of St Paul, of the Eucharist, the Word of God, and of Consecrated Life. A celebratory 'Jubilee Year' has special resonance, and these have been declared in the life of the Church every twenty-five years. All Holy Years are rooted in the idea of *special years* found in the Old Testament, woven into the history of the People of God, telling of God's unfailing and merciful love for them in the twists and turns of their journey together. Historically the declaration of such years required the people to respond in generosity to God's love. They were expected to give from their goodness and wealth, for the care of others. For example, at the end of every three years, a tenth of all produce was distributed to refugees, widows, orphans. At the end of every seven years, all debts were to be cancelled. Every fifty years, specially designated 'Jubilee' years were celebrated. Often described as a 'Year of the Lord's favour', these included cancellation of debts, freeing all slaves, and returning land to its original owners. Jesus, in the early days of his ministry, stood up in the Synagogue in Nazareth, and read from the Prophet Isaiah,

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'. (Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus finished at that point, without concluding the quote from Isaiah, looked up and said *'Today this scripture is being fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21).*

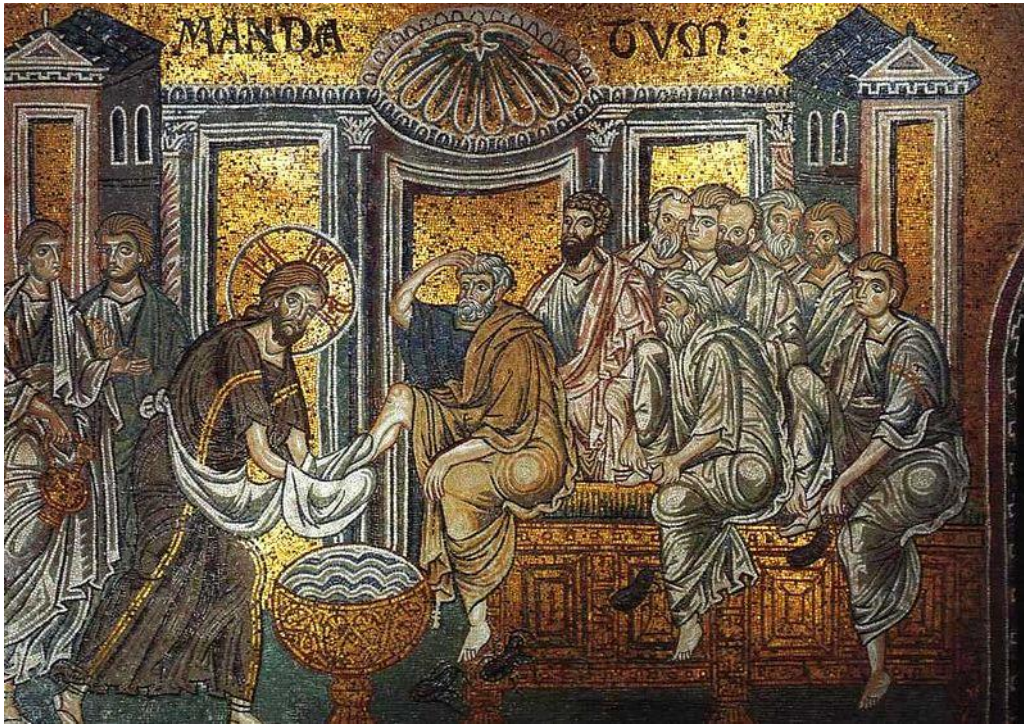
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Jesus, in himself, his life, death and resurrection, is the living message of the everlasting Jubilee of Mercy.



Christ washes the apostles' feet (Monreale) Image by Sibeaster (own work) [Public Domain] via Wikimedia Commons

Pope Francis Announces a Holy Year of Mercy (*Misericordiae Vultus*)

"Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us" MV 2

From the very earliest days of his papacy Francis has spoken of 'mercy' as central to following Jesus Christ. 'Mercy' is not simply part of God's love that we should understand as an abstract idea', but is the way Jesus asks us to follow him, something very real and active, to be lived out every day: *'be merciful just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:36)*. In his announcement of the Jubilee Holy Year, the Pope quotes Pope John XXIII's speech on the opening of the Second Vatican Council, urging the Church to *'use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up the arms of severity,'* offering the image of the Good Samaritan. The Pope has chosen to begin the Year of Mercy on 8th December, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and significantly, the fiftieth

anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. The year will close on 20th November 2016, on the Solemnity of Christ the King.

The Latin title of the Pope's announcement of the Holy Year of Mercy is '*Misericordiae Vultus*, or simply the 'Face of Mercy', referring directly to Jesus, showing us the merciful face of God. In this document, Pope Francis points us to many stories from Scripture that require us to renew our commitment to following Jesus, who is the living and visible sign of God's mercy, and to be sorry for ways in which are not truly living up to what we believe. We can go deeper in our understanding of what 'mercy' is, and what living mercifully means, by opening ourselves to the Word of God in Scripture, listening deeply, and connecting these stories to our own lives and relationships; allowing the meeting with Jesus through the Word, to change the way we see with eyes of mercy and respond to life in a more merciful way.

Holy Doors

'The Holy Door will become a Door of Mercy' through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instils hope' MV3

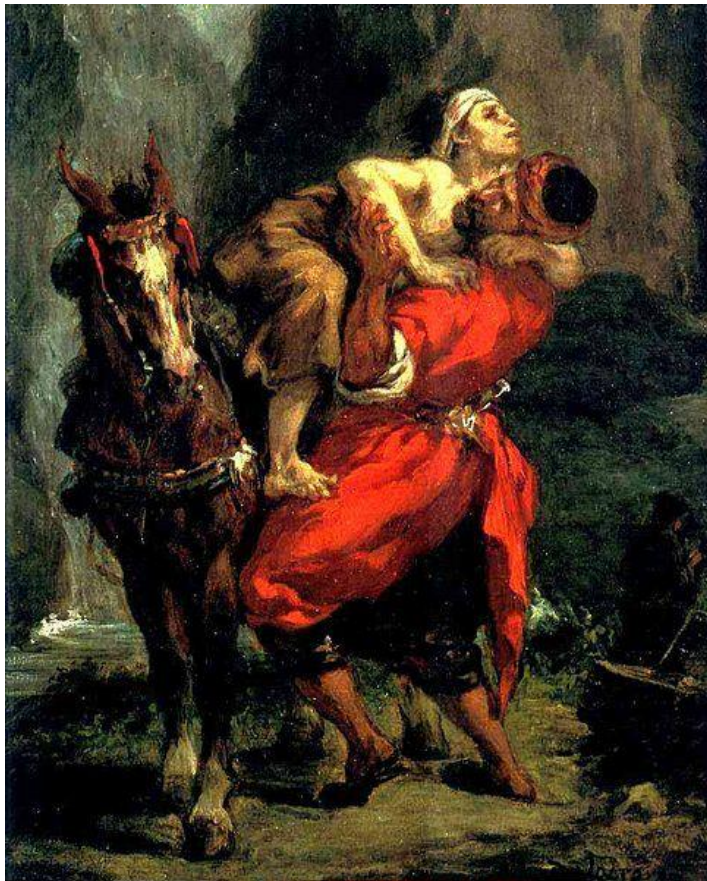


The Year of Mercy will begin when Pope Francis opens the great Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica in Rome. The door is only opened in these special years, and entering through them is a moment full of grace. Pope Francis has asked every diocesan bishop across the world to have 'Holy Doors', in their Cathedrals and other designated churches and shrines. We enter by the Holy Door consciously saying:

'Here I am, I am coming into your presence, Lord. I am sorry for the ways in which I have hurt those I love, and in so doing hurt you. I need your love and mercy. Thank you for your great love and acceptance of me.'

Around the Dioceses

During this Holy Year there will be local diocesan, national and international activities, including pilgrimage and reconciliation opportunities. Look out for ways in which you can engage with these. It is hoped there will be people available to support anyone entering by a Holy Door. Perhaps there will be 'pathways' through the Cathedrals or designated churches: a welcome, with people to pray and to listen, and invitation to special 'stations' for guided prayer experiences, or contemplation on God's love and mercy. Simply come! All are invited, all are welcome, to receive mercy and special blessing in this way.



Eugene Delacroix [Public Domain] in Tate Gallery via Wikimedia Commons

An Opportunity to Explore What 'Mercy' Mean in Our Families

God shows us his mercy – and it is like a father or a mother's love for their child. Mercy flows from a heart-stretching, tender, compassionate love that knows no limits. Pope Francis describes it as a 'wellspring' or well from which everyone can draw joy and peace, and the spring of mercy will never run dry, no matter how many people draw from it. Every time anyone is in need, he or she can approach.

How does this happen in our family life?

As families we live a 'true' life when we in our turn live this love-beyond-words-mercy, sourced in God's rich and unfailing mercy, shown to us in Jesus. As baptised people, we are literally 'soaked' in the mercy of God. Mercy is God's very nature, shared with us through Jesus, and we are given the power and the challenge from our baptism, to be 'merciful like the Father' - and as Jesus says, to have seen him is to have seen the Father. Our homes are places where our family members and all those who come can draw from our family 'well' of love, joy, peace, comfort, forgiveness, faithfulness, and 'togetherness'.

What Might Be Our 'Door of Mercy' at Home?

As a good start, we might sit down and talk about 'mercy' and what it means to be merciful in our lives, amongst family, friends, neighbours and strangers? Which are the 'doors' at home that could become our 'doorway of mercy' where anyone, family or friend or stranger, comes in and feels loved, accepted, comforted, healed? Might it be the front door? Or the back door? The kitchen or living room door? Any other door? You decide. If it's the front door, you could make a simple 'Welcome' sign that lets people entering know that they are blessed as they come in and go out of our home, hoping they will experience it as a place of 'mercy', welcome and acceptance, joy and peace.

'May this home be a place of happiness and health, of contentment, generosity and hope, a home of creativity and kindness, of mercy and forgiveness. May those who visit us and those who live here experience blessings and peace.'

Living out 'Works of Mercy' in Body, Mind and Spirit

'Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man' MV 2

The Year of Mercy is a call from the Pope to look at our lives, listen and very practically respond to the call to live out the Gospel demands to be 'merciful as the Father'

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to feed the hungry, • to give drink to those who are thirsty • to give clothes to the naked • to welcome to the stranger • to heal the sick • to visit those in prison • to bury the dead in sure and certain hope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to be there for one another when there is doubt • to teach/overcome ignorance that keeps people in poverty (education) • to be close to and comfort people (delete or put in 'who are') suffering loneliness and loss • to forgive those who offend us • to reject anger and violence, and be patient with everyone who speaks or acts against us • to pray for people, living and the dead.
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Coming directly from scripture, our church tradition calls these *actions* the '**corporal and spiritual works of mercy**'. These *works* go together - we don't divide them into either/or - and the sign or *test* that mercy is being lived in every possibly situation can simply be: '*See how they love one another!*' We will be judged by our love! '*When did we see you?*' we ask. '*When you did this for the least of my little ones, you did it for me*' says Jesus Christ the King (see Mt 25:37-40). Each session will enable conversation to connect with the 'works of mercy' as we experience them in family and wider life.

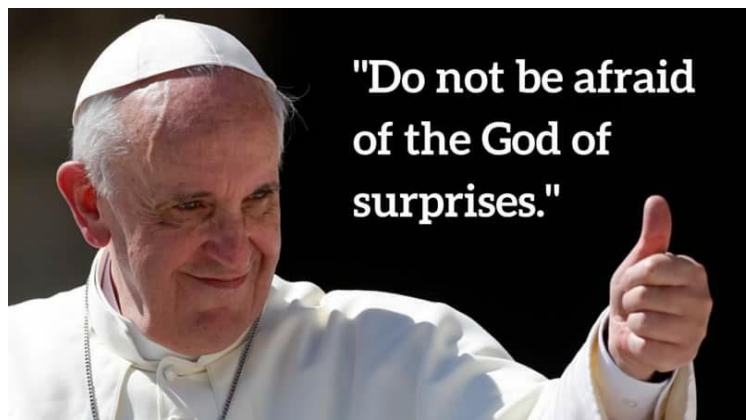
What difference does the 'year of mercy' make to our lives in families and parish?

'May the message of mercy reach everyone and may no-one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy' MV19

Through nurturing awareness of a merciful lifestyle, families share in the Church's mission of bringing God's reign of mercy to the world. Families are 'salt and light' for one another and in the life of the parish, and the parish is a source of blessing for families too. It's mutual! We can welcome and celebrate this fact. As Pope Francis describes it, mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever, in spite of the things we get wrong and the ways we hurt one another. At best, families can show the way. God is full of tenderness and compassion, and his mercy, is always greater than any 'turning away' from him has been. The invitation is to seek out the lost and bring them home, or if we have been 'lost' to come home and allow God to surprise us!

We pray for a continuing openness to the mercy of God at work in us, blessing us to go out and live mercifully as God's agents of mercy.

'May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no-one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy' (MV 19)



'Let us ask God to surprise us!' says Pope Francis (MV 25)