

HAVE MERCY, FOR GOD'S SAKE!
(THE YEAR OF MERCY) (#2)
(CONTINUED)

Pope Francis' Official Letter of September 1, 2015

On September 1, 2015, the Pope issued an official letter, "Letter of the Holy Father Francis to the President of the Pontifical Council For The Promotion of the New Evangelization At The Approach of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy September 1, 2015"! This immediately tells us that the Year of Mercy is part of "the promotion of the new evangelization." "My thought first of all goes to all the faithful who, whether in individual Dioceses or as pilgrims to Rome, will experience the grace of the Jubilee [The Year of Mercy]. I wish that the Jubilee Indulgence may reach each one as a genuine experience of God's mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father[-Mother] who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed." (Francis in the September 1, 2015 letter – note especially the second sentence here) Also "it is indeed my wish that the jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father [-Mother], whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective" (Pope Francis in his September 1, 2015 letter). So "Pope Francis has announced he is widely expanding the traditional indulgences available to Catholics during his upcoming Jubilee Year of Mercy, opening them to anyone who performs just one of the traditional works of mercy and to prisoners who pray at chapels available to them" (McElwee).

"The letter, published by the Vatican in seven languages [Italian, French, English, German, Spanish, Portuguese, and Polish] is striking for the global scope the pontiff envisions the Jubilee Year taking, with availability for pardon and mercy seemingly available to all... He wants the holy year to be 'for all true believers a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God.' He then offers an indulgence, or remission of the punishment for sin, for those that during the year are able to make a pilgrimage to the papal basilicas in Rome or to their local cathedral. [For people in Hamilton Diocese the Cathedral of Christ the King in Hamilton City and for those in the Archdiocese of Toronto, the Cathedral is Saint Michael in Toronto City; however since the Toronto Cathedral is being renovated, it is for the near future not one to which people can make a "pilgrimage"; the churches for this, then, in the Toronto Archdiocese are: St. Paul's Basilica (Toronto's oldest parish), St. Patrick's (Toronto), Merciful Redeemer (Mississauga), St. Anthony of Padua (Bramalea), St. Theresa's Shrine of the Little Flower (Scarborough), Martyrs' Shrine (Midland), and St. Patrick's (Brampton). In Hamilton Diocese, as well as the Cathedral, the "pilgrimage" churches are six Sacred Heart Parishes in Hamilton City, Kitchener, Paris, Guelph, Georgetown, and Walkerton – the Sacred Heart of Jesus being a powerful symbol of mercy.] As is traditional those making those pilgrimages will be asked to make confession, celebrate the Mass, and pray for the pope's intentions... Granting of special indulgences for the remission of sins during Catholic holy years is a traditional practice, but in the past normally required a visit to one or more of the papal basilicas in Rome. Francis' letter greatly expands the availability of the practice." (McElwee) The Holy Father wants these actions to be seen "as a sign of the deep desire for true conversion ... It is important that this moment be linked, first and foremost, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation [Confession] and to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a reflection on mercy. It will be necessary to accompany these celebrations with the profession of faith and with prayer for me and for the intentions that I bear in my heart for the good of the Church and the entire world." (Francis in the September 1, 2015 letter) (emphasis added)

The pope goes on to state that "living with faith and joyful hope this moment of trial [the sick and the lonely who are not able to go to Rome for the indulgences], receiving Communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer, even through the various means of communication [like social media], will be for them the means of obtaining the jubilee indulgence" (September 1, 2015

letter, emphasis added). Please note this because this goes beyond what we traditionally do regarding holy years and their graces/indulgences. For the sick or elderly unable to travel, we are called by God to let them know about this option.

The pontiff also extends this in another way for all of us, i.e., “the pontiff also extends the possibility for forgiveness of sin to anyone who performs one of the traditional spiritual or corporal works of mercy during the year” (McElwee). “I have asked the Church in this jubilee year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus Himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the jubilee indulgence.” (Francis in his September 1, 2015 letter)

For those in jail, the Holy Father has also made it possible for them to obtain the jubilee indulgence. “They may obtain the indulgence in the chapels of the prisons. May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father [-Mother] each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom.” (Pope Francis in the September 1, 2015 letter) (The “Holy Door” is a reference to the Jubilee Year of Mercy beginning with the opening of the Holy Door of Saint Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City on December 8, 2015)

“Furthermore, the jubilee indulgence can also be obtained for the deceased. We are bound to them by the witness of faith and charity that they have left us. Thus, as we remember them in the Eucharistic celebration, thus we can, in the great mystery of the communion of saints, pray for them that the merciful face of the Father [-Mother] free them of every remnant of fault and strongly embrace them in the unending beatitude.” (Francis in his September 1, 2015 letter)

Please note that in all these suggestions Francis is being very merciful because he makes it so easy for any Catholic to receive the jubilee indulgence! So in the spirit of his beautiful powerful words above, we can extend this basic consideration/approach as Cardinal Vincent Nichols does in his new book, A Pilgrimage Companion For the Year of Mercy 2015-2016 (another great resource available from Alive Publishing):

“We can contemplate the mercy of God in the simple actions of others: the kind acceptance of our failing efforts, the comfort we receive in weakness, the encouragement to try again, the forgiveness offered out of a shared humanity, the quiet word that helps to lift a veil of depression. These merciful moments set us on our feet again. In them we are touched by that hidden presence of the Holy Spirit.” (Nichols)

And lest that we as Catholics become too smug, we need to remember that mercy can and is expressed outside the Church too! Here we recall the following words of the martyr Oscar Romero written a few years ago:

“Outside the Church, anyone who struggles for justice, anyone who makes just demands in an unjust atmosphere, is working for the Kingdom of God. This person may not be a Christian [remember Ghandi?]. The Church does not have a monopoly on the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God goes beyond the borders of the Church ... (Through The Year With Oscar Romero: Daily Meditations, translated by Irene B. Hodgson)

TO BE CONTINUED

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