

## Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Popes have never shied away from proclaiming the Doctrine of Mercy. Beginning with Pope John XXIII, who on October 11, 1962, during the opening address of the Second Vatican Council, said, "The Church prefers the medicine of Mercy rather than that of severity: 'Today, however, Christ's Bride prefers the balm of mercy to the arm of severity. She believes that present needs are best served by explaining more fully the purport of her doctrines, rather than by publishing condemnations.'"

Pope Paul VI, who concluded the Second Vatican Council, spoke about mercy in his first Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Announcing the Gospel, on December 8, 1975, when he said, "This kingdom and this salvation, which are the key words of Jesus Christ's evangelization, are available to every human being as grace and mercy, and yet at the same time each individual must gain them by force - they belong to the violent, says the Lord."

Saint John Paul II, in his Encyclical, *Rich in Mercy*, *Dives in Misericordia*, makes it abundantly clear that the "Mercy of God is key to understanding our relationship to Him." He tells us that it is God who is rich in mercy. Jesus Christ reveals the Father to us, and as the Son, He manifests the Father and makes Him known to us.

Pope Benedict XVI, in an address to pilgrims in Rome in 2008 said, "Mercy is in reality the core of the Gospel message; it is the name of God himself, the face with which He reveals himself in the Old Testament and fully in Jesus Christ, the incarnation of creative and redemptive Love."

And, finally, Pope Francis builds on the understanding of mercy explained by his predecessors in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, *Joy of the Gospel*, published on November 24, 2013, when he tells us, "The salvation which God offers us is the work of His mercy."

"The Church must be a place of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel."

And so we are the recipients of the great fundamental understand-

ing of mercy. Cardinal Walter Kasper, the German Cardinal and theologian, in his book entitled, "Mercy: The Essence of the Gospel and the Key to Christian Life," concludes that, "We must describe mercy as the fundamental attribute of Almighty God. For Mercy is not simply one among the divine attributes...rather Mercy is to be seen as the core and the center of all that God is." In fact, he echoes the words of Benedict XVI.

## The Jubilee Year: Feast of the Immaculate Conception 2015 to the Feast of Christ the King 2016

In the announcement of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in his document entitled, *The Face of Mercy Who is Jesus Christ*, Pope Francis reminds us that mercy and justice are not equal weights on the scale of justice. No, mercy takes precedence.

Pope Francis quotes the words of St. Thomas Aquinas when he said, "...Show that God's mercy rather than a sign of weakness is the mark of His omnipotence."

The motto of Our Holy Father, *Miserando atque eligendo*, By having mercy and by choosing him, is the description of the call of St. Matthew in the Gospel. Jesus has mercy on him and calls him to follow Him.

Mercy for us is something difficult to understand. The parables of mercy we find in the Gospel of Luke give us the best understanding of the Father's mercy. The parable of the Prodigal Son, illustrated by the great painter Rembrandt, is a good explanation of the parable and how to understand this remarkable teaching of Jesus. In Rembrandt's painting, we see a father with a son kneeling before him, the son with one sandal on and one sandal off. The father's face is full of joy. There are, however, three other figures in the painting. The older brother, who stands grim in judgment, obviously is not happy about the forgiveness shown to the Prodigal Son. Also, there is the servant who is awaiting his master's order to prepare a feast for the Prodigal Son. In the distance, and not clearly seen, is a woman, most probably the mother of the Prodigal Son, urging her husband to

show mercy to her child. There is another way of understanding this portrait of mercy; that woman can be interpreted to be the Mother of God, the Mother of Mercy, Mary, our Heavenly Mother, who always looks to those who need mercy.

In fact, almost all of the icons that picture Mary holding her child, Jesus, have her looking to the left, not only to her child, but also to the sinners on the left as is told to us in the scene of the Last Judgment: the goats on the left, the sheep on the right. Yes, the Mother of Mercy is so much a part of making the Church truly a Mother.

On a personal note, my own Episcopal Motto is *Behold Your Mother*, which are the words of Jesus on the cross to St. John regarding His Mother, Mary. With the deeper meaning, it is the Church who is our mother to whom we come to find God's love and mercy; the merciful love of a caring mother and a forgiving father.

God constantly reaches out to us to show us His mercy. We hear Jesus telling us that it is mercy, not sacrifice, that He wishes, and thus show to others mercy. The Parable of the Good Samaritan perhaps demonstrates this so well for us. The one who showed the stranger mercy is the Samaritan, the hero, of the parable. And so it is for us to show mercy at all times. It makes us reflect on the image of God's love to us.

Certainly, it is worth reading the document of our Holy Father, Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Voltus*, *The Face of Mercy*, which proclaims the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, as it contains so much for our consideration. ([www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/yearofmercy](http://www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/yearofmercy))

## The Celebration in Our Diocese

I wish to explain how we will celebrate the Jubilee of Mercy in our own Diocese in Brooklyn and Queens and what special events will mark our own celebration. ([www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/yearofmercy](http://www.dioceseofbrooklyn.org/yearofmercy))

First, there will be the blessing of the Holy Doors in six churches of our Diocese; the Cathedral Basilica of St. James, the Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph and two additional churches in Brooklyn, as well as two Churches in Queens. This will occur

on Sunday, December 13, 2015, the Third Sunday of Advent at:

- Cathedral-Basilica of St. James, Brooklyn - Bishop Witold Mroziewski - 11 a.m. Mass

- Co-Cathedral of St. Joseph, Brooklyn, where I will celebrate the 10:30 a.m. Spanish Mass

- St. Thomas Aquinas Church, Flatlands, Bishop Raymond Chappetto - 11:30 a.m. Mass

- Regina Pacis Basilica, Bensonhurst, Bishop James Massa - Noon Mass

- Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Astoria, Bishop Octavio Cisneros - 5 p.m. Mass

- St. Gerard Majella Shrine Church, Hollis, Bishop Paul Sanchez - 11:30 a.m. Mass

The Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is open only in Jubilee Years. It was a custom that was begun by Pope Martin V in 1423, when graces were accorded to those who made a pilgrimage to Rome. Holy Doors have been designated in our own Diocese in Brooklyn and Queens, which will be for us the special locations mentioned above where indulgences can be obtained.

What is an indulgence? An indulgence presupposes conversion, a seeking of mercy and forgiveness. Pope Francis, in his proclamation, tells us, "To gain an indulgence is to experience the holiness of the Church, who bestows upon all the fruits of Christ's redemption, so that God's love and forgiveness may extend everywhere. Let us live this Jubilee intensely, begging the Father to forgive our sins and to bathe us in His merciful 'indulgence.'"

An indulgence reminds us that if we have not in our life performed the penance necessary to alleviate the time that we might await God's presence fully after our death, then that time can be shortened because of the penances and the indulgences we gained here on Earth.

Yes, the Father does indulge us. He showers us with mercy and forgiveness. Take the opportunity during this Jubilee of Mercy to become people who are converted and changed; changed in attitude and action, more merciful towards others, more willing to ask for God's