



Conclusion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy - Press Conference

Vatican Press Office, 21 November, 2016



With the closure of the Holy Door in Saint Peter's Basilica, the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy has concluded. To understand the significance it has had in the life of the Church, the goals proposed for it, and its continuing effects for Christian communities, it is necessary to have its two programmatic documents in hand: the Bull of Indiction for the Holy Year, *Misericordiae vultus*, and the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, signed yesterday by Pope Francis on the sagrato in front of Saint Peter's.

In the first document, one reads: "At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective" (Mv 3). Pope Francis' express desire was to give believers the experience of mercy so that they could become instruments of mercy. That is, to make mercy become once again an extraordinary and efficacious propulsive force in the life of the Church. One cannot make a secret of the situation that mercy, beginning with the very use of the term, had fallen into disuse, being relegated mostly to popular piety, without having a true value in the lifestyle of Christians. With this Jubilee, one thing is certain: mercy became the protagonist, at least for a year, in the daily lives of Christians. Entrusting the coordination of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization also had the goal of making this theme, which constitutes the essence of the Gospel, the path of evangelization in our times, to strengthen faith, overcome indifference, and elicit a coherent way of living.

One should not forget, in addition, that the Jubilee is essentially a religious and spiritual experience. The pathway that was set up from Castel Sant'Angelo to the Holy Door had the purpose of showing, in the midst of the city and its tourists, that one could create a special space for pilgrimage, reflection, and prayer. The millions of pilgrims who traversed the pathway wanted to give this witness, which was well understood by all those walking along Via della Conciliazione. The concretization of

the signs of mercy, carried out above all in the “Fridays of Mercy”, struck public opinion, presenting not only new kinds of poverty in our world, but also the simple and operational response of the Church.

Even if there were some who thought that the Jubilee was mainly a source of revenue, especially in a time of crisis such as the present, they misunderstood its more profound meaning. I am sorry, but everything has its *raison d'être*; to try to compromise an event like the Jubilee by instrumentalizing it for different ends does not merit a reply.

From the beginning of the Jubilee, I have always declined to give estimates about the number of pilgrims present in Rome. Now, we can affirm with precise information that 21,292,926 pilgrims participated in the Jubilee here in Rome. The greatest part of these were pilgrims from Italy, followed by German speakers, followed by those from the USA, Poland Spain...all the way to Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, Venezuela, Chad, Rwanda, Angola, the Cook Islands, Nepal...in short, pilgrims from 156 countries from around the world were present in Rome. You can truly say that the world visited, and that Rome was truly at the center of these pilgrims' interest.

As is known, for the first time in the history of the Jubilee years, this Holy Year was universal in character. Doors of Mercy were opened around the whole world as a witness that the love of God knows no limits. We have studied as much as possible the data we have received. From this emerged an extremely interesting analysis. In the countries in which Catholicism is more deeply rooted, the percentage of faithful who crossed through a Holy Door was more than 80% of the total number of Catholics. This result was reached thanks also to the distribution of the Dioceses; 50% of the circa 3,000 Dioceses in the world are found in Europe and in Central and South America. The growing number of Dioceses in Africa and, in part, in Asia, permitted the Jubilee Year to reach millions of people in the rest of the world as well. On the global level, as a matter of fact, thanks to data provided by some important Dioceses in various parts of the world, we can estimate an average participation between 56% and 62% of the total Catholic population; this means about that roughly between 700 and 850 million faithful crossed through their diocesan Holy Door between 8 December 2015 and November 2016. To this it is necessary to add the faithful who crossed through the Doors of Mercy opened in shrines and places of pilgrimage throughout the world. In this case, we are talking about totals not included in the numbers for the Diocesan Doors. We can verify that the largest shrines registered an average influx of 3 million faithful; for example, the sanctuary in Krakow was the site of a pilgrimage for 5 million Catholics; the shrine of Santiago de Compostela broke its record for pilgrims set in 2010; and the Shrine of Guadalupe saw the presence of about 22 million pilgrims. The sum of these numbers, therefore, brings us to a total of more than 900-950 million faithful throughout the world who crossed through a Holy Door.

Finally, one should not forget that the Jubilee traveled on the internet too! The website maintained in seven languages received over 6,523,000 visits; its pages were seen over 16,220,000 times; the actions taken on the site totaled over 11,800,000; there were over 32,300 searches; and more than 1,524,000 downloads. More than 8 million people enrolled on the site. Just a few examples to illustrate the communicative force of some of the events: the video of Pope Francis hearing confessions for the youth in Saint Peter's Square, in less than 24 hours, had over 2,398,000 hits, with more than 42,000 “likes”, 8,000 sharings, and 1,500 comments. The photo of Pope Francis at the neonatal department of the Saint John Hospital was viewed by 1,800,000 people and was shared by 6,600 within just a few hours... In conclusion, electronic communication was not lacking and made the events truly worldwide within a few minutes.

The Jubilee Volunteers who came to Rome also deserve recognition. There were 4,000 of them, of whom 1,800 were SMOM dedicated exclusively to first aid services in the 4 Papal Basilicas. They came from 36 different countries; the oldest volunteer was an 84-year-old man, while the youngest was 18. Their profiles varied: some came during their vacations from work or school, or in their free time, to give concrete assistance in solidarity with the pilgrims. It was a work that merits our approval and sincere gratitude for their labor and the sacrifices they made.

To all the pilgrims there was offered evidence of a secure city. The Jubilee began in the aftermath of a violent attack, unprecedented in Europe. At the beginning, fear discouraged many people from making the trip to Rome. As the weeks went by, however, thanks to the effective and widespread security measures in the city, the pilgrims were able to experience their Jubilee pilgrimage with tranquility and enthusiasm. A sincere thanks goes to the Ministry of Internal Affairs which, as the organization responsible for the security for the country, provided Rome with a serene and secure situation. In this sense, there was a strong collaboration between Italy and the Holy See which, through the Technical Secretariat, overseen by the Prefect of Rome, was able to guarantee a proper carrying out of all the Jubilee initiatives, above all for the Major Events that brought a notable influx of pilgrims. The usual challenges brought by different viewpoints were not lacking, but the effective collaboration always allowed a shared solution to be reached, which guaranteed the security of the citizens, the pilgrims, and the tourists. A sincere thanks also goes to the Region of Lazio for having prepared health services and emergency aid which were present not only in the hospitals, but also at the Jubilee events themselves.

To understand whether this Jubilee has had the efficacy hoped for, it is necessary to turn to the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera* which states explicitly: "Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father" (Mm 1). Beginning with the biblical image found in Chapter 8 of the Gospel of John, which narrates the encounter between Jesus and the woman caught in adultery, Pope Francis delineates the path for the future of the Church so that it may always be an instrument of mercy for everyone, without ever excluding anyone.

The two pillars that guide the whole structure of the letter are that mercy must be both *celebrated* and *lived*. Beginning from these foundations, one finds pastoral directions that will be very useful for planning the life of Christian communities spread throughout the world. Above all, the celebration of Mercy: it is good to note that Pope Francis offers some concrete suggestion in these pages that have already received an affirmation in the Jubilee celebration. A first innovation is that the Missionaries of Mercy are confirmed in their service, so that their mission may "continue until further notice as a concrete sign that the grace of the Jubilee remains alive and effective the world over" (Mm 9). In effect, the action of the Missionaries was very fruitful; they heard confessions for entire days, and they traveled all over their respective countries to make tangible that mercy knows no boundaries. Along these same lines, Pope Francis writes: "Given this need, lest any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God's forgiveness, I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion" (Mm 12). As is known, this sin was reserved to bishops who, depending on the circumstances, sometimes granted to the priests of their respective Dioceses the faculty to absolve it. Now, "in virtue of their ministry", that is, by the very fact that they are ministers of reconciliation, the sin of abortion may be forgiven by every priest, without a particular delegation. With the same spirit of going out to meet the needs of the faithful, the Holy Father "trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God's help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church" (Mm 12), establishes that those who frequent the churches administered by the priests of the Fraternity of Saint of Pius X can validly and licitly receive sacramental absolution.

Another initiative that will further meet the needs of diocesan pastoral plans is the request to give greater attention to the Word of God: "It would be beneficial if every Christian community, on one Sunday of the liturgical year, could renew its efforts to make the Sacred Scriptures better known and more widely diffused. It would be a Sunday given over entirely to the word of God, so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and his people" (Mm 7).

The second foundational pillar of the Apostolic Letter focuses more on the *living* of mercy and its “social character” (Mm 19). Pope Francis points out that the “temptation to theorize ‘about’ mercy” is always present; it “can be overcome to the extent that our daily life becomes one of participation and sharing” (Mm 20). In this light, he proposes a *World Day of the Poor* as a task for all the Church, “to reflect on how poverty is at the very heart of the Gospel and that, as long as Lazarus lies at the door of our homes (cf. *Lk* 16:19-21), there can be no justice or social peace” (Mm 21).

In his Letter, Pope Francis does nothing else than deepen the theme so dear to him of mercy as the essential dimension of the Christian faith and witness. The challenge to rethink the traditional spiritual and corporal works of mercy in the light of today’s new poverties is a concrete invitation to Christian communities and to every believer to give a place to the creativity of mercy, “to promote a *culture of mercy* based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters” (Mm 20).