

Opening of the Holy Door

Advent 3-C

Holy Rosary Cathedral

13 December 2015

Dear brother priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, and dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice” (Phil 4:4). Truly today in our local Church we have every reason to rejoice, as the Apostle Paul urged the Christians at Philippi, and as the Prophet Zephaniah proclaimed, “Rejoice and exult with all your heart” (Zeph 3:14). The great Jubilee of Mercy has been inaugurated symbolically in our Archdiocese by opening our own Holy Door of Mercy. For us there now “begins a time of the great forgiveness. . . . It is [the] time to rediscover the presence of God and his fatherly tenderness.”¹

This Extraordinary Jubilee declared by Pope Francis is a gift of grace to the Church living in a world so marred by war, violence, terrorism, poverty and a culture of death; it is a gift to a Church living at a time, “in which forgiveness is a rare guest in the spheres of human life.”²

¹ Francis, Homily at Opening of the Holy Door at the Lateran Basilica (13 December 2015).

² Francis, General Audience (9 December 2015).

Passing through the Holy Door is a concrete way for us to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who always welcomes us, his children, and who seeks us out to encounter us personally.

It is he who opens the door for us. As I said upon opening our own Holy Door, “This is the Lord’s gate: let us enter through it and obtain mercy and forgiveness.”

“To experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has come in search of us because we were lost”³: this is the first purpose of this Holy Year. But we can experience this joy only if we recognize ourselves as sinners. Unlike the delusion of the radical autonomy proposed by secularists, we need assistance, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In his gentleness, the Lord never forces open the door of our heart; he too asks permission to enter that sanctuary. The Book of Revelation says: “Listen, I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Rev 3:20). The Jubilee is a freely offered gift, and its graces likewise are to be freely received. During this Holy Year, the Church wants us to become ever more convinced that we are recipients, beneficiaries of God’s mercy.

³ Francis, Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015).

When you pass through the Holy Door, then, set aside all fear and dread, for these are inappropriate for those who are loved by God and who experience the joy of encountering the transforming grace of Christ. Do not be afraid: let yourself be embraced by the mercy of God who awaits you. As Pope Francis has remarked, “Nothing is sweeter than his mercy. Let us allow ourselves to be caressed by God: the Lord is so good, and he forgives all.”⁴

To be sure, it takes a little courage on our part to cross this threshold honestly. Each of us carries his or her particular burden of sin. One thing is for sure: we are all united as sinners.

But now is “the favourable time” to cross the threshold of the mercy of God who never tires of forgiving us, and who never tires of waiting for us on the other side of the door, saying, “Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep” (Lk 15:6).⁵

Mercy is the Mission of the Church

⁴ Francis, Angelus (8 December 2015).

⁵ Cf. Francis, General Audience (18 November 2015).

The proclamation of God’s merciful love offered to everyone is the Church’s mission. It is the content of all our initiatives of evangelization, both new and old. “The theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.”⁶

Because God’s mercy is “the beating heart of the Gospel,”⁷ the Church’s life is authentic, therefore, only if she is a convincing herald of mercy, if she is “a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ.”⁸ Our primary mission, then, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God’s mercy by drawing them to contemplate the face of Christ.

How We Are to Respond to the Call to Mercy

How, then, as the Church and as individual disciples, are we to respond to this mission of mercy?

⁶ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12.

⁷ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12.

⁸ Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 25.

Church

The Church – our local Church, our parishes, our schools, our organizations and movements – are being called to open their doors, to go out to meet God’s children on the path of their lives, at times uncertain, at times downtrodden, and to invite them to know the closeness of God, and to offer them the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.⁹ Just as the door of God’s mercy is always open, so too must be the Church’s doors, both literally and figuratively. Only if we open the doors can we go out to bring God’s mercy to others and can others come in to share in our experience of his forgiving love.¹⁰

As communities, we cannot bottle up the gift of mercy we have received. We must open our doors to see who is waiting outside, perhaps without the courage or the strength to knock, because they fear our harsh judgement or rejection. But the true Church “has an endless desire to show mercy, the fruit of her own experience of the power of the Father’s infinite mercy.”¹¹

After all, we are but servants at the door of God’s mercy. And that door has a name: it is Jesus. He himself affirmed: “I am

⁹ Francis, Homily at First Vespers of Divine Mercy Sunday (11 April 2015).

¹⁰ Cf. Francis, General Audience (18 November 2015).

¹¹ Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

the door; whoever enters by me will be saved” (Jn 10:9). Jesus, not us, is the Holy Door that lets in and lets out. Let’s not forget that God’s sheepfold is a refuge; the house of God, the Church, is a refuge of sinners welcomed and offered the gift of repentance by the Good Shepherd.

Individual Disciples

Like the crowd in today’s Gospel posing questions to John the Baptist, as individual disciples we, too, ask, “What should we do?” (Lk 3:12), what should we *do* to mark the Jubilee Year? The response of the Baptist was immediate. He invited the crowd to act justly and to look after the needs of those in need (cf. Lk 3:13-14). We, however, are asked to make a more radical commitment. More than ever, we are being reminded to be instruments of mercy, knowing that we will be judged on this. The joy of crossing through the Door of Mercy must be accompanied by our commitment to give practical and concrete witness to acts merciful love.¹²

“Merciful like the Father” is the “motto” of this Holy Year, and it sets the agenda for every disciple: to foster “the

¹² Cf. Francis, Homily at Opening of the Holy Door at the Lateran Basilica (13 December 2015).

revolution of tenderness.”¹³

In this Holy Year, let's open the doors of our hearts ever wider to those living on the fringes of society. Let us heal their wounds with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity.

We answer their cry by practising more frequently and deliberately the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Jesus introduces us to these works of mercy in his preaching, so that we can know whether or not we are living as his disciples. Throughout his life Jesus responded with mercy: he healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and fed the hungry. He grieved when his friend Lazarus died, accepted patiently the human weaknesses of his disciples and forgave those who crucified him.

¹³ Francis, Interview with *Credere*, official Jubilee publication.

The corporal works of mercy to which we are called reflect what Jesus did. We, too, are to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger, heal the sick, visit the imprisoned, and bury the dead. And let us not forget the spiritual works of mercy: to counsel the doubtful, instruct the ignorant, admonish sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offences, bear patiently those who do us ill, and pray for the living and the dead.¹⁴

In each of these “little ones,” Christ himself is present. Let us not forget the words of Saint John of the Cross: “as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love.”¹⁵

Conclusion

As we continue this Eucharist, we implore the assistance of the Blessed Virgin Mary who, at the foot of the Cross, attested that the mercy of Jesus is boundless and extends to everyone, that we may live this Jubilee of Mercy as a time of personal reconciliation with God, of healing in our families and of forgiveness in our world. May she never tire of turning her merciful eyes towards us, and so make us worthy to contemplate the face of divine mercy in her Son Jesus.

¹⁴ Cf. Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, 15.

¹⁵ St. John of the Cross, *Words of Light and Love*, 57.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver