

## Jubilee Year of Mercy – An Overview

Pope Francis has declared the Jubilee Year of Mercy – also called the Holy Year of Mercy – to begin Dec. 8. We've had a few "special" years recently – the Year for Priests (6/19/09-6/19/10), the Year of Faith (10/11/12-11/24/13), and the Year of Consecrated Life (11/30/14-2/2/16). So what's special about a Jubilee (Holy) Year that sets it apart from other named years?

Perhaps the first thing is that the Church has been celebrating Jubilees for more than 700 years, since 1300. During this time, both traditions and ceremonials have been developed for observing Jubilees. They are marked by pilgrimages to Basilicas in and around Rome, where special Holy Doors are opened for the pilgrims to pass through. Jubilee Indulgences are available for pilgrims who fulfill certain additional requirements. There are also solemn closings of the Holy Doors at the end of each Jubilee Year.

Beginning with 1475, Jubilee Years have been celebrated every 25 years, except for 1800 and 1850, when they were not declared due to political circumstances. There have also been 5 extraordinary Jubilees – in 1628 and 1629 (to pray for peace in northern Italy), 1933 (1900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Christ's death), 1966 (Vatican II's completion), and 1983 (1,950 years since Christ's death). The Jubilee Year of Mercy is the 30<sup>th</sup> Jubilee and the 6<sup>th</sup> extraordinary one.

The Jubilee Year of Mercy is unique in several ways:

- Although it has a Roman dimension, its main expression and realization will be at the local church level, with each diocese having at least one Holy Door site.
- It is based on a theme, the call to mercy.
- Missionaries of Mercy will be designated for every diocese.
- There will be special Jubilee celebrations for specific groups of people, such as workers and volunteers of Mercy, youth, those in consecrated life, those who work at shrines, priests, deacons, the sick and disabled, and catechists. It is hoped to even have a Jubilee celebration for prisoners in Rome next November.
- Pope Francis hopes to foster dialogue this year with Judaism and Islam, each of which emphasize that God is Merciful.

The most important thing about this Jubilee Year is that its activities are not just for the edification or personal sanctification of the participants. That's only the first step – we experience God's mercy so we can be a sign and instrument of it for others. We, as Church, must show more evidence of God's presence and closeness to the world.

*A year in which to be touched by the Lord Jesus and to be transformed by his mercy, **so that we may become witnesses to mercy.** Here, then, is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone, everyone, the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.*

*-- Pope Francis, Homily on 4/11/15 (emphasis added)*