

Jubilee of Mercy – Pilgrimage

One of the key religious practices during the Jubilee Year is making a pilgrimage to a Holy Door site. Such a pilgrimage has been an important part of Jubilee years since their beginning in 1300, when daily visits to the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul were required to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence. Residents of Rome had to make these visits for 30 days; others, for 15 days. The Basilicas of St. John Lateran and St. Mary Major were added in 1350 and 1390, respectively, and the four remain the principal Jubilee sites to this day. However, this year, as in 2000, there are additional Holy Door sites in dioceses throughout the world, enabling everyone to more easily make a pilgrimage.

A pilgrimage is not just a fancy tourist vacation or an exotic travel opportunity. It is a journey to a place of some religious significance – a shrine, a location where a religious leader lived or worked or died, or where it is believed that God is present in a special way. Most religions have designated pilgrimage sites for their members. The Holy Land was the first pilgrimage area for Christians, visiting the places where Jesus lived and taught as early as the Fourth Century. Rome, associated with Saints Peter and Paul and the early Christian martyrs, became a popular and more accessible pilgrimage site for European Catholics.

A pilgrimage is meaningful not only because of its destination, but also because of the pilgrim's internal disposition. One must accept the pilgrimage as a goal worthy of the effort needed to reach it – an act of faith. The prospective pilgrim recognizes that dedication and even sacrifice may be required to complete the pilgrimage, and makes that commitment. The journey may move the pilgrim to a personal conversion, resolved to more closely reflect in one's life the values experienced. For this Jubilee of Mercy, that would mean embracing God's mercy and being resolved to be merciful with others as the Father has been with us. Hence this Jubilee's motto: "Merciful Like the Father."

A pilgrimage also has symbolic meaning: our whole life is a pilgrimage, for we are always traveling to our eternal destination. We are not "home" until we reach the fullness of God's Kingdom. Individual pilgrimages can reflect – and help shape – the direction of our life's journey.

How do we make our pilgrimage to the Holy Doors of Mercy? Not just by getting in our cars and driving to a designated place – that's the physical method. But there are spiritual "steps" that are more to the point. Pope Francis sees them in Luke 6:37-38: "Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back." Don't judge or condemn – accept the good in every person and realize that you don't know everything about him or her. Forgive, as you have been forgiven by the Father. Give generously to others, for God in his infinite generosity has showered us all with his goodness. With such steps, we can pass through the Holy Doors, experience the Father's mercy, and witness to it.