

THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY: LENT AND RECONCILIATION

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him.”

With these words from the very first paragraph of Pope Francis’ Bull of Indiction, *Misericordiae Vultus* (MV), proclaiming the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, we see the heart of what we celebrate this year: that God’s mercy is brought to us in Jesus Christ. The closer we come to Jesus, the Son of God, and the more intimately we know Him, the more we will experience the unbelievable richness of the Father’s mercy.

The Holy Father has given the Church an extraordinary gift in the Year of Mercy. The word “mercy” reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Mercy is the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy is what connects God and His children, because His mercy opens our hearts “to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.” (MV 2) Indeed, this Year of Mercy is a special time for the Church, “a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.” (MV 3)

Isn’t that a great challenge for us – that we might become more effective witnesses of mercy? Imagine if we could really do that! Maybe that’s a good Lenten project for each and every one of us: to become a more effective witness of mercy!

We know that Lent prepares us for the celebration of Easter, either by preparing us for the Sacraments of Initiation, or by preparing us to recall our own Baptism. Doing penance is central to this. However, if we are going to truly live Lent and not just “observe” it, we must make a true response to God’s call to renewal, and accept the spiritual challenge to cooperate with God’s grace by making a decision, a plan and a continuous effort.

To really live this Jubilee Year in keeping with its motto “Merciful like the Father,” we must experience the proof of God’s love for us: “He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him.” (MV 14)

The Sacrament of Penance is for us one of the most powerful ways (or proofs!) we have of experiencing the mercy of God, and of renewing our baptismal dedication and dignity. Through the mercy of God, that sacrament becomes the opportunity to restore baptismal innocence, an innocence that becomes marred by sin.

We should always use this time of Lent for conversion and reconciliation in order to experience the richness of the Father’s mercy and, come Easter, celebrate the Paschal Mystery of the Lord’s death and resurrection with minds and hearts renewed by God’s mercy. ✠



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Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

415 Michigan Avenue NE, Suite 70 ✠ Washington, DC 20017 ✠ (202) 635-6990 ✠ www.fdlc.org