

# **Adult Catechism Class January 4, 2016**

## *The Year of Mercy: Merciful Like the Father*

### **Part 1: Scripture Readings:**

**Psalm 86: 4-7:** Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication. In the day of my trouble I call on you, for you will answer me.

**Luke 6:32-36:** “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

**Ephesians 2: 4-7:** But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

**1 Peter 1: 3-5:** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time

### **Part 2: What is the Year of Mercy?**

The Pope Francis announced during the second anniversary of his pontificate, that there will be an extraordinary jubilee year dedicated to mercy. The announcement came during the Holy Father’s homily at a Lenten penitential service at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. “Dear brothers and sisters, I have thought about how the Church can make clear its mission of being a witness of mercy,” “It’s a journey that starts with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to declare an Extraordinary Jubilee that has the mercy of God at its center. It will be a Holy Year of Mercy.” Luke 6:36, “Be merciful as your Father is merciful,” will be the verse for the year. “I am convinced that the whole Church will be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and making fruitful the mercy of God, with which we are all called to give consolation to every man and every woman of our time.” He then entrusted the Holy Year to Mary, Mother of Mercy. Since 1475, the Church has celebrated a jubilee year every 25 years. Extraordinary

jubilee years can be declared at any time by the pope, and are usually special anniversaries or commemorate special reasons to celebrate. The Year of Mercy will be the 29th jubilee or “Holy” year in the history of the Church. Jubilee years begin with an official declaration in front of the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica, one of four Holy Doors in Rome that are sealed from the inside except during Holy Years. Pope Francis made that declaration on Divine Mercy Sunday, the Sunday after Easter (March 29). The Holy Year began on December 8th, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, and will end on Nov. 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ King of the Universe. The opening of the Holy Year also marked the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second Vatican Council, something the official Vatican News Agency said is “of great significance, for it impels the Church to continue the work begun at Vatican II.” Mercy is also the particular emphasis of Pope Francis. These are the official words of Pope Francis when he made the announcement for the Year of Mercy: *The Holy Year will open on 8 December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This liturgical feast day recalls God’s action from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. So he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (cf. Eph 1:4), choosing her to be the Mother of man’s Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, the Holy Door will become a Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instils hope. On the following Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Holy Door of the Cathedral of Rome – that is, the Basilica of Saint John Lateran – will be opened. In the following weeks, the Holy Doors of the other Papal Basilicas will be opened. On the same Sunday, I will announce that in every local Church, at the cathedral – the mother church of the faithful in any particular area – or, alternatively, at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance, a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year. At the discretion of the local ordinary, a similar door may be opened at any Shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion. Every Particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal. Thus the Jubilee will be celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches as a visible sign of the Church’s universal communion. The Jubilee year will close with the liturgical Solemnity of Christ the King on 20 November 2016. On that day, as we seal the Holy Door, we shall be filled, above all, with a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving to the Most Holy Trinity for having granted us an extraordinary time of grace. We will entrust the life of the Church, all humanity, and the entire cosmos to the Lordship of Christ, asking him to pour out his mercy upon us like the morning dew, so that everyone may work together to build a brighter future. How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!*

### **Part 3: What is Mercy?**

With the announcement of a Year of Mercy by Pope Francis, we should start by asking ourselves "what is mercy?" And let us follow up that question with another: "what does mercy require of me?" Far too many think mercy is a nothing more than a complacency with sin in practice: "God loves me. I am forgiven. I can go and not feel bad about my sins." On the contrary, true mercy is found in prayer and penance. It is found in our spiritual works of mercy: admonishing sinners to repent, go to Confession, and reunite themselves with the Sacraments. True mercy is not a "feel good ideal" similar to how the protestants view salvation. True mercy is inseparable from Catholic notions of penance. Bishop Fellay in his Letter of May 2015 provided a reflection on True Mercy. The following an except from that document: What exactly is [mercy] about? In itself mercy is a word that is dear to the heart of every Catholic, because it designates the most touching manifestation of God's love for us. In past centuries the apparitions of the Sacred Heart were nothing but a more intense revelation of this mercy of God toward mankind. The same must be said about devotion to the Sorrowful and Immaculate Heart of Mary. Nevertheless, true mercy, which implies this initial, extremely touching movement of God toward the sinner and His misery, continues in a moment of the creature's conversion to God: "God desires not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (cf. Ezek 33:11). Hence the Gospels insist on the duty of conversion, renunciation and penance. Our Lord went so far as to say: "Unless you do penance, you shall all perish" (cf. Lk 13:5). This call to conversion is the heart of the Gospel, which we find in St. John the Baptist as well as in St. Peter. When sinners, touched by preaching, ask what they must do, they hear only this recommendation: "be converted and do penance." The Blessed Virgin in her apparitions in recent centuries, both in La Salette and in Lourdes or Fatima, says nothing different: "prayer and penance". Now the new preachers of a new mercy insist so much on the first step taken by God toward human beings who are lost because of sin, ignorance and misery that they too often omit this second movement, which must come from the creature: repentance, conversion, the rejection of sin. Ultimately, the new mercy is nothing but complacency about sin. God loves you... no matter what. As Pope Francis said, "We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it."

### **Part 4: What are we to do during the Year of Mercy?**

Again, according to Pope Francis: *Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church's very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church "has an endless desire to show mercy." Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to*

*have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instils in us the courage to look to the future with hope. The Church's first truth is the love of Christ. The Church makes herself a servant of this love and mediates it to all people: a love that forgives and expresses itself in the gift of one's self. Consequently, wherever the Church is present, the mercy of the Father must be evident. In our parishes, communities, associations and movements, in a word, wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an oasis of mercy.*

*We want to live this Jubilee Year in light of the Lord's words: Merciful like the Father. The Evangelist reminds us of the teaching of Jesus who says, "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). It is a programme of life as demanding as it is rich with joy and peace. Jesus's command is directed to anyone willing to listen to his voice (cf. Lk 6:27). In order to be capable of mercy, therefore, we must first of all dispose ourselves to listen to the Word of God. This means rediscovering the value of silence in order to meditate on the Word that comes to us. In this way, it will be possible to contemplate God's mercy and adopt it as our lifestyle.*

*The practice of pilgrimage has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a viator, a pilgrim travelling along the road, making his way to the desired destination. Similarly, to reach the Holy Door in Rome or in any other place in the world, everyone, each according to his or her ability, will have to make a pilgrimage. This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us. The Lord asks us above all not to judge and not to condemn. If anyone wishes to avoid God's judgement, he should not make himself the judge of his brother or sister. Human beings, whenever they judge, look no farther than the surface, whereas the Father looks into the very depths of the soul. How much harm words do when they are motivated by feelings of jealousy and envy! To speak ill of others puts them in a bad light, undermines their reputation and leaves them prey to the whims of gossip. To refrain from judgement and condemnation means, in a positive sense, to know how to accept the good in every person and to spare him any suffering that might be caused by our partial judgment and our presumption to know everything about him. But this is still not sufficient to express mercy. Jesus asks us also to forgive and to give. To be instruments of mercy because it was we who first received mercy from God. To be generous with others, knowing that God showers his goodness upon us with immense generosity.*

*It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God's 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. Let us rediscover these corporal works of mercy: 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.*

*A “year of the Lord’s favour” or “mercy”: this is what the Lord proclaimed and this is what we wish to live now. This Holy Year will bring to the fore the richness of Jesus’ mission echoed in the words of the prophet: to bring a word and gesture of consolation to the poor, to proclaim liberty to those bound by new forms of slavery in modern society, to restore sight to those who can see no more because they are caught up in themselves, to restore dignity to all those from whom it has been robbed. The preaching of Jesus is made visible once more in the response of faith Christians are called to offer by their witness. May the words of the Apostle accompany us: He who does acts of mercy, let him do them with cheerfulness (cf. Rom 12:8).*

*The season of Lent during this Jubilee Year should also be lived more intensely as a privileged moment to celebrate and experience God’s mercy. How many pages of Sacred Scripture are appropriate for meditation during the weeks of Lent to help us rediscover the merciful face of the Father! We can repeat the words of the prophet Micah and make them our own: You, O Lord, are a God who takes away iniquity and pardons sin, who does not hold your anger forever, but are pleased to show mercy. You, Lord, will return to us and have pity on your people. You will trample down our sins and toss them into the depths of the sea (cf. 7:18-19).*

*The initiative of “24 Hours for the Lord,” to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the Fourth Week of Lent, should be implemented in every diocese. So many people, including the youth, are returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation; through this experience they are rediscovering a path back to the Lord, living a moment of intense prayer and finding meaning in their lives. Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God’s mercy with their own hands. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace.*

*I will never tire of insisting that confessors be authentic signs of the Father’s mercy. We do not become good confessors automatically. We become good confessors when, above all, we allow ourselves to be penitents in search of his mercy. Let us never forget that to be confessors means to participate in the very mission of Jesus to be a concrete sign of the constancy of divine love that pardons and saves. We priests have received the gift of the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, and we are responsible for this. None of us wields power over this Sacrament; rather, we are faithful servants of God’s mercy through it. Every confessor must accept the faithful as the father in the parable of the prodigal son: a father who runs out to meet his son despite the fact that he has squandered away his inheritance. Confessors are called to embrace the repentant son who comes back home and to express the joy of having him back again. Let us never tire of also going out to the other son who stands outside, incapable of rejoicing, in order to explain to*

*him that his judgment is severe and unjust and meaningless in light of the father's boundless mercy. May confessors not ask useless questions, but like the father in the parable, interrupt the speech prepared ahead of time by the prodigal son, so that confessors will learn to accept the plea for help and mercy gushing from the heart of every penitent. In short, confessors are called to be a sign of the primacy of mercy always, everywhere, and in every situation, no matter what.*

*May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy. I direct this invitation to conversion even more fervently to those whose behaviour distances them from the grace of God. I particularly have in mind men and women belonging to criminal organizations of any kind. For their own good, I beg them to change their lives. I ask them this in the name of the Son of God who, though rejecting sin, never rejected the sinner. Do not fall into the terrible trap of thinking that life depends on money and that, in comparison with money, anything else is devoid of value or dignity. This is nothing but an illusion! We cannot take money with us into the life beyond. Money does not bring us happiness. Violence inflicted for the sake of amassing riches soaked in blood makes one neither powerful nor immortal. Everyone, sooner or later, will be subject to God's judgment, from which no one can escape.*

*This is the opportune moment to change our lives! This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched! When confronted with evil deeds, even in the face of serious crimes, it is the time to listen to the cry of innocent people who are deprived of their property, their dignity, their feelings, and even their very lives. To stick to the way of evil will only leave one deluded and sad. True life is something entirely different. God never tires of reaching out to us. He is always ready to listen, as I am too, along with my brother bishops and priests. All one needs to do is to accept the invitation to conversion and submit oneself to justice during this special time of mercy offered by the Church.*

*I present, therefore, this Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us. In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that her primary task, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God's mercy by contemplating the face of Christ. The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ. From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people approach it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness which springs up from it.*