

Frequently Asked Questions

Regarding the Jubilee of Mercy

Q. When does the Jubilee of Mercy begin?

“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. And 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” (MV 3).

Q. When will Pope Francis open the Holy Door? Why did he choose this day?

He will open the Holy Door at St. Peter’s on Tuesday, December 8, 2015. “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 instills hope” (MV 3). The day also has other significance. “I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world” (MV 4).

Q. Will the Pope open any other Holy Doors?

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 (MV 3).

Q. When should our diocese open a holy door at our cathedral?

Each diocese should open a “Door of Mercy” on December 13, the Third Sunday of Advent – the day the Pope opens the holy door at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran. “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” (MV 3) .

Q. May our diocese open more than one holy door?

“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” (MV 3).

Q. When should we close the Holy Door at our cathedral?

The doors should be closed on the Sunday, November 13, 2016 – the same day that the holy doors will be closed in the basilicas in Rome. The holy door at St. Peter’s will be closed on November 20, 2016. Q. When does the Jubilee of Mercy conclude? The Holy Year concludes on November 20, 2016 -- the Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe (cf. MV 5).

Q. Does the Jubilee of Mercy have a theme?

“Merciful like the Father... is the ‘motto’ of this Holy Year. This is a shortened version of the verse in Scripture, “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (Luke 6:36). The Pope wrote, “In mercy, we find proof of how God loves us. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him. What a beautiful thing that the Church begins her daily prayer with the words, “O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me” (Ps 70:2)! The assistance we ask for is already

the first step of God's mercy toward us. He comes to assist us in our weakness. And his help consists in helping us accept his presence and closeness to us. Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become compassionate towards others"(14).

Q. How is this Jubilee of Mercy different from other Jubilee Years?

Traditionally, a jubilee year is celebrated to mark twenty-five years or fifty years or an important anniversary, such as the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Christ in 2000. But Archbishop Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, makes some important distinctions: "In order to avoid any misunderstanding, it is important to reiterate that this Jubilee of Mercy is not and does not intend to be the Great Jubilee Year of 2000. Therefore, any comparisons lack validity, for every Holy Year possesses its own unique nature and aims. "It is the Pope's desire that this Jubilee be celebrated in Rome as well as in the local Churches; this will give due focus to the life of individual Churches and their needs, in such a way that the initiatives will not place an extra burden on local Churches, but will blend into their calendars and usual activities very naturally. "Also, for the first time in the history of the Jubilee tradition, there will be an opportunity for individual dioceses to open a Holy Door – the Door of Mercy – either in the Cathedral or in a church of special significance or a shrine of particular importance for pilgrimages. "Similarly, it is easy to cull other characteristics from the Bull of Indiction that will make this Jubilee unique. From the very beginning, however, the call to mercy breaks with the traditional pattern. The history of Jubilees has been marked by their occurrence every 50 or 25 years. The two Extraordinary Jubilees fell on anniversaries of Christ's redemptive act (1933, 1983). This Jubilee, however, is based upon a theme. It will build upon the central content of the faith and intends to call the Church once again to its missionary priority of being a sign and witness in every aspect of its pastoral life. I also have in mind Pope Francis' appeal to Judaism and Islam as loci in which to contextualize the theme of mercy in order to foster dialogue and a way of overcoming difficulties in the public realm.

Q. Are there other special days which our diocese should celebrate?

Pope Francis has named special days of jubilee throughout the year – for youth, for workers and volunteers of mercy, for prisoners, for deacons, for priests, for the sick and persons with disabilities, etc. In addition, there are special events, e.g., "Twenty-four Hours for the Lord" on March 4-5, with special emphasis on the sacrament of reconciliation. It is the intention of the Holy Father that these be celebrated also in dioceses throughout the world.

Q. What are "Missionaries of Mercy"?

On Ash Wednesday, February 10, 2016, at St. Peter's Basilica, the Pope will send out "Missionaries of Mercy," i.e., selected priests who have been granted the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See. The priests will be selected on the basis of their ability to preach well (especially on the theme of mercy) and on their ability to be "good confessors," expressing God's love in the confessional. Bishops can also recommend priests in their own dioceses to serve as missionaries of mercy.

Q. Does the Year of Mercy have an official website?

The official website for the Jubilee has already been launched: www.iubilaeummisericordiae.va, and can be accessed also at www.im.va. The site is available in seven languages: Italian, English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and Polish. On the site you will find official information regarding the calendar of the major public events, information for participating in the events with the Holy Father, and all of the official communications regarding the Jubilee. Also, through the site, dioceses will be able to receive information and pastoral suggestions, register pilgrimage groups, and relay to us their local diocesan projects. The website uses a number of social networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google Plus and Flickr) through which we will be able to provide updates on the Holy Father's initiative and follow in real time the major events as they take place.