

# THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

## “OPEN WIDE THE DOORS”

In this, the final writing in our series regarding the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, we come to the event which will unite the Archdiocese of Omaha with the Holy Father in Rome through the act of unsealing and opening the Holy Doors of the St. Cecilia's Cathedral.

In 1423, Pope Martin V opened the Holy Door of St. John Lateran for the first time in the history of Jubilees. In 1499, Pope Alexander VI requested that not only the Holy Door in Rome be opened, but all doors of all cathedrals in the world. For this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, the Holy Father has instructed that in each diocese, the Bishop designate one church (typically the cathedral) as a pilgrimage site, and open the Door of Mercy to the people of the diocese in that location. The celebration of the opening of the Holy Door has certain elements which give light to the nature of this celebration. It shows us the mystery of God, rich in mercy and compassion, manifested and brought about in Christ, the face of the Father's mercy, continually at work through the gift of the Holy Spirit. We see to a recognition of Christ as the sole door through which we enter seeking salvation, and the one that opens wide the way which leads to the Father. Finally, we encounter our own nature as Christian pilgrims, a Church who lives in ongoing and perpetual pilgrimage toward “Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Ben 13:8).

The diocesan bishop celebrates this event together with his flock, as is fitting in his connection of Episcopal consecration with the Bishop of Rome, and in the Bishop's stational church, the cathedral. The gesture that marks the beginning of the Holy Year is the opening of these Holy Doors, along with the solemn procession, led by the Bishop, of the local church – clergy and laity together – into the cathedral, which is the Mother Church of all the faithful, and where the Bishop, as pastor of the diocese, exercises his office of teacher and leader to the fullest, guiding his ecclesial community toward the visage of Christ.

The liturgy is composed of five parts apart from the Liturgy of Vespers. We will begin, weather permitting, in another location apart from the church, referred to as a *statio* or stational. There, the Archbishop will greet the pilgrim faithful, exhorting them to keep their eyes fixed on the face of Jesus. He prays a prayer, and the Gospel from Luke is proclaimed – “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.” Then, the Archbishop reads the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee Year. He then leads his people on a short procession to the Holy Door. The Archbishop, stopping at the Holy Door, unseals it, saying the words of the Psalm, “Open the gates of justice, we shall enter and give thanks to the Lord.” As the doors are opened, he invites the people to walk with him and enter the church, “This is the Lord's gate: let us enter through it and obtain mercy and forgiveness.”

As we enter, we encounter the face of Jesus in the icon which awaits us in the central aisle. As the Bishop leads us to Jesus, so Jesus leads us deeper into the church, and deeper into the bosom of the Father where we encounter his love and mercy. The icon is then incensed, along with the altar, where the sacrifice of Christ which made mercy possible is celebrated. The liturgy of Vespers is then celebrated (described last week) and our Archbishop, in his homily, teaches us about the mercy of the Father. “Hear my voice, LORD, when I call; have mercy on me and answer me. ‘Come,’ says my heart, ‘seek his face’; your face, LORD, do I seek! Hide not your face from me.” (Ps. 27)

Fr. James Netusil, 2015

*“In this Jubilee Year, may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: “Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (Ps 25:6).”*

*Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, 2015*