

THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY “EXTRAORDINARY JUBILATION”

As we approach this Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy in the Church, it is important that we know what a Jubilee Year is, why this one is extraordinary, and why the Holy Father decreed it at this time in history.

The idea of a “Year of Jubilee” finds its origins in Judaism. The word, most certainly, is a derivation of the Hebrew word “jobel” meaning “ram’s horn”, signifying the instrument which was sounded to indicate the beginning of a significant time. The Israelites as far back as the time of Moses set aside certain years either as years of celebration, or years of atonement and remission or pardon. In the book of Leviticus we find, “You shall treat this fiftieth year as sacred. You shall proclaim liberty in the land for all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to your own property, each of you to your own family.” For the Israelites, each seventh year was counted as each seventh day, as a year of rest or *Sabbath*. The same idea formed the fundamental notion of the Jubilee year for Catholics. The first Year of Jubilee in the Church was instituted in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII, carrying with it greater indulgences for pilgrims completing certain requirements such as a pilgrimage visit to a certain church, certain prayers said, etc. These indulgences continue in the current Church, and with the current Year of Mercy, with clear requirements given to pilgrims for the reception of the indulgence. First the person must be baptized. The person must not have been excommunicated because if they were they would not be able to participate in the Church’s indulgences and moments of public prayer. The faithful must be in a state of grace at the time the requirements are completed and have the interior disposition of complete detachment from sin, even venial sin. They must obtain sacramental confession and receive Holy Communion within several days. They must pray for the intentions of the Holy Father.

Why is this Year of Mercy considered an “extraordinary” Jubilee Year? Simply stated, this year does not fall within the typical cycle of jubilee years as decreed by the Church. The last Jubilee Year decreed by the Church under Pope John Paul II was the Great Jubilee of the Millennial Year 2000. While extraordinary Jubilee Years are not unknown, only years aligning with the 50 year cycle are considered “ordinary”.

Fr. James Netusil, 2015

“The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.”

Pope Francis, Misericordiae Vultus, 2015