



Year of Mercy

"Mercy is the very foundation of the Church's life," Pope Francis tells us. "It is absolutely essential for the . . . credibility of [the Church's] message that she herself *live and testify* to mercy." Christians will not persuade unbelievers that our God is merciful if our lives give witness to harshness and unforgiveness. Instead, Pope Francis says, "wherever there are Christians, everyone should find an *oasis* of mercy" – a place where weary travelers on the road of life find rest and refreshment because they are met with acceptance and forgiveness.

To encourage us to take the mercy of God to heart ourselves and to inspire others to "find the road that leads to the Father," Pope Francis has proclaimed a Jubilee Year of Mercy to begin on the feast of the Immaculate Conception and conclude on the feast of Christ the King in 2016.

The motto of the Holy Year is "Merciful like the Father." Our Father is merciful because He is Almighty; He is more than strong enough to absorb the blows of our sins and restore us to friendship, for with Him "all things are possible." In the words of Pope Francis, "no one can place limits on the . . . God who is ever ready to forgive." His mercy "is a spring that will *never* run dry, no matter how many people approach it."

"Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy," Pope Francis continues. "Everything in him speaks of mercy." Our Lord's last, agonizing

hours were nothing but a sustained plea for mercy: "Forgive them," he begged his Father as he was nailed to the Cross, "for they know not what they do." How could the Father of Mercies close His ears to this cry of His merciful Son?

It is the desire of Pope Francis "that the year to come will be *steeped* in mercy" and that "the balm of mercy reach *everyone*, both believers and those far away." This is where we come in, you and I; for God wants to touch others mercifully through us. But for that to happen we must first be touched by his merciful love ourselves. We must let ourselves be found anew by God's forgiveness so that He can pass it along through us to others. As Pope Francis puts it, "pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart."

As we well know, however, the attainment of a merciful heart does not come automatically or easily. It is a goal that demands dedication and sacrifice. To encourage this crucial dimension of the Year of Mercy, the Holy Father will open a specially designated Holy Door at St. Peter's in Rome. He has asked bishops to follow his example and open Holy Doors in their dioceses as well. I will do so at the Cathedral in Baker City and at the Chapel at the Diocesan Retreat Center in Powell Butte. One or the other of these sites is reachable from almost every parish in the Diocese at the cost of no more than a three-hour drive. Those of you who sacrifice your time to make the trip will discover the Holy Door to be a Door of Mercy. Pilgrimage that leads to its threshold will be for you "an impetus to conversion." For the Holy Door opens to the confessional, to forgiveness of sins, to reconciliation with God and neighbor, to the serenity of a merciful heart.

The mercy we find along the way of our pilgrimage through the Holy Year we must give away as freely as it is given to us. To learn how to do so, Pope Francis encourages intense reflection throughout the Church on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, bearing in mind the question we will ask on Judgement Day—“Lord, *when* did we seek you hungry or thirsty or naked?”—and the words we will hear in reply: “As often as you did this for the least of my brethren, you did it for me.”

All of us in the Diocese of Baker can actively anticipate this dialogue by patiently raising a simple question over and over: “Lord, who *are* the poor— the poor you wish *us* to attend to here and now?” Follow up this simple question with a simple prayer: “Lord, *show* us the poor. Open our minds and hearts and hands that we may accompany them on the way of your mercy.”

After Easter we will gather to share the answers to this prayer which the Lord may see fit to inspire in us. Then we can take steps to implement his designs for us throughout the Diocese. Who knows what they may be? “In this Jubilee Year,” Pope Francis advises, “let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart”