

## Gaudete Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> Advent C Opening of the Jubilee Year of Mercy

### I. Introduction

Every year, during the season of Advent, the Church rejoices as the feast of Christmas, the birthday of the Lord, draws near. Listening to the voice of the Lord, the Church invites us to share in a joy that is even greater than the problems and anxieties that beset us and the dangers that threaten our world. During this season of the year, we can sense that peace, that good will, that joy which was signaled by the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, over 2,000 years ago.

But this year the Church invites us to rejoice even more intensely thanks to a special Holy Year, a Jubilee of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis. Let us take a moment to see what this Jubilee Year of Mercy is all about, why it should bring us joy, and how that joy is reflected in today's Scripture readings. My hope is to call attention to the joy God's mercy brings into our lives and the joy of sharing the mercy we have received with others.

### II. What Is a Jubilee of Mercy?

The custom of the Holy Year has its roots in the Old Testament. Moses decreed that every 50 years a year was to be set aside as a time of forgiveness, rest from labor, & renewed solidarity as a people (Lev. 25:10-15). The Church began a similar custom as far back as far as 1300, and tied the Holy Year to special anniversaries of the Lord's birth. It included opening a special church door, known as the Holy Door coupled with encouragement to come to Rome to pray at the tombs of the Apostles. Holy Years were to be times of special focus on God's mercy, exceptional opportunities to seek forgiveness of sin, healing from the lingering effects of sin in our lives, and a deeper unity with Christ and with His Church.

At first holy years were proclaimed at the beginning of each new century but later Popes began to call for them more frequently, every 25 years or so. Some of you may remember the last major Holy Year in the Year 2000 which celebrated the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Christian millennium. St. John Paul II saw it as a pivotal time of deep renewal for Church and her mission.

Occasionally Popes have also proclaimed special Holy Years, and the Jubilee of Mercy of Pope Francis is a case in point. As if looking deeply into our hearts and looking deeply into the heart of our divided and torn world, Pope Francis has sensed our need to encounter the Lord in a more personal way, whom he calls "the face of the Father's mercy." "At times," he wrote, "we are called to gaze more attentively on [God's] mercy so that we may be a more effective sign of the Father's action in our lives" (MV, 3).

So, at the beginning of Mass, we spiritually join Pope Francis in opening the specially designed Holy Door, the Door of Mercy, in this Cathedral // Basilica. By solemnly opening the Holy Door and reverently walking through it, we symbolize that God has opened his heart to us in love, a merciful love, that "consoles, pardons, and instills hope" (ibid). The Holy Door leads us into the interior of the Church which proclaims God's mercy as "the beating heart of the Gospel" (MV, 12), shares with us God's overflowing mercies and

healing power through the Sacraments, and extends God's mercy through works of education, healing, and charity. Let us consider this an invitation from Pope Francis to share more deeply in the "endless desire" of the Church to proclaim & share God's mercy (MV, 9). So in the year ahead consider going on pilgrimage to Rome (if you can swing it) or on pilgrimage to specially designed churches throughout the Archdiocese. Please plan to make good use of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to take advantage of the indulgences offered in this special Holy Year, and to engage in the corporal and spiritual works of mercy by which we extend to others the mercy we ourselves have first received.

### III. Mercy and Joy

But why should any of this bring us joy? Isn't the Holy Year all about our need for conversion and repentance? And isn't that a dour and miserable business for most of us?

Well, maybe this will help. Suppose you find yourself on the outs with a very good friend. Maybe you've neglected your friend or in some way offended your friend. Deep down you're unhappy about this but you don't quite know what to do about it. And then one day your friend turns up at your door, and once inside, without embarrassing or demeaning you, speaks words of friendship and forgiveness. Think of the joy you'd experience from that encounter with your friend.

This is how God has treated us. When we squandered his friendship by sin & indifference, he didn't turn away from us. No, God came "in person" by sending his Son, Jesus, into the world. On Jesus face shone the glory of his Father's merciful love. In Jesus God's mercy was visible, audible, and tangible. In preaching Good News, in healing the sick, and dying and rising to save us, Jesus opened the door to the power and beauty of the Father's mercy and made God's mercy the very foundation of the Church's life (MV, 10). This is the love we encounter as we hear the Gospel and share in the Sacraments. And this is why we should rejoice perhaps as never before: Love has found us! Mercy is ours! God's love can and does transform us! As St. Paul said, "If God is for us who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31)

### IV. Light from Today's Scripture

Isn't this the essential message of today's Scripture readings? The prophet Zephaniah in our first reading takes this message a step further. He tells us as God not only shows us his mercy, God also rejoices over us... "The Lord, your God is in your midst, a mighty savior," he says, "He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love."

In the second reading, St. Paul urges us to rejoice and why? Because God's love is stronger, more powerful, and more beautiful than all of our worries and anxieties combined. So he invites us to trust prayerfully in God's mercy as the key that unlocks for us that peace and joy that is beyond all understanding. What joy we feel when we are able to say to a merciful Jesus, "I trust in you!"

And finally in the Gospel, the crowds, looking for the Messiah, ask John the Baptist, "What should we do?" "How should we get ready?" Or, if I may paraphrase, "What should we do to open the door of mercy in our lives?" John the Baptist doesn't give some complicated answer. He tells people that who handled other people's money to be fair and

honest. He told those with power to use it wisely, for the good of others, & not to be greedy. What we should take away from John the Baptist's words is this: God's mercy is in reach, it's available to us in our daily lives, no matter what our calling, no matter what our profession might be. If we strive to go about our daily lives with honesty and integrity, if we look beyond our own needs and focus on the needs of others, then we are opening the door of our hearts to God's merciful love.

#### V. Conclusion

So let us rejoice and let us be glad! With the approach of Christmas, let us take heart and be of good cheer because, with the birth of Mary's Child, a love unlike any other has found us! Let us share that love especially with the poor and vulnerable. Then we will experience the deepest of joy at Christmas and throughout this Jubilee Year of Mercy!