

WELCOME TO THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY 2015-2016

In his official document announcing the establishment of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis declared:

The Holy Year will open on 8th December 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. The 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. So he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love (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. I will have the joy of opening the Holy Doors 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 instils hope.

Five days ago after celebrating the Holy Mass in St. Peter's Square. Vatican City, Holiness, Pope Francis solemnly blessed and opened the Holy Door of Mercy that leads into the Basilica Church of St. Peter. Thanks to the live coverage of the event through the Eternal Word of Television Network (EWTN), millions of Catholic Faithful across the world witnessed the inauguration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy in Rome by Pope Francis. In the same official document, The Face of Mercy - *Misericordiae Vultus* – announcing the establishment of the Jubilee Year of Mercy Pope Francis had equally declared:

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.

... On the same Sunday, in every local church, at the Cathedral – the Mother Church of the faithful in and particular area - ... a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year. ... Every particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as 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.

It is with a spirit of gratitude and amazement that I invite you to the inauguration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, 2015 – 2016, in the Archdiocese of Owerri. I welcome you specifically on this Third Sunday of Advent, 13th December 2015, to the historic opening of the Jubilee Door of Mercy at the Maria Assumpta Cathedral, the Mother Church of the Archdiocese of Owerri and of the Ecclesiastical Province.

With the renovation going on for nearly four years we had hoped to enter the Cathedral on Christmas day, 25th December 2015. But the directive of the Holy Father that a Jubilee Door of Mercy be opened in every Cathedral on the 3rd Sunday of Advent, 13th December, brought an instant change of date. The Cathedral Renovation Committee immediately accepted the challenge and set up sub-committee for quickened action to ensure that we enter the Jubilee Door of Mercy of the Maria Assumpta Cathedral on this third Sunday of Advent as directed by the Holy Father.

The sudden announcement of a specific date of entry and the visible work-signs of readiness to re-enter the Cathedral caused great excitement for all the Faithful of the Archdiocese, especially among those who suffered the inconveniences of the unfavourable weather within the Obiri Odenigbo refugee-resort, during these four years. The grace coming from the announced Jubilee Year of Mercy, the excitement about our re-entry into the Cathedral, and now, our procession from the Obiri Odenigbo Pavilion through the Jubilee Year Door of Mercy into the newly renovated Maria Assumpta Cathedral, all combine to draw us all, Holy-Spirited, penitently, gratefully and providentially into the Sanctuary of Divine Mercy in Christ and into the Furnace-Fountain of Mercy ever-flowing from the Loving Heart of God Our Father.

The Third Sunday of Advent is known as Gaudete – Rejoice – Sunday. It is indeed very providential that we are re-entering our Cathedral on this Sunday, Full of Mercy and Redemption, on this Sunday calling on everyone to rejoice. The Antiphon of the Mass sets the tone of today's liturgy. It is an extract from today's second reading:

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice in near (Phi 4:4-5)

The first reading invites us to “shout for joy”, to “sing joyfully” to “be glad and exult with all your heart” as our mighty Saviour comes to “renew you in his love”. The Responsorial Psalm re-echoes the rejoice call, “Cry out with joy and gladness; for among you is the great and Holy One of Israel”. While we really have every cause to rejoice, St. Paul, in the second reading, challenges us as our response to God's overwhelming mercy, “Your kindness should be known to all”. The Gospel with the advent spirit of John the Baptist reminds us of our baptismal promises to worship God, to do the right and to practise the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

Our entry through our Marian Jubilee Door of Mercy into the heart of the Cathedral – Jesus' Seat of Mercy – is clearly a conversion-renewal event and summons. That is why indulgences – God's fatherly outreach through the Church to pardon us sinners and to free us from the temporal punishment due to our sins, is emphasised, in addition to frequent confession, regular Holy Communion and daily upright living.

As we re-make our baptismal promises today and as we are thoroughly refreshed and renewed through this Holy Eucharist Celebration and Inauguration of the Jubilee Year of Mercy, let us learn more and more to be merciful as God the Father so that we may truly become missionaries of Mercy.

God bless and enrich you with His Mercy.

His Mercy Endures Forever!

Blessed are the Merciful...!

Once again, Rejoice! Welcome to the Jubilee Year of Mercy 2015 to 2016.

+Anthony J.V.Obinna

Catholic Archbishop of Owerri

