



JUBILEE OF MERCY MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



Press Conference

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It has been almost two months now since Pope Francis opened the Holy Door of St. Peter's. Since that moment, the Doors of Mercy have been opened all around the world. The incredible number of people who have registered for these events allows us to acknowledge how this insight of Pope Francis, his idea of having this Extraordinary Jubilee, has answered a true need of the people of God who are receiving this event of grace with great joy and enthusiasm. We can conclude from this participation that the Jubilee is being intensely lived in all the world and in every local Church, where this time of grace is being organized as a genuine form of renewal for the Church and as a particular moment of the new evangelization.

Every day we receive thousands of pictures and documents from around the world attesting to the commitment and the faith of believers. Yet all of this activity has not stopped a substantial number of pilgrims from arriving in Rome during this period. According to the data available to us on a daily basis, as of today 1,392,000 people have participated in Jubilee events. An interesting detail is that 40% of those who have attended come from abroad, speaking largely Spanish and French. We have registered pilgrims from Bangladesh, Hong Kong, Korea, Kenya, Mozambique, El Salvador, New Zealand, Argentina, Mexico, the Fiji Islands, Russia, Belarus, the Seychelles, the Ivory Coast, Chad, Kuwait, the U.S.A., Albania and from many other countries. I would like to reiterate that this is not the criteria by which to judge the actual outcome of the Jubilee. A Holy Year of mercy goes well beyond numbers, for it is intended to touch the hearts and the minds of people in order to assist them in coming to understand the ways in which God's great love manifests itself in their daily lives. It is a

time during which to assess our lives of faith and to understand how we are capable of conversion and renewal, both of which come from recognizing the importance of remaining focused upon what is essential. In any case, a general evaluation of the Jubilee cannot be made after only two months but must be done at its conclusion. All of the other considerations at the moment are incomplete and temporary and, thus, do not merit particular attention.

During this period, Pope Francis has carried out two particular signs of his concrete witness of mercy. On Friday, December 18, he opened the Door of Charity in the homeless shelter, "Don Luigi di Liegro", where he celebrated Holy Mass in the refectory. On January 15, he visited the nursing home for the aged, "Bruno Buozzi" in Torrespaccata, after which he went to Casa Iride where he spent time with those in vegetative states who are being assisted by their families. These signs possess a symbolic value before all of the many needs that are present in society today. They are, however, intended to stir in all of us a greater awareness of the many situations of need in our cities and to offer a small response of caring and aid.

There are two particular events that now merit our attention. The first pertains to the presence in Rome of the urns containing the relics of Saint Leopold Mandić and Saint Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. Such an occasion is of great significance for it is an unprecedented event, given the stories of these two saints who spent their lives in the service of the mercy of God. Padre Leopold (1866-1942) was canonized by John Paul II on December 16, 1983 and is less well known than Padre Pio. Yet, his hunger for holiness spread beyond the Church of Padua, where he lived the major part of his life and where his memory and his relics remain. Originally from Croatia, this Capuchin father dedicated all of his life to the confessional. For almost thirty years, he spent from ten to fifteen hours a day in the secrecy of his cell, the very place which became a confessional for thousands of people who found in their relationships with him the privileged witness of forgiveness and of mercy. Some of his brothers noted that he was "ignorant and too lenient in forgiving everyone without discernment." Yet, his simple and humble response to this charge leaves one speechless: "Should the Crucified blame me for being lenient, I would answer Him: Lord, you gave me this bad example. I have not yet reached the folly of your having died for souls." Padre Pio (1887-1968), who was canonized in 2002 and also by John Paul II, does not require lengthy presentations. This simple Capuchin friar spent his entire life at San Giovanni Rotondo without ever leaving that town. Certainly, during his life, some in Rome caused him to suffer, but his holiness always prevailed. In the silence of obedience, he also became a privileged witness of mercy, dedicating all of his life to the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We are grateful to the Capuchin Fathers and to the Bishops of the Dioceses of Padoa and Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo for having responded so graciously to the wish of the Pope that the relics of these two saints remain in Rome for a period of time during the Jubilee.

The program is quite simple. The urns containing the relics will arrive in Rome on February 3 where they will be placed in the Church of San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura. The church will be open to the faithful starting at 15:00 with a celebration of reception. The relics will remain in San Lorenzo until 20:30 the following day, during which time there will be a number of celebrations reserved for the vast extended Franciscan Family. An all-night vigil is being organized in the Jubilee Church of San Salvatore in Lauro, which will begin at 22:00 on February 4. The prayer will continue until the following day, February 5, with various celebrations and will conclude with Holy Mass at 14:00 presided by His Excellency Michele Castoro, the Archbishop of Manfredonia-Vieste-San Giovanni Rotondo. At 16:00, a procession with the two urns containing the relics will begin from San Salvatore in Lauro and then proceed the entire length of Via della Conciliazione in order to arrive at the sagrato of St. Peter's Basilica. There on the sagrato, His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Comastri, the Archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, will receive the relics and after a moment of prayer, will then accompany the relics into the Basilica where they will be placed in the central nave before the Altar of the Confession for people to venerate. The relics will remain in St. Peter's for veneration until the morning of February

11 when, after the Holy Mass of thanksgiving at 7:30 am at the Altar of the Chair, they will be returned to their original homes. It is opportune to note that on February 10, Ash Wednesday, the Basilica will remain closed in the morning for the General Audience and then, in the afternoon, Holy Mass will be celebrated in the Basilica to mark the beginning of Lent. Thus, those who wish to venerate the relics are kindly asked to choose to do so on one of the previous days and to follow along the Jubilee reserved walkway in order to enter through the security check point as rapidly as possible.

As previously noted, the second event pertains to the celebration that will take place on Ash Wednesday when the Holy Father will give the mandate to the Missionaries of Mercy. As attested to in the Bull of Indiction, *Misericordiae vultus*, the Missionaries are to be a “sign of the Church’s maternal solicitude for the People of God, enabling them to enter the profound richness of this mystery so fundamental to the faith. There will be priests to whom I will grant the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See, so that the breadth of their mandate as confessors will be even clearer. They will be, above all, living signs of the Father’s readiness to welcome those in search of his pardon. They will be missionaries of mercy because they will be facilitators of a truly human encounter, a source of liberation, rich with responsibility for overcoming obstacles and taking up the new life of Baptism again. They will be led in their mission by the words of the Apostle: ‘For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all’” (*Rom 11:32*).

Thus, the Missionaries of Mercy are a select number of priests who have received from the Pope the charge to be privileged witnesses in their respective Churches of the extraordinariness of this Jubilee event. It is only the Pope who nominates these Missionaries, not the Bishops, and it is he who entrusts them with the mandate to announce the beauty of the mercy of God while being humble and wise confessors who possess a great capacity to forgive those who approach the confessional. The Missionaries, who come from every continent, number over 1,000. I am delighted to announce that there are Missionaries coming from many distant countries and, among these, some of which have a uniquely significant importance such as: Burma, Lebanon, China, South Korea, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, Israel, Burundi, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, Latvia, East Timor, Indonesia, Thailand, and Egypt. There will also be Oriental Rite priests.

We have received a great response for participation but must place a limit on the large number of requests in order to ensure that the specific sign value, one which expresses how truly special the initiative is, be maintained. All of the Missionaries have received the permission of their respective diocesan Bishops or Religious Superiors and will make themselves available to those requesting their services throughout the entirety of the Jubilee but, most especially, during the Lenten Season.

There will be 700 Missionaries arriving in Rome. Pope Francis will meet with them on February 9 in order to express his feelings regarding this initiative which will certainly be one of the most touching and significant of the Jubilee of Mercy. On the following day, only the Missionaries of Mercy will concelebrate with the Holy Father, during which time they will receive the “mandate”, as well as the faculty to absolve those sins reserved to the Holy See. An interesting story may help to capture the pastoral interest that this initiative has garnered around the world. Father Richard from Australia will visit 27 communities in his rural Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle where there is only one church and no priests in residence. Traveling in a camper, he will journey from community to community as a “Missionary of Mercy on Wheels”! This is but an example of the way in which the Jubilee is meant to reach all, allowing everyone to touch the closeness and the tenderness of God.

Finally, regarding other Jubilee events, the first Jubilee Audience will be held in St. Peter’s Square on Saturday, January 30. Pope Francis has responded generously to the many requests he has received from pilgrims who wish to meet him. Consequently, one Saturday a month has been added to the official calendar for a special audience, one which will be in addition to the regular Wednesday

Audiences. This first audience already has 20,000 people registered. Another event of particular interest is the Jubilee for the Curia, the Governorate, and Institutions connected to the Holy See to be held on February 22. This celebration will begin with a reflection given by Father Marco Rupnik at 8:30 am in the Paul VI Hall. After this meditation, there will be a procession through St. Peter's Square which will pass through the Holy Door. Holy Mass will then be celebrated by Pope Francis at 10:00.

The Jubilee continues to following its course and we are certain that, in accord with the desires of Pope Francis, it will be an important occasion "to live out in our daily lives the mercy which the Father constantly extends to all of us."