

# Catholic Review Column: A Holy Year of Mercy

Last Sunday, Pope Francis formally announced an extraordinary Holy Year dedicated to God's mercy. He fittingly chose the second Sunday of Easter, known as Divine Mercy Sunday since the pontificate of St. John Paul II, to invite each of us to look upon the face of the Risen Lord Jesus as the Face of God's Mercy.

The pope designated the Year of Mercy, which begins Dec. 8, 2015, so that all Catholics might reflect on the mercy God has shown us and how we might extend that mercy to others. In this holy year, Pope Francis wishes us to contemplate mercy as "the wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace ... the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us." Mercy, he continued, "is the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life ... the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to a hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness."

Pope Francis, like St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict before him, does not present God's mercy merely as a soothing ointment, designed to make us feel better about our sins while still living in them. Rather, mercy is God's way of reaching out to us, offering us a chance to look at ourselves, to convert, to believe. Mercy is also the foundation of the church's life: God's mercy is what the church preaches; his mercy is what the church dispenses in the Mass and the sacraments; his mercy is what the church practices in works of charity, healing and education; and we are all called to be authentic signs of God's mercy, indeed missionaries of God's mercy in a world that all too often chooses violence and severity over mercy.

Such authentic signs of God's mercy are revealed every time we commit corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Corporal works of mercy include feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, giving shelter to the homeless, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. When we administer spiritual works of mercy we teach the ignorant, counsel the doubtful, admonish the sinner, bear wrongs with patience, willingly forgiving those who have offended us, comfort the afflicted, and pray for the living and the dead.

Just as Jesus looked at Thomas with the eyes of mercy in last week's Gospel, so too is he looking at you and me with the eyes of mercy. He is asking us to believe in him. He is asking us to trust him. He isn't merely asking us to assent to a series of abstract truths, but instead to entrust our lives and our destiny to him, confident that he will forgive our sins and open for us the door of mercy of the house of his heavenly Father. What reveals the mighty power of God is his mercy, his endless capacity to forgive our sins and to raise us up to live a life made new by his own eternal newness.

The Year of Mercy is a time "for the Church to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be a sign and an instrument of the Father's mercy" (cf. Jn 20:21-23). May this Holy Year to come be a time of grace and joy for each of us and for the entire Catholic Church.