

Good Friday 2015

Introduction

Msgr. Woy, brother priests, deacons, religious, and seminarians, members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, parishioners and friends all:

Recently Pope Francis announced an Extraordinary Holy Year dedicated to the Mercy of God. "No one," he said, "can be excluded from God's mercy," and he added, "I have frequently thought about how the Church can make more evident its mission to be a witness to mercy."

You may recall the last Holy Year, the Great Jubilee of 2000. How vividly I remember the image of Pope John Paul II at St. Peter's Basilica kneeling before the special Holy Door he had just opened. "Open the doors to Christ!" he proclaimed again and again throughout his Pontificate.

Soon Pope Francis will return to that Holy Door and open it again. It is a symbolic way of saying that the doors of the church "are wide open so that all those who are touched by grace can find the certainty of forgiveness."

The Door to Forgiveness

It is Good Friday, the day of the Cross. It is that day in the Church's year, when, with hearts full of faith and gratitude, we listen yet again to the Gospel account of the Lord's Passion and Death. Swept up into the liturgy, we find ourselves walking way of the Cross with Jesus. In the shadow of the Cross, we will open our hearts in prayer, praying for the needs of the Church and the world, especially for the poor, the grieving, the suffering, the persecuted, the estranged. And with those prayers still in our hearts, we will adore 'the Cross on which hung the Savior of the world.' Then with deepest faith and gratitude, we will receive Our Savior in Holy Communion.

Let us see the Cross not as an instrument of vengeance and death but rather as the key that unlocks the door of mercy. At the same time, let it be the key that unlocks the door of our hearts by forgiving our sins and giving us access to the Father of mercies. Experience teaches that our sins have a way of shutting the door on God's

love. In our sinfulness, we are powerless to re-open the door we have closed. Alone we cannot atone for our sins. So, in his mercy, the Father sent us his only Son Jesus to share our humanity and, though innocent, to take upon himself the sins of the world. This Jesus did as he agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane, as he was unjustly tried by the Chief Priests and by Pontius Pilate, and as he was mocked, scourged, burdened with the Cross and made to walk toward Calvary. Lifted high upon the Cross, he, the Son of God made man, breathed his last. His death summed up and epitomized our estrangement from God and one another. Yet, his utter and complete gift of self, his sacrifice of love, stands forever as the key that unlocks the mercies of God the Father, that gains for us the path of freedom from our sins, and that enables us to share, even now, in the Father's love.

It is the Cross that unlocks the door of mercy, that mercy which we experience when we read the Scriptures prayerfully or open our hearts in prayer during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is the Cross that unlocks the door of forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation wherein our sins are forgiven. The Cross too sends us forth to shoulder the burdens of those around us, those who live in poverty only a few blocks from this Cathedral Church, those who live half a world away, those who are persecuted in the land made holy by the Lord's earthly life. And living as we do in an unforgiving world, it is the message of mercy that attracts many to Christ and the Church. "Blessed are those who show mercy; mercy shall be theirs!"

The Holy Year of Mercy is still some months away but on this Good Friday let 'draw confidently to the Throne of Grace,' by adoring the Cross as the key to our salvation, "We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you because by your Holy Cross you have redeemed the world!"