



JUBILEE OF MERCY MERCIFUL LIKE THE FATHER

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION



The celebration of the extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy on the American Continent

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Bogotá, Colombia, August 27-30, 2016

The Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy is the fruit of the Holy Spirit's strong and timely inspiration to Pope Francis. All Christians, Christian communities and their shepherds have been invited to contemplate more deeply the mystery of Mercy, attribute of God, revealed and realized in its fullness by Jesus Christ and spread by the grace of the Holy Spirit. In this way, the Holy Father is guiding us to live the essential part of the Gospel as good news for individuals, families, peoples and nations. For this reason, from August 27th to the 30th, the continental Celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy will be taking place in Bogotá.

Along with the journey of the Jubilee year, being celebrated in Rome and in the local churches of the entire world, this event will constitute one of the great convocations on a continental level. More than 400 people from North America, Central America, South America and the Caribbean will gather to welcome and celebrate the gift of the Mercy of God revealed and realized fully in Jesus Christ by the action of the Holy Spirit.

The continental Celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy was convoked and organized jointly by the Pontifical Commission for Latin America (CAL) and the Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM), in contact and collaboration with episcopates in the United States and Canada. The Church of the Americas will be assembled in Bogotá to live the Jubilee, a sign of the communion of the churches of the whole continent, mutually committed to celebrating and radiating the Gospel of Mercy from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego. Having passed the halfway point of the Jubilee Year already, in Bogotá the initiatives, experiences and works already carried out, as well as the fruits received, will be briefly summarized. The celebration proposes living this "year of grace" as a renewed impetus to

the continental mission, especially in light of the Aparecida document and the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

15 Cardinals and more than 120 Bishops are already registered along with participants from all nations of the continent. Rectors of National Marian Shrines, male and female religious superiors, heads of different works of mercy in American countries, American directors of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities, priests and lay people working in different ecclesial, social and popular areas will all be taking part. The event will be presided over by Cardinal Marc Ouellet, President of CAL, accompanied by his collaborators and by Cardinal Rubén Salazar, Archbishop of Bogotá and President of CELAM, who will also count on the coordination committee of the Latin American Episcopal Council.

An important audio-visual message from the Holy Father, Pope Francis, is expected for the inauguration of this celebration, which from its very first moment has had his full approval and encouragement.

Much more than a congress, this initiative constitutes a great event. And, for this reason, its program foresees only four addresses. The first address will be from by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, a significant presence, since he is the President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, to whom the Holy Father has entrusted everything related to the scheduling and organization of the Jubilee Year. "This is the Great Time of Mercy," is the title of his conference, which will echo the Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee, especially when it affirms that "From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly." The second address, titled "The Church, Sacrament of Mercy," will be given by Cardinal Marc Ouellet. Work groups will be guided to delve into and share the contents of these talks, in light of the different experiences, reflections and initiatives of the local churches of the continent.

The schedule includes a Penitential Liturgy at the very beginning of the Celebration, to encourage an examination of conscience and the supplication of mercy of all of the participants, with personal confessions.

Another major moment of the Celebration will be dedicated to the American saints. Indeed, the entire event is being presented under the motto taken from an expression of Pope Francis from May 2, 2015 when he made the invocation: "May a powerful gust of holiness sweep through all the Americas during the coming Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy!". This part will have as a prelude the third talk, to be offered by Fr. Eduardo Chavez, Canon of the Basilica of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, top "Charismatic" expert of the Guadalupan event, who will speak about "Holiness in the Times of Francis." Fr. Chavez will focus especially on the saint par excellence, the first disciple and missionary, the Mother of God and Mother of the American nations, to whom Pope Francis has a deep devotion, as he demonstrated once more when traveling through Mexico under the gaze and with the heart of Our Lady of Guadalupe. "He is my merciful gaze," said Our Lady of Guadalupe to St. Juan Diego of God, according to the narration of the Nican Mopohua. On the other hand, the Guadalupan event is at the origins of the formation of the American continent and its evangelization.

Immediately afterwards, some saints of the continent who stand out as "witnesses of mercy" will be presented, to gather up their legacy and consider the ways they edify the Church today and mark her mission. Several speakers will talk about the "missionary saints of the first evangelization" (Bishop Laval, José de Anchieta, Junípero Serra...), the saintly priests (Toribio de Mogrovejo, Rafael Guizar y Valencia, Brochero...), the saintly mystics (Rose of Lima, Mariana of Quito, Teresa of the Andes...), the saints of the defenseless (Peter Claver, Laura Montoya, Mother Cabrini...), the saints of charity (Martin de Porres, Katharine Drexel, Peter of St. Joseph of Betancur...), the martyr saints (Mexican

martyrs, Kateri Tekakwitha, Oscar A. Romero ...), the educator saints (Miguel Febres Cordero, John Neumann...).

An entire day will be dedicated to Works of Mercy on the American continent. A panel will meet to discuss some of the most significant Works of Mercy, like the “Hogar de Cristo” (Christ’s Home) in Chile, the “Fazendas da Esperanza” (Hope Farms), “Project Rachel,” and migrant assistance centers and others. Additionally, all of the participants will be divided into groups that will visit different sites of corporal and spiritual works of mercy, especially in the poorest areas and environments of Bogotá, in its social and existential peripheries.

Finally, the theme of “Mercy as the Soul of a Culture of Encounter, Forgiveness and Reconciliation on the American Continent” will be confronted. This will be presented by the two voices of Archbishop Luis Augusto Castro Quiroga of Tunja, President of the Colombian Bishops’ Conference and Archbishop José Horacio Gómez of Los Angeles.

The American Celebration of the Jubilee of Mercy will conclude with a “Continental Rosary for Peace,” to be followed by the Holy Eucharist presided over by Cardinal Rubén Salazar Gómez and the concluding words will come from the Presidents of CAL and CELAM. Prayer for Pope Francis and for his ministry will be an accompanying element of the participants’ activities for the duration of the entire encounter.

VIDEO MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

ON THE OCCASION OF THE CELEBRATION

OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY IN THE AMERICAS

[BOGOTÁ, 27-30 AUGUST 2016]

I welcome the initiative of CELAM and CAL, in association with the bishops of the United States and Canada – this makes me think of the Synod of America – to make possible this continent-wide opportunity to celebrate the Jubilee of Mercy. I am pleased to know that all the countries of America have been able to take part. Given the many attempts to fragment, divide and set our peoples at odds, such events help us to broaden our horizons and to continue our handshake; a great sign that encourages us in hope.

I would like to begin with the words of the apostle Paul to his beloved disciple: “I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I

received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience” (1 Tim 1:12-16a).

So Paul tells Timothy in his First Letter, chapter 1, verses 12 to 16. In speaking to him, he wants to speak to each of us. His words are an invitation, I would even say, a provocation. Words meant to motivate Timothy and all those who would hear them throughout history. They are words that cannot leave us indifferent; rather, they profoundly affect our lives.

Paul minces no words: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, of whom Paul considers himself the worst. He is clearly aware of who he is, he does not conceal his past or even his present.

But he describes himself in this way neither to excuse or justify himself, much less to boast of his condition. We are at the very beginning of the letter, and he has already warned Timothy about “myths and endless genealogies” and “meaningless talk”, and warned him that all these end up in “disputes”, arguments. At first, we might think that he is dwelling on his own sinfulness, but he does this so that Timothy, and each of us with him, can identify with him. To use football terms we could say: he kicks the ball to the center so that another can head the ball. He “passes us the ball” to enable us to share his own experience: despite all my sins, “I received mercy”.

We have the opportunity to be here because, with Paul, we can say: “We received mercy”. For all our sins, our limitations, our failings, for all the many times we have fallen, Jesus has looked upon us and drawn near to us. He has given us his hand and showed us mercy. To whom? To me, to you, to everyone. All of us can think back and remember the many times the Lord looked upon us, drew near and showed us mercy. All those times that the Lord kept trusting, kept betting on us (cf. Ez 16).

For my part, I think of the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, and the Lord’s constant betting on each one of us. That is what Paul calls “sound teaching” – think about it! – sound teaching is this: that we received mercy. That is the heart of Paul’s letter to Timothy. During this time of the Jubilee, how good it is for us to reflect on this truth, to think back on how throughout our lives the Lord has always been near us and showed us mercy. To concentrate on remembering our sin and not our alleged merits, to grow in a humble and guilt-free awareness of all those times we turned away from God – we, not someone else, not the person next to us, much less that of our people – and to be once more amazed by God’s mercy. That is a sure message, sound teaching, and never empty talk.

There is one particular thing about Paul’s letter that I would like to share with you. Paul does not say: “The Lord spoke and told me” or “The Lord showed me or taught me”. He says: “He treated me with mercy”. For Paul, his relationship with Jesus was sealed by the way he treated him. Far from being an idea, a desire, a theory – much less an ideology –, mercy is a concrete way of “touching” weakness, of bonding with others, of drawing closer to others. It is a concrete way of meeting people where they are at. It is a way of acting that makes us give the best of ourselves so that others can feel “treated” in such a way that they feel that in their lives the last word has not yet been spoken.

Treated in such a way that those who feel crushed by the burden of their sins can feel relieved at being given another chance. Far from a mere beautiful word, mercy is the concrete act by which God seeks to relate to his children. Paul uses the passive voice – pardon me for being a bit pedantic here – and the past tense. To put it loosely, he could well have said: “I was ‘shown mercy’”. The passive makes Paul the receiver of the action of another; he does nothing more than allow himself to be shown mercy. The past tense of the original reminds us that in him the experience took place at a precise moment in time, one that he remembers, gives thanks for, and celebrates.

Paul’s God starts a movement from heart to hands, the movement of one who is unafraid to draw near, to touch, to caress, without being scandalized, without condemning, without dismissing anyone. A way of acting that becomes incarnate in people’s lives.

To understand and accept what God does for us – a God who does not think, love or act out of fear, but because he trusts us and expects us to change – must perhaps be our hermeneutical criterion, our mode of operation: “Go and do likewise” (*Lk 10:37*). Our way of treating others, in consequence, must never be based on fear but on the hope God has in our ability to change. Which will it be: hope for change, or fear? The only thing acting out of fear accomplishes is to separate, to divide, to attempt to distinguish with surgical precision one side from the other, to create false security and thus to build walls. Acting on the basis of hope for change, for conversion, encourages and incites, it looks to the future, it makes room for opportunity, and it keeps us moving forward. Acting on the basis of fear bespeaks guilt, punishment, “you were wrong”. Acting on the basis of hope of transformation bespeaks trusting, learning, getting up, constantly trying to generate new opportunities. How many times? Seventy times seven. For that reason, treating people with mercy always awakens creativity.

It is concerned with the face of the person, with his or her life, history and daily existence. It is not married to one model or recipe, but enjoys a healthy freedom of spirit, and can thus seek what is the best for the other person, in a way they can understand. This engages all our abilities and gifts; it makes us step out from behind our walls. It is never empty talk – as Paul tells us – that entangles us in endless disputes. Acting on the basis of hope for change is a restless way of thinking that sets our heart pounding and readies our hands for action. The journey from heart to hands.

Seeing how God acts in this way, we might be scandalized, like the older son in the parable of the Merciful Father, by how the father treats his younger son upon seeing him return. We might be scandalized that he embraced him, treated him with love, called for him to be dressed in the best robes even though he was so filthy. We might be scandalized that upon seeing him return, he kissed him and threw a party. We might be scandalized that he did not upbraid him but instead treated him for what he was: a son.

We start being scandalized – and this happens to us all, it’s almost automatic, no? – we start being scandalized when spiritual Alzheimer’s sets in: when we forget how the Lord has treated us, when we begin to judge and divide people up. We take on a separatist mindset that, without our realizing it, leads us to fragment our social and communal reality all the more. We fragment the present by creating “groups”. Groups of good and bad, saints and sinners. This memory loss gradually makes us forget the richest reality we possess and the clearest teaching we have to defend. The richest reality and the clearest teaching. Though we are all sinners, the Lord has unfailingly treated us with mercy. Paul never forgot that he was on the other side, that he was chosen last, as one born out of time. Mercy is not a “theory to brandish”: “Ah! Now it is fashionable to talk about mercy for this Jubilee, so let’s follow the fashion”. No, it is not a theory to brandish so that our condescension can be applauded, but rather a history of sin to be remembered. Which sin? Ours, mine and yours. And a love to be praised. Which love? The love of God, who has shown me mercy.

We are part of a fragmented culture, a throwaway culture. A culture tainted by the exclusion of everything that might threaten the interests of a few. A culture that is leaving by the roadside the faces of the elderly, children, ethnic minorities seen as a threat. A culture that little by little promotes the comfort of a few and increases the suffering of many others. A culture that is incapable of accompanying the young in their dreams but sedates them with promises of ethereal happiness and hides the living memory of their elders. A culture that has squandered the wisdom of the indigenous peoples and has shown itself incapable of caring for the richness of their lands.

All of us are aware, all of us know that we live in a society that is hurting; no one doubts this. We live in a society that is bleeding, and the price of its wounds normally ends up being paid by the most vulnerable. But it is precisely to this society, to this culture, that the Lord sends us. He sends us and urges us to bring the balm of “his” presence. He sends us with one program alone: to treat one another with mercy. To become neighbors to those thousands of defenseless people who walk in our beloved American land by proposing a different way of treating them. A renewed way, trying to

let our form of bonding be inspired by God's dream, by what he has done. A way of treating others based on remembering that all of us came from afar, like Abraham, and all of us were brought out of places of slavery, like the people of Israel.

All of us still vividly recall our experience in Aparecida and its invitation once more to become missionary disciples. We spoke at length about discipleship, and wondered how best to promote the catechesis of discipleship and mission. Paul gives us an interesting key to this: showing mercy. He reminds us that what made him an apostle was how he was treated, how God drew near to his life: "I received mercy". What made him a disciple was the trust God showed in him despite his many sins. And that reminds us that we may have the best plans, projects and theories about what to do, but if we lack that "show of mercy", our pastoral work will be cut off midway.

All this has to do with our catechesis, our seminaries – do we teach our seminarians this path of showing mercy? – our parish structures and pastoral plans. All this has to do with our missionary activity, our pastoral plans, our clergy meetings and even our way of doing theology. It is about learning to show mercy, a form of bonding that we daily have to ask for – because it is a grace – and need to learn. Showing mercy among ourselves as bishops, priests and laity. In theory we are "missionaries of mercy", yet often we are better at "mistreating" than at treating well. How many times have we failed in our seminaries to inspire, accompany and encourage a pedagogy of mercy, and to teach that the heart of pastoral work is showing mercy. Being pastors who treat and not mistreat. Please, I ask you: be pastors who know how to treat and not mistreat.

Today we are asked especially to show mercy to God's holy and faithful people – they know a lot about being merciful because they have a good memory –, to the people who come to our communities with their sufferings, sorrows and hurts. But also to the people who do not come to our communities, yet are wounded by the paths of history and hope to receive mercy. Mercy is learned from experience – in our own lives first – as in the case of Paul, to whom God revealed all his mercy, all his merciful patience. It is learned from sensing that God continues to trust in us and to call us to be his missionaries, that he constantly sends us forth to treat our brothers and sisters in the same way that he has treated us. Each of us knows his or her own story and can draw from it. Mercy is learned, because our Father continues to forgive us. Our peoples already have enough suffering in their lives; they do not need us to add to it. To learn to show mercy is to learn from the Master how to become neighbors, unafraid of the outcast and those "tainted" and marked by sin. To learn to hold out our hand to those who have fallen, without being afraid of what people will say. Any treatment lacking mercy, however just it may seem, ends up turning into mistreatment. The challenge will be to empower paths of hope, paths that encourage good treatment and make mercy shine forth.

Dear brothers and sisters, this gathering is not a congress or a meeting, a seminary or a conference. This gathering is above all a celebration: we have been asked to celebrate the way God has treated each of us and all his people. For this reason, I believe that it is good time for us to say together: "Lord, I have let myself be deceived; in a thousand ways I have shunned your love, yet here I am once more, to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again, Lord; take me once more into your redeeming embrace" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 3).

Let us be grateful, as Paul told Timothy, that God trusts us to repeat with his people the immense acts of mercy he has shown us, and that this encounter will help us to go forth with renewed conviction as we seek to pass on the sweet and comforting joy of the Gospel of mercy.