

**Homily for the 4th Sunday of Lent, Cycle B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception**

March 15, 2015

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

This past Friday, March 13th, on the second anniversary of his election as the Bishop of Rome and Successor of Saint Peter, Pope Francis announced an Extraordinary Holy Year dedicated as a “Jubilee of Mercy.” In making this announcement, the Holy Father said, “Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought about how the Church might make clear its mission of being a witness to mercy. It is a journey that begins with a spiritual conversion. For this reason, I have decided to call an *extraordinary Jubilee* that is to have the mercy of God at its center. It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy. We want to live this Year in the light of the Lord's words: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful’ (cf. Lk 6:36). This Holy Year will begin on this coming Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception [December 8, 2015] and will end on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe – and living face of the Father’s mercy.” Pope Francis expressed his conviction that “the whole Church will

find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God, with which all of us are called to give consolation to every man and woman of our time. From this moment, we entrust this Holy Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she might turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey.”¹

The opening of this next Jubilee will take place on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council in 1965.

In the ancient Hebrew tradition, the Jubilee Year, which was celebrated every 50 years, was meant to restore equality among all of the children of Israel, offering new possibilities to families which had lost their property and even their personal freedom.

The Catholic tradition of the Holy Year began with Pope Boniface VIII in 1300. Boniface VIII had envisioned a Jubilee every century. From 1475 onwards - in order to allow each generation to experience at least one Holy Year - the ordinary Jubilee was to be celebrated every 25 years. However, an extraordinary Jubilee may be announced on the occasion of an event of particular importance. Until present, there have been 26 ordinary Holy Year celebrations, the last of which was the Jubilee of 2000.

The Catholic Church has given to the Hebrew Jubilee a more spiritual significance. It consists in a general pardon, an indulgence open to all, and the possibility to renew one's relationship with God and neighbor. Thus, the Holy Year is always an opportunity to deepen one's faith and to live with a renewed commitment to Christian witness.²

Notice that one of the primary features of a Holy Year is a special grant of indulgence. During these Sundays of Lent, I have been speaking about the theological concept of indulgences, which can be summarized as "a remission before God of the temporal punishment for sins, whose guilt is forgiven, which a properly disposed member of the Christian faithful obtains under certain and clearly defined conditions through the intervention of the Church."³

I also discussed why the remission of temporal punishment through an indulgence is needed if sins are forgiven in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. In short, through the ministry of the Church, "repentance after baptism leads to divine forgiveness of guilt as well as pardon with regard to the eternal punishment deserved for serious or 'mortal' sins, but with the possibility or even likelihood that penance must yet be done (earthly or 'purgatorial') before the forgiven sinner can be united with the

Trinity in heaven.”⁴ Indulgences are a way in which the Church helps her members who need to do that kind of penance (known as *temporal punishment*). Thus, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, when the priest imposes a sacramental penance that also happens to be enriched with an indulgence, the penitent who performs that work “can at the same time both satisfy the penance and gain an indulgence.”⁵

Last week I described the “four general concessions by which the Christian faithful are encouraged to infuse with a Christian spirit all the actions that go to make up their daily lives and to strive in the ordering of their lives towards the perfection of charity.”⁶ According to these four general concessions, a partial indulgence is granted to those who offer up the hardships of life in prayer, give of themselves or their goods to a charitable cause, voluntarily abstain from licit pleasures, and give explicit witness to their faith before others.⁷ These four grants are based on the Holy Bible and the doctrine of the Church, as clearly set forth by the Second Vatican Council.⁸

Today I will discuss other concessions by which partial and plenary indulgences are granted for works of devotion, charity and penance. The Church in her generous mercy provides many such works of devotion,

charity and penance, so I will just provide some examples from the various categories. Deserving of special mention are grants pertaining to those works by any one of which the faithful can obtain a plenary indulgence each day of the year:

- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament for at least one half hour;
- The pious exercise of the Way of the Cross;
- Recitation of the Marian Rosary in a church or an oratory, or in a family, a religious community, or a sodality of the faithful or, in general, when several of the faithful are gathered for any good purpose; and
- The devout reading or listening to the Sacred Scriptures for at least a half an hour.⁹

Some plenary indulgences pertain to works of devotion, charity and penance performed on designated days, such as:

- Public recitation of the act of dedication of the human race to Christ the King on the annual Solemnity of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, King of the Universe;

- Public recitation of the act of reparation on the Solemnity of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus;
- Receiving a papal blessing imparted by the Pope to the people of Rome and to the World, usually on Christmas and Easter, or three times a year on solemn feasts designated by the bishop to whose care the faithful are entrusted, even if the faithful are physically unable to be present physically at the sacred rite, provided they follow it devoutly as it is broadcast live by television or radio;
- Devout participation in a solemn Eucharistic procession, held inside or outside a church, especially on the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, also known as *Corpus Christi*;
- Spending at least three entire days in the spiritual exercises of a retreat;
- Participation in some of the services during the Week of Christian Unity and assist at the closing of this same week;
- Adoration of the Cross in the solemn liturgical action of Good Friday;

- Renewal of baptismal vows at the Easter Vigil or on the anniversary of one's baptism;
- Receiving First Holy Communion;
- Participating in a newly ordained priest's First Mass before the people on a chosen day;
- Participating at a Jubilee Mass celebrating the twenty-fifth, fiftieth, sixtieth and seventieth anniversary of priestly ordination and the twenty-fifth, fortieth and fiftieth anniversary of a bishop's ordination;
- Assisting at sacred functions during the pastoral visit of the Bishop;
- Visiting the cathedral church and there devoutly reciting an Our Father and the Creed on the solemnity of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul (June 29th) or on the solemnity of its titular, which for us here in Springfield is the Immaculate Conception (December 8th);
and
- Visiting a parish church and there devoutly reciting an Our Father and the Creed on the church's titular feast day.

A plenary indulgence is also administered by a priest when administering the sacraments and imparting the apostolic blessing to someone in danger of death. If a priest is not available at the hour of death, the Christian faithful may acquire a plenary indulgence at the time of death provided they have been in the habit of reciting some prayers during their lifetime.

Partial indulgences are also granted for numerous prayers and devotions, such as visiting the Blessed Sacrament for adoration, teaching or studying Christian doctrine, using articles of devotion (such as a crucifix, cross, rosary, scapular or medal) properly blessed by a priest or a deacon, spending time in mental prayer, reciting the *Angelus* at dawn, noon and evening, praying to one's guardian angel with a duly approved prayer, such as *Angel of God*, participating in novenas and praying litanies, such as of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, and of all the Saints.

Indulgences can be obtained not only for ourselves, but also for the souls in purgatory, such as by visiting a cemetery and praying for the dead.¹⁰

It is important to remember that it is not the mere performance of these actions that bring about the benefits of an indulgence, but the interior spiritual disposition of one's heart and the detachment from sin that must accompany these good works.

At the heart of Christianity is the experience of the love of God in the person of Jesus. Jesus comes to us in the Eucharist which we now celebrate. He joins us to Himself in His sacrifice of love. He unites us to the Father and to the Spirit. He gives us the help that we need to know, love and serve Him with all our mind and heart and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Pope Francis, Homily with announcement of Year of Mercy, March 13, 2015, <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-homily-with-announcement-of-year-of-m>.

²<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2015/03/13/0187/00419.html#Testo> in lingua inglese.

³ Apostolic Penitentiary, *Manual of Indulgences: Norms and Grants*, English translation of the *Enchiridion Indulgentiarum*, fourth edition, 1999, (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006), N1, p. 13.

⁴ *The New Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “indulgences.”

⁵ *Manual of Indulgences*, N21, §2, p. 19.

⁶ *Manual of Indulgences*, The Four General Concessions, Introduction, no. 1, p. 23.

⁷ *Manual of Indulgences*, The Four General Concessions, Grant IV, p. 34.

⁸ *Manual of Indulgences*, The Four General Concessions, Introduction, no. 3, p. 24.

⁹ *Manual of Indulgences*, Other Concessions, Introduction, no. 7, p. 41.

¹⁰ *Manual of Indulgences*, Other Concessions, Grants, nos. 1-33, pp. 43-102.