



Photo by Jim Stipe/CRS

## THE JUBILEE *year of mercy*

Pope Francis has declared that the Universal Catholic Church will observe a Jubilee Year of Mercy from December 8, 2015, to November 20, 2016. The pope made the declaration in front of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica. The Holy Door is usually bricked up, but is opened during a Jubilee year.

### WHAT IS THE JUBILEE YEAR OF MERCY?

Jubilee years occur about every 25 years—the last occurred in 2000. These holy years are filled with special celebrations and pilgrimages, strong calls for conversion and repentance, and the opportunity to experience God's grace through the sacraments, especially confession.

### WHERE IN SCRIPTURE DO WE LEARN ABOUT MERCY?

Jesus' message of mercy shines all through the Gospels, challenging society and the law to see the divine justice present in mercy. His greatest parables tell of an ungrateful steward forgiven of his debts, who tragically fails to show the same forgiveness to his debtors (Matthew 18:21-35); of a wasteful son who carelessly spends his father's inheritance, only to be embraced by his father when he penitently returns home (Luke 15:11-32). In his ministry, the Lord reached out to the hated tax collector (Luke 19:1-10) and rescued the accused adulteress (John 8:2-11), reconciling them with society and with God—and with themselves. This is our calling.

## WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH ABOUT MERCY?

Spreading God's mercy is central to the mission of the Catholic Church. The Church calls on us to reach out to the broken in body and spirit.

### The Corporal Works of Mercy

- Feeding the hungry
- Sheltering the homeless
- Clothing the naked
- Visiting the sick
- Ransoming the captive/  
Visiting the imprisoned
- Giving drink to the thirsty
- Burying the dead

### The Spiritual Works of Mercy

- Converting sinners
- Instructing the uninformed
- Advising the doubtful
- Comforting the sorrowful
- Bearing wrongs patiently
- Forgiving injuries
- Praying for the living and dead

—United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

This is what the Church enjoins her faithful to do. When she sends us out into the world, she sends us out as vessels of God's mercy. This is how we evangelize. We teach people about the faith by instructing them in God's mercy, but also by *embodying* it.

## WHERE IS MERCY IN THE WORK OF CRS?

The preferential love for those oppressed by poverty is at the heart of our work. Catholic Relief Services has been reaching out to the poor and broken on behalf of the Catholic Church in the United States for more than 70 years. CRS programs feed the hungry and develop food security programs that help them feed themselves. They bring water to the driest places on earth. They reach out to the captive. They bring shelter to people made homeless by natural disasters or war. They serve the sick, reaching millions threatened by diseases like AIDS and malaria. And, yes, they even help bury the dead with dignity, and care for the orphan.

CRS does this for people of all faiths—and people who have no faith at all. Because God wants *all* of his children to know his mercy.

## HOW DO WE PARTICIPATE IN THE JUBILEE?

The Year of Mercy is for all of us. To deliver God's mercy, we must first seek to fully experience it ourselves. This can be done by renewing ourselves through the sacraments, particularly confession. A pilgrimage is also a special way to experience this renewal.

Once we pursue and experience that mercy for ourselves, we reinforce it for others. This can be done by practicing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy or by supporting agencies like CRS that reach out to the poor and outcast. We can also advocate for the least among us, speaking out within our families, our communities, our Church and our nations—on our own or collectively through programs like Catholics Confront Global Poverty—so that God's mercy will shine brightly in the darkest corners of our world, within the darkest corners of the human spirit.