

Let the Jubilee of Mercy Begin! - Part II



On December 8, Pope Francis began the Jubilee of Mercy by opening the Holy Door in St. Peter's Basilica. Opening a door is an invitation to cross over, to enter a different space. As the Holy Father wrote earlier this year, the new space we are invited to enter is a life shaped not by laws but by mercy, or in Latin, *misericordia*.

Misericordia literally means to have pity in one's heart. Mercy is not just an attitude or an occasional sentiment. Rather, it is a strength or virtue that shapes and enlivens one's heart. Without mercy, our hearts beat wrong; without mercy, we suffer from heart disease.

Mercy 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

In a recent interview, Pope Francis spoke about the need for the Church to take the lead in practicing mercy by avoiding the temptation "to follow a hard line and to underline moral rules only," to the point that "many people are excluded." Instead, the Church should serve as "as a field hospital after a battle," reaching out to the wounded and injured. And earlier this year, Pope Francis recalled the words of St. Pope John XXIII at the opening of the Second Vatican Council: "Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity." Pope Francis is not saying that rules are unimportant, but that they are not ends in themselves. Their aim must always be to bring souls closer to God's mercy, which is the fundamental law. Of course, that is hardly a new idea. For centuries the Church's pastoral practice has been inspired by the ancient saying, *salus animarum lex suprema*—the salvation of souls is the supreme law. It is God's mercy that saves souls, not human observance of laws.

Mercy is the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.

We all want to get to heaven. Mercy is the bridge for our crossing over because God's mercy endures forever, as the Psalmist reminds us (Psalm 136). God's everlasting mercy gives us hope to continue the journey, for it is a mercy that is present even in our sinfulness. God will not stop being merciful. Like a good shepherd, he will search for us and bring us back, not begrudgingly, not to scold us, but with joy. The more we experience the everlasting mercy of God, the more generous we become in showing mercy to others, for we come to understand that we are not showing them our mercy, but God's. Knowing that gives us hope to accompany one another across the bridge of mercy to the heaven we so desire.

Throughout this year, I invite you to choose one of the corporal or spiritual works of mercy and dedicate yourselves to practicing it individually or as a family. You can take confidence in the promise of Jesus, "the measure you measure with, will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:2).

- Archbishop Blase Cupich