

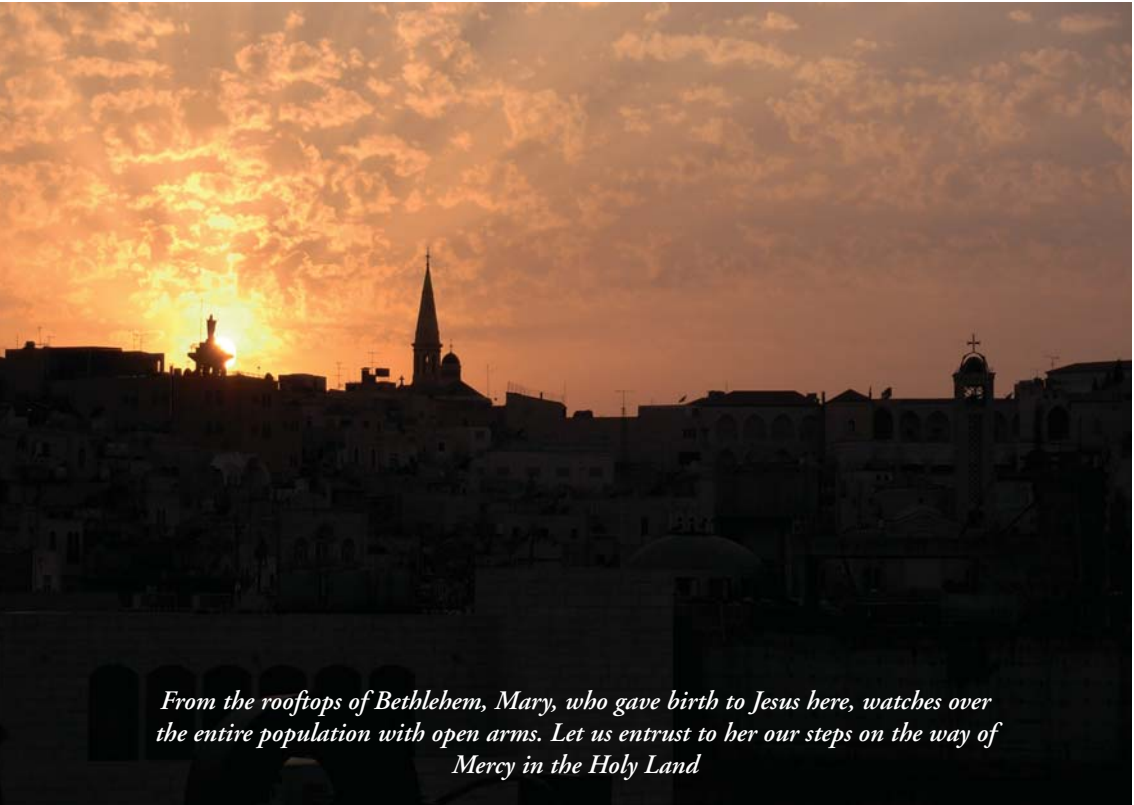


ORDO EQUESTRIS
SANCTI SEPULCHRI HIEROSOLYMITANI

PILGRIMS of MERCY in the HOLY LAND



By the Communication Office of the Grand Magisterium
in coordination with Msgr. Fortunato Frezza,
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*From the rooftops of Bethlehem, Mary, who gave birth to Jesus here, watches over
the entire population with open arms. Let us entrust to her our steps on the way of
Mercy in the Holy Land*

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Mercy is “the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us”(MV2) and “a key word that indicates God’s action towards us” (MV9). In our relationship with God, therefore, we cannot overlook the need to stop, “to contemplate the mystery of mercy” (MV2) and to welcome it. This is the first fundamental step that we are invited to take during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy. As with many things in life, we must devote time to rediscovering the footsteps of God’s Mercy in our lives. Perhaps it is precisely for this reason that one of the tools the Holy Father entrusts to the people of God in this Jubilee of Mercy is that of a pilgrimage. Considering the connection with the land where Jesus was born, lived, died and rose again, we suggest some steps for making a pilgrimage of Mercy in the Holy Land.



Preparing for the Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage does not begin on an airplane. Being a pilgrim is a state of Christian life, and when someone makes the decision to leave their comfort and daily life, and begins the journey of discovering the work of God in their life, they are already making a pilgrimage. Therefore, before leaving, and in order to prepare one's heart for the encounter, we suggest that you take the time to meditate and pray on the "parables of Mercy" (Lk 15:1-32).

In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.

Misericordiae Vultus 9

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable: "Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous

persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it. When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never

disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’” Lk 15,1-32

TO DEEPEN

Msgr. Fortunato Frezza (biblical scholar and Master of Ceremonies of the Order), *Steps of Mercy Path of Jubilee: A Biblical itinerary for the Jubilee of Mercy*, 2015, pp. 180-181

“There was a man who had two sons” (Lk 15,11): this is how the third parable of Chapter 15 begins, which the evangelist Luke refers to as a real authentic document of mercy in the action of searching: mercy for the lost! It tells of what would happen if a shepherd were to lose a sheep, if a woman were to lose a coin, and if a father were to lose his children. These are the “sheep that was lost” (Lk 15:6), the woman who lost her coin (cfr. Lk 15:9), and the prodigal son (cfr. Lk 15:24), who is also a lost brother (cfr. Lk 15:32). The outcome of the discovery is joy and celebration, a metaphor for both the conversion of even one sinner, and for the mission of the Son, sent “to seek out and to save the lost” (Lk 19:10). Everything can get lost here, but nothing is removed from the search; there is not a lost unobtainable for the Lord, who knows the trails and the human heart (cf. Ps 119,168; 139.3; Jn 2:25). Everything can get lost down here, except the mercy that also seeks those who do not want to; seeks and regenerates, as lost and found, dead and risen. [...]

In the three parables of Luke Chapter 15, as, indeed, in the parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. Lk 10:30-37), mercy is not mentioned, but it is accomplished. The Lost Son “set off and

went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him” (*Lk* 15:20). The father is exempt from the search; The son, in fact, is neither a sheep nor a lost coin: a child has the privilege of conversion, because the mercy of the father should be celebrated by one and enjoyed by the other. The father has a priestly attitude, in the eye and brush of Rembrandt, wrapped in his solemn garments and in his solemn gaze, in the sacred gesture of the imposition of hands, a paternal arm tightening, a motherly arm that caresses, both are for welcoming and forgiveness. In this way the feast of mercy can begin, awaiting his brother who also returns home to hear the words (cfr. *Lk* 15:31-32) of intimate fatherly mercy.



Rembrandt thus depicts in 1668 "The Return of the Prodigal Son." We pray that each one of us may experience the Father's merciful embrace during this year.



The Pilgrimage

The practice of *pilgrimage* has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a *viator*, a pilgrim travelling along the road, making his way to the desired destination. Similarly, to reach the Holy Door in Rome or in any other place in the world, everyone, each according to his or her ability, will have to make a pilgrimage. This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us.

Misericordiae Vultus 14

Putting oneself on a journey this year will be a new opportunity to rediscover oneself as a pilgrim on this earth, in need of following the footsteps and going out of oneself and one's own situations of comfort in order to encounter God and others. As Knights and Ladies of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre, we feel called – those who have the opportunity – to live the usual pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a particularly attentive spirit, to that Land which speaks of God's Mercy in a special way. Unlike what happens in other everyday situations of life, the goal to be reached is not physical but rather a change of heart. The physical locations we will encounter will be the means that will help us to listen to the Word of God.

Msgr. Fortunato Frezza (biblical scholar and Master of Ceremonies of the Order), *Steps of Mercy Path of Jubilee: A Biblical itinerary for the Jubilee of Mercy*, 2015, pp. VII-VIII preface

The jubilee, any jubilee – in the sense of a year for the forgiveness of sins, for reconciliation, for conversion and sacramental penance – moves the steps of those who want to be among those who benefit. In this way the jubilee becomes a pilgrimage, a journey of pilgrims aimed to give shape to the desire for good, to conversion and to liberation of the spirit. Whoever goes through the Jubilee desires a beneficial encounter with the soul itself, before God, and together with all the other pilgrims, all different and all secretly linked by a single goal. Indeed, the pilgrim is never alone, does not suffer alone, and is not a walking automation. Even if he carries the bare essentials with him, he knows what the one thing that is necessary and essential, becoming more and more convinced, as he gradually walks. The absence of the weight of things reminds him that he is not alone, because that absence reveals the presence of the first traveling companion, who is he himself. The Russian Pilgrim knew this and said of himself: “By the grace of God I am a man and a Christian, by actions a great sinner, by vocation a pilgrim wandering from place to place. My worldly goods are the sack on my back with a little dry bread and, in my inner pocket, the Holy Bible. Nothing more”.

Sacred Scripture: the true companion on the journey! [...]The pilgrims’ steps are guided by the passages of the Holy Bible that become the light of his path. How true for him are the yearnings of the Jewish Pilgrim: “Your word is a light to my feet and a lamp to my path”!

The Stages of the Pilgrimage

In order to live the pilgrimage to the Holy Land with a particular focus on Mercy, we propose the following stages, which groups may choose to follow. Of course, every place that Sacred Scripture mentions to us is part of the history of salvation, made so by divine Mercy, and the following is only a suggestion that we have made available to groups who are organizing their pilgrimages.



1

The Church of the Nativity (Bethlehem)

Our journey begins where “the Word became flesh and lived among us” (*Jn* 1:14). The same Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee urges us from its very first line to turn our gaze immediately to Jesus: “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy” (MV1). In knowing the Son we discover the Father and in accepting the great gift of a God, who becomes flesh, we enter into the mystery of God’s mercy, and in this mercy we see no limits.

In the “fullness of time” (*Gal* 4:4), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (cf. *Jn* 14:9). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.

Misericordiae Vultus 1

No one has penetrated the profound mystery of the incarnation like Mary. Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh. The Mother of the Crucified and Risen One has entered the sanctuary of divine mercy because she participated intimately in the mystery of His love.

Chosen to be the Mother of the Son of God, Mary, from the outset, was prepared by the love of God to be the *Ark of the Covenant* between God and man. She treasured divine mercy in her heart in perfect harmony with her Son Jesus.

Misericordiae Vultus 24

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us." So they

went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart.

Lk 2:1-19

TO DEEPEN

John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 1994, n. 7

In Jesus Christ God not only speaks to man but also *seeks him out*. The Incarnation of the Son of God attests that God goes in search of man. Jesus speaks of this search as the finding of a lost sheep (cf. *Lk* 15:1-7). It is a search which *begins in the heart of God* and culminates in the Incarnation of the Word. If God goes in search of man, created in his own image and likeness, he does so because he loves him eternally in the Word, and wishes to raise him in Christ to the dignity of an adoptive son. God therefore goes in search of man who *is his special possession* in a way unlike any other creature. Man is God's possession by virtue of a choice made in love: God seeks man out, moved by his fatherly heart.



The Pool of Bethzatha or Bethesda

Jesus performed many miracles during the years of his earthly ministry, but only a few of these miracles have had the exact locations of where they occurred located. The Pool of Bethzatha

or Bethesda, mentioned in the Gospel of John (Jn 5), has now been identified with remains that are located next to the Church of St. Anne, near the Sheep Gate. Scholars have made this discovery due to recognizing the five porches the Gospel speaks of, and a fresco was found on the walls representing an angel stirring the water.

This place gives us the opportunity to pause and reflect on the deeper meaning of the miracles performed by Jesus and the healing that was brought forth. What does it mean for us today, in our daily lives, to encounter the presence and the saving action of Christ? How does his great mercy manifest itself to us today with regard to our poverty and diseases?

With our eyes fixed on Jesus and his merciful gaze, we experience the love of the Most Holy Trinity. The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness. "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8,16), John affirms for the first and only time in all of Holy Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus' entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in favour of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.

Misericordiae Vultus 8

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took

up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat." But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Jn 5:1-15

TO DEEPEN

Excerpt from Pope Francis' morning homily at Santa Marta on 17 March, 2015, from an article published in *L'Osservatore Romano* on 18 March, 2015

And that is also why "a man who had been ill for 38 years" was there. He was there, waiting, and Jesus asked him: "Do you want to be well?". The sick man replied: "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, when the angel comes. While I am on my way, someone else gets down there before me". In other words, Jesus is presented with "a defeated man" who "had lost hope". A sick man, "not just paralyzed", Francis pointed out, but afflicted with "another, much worse disease", sloth.

"Sloth made him sad, lazy", the Pope noted. Another person would have "found a way to get there in time, like the blind man in Jericho who shouted and shouted, and they wanted to silence him but he shouted even louder: he found a way". But this man, overcome by 38 years of illness, "didn't want to be healed", didn't have the strength. At the same time, he had a "bitterness of spirit: 'Someone else gets there before me and I am left aside'. He also had "a little resentment". He was "really a sad soul, defeated, defeated by life".

However, “Jesus has mercy” for this man and says to him: “Rise! Get up, let’s put an end to this; take up your mat, and walk”.



Dominus Flevit

The Dominus Flevit Church is a small church located halfway between the foothills and the summit of the Mount of Olives. Its name means “the Lord wept”, and it indicates the precise place in which Jesus weeps over Jerusalem, as stated in the event narrated by Luke the Evangelist. Jesus is going up from Jericho to Jerusalem, and when he comes near Bethphage and Bethany, he asks two disciples to go to the next village to pick up the donkey on which he would enter into Jerusalem. Despite the applause, when Jesus would be close enough to the city, he would weep for it. His is a cry that is as that of a parent who loves his son so much that he allows him to be free even when he might make



mistakes. “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace...”: this is Jesus’ desire.

In this place where we you can watch Jerusalem, and perhaps, with the eyes of the heart, embrace all of humanity, let us take a little time to pray for this city, which is so particularly dear to us Knights and Dames of the Equestrian Order the Holy Sepulchre, and for the needs of the world.

For their own good, I beg them to change their lives. I ask them this in the name of the Son of God who, though rejecting sin, never rejected the sinner. Do not fall into the terrible trap of thinking that life depends on money and that, in comparison with money, anything else is devoid of value or dignity. This is nothing but an illusion! We cannot take money with us into the life beyond. Money does not bring us happiness. Violence inflicted for the sake of amassing riches soaked in blood makes one neither powerful nor immortal. Everyone, sooner or later, will be subject to God’s judgment, from which no one can escape.

Misericordiae Vultus 19

As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying,

*“Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!”*

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the

ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.”

Lk 19:37-44

TO DEEPEN

Excerpt from Pope Francis’ morning homily at Santa Marta on 20 November, 2014, from an article published in *L’Osservatore Romano* on 21 November, 2014

“Jerusalem was content, at peace with her life, and had no need of the Lord” and his salvation. This is why the city had “closed her heart before the Lord. And the Lord wept before Jerusalem, as he also wept at the closed grave of his friend Lazarus. Jerusalem was dead”.

In weeping “over his chosen city”, Jesus also weeps “over his Church” and “over us”. But why, the Pope asked, “wouldn’t Jerusalem receive the Lord? Because she was at peace with what she had, she didn’t want problems”. This is why Jesus exclaimed at the gates, “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! ... because you did not know the time of your visitation”. Indeed, the city “was afraid to be visited by the Lord; she was frightened of the gratuitousness of the Lord’s visit. She was certain about the things she was able to manage”.

This is an attitude seen among Christians even today, Francis noted. “We’re sure about what we can manage. But the Lord’s visit, his surprises, we aren’t able to manage them. And Jerusalem was afraid of this: of being saved on the path of the Lord’s surprises”. The city was “frightened of the Lord, of her spouse, of her beloved”. This was because “when the Lord visits his people, He brings us joy”, but He also “brings us conversion. And we are all afraid”. The Pontiff emphasized that what we fear is not “happiness”, but rather “the joy the Lord brings, because we can’t control it”.



The Cenacle

On Holy Thursday, in the room that had been carefully prepared to celebrate the Passover, which Jesus had so ardently desired to eat with his disciples, the sacramental anticipation (*Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 3) of Jesus' total donation takes place, the extreme act of Mercy towards mankind. That day, in that place, and every time we celebrate Holy Mass during which we make remembrance, Jesus offers his body and his blood for us, for each one of us.

While the synoptic gospels recount the institution of the Eucharist, the evangelist John narrates another fundamental event that occurs at the Cenacle: Jesus teaches his disciples that they are called to put themselves at the service of one another, to have mercy on each other. Christians cannot claim a relationship with God without taking an interest in and serving their brothers (1 Jn 4:20).

While he was instituting the Eucharist as an everlasting memorial of himself and his paschal sacrifice, he symbolically placed this supreme act of revelation in the light of his mercy.

Misericordiae Vultus 7

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the

disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Jn 13:1-15

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. Lk 22:14-20

TO DEEPEN

John Paul II, Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, 2003, n. 11

The Church has received the Eucharist from Christ her Lord not as one gift – however precious – among so many others, but as *the gift par excellence*, for it is the gift of himself, of his person in his sacred humanity, as well as the gift of his saving work. Nor does it remain confined to the past, since "all that

Christ is – all that he did and suffered for all men – participates in the divine eternity, and so transcends all times”. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the memorial of her Lord’s death and resurrection, this central event of salvation becomes really present and “the work of our redemption is carried out”. This sacrifice is so decisive for the salvation of the human race that Jesus Christ offered it and returned to the Father only *after he had left us a means of sharing in it* as if we had been present there. Each member of the faithful can thus take part in it and inexhaustibly gain its fruits. This is the faith from which generations of Christians down the ages have lived. The Church’s Magisterium has constantly reaffirmed this faith with joyful gratitude for its inestimable gift. I wish once more to recall this truth and to join you, my dear brothers and sisters, in adoration before this mystery: a great mystery, a mystery of mercy. What more could Jesus have done for us? Truly, in the Eucharist, he shows us a love which goes “to the end” (cf. *Jn* 13:1), a love which knows no measure.



Gethsemane

After the Supper, Jesus and his disciples went to Gethsemane. On his lips and in his heart was the declaration of the eternal mercy of God the Father, who would accompany the Son in all of the mystery of his Passion, Death and Resurrection. Jesus, true God and true man, now needs to go to prayer and entrust everything to the Father. Those minutes, those hours in the Garden of Olives speak directly to the hearts of all those who are



facing a difficult time in their lives. The love of God reached the point of giving us a companion for the journey who has already faced the test, despite being a spotless lamb. In situations of pain, even when we do not feel it, God could not be closer.

We include in our prayers on this pilgrimage all those who are oppressed and do not see the way out of the suffering they are experiencing. Let us pray that the Lord gives us the strength to believe that His Mercy continues to work even amidst difficulties and suffering.

“For his mercy endures forever.” This is the refrain that repeats after each verse in Psalm 136 as it narrates the history of God’s revelation. By virtue of mercy, all the events of the Old Testament are replete with profound salvific import. Mercy renders God’s history with Israel a history of salvation. To repeat continually “for his mercy endures forever,” as the psalm does, seems to break through the dimensions of space and time, inserting everything into the eternal mystery of love. It is as if to say that not only in history, but for all eternity man will always be

under the merciful gaze of the Father. It is no accident that the people of Israel wanted to include this psalm – the “Great *Hallel*,” as it is called – in its most important liturgical feast days.

Before his Passion, Jesus prayed with this psalm of mercy. Matthew attests to this in his Gospel when he says that, “when they had sung a hymn” (26:30), Jesus and his disciples went out to the Mount of Olives.

Misericordiae Vultus 7

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, “Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.” Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]] When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, “Why are you sleeping Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.” Lk 22:39-46

TO DEEPEN

Saint Augustine, *Sermons on Time*

“The Lord, saying: ‘let this cup pass from me, but not my will but yours be done’, says that man cannot be saved without the bitter medicine of death; without drinking the cup of humiliation and suffering” (Sermon LXXXI).

“Jesus Christ was as a compassionate doctor, who, though healthy, took the bitter medicine to his lips first, so that, following his example, the sick would not have difficulty taking it. Let us not say, therefore: I do not want it, I do not have strength to drink the cup of suffering that God sends me; since our Divine Saviour was the first to drink it up to the scum” (Sermon LXXXVIII).



Saint Peter in Gallicantu

To be on the path to holiness, as every Christian is, does not mean that one stops being a sinner completely and forever. We always need God's forgiveness, his Mercy that sustains us and helps us to move forward and get up when we fall. Saint Peter

understood this well: Jesus chose him as the "rock" on which "to build his church" but clearly did not ignore Peter's human weaknesses. God's call and the mission he entrusts to us does not imply pretending that there is no possibility of falling into temptation.

Jesus knows that Peter will deny him. On the evening of the Last Supper, when faced with the readiness of Peter, the dedication he expressed to the Master, Jesus foretells what will happen, saying: "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock



crows twice, you will deny me three times” (*Mk* 14:30). Let us consider the fact that because Jesus showed that he knew what would happen – and yet did not kick Peter out, but instead took him to pray at Gethsemane – Peter was able to recognize his betrayal, to regret and to get back up. Peter had faith in forgiveness. This, perhaps, is the difference between Peter and Judas: to believe that God’s mercy is so great that it welcomes us when, repentant, we return to the Father’s house.

Nevertheless, all of us know well the experience of sin. We know that we are called to perfection (cf. *Mt* 5:48), yet we feel the heavy burden of sin. Though we feel the transforming power of grace, we also feel the effects of sin typical of our fallen state. Despite being forgiven, the conflicting consequences of our sins remain. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives our sins, which he truly blots out; and yet sin leaves a negative effect on the way we think and act. But the mercy of God is stronger even than this. It becomes *indulgence* on the part of the Father who, through the Bride of Christ, his Church, reaches the pardoned sinner and frees him from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling him to act with charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin.

[...] to live the indulgence of the Holy Year means to approach the Father’s mercy with the certainty that his forgiveness extends to the entire life of the believer. To gain an indulgence is to experience the holiness of the Church, who bestows upon all the fruits of Christ’s redemption, so that God’s love and forgiveness may extend everywhere. Let us live this Jubilee intensely, begging the Father to forgive our sins and to bathe us in his merciful “indulgence.”

Misericordiae Vultus 22

“Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” And he said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.” [...]

Then they seized him and led him away, bringing him into the high priest's house. But Peter was following at a distance. When they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat among them. Then a servant-girl, seeing him in the firelight, stared at him and said, "This man also was with him." But he denied it, saying, "Woman, I do not know him." A little later someone else, on seeing him, said, "You also are one of them." But Peter said, "Man, I am not!" Then about an hour later still another kept insisting, "Surely this man also was with him; for he is a Galilean." But Peter said, "Man, I do not know what you are talking about!" At that moment, while he was still speaking, the cock crowed. The Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, "Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Lk 22:31-34, 54-62

TO DEEPEN

Cardinal J. Ratzinger, *Prayer at the First Station of the Cross*, Colosseum, 2005

Lord, you were condemned to death because fear of what other people may think suppressed the voice of conscience. So too, throughout history, the innocent have always been maltreated, condemned and killed. How many times have we ourselves preferred success to the truth, our reputation to justice? Strengthen the quiet voice of our conscience, your own voice, in our lives. Look at me as you looked at Peter after his denial. Let your gaze penetrate our hearts and indicate the direction our lives must take. On the day of Pentecost you stirred the hearts of those who, on Good Friday, clamoured for your death, and you brought them to conversion. In this way you gave hope to all. Grant us, ever anew, the grace of conversion.

André Louf, *Under the Guidance of the Spirit*, 1990

Due to this experience Peter lived, he knows how weakness and grace go together and harmonize together in every disciple of Jesus. It is necessary to emphasize the fact that, when appointing a leader, Jesus does not look for a model of virtue and perfection who might be contemplated and imitated, according to the possibilities, by Christians of all times. [...]

No, Peter is not a model of virtue, but he is capable of transmitting the experience that he himself lived through the love for Jesus and he is always able to bear witness. Certainly, temptation caused him to waver a bit, but at the heart of this and in the depths of the fall he was beautifully freed by Jesus. [...]

We naturally think that holiness must be sought in the opposite direction of sin and we count on God, that his love will free us from weakness and evil, and thus allow us to achieve holiness. However that is not how God works with us: holiness is not found in the opposite but at the very heart of the temptation, it is not waiting for us beyond our weakness but it is inside. To escape from weakness would mean escaping from the power of God who is at work only there within. Therefore, we must learn to abide in our weakness, but armed with a deep faith, to accept being exposed to our weakness and at the same time abandoned to the mercy of God. It is only in our weakness that we are vulnerable to the love of God and to his power. To live in temptation and weakness: this is the only way to enter into contact with grace and to become a miracle of the mercy of God. That is what happened to Peter: just as he denied his Master for the third time, “the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’ And he went out and wept bitterly.” (Lk 22:61-62). We can only imagine what that gaze meant for Peter.



The Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre

Jesus entered upon his passion and death, conscious of the great mystery of love that he would consummate on the Cross.

Misericordiae Vultus 7

In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes even more evident his love and its power to destroy all human sin. Reconciliation with God is made possible through the paschal mystery and the mediation of the Church.

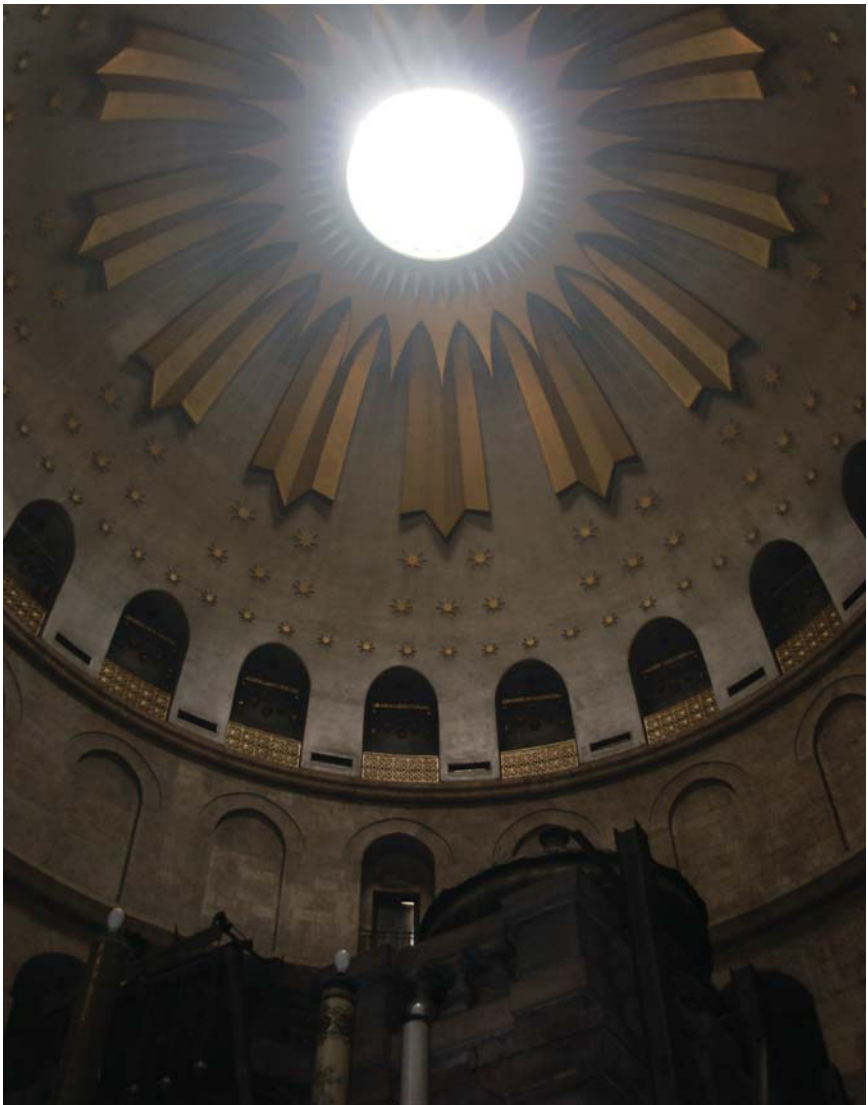
Misericordiae Vultus 22

Entering into the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre while praying and meditating on the latest Stations of the Cross, leaves one speechless. The air you breathe in that sacred place is that of donation, of the total abandonment of Jesus in the merciful arms of the Father and in the violent hands of humanity. Is there any greater proof of love for mankind? Let us spend time with Jesus, our salvation, and ponder the words of the Apostle Paul:

*[Jesus Christ] who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death –
even death on a cross.*

*Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.*

Phil 2:6-11





MERCY AS AN IMPORTANT THEME FOR VARIOUS COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN THE HOLY LAND

For those who love and dedicate themselves to the Holy Land it is a joy to be able to see how the theme of Mercy can be a source of convergence and communion among the major religious communities that are present in these places: Jews, Christians and Muslims. Let us work together so that the Holy Father's hope, for greater openness to dialogue, becomes a reality.

There is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates us to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God's most important attributes. Israel was the first to receive this revelation which continues in history as the source of an inexhaustible richness meant to be shared with all mankind. As we have seen, the pages of the Old Testament are steeped in mercy, because they narrate the works that the Lord performed in favour of his people at the most trying moments of their history. Among the privileged names that Islam attributes to the Creator are "Merciful and Kind". This invocation is often on the lips of faithful Muslims who feel themselves accompanied and sustained by mercy in their daily weakness. They too believe that no one can place a limit on divine mercy because its doors are always open.

I trust that this Jubilee year celebrating the mercy of God will foster an encounter with these religions and with other noble religious traditions; may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.

Misericordiae Vultus 23

On Our Return Home



The motto chosen for this Jubilee Year is “Merciful like the Father.” It is therefore an invitation to practice the exercise of mercy in relationships with our brothers and sisters. One would not have the ability to respond to Jesus’ teaching, “be merciful, just as your Father is merciful” (*Lk* 6:36), if they did not first receive the grace to immerse themselves in the mercy the Father has on us, as we tried to do during the pilgrimage. Once back at home with a treasure, we are called to bear fruits of mercy in our daily lives: in our families, in the workplace, in parishes and in our Lieutenancies.

Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle’s exhortation: “Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (*Eph* 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy” (*Mt* 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year.

Misericordiae Vultus 9

*I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the Lord!"
Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
Jerusalem — built as a city
that is bound firmly together.
To it the tribes go up,
the tribes of the Lord,
as was decreed for Israel,
to give thanks to the name of the Lord,
For there the thrones for judgment were set up,
the thrones of the house of David.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
"May they prosper who love you.
Peace be within your walls,
and security within your towers."
For the sake of my relatives and friends
I will say, "Peace be within you."
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
I will seek your good.
(Psalm 122)*

