

Pope Francis' Homily at the Penance service on Friday 13 March announcing the Jubilee or Holy Year of Mercy on Friday 13 March 2015.



This year as last, as we head into of the Fourth Sunday of Lent, we are gathered to celebrate the penitential liturgy. We are united with so many Christians, who, in every part of the world, have accepted the invitation to live this moment as a sign of the goodness of the Lord. The Sacrament of Reconciliation, in fact, allows us with confidence to draw near to the Father, in order to be certain of His pardon. He really is “rich in mercy” and extends His mercy with abundance over those who turn to Him with a sincere heart.

To be here in order to experience His love, however, is first of all the fruit of His grace. As the Apostle Paul reminds us, God never ceases to show the richness of His mercy throughout the ages. The transformation of the heart that leads us to confess our sins is “God's gift”, it is “His work” (cf. Eph 2:8-10). To be touched with tenderness by His hand and shaped by His grace allows us, therefore, to approach the priest without fear for our sins, but with the certainty of being welcomed by him in the name of God, and understood notwithstanding our miseries. Coming out of the confessional, we will feel God's strength, which restores life and returns the enthusiasm of faith.

The Gospel we have heard (cf. Lk 7:36-50) opens for us a path of hope and comfort. It is good that we should feel that same compassionate gaze of Jesus upon us, as when he perceived the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee. In this passage two words return before us with great insistence: *love* and *judgment*.

There is the love of the sinful woman, who humbles herself before the Lord; but first there is the merciful love of Jesus for her, which pushes her to approach. Her cry of repentance and joy washes the feet of the Master, and her hair dries them with gratitude; her kisses are pure expression of her affection; and the fragrant ointment poured out with abundance attests how precious He is to her eyes. This woman's every gesture speaks of love and expresses her desire to have an unshakeable certainty in her life: that of being forgiven. And Jesus gives this assurance: welcoming her, He demonstrates God's love for her, just for her! Love and forgiveness are simultaneous: God forgives her much, everything, because “she loved much” (Luke 7:47); and she adores Jesus because she feels that in Him there is mercy and not condemnation. Thanks to Jesus, God casts her many sins away behind Him, He remembers them no more (cf. Is 43:25). For her, a new season now begins; she is reborn in love, to a new life.

This woman has really met the Lord. In silence, she opened her heart to Him; in pain, she showed repentance for her sins; with her tears, she appealed to the goodness of God for forgiveness. For her, there will be no judgment except that which comes from God, and this is the judgment of mercy. The protagonist of this meeting is certainly the love that goes beyond justice.

Simon the Pharisee, on the contrary, *cannot find the path of love*. He stands firm upon the threshold of formality. He is not capable of taking the next step to go meet Jesus, who brings him salvation. Simon limited himself to inviting Jesus to dinner, but did not really welcome Him. In his thoughts, he invokes only justice, and in so doing, he errs. *His judgment on the woman distances him from the truth* and does not allow him even to understand who guest is. He stopped at the surface, he was not able to look to the heart. Before Jesus' parable and the question of which a servant would love his master most, the Pharisee answered correctly, "The one, to whom the master forgave most." And Jesus does not fail to make him observe: "Thou hast judged rightly. (Lk 7:43)" Only when the judgment of Simon is turned toward love: then is he in the right.

The call of Jesus pushes each of us never to stop at the surface of things, especially when we are dealing with a person. We are called to look beyond, to focus on the heart to see how much generosity everyone is capable. No one can be excluded from the mercy of God; everyone knows the way to access it and the Church is *the house that welcomes all and refuses no one*. Its doors remain wide open, so that those who are touched by grace can find the certainty of forgiveness. The greater the sin, so much the greater must be the love that the Church expresses toward those who convert.

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 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 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. I entrust the organization of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for Promotion of the New Evangelization, that [the dicastery] might animate it as a new stage in the journey of the Church on its mission to bring to every person the Gospel of mercy.

I am convinced 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.