

Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

On April 11, 2015, the eve of Divine Mercy Sunday, Pope Francis announced an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. It is extraordinary, not in the sense that God's mercy is ever anything other than extraordinary, but because the Church's Jubilee Years generally follow an ordered pattern of occurring every fifty years. Thus, this year is unexpected and in that sense extra-ordinary.

The theme for the Year, announced in the document prepared by the Holy Father is: *Merciful like the Father*. The Holy Father writes: "In mercy, we find proof of how God loves us. He gives his entire self, always, freely, asking nothing in return. He comes to our aid whenever we call upon him. What a beautiful thing that the Church begins her daily prayer with the words, "O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me" (*Ps 70:2*)! The assistance we ask for is already the first step of God's mercy toward us. He comes to assist us in our weakness. And his help consists in helping us accept his presence and closeness to us. Day after day, touched by his compassion, we also can become compassionate towards others." (*Misericordiae Vultus*, 14)

One important aspect of the Jubilee Year is that of *pilgrimage*. We may think of a pilgrimage as a lengthy journey to a far off Holy Place. Yet, it is really much simpler than that. A pilgrimage is a temporary 'dislocation' for the sake of a spiritual 'relocation'. One author noted that making the Stations of the Cross is a 'pilgrimage' for the stations take us to a different place and we return from there changed by the experience. The notion of a longer journey can add to the experience of coming to a 'different place' and it is thus that, in this Jubilee Year, I have designated Five Churches of the Diocese as Diocesan Mercy Pilgrimage Sites. These are noted elsewhere and I would ask that we seriously consider trying to get to all five sites between now and the end of the Extraordinary Year of Mercy on the Solemnity of Christ the King, November 20, 2016.

Concerning pilgrimages, Pope Francis wrote: "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)

Throughout the Jubilee Year of Mercy I will use the NorthCoast Catholic, our Official Diocesan Newspaper, to announce other Jubilee Year events including the April 4-5, 2016 "24 Hours for the Lord".

The Year of Mercy can be a time of great grace for all of us. I pray that it is for you a source of great spiritual solace and hope. May your commitment to Christ, the Lord of Mercy, be renewed and strengthened as a result of your active and conscious participation in the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. May it truly be extraordinary for you.

The Most Reverend Robert F. Vasa
Bishop of Santa Rosa