



November 23, 2015

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Tuesday, December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, our Holy Father Pope Francis will signal the beginning of the Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy as he opens the Holy Door at Saint Peter's Basilica. On the following Sunday, December 13, he will open the Holy Door at Saint John Lateran Basilica, his cathedral in Rome and the Mother Church of all Catholic churches. On that same day, I will open the Holy Door at Saint Thomas More Cathedral here in Arlington. This Year of Mercy will continue until November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King.

A "jubilee"—from the Latin for "joy"—is a special year of grace for the Church. Our most recent Jubilee Year was fifteen years ago in the year 2000. Ordinarily, a jubilee occurs every twenty-five years. However, the pope can declare an extraordinary jubilee in other years for special circumstances.

So what special circumstances would urge the Holy Father to declare this jubilee? In a word, the Holy Father has sensed that our world needs to know of and to experience God's mercy. Pope Francis said in his Bull of Indiction, *The Face of Mercy*, "The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God's mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy" (25).

The benefits of the Jubilee of Mercy will extend beyond the Church to the whole world if we witness to the Father's mercy with the joy of the Gospel. Is it not this kind of witness that ultimately wins hearts over to the Lord and to His Church? In this Jubilee of Mercy, let us dedicate ourselves to contemplating the Father's mercy and allow ourselves to be flooded with the inner joy that comes from receiving it. Then we will become the convincing heralds of mercy that Pope Francis desires us to be, and we can bring hope to a world which so hungers to know the incomparable love of the Lord Jesus.

The opening of the Holy Door, something most of us see only a few times in our lives, is meant to be a great symbol of Christ. When a pilgrim walks through that door, he or she should be reminded of how the Lord Jesus is the gate through which we pass from sin to grace (cf. Jn. 10:9). I invite each of you during this Jubilee to make a pilgrimage to Saint Thomas More Cathedral, to pass through the Holy Door, and in doing so, to reflect on the many ways and times you have, through Christ, encountered God's merciful love. When you know God's mercy, you will experience Gospel joy. And that enduring joy will make you a convincing herald of the gospel!

Faithfully in the Heart of Christ,

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde  
Bishop of Arlington