

## **DOORS and the YEAR of MERCY**

see *Misericordiae Vultus*, the Bull of Indiction for the Year of Mercy, (11 April 2015), nn3,4.

Holy Years have been part of our Catholic history since Boniface VIII declared the first such Jubilee in 1300. Since then they have usually been proclaimed every twenty five years. There have been a few exceptions such as 1983 which celebrated the 1,950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of our Lord. Pope Francis in calling a Holy Year of Mercy is declaring this year a Jubilee, rather than just a year dedicated to a particular theme. A major aspect of the Holy Year has been to make a pilgrimage to Rome seeking God's mercy and renewing our commitment to our baptismal life. The Holy Year begins when the Pope formally opens the Holy Door in St Peter's Basilica which is only open during such a year. Pilgrims enter the basilica through that door as a sign of faith, of our entering into the presence of God.

This time Pope Francis has also called for a Holy Door, "a Door of Mercy", to be opened in all cathedrals for the Jubilee Year. He also suggests that "a similar door may be opened at any shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion." In this way the Pope invites the local church and Rome to be in communion in this celebration. Parishes and communities should plan ways of making a pilgrimage to the Cathedral or other holy site where a Holy door has been opened.

The Holy Doors in Rome are closed up at the end of year to await the next Jubilee. Can we find ways of sharing in this image for the Year of Mercy? Our schools, homes and churches probably do not have the luxury of a door we do not use. Yet we all have doors which are more important than others. We have time to think as to whether there is a door which we could call our **HOLY YEAR of MERCY DOOR**. It could be the main door, the assembly hall door, a chapel door, which for the year we would decorate in a very special way. One suggestion was to set up a simple, small door frame with some decoration, which would be a sign or symbol of the Holy Doors elsewhere.

One other important point that Pope Francis makes is that he has chosen to open the Holy Door in St Peter's on 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church, because it is the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. He explains that the bishops of the Council "strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way." The image of the door expresses that hope and invites us draw more people closer to God.

The year will focus on the idea of God's mercy in the scriptures, and so for our liturgy and music there are many images of the door or the gate as ways of encountering God. We need to look out for opportunities to use those images in a particular way as we celebrate during this year. Some of them are given here just to prompt your thinking and hopefully you can develop them and share them with others.

Jacob has his dream of an encounter with God.

Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know!  
He was afraid and said, 'How awe-inspiring this place is! This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!' (Genesis 28:16,17)

What will you make of this verse from the psalms?

O gates, lift high your heads;  
grow higher, ancient doors.  
Let him enter, the king of glory! (Psalm 24:7)

How can you reflect on these words of Jesus?

So Jesus spoke to them again: In all truth I tell you, I am the gate of the sheepfold. All who have come before me are thieves and bandits, but the sheep took no notice of them. I am the gate. Anyone who enters through me will be safe: such a one will go in and out and will find pasture.  
(John 10:7-9)

How will you respond to this invitation?

Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to share a meal at that person's side. (Revelation 3:20)

Then as we come to Advent and Christmas there are many occasions in the liturgy where people come and go – they enter and leave the story. Perhaps there you might also find moments to reflect on the door, the door that opens us into the heart of God’s gracious mercy.

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Word count - 836