



Meeting #3: The Symbols of the Jubilee of Mercy

Theme: How the symbols of the Year of Mercy help us to obtain a deeper understanding of mercy.

Preparatory Reading and Reflection

- Attachment 1: The logo of the Year of Mercy (from the Vatican website)
- Attachment 2: The theology of the Holy Door by Rita A. Thiron, Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions
- Attachment 3: Tear down this wall by Carol Glatz, Catholic News Service

Opening Prayer: Prayer of the Order (Attachment 4)

Scripture Reading: Excerpts from Psalm 118 (Attachment 5)

Discussion questions:

1. General question

- a. The Year of Mercy began on December 8: What aspect of the Year has thus far been most noteworthy for you personally?

2. Questions relating to the logo of the Year of Mercy

- a. What does it mean to say that “it is the love of Christ that brings to completion the mystery of his incarnation culminating in redemption?”
- b. What are we, as members of the Order, called to do to be “merciful like the Father”?

3. Questions relating to the Holy Door:

- a. What does a door (and, in particular, the Holy Door) symbolize?
- b. Why are we encouraged to pass through a Holy Door during the Year of Mercy?
- c. What doors do we (as Americans, as Catholics, as members of the Order) need to tear down?

Closing Prayer: Archdiocese Of Washington prayer for the Year of Mercy (Attachment 6)



The *logo* and the *motto* together provide a fitting summary of what the Jubilee Year is all about. The motto *Merciful Like the Father* (taken from the Gospel of Luke, 6:36) serves as an invitation to follow the merciful example of the Father who asks us not to judge or condemn but to forgive and to give love and forgiveness without measure (cfr. Lk 6:37-38). The logo – the work of Jesuit Father Marko I. Rupnik – presents a small *summa theologiae* of the theme of mercy. In fact, it represents an image quite important to the early Church: that of the Son having taken upon his shoulders the lost soul demonstrating that it is the love of Christ that brings to completion the mystery of his incarnation culminating in redemption. The logo has been designed in such a way so as to express the profound way in which the Good Shepherd touches the flesh of humanity and does so with a love with the power to change one's life. One particular feature worthy of note is that while the Good Shepherd, in his great mercy, takes humanity upon himself, his eyes are merged with those of man. Christ sees with the eyes of Adam, and Adam with the eyes of Christ. Every person discovers in Christ, the new Adam, one's own humanity and the future that lies ahead, contemplating, in his gaze, the love of the Father.

The scene is captured within the so called *mandorla* (the shape of an almond), a figure quite important in early and medieval iconography, for it calls to mind the two natures of Christ, divine and human. The three concentric ovals, with colors progressively lighter as we move outward, suggest the movement of Christ who carries humanity out of the night of sin and death. Conversely, the depth of the darker color suggests the impenetrability of the love of the Father who forgives all.

A THEOLOGY OF A HOLY DOOR

A holy door or *porta sancta* has been used since the fifteenth century as a ritual expression of conversion. Pilgrims and penitents pass through it as a gesture of leaving the past behind and crossing the threshold from sin to grace, from slavery to freedom, and from darkness to light. Often these rituals are associated with prayer, pilgrimage, sacrifice, confession, and indulgences.

But the door finds meaning only when the believer associates the door with Christ. Jesus is the Door! In the words of Pope Francis, "There is only one way that opens wide the entrance into the life of communion with God: this is Jesus, the one and absolute way to salvation. To him alone can the words of the Psalmist be applied in full truth: 'This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter' (Ps 118:20)."

Saint John Paul II offers a similar exhortation: "To focus on the door is to recall the responsibility of every believer to cross its threshold. To pass through that door means to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord; it is to strengthen faith in him in order to live the new life which he has given us. It is a decision which presumes freedom to choose and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life [cf. Mt 13:44-46]" (Saint John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, 8, in the year 2000).

John's gospel clearly depicts this relationship between Jesus and us. "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. A thief comes only to steal and slaughter and destroy; I came so that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:7-10).

It is fitting that a Holy Door be situated within a church building. The door of the Church is the *ianua ecclesia* – "the silent witness to all the moments of our lives" (USCCB, *About the Jubilee Door*, 1999). Often sacramental rituals begin at the door – here, the priest or deacon welcomes the parents as they bring their child for baptism; here, he greets the bride and groom as they begin the wedding liturgy; here, he greets the catechumens at the Rite of Acceptance; and, finally, the priest greets the casket at the beginning of the funeral liturgy.

Therefore, let us create Holy Doors in our cathedrals or other significant churches which can be worthy symbols of Christ and a welcome invitation to seek Him within our communities of faith.

Prepared by Rita A. Thiron, M.A.

for the Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions

Tear down this wall: Holy Year calls for human barriers to tumble down

By Carol Glatz **Catholic News Service 11.12.2015 9:09 AM ET**

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- For a spiritual leader who denounces a world divided by walls, a church shuttered by cliques and hearts hardened to compassion, opening wide the Holy Door for the Year of Mercy will be a significant and symbolic moment for Pope Francis.

In Catholic tradition, the Holy Door represents the passage to salvation -- the path to a new and eternal life, which was opened to humanity by Jesus.

It also symbolizes an entryway to God's mercy -- the ultimate and supreme act by which he comes to meet people. Mercy is "the bridge that connects God and humanity, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness," the pope wrote in "Misericordiae Vultus" ("The Face of Mercy"), instituting the Holy Year of Mercy.

Doors have always had a special meaning for the Catholic Church, according to the late-Cardinal Virgilio Noe, the former archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica.

"The door of a church marks the divide between the sacred and profane, separating the church's interior from the outside world. It is the boundary defining welcome and exclusion," he wrote in the book, "The Holy Door in St. Peter's" in 1999.

The door is also a symbol of Mary -- the mother, the dwelling of the Lord -- and she, too, always has open arms and is ready to welcome the children of God home. Pope Francis was scheduled to open the door Dec. 8, the feast of Mary's immaculate conception.

But the door especially represents Christ himself -- the one and only way to eternal life. As Jesus said, according to the Gospel of John (10:9), "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture."

The Holy Year traditionally begins with the opening of the Holy Door to represent a renewed opportunity to encounter or grow closer to Jesus, who calls everyone to redemption.

Jesus knocks on everyone's door; he yearns to accompany and nourish everyone. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, then I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me," the Book of Revelation quotes him as saying.

But doors are also narrow, Cardinal Noe wrote, and people must stoop with humility and "be

brought down to size by conversion" in order to be "fit" for eternal life.

That is why passing through a Holy Door is part of a longer process of sacrifice and conversion required for receiving an indulgence granted during a Holy Year. A plenary indulgence, the remission of temporal punishment due to sin, is offered for pilgrims who also fulfill certain other conditions: reception of the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, visits and prayers for the intention of the pope and performing simple acts such as visiting the sick.

This spiritual process of encounter and conversion is made tangible in the elaborate rituals developed over time for the opening of the Holy Door.

The symbolic ceremony of opening a Holy Door came more than a century after the first Holy Year was proclaimed in 1300.

Pope Martin V, in 1423, opened the Holy Door in the Basilica of St. John Lateran for the first time for a jubilee. Next, Pope Alexander VI called for all four Holy Doors in Rome to be opened at Christmas in 1499 for the Jubilee of 1500.

Starting in the 16th century, the ceremony to open the door in St. Peter's Basilica included the pope reciting verses from the Psalms and striking the wall covering the Holy Door with a silver hammer three times.

Masons completed the task of dismantling the brick and mortared wall, which represents the difficulty and great effort required to overcome the barrier of sin and to open the path to holiness.

Some have found meaning in the fact that Jesus had five wounds and St. Peter's Basilica has five doors. Opening the Holy Door recalls the piercing of Jesus' side from which poured forth blood and water, the source of regeneration for humanity. The Holy Door of St. Peter's, in fact, is decorated with 16 bronze panels depicting the story of Jesus, in his mercy, seeking his lost sheep.

The symbolism of the hammer in the hands of the pope represents the power and jurisdiction God gives him to cast away the stones of sin, chink open hardened hearts and break down walls separating humanity from God.

The removal of the wall also conjures up pulling away the stone that sealed the tomb of Lazarus, whom Jesus resurrected from the dead.

For the closing of the door at the end of the Holy Year, the traditional rite included the pope blessing and spreading the mortar with a special trowel and setting three bricks for the start

of a new wall -- a symbol of the spiritual rebuilding of the Lord's house as well as the ever-present human temptation to put up new barriers against God with sin.

While there have been some changes to those ceremonies over time, the Holy Door is always a reminder that because of God's mercy, any obstacles can always be removed, and the door to hope and forgiveness is always there waiting.

Opening Prayer: Meeting #3

The Prayer of the Order

Lord Jesus, Thou hast seen fit to enlist me for Thy service in the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem. I humbly entreat Thee, through the intercession of the Most Holy Virgin of Philermos, of Saint John the Baptist, of Blessed Fra' Gerard, and of all the Saints, to keep me faithful to the traditions of our Order.

Be it mine to practice and defend the Catholic, the Apostolic, the Roman Faith against the enemies of religion. Be it mine to practice charity towards my neighbors, especially the poor and the sick.

Give me the strength I need to carry out this my resolve, forgetful of myself, learning ever from Thy Holy Gospel a spirit of deep and generous Christian devotion, striving ever to promote God's glory, the world's peace, and all that may benefit the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem.

Amen.

Scripture Reading

Excerpts from Psalm 118

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever.

Open to me the gates of righteousness
that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.

I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.

Closing Prayer: Meeting #3

Prayer of the Archdiocese of Washington for the Year of Mercy

Almighty God and Father,
You have created all things
and know the desire of every heart.
In this Year of Mercy, we reflect
on your great love for us, and
acknowledge our sinfulness
and need for your healing mercy.
Trusting that you never tire of forgiving us,
we open our hearts to receive
your forgiveness and love.
Having encountered you, Mercy itself,
and guided by the Holy Spirit,
may we witness to the love
we have received by sharing it
with those most in need:
the hungry, the homeless,
the afflicted, and the oppressed.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen