

## ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY

22 November 2015, the Solemnity of Christ the King  
Archbishop Peter Takeo OKADA  
Apostolic Administrator of Diocese of Saitama

To all the faithful of the Diocese of Saitama,

As we usher in the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy opening on 8 December 2015, I'm sending you this letter of exhortation and encouragement.

In his bull, *Misericordiae Vultus (Jesus Christ, the Face of the Father's Mercy)*, Pope Francis explains the significance of this extraordinary Holy Year.

God's mercy is fully revealed in Jesus Christ, God made man. Whoever sees the Son sees the Father. Whoever sees Jesus Christ sees the merciful God. Pope Francis is calling us to know more deeply God's mercy revealed through our Lord Jesus and to spread it with joy to others.

God's mercy lets him forgive us sinners our sins, heal our wounds, pains and illness, purify and inspire us, and lead us into the bosom of God who is holy.

In order to know God's mercy more deeply, we need to pray sincerely, savor the Scripture more, and receive the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Eucharist with all our heart.

God's mercy, as described in the well-known parable of the Prodigal Son, is first and foremost revealed as the love of God who embraces and forgives sinners. When the prodigal son returned to his father, the father was filled with compassion and welcomed his son back in great joy. We too have been forgiven our sins through the Sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation. It is true that God forgives those who repent their sins, but we know those who receive the forgiveness of sins are not automatically made problem-free, pure and holy. When we have committed offenses and sins, we must do penance. Furthermore, due to the inclination and attachment to sin still remaining in us, we have discord and division in ourselves, torn between the Spirit and the flesh.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. By contrast, the works of the flesh oppose the Holy Spirit: they are impurity, idolatry, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, factions, envy, and things like these. (cf. Galatians 5:19-23)

We need to fight against the works of flesh and do penance as fight for our purification even after receiving the forgiveness of sins. Looking back at the history of the Church, we find that severe long-term penance with corporal mortification used to be imposed on penitents. In the course of time, however, it has been replaced with other forms such as prayer, works of mercy, fasting, almsgiving, and a visit to churches.

In His letter dated 1 September on the occasion of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy<sup>1</sup>, Pope Francis describes the Jubilee Indulgence<sup>2</sup>. He wishes that through the Indulgence all the faithful may take an opportunity to have a genuine experience of God's mercy. By doing concrete acts of penance and purification, we share in God's mercy and become doers of the works of God's mercy to serve others.

In order to share in this grace, the acts of purification and penance exhorted by the Holy Father include the following:

- 1) Make a pilgrimage to the designated churches<sup>3</sup>, cross through a Door of Mercy, visit the Blessed Sacrament, say the designated prayer (Prayer of Pope Francis for the Extraordinary Jubilee) and make a Profession of Faith.
- 2) Receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation from a priest and receive the Holy Eucharist.
- 3) Pray with the Scripture to contemplate deeply on God's Mercy.
- 4) Practice the acts in accordance with God's Mercy.

Each and every act to make God's mercy visible and tangible, whether it be spiritual such as prayer for the souls in the Purgatory or corporal such as good deeds, is an opportunity to obtain the Indulgence.

The Holy Father shows some concrete ways to receive God's Mercy for those who cannot enter the Holy Door due to sickness, aging and some other reasons as well as the incarcerated in prison.

The Holy Father is also extending God's mercy to those who had no other choice under difficult circumstances but to victimize the life of the unborn, encouraging them to receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> The full Japanese translation of the letter will appear on the website of Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan.

<sup>2</sup> The term "indulgence" may be difficult to understand, but it means a remission of the temporal punishment that brings about effects of penance under certain conditions prescribed by the Church. Punishment is the evil consequence inevitably following from the very nature of sin, and it inflicts us. Practices of penance led by conversion free us from the punishment. (Cf. Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, *Katorikku Kyoukai no Oshie [The Teachings of the Catholic*

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*Church*], pp. 220-221)

<sup>3</sup> The designated churches in the Diocese of Saitama are Urawa Cathedral Church, Maebashi Church, Matsugamine Church and Mito Church.