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DECEMBER 2015

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HOLY YEAR OF MERCY

TIME OF GRACE AND CONVERSION

BY FATHER NORMAN LANGENBRUNNER



When Pope Francis announced his intention to call for an Extraordinary Jubilee, he said, “It shall be a Holy Year of Mercy,” a time for animating “a new stage in the journey of the Church on its mission to bring to every person the Gospel of mercy.”

He decreed this Holy Year should begin on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council. It is Pope Francis’ hope that “the whole Church will find in this Jubilee the joy needed to rediscover and make fruitful the mercy of God.” The Holy Year will conclude on November 20, 2016, the Sunday dedicated to Jesus Christ as King of the Universe.

DEDICATED TO MERCY

Pope Francis’ dedication to promoting the concept of God’s mercy is reflected in his personal motto: *Miserando atque Eligendo*. Although it doesn’t translate easily into English, the gist is clear: lowly but chosen through God’s mercy. The Latin expression comes from a sermon



CNS PHOTO/GREGORY A. SHERITZ

by Venerable Bede (673–735) commenting on Jesus’ decision to call Matthew the tax collector to be an apostle.

Pope Francis’ many acts of mercy shown to strangers—at risk of his own life as Father Jorge Bergoglio, SJ, superior of Jesuits in Argentina—underscore his sense of mercy and compassion. Only recently have stories emerged about his efforts to save dozens of people who were on the enemies list of the Argentine military junta during the “Dirty War” of the late 1970s and early 1980s. One rescued man said, “I’ve always wondered if Bergoglio was fully aware of the risks he took. I don’t know if anyone else would have saved me without knowing me at all.”

CALLING THE CHURCH TO MERCY

Pope Francis’ emphasis on mercy continues the call for mercy issued by other recent popes. Pope John XXIII addressed the assembly at the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962, saying: “Nowadays the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy



rather than that of severity.” In his encyclical, *The Mercy of God* (*Dives in Misericordia*), Pope John Paul II described “a heartfelt appeal by the Church to mercy, which humanity and the modern world need so much” (2). Pope Francis’ exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) was animated by his focus on mercy, reiterating his oft-spoken reminder, “God never tires of forgiving us; we are the ones who tire of seeking his mercy” (3).

Awareness of divine mercy, however, isn’t new to God’s people. Examples are found throughout the biblical story of salvation. God intervenes for a number of women who are childless, such as Abraham’s wife, Sarah, and Samuel’s mother, Hannah. Yahweh forgives his people’s rebellion as they wander the wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. The prophets and psalms consistently offer the message of divine mercy. The gospel of mercy is reflected in the miracles Jesus performed and parables he taught. The God of the Scriptures is a God of mercy.

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