Summary in Plain English

1. In Jesus we see the mercy of the Father. This mercy is rich and everlasting. Jesus is the sacrament of this: the visible, tangible, and audible manifestation of God’s endless love, forgiveness, and mercy. When we see Jesus, we see the Father; Jesus thus reveals the mercy of God to us.

2. We should think deeply about mercy because mercy is what leads to a true and deep sense of well-being. When we understand mercy, we understand the Blessed Trinity – the community of love which is God.

3. There are times in our lives when we think and pray about mercy more so that we can ourselves become agents of God’s love for others.

For this reason, I hereby proclaim a Jubilee of Mercy. The Jubilee will open on December 8, 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. I chose this feast because it holds a unique place in our history. We humans are a sinful lot: selfish, greedy, lustful, and mean. But despite this, God responds to us with love. Mercy me. Mercy is always greater than our sin and, as if to prove it, God called Mary to bear Jesus and he gave Mary freedom from this sinful nature.

On December 8 I will open the Holy Door which will thereby become a Door of Mercy. Anyone who passes through this door will experience God’s mercy.

Soon after this, other doors will be opened, first in the Church of St John Lateran in Rome, then in other basilicas, at local shrines throughout the world, and even in local parish churches, as the bishop directs. This will be a world-wide Jubilee.

In your own words, what is mercy?
The ready willingness to help anyone in time of need.

Mercy is an attitude on our part that leads us to look deep into the human heart to seek the circumstance that caused an offense.

In Judaism and Christianity, the concept of the Jubilee is a special year of remission of sins and universal pardon.

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrates Mary’s conception in the womb of her mother, St Ann. We celebrate the birth of Mary nine months later on September 8th.

Is there a door within your parish that can be designated for this Holy Year?
4. I chose December 8 as the opening of the Jubilee because it is also the 50th Anniversary of the closing of Vatican II. I want to keep Vatican II alive in the Church because at the Council, our fortress-like walls came tumbling down and a new age of mercy was inaugurated.

Saint John XXIII himself proclaimed this in his opening speech at the Council, “Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity,” he said. The medicine of mercy, indeed. And Blessed Paul VI likewise echoed this sentiment in his closing remarks.

We trust now that the Holy Spirit will guide us as a Church to observe this Jubilee faithfully.

5. The Jubilee year will close on November 20, 2016. I can’t tell you how much I hope this year will create a Church of mercy, steeped in love and forgiveness, ready to be like Jesus in every way. This is how the world is being saved!

6. As we think about mercy we will come to see that it is not merely an abstract idea. Throughout history, God has been “merciful in practice.” Mercy is not a mere theology but a way we see and understand God. God is mercy and love.

He has touched real people’s lives: securing justice for the oppressed, giving food to the hungry, letting prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down, loves the just, watches over travelers, supports widows and orphans, and brings the wicked to ruin. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds and lifts up the downtrodden.

This is our agenda for the Jubilee year. God acts toward us like a father or mother who loves their child deeply and profoundly. It is a visceral love, gushing forth. So, too, this year, must our love gush forth to give mercy to the people of the world.

7. In our long religious tradition, we have sung over and over again from Psalm 136. Jesus may have prayed this very psalm before his trial and death. In it, after every verse, we proclaim, “For his mercy endures forever.” Other translations say, “For his love never quits.” They mean the same. Jesus’ self-giving journey to Calvary was an act of supreme mercy toward us.
8. Now let us gaze on Jesus. He embodies God’s love for us. The stories he told and the signs he worked were all designed to reveal God’s mercy: to the sick, the suffering, the stranger, the rejected, and the sinner: God’s mercy endures forever!

What moved Jesus to act with compassion toward all was nothing less than mercy. Jesus looked on all with merciful love. He understood the human heart and he knew how bound up we are by our selfishness and self-centeredness. He knew that we lacked love; but he knew as well that by loving us to the end, he would free us from these demons and set us on the pathway to love others.

Saint Bede the Venerable wrote about how Jesus called Matthew, a public sinner and tax collector. Jesus looked on that man with mercy, according to Bede. He saw beyond the sins to the heart of Matthew. His very look wiped away Matthew’s sins.

I myself am so impressed by Bede’s words that I chose them as my episcopal motto: *miserando atque eligendo* which could be rendered in English, “I forgive you and I choose you.”

9. Likewise in the parables which Jesus used to instruct us, God is revealed as the Father who never gives up, even on a son who betrayed him. He seeks out the lost sheep. We are that lost sheep ourselves. God has had such mercy on us! God welcomes these lost ones back to himself with happiness; he doesn’t scold them and punish them. He’s just happy to have them back.

The basis of this is Jesus’ teaching on mercy in Matthew 18. This is the story of the servant whose debt was forgiven by his master only to trounce without mercy on someone who owed him far less. The master was infuriated by this. “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” the master asks. (Mt 18:33). Jesus concludes, “So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Mt 18:35).

How dare we now fail to show mercy toward those who need it most? This parable contains a profound teaching for us. Mercy is God’s way of treating us; how we treat others determines whether we are children of God or not. Just as God is merciful so we also must be merciful. How dare we take any other approach?

10. The Church is a sacrament of Christ to the world and therefore, we must have mercy in our core. Nothing in our preaching or teaching can lack in mercy. Perhaps we have forgotten how to

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**Mt 9:36**

On whom do we need to look with merciful love? Who among us does not deserve such mercy?

What is the experience of God’s mercy like?

Whom do we now exclude from God’s offer of mercy? How can we invite them to the table?

In what ways has the Church failed to offer mercy to people?
show mercy or live as merciful people. It may be that our focus on justice led us away from mercy as the first impulse.

In the wider world, mercy is also lacking, as we can see in the news each day. The time has now come for us to return to being a Church of mercy. This must be our witness to the world.

11. Saint John Paul II offered a great teaching on this as well. “The Church,” he said, “lives an authentic life when she professes and proclaims mercy – the most stupendous attribute of the Creator and of the Redeemer – and when she brings people close to the sources of the Savior’s mercy.”

Our mercy must extend to all creation, Saint John Paul II teaches. Our task of building and planting the earth, given to us by God in Genesis 2:15, must include attitudes and actions of mercy toward the land as well as its people.

12. We as the Church must imitate Christ. We must be as merciful as he was. Our language and our gestures must transmit mercy so as to touch the hearts of modern men and women again.

13. During the Jubilee we want the words of Luke (6:35) to echo in our own hearts, “Be merciful just as your Father is merciful.” In order to do this, we must reclaim the Word of God, quiet prayer in which God speaks to us, and silence. Let us adopt mercy as our lifestyle.

14. In our religious tradition, we have long valued the idea of being on a journey toward the heart of the Lord. We are a “pilgrim Church.” This means we must move away from our comfort zones and walk out into a new place. Our pilgrimage to any particular Church building must be a sign of an inner journey to greater mercy.

To succeed at this we must take seriously Jesus’ teaching: “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:37-38).

The Lord asks us above all not to judge and not to condemn. This is the beginning of mercy. We judge others harshly, often condemning them or questioning their faithfulness. But why? Only God sees into the depths of our souls.

Dives in Misericordia, #11

The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. (Genesis 2:15)

What is the challenge in this for you as a parish? How you more closely imitate Christ?

When people make pilgrimage to your parish, what is the experience of mercy they find there? How can we render fewer judgements and more invitations?
We must learn to forgive and become instruments of mercy. Our motto, Merciful like the Father, leads us to throw open our hearts and our doors and become compassionate toward others.

15. So in this holy year, we will open our hearts to those on the fringe of society. We will heal wounds, not cause them. We will avoid indifference and take the first step toward those most in need of our mercy. Let us open our eyes to see the wounds of the world, to see those deprived of dignity and recognize their cry for help!

I want everyone to reflect deeply on the spiritual and corporal works of mercy throughout this year. Let us teach them to our children and to each other.

We ourselves will be judged on how merciful we have been toward others. If we have shown mercy to the hungry, the homeless, the prisoner, and the lonely, then judgement will go well for us. As St John of the Cross put it, “as we prepare to leave this life, we will be judged on the basis of love.”

16. The Gospel of Luke offers another element that will help us live this Jubilee with vigor. Jesus rose to read in his hometown synagogue, according to Luke 4. He read from Isaiah the Prophet, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good tidings to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to those in captivity; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

This “year of the Lord’s favor” is what we now enter into as our Jubilee. Let us address poverty once and for all. Let us proclaim liberty to those bound up in selfishness. Let us restore sight to those too blind to see human indignity. And let us do this cheerfully!

17. Let us make Lent 2016 a special time of allowing God to embrace us with his mercy once again. He never tires of taking us back, like the Father of the prodigal son. Let us make our Lenten fast one which frees the oppressed, tends to the homeless poor, and offers food to the hungry.

Toward this end, I want to see every diocese implement 24 Hours for the Lord, an initiative which draws people to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This sacrament is a vital part of our Jubilee year. I never tire of calling confessors to be authentic signs of God’s love. We become such a sign when we realize first and foremost our own need for forgiveness and mercy. And let us also reach out to

Who is included in this “fringe of society” in your community, whether or not they are Catholic?

Mt 25:31-45

Words of Light and Love, 57 (St John of the Cross)

Isaiah 61:1-2
Luke 4:16-19

This planning process will help you think about ways to do this.

We will plan ways to teach people to “fast for the sake of others” this year.

And we will plan ways to offer Reconciliation for all in the parish.
those standing outside our walls. Embrace them as the Father did his prodigal son.

18. Also during Lent 2016, I plan to send out what I am calling Missionaries of Mercy. These will be priest confessors empowered to pardon even those sins normally reserved to the Holy See. It is my hope that local dioceses will organize “missions to the people” which will be open to all who seek mercy. We want to invite back all those who desire to live in God’s love.

19. May this message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to it. I include especially the men and women taking part in organized crime, those who have made money their god, and those who participate in corruption, greed, and wrongdoing.

To those people I say, “This is your moment of grace.” Return to the Father; he waits to embrace and forgive you. Please accept this invitation to conversion.

20. Let me say a word now about the connection between justice and mercy. Justice leads to rule of law in society; it also refers to what each person is rightly due. Indeed the law is important to us but we must be careful not to fall into legalism.

Jesus himself addressed this. To those who objected to his open love for all, he suggested a meditation on mercy. Love triumphs over law in Jesus’ teaching. Paul is an example of this. He had spent his life enforcing the law – that is, until he met Jesus. His conversion turned his view of that law upside down.

Likewise for us. When people come to us with “legal” issues with the Church, we often offer them only legal solutions. But a more merciful solution is what we seek to offer instead.

21. Offering us mercy instead of judgment is God’s way of reaching out to us in the midst of our wrongdoing and selfishness. Such divine mercy helps us look deep within to find our true person there, a person created by a loving God and destined also for love in God.

During the time of the Old Testament prophet, Hosea, the people of Israel were sinful and unfaithful. According to justice, God had every right to destroy and punish them. But instead, God offered them only his endless mercy. “How can I give you up?” God asked. “…my compassion grows warm and tender.”
And this is to our point here. Merely following the rules is not enough; justice must be tempered by mercy. If God acted any other way, he would no longer be God but only a mere human. When we feel the tenderness of God’s forgiveness – even when we know how selfish and badly we have behaved – then we grow in love.

Therefore, we allow only the self-giving love that Christ showed for us to be our norm. Beyond that, who are we to judge?

22. Let me now speak a little about indulgences because a Jubilee year always involves granting them. Simply put, God indulges us. This Holy Year of Mercy is time during which, by taking certain steps under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we will come to know firsthand this indulgent God. Not only are our sins forgiven but we are transformed as children of God. We are transformed; and this is what the indulgence of the Holy Year offers us.

So when we visit a shrine, celebrate Reconciliation, tend to the poor, or make peace with someone, we receive an indulgence from God. Likewise, we live within the communion of saints and their holiness leads us to holiness.

Therefore, we approach the Father’s mercy with absolute assurance that his mercy extends to our entire lives. To “gain an indulgence” is to experience this holiness in the Church.

23. As we ponder the meaning of mercy this year, we do so as neighbors to Jews and Muslims. Both of these great traditions consider mercy to be one of God’s most important attributes. Both are steeped in understanding God as mercy and kindness.

I hope that during this Jubilee we can encounter these and other great religious traditions and dialogue with them.

24. We turn now to Mary, the Mother of Mercy. May she watch over us in this Jubilee year. She witnessed the mercy of her son, Jesus, throughout his life and even at the foot of his cross. In her great hymn, Mary sang in this or similar words: “God’s mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him...” During this year, let us pray to Mary in the great Salve Regina, known in English as the Hail, Holy Queen.

We pray with those in the communion of saints who made divine mercy their mission. In particular, we honor St Faustina Kowalska. May she stand with us before God throughout this year.

What is your memory of indulgences? How can we teach people to seek them as a part of their pilgrimage to the heart of the Lord?

Who are your Jewish or Muslim neighbors?

Luke 1:50

Salve Regina. See the separate note on this prayer which is within this kit.

To learn more about Sr Faustina visit this location on the web.
25. With all these thoughts and prayers in mind, I now present this Extraordinary Jubilee Year. Let us allow God to surprise us in this year. He never tires of opening his heart to us. He loves us. We as the Church must become during this year a more credible witness to mercy, professing it, living it, teaching it to others, and above all, offering it to each other.

Let us hold no one at a distance. Let us place no burdens or hurdles before people. May we imitate Christ in extending mercy, and may we become the voice of every man and women as we pray together. “Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old” (Ps 25:6).

What is your response to this papal bull? What do you think it means for your parish?

Dreaming a little, what can you foresee for your parish in two or three years as we become more and more a “Church of mercy”?

Pompeo Batoni: The Prodigal

Public domain

This papal bull was promulgated in Rome at St Peter’s Basilica on April 11, 2015, the vigil of the 2nd Sunday of Easter, which is also known as Divine Mercy Sunday, in the third year of my pontificate.

+Francis of Rome

To read the original text, return to the landing page for this planning kit.