Jubilee of Mercy – Lent 2016

Caritas Christi urget nos

Day of spiritual retreat for those who are involved in the charitable service of the Church

Promoted by the Pontifical Council Cor Unum

The Jubilee is an opportunity to meet God in order to better serve our brothers and sisters. Encountering God’s mercy means becoming merciful with our very brothers and sisters in the spirit of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. This can help to fight against the spiritual worldliness in the Church to which many times Pope Francis is asking us to be attentive.

In order to experience also the grace of the Jubilee in our places of service, Pope Francis has instructed the Pontifical Council Cor Unum, which follows at a universal level the charitable service of the Church, to propose to all those who work in different forms in the Church’s charitable activity a day of spiritual retreat during Lent on the theme: Caritas Christi urget nos.

The day should be celebrated locally within each group if possible, since it is the Holy Father’s wish that the Jubilee is celebrated especially in loco. A specific date for the entire universal Church has not been determined in order to allow each charitable organization, group or institution to carry out with great freedom according to its needs. To assist in the preparation, we present below a basic proposal, which can then be adapted that is essentially a liturgical celebration to promote the personal encounter with the Lord. It can be integrated with the passage through the Holy Door of Jubilee that is locally established.

The day will comprise three parts: a penitential celebration with individual confessions; a time of sharing in group and the Eucharistic celebration.

For the penitential celebration, a program was prepared that provides an introduction, two readings alternated with a psalm, a catechetical guide to prepare for confession, the confessions, which are done better within the celebration to show the communitarian dimension of our journey of faith.

For the time of group sharing, there are some proposed questions to assist the dialogue on how the service is lived, both in the personal commitment and in the experience with others.

For the Eucharistic celebration, the form “For Charity” can be applied, which can be used, in accordance with the respective bishop, on weekdays; however not on Sundays and feast days and from Monday to Wednesday of Holy Week, according to the liturgical norms (cfr. Institutio Generalis Missali Romani, 374). Instead, it is good to keep the readings of the day during Lent in order to maintain the spirit of the liturgical season.

In the proposed material, there is also the prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee and a list of the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, from which the retreat day is inspired.

Also, a poster of Jesus the Good Shepherd and the works of mercy is provided. This can be used, adapting it to the local language and initiatives.

For more information, please contact directly the Pontifical Council Cor Unum (corunum@corunum.va; cath-aid@corunum.va).
Introduction for the day

The organizations that express the service of charity in the Church are particularly involved in the celebration of the Holy Year of Mercy because our service is the concrete, physical, direct expression of mercy by which the human persons are sought, loved and served by the Lord, who is present in the history of the world through ourselves and our works.

It is certainly a grace to be able to dwell on the gift that we continually receive – to be loved and to love – in order not to get used to it nor reduce it to the size of our heart. “God is greater than our hearts” (1 Jn 3:20) and his grace in us is at work to expand, strengthen and make it flesh of our flesh: hence it becomes this concrete gesture, daily gift, the bread that nourishes us and that we offer every day.

The Jubilee was “like a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land” (cfr. Lv 25,4).

The land resting in the time of the Jubilee suggests two things:
- that the Jubilee is an opportunity to do some discernment between what we do for the Kingdom and what can be omitted. Too often, we give equal importance to everything and we strive for good things but are not significant;
- also that our work for the Kingdom should be peacefully abandoned in God, done with diligence but without fear or worries, or angrily chasing after time which is never enough.

In this time of prayer and encounter with the Lord, let us try to allow our hearts to rest a little, encompassing in the light of His mercy, in His love and His grace, the land entrusted to our work.
The farmer, for how much he works, knows that the Lord is the one who makes it grow (cfr. 1 Cor 3:6ss): this attitude of trusting abandonment becomes a proclamation and a testimony of how the gift of mercy precedes and sustains our service.

The Jubilee celebrates a mercy that never tires. It is a mercy that always looks for new ways and new signs to manifest itself and goes in search of those who think they do not need it or are not worthy of it. We are servants of a God who is at work to restore dignity to those who have lost it, to help those in need, to make us capable of loving and healing the broken and hardened hearts. The memory of the Lord’s mercy, which we wish to renew in this occasion, refreshes our hearts. In fact, it reminds us that God continues to look at us and love us in spite of the sins of men and ours. It reminds us that, even if our field was devastated, He can still make good grain grows in it—and that He intensely desires to do so. It makes us, in our turn, to be merciful.

We are often harsh in our relationships, strict in our judgment and devoid of hope in our evaluations. Sometimes, we carry within us explicit or unspoken and yet deep resentments: strange contradiction to the message of peace and forgiveness that we so often utter.

The Jubilee is an opportunity for a silent and profound restoration of the interior unity, to rid ourselves of the hostilities that are more or less disguised, which we carry inside, to feel at peace because we are deeply loved by a Love that is greater than any disappointment, envy, frustration and injustice that we think that we have suffered.

The heart rests and expands: by allowing love and forgiveness, the heart becomes capable of forgiveness. We become magnanimous and serene.

The heart’s rest takes place trying to be active, yes, but less protagonistic because it is more capable of allowing God to work, discern, discover, and contemplate what He does before us and sometimes without us.

We would like to know how to continue our service with diligence, but trying to see things more clearly as a small, small sign of a love and of a much greater activity that works in Christ and has acted in million of persons, hundreds of peoples, as the presence of an ever greater love.

We ask for the grace that this time of retreat and prayer will help to rid our hearts and mind from pettiness, waste of resentments, revenge, divisions and gives us a greater ability to see the work of the Spirit in the big and small things, in our neighbor and especially in the little ones and in the simple, popular and quiet holiness that surround us every time we serve the poor.
I. Moment: the penitential liturgy

Texts for reading

From the Second Letter of the Apostle Saint Paul to the Corinthians (5:14-21)

*The love of Christ impels us*

Brothers and Sisters, for the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. Consequently, from now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.

And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

Psalm 103

**R) Merciful and gracious is the Lord**

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s,

The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.
From the Holy Gospel according to Matthew (25: 31-46)
You did it to me

At that time, Jesus said: «When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left. Then the King will say to those at his right hand: «Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me». Then the righteous will answer him: «Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?». And the King will answer them: «Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me». Then he will say to hose at his left hand: «Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me». Then they also will answer: «Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?». Then he will answer them: «Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me». And they will go away into eternal punishment, but he righteous into eternal life».

Possible points for reflection

As St. Paul tells us, not only the service of charity, but our whole life is shaped by Christ’s death, which occurred because we no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died and rose for us. Mercy is manifested as a gift and sacrifice of oneself so that others may have life, as it has happened to Christ. God is in Himself this inexhaustible gift of self that continually generates life: this is why Scripture can affirm that he “is love” (1 Jn 4:8).

The Old Testament uses two words to express God’s mercy. The first is esed, a tenderness that is interwoven with fidelity, which is manifested in the events that God governs, and more specifically in the action with which he inspires and carries on history, in creation, liberation and his manifestation as providence (cfr. Psalm 136,1.5-7.10-12.25-26).

The other word is the verb Ra  am (taken from the term Re  em, which corresponds to the organ that is capable of producing life, the uterus: cfr. Exodus 34:5-7). It is a term that connects the work of God to the womb, which is the place in which the body and life of the person are interwoven. In this sense, mercy is understood as a regenerating activity, that re-creates.

Living by this mercy, the grace of being continuously renewed and reborn is given: as Paul proclaims, old things pass away and new ones are born.

Mercy – offered and received – does not leave everything as before, but makes all things new. The Apostle calls this ever new relationship between God and us as “reconciliation”. There is no reality in our life that is not transformed when it is lived with the Lord. The grace of the Holy Year consists in the possible newness of a reconciliation, supported by God’s merciful action, who
touched every aspect of our life, both inner and outer, the concrete relationships of our families, our communities, with the poor in body and spirit, with the injustices suffered (to be forgiven) or inflicted (for which forgiveness is asked), and with those who are our daily neighbors.

«Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.» (Evangelii gaudium, n.2).

Faced with the risk of reducing mercy to a feeling, beautiful and noble, but still intangible and interior, we are invited to transform ourselves to authentic mercy, to generate or re-create life continuously. The divine act of creating – for love – out of nothing is reflected and in a certain sense is continued in the works of mercy listed by Jesus in the Gospel. Besides the feeling of welcome and inner compassion, it is mainly about letting our hearts to be formed, carrying out the actions that we see in the Gospels as the effects of the compassion of Jesus (Mt 9:36s; 14:14; 15:32; Mc 1:41; Lc 7:13s).

We can thus take advantage of this Holy Year to reconcile with Christ, giving him once more space in our life, begging the grace of His mercy, and allowing it to act as a source of newness.

Thanks to His resurrection, Jesus is not an event of the past, but He is our present. He is here and now in His concrete humanity that He Himself taught to be recognizable in “the least of His brethren” (Mt 25,40.45). This expression refers first of all to the Church – which remains His mysterious body – but also the poor, anyone who is in need, and more generally those who are our neighbors. Who are we called to be neighbors with today?

The Pope in his Lenten Message this year, citing the Bull Misericordiae Vultus: the works of mercy «remind us that faith finds expression in concrete everyday actions meant to help our neighbors in body and spirit: by feeding, visiting, comforting and instructing them. […] For in the poor, the flesh of Christ becomes visible in the flesh of the tortured, the crushed, the scourged, the malnourished, and the exiled… to be acknowledged, touched, and cared for by us» (n. 3). It is only by working in love that we can know the truth of God: «he who loves is born of God and knows God; for God is love» (1 Jn 4:7-8). «It is love which not only creates the good but also grants participation in the very life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For he who loves desires to give himself». (Dives in Misericordia, 7). The passage of the Gospel of Matthew, which is the inspirational text of the works of mercy, is therefore a clear reference for our examination of conscience and conversion: if we have known and love Christ in our brother and sister in need.

It is important that our spiritual and corporal works of mercy should clearly express the dimension of hope that gives substance and consistency of faith by which they are sustained. These have its original structure in the Trinitarian love and its source and model in the total self-giving of Christ.

Without this insight, the works of mercy would support only an uncertain road, it would not open us to embrace the gift of being made into new creatures: it would be a moment of consolation without sense of prophecy.
II. Moment: sharing

Questions for work group

1. How can we help each other to refocus on the mystery of the love of Christ and his death, which generates us to new life, making us capable of receiving and giving mercy, defying the fear of death?

2. What are the biggest obstacles that we experience in our conversion to the measure of love that we contemplate in Christ? Which fears hinder our gift?

3. Which spiritual and corporal works of mercy do we find more challenging in the face of demanding situations that we encounter?

4. Which reconciliation, necessary for our life in Christ, do we not allow to happen or even obstruct?

5. How can we renew our ministry of charity in the light of Christ’s mercy, which is the living unity of truth and charity?
III. Moment: the Eucharistic Celebration

Holy Mass

Wherever it is possible and appropriate, the Eucharist is celebrated in one of the Churches where there is the Jubilee Holy Door, prefacing the celebration with the processional passage through the said Door. The readings of the day, the parts of the Mass – unless otherwise specified – are taken from “For Charity”]

FOR THE VIRTUE OF CHARITY

Entrance Antiphon

«Thus says the Lord: I will take from your bodies your stony hearts and give you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you. You will be my people, and I will be your God». Ez 36:26-28

Collect

Set our hearts aflame, O Lord, with the Spirit of your charity, we pray, that we may always think thoughts worthy and pleasing to your majesty and love you sincerely in our brothers and sisters. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Prayer over the Offerings

Sanctify these gifts in your mercy, O Lord, and, accepting the oblation of the spiritual sacrifice, grant, we pray, that we may extend your charity to all. Through Christ our Lord.

Communion Antiphon

So faith, hope and charity remain, these three; But the greatest of these is charity. 1Cor 13:13

Prayer after Communion

Pour out the grace of the Holy Spirit, O Lord, on those you have replenished with the one Bread of heaven and refresh us, we pray, with the delights of perfect charity. Through Christ our Lord.
Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee

Lord Jesus Christ,
You have taught us to be merciful like the heavenly Father, and have told us that whoever sees you sees Him.
Show us your face and we will be saved.
Your loving gaze freed Zacchaeus and Matthew from being enslaved by money;
the adulteress and Magdalene from seeking happiness only in created things;
made Peter weep after his betrayal,
and assured Paradise to the repentant thief.
Let us hear, as if addressed to each one of us, the words that you spoke to the Samaritan woman:
“If you knew the gift of God!”

You are the visible face of the invisible Father,
of the God who manifests his power above all by forgiveness and mercy;
let the Church be your visible face in the world, its Lord risen and glorified.
You willed that your ministers would also be clothed in weakness
in order that they may feel compassion for those in ignorance and error;
let everyone who approaches them feel sought after, and forgiven by God.

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing
so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord,
and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor,
proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed
and restore sight to the blind.

We ask this of you, Lord Jesus, through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy;
you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever.

Amen.
The Works of Mercy

“The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities.

Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently.

The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead.

(CCC n. 2447).

THE SEVEN CORPORAL WORKS OF MERCY

1. Feed the hungry.
2. Give drink to the thirsty.
3. Clothe the naked.
4. Shelter the homeless.
5. Visit the sick.
6. Visit the imprisoned.
7. Bury the dead.

THE SEVEN SPIRITUAL WORKS OF MERCY

1. Counsel the doubtful.
2. Instruct the ignorant.
3. Admonish the sinner.
4. Comfort the afflicted.
5. Forgive offences.
7. Pray for the living and the dead.