

Sacrament of Penance Major Part of Jubilee Year

Following are further excerpts from the NC News translation of Pope John Paul II's bull, "Aperite Portas Redemptori," describing his intentions for the upcoming holy year.

Since the church is the dispenser of the manifold grace of God, and if she attributes to this year a specific meaning, then the divine economy of salvation will be actualized in the various forms in which this jubilee year of the redemption will manifest itself.



The profound meaning and hidden beauty of this year that the Lord enables us to celebrate is to be seen in the rediscovery and lived practice of the sacramental economy of the church, through which the grace of God in Christ reaches individuals and communities.

Furthermore, it must be clear that this special time, when all Christians are called upon to realize more profoundly their vocation to reconciliation with their Father in the Son, will only reach its full achievement if it leads to a fresh commitment by each and every person to the service of reconciliation, not only among all men and women. It must also lead to a fresh commitment to the service of peace among all peoples. A faith and a life which are authentically Christian cannot fail to blossom in a love which constitutes truth and promotes justice.

The extraordinary jubilee celebration of the redemption is intended, first of all, to revive in the sons and daughters of the Catholic Church the awareness "that their privileged condition is not attributed to their own merits, but to a special grace of Christ. If they fail to respond to that grace in thought, word and deed, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be the more severely judged."

Consequently every baptized person must, above all, be aware of being called to a particular commitment to penance and renewal, since this is the permanent state of the church, which, "at once holy and always in need of purification, never ceases to do penance and to be renewed," as she follows the invitation that Christ addressed to the crowds at the beginning of his ministry, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

In this specific commitment, the year that we are about to celebrate follows the same line as the 1975 holy year in which my venerable predecessor Paul VI called for renewal in Christ and reconciliation with God. Surely there is no spiritual renewal that does not pass through penance and conversion, both as the interior and permanent attitude of the believer and as the practice of virtue that responds to the invitation of the Apostle Paul to "be reconciled with God."

and also as the means of obtaining God's forgiveness through the sacrament of penance.

It is in fact a requirement of one's very condition in the church that every Catholic should leave nothing undone to remain in the life of grace and should do everything to avoid falling into sin, in order always to be able to share in the body and blood of the Lord and thus to be of assistance to the whole church in one's personal sanctification and in the ever more sincere commitment to the Lord's service.

Freedom from sin, therefore, is a fruit and a primary requirement of faith in Christ the redeemer and faith in his church — Christ who set us free that we might remain free and might share the gift of his sacramental body for the building up of his ecclesial body.

At the service of this freedom, the Lord Jesus instituted in the church the sacrament of penance so that those who have committed sin after baptism may be reconciled with God whom they offended, and with the church which they have wounded.

The universal call to conversion fits precisely into this context. Since all are sinners, all need that radical change of spirit, mind and life that the Bible calls "metanoia," conversion. And this attitude is created and fostered by the word of God — the revelation of the Lord's mercy — is actualized above all by sacramental means, and is manifested in numerous forms of charity and fraternal service.

In order to return to the state of grace, in ordinary circumstances, it is not sufficient internally to acknowledge one's guilt and to make external reparation for it. Christ the redeemer, in founding the church and making it the universal sacrament of salvation, established that the salvation of the individual should come about within the church and through the ministry of the church — that same church which God also uses in order to communicate the beginning of salvation, which is faith.

It is true that the ways of the Lord are inscrutable and that the mystery of encountering God in one's conscience remains unfathomable; but the "way" that Christ made known to us is through the church which, by means of the sacrament, or at least the "desire" for it, re-establishes a new personal contact between the sinner and the redeemer. This life-giving contact is shown also in the sign of sacramental absolution, whereby Christ who forgives, in the person of his minister, reaches as an individual the person who needs to be forgiven, and enlivens in that person the conviction of faith, on which every other conviction depends: "faith in the Son of God, who has loved me and has given himself for me."

Every rediscovered conviction of the merciful love of God and every individual response of repentant love by man is always an ecclesial event. To the power proper to the sacrament, as a sharing in the merits and the infinite

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satisfying value of the blood of Christ, our one redeemer, are added the merits and satisfactions of all those who, sanctified in Christ Jesus and faithful to the call to be holy, offer their joys, prayers, privations and sufferings on behalf of their brothers and sisters in the faith who are most in need of forgiveness and indeed for the sake of the whole body of Christ which is the church.

In consequence, the practice of sacramental confession, in the context of the communion of saints which contributes in different ways to bringing people close to Christ, is an act of faith in the mystery of redemption and of its realization in the church. The celebration of sacramental penance is in fact always an act of the church, whereby she proclaims her faith, gives thanks to God for the liberty with which Christ has set us free, offers her life as a spiritual sacrifice to the praise of the glory of God, while she hastens her steps toward Christ the Lord.

It is a demand of the very mystery of redemption that the ministry of reconciliation, entrusted by God to the shepherds of the church, should find its natural accomplishment in the sacrament of penance. Those responsible for it are the bishops, who in the church are the stewards of the grace deriving from the priesthood of Christ, the priesthood which he shares with his ministers, also in their role as guardians of the penitential discipline. Also responsible for it are the priests, who are able to unite themselves to the intention and charity of Christ, in particular by administering the sacrament of penance.

In this regard, it is extremely significant that the Synod of Bishops, which will be celebrated in this jubilee year of the redemption, has precisely as its theme reconciliation and penance in the mission of the church.

Certainly the fathers of the synod will, together with me, devote particular attention to the irreplaceable role of the sacrament of penance in this saving mission of the church, and they will make every effort to ensure that nothing is omitted which serves to build up the body of Christ. Is it not our most ardent shared desire that in this year of the redemption the number of straying sheep may diminish and that all might return to the Father who awaits them and to Christ the shepherd and guardian of all souls?

Pope Asks Bishops Mark Holy Year

By Father Kenneth J. Doyle
Vatican City (NC) — Pope John Paul II has written to all Catholic bishops to ask them to mark the Holy Year which begins on March 25 by holding special celebrations and offering programs of spiritual enrichment in their own dioceses.

The pope's wishes were contained in a letter to his "venerable brothers in the episcopate" which was dated Jan. 25 and released by the Vatican on Feb. 17.

On March 25 the pontiff will open the Holy Doors, initiating a year of jubilee marking the 1950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Christ.

Blessed Kateri Group to Begin

The first meeting of a Blessed Kateri Prayer Group will be 3:30 p.m., Saturday, March 5 in Room 11 of Blessed Sacrament School, 546 Oxford St.

The group will promote the canonization cause of Kateri Tekakwitha, declared blessed by Pope John Paul II in 1980. Since that time there has been an upsurge of interest and devotion to this candidate for sainthood, according to Mrs. Anne M. Scheuerman, local spokesperson for the international campaign.

On that date or immediately following it, each of the world's bishops is asked to hold a "special celebration" linked to the pontiff's action.

All Holy Years are marked by pilgrimages of Catholics to Rome, but in his letter the pope noted "the heritage and particular genius of the various ecclesiastical communities around the world." He invited local bishops to tap local pastoral resources and history in planning programs within their dioceses.

The pope said that current diocesan programs can take on a deepened meaning and be

enlivened by a more intense spirituality during 1983 "by showing their connection with the mystery of redemption, by rediscovering their pastoral and formative power, and by adding to them a special dignity in the celebrations."

The pontiff chose to release his letter on the date of the publication of the working document for next Fall's assembly of the Synod of Bishops, whose theme will be "Reconciliation and Penance in the Life of the Church."

A consideration of that working document, said the pope, "can revive in people's consciences the sense of God and the sense of sin, the sense of the greatness of God's forgiveness, the sense of the importance of the sacrament of Penance for human and Christian growth and indeed for the very renewal of society."

"The sacrament of Confession," said the pontiff, "is the irreplaceable means of conversion and spiritual progress."

For this reason, he observed, during the Holy Year, "everything that is pastorally effective for evoking in people's hearts sentiments of sorrow for faults committed must be opportunely supported by the means that are available."

Such means, the pope continued, "include catechesis, frequent penitential services, (and) the presence of priests in the main churches who will insure that at any hour of the day individuals can receive the sacrament of Penance."

The pope also invited the bishops to use in their dioceses "all practices that aim at preserving and fostering in people's hearts filial devotion to the Blessed Virgin." He noted that the Church views Mary as the image of what the Church itself hopes to attain.

Especially recommended by the pontiff was the recitation of the rosary. In contemplating through the rosary the events of the life of Christ, he said, "We see how the Word of God entered, by a merciful decree, into the world of man and accomplished the redemption."

The pope suggested to the bishops that the local celebrations on March 25 would provide them an opportunity to explain "the purposes of the special jubilee and the ways in which the indulgence can be gained in the diocese by communities and individuals."

Holy Years traditionally offer Catholics the privilege of gaining a plenary indulgence, which is the remission of the temporal punishment due for sins already forgiven, through reception of the sacraments, participation in certain celebrations or visits to designated sacred sites, and prayers for the pope's intentions.

The pontiff termed the Holy Year "a call to repentance and renewal." He said that it is "meant to leave its mark upon the whole life of the Church and of Christians, for it is meant to inspire a renewed resolve to come to maturity in that charity that does the truth and promotes justice."

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