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Advent Day of Recollection for the Priests of the Archdiocese of Miami
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Making Straight the Path: Priests, Advent and the Upcoming Year of Mercy

Introduction

- It is a great joy for me to be with you here in my Miami to join in prayer with you at the beginning of Advent. It's my first time to Miami. But I'm close to now Cardinal Sean O'Malley, who ordained me back in 1999, who speaks often of this city, its clergy, faithful, and overall vitality, as well as my new boss, Archbishop Bernardito Auza, Apostolic Nuncio and Permanent Observer of the Holy See to the UN, who likewise is a frequent visitor and great fan of this Archdiocese. So I'm really happy that in future conversations I'll be able to contribute to the conversation! My thanks to Archbishop Wenski and to Fr. Richard Vigoa for the invitation.
- Our theme today for this Advent Day of Recollection is "Making Straight the Paths: Priests, Advent and the Year of Mercy." We begin the Jubilee Year of Mercy a week from today and I'm a firm believer that, thinking and praying with the Church, ecclesiastical holy years ought to have add flavor to almost everything the Church does during those years. There's a practical genius behind ecclesiastical holy years, because they focus the attention of the Church on an important aspect of Christian faith and life that needs to be better appreciated and lived. St. John Paul II, who experienced the importance of holy years in forming and strengthening people in faith under communism in Poland, convened holy years to celebrate and give greater attention to our Redemption (1983), Mary (1987), Jesus Christ (1997), the Holy Spirit (1998), God the Father (1999), the Incarnation (2000), the Rosary (2002-3), and the Eucharist (2004-5). Pope Benedict picked up from there, convoking holy years dedicated to St. Paul (2008-9), the Priesthood (2009-2010) and the Christian Faith as a whole (2012-3). Now Pope Francis has caught the bug, convoking at the beginning of last Advent the Year of Consecrated Life that will extend through the Feast of the Presentation and overlapping with it something that's obviously very dear to his heart and urgent, this Jubilee of Mercy, which will commence on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception — when we celebrate the beginning of the redemption wrought by God's mercy preveniently received by the Mother of Mercy as well as mark the fiftieth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council which corresponded to Pope St. John XXIII's call to share the "medicine of mercy," which is the Gospel, more effectively and lavishly with the world.
- And so when I was asked to come for this Advent Day of Recollection, I suggested that we anticipate the ecclesiastical holy year that will be one week away and look at Advent through the lens of the Jubilee of Mercy and look at the Year of Mercy through the prism of Advent. At first glance, these two themes might not seem coextensive. Even though we wear violet throughout this short liturgical season, many try to contrast Advent with Lent, describing Lent as a season of penance and mercy and advent as a season of waiting and preparation. As we'll hear later, however, Pope Francis has stressed that mercy characterizes and must characterize everything the Church does. We could also add that there is a constant theme of mercy throughout Advent. We'll have a chance to examine the liturgical readings given to us for this season in our second talk, but for now we could just see the connection through some of our favorite Advent and Christmas hymns:
 - "Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free, from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee. "
 - "Then cleansed be every heart from sin, make straight the way of God within, prepare we in our hearts a home, where such a mighty guest may come."
 - "Veni, Veni Rex gentium, veni, redemptor omnium, ut salvas tuos famulos peccati sibi conscios." (O come, o come, King of the Nations, Come Redeemer of all, to save your servants conscious of their sin against you)

- From “Lo, how a rose e’er blooming”: “Dispel in glorious splendor the darkness everywhere. True man yet very God, from sin and death now save us and share our every load.”
- From the *Rorate Caeli*, one of the most famous Advent hymns taken from Isaiah, “*Rorate caeli: “Do not be angry, O Lord, and remember no longer our iniquity... We have sinned and are become as one that is unclean: and we have all fallen as a leaf, and our iniquities like the wind have carried us away... Be comforted, be comforted my people: thy salvation cometh quickly: why art thou consumed with grief... I will save thee: fear not, for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy redeemer... “Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down the Just One.”*”
- And finally some Christmas hymns celebrating the fulfillment of the Advent in history, which points us to the meaning of Advent in mystery and in majesty:
 - “Hark, the Herald angels sing glory to the newborn King! Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.”
 - “O Holy child of Bethlehem! Descent to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.”
- So as these hymns that express the Christian faith attests, there is a clear connection between how we pray in Advent and God’s Mercy. It’s also very clear in what we’ll be preaching about this Sunday.
- On the second and third Sundays of Advent each year, the Church leads us on pilgrimage to the Jordan River, so that we might enroll in the school of St. John the Baptist, hear his message and put it into action in our lives. At first glance, it seems like a strange choice to meet him at the Jordan, 30 years *after* Christ’s birth, millennia *before* his Second Coming. But the reason why the Church always visits John at the Jordan is because he was the one chosen by God the Father from all eternity to get his people ready through conversion to receive His Son.
- When we meet him at the Jordan, John blares, “I am the voice of One crying out in the desert.” He didn’t say, “I am one crying out in the desert,” but rather, “I am the *voice* of one crying out in the desert.” John is the voice, the loudspeaker, the spokesperson; it’s Christ, the Word, who is the One crying out. John’s message is God’s message, which John screams at the top of his powerful lungs. The message was urgent and clear: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” In the ancient world, the roads were a mess. Every time there was a battle, the roads would be attacked and bridges destroyed, to try to stop the advance of the enemy. The weather took its toll as well, leading to all types of serious potholes and other obstacles. Any time a dignitary would be coming, they would have either to fix the roads or build new ones so that the rolling caravan accompanying him could arrive without delay and without hassle. John the Baptist tells us that to get ready for the Lord who, as St. Martha says before Lazarus’ resuscitation is the “one coming into the world,” we need to prepare a way for him. We, too, need to make straight the paths. In the ancient world, preparing such a path meant a great deal of manual work, making crooked paths straight, rough ways smooth, and even charting paths through the mountains and valleys. For us, that pathway will not be traced on the ground, but in of our hearts. It will not be made in the wilderness, but in our life. The work is not something that will make our hands dirty, but our souls clean.
- “To make straight the paths of the Lord” means to clear the path of sin, which is the major obstacle for the Lord to come into our lives. Echoing the prophet Isaiah (Is 40:4), John the Baptist says, “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth” (Lk 3:5). It’s key to call those topographical formations by their proper names. We have to make low the mountains of our pride and egocentrism. We have to fill in the valleys that come from a shallow prayer life and a minimalistic way of living our faith. We have to straighten out whatever crooked paths we’ve been walking: if we’ve been involved in some secret sins or living a double life, the Lord calls us through John the Baptist to end it; if we’ve been involved in some dishonest practices, we’re called to straighten them out and do restitution; if we’ve been harboring grudges or hatred, or failing to reconcile with others, now’s the time to clear away all the debris; and if we’ve been pushing God off the side of the road, if we’ve been saying to Him that we don’t really have the time for him, now’s the time to get our priorities straight.
- The real meaning of conversion that the Baptist preaches and we are likewise supposed to preach as precursors of the Lamb of God who comes to take away the sins of the world was articulated best by

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in a powerful address during the last Jubilee Year (2000) to catechists. He focused on how the first message the Church must proclaim to the world and live is this message of conversion of John the Baptist that we hear at the beginning of every new liturgical year: ““The fundamental content of the Old Testament is summarized in the message by John the Baptist: *metanoete* - Convert! There is no access to Jesus without the Baptist; there is no possibility of reaching Jesus without answering the call of the precursor, rather: Jesus took up the message of John in the synthesis of His own preaching: [repent and believe]. The Greek word for converting means: to rethink – to question one’s own and common way of living; to allow God to enter into the criteria of one’s life; to not merely judge according to the current opinions. Thereby, to convert means: not to live a all the others live, not do what all do, not feel justified in dubious, ambiguous, evil actions just because others do the same; begin to see one’s life through the eyes of God; thereby looking for the good, even if uncomfortable; not aiming at the judgment of the majority, of men, but on the justice of God – in other words: to look for a new style of life, a new life.” That’s the life Christ came to give us to the full. But in order to be able to follow him in this path of life, we need to free ourselves from the debris hinders the path and that can occasionally shackle us.

- This type of conversion to which we’re called is not a one-time thing. It’s a continual process of trying to make Christ’s style of life our own, putting on Christ’s mind, beating to the beat of his sacred heart. We can simply recall that St. Augustine’s conversion was in three parts. The first is his famous conversion, from a life of sin to a life of grace. But the second came when he was called to leave his monastery and take up the service of a very unappealing assignment as the coadjutor bishop of Hippo, recognizing that he needed to live, not for himself, but for others. “Christ died for all,” he read in St. Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians, “so that those who live should not live for themselves, but for him who died for them.” The bishop of Hippo needed someone who could preach well in Latin, and, though Augustine initially resisted, he allowed himself to be ordained a priest and then a bishop. This required great sacrifice to be available to everyone rather than to his prayer and writing, to lay down his life with Christ so that others might find him, but he made it. The third and decisive phase of his transformative odyssey came at the end of his life, when Augustine discovered, as Pope Benedict said in 2007 at his tomb in Pavia, a third and definitive stage of humility: “Not only the humility of integrating his great thought into the humble faith of the Church, not only the humility of translating his great knowledge into the simplicity of proclamation, but also the humility of recognizing that he himself and the entire pilgrim Church needed and continually need the merciful goodness of a God who forgives every day.” The deepest sense of conversion occurs when we become, like God, people of mercy, and share that merciful love with others. The same Lord who called him to ever deepening conversion calls us to the same so that we might be able to be ever more effective ambassadors, appealing to others on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God.
- So what I’d like to do in our time together today is to break our reflections up into two parts. In the first part, I’d like to give a presentation of some of the important background for the Year of Mercy, that can help us as disciples to understand and live it better, and then as apostles to help us to preach and teach it more effectively so that those we’re privileged to serve may be able to live it better. And then in a second part, I’d like to get more practical and focus on some suggested best practices for this Year.
- I’d just like to say that we’ll cover a lot of ground and I speak like a New Englander, quite briskly. So I’d urge you, unless it will help you to stay awake and pay better attention, not to feel any need to take notes. I’ll upload this lecture and an audio recording of it to CatholicPreaching.com later today in case you’d want to ponder anything mentioned here more deeply or use any of it for your own pastoral work.

Ten Points on the Background of the Year of Mercy

- I’d like to begin with some thoughts, mainly from Pope Francis, that can help orient us on the importance of this Jubilee Year. To make it easier to remember, I’ve broken it down into ten lessons.
- The first lesson is that we are now living at *kairos* of mercy
 - Pope Francis said in the interview aboard Shepherd One coming back from Brazil that the Church must follow the path of mercy and that this is a special need of our time: “The Church is a mother: she has to go out to heal those who are hurting, with mercy. If the Lord never tires of forgiving, we have no other choice than this: first of all, to care for those who are hurting. The Church is a mother, and she must travel this path of mercy. And find a form of mercy for all. When the

prodigal son returned home, I don't think his father told him: "You, sit down and listen: what did you do with the money?" No! He celebrated! ...And I believe that this is a *kairos*: this time is a *kairos* of mercy. But John Paul II had the first intuition of this, when he began with Faustina Kowalska, the Divine Mercy... He had something, he had intuited that this was a need in our time."

- The crisis of unexpiated guilt
- In the homily he gave during the Vespers Service in which he promulgated the papal bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, he said, "Many question in their hearts: why a Jubilee of Mercy today? Simply because the Church, in this time of great historical change, is called to offer more evident signs of God's presence and closeness. ...This is a time for the Church to rediscover the meaning of the mission entrusted to her by the Lord on the day of Easter: to be a sign and an instrument of the Father's mercy (cf. *Jn* 20:21-23). For this reason, the Holy Year must keep alive the desire to know how to welcome the numerous signs of the tenderness which God offers to the whole world and, above all, to those who suffer, who are alone and abandoned, without hope of being pardoned or feeling the Father's love. A Holy Year to experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has come in search of us because we were lost. A Jubilee to receive the warmth of his love when he bears us upon his shoulders and brings us back to the Father's house. A year in which to be touched by the Lord Jesus and to be transformed by his mercy, so that we may become witnesses to mercy. Here, then, is the reason for the Jubilee: because this is the time for mercy. It is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone the way of forgiveness and reconciliation."
- The second lesson is that in response to this *kairos*, all of the Church's ministers are called to be "ministers of mercy above all."
 - In the first and most famous of his now many interviews, with Fr. Antonio Spadaro in September 2013, Pope Francis said about us as priests that "the ministers of the Church must be ministers of mercy above all." By this he means more than merely being confessors, but he certainly does mean that we are going to be very dedicated confessors who allow the riches of God's mercy to flow out through us into a life characterized by Christ-like compassion.
 - Mercy has been the central theme of the Pontificate of Pope Francis. I'll never forget being present in St. Peter's Square for his first Angelus meditation, March 17, 2013. His beautiful words in Italian remain indelible in my memory in which he proclaimed the beauty of God's undying mercy as not only Jesus' most powerful message but the Church's most powerful continued message to the world: "Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think – and I say it with humility – that this is the Lord's most powerful message: mercy. It was he himself who said: "I did not come for the righteous". The righteous justify themselves. Go on, then, even if you can do it, I cannot! But they believe they can. "I came for sinners" (Mk 2:17)... The Lord never tires of forgiving: never! It is we who tire of asking his forgiveness. Let us ask for the grace not to tire of asking forgiveness, because he never tires of forgiving."
 - We see on Easter Sunday evening that just as God the Father sent his Son as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world, so Jesus was sending the apostles, and their successors, and us as their priestly collaborators to continue that saving, merciful work and Pope Francis is using his office, his words, and his example, to do everything he can to get people to receive gratefully and often this gift.
 - 2 Cor 5:20: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God!"
- The third lesson is that understanding our need for God's mercy is key for us to recognize who we really are.
 - (*Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio, El Jesuita*) An authentically Christian discipleship begins our recognition that we're sinners in need of salvation and the concomitant experience that that Savior looks on us with merciful love. "For me, feeling oneself a sinner is one of the most beautiful things that can happen, if it leads to its ultimate consequences" the future Pope Francis said in "El Jesuita." At the Easter Vigil, he says, we sing "O Felix culpa," exulting in the "happy sin" that brought us to experience the love of the Redeemer. "When a person becomes conscious that he is a sinner and is saved by Jesus," Cardinal Bergoglio said, "he proclaims this truth to himself and discovers the pearl

of great price, the treasure buried in the field. He discovers the greatest thing in life: that there is someone who loves him profoundly, who gave his life for him.” Many Catholics have sadly not had this fundamental Christian experience. “There are people who believe the right things, who have received catechesis and accepted the Christian faith in some way, but who do not have the experience of having been saved,” he lamented. He then gave a powerful metaphor of what the true experience of God’s mercy is like. “It’s one thing when people tell us a story about someone’s risking his life to save a boy drowning in the river. It’s something else when I’m the one drowning and someone gives his life to save me.” That’s what Christ did for us to save us from the eternal watery grave of the deluge of sin. That’s what we should celebrate every day of our life, just like someone whose life has been saved by a hero would never be able to forget it, not to mention thank him enough. Unfortunately, he said, “There are people to whom you tell the story who don’t see it, who don’t want to see, who don’t want to know what happened to that boy, or who always have escape hatches from the situation of drowning and who therefore lack the experience of who they are. I believe that only we great sinners have this grace.”

- (March 17 Homily) “Jesus has this message for us: mercy. I think – and I say it with humility – **that this is the Lord’s most powerful message: mercy.** It was he himself who said: “I did not come for the righteous”. The righteous justify themselves. Go on, then, even if you can do it, I cannot! But they believe they can. “I came for sinners” (Mk 2:17). Think of the gossip after the call of Matthew: he associates with sinners! (cf. Mk 2:16). He comes for us, when we recognize that we are sinners. But if we are like the Pharisee, before the altar, who said: I thank you Lord, that I am not like other men, and especially not like the one at the door, like that publican (cf. Lk 18:11-12), then we do not know the Lord’s heart, and we will never have the joy of experiencing this mercy!
- Mercy is essential for understanding who Pope Francis is.
 - In the Sept. 19 interview with Fr. Antonio Spadaro, when he was asked “Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?,” he replied, “I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner... The best summary, the one that comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon.” And he repeats: “I am one who is looked upon by the Lord. I always felt my motto, Miserando atque Eligendo [By Having Mercy and by Choosing Him], was very true for me. ... This is what I said when they asked me if I would accept my election as pontiff.” Then the pope whispers in Latin: “*Peccator sum, sed super misericordia et infinita patientia Domini nostri Jesu Christi confisus et in spiritu penitentiae accepto.*” I am a sinner, but I trust in the infinite mercy and patience of our Lord Jesus Christ, and I accept in a spirit of penance.”
 - MV 8: The calling of Matthew is also presented within the context of mercy. Passing by the tax collector’s booth, Jesus looked intently at Matthew. It was a look full of mercy that forgave the sins of that man, a sinner and a tax collector, whom Jesus chose – against the hesitation of the disciples – to become one of the Twelve. Saint Bede the Venerable, commenting on this Gospel passage, wrote that Jesus looked upon Matthew with merciful love and chose him: miserando atque eligendo. This expression impressed me so much that I chose it for my episcopal motto
 - Mercy is the fundamental story of his vocation. He said to the 200,000 in St. Peter’s Square on the Vigil of Pentecost (May 18): “One day in particular, though, was very important to me: 21 September 1953. I was almost 17. It was ‘Students’ Day,’ for us the first day of spring — for you the first day of autumn. Before going to the celebration I passed through the parish I normally attended, I found a priest that I did not know and I felt the need to go to confession. For me this was an experience of encounter: I found that someone was waiting for me. Yet I do not know what happened, I can’t remember, I do not know why that particular priest was there whom I did not know, or why I felt this desire to confess, but the truth is that someone was waiting for me. He had been waiting for me for some time. After making my confession I felt something had changed. I was not the same. I had heard something like a voice, or a call. I was convinced that I should become a priest. This experience of faith is important. We say we must seek God, go to him and ask forgiveness, but when we go, he is waiting for us, he is there first! In Spanish we have a word that

explains this well: *primerear* — the Lord always gets there before us, he gets there first, he is waiting for us! To find someone waiting for you is truly a great grace. You go to him as a sinner, but he is waiting to forgive you.”

- To encounter Jesus is to encounter one who has been waiting for us to share us his mercy, it's to meet one who calls us precisely in his merciful love, it's to proclaim when he asks, “Who do you say that I am?,” that he is the long-awaited Messiah come to set the captives free, the Son of the Living God who is slow to anger and abounding in merciful love, to the one who awaits us with the love of the Prodigal Father to restore us to communion with him and others.
- The fourth lesson is that if we really understand Jesus, we will grasp that everything he did was to share his mercy.
 - MV 8: The mission Jesus received from the Father was that of revealing the mystery of divine love in its fullness. “God is love” (1 Jn 4:8,16), John affirms for the first and only time in all of Holy Scripture. This love has now been made visible and tangible in Jesus' entire life. His person is nothing but love, a love given gratuitously. The relationships he forms with the people who approach him manifest something entirely unique and unrepeatable. The signs he works, especially in the face of sinners, the poor, the marginalized, the sick, and the suffering, are all meant to teach mercy. Everything in him speaks of mercy. Nothing in him is devoid of compassion.
 - (July 4, 2013 homily) The Pope based his meditation on the miracle of the healing of a paralytic (Mt 9:1-8). He reflected on the sentiments that must have shocked the crippled man when, while being carried on his bed, he heard Jesus telling him “take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven”. Those who were near Jesus and heard his words “said: ‘this man is blaspheming’; only God can forgive sins”. And Jesus, to make them understand, asked them “Which is easier, to forgive sins or to heal?”. Jesus, St Peter said, went about doing good, curing all”.
 - “But when Jesus”, the Pope continued, “healed a sick man he was not only a healer. When he taught people — let us think of the Beatitudes — he was not only a catechist, a preacher of morals. When he remonstrated against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Sadducees, he was not a revolutionary who wanted to drive out the Romans. No, these things that Jesus did, healing, teaching and speaking out against hypocrisy, were only a sign of something greater that Jesus was doing: he was forgiving sins”.
 - Reconciling the world in Christ in the name of the Father: “this is Jesus' mission. Everything else — healing, teaching, reprimands — are only signs of that deeper miracle which is the re-creation of the world. Thus reconciliation is the re-creation of the world; and **the most profound mission of Jesus is the redemption of all of us sinners.** And Jesus”, the Pope added, “did not do this with words, with actions or by walking on the road, no! He did it with his flesh. It is truly he, God, who becomes one of us, a man, **to heal us from within**”.
- The fifth is that sharing mercy is God's greatest joy, and therefore God has a preferential option for those in most need of his mercy.
 - (April 7 Homily, St. John Lateran Cathedral, for Divine Mercy Sunday): The Father, with patience, love, hope and mercy, had never for a second stopped thinking about [the Prodigal Son], and as soon as he sees him still far off, he runs out to meet him and embraces him with tenderness, the tenderness of God, without a word of reproach: he has returned! And that is the joy of the Father. In that embrace for his son is all this joy: he has returned! God is always waiting for us, he never grows tired. Jesus shows us this merciful patience of God so that we can regain confidence, hope – always!
 - (Sept 15, 2013 Angelus) In the Liturgy today we read chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke, which contains three parables of mercy: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and then the longest of them, characteristic of St Luke, the parable of the father of two sons. ... All three of these parables speak of the joy of God. ... The joy of God is forgiving, the joy of God is forgiving! ... **The whole Gospel, all of Christianity, is here!** ... Mercy is the true force that can save man and the world from the “cancer” that is sin, moral evil, spiritual evil. Only love fills the void, the negative chasms that evil opens in hearts and in history. Only love can do this, and this is God's joy! Jesus is all mercy, Jesus is all love: he is God made man

- MV 9: In the parables devoted to mercy, Jesus reveals the nature of God as that of a Father who never gives up until he has forgiven the wrong and overcome rejection with compassion and mercy. We know these parables well, three in particular: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the father with two sons (cf. Lk 15:1-32). In these parables, God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he pardons. **In them we find the core of the Gospel and of our faith**, because mercy is presented as a force that overcomes everything, filling the heart with love and bringing consolation through pardon.
- (Daily Mass, Nov 7, 2013) Indeed, the Holy Father said, God **“has a certain weakness of love for those who are furthest away, who are lost. He goes in search of them.** And how does he search? He searches to the very end. Like the shepherd who journeys into the darkness looking for his lost sheep until he finds it” or “like the woman who, when she loses her coin, lights a lamp, sweeps the house and seeks diligently until she finds it”. God, seeks out the lost because he thinks: “I will not lose this son, he is mine! And I don’t want to lose him!”. But God’s work does not consist only in seeking out the lost, Pope Francis then added. “When he finds us, when he has found the lost sheep” he neither sets it aside nor does he ask us: “Why did you get lost? Why did you fall?”. Rather, he restores what was lost to its proper place. And when this happens “it is God who rejoices. God rejoices not in the death of the sinner but rather that he be restored to life”.
- (Aug 25, 2013 Angelus) Some of you, perhaps, might say to me: “But, Father, I am certainly excluded because I am a great sinner: I have done terrible things, I have done lots of them in my life”. No, you are not excluded! Precisely for this reason you are the favorite, because Jesus prefers sinners, always, in order to forgive them, to love them. Jesus is waiting for you to embrace you, to pardon you. Do not be afraid: he is waiting for you. Take heart, have the courage to enter through his door.
- Lk 15: Heaven rejoices more for one repentant sinner than for 99 who never needed to repent.
- The sixth takeaway is that mercy must characterize all that the Church does because the Church is made to be a field hospital for sinners
 - The reform of the Church is one in which we reshape the Church to conform fully with God’s mercy, to help form each of us to be merciful as our Father is merciful, so that we may experience the happiness described in the beatitudes, “Blessed are the merciful, for they will be called children of God.”
 - MV 10: Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy. The Church’s very credibility is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. ... Perhaps we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.
 - MV 12: The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behavior after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. In the present day, as the Church is charged with the task of the new evangelization, the theme of mercy needs to be proposed again and again with new enthusiasm and renewed pastoral action. It is absolutely essential for the Church and for the credibility of her message that she herself live and testify to mercy. Her language and her gestures must transmit mercy, so as to touch the hearts of all people and inspire them once more to find the road that leads to the Father.
 - October 2, 2013 Audience). You could say to me: but the Church is made up of sinners, we see them everyday. And this is true: we are a Church of sinners; and we sinners are called to let ourselves

be transformed, renewed, sanctified by God. There has been in history the temptation for some to say: the Church is only the Church of the pure, the perfectly consistent, and expels all the rest. This is not true! This is heresy! The Church, that is holy, does not reject sinners; she does not reject us all; she does not reject because she calls everyone, welcomes them, is open even to those furthest from her, she calls everyone to allow themselves to be enfolded by the mercy, the tenderness and the forgiveness of the Father, who offers everyone the possibility of meeting him, of journeying toward sanctity. “Well! Father, I am a sinner, I have tremendous sins, how can I possibly feel part of the Church? Dear brother, dear sister, this is exactly what the Lord wants, that you say to him: “Lord, here I am, with my sins”. Is one of you here without sin? Anyone? No one, not one of us. We all carry our sins with us. But the Lord wants to hear us say to him: “Forgive me, help me to walk, change my heart!”. And the Lord can change your heart. In the Church, the God we encounter is not a merciless judge, but like the Father in the Gospel parable. You may be like the son who left home, who sank to the depths, farthest from the Gospel. When you have the strength to say: I want to come home, you will find the door open. God will come to meet you because he is always waiting for you, God is always waiting for you, God embraces you, kisses you and celebrates. That is how the Lord is, that is how the tenderness of our Heavenly Father is. The Lord wants us to belong to a Church that knows how to open her arms and welcome everyone, that is not a house for the few, but a house for everyone, where all can be renewed, transformed, sanctified by his love, the strongest and the weakest, sinners, the indifferent, those who feel discouraged or lost. The Church offers all the possibility of following a path of holiness, that is the path of the Christian: she brings us to encounter Jesus Christ in the Sacraments, especially in Confession and in the Eucharist; she communicates the Word of God to us, she lets us live in charity, in the love of God for all. Let us ask ourselves then, will we let ourselves be sanctified? Are we a Church that calls and welcomes sinners with open arms, that gives courage and hope, or are we a Church closed in on herself? Are we a Church where the love of God dwells, where one cares for the other, where one prays for the others?

- MV 15. In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes modern society itself creates. How many uncertain and painful situations there are in the world today! How many are the wounds borne by the flesh of those who have no voice because their cry is muffled and drowned out by the indifference of the rich! During this Jubilee, the Church will be called even more to heal these wounds, to assuage them with the oil of consolation, to bind them with mercy and cure them with solidarity and vigilant care. Let us not fall into humiliating indifference or a monotonous routine that prevents us from discovering what is new! Let us ward off destructive cynicism! Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism! It is my burning desire that, during this Jubilee, the Christian people may reflect on the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. It will be a way to reawaken our conscience, too often grown dull in the face of poverty. And let us enter more deeply into the heart of the Gospel where the poor have a special experience of God’s mercy.
- The seventh lesson is that to emphasize mercy doesn’t mean that we take it for granted, as if receiving God’s mercy is not needed. We must recognize how much we need it and come to get it — and not remain corrupt in our sins
 - May 17, 2013 daily homily) When Peter later remembers how he denied evening knowing Jesus, “he feels ashamed. Peter’s shame.... Peter is a great man. A sinner. But the Lord shows him, him and us all, we are all sinners”. **“The problem is not sinning”, but “not repenting of the sin, not feeling ashamed of what we have done. That is the problem”.**
 - Pope Francis distinguishes on three different occasions sinners from the corrupt
 - June 3, 2013 daily homily)
 - “Three types of Christians in the Church come to mind: the sinners, the corrupt, the saints. We don’t need to say too much about sinners because that is what we all are.

We recognize this from within and we know what a sinner is; and, if one of us does not understand himself to be a sinner, he should visit a spiritual doctor: something is not right". The Holy Father took time to explain the characteristics of a corrupt person, referring Gospel: God "called us with love, he protects us. Yet then he gives us freedom, he gives us all this love 'on lease'. It's as if he were to say to us: protect and keep my love just as I safeguard you. This is the dialogue between God and us: to safeguard love. Everything begins with this love".

- Then, however, the tenant farmers to whom the vineyard had been entrusted "thought highly of themselves, they felt independent of God", explained the Pontiff. In this way "they took possession of the land and forfeited their relationship with the Master of the vineyard: We ourselves are the masters! And when someone came to collect the part of the harvest that belonged to the master, they beat him, they treated him shamefully, they killed him". This means losing the relationship with God, no longer feeling the need "for that master". **That is what makes the "corrupt, those who were sinners like us but have gone a step further": they are "solidified in sin and they don't feel the need for God". Or at least they trick themselves into not perceiving it,** because "in our genetic makeup there is this relationship with God, and since they cannot deny it, they create a unique God: themselves". These are the corrupt, and "this is also a danger for us: that we become corrupted"
- The Bishop of Rome concluded, "The Apostle John calls the corrupt the antichrist who are among us but not of us. The word of God speaks of the saints as of a light: they are before God's throne in adoration. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to know that we are sinners — truly sinners. The grace not to become corrupt... the grace to follow the way of sanctity."
- (Daily homily Nov 11, 2013)
 - The Pope based his homily on a passage taken from the Gospel of St Luke: "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him; and if he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, and says, 'I repent,' you must forgive him" (cf. Lk 17:1-6). "When I read this passage," he said, "I always see in it a portrait of Jesus... He never tires of forgiving. And he counsels us to do the same". Jesus' attitude towards those who sin and sincerely repent is always one of forgiveness.
 - However, Pope Francis added, there is another passage which reads: "Woe to those by whom scandals come". "Jesus," he said, "is not speaking here about sin but about scandal" and he says: It would be better for him if a millstone were put around his neck and he be thrown into the sea, than that he should scandalize one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves!". The Pope therefore asked: "But what is the difference between sin and scandal?". The difference, he said, is that "whoever sins and repents asks for forgiveness, he feels weak, he sees himself as a child of God, he humbles himself and asks Jesus to save him. But the one who gives scandal and does not repent continues to sin and pretends to be a Christian". It is as though he leads "a double life," and he added, "the double life of a Christian causes great harm".
 - "**This is the difference between a sinner and a man who is corrupt. One who leads a double life is corrupt, whereas one who sins would like not to sin, but he is weak or he finds himself in a condition he cannot resolve, and so he goes to the Lord and asks to be forgiven.** The Lord loves such a person, he accompanies him, he remains with him. And we have to say, all of us who are here: sinner yes, corrupt no".
 - Those who are corrupt, Pope Francis continued, do not know what humility is. Jesus likens them to whitewashed tombs: they appear beautiful on the outside, but inside they are full of dead bones. "And a Christian who boasts of being a Christian but does not lead a Christian life is corrupt". We all know such people, and we all know

“how much harm corrupt Christians, and corrupt priests do to the Church. What harm they do to the Church! They do not live in the spirit of the Gospel, but in the spirit of worldliness. St Paul states it clearly to the Romans: Do not be conformed to this world (cf. Rom 12:2). However, it is even stronger in the original text: do not enter into this world’s schemes, into its framework, because this leads to a double life”.

- Pope Francis concluded: **“A varnished putrefaction: this is the life of someone who is corrupt. And Jesus does not call them simply sinners. He calls them hypocrites. And yet Jesus always forgives, he never tires of forgiving. The only thing he asks is that there be no desire to lead this double life. Let us ask the Lord for the grace to flee from every form of deceit and to see ourselves as sinners. Sinners yes, corrupt no”.**

▪ (Daily Homily, January 14)

- Pope Francis likened the sons of Eli to “the corrupt Christian, the corrupt layperson, the corrupt priest, the corrupt bishop. They take advantage of the situation, of the privilege of faith, of being a Christian. And their hearts become corrupt. We think of Judas: perhaps it was through jealousy and envy that he began to dip his hand into the purse” and “thus his heart began to be corrupted. John — the beloved Apostle who loved the whole world, who preached love — says of Judas: he is a thief. Full stop. It’s clear: he was corrupt. And from a corrupt heart betrayal also comes. He betrays Jesus”.
- “Let us ask the Lord,” Pope Francis concluded, “that these two readings may help us in our Christian lives not to become corrupt like the sons of Eli; not to be lukewarm like Eli; but to be like Jesus, with that zeal to seek out people, to heal people, to love people”.

▪ (Daily Homily, February 13) Solomon

- “The wisest man in the world” lost his faith this way, the Holy Father said. Solomon allowed himself to become corrupt because of “an indiscreet love, without discretion, because of his passions”. Yet, the Pope said, you might say: “But Father, Solomon did not lose his faith, he still believed in God, he could recite the Bible” from memory. To this objection the Pope replied: “having faith does not mean being able to recite the Creed: you can still recite the Creed after having lost your faith!”.
- Solomon, the Pope continued, “was a sinner in the beginning like his father David. **But then he “continued living as a sinner” and became “corrupt: his heart was corrupted by idolatry”.** His father David “was a sinner, but the Lord had forgiven all of his sins because he was humble and asked for forgiveness”. Instead, Solomon’s “vanity and passions led” him to “corruption”. For, the Pope explained, “the heart is precisely the place where you can lose your faith”.

- Referring to a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, the Pope expressed his hope that “no evil seed will grow” in the human heart. It was “the seed of evil passions, growing in Solomon’s heart” that “led him to idolatry”. To prevent this seed from developing, Pope Francis indicated “the good counsel” that was suggested in the Gospel reading of the day: “Receive with meekness the Word that has been planted in you and it can lead you to salvation”. With this knowledge, the Pope concluded, “we follow the path of the Canaanite woman, the pagan woman, accepting the Word of God, which was planted in us and will lead us to salvation”. The Word of God is “powerful, and it will safeguard us on the path and prevent us from the destruction of corruption and all that leads to idolatry”

- The eighth lesson is that to preach and practice mercy we must seek a renewal in the Sacrament of God’s mercy and help people to become frequent penitents.
 - Pope Francis has given lots of catecheses on foundation for the Sacrament and trusting in what God has done. The following is just one.

- (Feb 19, 2014 General audience) Do not be afraid of Confession! When one is in line to go to Confession, one feels all these things, even shame, but then when one finishes Confession one leaves free, grand, beautiful, forgiven, candid, happy. This is the beauty of Confession! I would like to ask you — but don't say it aloud, everyone respond in his heart: when was the last time you made your confession? Everyone think about it ... Two days, two weeks, two years, twenty years, forty years? Everyone count, everyone say 'when was the last time I went to confession?'. And if much time has passed, do not lose another day. Go, the priest will be good.
 - Following his predecessors, he has stressed the importance of frequent Confession
 - Pope Francis has been calling all of us to a renewed appreciation for, and reception of, the Sacrament of Penance.
 - Nov 20 catechesis: **Priests and bishops too have to go to confession: we are all sinners. Even the Pope confesses every 15 days, because the Pope is also a sinner. And the confessor hears what I tell him, he counsels me and forgives me, because we are all in need of this forgiveness.**
 - The Church routinely has recommended to us to receive the Sacrament of Penance frequently. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Without being strictly necessary, confession of everyday faults (venial sins) is nevertheless strongly recommended by the Church.” It stresses confession of venial sins because it presumes that if someone has committed a mortal sin, they would have recourse to the Sacrament without delay. But priests know that if people are not coming to the Sacrament regularly, they often wait for months to confess even mortal sins.
 - St. John Paul emphasized that we're deceived if we think we can become holy without it. “It would be an illusion to seek after holiness, according to the vocation one has received from God, without partaking frequently of this sacrament of conversion and reconciliation,” he said in 2004. “Those who go to Confession frequently, and do so with the desire to make progress, will notice the strides that they make in their spiritual lives.”
 - Pope Paul VI described those strides: “Frequent and reverent recourse to this sacrament, even when only venial sin is in question, is of great value. Frequent Confession is not mere ritual repetition, nor is it merely a psychological exercise. Rather it is a constant effort to bring to perfection the grace of our Baptism, so that we carry about in our bodies the death of Jesus Christ who died; so that the life Jesus Christ lives may be more and more manifested in us.”
 - While the Church has never officially defined how frequent someone seeking holiness should partake of the Sacrament of Mercy, it has implied that, like Pope Francis, we should be going at least every two weeks. We glimpse this in the way it handles the conditions necessary for receiving plenary indulgences, where it teaches that to receive such an indulgence, we need to have gone to confession within eight days prior or after.
- The ninth takeaway is that the practice of mercy shows who God's real children are, because his children seek to become merciful like their heavenly father is merciful.
 - MV 9: From another parable, we cull an important teaching for our Christian lives. In reply to Peter's question about how many times it is necessary to forgive, Jesus says: “I do not say seven times, but seventy times seventy times” (Mt 18:22). He then goes on to tell the parable of the “ruthless servant,” who, called by his master to return a huge amount, begs him on his knees for mercy. His master cancels his debt. But he then meets a fellow servant who owes him a few cents and who in turn begs on his knees for mercy, but the first servant refuses his request and throws him into jail. When the master hears of the matter, he becomes infuriated and, summoning the first servant back to him, says, “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (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). This parable contains a profound teaching for all of us. Jesus affirms that mercy is not only an action of the Father, it becomes a criterion for ascertaining who his true children are. In short, we are called to show mercy because

mercy has first been shown to us. Pardoning offences becomes the clearest expression of merciful love, and for us Christians it is an imperative from which we cannot excuse ourselves. At times how hard it seems to forgive! And yet pardon is the instrument placed into our fragile hands to attain serenity of heart. To let go of anger, wrath, violence, and revenge are necessary conditions to living joyfully. Let us therefore heed the Apostle's exhortation: "Do not let the sun go down on your anger" (Eph 4:26). Above all, let us listen to the words of Jesus who made mercy as an ideal of life and a criterion for the credibility of our faith: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Mt 5:7): the beatitude to which we should particularly aspire in this Holy Year.

- The tenth flows from the ninth: It's the five-fold expression of Jesus' mercy that the Church is supposed to imitate and each of us is supposed to imitate.
 - The evangelists often say that Jesus' heart was moved with pity for the crowd. That translation softens the original Greek verb "*esplangchnisthe*", which is a compound of the word *splanchna*, which means "viscera" or "guts" or "womb." A more literal translation would be that Jesus was "sick to his stomach" with compassion as he saw the crowds. An even more accurate one is that his "guts were exploding" with pity. He didn't just "feel bad" for the people who were hungry; Jesus' compassion was like a volcanic eruption in his innards.
 - In the Gospels, this expression — *esplangchnisthe*, this explosion within Jesus' insides — is used several times and it describes five things that Jesus, in response to these intense inner cramps of mercy, did.
 - On one occasion the Gospel tells us, "When he saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with pity for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to *teach* them many things" (Mk 6:34).
 - The Evangelists tell us in several places that his heart was moved with pity for the multitudes "and he *cured* their sick." (Mt 14:14; Mt 9:27; Mt 20:34, Mk 1:41; Lk 7:13).
 - In the miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fish, Jesus says in the first person "My heart is moved with pity for the crowd," and in response he *fed* them (see also Mt 15:32).
 - On multiple occasions, the Evangelists tell us his heart was moved with pity, like with the paralyzed man on the stretcher, and he *forgave* their sins. (Lk 7:13; Lk 15).
 - And when Jesus' heart was moved with pity for the crowds because they were "mangled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd," he told his disciples, "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few, so *pray* the Master of the Harvest to send out laborers for his harvest" (Mt 9:36) a prayer that would be answered immediately when Jesus would from among those praying disciples call 12.
 - Jesus' visceral compassion led him to teach, to heal, to feed, to forgive, and to pray for, call and send out laborers with the same compassion on the crowds.
 - Together with him, he wants us to see how many wander without direction in life and instruct them how to live by following Jesus the Way. He wants us to see how many are suffering physically, psychologically and spiritually and seek to become nurses of the Divine Physician. He wants us to notice the multitudes starving physically or spiritually and to give them the nourishment he provides through us to meet that need. He wants us to see how many are carrying around the wounds of unexpiated guilt or severed relationships and to bring them God's mercy and to God's mercy. In all of this, he wants us to become hard workers, not just bodies, in his fields and to pray insistently for other diligent laborers to join us in becoming the compassionate upset stomach of the Mystical Body. He wants us to share in this work.

Some Proposed Best Practices for Living the Jubilee of Mercy and Helping Others to Live It

- After focusing on the various theological background points for the Year of Mercy, I'd like to turn to some practical things we might do to live it well and to help those we serve experience all the graces that God will make possible during this 349 day Jubilee. I call these "proposed best practices" not because I've focused grouped them or had McKinsey Consulting do a survey of what various others have done for a Jubilee that yet hasn't even started, but these are ten of my ideas, some influenced by others, of what might

help to live this year fruitfully. While you might have others that would make your top ten, I hope that what I'll say will at least give you some food for thought.

- First, get this Jubilee Year off to a good start by really immersing it within the Year of Mercy. The readings of Advent really highlight the connection between Advent and Mercy and so I'd encourage you to make it a constant theme of your Advent prayer and preaching and share the fruits of this contemplation with others to help them likewise get this Year of Mercy off to a good start. Here's a quick presentation of the themes of conversion and mercy found in Isaiah, the Other Advent Prophets, St. Paul in the Sunday epistles, and the Advent Gospels of daily and Sunday Masses:
 - Isaiah
 - Is 2 (1A): "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks;"
 - Is 63 (1B): "Behold you are angry and we are sinful, and all of us have become like unclean people, all our good deeds are like polluted rags."
 - Is 4 (1 Mon): "When the Lord washes away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purges Jerusalem's blood from her midst."
 - Is 11 (1 Tues): "The wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid."
 - Is 25 (1 Wed): "The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth. On that day it will be said: "Behold our God to whom we looked to save us! This is the Lord for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"
 - Is 40 (1 Sat) "On that day the Lord binds up the wounds of his people, he will heal the bruises left by his blows."
 - Is 35 (2 Mon): "A highway will be there, called the holy way; no unclean may pass over it, nor fools go astray on it. ... On it the redeemed will walk."
 - Is 41 (2 Thurs): Fear not... I will help you, says the Lord, your redeemer is the Holy one of Israel."
 - Is 45 (3 Wed): "Let your just one descend, O heavens, like dew from above..."
 - Other prophets
 - Jer 33 (1C): The Lord our justice.
 - Jer (2 Sun C) "For God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low and that the age-old depths and gorges be filled to level ground that Israel may advance secure in the glory of God... for God is leading Israel in joy by the light of his glory, with his mercy and justice for company."
 - Zeph 3 (3 Tues): Woe to the rebellious and polluted city that accepts no correction. ... "I will change and purify the lips of the peoples."
 - Zeph 3 (3 Sun C): Shout for joy, o daughter Zion! ... The Lord has removed the judgment against you."
 - Mal 3 (Dec 23): "I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me. ... He is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord..."
 - 2 Sam 7 (Dec 24). God will build a house for David, a reconciled sinner.
 - St. Paul in the Epistles
 - Rom 13 (1A): "Let us throw off the works of darkness... Let us conduct ourselves properly as in the day, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in promiscuity and lust, not in rivalry and jealousy, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh."
 - 1 Thess 3 (1C): "to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones."
 - Phil 1 (2 Sun C): "So that you may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."
 - Phil 4 (3 Sun C): "Rejoice in the Lord always! I shall say it again rejoice!" Great joy of God is his mercy.
 - Gospel

- Mt 24 (1A): Stay awake!
 - Mk 13 (1B): Be watchful! Be alert!”
 - Lk 21 (1C): “Beware that your hearts do not become drowsy from carousing and drunkenness.”
 - Mt 15 (1 Wed): “My heart is moved with pity for the crowd...” Fed...
 - Mt 7 (1 Thur): “Not everyone but says “Lord, Lord” will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” Building on the rock of his word.
 - Mt 9 (1 Fri): Two blind men, “Son of David, have pity on us!” “Do you believe that I can do this?” “Yes, Lord!”
 - Mt 9 (1 Sat) Jesus was teaching, proclaiming and curing. “At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity for them because they were troubled and abandoned like sheep without a shepherd.” Pray. Harvest Master. Called.
 - Lk 3 (2 Sun C): “A voice of one crying out in the desert: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’”
 - Lk 5 (2 Mon): healing of paralyzed man after forgiving his sins.
 - Matt 11 (2 Wed): Come to me. Rest. Yoke. Meekness. Humility.
 - Mt 11: (2 Thurs): John the Baptist. Violent take the kingdom by force. Violence of plucking out eyes and chopping off limbs.
 - Mt 11 (2 Fri): The Son of Man ... is a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”
 - Lk 3 (3 Sun C): “What should we do?” John describes justice and charity. Another coming who will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.
 - Mt 21 (3 Mon): John’s work of heavenly or earthly origin... We need to confront the question. We could ask about Pope Francis. Will we live this most important lesson?
 - Mt 21 (3 Tues): Two brothers. One who repents and does the Father’s will...
 - Lk 7 (3 Wed): Jesus’ doing the works of charity foretold by Isaiah, “the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.” “Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me.”
 - Mt 1 (Dec 17) Sinners in genealogy, foreigners.
 - Mt 1 (Dec 18): “You are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”
 - Lk 1 (Dec 19): “He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of ... the disobedient to the understanding of the righteous.” Mute medicine. `
 - Lk 1 (4 Sun C and Dec 21): Mary taking Jesus in Visitation. Jesus’ visitation. Sanctifying JB from the womb.
 - Lk 1 (Dec 22): Magnificat: “He has mercy on those who fear him in every generation. ... He has come to the help of his servant Israel, for he remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers... forever.” `
 - Lk 1 (Dec 23): His name is John: God is gracious...
 - Lk 1 (Dec 24): “He promised to show mercy to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant. ... You, my child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way, to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins. In the tender compassion of our God, the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and to guide our feet into the way of peace.”
- Second, increase the frequency and improve the quality of our confessions
 - Pope Francis goes every other week, “every 15 days,” as he likes to say.
 - We’re actually doing a favor to our brothers in giving them a chance to participate more fully in one of the great graces of the Year.
 - In recent years, the popes have been calling priests to be good penitents so that they may be great confessors. Pope John Paul II wrote in his encyclical on the Sacrament of Penance in 1984, “In

order to be a good and effective minister of Penance, the priest needs to have recourse to the source of grace and holiness present in this Sacrament. We priests, on the basis of our personal experience, can certainly say that, the more careful we are to receive the Sacrament of Penance and to approach it frequently and with good dispositions, the better we fulfill our own ministry as confessors and ensure that our penitents benefit from it. And on the other hand this ministry would lose much of its effectiveness if in some way we were to stop being good penitents. Such is the *internal logic* of this great Sacrament. It invites all of us priests of Christ to pay renewed attention to our personal confession.” We are being “internally illogical,” or, in other words, hypocritical, when we offer the graces of the Sacrament without ourselves receiving them frequently.

- To improve the quality of our confessions, I’d encourage that we spend time trying to foster greater sorrow.
 - Contrition is the most important part of our preparation for the Sacrament. That sentence is intended to be somewhat provocative, because many people — both today and at the time of the Curé of Ars — think that the most important element in preparing for a good confession is the examination of conscience. The examination is, after all, what most Catholics spend the majority of their time on before coming to confession. While it is certainly good that people spend time doing a quality examination of conscience, there is something more important, both quantitatively and qualitatively: contrition.
 - “It is necessary to spend more time asking for contrition than making the examination of conscience,” St. John Vianney used to preach unambiguously to his people. He counseled them to spend a great deal of time in prayer before God asking him to grant them true sorrow for their sins. He knew, first, that it was sorrow that would help turn their confession into a real occasion of conversion. He also recognized that it was contrition that would transform the experience of confession from a dry accounting of one’s transgressions into an opening for profound reconciliation with a merciful Father against whom one has sinned and to whom one says “sorry” in the sacrament.
 - Pope John Paul II, in the 1984 Apostolic Exhortation “Reconciliation and Penance,” the most extensive treatment in the history of the magisterium on the Sacrament of Penance, called contrition the “essential act of Penance on the part of the penitent.” He defined it as “a clear and decisive rejection of the sin committed, together with a resolution not to commit in again, out of the love that one has for God and that is reborn with repentance.” He went on to say that contrition is the “beginning and the heart of conversion, of that evangelical metanoia [total revolution in one’s way of thinking] that brings the person back to God like the Prodigal Son returning to his Father.”
 - John Paul II particularly wished to emphasize the connection how true contrition brings about the “radical change of life” called conversion. He said that traditionally people regard the conversion to which true contrition leads as a “mortification” in which we try to eradicate the roots of sin from life. Jesus used the image of cutting off our limbs and plucking out our eyes if they’re leading to sin. That Pope said that there’s an aspect of this “death” involved, but he stressed that “contrition and conversion are even more a drawing near to the holiness of God, a rediscovery of one’s true identity that has been upset and disturbed by sin, a liberation in the very depth of self and thus a regaining of lost joy, the joy of being saved.” Contrition and conversion is meant, in other words, to bring us true joy, the joy that comes from experiencing anew the full depth of the merciful love of God. This is the reason why St. John Vianney would call contrition, “the balm of the soul.”
 - John Paul II worried that “the majority of people in our time are no longer capable of experiencing” that balm because they are no longer sufficiently motivated by the love of God to experience true sorrow, and without that sorrow, they won’t be able to have the type of conversion that draws them anew into the depth of God’s holiness. This is the reason why helping people form true contrition out of love for God is so important to help people experience the full power of the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
 - St. John Vianney realized this and worked so hard, both in the pulpit and in the confessional, to help people achieve this sorrow.

- On one occasion a penitent was confessing his sins matter-of-factly without sorrow. The Curé of Ars began to weep on his side of the confessional. The penitent was startled and asked him, as any of us might, “Father, why are you crying?” St. John Vianney responded, with words that soon became famous, “I am crying because you are not.”
 - He would often break down in the confessional over the sins that people were confessing. His tears routinely became contagious as penitents discovered what the proper interior response should be to what they had done. Witnessing this priest’s weeping over their sins often was enough to bring them to profound repentance, and it was common a common sight to see people sobbing from sorrow and joy as they leave the saint’s confessional.
 - On other occasions, St. John Vianney would point to the confessional crucifix — indicating the price Jesus had paid for the sins the penitent was confessing at that moment — and begin to weep. Most penitents soon joined him. To one man who had only what Church tradition called “imperfect contrition” — the “contrition of fear” of eternal damnation and the other consequences of sin — he replied in a way that brought him quickly to “perfect contrition,” which is a sorrow based on love for God. “Save your poor soul!” Vianney said with infinite tenderness. “What a pity to lose a soul that has cost our Lord so much. What harm has he done to you that you would treat him in this way?”
 - Many penitents attested that even when they were confessing their sins with sorrow and tears, each of their admissions would provoke from him a profound and seemingly uncontrollable sigh or groan. He taught them indelible lessons of the horror a son or daughter should have for sin against his or her all-loving Father. Once a young priest who had come to the patron saint of priests for confession left not only with his sins absolved but with a much deeper realization of the sorrow that should characterize both penitent and confessor. He stated, many years later, “Every one of my accusations provoked on his part an exclamation of faith, commiseration and horror for the smallest sin. ‘What a pity,’ he would say, over and over again. I was particularly struck by the accent of tenderness with which he uttered the words. That simple ‘What a pity!’ in all its beauty showed what damage sin had done to my soul.”
 - St. John Vianney would say that contrition not only should precede a good confession and follow it, since true contrition will lead to acts of penance, reparation, the firm purpose of amendment necessary for a radical change in life. Using a domestic analogy, he taught, ““You see a house that is all filthy. It is the same with your soul. After the examination, even after confession, it is necessary to have contrition to wash it.” The tears of contrition become like a second baptismal path washing the dirt of the soul, even the most embedded, away.
 - The contrition St. John Vianney had for sins extended also to his own. He often confided that his one great aspiration was to retire to a monastery where he could “weep over his sins” and “poor life.” That genuine sorrow out of love for God was something he couldn’t help passing on to all those who heard him speak about the mercy of God and all those who received it through him in the confessional. That’s the type of contrition I believe he’s praying for all of us to receive and show this Year of Mercy, a year that would without question have pleased him very much.
- Third, forgive those who have hurt us
 - We take a lot of blows as priests and we can harbor a lot of resentment. Sometimes we hide it well. Sometimes we don’t even try to hide it. Some parishioners can have doctoral degrees in criticism and detraction and it gets to us. Sometimes we might feel slighted by the chancery in terms of an assignment or sense that we were more deserving of some type of honor or opportunity someone else got. Like estranged family members, there can be divisions in what is meant to be the greatest fraternity in the world, our presbyterium, even though our unity is supposed to show the world what Jesus prayed for in John 17, so that the world may know that the Father sent him and loves us as much as he loves them. This is a great year for us to extend the mercy to others that we want God to extend through us.

- Fourth, increase the time of Confession for our people.
 - It would without question please God very much if this year we were to make it easier for his people to go to Confession. The times we offer confession aren't always the most convenient. When I was organizing the Reconciliation Weekends of the Diocese of Fall River, I put out a survey and the least convenient time for people to come of all the options offered was Saturday afternoon, and yet that is the time when many priests uniquely offer the Sacrament.
 - Arranging more time for the Sacrament allows our people to show where our real priorities are, that reconciling people to the love of the Father is more important in the long run than attending meetings, scheduling other appointments, going to potlucks and the rest.
 - One particular time Pope Francis is asking all of us to add times for confession is during the “24 Hours of the Lord” initiative that he wrote about in *Misericordiae Vultus*, in which he would like to see the whole Church become one giant confessional for a couple of days.
 - MV 17: The initiative of “24 Hours for the Lord,” to be celebrated on the Friday and Saturday preceding the Fourth Week of Lent, should be implemented in every diocese. So many people, including the youth, are returning to the Sacrament of Reconciliation; through this experience they are rediscovering a path back to the Lord, living a moment of intense prayer and finding meaning in their lives. Let us place the Sacrament of Reconciliation at the centre once more in such a way that it will enable people to touch the grandeur of God's mercy with their own hands. For every penitent, it will be a source of true interior peace.
 - In a 1986 letter to priests on the bicentennial of St. John Vianney's birth, Pope John Paul said that the state of the world requires that all priests should imitate the pastor of Ars in making themselves “very available” for the Sacrament of Penance. He asked them to give it “priority over other activities” so that the faithful will realize the value attached to this “most difficult, the most delicate, the most taxing and the most demanding [priestly ministry] of all — especially when priests are in short supply.”
 - There is a martyrdom of waiting sometimes involved in sitting in the confessional — St. John Vianney experienced it for nine years — but eventually people will come. If heaven rejoices more for one repentant sinner, we can do great good waiting just for that one sinner... That would please the Lord more than almost any other priestly work.
- Fifth, preach and teach more about mercy
 - In *Presbyterorum Ordinis* 4, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council said that the point of preaching is “conversion and holiness,” basically continuing Jesus' predication which centered on “repent and believe.” Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* spoke about entering more deeply into the Covenantal dialogue with God, in which preaching involves proclaiming God's covenant and helping people respond faithfully to it, something that complements the teaching of the Council. Sometimes we can avoid preaching about conversion and sin, because they're unpopular topics in an affirmation age. Preaching mercy allows us to do something different. To preach mercy is to preach the real love of God. It is of course implied that we all need the mercy we're describing, but it's a positive way that doesn't make people scrupulous but teaches them about God, themselves and others. It's only the sinners loved by God who know who they really are, as Pope Francis reminds us. Pope Francis is himself a model about the preaching of mercy. He preaches it all the time but the emphasis is on God and not on sin.
 - When we look at those whom Jesus has called, we see that he chooses people who can powerfully preach by their life the mercy that God through them wants to extend to others. We see this in the life of St. Matthew. His first deed after encountering his Savior was to call his friends together so that they might themselves encounter Jesus. He knew they were sinners and knew how much they needed Jesus to cure them of the same malady from which Jesus had cured him. We likewise see this reality in the life of St. Peter, whose first words to the Lord were “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man” (Lk 5:8), but whom Jesus built as the rock on whom his mission of mercy would continue. We see this reality in the life of St. Paul, who used to kill Christians for a living, but after whose conversion became the greatest evangelist of God's Gospel of mercy the Church has ever seen. All three went out as proof positive, as living advertisements, that the forgiveness of sins is possible. When I was a teenager, I used to tease my balding father about the commercials for the

Hair Club for Men. (Little did I know that twenty years later other teenagers would tease me for a similar protruding forehead!). I thought it was one of the best commercials ever made. At the beginning of it, Sy Sperling, the owner with a full head of hair, detailed the new techniques to cover up baldness and the great reactions he had received from needy men. Up to this point, there was nothing different than any other such commercial. But at the end of it, he said, “I’m telling you this will work not just because I’m the president of the company, but because I’m a former client” and held up a photograph of him fully bald, as clear proof that his technique works. The Lord wants to do the same thing with each of us. He wants to reconcile us and send us out as the Sy Sperlings of our day. He can do with us – he will do with us – what he did with Matthew, Peter, Paul, Augustine and others, if we let him.

- This year is also an opportunity for us to catechize about the Sacrament of God’s mercy like Pope Francis has been doing, showing that the Sacrament is at the heart of Jesus’ sacramental economy, the first thing he did when he rose from the dead. What would that catechesis look like?
 - The most detailed and helpful answer to this question came in Pope John Paul II’s 1984 apostolic exhortation “Reconciliation and Penance,” which he wrote after he and bishops from across the world spent a month studying how to respond to the crisis of the sacrament of penance. It is the greatest document published in the history of the magisterium on the subject of confession and it’s well worth re-reading this Year of Mercy (as is his second encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, published 35 years ago yesterday). John Paul II said that preaching and catechesis are the “first means to be used” in trying to get people back to the sacrament. In paragraph 26, he specifies ten different catechetical themes that are needed to eradicate the various weeds choking the growth of the word of God in people’s hearts today as well as to help nourish any seeds that have taken root.
 - The first is about reconciliation, which he defines as the “need to rebuild the covenant with God in Christ, the Redeemer and Reconciler ... and with one’s brethren.” He suggests this catechesis be based on Jesus’ many homilies on reconciliation with God and others in the Gospel.
 - The second is on penance, which “literally means to allow the spirit to be overturned in order to make it turn toward God.” There can be no reconciliation with God and others unless it is preceded by conversion and repentance, which are not just superficial feelings but a crucifixion of the “old man” so that the “new” can be born by the power of Christ. This catechesis is all the more needed, John Paul II says, because contemporary man “finds it harder than ever to recognize his mistakes” and say he’s sorry.
 - Third, there needs to be a catechesis on conscience and its formation, because if the conscience is poorly formed, it will turn into “a force that is destructive of the true humanity of the person” rather than serve as the “holy place where God reveals to him his true good.”
 - Fourth, there must be a teaching on the sense of sin, which has become “considerably weakened in our world.” If we don’t recognize that sin is poison of the soul and that sins are particular spiritual toxins, we’ll never sense our need to go to the doctor.
 - Fifth, there’s a need for catechesis on temptation and temptations, and how to respond to them with faith and the power of God.
 - The sixth and seventh parts of the catechesis focus on fasting and almsgiving, respectively. These are not merely “signs” of conversion, repentance, mortification and charity, but “means” by which we can become configured with Christ who himself fasted and gave all.
 - The eighth and ninth aspects John Paul II describes concern the “concrete circumstances in which reconciliation has to be achieved” — namely, the family, civil community, and social structures, and the like — as well as the “four reconciliations” that remedy the four fundamental rifts caused by sin: with God, oneself, others and

the whole of creation.

- Lastly there's a need for a "constant catechesis" on the four last things: death, judgment, hell and heaven. "In a culture which tends to imprison man in the earthly life at which he is more or less successful," John Paul II explains, pastors must "provide a catechesis that will reveal and illustrate with the certainties of faith what comes after the present life. ... Only in this eschatological vision can one realize the exact nature of sin and feel decisively moved to penance and reconciliation."
 - This ten-part preaching and catechetical strategy John Paul II recommended responds to the most common and serious questions, misunderstandings, and doubts modern man continues to have with regard to the Sacrament. St. John Paul says that "pastors who are zealous and creative" will never lack opportunities to impart these points to their people. He specifically mentions homilies, Bible studies, lectures, religious education curricula and especially "old style popular missions."
- Sixth, pray for people to come to receive God's mercy
 - During the Year for Priests in 2008-2009, we had a chance to ponder and learn from the priestly example of St. John Vianney, especially his ministry of mercy. He is the greatest confessor in the history of the Church, hearing confessions 12-18 hours a day for the last 11,315 days of his life.
 - While only God knows all the reasons why St. John Vianney's confessional was teeming while so many other confessionals in France were vacant, it seems plausible that the fundamental reason was that God himself was drawing them there. I like to think, moreover, that one of the reasons God was moving his sons and daughters to confess to this simple priest in a tiny village was because St. John Vianney "earned" and "deserved" them far more than other priests.
 - God, who cannot be outdone in generosity, seemed reward the constant prayers and heroic sacrifices of St. John Vianney for the conversion of others. Just as no other confessor in history has heard so many confessions for so many years as the Curé of Ars, so probably no other priest prayed and sacrificed as much for the conversion necessary to bring sinners to the confessional.
 - He would spend most of the night in his Church alone with the Lord, begging, "O my God, grant me the conversion of my parish! I consent to suffer whatever you wish for as long as I live."
 - He would fast and do other types of bodily penance in prayerful reparation to God for the sins others were not confessing.
 - He would wait patiently in his confessional, praying for those who should be on the other side, but who, for one reason or another, had not yet come to conversion.
 - He did this for a decade before there was a steady flow of penitents.
 - Even after he began to be overwhelmed by the number of penitents, however, he kept praying and doing sacrifices for the conversion of others. While in most matters he was reticent about his own interior life, in terms of his praying for sinners, he was very open, because he wanted to enlist others in the effort to imitate him in praying for those in need of God's mercy.
 - "I can't stop praying for poor sinners who are on the road to hell," he once said. "If they come to die in that state, they will be lost for all eternity. What a pity! We have to pray for sinners!"
 - He said that praying for sinners was the "most beautiful and useful of prayers" because "the just are on the way to heaven, the souls of purgatory are sure to enter there, but the poor sinners" will be lost forever. He said that all devotions are good but "there is no better one" than such prayer for sinners.
 - "What souls we can convert by our prayers," he said on another occasion. Paraphrasing the Lord's words to the Prophet Ezekiel, he added, "The one who saves a soul from hell saves this soul and his own as well."
 - He passed these truths on to all who would listen, because he knew that one did not have to be a priest absolving sins in God's name in the confessional to save sinners; by God's design, one could also do so through prayer.

- When he talked about praying for sinners, he wasn't describing merely a short invocation, but a serious program of persistent supplication.
 - When a parishioner asked him how more effectively to pray for sinners, the patron saint of priests responded with a list of things that seem to have an autobiographical tone to them. "One can offer himself as a victim for 8-15 days for the conversion of sinners. One can suffer cold, heat, deprive oneself of looking at something, go visit someone who would appreciate it, make a novena, attend daily Mass for this intention in places where it is possible. Not only would one contribute to God's glory by this holy practice [of praying for sinners], but one would obtain an abundance of grace."
 - To a brother priest who complained that his efforts to get his people to return to the Sacrament of Penance through his ministry in the pulpit had so far borne little fruit, St. John Vianney replied, with a response that likely featured much self-revelation, "You have preached, you have prayed, but have you fasted? Have you taken the discipline [a self-imposed penitential scourging]? Have you slept on the floor? So long as you have done none of these things, you have no right to complain."
- Whenever someone he met refused to repent, the Curé of Ars redoubled his prayers and penances for that person's conversion. He would, moreover, do "preventative" prayer and penance prior to the scheduled debauched dances (the *vogues*) to beg God's grace to help people falling in sin. He would also do post-confessional prayer and sacrifice for reconciled sinners, giving them easier penances and doing the rest himself, so that no one would be afraid to return to the sacrament of God's mercy because of the fear of a harsh penance.
- He prayed so much and so insistently precisely because he was convinced that the conversion of some from the state of mortal sin to grace was a true miracle that only God can work. "A great miracle is needed to raise a poor soul in that state," he taught in one of his catechism lessons. "Yes, a greater miracle than what the Lord did to raise Lazarus!"
- St. John Vianney never lost the wonder of being God's instrument for these most important miracles. When his fame began to grow through his being the instrument for some miraculous bodily cures, he downplayed their significance, saying that the "body is so very little" and adding, "It is a beautiful thought, my children, that we have a sacrament that heals the wounds of our soul!"
- St. John Vianney's existence, like Christ's before him, became one great prayer for the miracle of the conversion of sinners. "I am only content," he said, "when I'm praying for sinners." One of the reasons for his was that he knew, by what seems to be a divine intimation, that such prayer pleased God immensely. "The good God has made me see," he said to one of his friends, "how much he loves that I pray for poor sinners. . . . I don't know if it were really a voice I heard or a dream, but, whatever it was, it woke me up and told me that **to save a soul in the state of sin is more pleasing to God than all sacrifices.** For that reason, I do all my resolutions for penance."
- His heroic praying for sinners was the prehistory for so many of the miracles of conversion that took place in his confessional. Our praying, like he prayed, for the conversion of those we serve and others will likely also be the precursor to how much joy we share with God in reconciling his sons and daughters this year and beyond.
- Seventh, promote devotion to the Lord's mercy as indicated by Christ to St. Faustina in the 1930s.
 - Thanks to our theological education, all of us know that we don't have to accept private revelations, but the Church has found Jesus' appearances to St. Faustina credible. Jesus seemed to request it devotion to his divine mercy.
 - If you'd permit me I'd like to give a little personal witness here about my own conversion to the Divine Mercy devotion. I wrote on this six years ago and since then many priests have emailed me to say it was helpful to them.
 - When I first entered Mount St. Mary's seminary in Maryland, I met some fellow seminarians with a devotion to the Divine Mercy. They would often get together and recite the chaplet together. I was invited on several occasions to join them, but I always politely declined. I thought I didn't need another devotion and preferred to use my Rosary beads for the Rosary. I also didn't want to spend the time researching the devotion to see whether it was genuinely from the Lord or merely the latest Catholic fad.

- When I got to Rome, my thoughts remained the same, but on my way back and forth between the North American College and St. Peter's Basilica, I would always pass the Church of Santo Spirito, which was the center for the Divine Mercy devotion in Rome. One day I stopped into the Church to go to confession and the Church was packed with young people praying the Divine Mercy Chaplet. It struck me that in order to be a good priest, I minimally was going to have to study the devotion to be able to reply to young people like them should I ever be asked about whether it was salutary for their spiritual growth.
- So I got a copy of *The Diary* of Blessed Faustina Kowalska, the 730-page journal of what this Polish nun during the 1930s said the Lord revealed to her as his "secretary." I began to read it, but it gave me vertigo. It just seemed to repeat the same points with very minor changes, and I didn't know what to do with the massive amounts of unsynthesized spiritual data. I read about half of it before I concluded I couldn't take it anymore. Even though many of the points were beautiful and nothing seemed to be contrary to the faith, I determined to put off a final evaluation until I could muster the time and the willpower to return to finish it.
- Everything changed for me, however, on April 30, 2000, the day Sr. Faustina was canonized by Pope John Paul II. That morning I celebrated Mass in a closed and almost totally empty basilica of St. Peter and headed to the Blessed Sacrament chapel to make my thanksgiving. When the Pope celebrated outdoor public Masses, I normally would stay there praying the breviary until the masters of ceremony arrived to pass out surplices and stoles for those who were going to be distributing Holy Communion during the Mass, a privilege that always came with a great seat.
- That day, however, as I was finishing my thanksgiving, the unbidden thought came to me that Sr. Faustina's canonization might be my last chance to see a papal Mass from the perspective of the piazza before returning back home to take up a pastoral assignment. So I walked through the Jubilee door about 7:30 and out into the square. Some of those who were responsible for seating must have erroneously thought that since I was leaving the closed basilica, I had to be someone important. I was able to proceed unimpeded to the back left corner of the front-right section before the altar. I wondered what I'd do for the three hours before the canonization Mass. As it turns out, I didn't have to worry about how to occupy my time.
- After I had finished morning prayer, a young man, one of the first people to enter the square after the gates were opened at 7:30, approached and asked me in Italian whether I would be able to hear his confession. "Certo," I replied, as he knelt down on the hard stone of St. Peter's square in front of me. After I had given him absolution, a young girl came and queried whether I spoke Spanish. I told her that I did, and she asked whether I would be willing to hear her confession, too. I said that I would be happy to do so.
- For the next two hours and 45 minutes, until literally the opening antiphon of the Mass, I heard confessions non-stop in the back-left corner of the front-right section. Italians, Spaniards, Brazilians, French- or English-speaking Poles and Germans, as well as a few from Britain and the United States, all humbly knelt down and poured themselves out. I was blown away by the depth and tearful beauty of the penitents' contrition and appreciation for the gift of God's mercy. As only a priest could see from the "inside" of people's souls, I witnessed the profound fruits that the devotion to Divine Mercy had produced in Catholics from various countries, cultures and languages. As Mass began, I thanked the Lord for having moved me to go out to the square that morning and for having used me as his instrument to share his Divine Mercy with so many.
- During John Paul's canonization Mass homily, I was surprised and thrilled when he said, "It is important then that we accept the whole message [of God's merciful love] that comes to us from the word of God on this Second Sunday of Easter, which from now on throughout the Church will be called 'Divine Mercy Sunday.... By this act I intend today to pass this message on to the new millennium.'" I knew that from that point forward, I was being summoned, as all priests were, to be a particular herald of that message. I felt that the experiences of that morning were a gift from God to help me to see the greatness of the

interior miracles that the devotion could effect in people. I remember rejoicing that I would have the opportunity, returning to parishes in the Diocese, to bring this message and celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday each year as the culmination of the Easter octave.

- When I came back exhilarated to the Seminary that afternoon, I couldn't help talking about these experiences with my fellow neophyte priests and other seminarians. I asked one of the older seminarians, who had had a devotion to Divine Mercy for years, whether there was a better way to learn the devotion than through the *Diary*. He smiled, said he had had the same problem with the *Diary*, and then pulled off his shelf and lent me a great book by Fr. George Kosicki entitled *Tell My Priests*. This 123-page goldmine excerpts and organizes the Diary specifically for priests to learn the devotion and to pass it on clearly and passionately. Fr. Kosicki demonstrated, convincingly, that everything in the devotion is just an application of what Jesus himself did and preached in the Gospels. He also highlighted the messages that Jesus had specifically asked St. Faustina to tell his priests, one of which was that whenever a priest preached on his Divine Mercy, huge sinners would return to him. I honestly have to say that every time I have, the Lord's prediction has come true.
- Over the course of time, I have grown in love and appreciation for this devotion I love the fact that praying the Divine Mercy chaplet unites the two sacraments the Lord set up for us to receive thousands of times in our lifetimes, the Mass and the Sacrament of his Mercy. I've always looked at Eucharistic adoration as one means by which the Lord has established through mystics in the Church to help his people grow in appreciation of the great sacrament that is the source and summit of any Christian life. I now look at the Divine Mercy devotion — the prayers and the image — as the means the Lord established to help us to adore and appreciate him in the Sacrament of Confession.
- The Divine Mercy is a devotion that has changed my life as a disciple and apostle and has brought me to experience much more fully the heart of the Redemption and the joy of life with the risen Christ. I encourage you, as we approach the beginning of the Year of Mercy a week from now, to come to know the Lord more intimately through this ever-timely and beautiful devotion as well if you haven't yet already.
- There are five specific practices Jesus recommended in this devotion to help us to recognize our need for mercy, come to receive it and learn to share it. These would all be things we could do throughout this year:
 - Stop at 3 pm each day and just unite ourselves to Jesus' mercy on the Cross, what Jesus called the Hour of Mercy.
 - Pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy each day. I've made a resolution to pray it privately each day in Thanksgiving after Holy Communion or after Mass, and I've asked my spiritual directees likewise to do it, to unite ourselves to Jesus' mercy in expiation for our sins and the sins of the whole world as we unite ourselves to his body, blood, soul and divinity within.
 - Pray with the image of divine mercy by which Jesus wanted to be venerated in his mercy, installing such an image perhaps in our Church sanctuaries for this year, in our rectory chapels if we have one, and perhaps in our private quarters.
 - Live the Novena of Mercy from Good Friday through Divine Mercy Sunday and perhaps regularly pray for the nine different groups in need of God's mercy during the General Intercessions at daily and Sunday Masses.
 - Really celebrate Divine Mercy Sunday and giving people a chance to see it. In some parishes they never hear about Divine Mercy Sunday but only homilies about Doubting Thomas every year. This would be a year to start promoting Divine Mercy Sunday.
- Jesus promised St. Faustina that if a priest preaches about the depths of his Mercy and promotes this devotion, "big fish" will come, and I have to say that Jesus has fulfilled that promise many times over in my sixteen years as a priest.
- Eighth, perform and facilitate parishioners' or students' performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy. At a personal level, we could try to fulfill all of these each month, or quarter or during the Year and ask our people to do the same, not merely as a "been there, done that" experience but as the first step to

making the corporal and spiritual works of mercy really a part of this Year and of all the years God gives us.

○ Corporal

- Give alms — not just during Lent
- Feed the Hungry and give drink to the thirsty — So many go hungry, here in our country and abroad!
- Clothe the Naked — Sending used clothes to impoverished lands, making sure that those in wintry climates have winter clothing, and also fighting against those enslaved by the pornographic trade and prostitution.
- Welcome the Stranger and Shelter the Homeless — This is a year to recognize Christ in the immigrant and to see the members of the Holy Family in those looking for an inn to stay
- Visit the Imprisoned — This is the hardest of all of the corporal works of mercy to do, but there are many good ministries that serve the imprisoned. Most of us know people who are in jail and minimally we can write them, we can send them things to read, holy cards and the like, but how important it is for us as priests to go visit as well, if even once a year to celebrate Mass or help with confessions.
- Visit and Care for the Sick — So many are homebound! So many are in nursing homes! People never forget when we visit them in such circumstances.
- Bury the Dead — Making sure we attend to the rites of burial very well and facilitate others' doing so in an age in which funerals can be so expensive.

○ Spiritual

- Instruct the Ignorant — So many don't know the faith! Do our parishioners recognize that to step forward as a catechist or a tutor is a *work of mercy*? Do we realize that evangelization is one of the greatest works of mercy?
- Admonish the sinner — To admonish doesn't mean we channel our inner Jeremiah, but do we have the courage and the wisdom to make a fraternal correction with the charity with which Christ calls us to in the Gospel?
- Counsel the doubtful — Do we patiently work with those who have doubts? In a broader sphere, do we make time to give others spiritual direction, in the most general sense?
- Console the sorrowful and mourning — Do we draw close or run away from the emotional situations that take place when others are grieving? Do we attend wakes and funerals when we're not celebrating? Do we send cards? Do we celebrate Mass intentions as if they were for our own family members?
- Comfort the afflicted — So many are in pain? Do we help them in material and spiritual ways?
- Bear wrongs patiently — It's hard to suffer wrongs. We naturally fight back. Do we even try to unite those circumstances to Christ who shows us how "freely to lay down" our lives?
- Forgive injuries — We've already spoken above about forgiving others, but this is a necessity, we know, if we're going to be forgiven by God.
- Pray for the living and the dead — This is the most important work of mercy of all and what we're supposed to be models at. Do we pray for the dead as if their lives depended on it? Do we pray for the living like Monica prayed for Augustine?

• Ninth, lead a pilgrimage of mercy.

- This is, in my opinion, the *sweetest* of the ten proposed best practices.
- Pope Francis encourages us to make pilgrimages to Rome during this holy year and cross through the Jubilee Door. He wrote about it in *Misericordiae Vultus*:
 - MV 2-3. I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, the Holy Door will become a Door of Mercy through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope. On the following Sunday, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Holy Door of the Cathedral of Rome – that is, the Basilica of Saint John Lateran – will be opened. In the following weeks, the Holy Doors of the other Papal Basilicas will be opened. On the same Sunday, I will announce that in every local Church, at the cathedral – the mother church of the faithful in

any particular area – or, alternatively, at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance, a Door of Mercy will be opened for the duration of the Holy Year. At the discretion of the local ordinary, a similar door may be opened at any Shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion. Every Particular Church, therefore, will be directly involved in living out this Holy Year as an extraordinary moment of grace and spiritual renewal. Thus the Jubilee will be celebrated both in Rome and in the Particular Churches as a visible sign of the Church's universal communion.

- Jubilee Door in Rome is all about Reconciliation. Perhaps we can have an image of it printed with Pope Francis' prayer for the Jubilee of Mercy on the back. As a tour guide for St. Peter's Basilica, I used to love, and still do, to catechize about mercy through that door.
 - The whole purpose of a door is meant to separate one location from another, and going through a door is meant to symbolize the passage from one place to another. Church architects throughout time have made great use of doors to express the Church's theology. The main entrance of St. Peter's Basilica, for example, is directly underneath the huge statue of the Risen Christ on the top of the tympanum, to symbolize that to enter the Church you need to go through, with and in Christ, who said that he himself was the gate to the sheepfold. The Holy Year Door is intentionally smaller than this main entrance, to reinforce Jesus's call to enter through the narrow door. But when we focus on the Holy Door itself, we cannot but notice the meaning of the passage it is calling us to. There are sixteen frames on this beautiful bronze portal that was made for the Jubilee in 1950, and they're all focused on the two-fold moment of conversion and God's mercy. By these sixteen frames, the Church is explicitly calling all those who enter through this narrow door to conversion, to leaving their sins, leaving their fears and doubts, in the vestibule — behind them — and entering into the fullness of the Lord's mercy by crossing that threshold.
 - The first two frames are dedicated to the Sinful Fall of Adam and Eve and their exile from paradise, which led to the need for salvation, for them and for us all. It takes up two frames, it seems, to emphasize its centrality. But the next two frames are dedicated to the scene of the Annunciation, almost in direct response, as the fulfillment of the proto-evangelium announced to Adam and Eve. God became man to save us. Panel 5 is dedicated to Jesus's baptism, in which we're invited to Listen to Him, God's beloved Son, and which is meant to remind us of our own baptism, that grace-filled day when God gratuitously freed us from our sins and made us children. But we know how many times we have not lived up to that grace. So next we encounter Jesus' hunting down the lost sheep — us — to forgive us, making heaven erupt more for our return than for the ninety-nine who supposedly didn't need such forgiveness. We meet next the Prodigal Son, who had squandered his entire inheritance, but the Father still went out, hugged him, killed the fatted calf and rejoiced that his child who was dead had come back to life. The eighth panel focuses on the paralyzed man in Capernaum, whose friends loved him enough that they brought him to Jesus for forgiveness, and during which Jesus demonstrated clearly that the Son of God has power to forgive those sins by healing the man's paralysis as well. The subsequent image captures the sinful woman who washed and anointed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair, which led Jesus to forgive all of her sins and tell Simon the Pharisee that those who better recognize how much they need to be freed from their sins show greater love and gratitude for such a gift. Jesus tells Peter in the next panel that the disciple is to forgive 70×7 times, in imitation of God who forgives us without limit. Peter experiences that need for unlimited forgiveness in the next panel, which happens when Jesus looks at him after he has thrice denied him, leading to his conversion. The twelfth panel is Jesus on Calvary, where he forgives the Repentant Thief on the Cross and promises him Paradise. Thomas is next, piercing Jesus' side with his finger, converting from his disbelief in the resurrection to giving his great confession, "My Lord and my God." Jesus in the 14th panel breathes on the apostles with the Holy Spirit and gives them the power to forgive sins. Paul is the subject of the penultimate panel. The Christian killer, who did to the disciples in the 30s what Nero did in

the 60s, is shown struck from his horse and called by the Lord to conversion.

- This whole progression shows the path from conversion to salvation, and the Church invites us to see ourselves in the lost sheep, the prodigal son, the paralytic, sinful woman, Peter, Dismas, Thomas and Paul, and to rejoice that the Lord has come to save us from all of these sins through the ministry of those, like Peter, Paul and Thomas, who were manifest sinners in their own right, and hence were chosen instruments to show God's mercy.
- If you were keeping track, I only mentioned fifteen panels. The sixteenth pictures the Pope at the Jubilee door, saying the words Jesus himself said to the lukewarm members of the Church of Laodicea in the book of Revelation: "I am standing at the door, knocking." Throughout this Year of Mercy, he will be standing at the door of our too often tepid hearts knocking, trying to gain access. This year, even today, is the time to let him open up the door of our hearts and the hearts of those we serve, so that we can be freed from the slavery to ourselves and our sins and cross the threshold of that holy door so that we might come and adore him with great, great joy.
- If we can't get to Rome or our people can't afford it, we can lead them on pilgrimages to the Cathedral Jubilee door and to the other Churches that have been specified by Archbishop Wenski. It's a beautiful thing to get people out of their pews, out of their comfort zones, and lead them on a journey and in this year Pope Francis is asking us to do this.
 - MV 14. The practice of pilgrimage has a special place in the Holy Year, because it represents the journey each of us makes in this life. Life itself is a pilgrimage, and the human being is a viator, a pilgrim travelling along the road, making his way to the desired destination. Similarly, to reach the Holy Door in Rome or in any other place in the world, everyone, each according to his or her ability, will have to make a pilgrimage. This will be a sign that mercy is also a goal to reach and requires dedication and sacrifice. May pilgrimage be an impetus to conversion: by crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us.
- The final practice is to highlight the different aspects of mercy in the Mass. The Mass, we know, is the source and summit of the Christian life, meaning that any life that's truly Christian is meant to find in the Mass the starting point from which everything flows and the goal toward which everything ought to be directed. And so we ought to integrate the Year of Mercy within our Eucharistically-centered spirituality. And, thankfully, that's very easy because the Mass is drenched in thoughts of mercy. The more we ponder mercy in the Mass and help our people to see these references, the easier it will be for them and us both to grow in amazement of the Lord's mercy. Specifically we can look to the following parts of the Mass:
 - The Penitential Rite
 - Using Form A and Form B, which better focus on our need for mercy
 - With form A, we admit we're great sinners who have sinned by our own grievous fault, we acknowledge our need for help, and we pray for ourselves and others.
 - With form B, we focus on certain phrases that hopefully can become short aspirations throughout this year:
 - *Have mercy on us, O Lord*
 - *For we have sinned against you.*
 - *Show us, O Lord, your mercy*
 - *And grant us your salvation.*
 - If we use forms A and B, we then still have the Kyrie. It might be an opportunity throughout this Year of Mercy that we sing the Kyrie every Mass. It can be quite simple, but people will notice that it's a year of Mercy.
 - Glory to God — We pray, "hear our prayer" and that's said precisely in response to our petition to the Lamb of God have mercy on us.
 - Creed — "I believe in ... the forgiveness of sins"
 - Prayers of the Faithful — We could add petition at every Mass relevant to the Year of Mercy. Perhaps we could take them from the Novena of Divine Mercy and the various groups that are

prayed for.

- Eucharistic Prayers — Perhaps we can give greater emphasis and prayerful concentration to when we pray:
 - EP I
 - “To you, therefore, most merciful Father...”
 - “To us, also, your servants, who, though sinners, hope in your abundant mercies, graciously grant some share and fellowship with your holy Apostles and Martyrs”
 - EP II
 - “Have mercy on us all we pray, that ... we may merit to be coheirs to eternal life and my praise and glorify you through your Son, Jesus Christ”
 - EP III
 - “Look, we pray, upon the oblation of your Church and, recognizing the sacrificial Victim by whose death you will to reconcile us to yourself...”
 - “May this Sacrifice of our reconciliation, we pray, O Lord, advance the peace and salvation of all the world.”
 - EP IV
 - “Even when through disobedience he had lost your friendship, you did not abandon him to the domain of death. For you came in mercy to the aid of all so that those who seek might find you.”
 - “To all of us, your children, grant, O merciful Father, that we may enter into a heavenly inheritance. ... There with the whole of creation, freed from the corruption of sin and death, may we glorify you...”
 - Reconciliation EP I (*particularly fitting to use this year*)
 - Preface: “Being rich in mercy, you constantly offer pardon and call on sinners to trust in your forgiveness alone. Now did you turn away from us and, though time and again we have broken your covenant, you have bound the human family to yourself through Jesus, your Son, our Redeemer, with a new bond of love so tight that it can never be undone. Even now you set before your people a time of grace and reconciliation and, as they turn back to you in spirit, you grant them hope...”
 - “Indeed though we once were lost and could not approach you, you loved us with the greatest love: for your Son... handed himself over to death and did not disdain to be nailed for our sake to the wood of the Cross...”
 - “In a similar way, when supper was ended, knowing that he was about to reconcile all things in himself through his blood to be shed on the Cross...”
 - Advent connection: “Looking forward to his blessed coming, we offer you, who are our faithful and merciful God, this sacrificial victim who reconciles to you the human race.”
 - “And with our deceased brothers and sisters whom we humbly commend to your mercy.”
 - Reconciliation EP II
 - Preface: “Even though the human race is divided by dissension and discord, yet we know that by testing us, you change our hearts to prepare them for reconciliation.”
 - “He is the hand you extend to sinners...”
 - “When we ourselves had turned away from you on account of our sins, you brought us back to be reconciled, O Lord, so that, converted at last to you, we might love one another through your Son, whom for our sake you handed over to death. And now, celebrating the reconciliation Christ has brought us, we entreat you...”
 - “In a similar way on that same evening, he took the chalice of blessing in his hands, confessing your mercy...”
 - Consecration

- “which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins”
- Memorial Acclamation — This year might be particularly appropriate to use “Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.” It proclaims that we’re sinners in need of a Savior!
- Our Father — We ponder our need to forgive in order to be open to receive the Lord’s gift of forgiveness. God only forgives us when we forgive others not because he’s punishing us but because unless we have hearts opened to mercy toward others, our hearts will be too hardened to receive God’s gift.
- *Libera nos* — We pray with a particularly Advent theme: “That by the help of your mercy, we may be always free from sin and safe from all distress, as we await the blessed hope and the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”
- Lamb of God — We pray to Jesus who has come to take away our sins, to have mercy on us and grant us peace.
- *Domine non sum dignus* — We pray, “...only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” During this Year, we can give great attention to where and how Jesus says that word ... with our accents.
- The Private Prayers of the Priest — All of these focus on mercy and so we can pray them this year with greater devotion:
 - Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.”
 - *Per evangelica dicta, deleantur nostra delicta* — “Through the words of the Gospel, may our sins be wiped away”
 - Offertory: “With humble spirit and contrite heart may we be accepted by your, O Lord...” (Dan 3:39).
 - *Lavabo*: “Wash me, O Lord, from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin”
 - *Lord Jesus Christ...* “Free me by this, your most holy Body and Blood, from all my sins and from every evil”
 - “May the Receiving of your Body and Blood, Lord Jesus Christ, not bring me to judgment and condemnation but through your loving mercy be for me protection in mind and body and a healing remedy.”
- Vesting Prayers
 - Ablution — “Give strength to my hands, Lord, to wipe away all stain, so that I may be able to serve thee in purity of mind and body”
 - Amice — “Lord, set the helmet of salvation on my head to fend off all the assaults of the devil.”
 - Alb — “Make me white, O Lord, and cleanse my heart that being made white in the Blood of the Lamb I may merit an eternal reward.”
 - Cincture — “Gird me, O Lord, with the cincture of purity and quench in my heart the fire of concupiscence that the power of continence and chastity may abide in me.”
 - Stole — “Lord, restore the stole of immortality that I lost through the collusion of our first parents, and, unworthy as I am to approach thy sacred mysteries, may I yet gain eternal joy.”
 - Chasuble — Yoking ourselves to Christ in his mercy: “O Lord, you who have said: ‘My yoke is sweet and my burden light,’ grant that I may so carry it as to merit thy grace.”

Conclusion

- As we bring our time today to a close, I’d like to ponder Pope Francis’ hopes expressed at the end of *Misericordiae vultus*.
 - MV 25. I present, therefore, this Extraordinary Jubilee Year dedicated to living out in our daily lives the mercy that the Father constantly extends to all of us. In this Jubilee Year, let us allow God to surprise us. He never tires of throwing open the doors of his heart and repeats that he loves us and wants to share his love with us. The Church feels the urgent need to proclaim God’s mercy. Her life is authentic and credible only when she becomes a convincing herald of mercy. She knows that **her primary task**, especially at a moment full of great hopes and signs of contradiction, **is to introduce everyone to the great mystery of God’s mercy by contemplating the face of Christ**. The

Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ. From the heart of the Trinity, from the depths of the mystery of God, the great river of mercy wells up and overflows unceasingly. It is a spring that will never run dry, no matter how many people approach it. Every time someone is in need, he or she can approach it, because the mercy of God never ends. The profundity of the mystery surrounding it is as inexhaustible as the richness that springs up from it. In this Jubilee Year, may the Church echo the word of God that resounds strong and clear as a message and a sign of pardon, strength, aid, and love. May she never tire of extending mercy, and be ever patient in offering compassion and comfort. May the Church become the voice of every man and woman, and repeat confidently without end: "Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old" (Ps 25:6).

- We are the faucets through which the great river of mercy flows. May God give us the grace this year to receive from him so much of that river that we may in response turn the faucet all the way up!
- And we finish by praying the Prayer of Pope Francis for the Jubilee of Mercy, which he published May 6.

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, loved, 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 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*