



« Christ, the face of the Father's Mercy »

Pastoral Letter

of His Beatitude Fouad Twal

Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem

on the occasion of

the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy

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« *Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful* »

(Lk 6, 36)

Dear Brother Bishops and Priests, deacons, men and women religious brothers and sisters, and faithful,

On April 11, Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy to open on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and conclude on November 20, 2016, the Solemnity of Christ the King. To explain its meaning, the Holy Father published a Bull of Indiction, titled *Misericordiae Vultus* or “*The Face of Mercy*.” We invite you to embrace this initiative so that this new jubilee brings many graces and blessings to all mankind. This year coincides with a difficult period of our history because we suffer, especially in the Middle East, the savagery of man, capable of fratricidal hatred.

Before presenting a summary of the Papal Bull (third part), we start with the general meaning of the Jubilee year (first part), then its implications in our life (second part).

Part One

“Year of Grace” or “Jubilee Year” In the Bible and the Life of Christ

Saint Luke tells us that Jesus “...came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.*” (Lk 4:16-19)

For Jews, “the year of benefits” or “the jubilee year” occurred every fifty years. The fields had to return to their original owners and the land had a rest for one year, during which time it was forbidden to cultivate it. Prisoners and slaves were freed. Later, Jesus updated the passage of Isaiah in his person, saying that the benefits of the year were realized through his Incarnation, his miracles and his proclamation of the good news.

In Church history, the first to declare a holy year was Boniface VIII in 1300. His intention was to establish a holy year. But in the year 1475, the idea came, to share it with every generation of believers. To achieve this, it had to be repeated every 25 years. By way of exception, some Popes considered to declare an “extraordinary” holy year to commemorate special events. For example, 1933 and 1983 were declared

Holy Years to commemorate the 1,900th anniversary of the death of Jesus Christ and the 1,950th anniversary of the Year of Redemption. The last Holy Year was in 2000, on the occasion of the beginning of the third millennium of the birth of Christ according to the flesh. So far, the Church has lived 26 jubilee years in addition to this *Year of Mercy*.

“At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives,” wrote *Pope Francis and continued*: “For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”¹

At the start of Holy Year on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis will open the Holy Door at Saint Peter’s Basilica. It symbolizes the Door of Mercy; anyone who enters by it can experience the love of God, which consoles, forgives, and gives hope.

Pope Francis then mentions the different stages of the Jubilee year: opening at the level of the universal Church, of the local churches, the closing of the year and the various initiatives which mark it.

“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 that same Sunday, I wish,” said *the Pope*, “that in every particular Church (...) a Door of Mercy is also open throughout 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-

1 MisericordiaeVultus #3

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.”²

In our Diocese, the Holy Door will be opened in the Basilica of Gethsemane in Jerusalem, another in the Church of Saint Catherine in Bethlehem, a third in the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, and a fourth at Our Lady of the Mount Shrine, Anjara, Jordan.

The Pope also explains the relationship of the Jubilee year with the anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. “I have chosen the date of December 8 because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization that had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father’s love in the world.”³

2 Ibid

3 MisericordiaeVultus# 4

Part Two

The issue of Mercy

In this part, I wish to dwell on the implications of Divine Mercy in our lives, in the light of the Apostolic Letter by Pope Francis.

From the merciful God to forgiving man

In the New Testament we find two parables which clearly show the relationship between God's mercy and ours: those of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32) and the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). In the first, Jesus reveals God's unlimited mercy towards sinners. In the second, He shows how this mercy should go from God to man. The experience we have of the mercy of God invites us to practice it towards our brothers and sisters. Our compassion is based on that of God: "*Be merciful as your father in heaven is Merciful.*" (Lk 6:36)

Mercy unlimited

In the parable of the Good Samaritan, it is remarkable that Jesus chose a character from Samaria to give first aid to an injured Jew, since between Samaritans and Jews, there existed centuries of hostility. What Jesus wanted to show is the mercy that transcends all borders and destroys all walls. It is a mercy to humanity as such, regardless of race, religion, faith, color, language, culture or origin. As the mercy of God knows no

borders, so should be the mercy of man towards his neighbor and especially the weak, the oppressed, the marginalized, the immigrants, the internally displaced and those who live on the peripheries of society.

A Practical Mercy

Mercy is not a temporary emotion which “moves” the heart and stops at that point, but it is a concrete, tangible and inventive commitment which mobilizes the whole person. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father did not stop at his emotions – his heart was moved but he runs towards his son, embraces him, restores his original dignity, and in the full extent of its benefits prepares for him a grand banquet. Similarly, the Good Samaritan, after feeling compassion, he then, one after another, takes concrete initiatives towards the wounded Jew: he bandaged his wounds, lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. Jesus concludes the parable by saying: “*Go and do likewise.*” (Lk 10:37)

We distinguish between the spiritual works of mercy (counsel those who are in doubt, teach the ignorant, warn sinners, comfort the afflicted, forgive offenses, bear patiently with people, pray for the living and the dead) and corporal works of mercy (feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger and shelter the homeless, assist the sick, visit prisoners, bury the dead).⁴ This teaching puts before the faithful a wide range of possible works to accomplish, which everyone can choose according to his or her own charism and talents.

4 cf. Catechism the Catholic Church, # 2447

Yes, the sinner, and not the sin

During His earthly life, Jesus tirelessly denounced all kinds of sins because they corrupt man and disfigure the image of God in him. He continually worked to heal the human person at the root of his being and to uproot the evil of his heart, where evil thoughts come from as well as the good deeds (Mk 7:14-23). The Lord dealt with sinful man with infinite tenderness, showing the merciful love of the Heavenly Father. In doing so, He does not approve the action of the sinner but calls to conversion and change of life. To the adulterous woman, Jesus said, “*Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin anymore*”(Jn 8:11). To this end, he instituted the sacrament of penance and reconciliation, the effective sign of the mercy and tenderness of God toward sinners. It is good to note that the formula of absolution in the Latin rite begins with these words: “*God, the Father of mercies ...*”

Mercy in international relations

Mercy is not limited to individual relationships (from one person to another), but embraces public life in all its sectors (political, economic, cultural, social), at all levels (international, regional and local), and in all directions (between states, peoples, cultures, religions and confessions). When mercy becomes part of public action, it is able to transfer the world from the sphere of selfish interests to that of human values. This form of collaboration builds a better world. Mercy is a political act *par excellence*, provided the policy is set in its noblest sense, of caring for the human family starting with ethical values, of which mercy is a principal component opposed to violence, oppression, injustice, authoritarianism and the spirit of domination.

This is a call to the illustrious of the world who are not interested in the destiny of peoples in different continents, including our region. It is a call to the developers of ideologies of death that they return to their conscience and make the value of the life of each human person prevail above material interests and exploitation of resources of countries that do not belong to them. We pray that the protagonists of these policies hear the call to mercy as coming from God, Pope Francis, the oppressed, in short, the entire human community.

Witnesses of Mercy

In a world that is increasingly dehumanizing and moving towards ruthlessness, violence and oppression, the Christian vocation is to witness to divine mercy, in collaboration with men and women of good will. The seed of mercy is in all religions, and we are all responsible to germinate it in private and public life. Then we will be witnesses of a better world, ruled by justice, peace, tenderness, love and mutual respect. We invite all our faithful, who have any influence and power in the political, economic, cultural, social or family life to live mercy and make a culture that permeates the world that belongs to us.

Part Three

Presentation of the Apostolic Letter on the Jubilee of Mercy

In this part, we go through the apostolic letter to appreciate it directly. The Holy Father begins by representing the characteristics of mercy in the person of Christ:

“Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in him. The Father, “rich in mercy” (*Eph 2:4*), after having revealed his name to Moses as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (*Ex 34:6*), has never ceased to show, in various ways throughout history, his divine nature. In the “fullness of time” (*Gal 4:4*), when everything had been arranged according to his plan of salvation, he sent his only Son into the world, born of the Virgin Mary, to reveal his love for us in a definitive way. Whoever sees Jesus sees the Father (*cf. Jn 14:9*). Jesus of Nazareth, by his words, his actions, and his entire person reveals the mercy of God.”⁵

Mercy is proper to God

“It is proper to God to exercise mercy, and he manifests his omnipotence particularly in this way”. These words of

5 MisericordiaeVultus, #1

Saint Thomas Aquinas show that God’s mercy, rather than a sign of weakness, is the mark of his omnipotence. For this reason the liturgy, in one of its most ancient collects, has us pray: “O God, who reveal your power above all in your mercy and forgiveness...” Throughout the history of humanity, God will always be the One who is present, close, provident, holy, and merciful.”⁶

“Patient and merciful.” These words often go together in the Old Testament to describe God’s nature. His being merciful is concretely demonstrated in his many actions throughout the history of salvation where his goodness prevails over punishment and destruction.”⁷

“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.”⁸

The Mercy of God is the root of mercy towards others

“As we can see in Sacred Scripture, mercy is a key word that indicates God’s action towards us. He does not limit himself merely to affirming his love, but makes it visible and tangible. Love, after all, can never be just an abstraction. By

6 #6)

7 Ibid.

8 #9

its very nature, it indicates something concrete: intentions, attitudes, and behaviours that are shown in daily living. The mercy of God is his loving concern for each one of us. He feels responsible; that is, he desires our wellbeing and he wants to see us happy, full of joy, and peaceful. This is the path which the merciful love of Christians must also travel. As the Father loves, so do his children. Just as he is merciful, so we are called to be merciful to each other.”⁹

Mercy is the life-style of the Church

“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.”¹⁰ But the Church is all of us, the faithful, and pastors and consecrated. We all need to learn mercy especially with the people entrusted to our pastoral care.

...especially to the marginalized

“In this Holy Year, we look forward to the experience of opening our hearts to those living on the outermost fringes of society: fringes which 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

9 MisericordiaeVultus, #9

10 #10

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!¹¹

The Pope gives a concise overview of mercy

“We need constantly to contemplate the mystery of mercy. It is a wellspring of joy, serenity, and peace. Our salvation depends on it. Mercy: the word reveals the very mystery of the Most Holy Trinity. Mercy: the ultimate and supreme act by which God comes to meet us. Mercy: the fundamental law that dwells in the heart of every person who looks sincerely into the eyes of his brothers and sisters on the path of life. Mercy: the bridge that connects God and man, opening our hearts to the hope of being loved forever despite our sinfulness.”¹²

Missionaries of Mercy

“During Lent of this Holy Year,” *the Holy Father continues*: “I intend to send out Missionaries of Mercy. They

¹¹ #15

¹² Misericordiae Vultus, #2

will be a sign of the Church's maternal solicitude for the People of God, enabling them to enter the profound richness of this mystery so fundamental to the faith. There will be priests to whom I will grant the authority to pardon even those sins reserved to the Holy See, so that the breadth of their mandate as confessors will be even clearer. They will be, above all, living signs of the Father's readiness to welcome those in search of his pardon. They will be missionaries of mercy because they will be facilitators of a truly human encounter, a source of liberation, rich with responsibility for overcoming obstacles and taking up the new life of Baptism again. They will be led in their mission by the words of the Apostle: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all" (Rom 11:32). Everyone, in fact, without exception, is called to embrace the call to mercy. May these Missionaries live this call with the assurance that they can fix their eyes on Jesus, "the merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God" (*Heb 2:17*).¹³

The Pope continues: "I ask my brother Bishops to invite and welcome these Missionaries so that they can be, above all, persuasive preachers of mercy. May individual dioceses organize "missions to the people" in such a way that these Missionaries may be heralds of joy and forgiveness. Bishops are asked to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation with their people so that the time of grace made possible by the Jubilee year makes it possible for many of God's sons and daughters to take up once again the journey to the Father's house. May pastors, especially during the liturgical season of Lent, be diligent in calling back the faithful "to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace. (*Heb 4:16*)"¹⁴

13 #18

14 Ibid

Justice and Mercy

The Holy Father affirms that justice is not limited to the application of the law, but continues its path towards love and conversion. This shows the importance for civil society: “It would not be out of place at this point to recall the relationship between justice and mercy. These are not two contradictory realities, but two dimensions of a single reality that unfolds progressively until it culminates in the fullness of love. Justice is a fundamental concept for civil society, which is meant to be governed by the rule of law. Justice is also understood as that which is rightly due to each individual. In the Bible, there are many references to divine justice and to God as “judge”. In these passages, justice is understood as the full observance of the Law. (...) Such a vision, however, has not infrequently led to legalism by distorting the original meaning of justice and obscuring its profound value. To overcome this legalistic perspective, we need to recall that in Sacred Scripture, justice is conceived essentially as the faithful abandonment of oneself to God’s

The model is Jesus Christ, which exceeds the law that divides people into two categories: the righteous and sinners:

“For his part, Jesus speaks several times of the importance of faith over and above the observance of the law. It is in this sense that we must understand his words when, reclining at table with Matthew and other tax collectors and sinners, he says to the Pharisees raising objections to him, “Go and learn the meaning of ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’. I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners” (*Mt 9:13*). Faced with a vision of justice as the mere observance of the law that judges people simply by dividing them into two groups – the just and sinners – Jesus is bent on revealing the great gift of mercy that searches out sinners and offers them pardon and salvation. One

can see why, on the basis of such a liberating vision of mercy as a source of new life, Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the other teachers of the law. In an attempt to remain faithful to the law, they merely placed burdens on the shoulders of others and undermined the Father's mercy. The appeal to a faithful observance of the law must not prevent attention from being given to matters that touch upon the dignity of the person."¹⁵

“For it is loyalty that I desire, not sacrifice”

“The appeal Jesus makes to the text from the book of the prophet Hosea – “I desire loyalty and not sacrifice” (6:6) – is important in this regard. Jesus affirms that, from that time onward, the rule of life for his disciples must place mercy at the centre, as Jesus himself demonstrated by sharing meals with sinners. Mercy, once again, is revealed as a fundamental aspect of Jesus' mission. This is truly challenging to his hearers, who would draw the line at a formal respect for the law. Jesus, on the other hand, goes beyond the law; the company he keeps with those the law considers sinners makes us realize the depth of his mercy.”¹⁶

“The Apostle Paul makes a similar journey. Prior to meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, he dedicated his life to pursuing the justice of the law with zeal (*cf. Phil 3:6*). His conversion to Christ led him to turn that vision upside down, to the point that he would write to the Galatians: “We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified” (*Gal 2:16*).¹⁷

15 Ibid

16 Ibid

17 *MisericordiaeVultus*, #20

Justice alone is not enough

“If God limited himself to only justice, he would cease to be God, and would instead be like human beings who ask merely that the law be respected. But mere justice is not enough. Experience shows that an appeal to justice alone will result in its destruction. This is why God goes beyond justice with his mercy and forgiveness. Yet this does not mean that justice should be devalued or rendered superfluous. On the contrary: anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end, because one begins to feel the tenderness and mercy of God. God does not deny justice. He rather envelopes it and surpasses it with an even greater event in which we experience love as the foundation of true justice.”¹⁸

In paragraph 19 of the Apostolic Letter, we find an answer to the problems experienced by a large part of humanity. This is a cry of alarm against organized violence, corrupt officials and their accomplices:

“May the message of mercy reach everyone, and may no one be indifferent to the call to experience mercy. I direct this invitation to conversion even more fervently to those whose behaviour distances them from the grace of God. I particularly have in mind men and women belonging to criminal organizations of any kind. For their own good, I beg them to change their lives. I ask them this in the name of the Son of God who, though rejecting sin, never rejected the sinner. Do not fall into the terrible trap of thinking that life depends on money and that, in comparison with money, anything else is devoid of value or dignity. This is nothing but an illusion! We cannot take money with us into the life beyond. Money does not bring us happiness. Violence inflicted for the sake of

18 #21

amassing riches soaked in blood makes one neither powerful nor immortal. Everyone, sooner or later, will be subject to God's judgment, from which no one can escape."¹⁹

"The same invitation is extended to those who either perpetrate or participate in corruption. This festering wound is a grave sin that cries out to heaven for vengeance, because it threatens the very foundations of personal and social life. Corruption prevents us from looking to the future with hope, because its tyrannical greed shatters the plans of the weak and tramples upon the poorest of the poor. It is an evil that embeds itself into the actions of everyday life and spreads, causing great public scandal. Corruption is a sinful hardening of the heart that replaces God with the illusion that money is a form of power. It is a work of darkness, fed by suspicion and intrigue. (...) If we want to drive it out from personal and social life, we need prudence, vigilance, loyalty, transparency, together with the courage to denounce any wrongdoing. If it is not combated openly, sooner or later everyone will become an accomplice to it, and it will end up destroying our very existence."²⁰

"This is the opportune moment to change our lives! This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched! When confronted with evil deeds, even in the face of serious crimes, it is the time to listen to the cry of innocent people who are deprived of their property, their dignity, their feelings, and even their very lives. To stick to the way of evil will only leave one deluded and sad. True life is something entirely different. God never tires of reaching out to us. He is always ready to listen."²¹

"Mercy is not opposed to justice but rather expresses

19 #19

20 *Misericordiae Vultus*, #19

21 *Ibid*

God's way of reaching out to the sinner, offering him a new chance to look at himself, convert, and believe. The experience of the prophet Hosea can help us see the way in which mercy surpasses justice. The era in which the prophet lived was one of the most dramatic in the history of the Jewish people. The kingdom was tottering on the edge of destruction; the people had not remained faithful to the covenant; they had wandered from God and lost the faith of their forefathers. According to human logic, it seems reasonable for God to think of rejecting an unfaithful people; they had not observed their pact with God and therefore deserved just punishment: in other words, exile. The prophet's words attest to this: "They shall not return to the land of Egypt, and Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me." (*Hos 11:5*) And yet, after this invocation of justice, the prophet radically changes his speech and reveals the true face of God: "... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy" (*Hos 11:8-9*). Saint Augustine, almost as if he were commenting on these words of the prophet, says: "It is easier for God to hold back anger than mercy". And so it is. God's anger lasts but a moment, his mercy forever."²²

In paragraph 22 appears the theme of *indulgences*:

"A Jubilee also entails the granting of indulgences. This practice will acquire an even more important meaning in the Holy Year of Mercy. God's forgiveness knows no bounds. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God makes even more evident his love and its power to destroy all human sin. Reconciliation with God is made possible through the paschal mystery and the mediation of the Church. Thus God is always

22 #21)

ready to forgive, and he never tires of forgiving in ways that are continually new and surprising. Nevertheless, all of us know well the experience of sin. We know that we are called to perfection (*cf. Mt 5:48*), yet we feel the heavy burden of sin. Though we feel the transforming power of grace, we also feel the effects of sin typical of our fallen state. Despite being forgiven, the conflicting consequences of our sins remain. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, God forgives our sins, which he truly blots out; and yet sin leaves a negative effect on the way we think and act. But the mercy of God is stronger even than this. It becomes indulgence on the part of the Father who, through the Bride of Christ, his Church, reaches the pardoned sinner and frees him from every residue left by the consequences of sin, enabling him to act with charity, to grow in love rather than to fall back into sin.”²³

Mercy in various religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism)

“There is an aspect of mercy that goes beyond the confines of the Church. It relates us to Judaism and Islam, both of which consider mercy to be one of God’s most important attributes.” Throughout the Bible we are told of this mercy. It suffices to open the Book of Psalms to realize how much God exercises mercy towards his people. “Islamic attributes to the Creator are “Merciful and Kind”. This invocation is often on the lips of faithful Muslims who feel themselves accompanied and sustained by mercy in their daily weakness. They too believe that no one can place a limit on divine mercy because its doors are always open.” *The Pope* “trusts that this Jubilee Year celebrating the Mercy of God will foster an

23 *Misericordiae Vultus*, #22

encounter “with these monotheistic religions and may it open us to even more fervent dialogue so that we might know and understand one another better; may it eliminate every form of closed-mindedness and disrespect, and drive out every form of violence and discrimination.”²⁴

24 #23)

Conclusion

“The Church lives within the communion of the saints. In the Eucharist, this communion, which is a gift from God, becomes a spiritual union binding us to the saints and blessed ones whose number is beyond counting (*cf. Rev 7:4*). Their holiness comes to the aid of our weakness in a way that enables the Church, with her maternal prayers and her way of life, to fortify the weakness of some with the strength of others.”²⁵

On this point, the two Saints Marie Alphonsine Ghattas and Mariam of Jesus Crucified Baouardy, recently canonized, spontaneously come to mind as our guides on our earthly pilgrimage. These two women experienced deeply the mercy of God in their lives. Their experience was so rich that it has overflowed to others that, for them, mercy has become a lifestyle. So, let us immerse ourselves in the spirituality of this Jubilee year and ask the heavenly Father for the remission and forgiveness of our sins. His mercy fills our private and public, civil and ecclesiastical, familial and social life, becoming a sign of God’s mercy in all areas of life.

At the end of his letter, Pope Francis invites the Church to be the visible sign and instrument of this forgiveness: “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*).²⁶

25 *Misericordiae Vultus*, #22

26 #25)

May the heavenly Father fills us with the torrent of His mercy and love through Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit!

† **Fouad Twal**, Latin Patriarch

