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Beloved Confreres,

The Jubilee Year of Mercy

During a penitential service at St. Peter's Basilica on March 12, 2015 Pope Francis announced the extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy, which would begin later on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, this year. It will end on the Solemnity of Christ the King, November 20, 2016. The scriptural focus for the jubilee year is Christ's command from Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

My dear Friends! Today we have entered into this very special Year of Mercy. This year of Mercy invites us:

- To be more and more aware of the compassionate love of the Father
- To experience the compassion of God in our personal, community life and apostolate
- To help others to experience the mercy of God
- To proclaim the mercies of God to all nations
- And above all to be merciful and compassionate like our dear Father.

The Holy Father has announced many possibilities of obtaining indulgences through various devotional practices. So too each diocese has planned various programs and devotional practices to make known the Year of Mercy and to help the faithful to experience in a very personal way the deep compassionate love of the Father.

My dear Friends, The Year of Mercy is only a tiny fraction of Eternity of Mercy ! We all float and swim in the ocean of the eternal mercy of God. This ocean is so vast that everyone has a place and chance to be deep into it. But often times we do not realize how much of the merciful love we do experience from God.

Many times we ignore the mercy of God or we take it for granted. Whether we accept or not, from the very beginning of our lives here on earth we have been experiencing the mercy of God. He was also merciful to the generations that have gone before us. Had he judged based on our merit we would not have been what we are today. Had he called us to serve in consecrated life counting on our goodness, no one would have been worthy to serve him. The psalmist prayed, If you, LORD, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? (Ps. 130:3). If we stand today, it is not because we have not sinned but because God is merciful.

It is an undeniable fact that over the years our faith has been marked by systems of laws almost replacing the real God-given law of Love. As priest one is a sacred minister and cleric. However when clericalism rules the heart and mind of a priest he goes very far from the mind of Jesus. Pope Francis deplores such a scenario.

At the very outset of this Year of Mercy, let us become aware that we are precious in the eyes of God; we are the result of his mercy. The merciful one has done great things for us.

If God is generous and compassionate to us, we too are obliged to be the same to ourselves and to others. We need not condemn ourselves, for God himself does not condemn us. We should not condemn or judge the other, for in doing so we act against the holy will of God. We are not authorized to condemn the other.

Beloved Confreres, I invite all of us to have very personal program as to how each of us is going to celebrate this year of Mercy. I use the word "to celebrate" with a purpose. God tells us with great love through his son Jesus, "your many sins are forgiven". This forgiveness is the decision of God and not our merit. Even if we are unfaithful he continues to be faithful (2 Tim 2:13). Up on this immeasurable merciful love of the Father we have the reasons to rejoice and to celebrate.

As we begin this great Jubilee Year of Mercy, may I remind you and exhort on the following things:

- Year of Mercy is not to be limited to mere devotional practices aiming at obtaining indulgences. All these should begin with a conversion of heart. Hence as part of the personal program at the very beginning of this Jubilee Year of Mercy, I exhort you to seek the mercy of God through the sacrament of reconciliation with the particular and special intention of entering into this unique Year of Mercy. This should be the starting point of our personal program. It is with this disposition of being freed from our sins, we can worthily participate in the various programs arranged by the Church at the universal level and local level.
- Each of us need to identify in our lives those areas where we can be agents of compassion. Sure by one's priestly ministry one is the dispenser of the mercy of God. But going beyond these sacramental services everyone of us should manifest the merciful face of God. We ourselves should become sacraments of the mercy of God.
- Let us realize and proclaim with greater conviction that our God is a God of LOVE and not a God of LAWS.
- In this process there are many things we need to do and many more things we should not do. We should not become victims of legalism or clericalism. We should not condemn others.
- By allowing us to be born into this "world" Jesus wants us to know that we are no better than the others. We should refrain ourselves from labelling others or even branding the other as sinners beyond redemption. If I have experienced the mercy of God, every other human being can experience the same.
- We need to remember that Jesus our saviour has obtained for us the true mercy from our loving and caring father. If we believe that there are sinners beyond redemption, we are affirming our disbelief in the very mercy of God. If God himself does not keep the records of the sins of the past, why do we take the trouble to write with a **permanent marker** the sins of others in the pages of the history ? God not only forgives us our sins but he also wipes them away.

From this personal level we as members of the community need to discern as to how we can as communities become agents of compassionate love of God. This will lead us to celebrate this year of Mercy in a very meaningful manner.

The seven spiritual works of mercy

Besides what is above, I believe we need to exercise these spiritual works of mercy as taught in the tradition of the Catechism of our Catholic faith.

- 1) admonish (and love) the sinner,
- 2) instruct the ignorant,
- 3) counsel the doubtful,
- 4) comfort the sorrowful,
- 5) bear wrongs patiently,
- 6) forgive all injuries, and
- 7) pray for the living and dead.

Thus the jubilee year is a “**holy year**” marked by acts of faith, charity, and fraternal communion.

From this moment, let us entrust this Holy Year to the Mother of Compassion the patroness of our Congregation. May this Mother turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey as individuals and as members of the community.

Immaculate Conception

Today once again the Mother Church reminds us "*that the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin.*" (Encyclical *Ineffabilis Deus* by Pope Pius IX) Therefore, being always free from original sin, the doctrine teaches that from her conception Mary received the sanctifying grace that would normally come with baptism after birth.

My dear friends, Mary was born immaculate by the special direct act of God; we are made immaculate through the divine act accomplished at our baptism by way of human ministry. In presenting to us our Mother with this unique nature, we are reminded of our potentialities to live a life that is immaculate.

This Jubilee Year of Mercy is the unique means and opportunity for us to live immaculate lives and help others to do the same. When we dip ourselves into the ocean of the Grace of God, we cannot but be freed from even the stains of sin.

Entrusting each one of you to love and mercy of God,

United with you in the merciful Jesus,



Fr. Johnson Kallidukil MSFS (Provincial Superior MSFS East Africa Province)

The world needs to discover that God is father, that there is mercy, that cruelty is not the path, that condemnation is not the path. Because the church herself sometimes follows a hard line, she falls into the temptation of following a hard line, into the temptation of underlining only moral norms, but so many people remain on the outside.

Pope Francis