

Letter from Pope Francis to Archbishop Rino Fisichella, September 1, 2015

2015-09-01 Vatican Radio

(Vatican Radio) Pope Francis today conceded to priests during the upcoming Holy Year the disposition to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and seek forgiveness for it.

He also expressed his hope that solutions may soon be found to recover full communion with the Fraternity of St Pius X.

In an articulated letter addressed to the President of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization, the Pope focused on a series of points which he said require attention to enable the celebration of the upcoming Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

Highlighting the fact that the Holy Year must be a true moment of encounter and closeness to the Lord for all believers, Pope Francis addressed the question of Jubilee Indulgences which he said represent a genuine experience of God's mercy.

And to the traditional list of all the ways one may obtain an Indulgence by crossing a Holy Door or a Door of Mercy, the Pope added a couple of dispositions and requests pointing out that in every occasion, the solemn moment must be linked, first and foremost, to the profession of faith, deep repentance, the celebration of the Eucharist and a reflection on mercy.

Please find below the full text of the Pope's letter:

To My Venerable Brother
Archbishop Rino Fisichella
President of the Pontifical Council
for the Promotion of the New Evangelization

With the approach of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy I would like to focus on several points which I believe require attention to enable the celebration of the Holy Year to be for all believers a true moment of encounter with the mercy of God. It is indeed my wish that the

In the letter Pope Francis specifically turns his attention to women who have resorted to abortion and bear the scar of this agonizing and painful decision saying the forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented. For this reason he writes - I have decided to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it.

Pointing out that a Jubilee Year has often constituted an opportunity for a great amnesty, the Pope includes prisoners in his list of believers seeking pardon, whom he says, may obtain the Indulgence in the chapels of the jails.

And holding out the possibility of obtaining an Indulgence to the sick, the elderly, the homebound and even the deceased, the Pope never neglects to point out that the experience of mercy must be visible in works of faith, hope and charity.

Finally, turning to those faithful who for various reasons choose to attend churches officiated by priests of the Fraternity of St. Pius X, Pope Francis said they too will validly and licitly receive the absolution of their sins, trusting that in the near future full communion will be recovered with Rome.

Jubilee be a living experience of the closeness of the Father, whose tenderness is almost tangible, so that the faith of every believer may be strengthened and thus testimony to it be ever more effective.

My thought first of all goes to all the faithful who, whether in individual Dioceses or as pilgrims to Rome, will experience the grace of the Jubilee. I wish that the Jubilee Indulgence may reach each one as a genuine experience of

God's mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed. To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, open in every Cathedral or in the churches designated by the Diocesan Bishop, and in the four Papal Basilicas in Rome, as a sign of the deep desire for true conversion. Likewise, I dispose that the Indulgence may be obtained in the Shrines in which the Door of Mercy is open and in the churches which traditionally are identified as Jubilee Churches. It is important that this moment be linked, first and foremost, to the Sacrament of Reconciliation and to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist with a reflection on mercy. It will be necessary to accompany these celebrations with the profession of faith and with prayer for me and for the intentions that I bear in my heart for the good of the Church and of the entire world.

Additionally, I am thinking of those for whom, for various reasons, it will be impossible to enter the Holy Door, particularly the sick and people who are elderly and alone, often confined to the home. For them it will be of great help to live their sickness and suffering as an experience of closeness to the Lord who in the mystery of his Passion, death and Resurrection indicates the royal road which gives meaning to pain and loneliness. Living with faith and joyful hope this moment of trial, receiving communion or attending Holy Mass and community prayer, even through the various means of communication, will be for them the means of obtaining the Jubilee Indulgence. My thoughts also turn to those incarcerated, whose freedom is limited. The Jubilee Year has always constituted an opportunity for great amnesty, which is intended to include the many people who, despite deserving punishment, have become conscious of the injustice they worked and sincerely wish to re-enter society and make their honest contribution to it. May they all be

touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of his forgiveness. They may obtain the Indulgence in the chapels of the prisons. May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom.

I have asked the Church in this Jubilee Year to rediscover the richness encompassed by the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. The experience of mercy, indeed, becomes visible in the witness of concrete signs as Jesus himself taught us. Each time that one of the faithful personally performs one or more of these actions, he or she shall surely obtain the Jubilee Indulgence. Hence the commitment to live by mercy so as to obtain the grace of complete and exhaustive forgiveness by the power of the love of the Father who excludes no one. The Jubilee Indulgence is thus full, the fruit of the very event which is to be celebrated and experienced with faith, hope and charity.

Furthermore, the Jubilee Indulgence can also be obtained for the deceased. We are bound to them by the witness of faith and charity that they have left us. Thus, as we remember them in the Eucharistic celebration, thus we can, in the great mystery of the Communion of Saints, pray for them, that the merciful Face of the Father free them of every remnant of fault and strongly embrace them in the unending beatitude.

One of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life. A widespread and insensitive mentality has led to the loss of the proper personal and social sensitivity to welcome new life. The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails. Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe they they have

no other option. I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfil this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.

A final consideration concerns those faithful who for various reasons choose to attend churches officiated by priests of the Fraternity of St Pius X. This Jubilee Year of Mercy excludes no one. From various quarters, several Brother Bishops have told me of their good faith and sacramental practice, combined however with an uneasy situation from the pastoral standpoint. I trust that in the near future solutions may be found to recover full communion with the priests and superiors of the Fraternity. In the meantime, motivated by the need to respond to the good of these faithful, through my own disposition, I establish that those who during the Holy Year of Mercy approach these priests of the Fraternity of St Pius X to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation shall validly and licitly receive the absolution of their sins.

Trusting in the intercession of the Mother of Mercy, I entrust the preparations for this Extraordinary Jubilee Year to her protection.

From the Vatican,
1 September 2015