



# Priestly People

WE ALL ARE THE PRIESTLY PEOPLE OF GOD. TOGETHER, WE ARE LEADERS IN RESPONDING TO THE EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF PRIESTS AND BROTHERS.

January 2016 - Vol. 32 No. 1

## Year of Mercy

December 8, 2015 — November 20, 2016

Dear brothers and sisters, I have often thought of how the Church may render clearer her mission to be a witness to mercy; and we have to make this journey. It is a journey which begins with spiritual conversion. Therefore, I have decided to announce an *Extraordinary Jubilee* which has at its center the mercy of God. It will be a *Holy Year of Mercy*. We want to live in the light of the word of the Lord: “**Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful**” (cf. Lk 6:36). And this especially applies to confessors! So much mercy!

This Holy Year will commence on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and will conclude on Sunday, 20 November 2016, the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe and living face of the Father’s mercy. I entrust the organization of this Jubilee to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, in order that it may come to life as a new step on the Church’s journey in her mission to bring the Gospel of mercy to each person.

I am confident that the whole Church, which is in such need of mercy for we are sinners, will be able to find in this Jubilee the joy of rediscovering and rendering fruitful God’s mercy, with which we are all called to give comfort to every man and every woman of our time. Do not forget that God forgives all, and God forgives always. Let us never tire of asking forgiveness. Let us henceforth entrust this Year to the Mother of Mercy, that she turn her gaze upon us and watch over our journey: our penitential journey, our year-long journey with an open heart, to receive the indulgence of God, to receive the mercy of God.

**Pope Francis – announcing the Year of Mercy**

*The Servants of the Paraclete join Pope Francis by evangelizing the Year of Mercy through Priestly People!*



For the Jewish people (cf. Leviticus 25:10) a jubilee is a time for celebration, encompassing a year of emancipation and restoration. For Roman Catholics a Jubilee is a time for celebrating the remission of the penal consequences of sin, sometimes called indulgences. Essentially a Jubilee Year of Mercy, as proclaimed by Pope Francis, is a time to open our hearts to receive the abundance of God’s love, grace and forgiveness for each of us individually and for all of us collectively. The Jubilee Year of Mercy began on December 8, 2015, the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second Vatican Council, and will conclude on November 2, 2016, the Feast of Christ the King.

As reported in many newspapers and on many websites Pope Francis is widely expanding indulgences for the Jubilee Year of Mercy and is allowing all priests to absolve the sin of abortion. He has opened the Holy Door of Mercy in Rome and invited many others to follow his example by opening basilicas, cathedrals and churches where the faithful can come to pray for the gift of Divine Mercy. He is encouraging all Catholics to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation without fear of judgment. He wants us all to know the joy that comes with the gift of God’s mercy. He has urged priests to ensure that entering a confessional is not akin to walking into a torture chamber but into a place of mercy, compassion, forgiveness and healing. He wants all those who have become alienated from the church to be reconciled to God and to one another. He is putting out the red carpet to welcome sinners. He is calling estranged and alienated Catholics to come home, to come to the table, to claim their place at the Altar of the Eucharist which, he reminds us “is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

Compassion, forgiveness and healing constitute the essence of the charism and ministry of the Servants of the Paraclete. Since 1947 when our founder, Fr. Gerald M. C. Fitzgerald, sP first opened Via Coeli Monastery in Jemez Springs, New Mexico, priests and religious have come to our houses in search of mercy and understanding, compassion and forgiveness. They have arrived broken and hopeless, with feelings of guilt, embarrassment and shame. They have come without hope and with diminished faith. They have come to experience the healing only Jesus Christ, in union with the Father and the Holy Spirit, can give.

Some may feel that what they have done or failed to do is unforgivable. Some might no longer see the meaning and purpose of life and find no good reason to pretend otherwise. Some have been abandoned by family and friends, labeled and tossed aside, scorned by society, judged by the media, condemned by those whom they have hurt.

Often they can be filled with self-loathing and condemnation. Sometimes a few may be misunderstood even by the church they love but in whose service they have failed. They know they have been a real part of some very serious problems in the life of the church and society and they are desperately searching for ways to be part of a solution. Often they are rebuffed and told no one wants their help. They are often talked about but seldom are they listened to. They are told they should be locked away, never to be heard from again. At some point perhaps even the invitation to avail themselves of the promises of a Jubilee Year of Mercy seems to be beyond their reach. Some may even ask themselves “Is mine the ‘unforgivable’ sin?” or if compassion and mercy, love and forgiveness are for everybody else, but never for them, always beyond their reach.

As we begin this Jubilee Year of Mercy I cannot help but think of the priests and religious brothers we serve in our ministry as well as those who might need our help but who are too embarrassed or ashamed to ask for some assistance. How will they be able to celebrate a year of mercy after living for many years with the guilt and shame of sin? How will they ever come to know that this is also a year of mercy for them? How will they be healed and how will those who have been hurt by priests and other religious leaders in the church be healed?

Infidelity to vows, sins that betray the call to priesthood and religious life and failures in poverty, chastity and obedience all have their consequences. Nowadays these consequences are, quite understandably, immediate and sometimes even severe. Very often priests and religious are removed from public ministry by church leaders who are genuinely committed to the safety and wellbeing of all God’s people. Those whose actions have become a cause for concern or whose behavior is suspect are sent for psychological and spiritual counseling. They become subject to civil and criminal procedures as do their dioceses and religious congregations and institutions. Public exposure and media coverage make allegations against and about them widely available. Every fall from grace can be a fall into darkness and despair. So too, those whose lives are impacted by the sins of the clergy suffer, often in silence. For them too there is fear of public disclosure and its consequences, particularly shame and even guilt. Guilt not because they might feel they have done wrong, but because they may feel obliged to speak truth to power, to tell the awful truth of their experiences and speak out in a way that might be critical of a church they and their families and friends love or once loved.

Good priests are ready to listen to those who have been hurt and are hurting. Holy priests are ready to accompany those who are suffering in a way that affirms their courage and encourages them on their healing journey. All priests – along with religious and the laity – should strive both in prayer and in action to be ministers of mercy and agents of reconciliation for all of God’s people. We should not only extend the olive branch of peace, but also follow the example of the merciful father who opened his arms to forgive, receive and welcome home his prodigal son. But before any of us share the gift of mercy, we, especially we priests and religious, must open our own hearts and souls and confess our own sins so that when we celebrate the year of mercy we will be ready to receive the great gift of God’s unconditional love.

Lest there be any confusion, let it be clear that I am writing about all priests and religious, not just those whose faults have become well known. I am writing about the most recently ordained as well as those who have served with in ministry for more than just a few years. There is not one of us who has been perfect from the day we were ordained or made our first vows. None of us set out to do any harm. We all began our preparation and training for religious life and priesthood with the goal of being faithful to the vows and promises we made. We set out on the path of ministry with genuine zeal. We sought to bring mercy and forgiveness, healing and grace, comfort and encouragement, wisdom and blessing to the people of God. Yet, somehow, somewhere along the road of life we strayed. Most of us did not stray far from the path we were called to follow. Thanks be to God. Most of us were able to recognize that we needed to confess our sins like any other sinner. Most of us, when we were desperate found ways to meet our needs, ways that did not involve or result in a loss of personal, priestly or religious dignity or in ways that brought harm to the people of God, the church and society at large. We sought out counselors. We spoke with our spiritual directors. We shared with our closest friends and



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During this Jubilee Year of Mercy perhaps it would be good to reflect on the meaning of the priesthood. It might also be a source of blessing to remember the many good and kind priests and religious who have served you and your families with selfless dedication throughout the course of your lives. They were there when you were baptized and confirmed. They heard your confessions and offered you absolution. They visited those who were ill and celebrated the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. They accompanied the faithful of their parishes, schools and hospitals on pilgrimages and outings for the young and the young at heart. They presided at services for the burial of the dead and offered comfort to those who were overcome with grief. In union with our parents, godparents and grandparents they taught us how to pray and preached about the Scriptures in ways that helped us yearn for a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

Although some have criticized the words of Lacordaire on the priesthood saying they were too clerical and dismissive of the laity, I personally find that It should come then, as no surprise, that priests and religious too need to be shown mercy.

Despite the human failings found in every person, I must say that in most ways priests and religious are more like everyone else than they are different. **appreciate the need to pray, rest, relax and enjoy life.** And some numbed themselves by working so much that they could no longer special rights and privileges to which they believed they were entitled. **And** tried to satisfy their own longings by acquiring money and possessions, and to protect and serve, some sought comfort in alcohol and drugs, and some when they felt slighted and cheated, not receiving the rewards they believed they were entitled to. Some betrayed the trust of people they were called to and tried many of the things the world promises would give them relief. Some sought power and control, highs when they were low, and satisfaction and to diminish their guilt. Some became trapped in the webs of addictions, of unknowing, looking for ways to ease their pain, to alleviate their shame Some, however, became lost and lonely, and wandered in the great cloud to struggle, even petitioned to be released from their vows and/or laicized. trusted family members. We sought the Lord in prayer and made countless sacrifices in atonement for our sins. Some volunteered to spend months and years living a life of prayer and penance and some, aware that they continued years living a life of prayer and penance and some, aware that they continued

### A Priest by Lacordaire

his reflections on the priesthood are quite insightful. In fact, I believe that in many ways Lacordaire is describing the call to ministry of every baptized person, priests, religious and laity included.

To live in the midst of the world without wishing its pleasures: To be a member of each family, yet belonging to none. To share all suffering; to penetrate all secrets; To heal all wounds; to go from men (sic) to God and offer Him their prayers; To return from God to men (sic) to bring pardon and hope; To have a heart of fire for Charity, and a heart of bronze for Chastity. To teach and to pardon, console and bless always.

My God, what a life: and it is yours, O priest of Jesus Christ! Finally, I would like to share a word of encouragement that I often offer to priests and religious, particularly those who were recently ordained or professed. Sometimes, after years of prayer and study, it becomes possible to think that we "know it all," that we have all that it takes to be priests and religious. After all, we say, we have spent years in training. But I say that all we were taught in the seminary and religious formation is not enough: that the people we serve will also teach us and show us the best ways to be a priest, a brother or a sister. **After all, we became priests and religious not to serve ourselves but to serve God and the people of God faithfully and without reserve.** Therefore with hearts longing for mercy and with souls thirsting for the Lord and in a spirit of contrition and humility, let us continue to pray always for the people of God. Let us dare to ask Our Merciful Father for a spirit of honesty, openness and willingness that will help us all, laity, religious and priests to learn from and to teach one another so that together we might grow in holiness and become genuine ministers of mercy.

Thank you & God bless you!  
Fr. David, SP

*David J. Fitzgerald, SP*  
Very Rev. David T. Fitzgerald, SP  
Servant General