

# A Threshold of Hope

## Jubilee Year 2000

By: Philip C. L. Gray

**ISSUE:** What is the significance of Jubilee Year 2000? How can I participate in the special graces given during this time?

**RESPONSE:** The Third Millennium is a threshold of Hope for all men seeking peace in God's plan. We can participate in the special graces given during this time if we remain docile to the working of the Holy Spirit and enter fully into the life of the Church. In his Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, John Paul II outlines how we can enter fully into the mystery of the Church during this year of grace.

**DISCUSSION:** And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you, when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family. A jubilee shall that fiftieth year be to you; in it you shall neither sow, nor reap what grows of itself, nor gather the grapes from the undressed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you; you shall eat what it yields out of the field (Lev. 25:10-12).

To the Israelite, the jubilee year heralded a time of freedom. It reminded Israel that God had freed him from the oppression of Egypt and provided for him in the promised land. All debts were cleared in the jubilee year. Slaves were freed. Land bought was returned to the original family who owned it. No one was allowed to farm. All trusted in God's providence to provide, just as they did during their journey from Egypt.

The jubilee year was a time of renewal. This discipline in Israel raised up the lowly by giving them the subsistence of their land again. It humbled the mighty, who relinquished their acquired land to the less fortunate who had sold it to them. Finally, it was a time of spiritual renewal, for all trusted in the Providence of God as Adam did before he tilled the soil in worrisome labor.

Because we possess the full revelation of God in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 is a threshold of hope for a time of peace. Our Holy Father calls us to enter this time of renewal with open hearts and renewed desire. In his Bull of Indiction, John Paul II explains the rich signs "which attest to the faith and foster the devotion of the Christian people"<sup>1</sup> for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

### **Liberty for Captives and a Year of Favor from the Lord**

*"[T]he Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 will begin on Christmas Eve 1999...until the closing of the Jubilee Year on the day of the epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ, 6 January 2001."*<sup>2</sup>

The signs, images and actions of the Jubilee Year emphasize Freedom and joyful Hope. Recalling the celebration of the Israelites on the banks of the Red Sea after God delivered them from Egypt (Ex. 14:30-15:21), the Jubilee is a time to recall our own freedom from sin through the Incarnation of the Son. We also recall that the Israelites immediately murmured against God, and He challenged them to trust Him and obey His commands (Ex. 15:22-26). Let us remember that this gift of freedom demands a response to the God Who saves us, a response of continual conversion with joyful hope in our resurrection and eternal life with Him.

Our response of conversion is a continual journey toward God. To foster true conversion in our lives, we must foster true contrition through acts of penance. Following Sacred Scripture and Tradition, Christians do penance in three ways: fasting, prayer and almsgiving (Tob. 12:8; Mt. 6:1-8; Catechism, 1434). To increase the favors available during this time of grace, our Holy Father has granted a special Jubilee Indulgence. This is a plenary indulgence that can be obtained once a day by performing certain acts of penance associated with the theme and images of the Jubilee Year. If we enter into the actions of the Church during this special time, we cannot but help experience true conversion and freedom in Christ as we journey in our pilgrimage of faith.

As the Israelites journeyed toward the Promised Land, so we journey toward union with God in heaven. This image of a journey is a powerful image in our life of faith. For this reason, it is fitting that the Jubilee Indulgence is associated with acts of pilgrimage. According to the decree implementing the conditions for gaining the Jubilee Indulgence, anyone can make a pilgrimage. In addition to the four Patriarchal Basilicas in Rome and various other basilicas and shrines in the Holy Land and throughout the world, the decree identifies every cathedral church as a place of

pilgrimage. Also, each bishop can designate other places within his diocese as places of pilgrimage. In those places, the faithful may obtain the indulgence by offering prayers and acts of penance. Finally, the decree notes that the indulgence can be obtained

*In any place*, if they visit for a suitable time their brothers and sisters in need or in difficulty (the sick, the imprisoned, the elderly living alone, the handicapped, etc.), as if making a pilgrimage to Christ present in them (cf. *Mt 25:34-36*), and fulfilling the usual spiritual and sacramental conditions and saying the usual prayers. The faithful will certainly wish to repeat these visits throughout the Holy year, since on each occasion they can gain the plenary indulgence, although obviously not more than once a day.

It is this final act of pilgrimage that marks true conversion of heart. In our charity towards the less fortunate who cannot repay us, we share the love that God gave us, that we cannot repay (*Lk. 14:12-14*). This genuine love of neighbor for love of God is the most fulfilling act of penance and the true mark of Christianity. “For charity delivers from death and keeps you from entering the darkness; and for all who practice it, charity is an excellent offering in the presence of the Most High” (*Tob. 4:10-11*).

### **Where Charity Prevails, There Is God**

In his apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (On Preparation for the Third Millennium [TMA]), our Holy Father emphasizes the freedom of the jubilee and charity toward those who cannot repay. In particular, he addresses the need to respect the human dignity of those in developing countries. He called for an eradication of international debts that threaten these countries (TMA, 51). In his Bull of Indiction, he explains further:

The human race is facing forms of slavery which are new and more subtle than those of the past; and for too many people freedom remains a word without meaning....There...is a need to create a new culture of international solidarity and cooperation, where all—particularly the wealthy nations and the private sector—accept responsibility for an economic model which serves everyone. There should be no more postponement of the time when the poor Lazarus can sit beside the rich man to share the same banquet and be forced no more to feed on the scraps that fall from the table (cf. *Lk 16:19-31*). Extreme poverty is a source of violence, bitterness and scandal; and to eradicate it is to do the work of justice and therefore the work of peace.

The Jubilee is a further summons to conversion of heart through a change of life. It is a reminder to all that they should give absolute importance neither to the goods of the earth, since these are not God, nor to man’s domination or claim to domination, since the earth belongs to God and to him alone: “The earth is mine and you are strangers and sojourners with me” (*Lev 25:23*). May this year of grace touch the hearts of those who hold in their hands the fate of the world’s peoples (12)!

This charity toward all must begin at home and within our own communities. It is marked by a profound sense of hospitality. This is not merely doing good for others, but rather opening our hearts for others as God has opened His for us.

An exemplary witness to this is Saint Philip Neri who, for the Jubilee of 1550, established the “roman charity” as a tangible sign of welcome to pilgrims. A long story of holiness could be told on the basis of the Jubilee experience and the fruits of conversion which the grace of pardon has produced in so many believers.<sup>3</sup>

There are many ways in which we can foster charity and hospitality within our lives. Within the home, you can make effort to spend time with a brother, sister, child or spouse. When spending this time, do things they want to do rather than things of your choosing. Within the community, there is often a profound sense of separation and alienation, which is directly opposed to charity and hospitality. This can change. Take time to visit your neighbors. Bring them a loaf of bread, or a batch of cookies. Invite them for a meal. Visit the residents in a local nursing home, or shut-ins within your parish. Invite them to your home. In all things remember, one who has a heart authentically opened to others does so with generosity and joy.

### **May We Be One as the Father Is One with the Son**

The communion of saints expresses the full reality of the Christian mysteries. Because we are united in our humanity and God has united Himself to us in His Incarnation, we are called to realize the unity God possesses with Himself (cf. *Jn. 17:20-24*). The communion of saints witnesses to that unity.

During the Jubilee Year, Pope John Paul II exhorts us to express our union with the saints in two ways: through a purification of memory, and through a remembrance of the martyrs. In the purification of memory, he calls “everyone to make an act of courage and humility in recognizing the wrongs done by those who have borne or bear the name of Christian.”<sup>4</sup> While the lives of the saints attest to the fact that perfection is possible, the sinful acts of man throughout history weigh us down in the present day. Because of our common bond in humanity, we carry the weight of these sins, even if not individually responsible for them.

As the Successor of Peter, I ask that in this year of mercy the Church, strong in the holiness which she receives from her Lord, should kneel before God and implore forgiveness for the past and present sins of her sons and daughters. All have sinned and none can claim righteousness before God (cf. *1 Kgs* 8:46). Let it be said once more without fear: “We have sinned” (*Jer* 3:25), but let us keep alive the certainty that “where sin increased, grace abounded even more” (*Rom* 5:20).<sup>5</sup>

To encourage us in our resolve to purify our memories and live a life of conversion, we have the memory of the martyrs. “The martyr, especially in our own days, is a sign of that greater love which sums up all other values.”<sup>6</sup> They were willing to bear the burdens of humanity with the courage and humility of Christ. In absolute faith, they gave their lives for the true faith. In this century alone, we have witnessed a greater number of martyrs than in any other century. “May the People of God, confirmed in faith by the example of these true champions of every age, language and nation, cross with full confidence the threshold of the Third Millennium. In the hearts of the faithful, may admiration for their martyrdom be matched by the desire to follow their example, with God’s grace, should circumstances require it.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Enter In, and Be Healed**

The Holy Door of the Jubilee symbolizes the full meaning of the Jubilee. Found at the Basilica of the Most Holy Saviour at the Lateran, this Holy Door, which symbolizes Christ Himself, is open to all. All are invited to cross its threshold into a life with Christ. The choice to cross

is a decision which presumes freedom to choose and also the courage to leave something behind, in the knowledge that what is gained is divine life (cf. *Mt* 13:44-46)...Through the holy door, symbolically more spacious at the end of a millennium, Christ will lead us more deeply into the Church, his Body and his Bride. In this way we see how rich in meaning are the words of the Apostle Peter when he writes that, united to Christ, we too are built, like living stones, “into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God” (*1 Pt* 2:5).<sup>8</sup>

At a time when so many approach the third millennium in fear, or with a desire for personal gain, let us recall the first jubilees celebrated by the Israelites. Let us welcome this Jubilee as a threshold of hope and make it a time of profound joy.

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, no. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 7 (original emphasis).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 5.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 8.

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