

# The Great Jubilee Year

By Fr. Francis J. Peffley

When Pope John Paul II was elected in 1978, he immediately began preparing for what he foresaw as the greatest year in the history of the Catholic Church: the upcoming year 2000. He has predicted that this year will be a season of grace, a new "spring time of Christianity," greater than any previous Jubilee year. And so by using the seven letters of Jubilee as points of reference, I would like to highlight seven important aspects of the Great Jubilee Year.

## **J = Journey**

We begin with J for journey or pilgrimage. One of the major themes of the papal encyclicals concerning the jubilee year is the idea of pilgrimage: Life on earth is a pilgrimage to heaven. We are on our way to eternal life. The Pope recalls Old Testament models such as Abraham, called to leave his native land and to journey after God's holy will; the children of Israel wandering through the wilderness toward the Promised Land; and the frequent pilgrimages of the Chosen people to Mount Zion. The Pope notes that Christ Himself was on a pilgrimage, coming from the Heavenly Father to earth, embarking on the way of the cross to His death and resurrection, and then returning back to Heaven at the Ascension. As His Church, we too are on a pilgrimage, with the Heavenly Jerusalem as our final goal and destination.

We prefigure that spiritual pilgrimage by making journeys to various holy places here on earth: Rome, the Holy Land, the Marian Shrines. These pilgrimages are times of prayer, asceticism, conversion, and repentance, which help us progress along the way of Christian perfection. Why not make a pilgrimage during the year 2000? Of particular interest is the Holy Land, the place made holy by our Savior's birth, death and resurrection, or Rome, where the International Eucharistic Congress and World Youth Day will take place. Closer to home you might choose the Cathedral or one of the diocesan churches that has been designated as a place for Jubilee Year pilgrimages.

## **U = Understanding**

The letter U denotes the need for understanding the history of the Jubilee year, as the Pope recommends in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*. A history of the Jubilee year begins in the Old Testament, where it was designated a year of favor from the Lord. Every fifty years, slaves were freed, debts were canceled, confiscated property was restored. It was a year of remission of sins. The Church's first Jubilee year was 1300 when Pope Boniface VIII invited people to make a pilgrimage to Rome for a special pardon of their sins. In modern times there were the Holy Years of 1950 and 1975. In 1983 the Church celebrated the 1950<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Christ's death in the Mystery of the Redemption. For the

Church of today a Jubilee year is even more special. It is a year of personal conversion and reconciliation, when people are encouraged to go to confession and when special emphasis is given to the granting of indulgences.

Interestingly, this Jubilee is the first time the Pope has used the word "great" in the title: the *Great* Jubilee Year. It will be celebrated simultaneously in Rome, the Holy Land, and every diocese of the world. In the Vatican at midnight mass on Christmas Eve 1999, the Holy Year Door that is sealed between Jubilee years will be opened by the Holy Father, a custom dating to 1423. This symbolic act represents to the world the opening of the Church's reservoir of graces, a flooding of the coming year with spiritual gifts and blessings. Then the Pope will step through that door, crossing "the threshold of hope" into the Great Jubilee Year, carrying the book of the gospels and presenting it as an offer of salvation to the world. Recalling the words of Christ, "I am the way... and no one can come to the Father except through me." The Pope has said that when he passes through the Holy Year Door he will be confessing Jesus Christ as Lord. This passage represents the way all of us pass from a life of sin to a life of grace and holiness.

For Catholics worldwide, the Great Jubilee Year will begin on Christmas day with the solemn liturgy presided over by the local Bishop in the Cathedral (or main designated church of the diocese), and will end on January 6, 2001, the feast of the Epiphany. As an aid to further appreciation of the importance of the Great Jubilee Year, I recommend reading *Tertio Millennio Adveniente* (the Advent of the Third Millennium) and the *Incarnationis Misterium* (Mystery of the Incarnation).

## **B = Blessed Trinity**

The letter B brings us to the Blessed Trinity, because the whole purpose of life is to see God face to face in the Beatific Vision, to see the Blessed Trinity. A Bishop was once quizzing a class of children prior to their confirmation, and asked one boy, "Tell me about the Blessed Trinity." The boy mumbled something about, "Three and one and one and three."

"I don't understand," the Bishop said.

"You're not supposed to," came the retort. "It's a mystery."

Dwelling upon the mystery of the Blessed Trinity is what will make our eternity glorious, and the Pope has prepared the Church by his Trinitarian plan of preparation for the year 2000. The years 1994 to 1996 were proposed as a time of prayer and inner conversion; 1997 was the year of Jesus Christ, and the focus was on the sacrament of Baptism and the virtue of Faith; 1998 was the year of the Holy Spirit, along with the Sacrament of Confirmation and the virtue of Hope; and 1999 has been the year of God the Father, with emphasis on the sacrament of Penance and the virtue of Charity. Thus over the past three years, the Church

has focused on all three Divine Persons of the Blessed Trinity. And now, the Pope has asked that the year 2000 be devoted to the unity of the Blessed Trinity, the one God in three Divine Persons. A practical recommendation would be to review the beautiful section on the Blessed Trinity in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, or to read one of the many apologetics books available at local Catholic book shops.

## **I = Indulgences**

The next letter is I and it stands for Indulgences, a word rarely heard since Vatican Council II but a part of Catholic teaching nonetheless. In the Pope's words, by God's mercy "repentant sinners receive a remission of temporal punishment due for sins already committed when they receive an indulgence." Every sin produces both guilt and temporal punishment, due to satisfy the offense to God's justice. Obviously, with mortal sin the result is the loss of friendship with God and the debt of eternal punishment, which is hell. But when a person repents and confesses a mortal sin, the guilt is forgiven and remission of the eternal punishment takes place. However, as the Pope says, every sin, mortal or venial, involves an unhealthy attachment to created things, and we must be purified of that wrong attachment by a temporal punishment, either here on earth or after death in purgatory. What an indulgence does is free the repentant soul from that temporal punishment, somewhat as we might fill in a hole in a piece of precious wood after a nail had been carelessly driven into it, then removed. The indulgence helps restore the smooth surface of the soul, so to speak, after it has been defaced.

I sometimes call indulgences "doing God's community service." Once when I was a small boy, I once broke a neighbor's window with a baseball and refused to own up to it. When I eventually admitted my guilt, I was entirely forgiven--but then I was offered two choices: Either take my allowance money and buy a new window, or cut the neighbor's grass for two weeks! Paying back the neighbor is analogous to temporal punishment: It restores our soul through training in righteousness and it restores our relationships--in this case, with my neighbor.

The Church offers two ways to help restore our soul and our relationship with God after sin: a plenary indulgence, which is the full remission of all temporal punishment due to sin, and a partial indulgence which is the removal of part of the temporal punishment. Here are the conditions for gaining a plenary indulgence:

- ◆ Confession within 8 days before or after the occasion for gaining the indulgence
- ◆ Mass and Communion on the day of the occasion
- ◆ Prayers for the intentions of the Holy Father

- ◆ Detachment from all sin
- ◆ Performance of the act designated by the Church to which the indulgence is attached

What makes this year of the Great Jubilee unique is that the Pope will be allowing special additional ways to gain a plenary indulgence, such as making a pilgrimage to Rome or any of the major Basilicas, or to the Holy Land and to noted churches there. He also includes visits to local cathedrals and designated diocesan churches. Of course, these pilgrimages are not possible for all Catholics, so the Holy Father suggests we make visits to those in need, such as shut-ins, the imprisoned, the elderly living alone, the handicapped – done in the spirit of making a pilgrimage to Christ present in those persons. The Pope even says a plenary indulgence can be gained through actions that express, in a practical and generous way, the penitential spirit at the heart of the Jubilee, such as fasting at least one full day from marginal desires, such as smoking, alcohol, or personal tastes in food. The Pope suggests donating “a proportionate sum of money to the poor or supporting by a significant contribution works of a religious or social nature, especially for the benefit of abandoned children, young people in trouble, the elderly in need, foreigners and various countries seeking better living conditions”, or “devoting a suitable portion of personal free time to activities benefiting the community or other similar forms of personal service”. It is presumed, of course, that the conditions mentioned above for gaining the indulgence are met, and that all these things would be performed in the spirit of Christian love, which brings us to the letter L.

### **L = Love**

Charity should be a sign for the year 2000, especially charity toward the poor and needy, the Holy Father says. We should make an examination of conscience, tell God we're sorry for what we have done, and ask others for forgiveness as well. We should then forgive others who have wronged or hurt us, and even forgive personal debts owed to us. The Church itself should ask forgiveness for past wrongs, the Pope urges, and wealthy nations should forgive the debts of smaller nations.

Since the love of martyrs for Christ and the Faith is the supreme example of charity, the Holy Father asks that we not forget the witness of love given by the martyrs of the two thousand years of church history, as well as those of this present age. The Catholic Church has produced martyrs under the Nazis, under the Communists, and in racial and tribal conflicts. Indeed, historians say there have been more martyrs in the past century than in all the previous centuries of church history. We ourselves must be open to the possibility of martyrdom, and the practical response to this possibility is to prepare by daily prayer, penance, the sacraments, and scripture, while living the days of this new year in a spirit of

love and forgiveness. And because the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Faith, as Tertullian said, we can expect a flourishing of Christianity in the new millennium.

### **E = Eucharist**

The first E at the end of the word Jubilee stands for Eucharist. Notice that in the three previous years, the focus was on the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and Penance. According to the Holy Father the year 2000 will be intensely Eucharistic. The Eucharist is Christ our Savior, who took flesh in Mary's womb twenty centuries ago and continues to offer Himself to humanity as the source of Divine Life. Let me make three practical recommendations: 1) Nothing would enhance our spiritual life more than daily Mass and daily Holy Communion. 2) A daily or weekly Eucharistic holy hour. For Bishop Sheen, every day of his priesthood included a holy hour before the Blessed Sacrament, and so I recommend that as well. 3) Attend Eucharistic congresses. Almost every diocese is planning one. (The Arlington diocese will hold one on March 25 at the Patriot Center.) And why not focus on the Eucharist as your topic of spiritual reading for the Great Jubilee Year?

### **E = Evangelization**

The second letter E stands for the New Evangelization, called for by the Pope and Vatican Council II. All of us, especially the laity, are called to participate in the missionary task of the church. The Holy Father calls the laity the leaven in society: They are the yeast that will cause the hidden life of Christ to rise within humanity, purifying and energizing the cultures of the world.

The model of Eucharistic devotion and Evangelization is the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Pope has called her the first disciple, the first evangelist, for she brought Christ to her cousin Elizabeth and presented Him to shepherds and kings. During this year of the Eucharist we should address her as Mother of the Eucharist or Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament. We should meditate on her relationship to the Trinity. Certainly she was a creature, not divine, not a goddess. But she is the only human being taken to the "borders of infinity," with a unique relationship with each person of the Blessed Trinity: chosen daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit. No one has ever had that kind of relationship with God. The Pope has termed her the Star of Evangelization, and says "the nations will never grow weary of invoking the Mother of Mercy, and will always find refuge under her protection. May she who, with Jesus her Son and Joseph her spouse, went on pilgrimage to the holy Temple of God, guard the steps of all those who will be pilgrims in this Jubilee Year. And through the coming months may she deign to intercede intensely for the Christian people so that abundant grace and mercy may be theirs, as they rejoice at the two thousand years since the birth of their Savior."