

# Opening the Door of Mercy

**Sermon of Fr Juan Pablo Catoggio  
Chairman of the General Presidium**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Rejoice, again I say, rejoice! This is what St Paul calls out to us in the second reading. The Third Sunday of Advent is known as Laetare, because we celebrate, laetare, rejoice! We rejoice in the longing and expectation that Jesus, the Lord, will soon come to us, that he is already near. The Prophet Zephaniah had already proclaimed this joy in advance, and the People of Israel believed in it, drew courage from this hope, and lived from it.

The Prophet calls out to us four times:

*“Shout for joy, daughter of Zion, Israel, shout aloud! Rejoice, exult with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem! Zion have no fear, do not let your hands fall limp. He will exult with joy over you, he will renew you by his love, he will dance with shouts of joy for you as on the day of festival.”*

God says these words to us today, and it does us good, it gives us courage! We need this personally, and we should tell it to everyone; all expect it of us. There are many reasons to be discouraged today, to let our hands fall limp, there are many, all too many reasons to give up, to become resigned, indeed, to become discouraged or even despair. However, those words of promise apply to us all, “On that day it will be said: Zion, have no fear, do not let your hands fall limp. *The Lord your God is in your midst, a victorious warrior.* He will exult with joy over you, he will renew you by his love; he will dance with shouts of joy for you as on a day of festival.”

Rejoice, because the Lord is coming. That is God’s invitation in Advent. We like to sing in these days, “O come, O come, Emmanuel, set free thy people Israel... O come, thou key of David, come and open wide our heav’nly home ...”

The door is a symbol of Advent: The Lord is coming to us; we want to open the door to him and welcome him. This year the door is a particularly telling symbol. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, has proclaimed an extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. Last Tuesday, 8 December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, our Holy Father opened the Holy Door in St Peter’s in Rome. Today, however, for the first time many “Doors of Mercy” will be opened at many places all over the world. Our bishop has nominated the Original

Shrine in Schoenstatt to be such a Holy Door, and honoured it with a special indulgence. So today after Holy Mass we may open the Holy Door of Mercy at the Original Shrine!

What does a door mean? In particular, what can the Door of Mercy mean to us?

A door is an opening through which we enter into a room, and through which we leave it again. It differs from a wall that prevents our entry, and that allows no possibility, no freedom to go in or out.

Through sin the doors of Paradise were closed; through Mary's yes the door for the incarnation of God was opened. Through the door of the ark Noah saved creation from the deluge. The doorposts of Egypt became the sign of liberation from slavery, and the gates of the Temple opened up access to God's dwelling.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, said of himself: I am the door (Jn 10.7). His pierced side, from which his merciful love pours out to us, is the door of grace; it became the door to the Father, it is the door of mercy in its original meaning.

**“By crossing the threshold of the Holy Door, we will find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate ourselves to being merciful with others as the Father has been with us” (MV 14).** That is the motto of the Holy Year. It indicates two dimensions of mercy that are inseparable: The first and basic dimension is the mercy of God the Father, “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” (Ex 34,6), which is repeatedly given to us, and which we repeatedly experience. The second dimension is our attitude of mercy to everyone, and in particular those who suffer. Two parables of Luke's Gospel – the Gospel of mercy – clarify both aspects. The first, the vertical dimension as it were, finds expression in the parable of the “prodigal son” and the merciful Father (Lk 15). God embraces us with his mercy and forgiveness. The second, horizontal dimension, is illustrated in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10): He practices mercy towards the stranger, whom he sees and treats as his neighbour. God's mercy, which we experience in the forgiveness and tender love of God, and in his consolation, becomes effective in actual works of love towards the people around us. Mercy has something to do with action, as we have heard in the Gospel. The “people”, then the “tax collectors” and the “soldiers”, all three groups asked: “What must we do?”

The two dimensions are connected, “Be merciful as your Father is merciful” (Lk 6,36), and “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy” (Mt 5,7). Indeed, as Pope Benedict said, “Mercy is in reality the essence of the message of the Gospel, it is the name of God himself”.

Pope Francis experiences that he himself is one whom God has embraced in his mercy. In an interview he answered the question of Fr Spadaro SJ, “*Who is Jorge Mario Bergoglio?*” The Pope looked at him in silence and then said, “I do not know what might be the most fitting description.... I am a sinner. This is the most accurate definition. It is

not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner." "Yes, but the best summary, the one that comes more from the inside and I feel most true is this: I am a sinner whom the Lord has looked upon." *And he repeats*: "I am one who is looked upon by the Lord. I always felt my motto, *Miserando atque Eligendo* [By Having Mercy and by Choosing Him], was very true for me."

Let us think of ourselves: We know we are sinners, we are, we know it, we don't deceive ourselves and we don't pride ourselves on it. But do we know that God has also looked upon us, we have been absolutely accepted by the Father; he has forgiven us and loves us? Do we really believe it?

In these days and week we recall the return fifty years ago of Fr Kentenich, Schoenstatt's founder, from fourteen long years of exile in the USA. He came to Rome. Suddenly, and against all expectations, all the decrees were lifted. He was soon allowed to return to Schoenstatt, just in time to celebrate Midnight Mass in the Original Shrine. The Miracle of the Holy Night took place for a second time. Shortly before that, just on a day like today, on 13 December fifty years ago, he addressed a message to the Schoenstatt Family. As the fruit of God's guidance, and like a permanent programme, he spoke of a new image of the human person, God and the community, which are saturated by God's mercy. We can only marvel at the way our Holy Father's message for the jubilee matches that Christmas letter of Fr Kentenich fifty years ago.

Fr Kentenich expressed his message in a most beautiful and profound prayer, "Dear Mother Thrice Admirable and Queen of Schoenstatt, see to it that we experience that we are miserable children of the King who are worthy of mercy, and hence go through life in a special way as the favourites of God's infinitely merciful fatherly love." Perhaps we may wish ourselves a new Miracle of the Holy Night in this sense of a profoundly merciful heart, a heart that has been touched and gripped by God's mercy, and give and show this mercy to others. That would be a lovely grace we could pray to be given in the shrine in this year.

Pope Francis wrote, "How much I desire that the year to come will be steeped in mercy, so that we can go out to every man and woman, bringing the goodness and tenderness of God! May the balm of mercy reach everyone, both believers and those far away, as a sign that the Kingdom of God is already present in our midst!" (MV 5).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us walk through the Door of Mercy into the room of the Blessed Mother, the *Mater Misericordiae*, the Mother of Mercy, into the room of her mercy. Let us ask her who experienced God's mercy and lauded it in the Magnificat, "*illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte*" – turn your merciful eyes towards us!

