

The Holy Doors

Traditionally, the five conditions to receive indulgences are: experiencing the Sacrament of Reconciliation, receiving holy Communion, praying for the pope, a rejection of all attachment to sin, and a passage through a Holy Door (such as one of the patriarchal basilicas or another specially designated door in your diocese).



Karen Callaway

The Holy Year will also include other ways to experience God's healing mercy. Pope Francis has announced that he will be sending out "Missionaries of Mercy" — priests who will have the authority to pardon sins such as defiling the Eucharist, which normally can only be absolved by the pope himself.



Karen Callaway

Making it Personal

What can we do in our own churches, homes, and daily lives to celebrate the Holy Door in this Year of Mercy?



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✠ The Holy Father has asked that a Holy Door be designated in every diocese around the world, making a mini-pilgrimage feasible for all Catholics. The same grace that is associated with the Holy Door in Rome will be associated with the local Holy Doors.

✠ Ask your pastor, deacon, or pastoral minister to gather a group from your parish to visit a designated Holy Door in your diocese.

✠ Families can designate a door in their homes as a "holy door." Place a small holy-water font at its entrance and encourage all who enter and leave to make the Sign of the Cross.



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✠ When family members are in need of forgiveness and mercy, use the entrance through your own "holy door" as a sign of reconciliation and peace. Make sure to attend the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

✠ Remember also that the door to any Catholic church can be a "holy door" if you make it so. Sometime during this year, come to Mass a few minutes early and make your entrance into the sanctuary a part of your prayerful entrance into the presence of our Lord. Or stop by a church during the workday to sit in the Lord's presence in prayer for a short while.



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Embrace God's Mercy

His mercy endures forever. Psalm 136

This holy year is an invitation to experience the awesome power of God's mercy at work in our own lives. Make the journey and walk through a Holy Door this year. Give yourself the gifts that only Christ can give — the gifts of grace, salvation, and peace. When we recognize God's mercy, we realize that mercy is a gift to be shared with the people in our lives and around the world. Let us go forth in the days to come and proclaim like Mary Magdalene upon witnessing the resurrection, "I have seen the Lord" (Jn 20:18).

Additional Resources

Books

A Year of Mercy With Pope Francis: Daily Reflections, Ed. Kevin Cotter (Our Sunday Visitor, 2014).

By the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization and published by Our Sunday Visitor:

- Celebrating Mercy*
- Confession: Sacrament of Mercy*
- The Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy*
- Mercy in the Fathers of the Church*
- Mercy in the Teaching of the Popes*
- The Parables of Mercy*
- The Psalms of Mercy*
- The Saints of Mercy*

Website

Misericordiae Vultus (Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy), Pope Francis, w2.vatican.va

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In accord with the Jubilee Year of Mercy, Pope Francis has declared that the Holy Doors will be opened for pilgrims to pass through and experience the loving mercy of God.

Pope Francis has declared a Jubilee Year of Mercy: twelve months for us to focus on and deepen our gratitude for the loving mercy of God. As with all jubilee years, the Year of Mercy will include the use of a Holy Door, a specially designated entrance that has spiritual and symbolic meaning for Catholics.

In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, passing through a Holy Door is part of the pilgrimage that all Catholics are encouraged to make, whether during a trip to Rome or a trip to the cathedrals or specially designated churches in their own dioceses. These pilgrimages come with special graces, and they allow each of us to share in the many blessings of the Holy Year.

“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.”

– Pope Francis,
Misericordiae Vultus

“I Am the Door”

Jesus said, “I am the door” (Jn 10:7), bringing to fruition the words of the psalmist, who said, “This is the door of the Lord where the just may enter” (see 118:20). Passing

through the Holy Door symbolizes our leaving the world outside and entering into the realm of salvation. As Pope St. John Paul II said, the Holy Door “evokes the passage from sin to grace which every Christian is called to accomplish” (*Incarnationis Mysterium*).

The tradition of the Holy Door most likely originated during the time when sinners were given public penances that had to be performed before they could receive

absolution. On completion of the penance, the penitent was then allowed through the “holy door” of the Church to confess and be reunited with the Church. Today pilgrims still enter through the Holy Door as a sign of repentance and the desire to renew and recommit to their faith.



Holy Door at St. Peter’s

What Is a Holy Door?

Each of the four papal basilicas in Rome (St. Peter, St. Mary Major, St. John Lateran, and St. Paul Outside the Walls) has a Holy Door. These doors are sealed from the inside so that they cannot be opened except during holy years. Pilgrims fulfilling certain penances and then going through the newly opened doors can gain the plenary indulgence (removal of the temporal punishment due to sin) associated with the special year.

On December 8, 2015, the Holy Door at St. Peter’s will be opened to begin the Year of Mercy. “On that day, the Holy Door will become a *Door of Mercy* through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope,” as Pope Francis said during his announcement of the Holy Year. The door will

remain open until November 20, 2016, when it will be ceremonially closed and bricked shut until the next Holy Year.

On the Third Sunday of Advent, the Holy Door of the Basilica of St. John Lateran, the official home church of the pope, will also be opened. In the following weeks, the other Holy Doors in Rome will be opened. At the same time, Pope Francis has asked that a Door of Mercy be opened in “the mother church of the faithful in any particular area — or, alternatively, at the co-cathedral or another church of special significance.” In addition, “a similar door may be opened at any shrine frequented by large groups of pilgrims, since visits to these holy sites are so often grace-filled moments, as people discover a path to conversion” (MV).

Opening the Door

The ritual to open the Holy Door dates back to 1499 when Pope Alexander opened the door on December 24 to begin the Holy Year 1500. The door, which is bricked shut at the end of a Holy Year, is ceremonially opened by the pope. Traditionally, the pope strikes it three times with a silver hammer, while singing, “Open unto me the gates of justice.”

The threefold strike to open the door is symbolic. It recalls Moses’s striking the rock to bring forth water (Nm 20:6-11), as well as God striking the earth to free Paul and Silas from prison (Acts 16:25-40) and the strike the soldier gave Jesus on the cross.



Pope John Paul II prepares to enter St. Peter’s Basilica after opening the Holy Door in 1983.

Opening Our Hearts

This ritual invites each of us to recall that the “door” to salvation is Jesus himself. Christ is now open and waiting for every person. During the Holy Year of Mercy, we all are called to pray that our own personal “shut doors” of sin and temptation may be opened and that we open our hearts to those on “the outermost fringes of society.” Pope Francis says that this year is “the opportune moment to change our lives! This is the time to allow our hearts to be touched!” (MV).

Why a Year of Mercy

Pope Francis envisions a year when people will become more merciful in their own lives and bring God’s mercy to others. He is entrusting the extraordinary jubilee year to the “Lordship of Christ” and asks Christ to pour out his mercy on the entire cosmos. “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!” (MV).



An Opportunity to Experience God’s Love

A Holy Year provides an opportunity for each of us to participate in and experience the healing Sacrament of Reconciliation. After having confessed our sins and received absolution, we may also receive a “plenary indulgence,” which lessens the effects of our sin here on earth. Pope Francis explains: “To gain an indulgence is to experience the holiness of the Church, who bestows upon all the fruits of Christ’s redemption, so that God’s love and forgiveness may extend everywhere. Let us live this Jubilee intensely, begging the Father to forgive our sins and to bathe us in his merciful ‘indulgence’” (MV).