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Archbishop Rino Fisichella summarises the meaning of the Jubilee Year and presents the Apostolic Letter “Misericordia et misera”

This morning in the Holy See Press Office, Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, presented the conclusions of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy and the Holy Father’s Apostolic Letter, “Misericordia et misera”.

“To understand the value the Jubilee has had in the life of the Church, the objectives that were proposed, and the effects that should continue to be felt in Christian communities, it is necessary to refer to two programmatic documents: the Bull for the convocation of the Holy Year, *Misericordiae Vultus*, and the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, signed yesterday”, the prelate began.

“In the first document we read, “At times we are called to gaze even more attentively on mercy so that we may become a more effective sign of the Father’s action in our lives. For this reason I have proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy as a special time for the Church, a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective”. Pope Francis’ wish was precisely this: to fulfil in believers the experience of mercy, to enable them too to become instruments of mercy. ... We cannot hide that mercy, starting from the very use of the term, had become something outdated, relegated mostly to popular piety and without a true value in the lifestyle of Christians. With this Jubilee, one fact is certain: mercy became the protagonist, at least for a year, of the daily life of Christians”.

“Besides, we must not forget that the Jubilee is essentially a religious and spiritual experience. The route established from Castel Sant’Angelo to the Holy Door was intended to highlight that in the midst of the city and the tourists, a particular space was created for pilgrimage, reflection and prayer. The millions of pilgrims who have participated wished to offer this witness that has been understood well by those who crossed Via della Conciliazione. The concretisation of the signs of mercy, especially in the ‘Mercy Fridays’, have affected public opinion, exposed not only to the new forms of poverty of our world, but also to the simple and functional response of the Church. If others thought that the Jubilee was primarily a source of income, especially in a moment of crisis such as the present, they misunderstood its deepest meaning”.

With reference to the data on the flows of pilgrims in Rome, he affirmed that so far 21,292,926 pilgrims have

participated in the Jubilee in Rome. “The most numerous group consists of Italians, followed by German speakers, than the United States of America, Poland, and Spain, but also reaching Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, Venezuela, Chad, Rwanda, Angola, the Cook Islands, Nepal... in short, we can say that the whole world has come to Rome. As we know, for the first time in the history of Jubilees, this Holy Year had a universal nature. Doors of Mercy have been opened throughout the world to bear witness that God’s love knows no bounds. ... In countries where Catholicism is deeply rooted, the percentage of faithful who have crossed the Holy Door has exceeded 80 per cent of the total number of Catholics. ... At a global level, indeed, thanks to the data provided by some important dioceses from around the world, it has been possible to estimate a participation between 56 and 62 per cent of the total Catholic population; between 700 and 850 million faithful have cross the Holy Door from 8 December 2015 to the month of November 2016, in the dioceses. To this, it is necessary to add the faithful who have crossed the Doors of Mercy opened in shrines and places of pilgrimage throughout the world. ... In this regard, it is possible to confirm that the largest shrines have recorded an average flow of three million faithful; for instance, the shrine of Krakow has been a place of pilgrimage for five million Catholics; the shrine of Santiago de Compostela has beaten the 2010 record for visits; the shrine of Guadalupe has seen the presence of around 22 million pilgrims. The sum of these data, therefore, is a total figure of more than 900 to 950 million faithful who have crossed the Holy Door around the world”.

“Finally, let us not forget that this Jubilee has journeyed also on the Internet! The site realised in seven languages has received more than 6,523,000 visits ... and there are more than eight million subscribers to the site. ... A word should also be mentioned for the Jubilee Volunteers who came to Rome. There were more than 4,000, of whom 1,800 of the SMOM were dedicated exclusively to the health service in the four papal Basilicas. They came from 36 different countries, and the eldest was 84 years old, whereas the youngest was aged 18”.

With regard to security measures, Msgr. Fisichella noted that “all pilgrims were offered the image of a safe city. The Jubilee began shortly after an attack of unprecedented violence in Europe; fear had from the very beginning discouraged many people from journeying to Rome. However, as the weeks passed, thanks to active work in ensuring the safety of the city, pilgrims were able to live their Jubilee experience with tranquillity and enthusiasm”. The archbishop thanked the Italian authorities for this, and highlighted the excellent collaboration between Italy and the Holy See in ensuring the success of the Jubilee initiatives.

He went on to affirm that “to understand whether the Jubilee had had the desired effect, it is necessary to refer to the Apostolic Letter *Misericordia et misera*, in which we read: ‘Mercy cannot become a mere parenthesis in the life of the Church; it constitutes her very existence, through which the profound truths of the Gospel are made manifest and tangible. Everything is revealed in mercy; everything is resolved in the merciful love of the Father’. The two pillars on which the structure of the Letter rests are the fact that mercy demands to be celebrated and lived. Starting from this, pastoral guidelines are given which will be very useful for the planning of the life of Christian communities around the world. First and foremost, the celebration of mercy. It is worth noting that Pope Francis, in these pages, offers concrete indications that have already been reflected in the Jubilee celebration. A first novelty is that the Missionaries of Mercy are confirmed in their service, so that it may ‘continue until further notice as a concrete sign that the grace of the Jubilee remains alive and effective the world over’. Indeed, the action of the Missionaries has been very fruitful; they have confessed for entire days, and they have travelled from one place to another in their respective countries to touch by hand that mercy that knows no bounds”.

“In the same way, Pope Francis writes, ‘lest any obstacle arise between the request for reconciliation and God’s forgiveness, I henceforth grant to all priests, in virtue of their ministry, the faculty to absolve those who have committed the sin of procured abortion’. As is well known, absolution of this sin was reserved to bishops who, from time to time according to the circumstances, granted the faculty to priests in their respective dioceses. From now on, ‘in virtue of their ministry’, that is, for the very fact of being ministers of reconciliation, the sin of abortion may be absolved by any priest, without the need for any particular proxy. With the same spirit of reaching out to respond to the needs of the faithful, the Pope, ‘trusting in the good will of their priests to strive with God’s help for the recovery of full communion in the Catholic Church’, established that those who attend churches officiated by priests of the Priestly Fraternity of St. Pius X may validly and licitly receive the sacramental absolution of their sins”.

There is also an initiative that, reaching further to the pastoral plans of the dioceses, will involve “giving greater space to the Word of God” by dedicating an entire Sunday to the Word of God, “so as to appreciate the inexhaustible riches contained in that constant dialogue between the Lord and His people”.

With regard to the second pillar of the Apostolic Letter, he observed that it focuses mostly on living mercy in its social character. “In this context he proposes a World Day of the Poor, as a commitment for all the Church ‘to reflect on how poverty is at the very heart of the Gospel and that, as long as Lazarus lies at the door of our homes, there can be no justice or social peace”.

“In this letter, Pope Francis does none other than deepen the theme, dear to him, of mercy as an essential dimension of faith and Christian witness”, concluded Archbishop Fisichella. “The provocation to reread the traditional corporal and spiritual works of mercy in the light of the new poverties of today’s world, are a concrete invitation for Christian communities and every believer to give space to the creativity of mercy, to give rise to a ‘culture of mercy based on the rediscovery of encounter with others, a culture in which no one looks at another with indifference or turns away from the suffering of our brothers and sisters”.
