



Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles **Office of the Bishop**

November 24, 2015

To the Clergy, Religious and Lay Faithful of the Eparchy:

Our Holy Father has announced a Holy Year, A Year of Mercy, to begin on December 8, 2015, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Holy Virgin; the Holy Year closes on November 20, 2016. The message of Mercy has been one of the focuses of the ministry of Pope Francis. He reminds us “Let us not forget that God pardons and God pardons always...Let us never tire of asking for forgiveness.” The idea of “mercy” is not foreign to our Maronite Liturgy. It would not be an exaggeration to note that in our Liturgy the word *mercy* (or *compassion*) is used many, many times. The recognition of our sinfulness and our need for forgiveness permeates the text of our prayers. Since the opening of the Holy Year falls on the feast of the Holy Virgin, it is important to remember also that she has always been seen a role-model for all Christians encouraging her Divine Son to show mercy and compassion on others.

Pilgrimage Churches

Among the ancient traditions of the Church is the “pilgrimage”. Pilgrimages involve designating holy shrines, often particular churches, as places where to obtain special graces and to seek mercy and forgiveness. The Holy Father writes “I wish that the Jubilee Indulgence may reach each one as a genuine experience of God’s mercy, which comes to meet each person in the Face of the Father who welcomes and forgives, forgetting completely the sin committed. To experience and obtain the Indulgence, the faithful are called to make a brief pilgrimage to the Holy Door, open in every Cathedral or in the churches designated by the Diocesan Bishop...”

In response to the call of the Holy Father, I have designated a number of Churches in our Eparchy as sites of pilgrimage. They are attached to this letter as a separate addendum. They will be places that encourage the Faithful to plan to visit during the Holy Jubilee Year.

Indulgences

Visiting one of the pilgrimage Churches can obtain an indulgence. What is an indulgence? The Church explains, "An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain defined conditions through the Church’s help when, as a minister of redemption, she dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions won by Christ and the saints" (*Indulgentiarum Doctrina 1*). To gain a plenary (full) indulgence you must perform the act with a contrite heart, plus you must go to confession, receive Holy Communion, and pray for the pope’s intentions. (An Our Father and a Hail Mary said for the pope’s intentions are sufficient, although you are free to substitute other prayers of your own choice.) The final condition is that you must be free from all attachment to sin, including venial sin.

Opportunities for Spiritual Growth

This Holy or Jubilee Year can also be an opportunity for all to grow in holiness and to strengthen us in our spiritual life.

I encourage the following activities in every parish of the Eparchy:

- ❖ March 4-5, 2016: Pope Francis is asking “Twenty-four Hours with the Lord” (adoration, services, opportunities for Confession).
- ❖ October 8-9, 2016: October being the Month of the Rosary, setting aside times for recitation of the Rosary in all Churches.
- ❖ During the Holy Year: Setting a certain percent of parish income to go to a local charity or to the needy of the parish. Mercy and compassion necessitates our willingness to assist those in need at the local and even international level.
- ❖ During the Holy Year: Plan a fund-raising event on one of the Fridays of Lent with the proceeds designated for Caritas Lebanon.
- ❖ During the Holy Year, parishes should set aside additional time for the Mystery of Reconciliation and Reconciliation Services.
- ❖ During the Holy Year, parishes should have a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament at least once per month.
- ❖ Fridays of Lent (2016): Include with our Services of the Cross, homilies and lessons on the Lord’s mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation.
- ❖ During the Holy Year: Development of Bible Study programs that stress the Mercy of the Lord.

Conclusion

In closing this letter, I wish to encourage all clergy, religious and laity to accept this invitation as an opportunity and to focus our spiritual lives on the Mercy of God. To our priests, deacons and subdeacons and our religious men and women, we must be missionaries of mercy and set the example of showing mercy and compassion; as Bishop, I, too, must lead by example. To all the Faithful of the Eparchy, we must be living witnesses to the love, forgiveness and mercy that the Lord continually bestows upon us. May this Holy Year truly be a source of blessing for us all.

Be assured of my prayers for all of you and your loved ones.

With my heartfelt blessing and sincerely yours in Christ,



+A. Elias Zaidan

Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ A. Elias Zaidan

Bishop of the Eparchy of Our Lady of Lebanon of Los Angeles