



Bishop of Portsmouth
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Bringing people closer to Jesus Christ through His Church

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To the Clergy and People of our Diocese
JUBILEE YEAR 2025

14th January 2024
The Second Sunday of the Year

Dear Friends,

As we embark on the new year 2024, the Holy Father has invited us to prepare for the Jubilee Year of 2025, entitled 'Pilgrims of Hope'. In his letter promoting the Jubilee Year, Pope Francis recalls the suffering and hardships that many of us experienced during the pandemic. In a time where many countries also suffer the effects of war and the climate crisis, Pope Francis sees the Jubilee Year 2025 as an opportunity to restore hope, a time of renewal and rebirth.¹ The Jubilee Year will begin on 24th December 2024, with the opening of the Holy Door at St Peter's Basilica and will draw to a close on the feast of Epiphany, January 2026.

In preparation for the Jubilee Year, the Pope has proclaimed this year 2024 to be a year of prayer in preparation. It will focus on that prayer given to the disciples, the 'Our Father.' The Our Father not only reminds us that God is our Father but also reminds us of the union we share as brothers and sisters in Christ.

The word jubilee derives from the Hebrew, 'Jobel', which means 'a ram's horn.' The instrument would be blown indicating the start of the year.² In the Old Testament, for the Israelites, the jubilee was a time of universal pardon.³ In the Book of Leviticus, the Lord says, "And you shall hallow the fiftieth year and you shall proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you: you shall return, every one of you, to your property and every one of you to your family."⁴ The year was seen as a time to re-establish relationship with God, with each other, and creation. This would see misappropriated land returned to their owners, debts forgiven, Hebrew slaves set free, and a fallow period for the land to recover.⁵ In the New Testament, on the Sabbath day in the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus reads the Jubilee prophecy (see Luke 4:16-21) from the prophet Isaiah (61:1-2) and proclaims that it would be fulfilled through him,

¹ Giubileo 2025 "Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation for the jubilee 2025" <https://www.iubilaeum2025.va/en/giubileo-2025/lettera-di-papa-francesco.html> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

² Christianity.com "What was the Year of Jubilee?" <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-was-the-year-of-jubilee.html> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

³ New Advent "Holy Year of Jubilee" <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08531c.htm>, <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/the-year-of-jubilee-2025/the-year-of-the-jubilee/what-is-a-jubilee/> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

⁴ Leviticus 25:10 NRSV

⁵ New Advent "Holy Year of Jubilee" <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08531c.htm>, <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/home/events/the-year-of-jubilee-2025/the-year-of-the-jubilee/what-is-a-jubilee/> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

“The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn...” The true jubilee is Jesus Christ himself. While in the jubilee of old slaves were set free from bondage and united with their families and homeland, in Jesus, we are freed from the bondage of sin and death. Jesus unites us to our true family, the family of God (the Church), and to our true homeland, heaven.⁶

On 22nd February, 1300, Pope Boniface VIII introduced the first jubilee, also known as a holy year, to mark the beginning of that century.⁷ Pope Boniface recommended that a jubilee year take place every hundred years. Later popes changed the intervals between years, and jubilees are now celebrated every 25 years, although sometimes a pope may add an additional “extraordinary” year, such as the 2016 ‘Year of Mercy.’ Since 1300, the church has celebrated 28 jubilees, the most recent being celebrated in preparation of the millennium year during the papacy of St John Paul II.⁸ A jubilee year commemorates a special year of forgiveness and reconciliation⁹, themes reflected also in the Lord’s prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

During this coming year of prayer, let us also (re)consider the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Just as Jesus was attentive to the practical needs of those He encountered in His ministry, the spiritual works of mercy call us to reach out to our neighbour and attend to their spiritual needs too.¹⁰ The seven spiritual works of mercy are: counselling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant, admonishing the sinner, comforting the sorrowful, forgiving injuries, bearing wrongs patiently, and praying for the living and the dead.¹¹ In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus commends the ones who show mercy to those who are suffering and marginalised (Matthew 25:31-46.) Mercy is a virtue in which one is called to have compassion for another, and if possible, to alleviate their suffering.¹² At a time when the Church focuses on forgiveness and reconciliation, the spiritual (and corporal) works of mercy are about helping those on the journey of faith and those who are searching to be reconciled with God, the Church and with others.

So, as we begin this year of prayer in preparation for the Holy Year 2025, let us daily contemplate the ‘Our Father’ and extend that prayer in practice through performing the seven spiritual works of mercy.

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip

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⁶ Hahn *Catholic Bible Dictionary* p.483

⁷ CBCEW “Jubilee in the Catholic Church” <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/jubilee-in-the-catholic-church/> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

⁸ CBCEW “Jubilee in the Catholic Church” <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/jubilee-in-the-catholic-church/> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

⁹ CBCEW “Jubilee in the Catholic Church” <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/jubilee-in-the-catholic-church/> (Accessed: 30/12/2023)

¹⁰ USCCB “The Spiritual Works of Mercy” <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy> (Accessed: 31/12/2023)

¹¹ USCCB “The Spiritual Works of Mercy” <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/new-evangelization/jubilee-of-mercy/the-spiritual-works-of-mercy> (Accessed: 31/12/2023)

¹² New Advent “Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy” <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10198d.htm> (Accessed: 31/12/2023)

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