



Pilgrimages of Mercy to the Holy Door

In the announcement from the Vatican about the Holy Year of Mercy, Pope Francis stressed the importance of living the Holy Year as “a true pilgrimage” with the proper elements of prayer and sacrifice. He went on to say, “We will ask pilgrims to make a journey on foot, preparing themselves to pass through the Holy Door in a spirit of faith and devotion.”

Pope Francis is inviting us to make a pilgrimage to a Holy Door to pray for and receive mercy and to experience a true conversion of heart. He has asked bishops to designate doors in each diocese as Holy Doors to provide opportunities for Christians around the world to pass through a Holy Door.

Why make a pilgrimage? St. Theresa of Avila, when asked the question, said, “To have courage for whatever comes in life.” Pilgrimages are more than visits. They are spiritual journeys that have a tangible goal. Those who have traveled to holy sites realize they knew where they were going but not what the experience would be and what would flow in their lives as a result of the pilgrimage.

This is precisely what Pope Francis is inviting us to experience—to pilgrimage, to make a *prayer with our feet*. He is calling us to come, to place our hope and to trust in our merciful God, to ask for strength to embrace God’s mercy and forgiveness, and to ask God to transform our hearts and lives.

Pilgrimages of Mercy invite us to prepare and understand that life is a pilgrimage to our ultimate destination. As we journey, we know our need for continuous conversion. We are seekers of mercy and forgiveness. We are called to share our gifts with others and to extend mercy and forgiveness to those we meet along life’s pilgrimage.

In addition to the Cathedral Church in your diocese, several other churches have been designated for Pilgrimage to the Holy Door. For example in the Philadelphia Archdiocese the following are designated as pilgrimage sites: Miraculous Medal Shrine; Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Doylestown; Shrine of St. John Neumann; Shrine of St. Katharine Drexel, Bensalem; and Shrine of St. Rita of Cascia. Check with your diocesan website to learn more.

As is tradition in our church, those desiring God’s indulgence after making a pilgrimage are asked to turn away from any attraction to sin, to receive the sacrament of reconciliation, to attend a Eucharist, and to pray for the pope’s intentions.

Suggestions to Prepare for your Pilgrimage to a Holy Door:

Pray for the attitude of wonder, awe, faith, and desire for God’s loving comfort and forgiveness. Recognize yourself as a pilgrim—as one who has already been found by a God who is inviting you to find peace, comfort, forgiveness, and mercy.

Visit the Holy Door

As you cross the threshold of the Holy Door, leave all that is disturbing you behind. Find the strength to embrace God's mercy and dedicate yourself to being merciful with others as God has been with you.

Those who cannot pass through a Holy Door, such as those who are sick, elderly, or in prison, may still gain the graces by asking for God's forgiveness and Mercy and make the intention to be a more compassionate, forgiving, and merciful person.

Sr. Kathy Donovan, OSF

Pope Francis has said "Mercy is the best thing we can feel: it changes the world. A little mercy makes the world less cold and more just. We need to understand properly this mercy of God, this merciful Father who is so patient."