

Holy Thursday: Pilgrims of Hope

Pope Francis announced the Jubilee Year 2025 which began on Christmas Eve last year (December 24, 2024). That's the reason for the prayer we say at the end of mass every Sunday, and we will continue to say 'The Jubilee Prayer' till January 6, 2026.

In the Catholic tradition, "a Holy Year or Jubilee Year" is a great religious event. It is a year of forgiveness of sins and also the punishment due to sin, it is a year of reconciliation between adversaries, of conversion and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and consequently of solidarity, hope, justice, commitment to serve God with joy and in peace with our brothers and sisters. A Jubilee year is above all the year of Christ, who brings life and grace to humanity.

Jubilee Year is a time of grace and renewal in the family (children, grandchildren). Therefore, Jubilee Year offers an important opportunity to deepen our relationship with God and each other.

The idea of a Jubilee time comes from the Old Testament and was known as a year of the Lord's favour. It was a time for new beginnings: people's debts were cancelled; property was returned to its original owners; the land was to lie fallow as crops were not sown so the land could rest. It was also a time of forgiveness and healing: prisoners and slaves were set free; and land was given to those who had no place of their own to live and work. (*c.f* Leviticus 25:10-14)

The first Jubilee was proclaimed in 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII. Years later, there were many requests for the second Jubilee to be held earlier, in 1350 instead of 1400. Clement VI gave his consent and set a period of fifty years between jubilees. Besides visiting the Basilicas built over the tombs of Peter and Paul the pilgrims were also required to visit to Saint John Lateran, the first Church of the Bishop of Rome who is the Pope. Later Pope Urban VI decided to reduce the period to thirty-three years in memory of the earthly life of Jesus. Then, in the year 1470 Pope Paul II issued a Bull to fix the Jubilee for every twenty-five years. Of course, many of us could recall the last one held - 'Jubilee Year 2000' (the Great Jubilee).

We too can relate to jubilees since our lives are marked with anniversaries, birthdays, and weddings anniversaries, anniversaries of Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, anniversary of Priestly or Episcopal Ordination. Communities, dioceses and parishes also celebrate anniversaries of foundation – Silver Jubilee or Golden Jubilee, even for a patron saint.

In this year's jubilee we are called to 'pilgrims of hope'; journeying together. The sense of being on a journey to the God should encourage each of us to undertake an authentic journey of conversion, through renewed appreciation and better celebration of the sacraments of the church.

A Jubilee Year is marked by special spiritual activities – pilgrimage, days of prayer, indulgence... etc. Bishop Mark has designated some churches and shrines as Pilgrimage Center. They are –

1. Cathedral of Holy Family, Saskatoon
2. St. Paul Co-Cathedral, Saskatoon
3. Our Lady of Sorrow Shrine, Blumenfeld
4. St. Peter's Abbey, Muenster
5. St. Anthony Church, Grosswerder
6. Holy Rosary Shrine, Reward
7. Shrine of Our Lady of Mount Carmel
8. Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, St. Laurent
9. Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, Rama

In the teaching of the Catholic Church, an **indulgence** is "a way to reduce the amount of punishment one has to undergo for (forgiven) sins." The Catechism of the Catholic Church describes an indulgence as "a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain prescribed conditions..." (CCC: 1471)

***To receive the plenary indulgence the following conditions must be met,

- Detachment from all mortal and venial sin.
- Avail oneself to sacramental Confession,
- Reception of Holy Communion, and
- Praying for the intentions of the Holy Father.

Indulgences can be **partial** (remitting some of the temporal punishment due to sin) or **plenary** (which remits all punishment). An Indulgence cannot be bought or paid for.

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus

Thank you, Lord

Good Friday: He descended into hell

Since December 24, 2024; at the beginning of the Jubilee Year, the church encouraged us to be using the Nicene Creed as the *Credo*. Prior to this, we have been using the Apostles' Creed. Both creeds are pretty much the same and are recognized by the Catholic church. At the same time, they are different. Though not too many differences are present, but one of the notable differences between Nicene creed and Apostles' creed is – “he descended into hell.”

The Nicene Creed was originally formulated at the first Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church held in Nicea in 325 A.D. (*Anno Domini – in the year of the Lord*) and was later amplified, adopted and authorised as a true expression of the Faith at the second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in 381A.D.

The Apostles' Creed was written by Hippolytus of Rome in 215 A.D; he was a renowned theologian in the early Church. It was not written to be recited at Mass, but to be used as part of the rite of Baptism in the early Church.

The Council of Nicea simply adopted a baptismal creed and made it more precise to confront the Arian heresy. The Apostles' Creed is probably older than the Nicene Creed, since it is based on the baptismal profession of the early Roman Church. Both creeds, however, have the same ancient origin.

Nicaea (*Nikaia*) was an ancient Greek city; it is presently known as city of İznik in Turkey. The Council of Nicaea was the first council in the history of the Christian church that was intended to address the entire body of believers. It was convened by the emperor Constantine to resolve the controversy of Arianism (*the belief that Jesus is only man and not God*), a doctrine that held that Christ was not divine but was a created being.

*(***I have attached an extra sheet to this homily, which has both Nicene and Apostles' creeds with their differences highlighted)*

According the Catechism of the Catholic Church, “the first meaning given in the apostolic preaching to Christ's descent into hell...that Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead.” (CCC: 632).

“Scripture calls the abode of the dead, to which the dead Christ went down, “hell”- *Sheol* in Hebrew or *Hades* in Greek-because those who are there are deprived of the vision of God.” (CCC: 633)

The Greek word for earth (*tesges*) which generally means ‘the surface of the earth’ or ‘the place where human beings inhabit’. So, the word they use to describe grave or underworld is *Hades*. Therefore, the word Hades [Ἅιδης (Haidês)] in Greek means ‘grave’ or ‘hell’. What this signifies is that one can either say, ‘he descended into hell’ or ‘he descended into the grave.’

The catechism explained further that ‘Christ went down into the depths of death so that "the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live." Jesus, "the Author of life," by dying destroyed "him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage." Henceforth the risen Christ holds "the keys of Death and Hades.” (CCC: 635)

The apostles Peter and Paul helped us also to comprehend this article of faith in their different texts in the bible. These two apostles made reference to ‘Christ’s descent into hell’ in their teachings – Ephesians 4:8-9 and 1 Peter 3:18-20.

In his first letter, Peter expanded the interpretation of the text, when opined that “he risen Christ proclaimed his triumph to the imprisoned spirits as he passed through the heavens to his exaltation. The text refers to a proclamation of judgment by the resurrected Christ to the spirits interpreted as angels who had disobeyed God and were subsequently put in prison. Christ's proclamation sealed their doom and was a proof that he triumphed over sin, death and hell, redeeming human beings.”

The above text compliments what Paul said in his letter to the Ephesians 4:8-9, that Jesus descended into graves (hell) to save those who have been held captive by devil (death) since Adam’s fall.

Prayer:

Thank you, Jesus

Thank you, Lord

Fr. Benjamin Ezekwudo

Nicene Creed

I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.

For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.

He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.

Amen.

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God,
the Father Almighty,
Creator of heaven and earth,
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried;

He descended into hell;
on the third day He rose again from the dead;
He ascended into heaven,
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty;
from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Holy Catholic Church,
the communion of Saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and life everlasting.

Amen.