



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The opening of the Jubilee in St. Peter's Square

"The Church is called to reach people wherever they are, in order to bring the joy of the Gospel to them..."



After passing through the Holy Door, the Holy Father was followed by his predecessor. This common experience is a sign of their deep unity at the service of the Church.

December 8 marked the **1,000th day of Pope Francis' papacy**. Saint Peter's Square was cordoned off by police, yet the faithful, who arrived at dawn, were able to be present in large numbers at the opening of the extraordinary Holy Year on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. The beauty of the celebration opened our hearts to the promise of renewed life. The weather, cloudy at first, cleared up as usual when the Pope appeared, as he would soon open the "Holy Door of Mercy".

"We carry out this act, so simple yet so highly symbolic, in the light of the word of God which we have just heard. That word **highlights the primacy of grace**," he explained during his homily, commenting on the visit made to Mary by the angel Gabriel at the Annunciation.

"When Gabriel entered her home, even the most profound and impenetrable of mysteries became for her a cause for joy, faith and abandonment to the message revealed to her. The fullness of grace can transform the human heart and enable it to do something so great as to change the course of human history," Peter's successor emphasized, encouraging us to reaffirm our confidence in **God's love "which precedes, anticipates and saves."** "Yet the history of sin can only be understood in the light of God's love and forgiveness. Sin can only be understood in this light. Were sin the only thing that mattered, we would be the most desperate of creatures. But the promised triumph of Christ's love enfolds everything in the Father's mercy".

The Immaculate Virgin stands before us as a "privileged witness of this promise and its fulfillment". Pope Francis urged us to pass through the Holy Door knowing that we ourselves are part of this mystery of love. "Let us set aside all fear and dread, for these do not befit men and women who are loved. Instead, let us experience the joy of encountering that grace which transforms all things", he continued.

The Ave Maria of Lourdes set the tempo of the mass, in an atmosphere of intense prayer. Francis' predecessor, Benedict XVI, followed him through the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, showing their deep unity in service to a Church "open to the world", 50 years after the closing of the Second Vatican Council, in which Pope Emeritus took part as a young theologian. "A genuine encounter between the Church and the men and women of our time. An encounter marked by the power of the Spirit, who impelled the Church to emerge from the shoals which for years had kept her self-enclosed so as to set out once again, with enthusiasm, on her missionary journey. It was the resumption of a journey of encountering people where they live: in their cities and homes, in their workplaces. Wherever there are people, the Church is called to reach out to them and to bring the joy of the Gospel," Pope Francis explained, talking about a "missionary drive", and that the Jubilee causes this openness "in the spirit which emerged from Vatican II, the spirit of the Samaritan".

"May our passing through the Holy Door today commit us to making our own the mercy of the Good Samaritan," he concluded, eager to lead the whole People of God in an evangelical renewal movement, expressed in concrete gestures of solidarity.

Borrowing the words that the Pope used during the Angelus, let us pray and ask every day of the Holy Year that "through the intercession of Immaculate Mary, may mercy take possession of our hearts and transform our whole life."

F.V.

(December 10, 2015)