



WHAT IS A JUBILEE YEAR?

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

In the Roman Catholic tradition, a Jubilee, or Holy 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.

The origin of the Christian Jubilee goes back to Bible times. The Law of Moses prescribed a special year for the Jewish people: "You shall hallow the fiftieth year and proclaim the liberty throughout the land, to all its inhabitants; it shall be a jubilee for you when each of you shall return to his property and each of you shall return to his family. This fiftieth year is to be a jubilee year for you: you will not sow, you will not harvest the un-gathered corn, you will not gather the untrimmed vine. The jubilee is to be a holy thing to you, you will eat what comes from the fields." (*The Book of Leviticus 25, 10-14*) The trumpet with which this particular year was announced was a goat's horn called Yobel in Hebrew, and the origin of the word jubilee. The celebration of this year also included the restitution of land to the original owners, the remission of debts, the liberation of slaves and the land was left fallow. In the New Testament, Jesus presents himself as the One who brings the old Jubilee to completion, because he has come to "preach the year of the Lord's favor" (*Isaiah 61: 1-2*).

The Jubilee is called Holy Year, not only because it begins, is marked, and ends with solemn holy acts, but also because its purpose is to encourage holiness of life. It was actually convoked to strengthen faith, encourage works of charity and brotherly communion within the Church and in society and to call Christians to be more sincere and coherent in their faith in Christ, the only Savior.

A Jubilee can be "ordinary" if it falls after the set period of years, and "extraordinary" when it is proclaimed for some outstanding event. There have been twenty-five "ordinary" Holy Years so far: the last one taking place in the Year 2000 was the 26th. The custom of calling "extraordinary" Jubilees began in the 16th century and they can vary in length from a few days to a year. There have been two extraordinary jubilees in this century: 1933 proclaimed by Pope Pius XI to mark the 1900th anniversary of Redemption and 1983 proclaimed by Pope John Paul II to mark 1500 years since the Redemption carried out by Christ through his Death and Resurrection in the year 33. In 1987 Pope John Paul II also proclaimed a Marian year.

- Adapted from the Vatican Website