

# DISCOVER

## the Joy of Christ



### Home: The First Threshold of Mercy

One of the big events of the Year of Mercy was the opening of the Holy Door at Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. The door represents Jesus as the door through which we must pass to eternal life. Jesus calls Himself the "Sheep's Gate" and tells us "nobody comes to the Father except through Me." When we walk through a "Holy Door" a special outpouring of Jesus' mercy is granted through simple acts of devotion. So it is especially appropriate that the Holy Door was opened during this Jubilee celebration. But not only did Pope Francis open the Holy Door at St. Peter's, he called for every diocese in the world to designate Holy Doors in cathedrals and shrines, showing the overflowing abundance and availability of God's mercy.

Then Pope Francis took the Church's message of mercy even further when he encouraged every family to make the door to their own home a door of mercy. Now, this doesn't mean that walking through the door of a home automatically gives you a special outpouring of Jesus' mercy. That wasn't the Holy Father's intention. His intent was to remind us that mercy begins at home.

The family is referred to as the "deeper school of humanity" (Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 52). By God's design, it is where we first experience Jesus' great and abundant mercy. Feeding the hungry (children), consoling the sick, admonishing the sinner and the like are common practices at home. As the corporal and spiritual works of mercy repeatedly play out each day, the family becomes more skilled at expressing loving kindness, compassion and forgiveness to those who offend. Over time, the home becomes a place of free-flowing mercy.

Becoming a merciful family and creating a peaceful home is hard work. Learning to love isn't easy because family life is messy. It is easy to forget that our homes

are to be sanctuaries of charity and forgiveness. That is why Pope Francis asks us to imagine that the following three expressions are written above the main door of our home: "May I"; "Thank you"; "Pardon Me". Envisioning these phrases will remind us that we are crossing a threshold of mercy when we enter our home.

#### "May I"

The common life of a family is strengthened when the phrase "May I" is used to ask for something. This simple gesture of respect has the power to keep life within the home intact "even when tested with a thousand problems". Saying "may I" teaches us to walk more gently with each other, to ask more politely, and even to seek the permission of our family members before we make our wills known.

#### "Thank You"

We often say "thank you" for favors granted to us. But to really say "thank you" in the context of family love is to truly appreciate the goodness in each family member. Families should be a place where we draw out each other's goodness and truly appreciate that goodness. Openly expressing gratitude prevents pettiness from cracking the family foundation and cultivates good relations among family members that are firmly rooted in charity and respect.

#### "Pardon Me"

Pope Francis tells us that "If we are not able to forgive ourselves, then we are no longer able to forgive period. A house in which the words "I'm sorry" are never

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DIocese of LA CROSSE, WI

uttered begins to lack air, and the floodwaters begin to choke those who live inside.” (General Audience May 15, 2015) This is why every family needs forgiveness. But for forgiveness to be given, it must first be sought. We have to learn to admit when we are wrong, especially when we cause harm (even when we didn’t mean to). Apologizing to one another is not a sign of weakness. Rather, in recognizing our faults and asking for forgiveness, the bonds of love and trust between family members are deepened.

Just as the Church is to always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven so too is the family home. Each home – each family – is meant to be a place where husbands and wives, children, grandchildren, cousins, in-laws, aunts and uncles are welcomed, loved and forgiven. Anyone entering the “holy doors” of a home – what can be referred to as a domestic church – should immediately sense compassion, tenderness and a healthy dose of God’s presence. The home needs to be the first threshold of mercy.

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