

**Homily for the Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph - Cycle C
Opening Mass for the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois
December 29, 2024**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Our Mass this morning marks the official opening of the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025, which will continue until Holy Family Sunday next year, December 28, 2025.

A Jubilee Year is a significant moment in the life of the Church in which she celebrates the year of messianic favor inaugurated by Christ through his Incarnation and Paschal Mystery.¹ Proclaimed every twenty-five years since the thirteenth century, the celebration of jubilee years typically includes pilgrimages, processions, celebrations of Mass, and an invitation to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. These liturgical celebrations are opportunities to receive the Lord's mercy, especially through the practice of the Jubilee indulgence, and lead to the performance of works of mercy.

Although Pope Francis proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee for the Year of Mercy in 2015, the last Ordinary Jubilee Year took place in 2000, when Pope John Paul II led the Christian faithful across the threshold of two

millennia from the birth of Jesus Christ. It is important to note that the word “ordinary” in this context does not refer to something that has no special significance, but to something expected in the normal order of events. Similarly, “extraordinary” here does not mean that it is better than an ordinary jubilee, but refers to something that does not follow the customary order of events. In that sense, calling this an Ordinary Jubilee Year means that it is simply following the expected order of a jubilee celebration in the Catholic Church every twenty-five years.

The theme for this Jubilee Year is “Pilgrims of Hope.” The title given by Pope Francis to his document declaring the Jubilee Year of 2025 is *Spes non confundit*, Latin for “Hope does not disappoint,” taken from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Romans (*Rom* 5:5), in which Saint Paul offered these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome. Similarly, Pope Francis wrote, “Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross ... By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint

because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love."²

The Holy Father points out that, "Pilgrimage is of course a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life. A pilgrimage on foot is a great aid for rediscovering the value of silence, effort and simplicity of life."³ We began Mass this morning by gathering in the Atrium and then making a short procession outside and through the front door of the Cathedral, in a sense making a symbolic pilgrimage, serving to symbolize the journey of hope that, illumined by the word of God, unites all the faithful.

Indulgences are also an important aspect of a Jubilee Year. Before describing how to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence, we should first discuss what the Church means by the concept of an "indulgence," since many people misunderstand this aspect of our Catholic faith. It is common these days when a person dies to hear loved ones make statements asserting that the deceased person is now in heaven, but we cannot be sure of that. First of all, there seems to be a mistaken presumption that Christ's death and resurrection means that everyone is going to heaven, but that is not what the

Bible says. There are many references in the Bible to the Last Judgment,⁴ and Jesus himself taught that the wicked “will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”⁵ Even a person who seemed to be very good in this life may still have to spend some time in purgatory before going to heaven. We may think that having our sins forgiven when we go to sacramental confession means that there is no more punishment for those sins, but Pope Francis points out that, “as we know from personal experience, every sin ‘leaves its mark.’ Sin has consequences, not only outwardly in the effects of the wrong we do, but also inwardly, inasmuch as ‘every sin, even venial, entails an unhealthy attachment to creatures, which must be purified either here on earth, or after death, in the state called Purgatory.’⁶ In our humanity, weak and attracted by evil, certain residual effects of sin remain. These are removed by the indulgence, always by the grace of Christ.”⁷ That is essentially why we pray for the dead, because if they were already in heaven and not possibly in purgatory, they would not need our prayers.

In the *Decree on the Granting of the Indulgence During the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025*, the Apostolic See decreed that, “During the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025, all other Indulgences previously granted remain in force. All the

faithful, who are truly repentant and free from any affection for sin, who are moved by a spirit of charity and who, during the Holy Year, purified through the Sacrament of Penance and refreshed by Holy Communion, pray for the intentions of the Supreme Pontiff, will be able to obtain from the treasury of the Church a plenary indulgence, with remission and forgiveness of all their sins, which can be applied [for] the souls in Purgatory . . . if they undertake a pious pilgrimage to any sacred Jubilee site: by devoutly participating in Holy Mass,” the Way of the Cross, recitation of the Rosary, or participating in a penitential celebration, which ends with the individual confessions of the penitents, as established in the Rite of Penance (form II). In our Diocese of Springfield in Illinois, the designated sacred Jubilee site is right here in our Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception.

The plenary indulgence for the Jubilee Year of 2025 may also be obtained by making a pious visit to other designated sacred places throughout the world, such as the major basilicas in Rome or the cathedral in any diocese.

“The faithful who are truly repentant of sin but who cannot participate in the various solemn celebrations, pilgrimages and pious visits for serious reasons (especially cloistered nuns and monks, but also the elderly, the sick,

prisoners, and those who, through their work in hospitals or other care facilities, provide continuous service to the sick), can obtain the Jubilee Indulgence, under the same conditions if, united in spirit with the faithful taking part in person, (especially when the words of the Supreme Pontiff or the diocesan Bishop are transmitted through the various means of communication), they recite the Our Father, the Profession of Faith in any approved form, and other prayers in conformity with the objectives of the Holy Year, in their homes or wherever they are confined (e.g. in the chapel of the monastery, hospital, nursing home, prison...) offering up their sufferings or the hardships of their lives;

“In addition, the faithful will be able to obtain the Jubilee Indulgence if, with a devout spirit, they participate in popular missions, spiritual exercises, or formation activities on the documents of the Second Vatican Council and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, held in a church or other suitable place, according to the mind of the Holy Father.

“Despite the rule that only one plenary indulgence can be obtained per day, the faithful who have carried out an act of charity on behalf of the souls in Purgatory, if they receive Holy Communion a second time that day, can

obtain the plenary indulgence twice on the same day, applicable only to the deceased," provided this take place within a Eucharistic celebration.⁸

It is very intentional that this Jubilee Year of 2025 opens in dioceses throughout the world on this Feast of the Holy Family, since we are adopted members of God's family by virtue of our baptism.

Today's Gospel (*Luke 2:41-52*) is the only story depicting Jesus as an adolescent in the four Gospels. It serves two purposes. Theologically, Jesus testifies to his divine sonship by referring to God as his Father, the first time in the Gospel that Jesus makes this claim. Secondly, it offers a glimpse into family life as experienced by Mary, Joseph, and Jesus. This helps ground the theological claims of Jesus within the context of real human living. Jesus always was both fully human and fully divine.

The setting of this story is very realistic. Family members (both local plus extended) have just celebrated the Passover in a very crowded Jerusalem. On the way home, they realize that Jesus is missing. He has remained behind in Jerusalem without his parents' knowledge. No doubt it was presumed that he was somewhere among the extended family members. Only a day later do they discover that he has, in fact, vanished.

The search for the lost Jesus went on for three days in a still very crowded Jerusalem. No details are given, but somehow the lost Jesus is found in the Jerusalem temple, situated in the midst of teachers listening to them and questioning them. This, of course, would be amazing, but that is not the emotion expressed by Mary and Joseph. They are astonished that this 12-year-old would put his parents through such an ordeal.

Once the relief of finding the child subsides, his mother lets him know in no uncertain terms how irresponsible he has been. Jesus responds on a different level, offering a theological answer to a domestic family situation. Why were his parents concerned? Do they not know who he is and what he must be about? The answer is definitely no. Jesus is the Son of God, and obedience to his heavenly Father supersedes obedience to Mary and Joseph. On a human level, however, his parents win the day. Jesus finds himself back with his family, headed for Nazareth. There he will continue to grow into adulthood, acquiring wisdom and knowledge.

This Wednesday marks the beginning of a new year. It is always good to begin something new with a sense of hope about what is to come.

The Holy Father connects the virtue of hope and our Blessed Mother, saying, "Hope finds its supreme witness in *the Mother of God*. In the Blessed

Virgin, we see that hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life. ... [that] the Mother of God comes to our aid, sustains us and encourages us to persevere in hope and trust.”⁹

My brothers and sisters in Christ: We are a holy family drawn together through Christ in the Eucharist. With hearts strengthened by hope in God’s mercy, we receive Christ in Holy Communion and go forth from Mass, striving to live holy lives.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ (Cf. Lk 4:19; John Paul II, *Tertio millennio adveniente*, nos. 11- 16).

² Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee of the Year 2025, given in Rome on May 9, 2024, par. 3; accessed online December 23, 2024, at: https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/20240509_spes-non-confundit_bolla-giubileo2025.html.

³ Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, par. 5.

⁴ “69 Bible Verses about Last Judgment,” accessed online December 29, 2024, at: <https://bible.knowing-jesus.com/topics/Last-Judgment>.

⁵ Matthew 25:46, accessed online December 29, 2024, at: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/matthew/25>.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1472.

⁷ Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, par. 23.

⁸ Apostolic Penitentiary, *Decree on the Granting of the Indulgence During the Ordinary Jubilee Year of 2025*, given May 13, 2024; accessed online December 28, 2024, at: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/tribunals/apost_penit/documents/rc_penitenzieria-ap_20240513_norme-indulgenza-giubileo2025_en.html.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Spes non confundit*, par. 24.