

FRANCISCAN JUBILEE

A message from Jan Parker, OFS, National Minister – OFS-USA



I will never forget my 50th birthday. My daughter, aware of the significance of this 50-year mark, made a sign that she hung on my mailbox. It simply said, “*It’s Jan’s Jubilee!*” I still have that sign. It now hangs on a wall in my garage as an important reminder to always turn to God, where I find joy and peace beyond all I could ask or imagine.

It was not my idea that the theme of the 2022 Quinquennial Congress would be “**Jubilee,**” but when Br. Bob Brady, OFM, suggested it, I was thrilled.

I celebrated a personal Jubilee when I turned 50 and found it to be a life-changing year-long experience of discovering again who I am called to be and the power of God’s love and mercy. My hope, and the hope of our entire Q Committee, is that this Jubilee Quinquennial will be a life-changing experience of conversion for everyone in our national fraternity, as well as each one who attends.

The history of Jubilee goes back to the law given to the Israelites in Leviticus 25: “*You will declare this fiftieth year to be sacred....You will keep this as a Jubilee....*” God called his people to an economic, cultural, environmental, and communal *reset*, when the land and people rest, and all those who are in slavery are set free to return to their communities. Jubilee law addresses the wellbeing of the community and calls God’s people to live in ways that reflect good relationships with God, with each other, and with creation.¹ Jubilee law tells us something about God’s intention for his people.

Fast forward to Luke’s gospel, and we see Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, declaring *a time of Jubilee*—“the year of the Lord’s favor”—but wait, there’s something more here. Jesus closes the scroll, looks at us, and says, “*Today this scripture has been fulfilled....*” Today! Not just every 50 years, not just every seventh year, but today, and every today! The kingdom is now—*JUBILEE is now.*

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we see Jubilee’s objective: freedom and release from sin, restoration with God, a reset for all of creation. Have we realized this? Internalized it? We find a full description in 2 Corinthians 5, a passage that declares our new creation in Christ, and the call to be re-made to become that new creation. I look at this passage and rejoice in this *call to conversion*. God’s people—the church—are meant to be a foretaste of what God wants to do for the entire creation. Sisters and brothers, we are meant to not only live Jubilee for ourselves, but to *be Jubilee* for others. The love of God impels us.

God’s command for Jubilee says, “Stop. Step back. Look at what you are doing.” A Jubilee moment exposes human greed and brings to light the selfishness in society. The law didn’t have the capacity to change those things, it only showed them. But God said, *I will pour out my Spirit upon you and the law*

¹ See tearfund.org.au/stories/jubilee-in-the-bible Tearfund is a Christian agency working for a just and compassionate world.

*will be written in your heart.*² Jubilee is no longer just a law. Christ has fulfilled the law and has sent us his Spirit to implant this law *in our hearts*. As members of this Spirit-filled Church, to which we are bonded more closely by profession, we commit ourselves to a living discipleship that entails both generosity and sacrifice. We constantly call on the Spirit of God to empower and enable us to be a part of God's mission to *reset all areas of life, bring release and restoration—to be Jubilee*.

As bearers of peace and messengers of joy and hope, we must announce the kingdom of God is *now*. How do we do this? By remembering “who we are”—**our identity as Franciscans**—and being who we are called to be. Our Quinquennial mission statement calls us to “**celebrate and renew our Franciscan calling in the spirit of conversion.**” At this Quinquennial moment, and every day going forward, we must live this, tending to our own daily conversion, as well as the conversion of society.

Jubilee was a recovery of identity, especially for the poor. It is not about simply correcting economic problems, which is very important; not even just caring for the poor because they're poor; but it is restoring identity, which is a part of their history and very important for them.

— CB Samuel

Can we bring about the changes that are needed, both in ourselves and in our world? We have spoken a lot this year about prophetic creativity. Let's align ourselves with the creativity of God who says, “I make all things new” and dare to be creative. Let us incarnate and enact the certain hope of this new creation, and be the change we long to see.

This is my hope—that what I celebrated in my 50th year will always remain with me, and that this new focus on Jubilee will be a time for all of us to once again celebrate God's mercy and forgiveness, know God's love in a new way, and to start again. To forgive others. To love all people and all creation as sister and brother. To accept our humanness. To rejoice in how God is working in our lives, and how he is working right now in this time of Jubilee. God truly is at work among us, making all things new!

I have often talked of the trajectory we are on. There is a new day ahead. New leaders will be called forth. There will be new opportunities to share God's love. But let's not just look ahead. Let's look to today—to right now for *now is the acceptable time*.

Many will be drawn to the Quinquennial to experience Jubilee, but here's the good news—you don't have to be at the Q to experience it. Jubilee joy is ours whenever and wherever we pause to acknowledge God's presence with us. Jubilee joy is in every Franciscan heart and is palpable in every experience of fraternity—in every moment of fraternal communion. The world needs this Jubilee joy. Let's share it!

Jubilee Song of Restoration

Psalm 126

When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we thought we were dreaming.

Our mouths were filled with laughter; our tongues sang for joy.

Then it was said among the nations, “The LORD had done great things for them.”

The LORD has done great things for us! We are filled with joy!

Restore again our fortunes, LORD, like the dry stream beds of the Negeb.

Those who sow in tears, will reap with cries of joy.

Those who go forth weeping, carrying sacks of seed,

Will return with cries of joy, carrying their bundled sheaves.

² Jeremiah 31:31