

## Pope Francis on Vatican II

When Pope Francis announced the Jubilee of Mercy, on April 11, 2015, he spent two long paragraphs describing his view of Vatican II. Consider prayerfully the following:

**I have chosen the date of 8 December because of its rich meaning in the recent history of the Church. In fact, I will open the Holy Door on the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council. The Church feels a great need to keep this event alive. With the Council, the Church entered a new phase of her history. The Council Fathers strongly perceived, as a true breath of the Holy Spirit, a need to talk about God to men and women of their time in a more accessible way. The walls which for too long had made the Church a kind of fortress were torn down and the time had come to proclaim the Gospel in a new way. It was a new phase of the same evangelization which had existed from the beginning. It was a fresh undertaking for all Christians to bear witness to their faith with greater enthusiasm and conviction. The Church sensed a responsibility to be a living sign of the Father's love in the world.**

**We recall the poignant words of Saint John XXIII when, opening the Council, he indicated the path to follow: "Now the Bride of Christ wishes to use the medicine of mercy rather than taking up arms of severity ...The Catholic Church, as she holds high the torch of the Catholic truth at this Ecumenical Council, wants to show herself a loving mother to all; patient, kind, moved by compassion and goodness toward her separated children" (Gaudet Mater Ecclesia, 11 Oct. 1962, 2-3). Blessed Paul VI spoke in a similar vein at the closing of the Council: "We prefer to point out how charity has been the principal religious feature of this Council ...the old story of the Good Samaritan has been the model of the spirituality of the Council ...a wave of affection and admiration flowed from the Council over the modern world of humanity. Errors were condemned, indeed, because charity demanded this no less than did truth, but for individuals themselves there was only admonition, respect and love. Instead of depressing diagnoses, encouraging remedies; instead of dire predictions, messages of trust issued from the Council to the present-day world. The modern world's values were not only respected but honoured, its efforts approved, its aspirations purified and blessed ...Another point we must stress is this: all this rich teaching is channeled in one direction, the service of mankind, of every condition, in every weakness and need" (Final Public Session, 7 Dec. 1965).**

It has often been observed that Pope Francis is the first pope of our time who did not attend Vatican II. He certainly did study and live it as a seminarian and young priest. For all concerned about our calling to witness to Christ, his words above are very relevant. Even more so as we try to figure out what Vatican II means today.