

The quality of mercy is not strained

It would be a pity if an event of such magnitude were to pass into oblivion. Sunday, March 12, was the Day of Pardon celebrated on the occasion of the Great Jubilee.

The event – at once simple and profound – was expressly desired by Pope John Paul as an evocative sign of the Jubilee year which, of its own nature, is a special time of grace and conversion.

It was an event of stark simplicity, as appropriately described by the BBC Rome correspondent, David Willey.

It was an event of prophetic dimensions, an act wherein the Church bore witness to the fragility of its members throughout the ages and asked for mercy and forgiveness.

Forgiveness was asked at the celebration of sins in general, of sins committed in the service of truth, of sins that have tarnished Christian unity, of sins against the people of Israel, of sins against love and respect for other cultures and religions, of sins against the dignity of women, and of sins concerning the fundamental rights of the human person.

Many events from history spring to mind, events with wide-ranging effects: coercive methods at times adopted by the Inquisition; the heart-rending pains of schism, anti-Semitism and the Crusades; the eradication of indigenous cultures by colonising powers who used both sword and cross to quench their thirst for

political and economic expansion...

The celebration on March 12 closely follows the publication of a document by the International Theological Commission called "Memory and Reconciliation: The Church and the Faults of the Past", five days earlier.

The Holy Father described this document as "useful for correctly understanding and carrying out the authentic request for pardon, based on the objective responsibility which Christians share as members" of the Church.

Both events are veritable milestones in the long and winding road leading to a sincere "purification of memory", to use a phrase first used by Paul VI in 1964, during his visit to Jerusalem. There is much to learn from this *mea culpa* by the Church. Its epitome may perhaps be found in the words used by Pope John Paul, "Let us forgive and ask forgiveness".

Indeed this is a challenge, yet also an invitation, not only for Christians, but for all men and women of goodwill. Forgiveness calls for a deep-seated courage as well as an undaunted will-power.

Or as incisively pictured by an anonymous author: Forgiveness is the scent the violet leaves on the heel that crushed it.

There is much to learn from all this... even within our shores.

FR HECTOR SCERRI,
lecturer, Dogmatic Theology,
University of Malta.