

Abortion and excommunication in the Jubilee Year of Mercy

In his September 1, 2015 words to the head of the Pontifical Council for the New Evangelization, Pope Francis made the unprecedented move of granting faculties to all clergy in the Church universal to lift any excommunication incurred with the sin of abortion. (Such faculties were already common among clergy in the United States, but most clergy in the world had to consult with their bishop's office before absolving the sin of abortion.)

In Francis' message one clearly hears echo of the tender words of Saint John Paul II, promulgated 20 years earlier in *Evangelium vitae* 99:



“One of the serious problems of our time is clearly the changed relationship with respect to life. A widespread and insensitive mentality has led to the loss of the proper personal and social sensitivity to welcome new life. The tragedy of abortion is experienced by some with a superficial awareness, as if not realizing the extreme harm that such an act entails. Many others, on the other hand, although experiencing this moment as a defeat, believe they they have no other option. **I think in particular of all the women who have resorted to abortion. I am well aware of the pressure that has led them to this decision. I know that it is an existential and moral ordeal. I have met so many women who bear in their heart the scar of this agonizing and painful decision. What has happened is profoundly unjust; yet only understanding the truth of it can enable one not to lose hope. The forgiveness of God cannot be denied to one who has repented, especially when that person approaches the Sacrament of Confession with a sincere heart in order to obtain reconciliation with the Father. For this reason too, I have decided, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, to concede to all priests for the Jubilee Year the discretion to absolve of the sin of abortion those who have procured it and who, with contrite heart, seek forgiveness for it. May priests fulfil this great task by expressing words of genuine welcome combined with a reflection that explains the gravity of the sin committed, besides indicating a path of authentic conversion by which to obtain the true and generous forgiveness of the Father who renews all with his presence.**”