

The Jubilee has always been an event of great spiritual, ecclesial, and social significance in the life of the Church. Ever since 1300, when Boniface VIII instituted the first Holy Year – initially celebrated every hundred years, then, following its biblical precedent, every fifty years, and finally every twenty-five years – God’s holy and faithful people has experienced this celebration as a special gift of grace, characterized by the forgiveness of sins and in particular by the indulgence, which is a full expression of the mercy of God. The faithful, frequently at the conclusion of a lengthy pilgrimage, draw from the spiritual treasury of the Church by passing through the Holy Door and venerating the relics of the Apostles Peter and Paul preserved in Roman basilicas. Down the centuries, millions upon millions of pilgrims have journeyed to these sacred places, bearing living witness to the faith professed in every age.

The Great Jubilee of the year 2000 ushered the Church into the third millennium of her history. Saint John Paul II had long awaited and greatly looked forward to that event, in the hope that all Christians, putting behind their historical divisions, could celebrate together the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of humanity. Now, as the first twenty-five years of the new century draw to a close, we are called to enter into a season of preparation that can enable the Christian people to experience the Holy Year in all its pastoral richness. A significant step on this journey was already taken with the celebration of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, which allowed us to appreciate anew all the power and tenderness of the Father’s merciful love, in order to become, in our turn, its witnesses.

In the last two years, not a single country has been unaffected by the sudden outbreak of an epidemic that made us experience first-hand not only the tragedy of dying alone, but also the uncertainty and fleetingness of existence, and in doing so, has changed our very way of life. Together with all our brothers and sisters, we Christians endured those hardships and limitations. Our churches remained closed, as did our schools, factories, offices, shops, and venues for recreation. All of us saw certain freedoms curtailed, while the pandemic generated feelings not only of grief, but also, at times, of doubt, fear and disorientation. The scientific community quickly developed an initial remedy that is gradually permitting us to resume our daily lives. We are fully confident that the epidemic will be overcome and that the world will return to its usual pattern of personal relationships and social life. This will happen more readily to the extent that we can demonstrate effective solidarity, so that our neighbours most in need will not be neglected, and that everyone can have access to scientific breakthroughs and the necessary medicines.

We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us, and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision. The forthcoming Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire; that

is why I have chosen as the motto of the Jubilee, *Pilgrims of Hope*. This will indeed be the case if we are capable of recovering a sense of universal fraternity and refuse to turn a blind eye to the tragedy of rampant poverty that prevents millions of men, women, young people and children from living in a manner worthy of our human dignity. Here I think in particular of the many refugees forced to abandon their native lands. May the voices of the poor be heard throughout this time of preparation for the Jubilee, which is meant to restore access to the fruits of the earth to everyone. As the Bible teaches, “The sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired servant and the sojourner who lives with you; for your cattle also, and for the beasts that are in your land, all its yield shall be for food” (*Lev 25:6-7*).

The spiritual dimension of the Jubilee, which calls for conversion, should also embrace these fundamental aspects of our life in society as part of a coherent whole. In the realization that all of us are pilgrims on this earth, which the Lord has charged us to till and keep (cf. *Gen 2:15*), may we never fail, in the course of our sojourn, to contemplate the beauty of creation and care for our common home. It is my hope that the coming Jubilee Year will be celebrated and experienced with this intention too. Growing numbers of men and women, including many young people and children, have come to realize that care for creation is an essential expression of our faith in God and our obedience to his will.

To you, dear Brother, I entrust responsibility for finding suitable ways for the Holy Year to be planned and celebrated with deep faith, lively hope and active charity. The Dicastery charged with promoting the new evangelization can help make this season of grace a significant stimulus to the pastoral outreach of the particular Churches, both Latin and Eastern, which are called in these years to intensify their commitment to synodality. In this regard, our pilgrimage towards the Jubilee will express and confirm the shared journey that the Church is called to make, in order to be ever more fully a sign and instrument of unity in harmonious diversity. It will be important to foster a renewed awareness of the demands of the universal call to responsible participation by enhancing the charisms and ministries that the Holy Spirit never ceases to bestow for the building up of the one Church. The four Constitutions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, together with the Magisterium of these recent decades, will continue to provide direction and guidance to God’s holy people, so that it can press forward in its mission of bringing the joyful proclamation of the Gospel to everyone.

As is customary, the Bull of Indiction, to be issued in due course, will contain the necessary guidelines for celebrating the Jubilee of 2025. In this time of preparation, I would greatly desire that we devote 2024, the year preceding the Jubilee event, to a great “symphony” of prayer. Prayer, above all else, to renew our desire to be in the presence of the Lord, to listen to him and to adore him. Prayer, moreover, to thank God for the many gifts of his love for us and to praise his work in creation, which summons

everyone to respect it and to take concrete and responsible steps to protect it. Prayer as the expression of a single “heart and soul” (cf. *Acts* 4:32), which then translates into solidarity and the sharing of our daily bread. Prayer that makes it possible for every man and woman in this world to turn to the one God and to reveal to him what lies hidden in the depths of their heart. Prayer as the royal road to holiness, which enables us to be contemplative even in the midst of activity. In a word, may it be an intense year of prayer in which hearts are opened to receive the outpouring of God’s grace and to make the “Our Father,” the prayer Jesus taught us, the life programme of each of his disciples.

I ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to accompany the Church on the journey of preparation for the grace-filled event of the Jubilee, and to you and your co-workers, with gratitude, I cordially send my Blessing.

*Rome, Saint John Lateran, 11 February 2022, Memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes.*

FRANCIS