



INTRODUCTION TO THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025

We read in the Book of Leviticus that the “fiftieth year is sacred...This fiftieth year is your year of jubilee” (Lv 25:10 + 11). A reading of the entire chapter 25 provides a fuller understanding of the Jubilee Year. These Jubilee Years were special years of remission of sins, debts and universal pardon. Named after the Hebrew word, “yōbēl,” meaning “goat,” since the ram’s horn (the shofar) was used to declare the beginning of the year, this was a year when slaves would regain their freedom and that land that had been sold to others would be returned to the original owner. It was a year when no crops could be planted or harvested. All of these practices were to remind the ancient Israelites that everything they thought they owned ultimately belonged to God.

Although it is unknown if the Jubilee Year regulations were ever fully put into practice, there is evidence that aspects of it were observed at various times. In fact, ever since the 6th century BC, the people of Israel and we, their descendants in the faith, have held Jubilee Years. In 1425, Pope Martin V used the solemn opening of the door of St. John Lateran Cathedral (the pope’s episcopal see) for the first time to inaugurate a Jubilee Year. Then, in 1475, Pope Sixtus IV celebrated the first 25-year Jubilee Year. Since then, Ordinary Jubilee Years have been celebrated every 25 years, with a few exceptions for various reasons; the most recent Ordinary Jubilee Year was in the year 2000.

Jubilee Years are usually inaugurated through a Bull of Indiction. The word “indiction” means an announcement regarding a recurring event. Pope Francis announced the upcoming Jubilee Year with his Bull of Indiction entitled: *Spes non Confundit* (hope does not disappoint). In this 17-page document, our Holy Father outlines the reasons for and benefits of this Jubilee Year. Allow me to highlight a few of the more significant aspects of the upcoming Jubilee.

“Hope does not disappoint,” a quote taken from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans 5:5, is the central message of this Jubilee Year. In the spirit of hope, the Apostle Paul addressed these words of encouragement to the Christian community of Rome. Pope Francis writes in his Papal Bull: “For everyone, may the Jubilee be a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the ‘door’ (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as ‘our hope’” (1 Tim 1:1).

Using the teaching St. Paul provides in his Letter to the Romans, our Holy Father goes on to instruct that:

Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom 5:19). That life becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God’s grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit. By his perennial presence in the life of the pilgrim Church, the Holy Spirit illumines all believers with the light of hope. He keeps that light burning, like an ever-burning lamp, to sustain and invigorate our lives. Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God’s love: “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35, 37-39).

Of course, Pope Francis goes on, “Saint Paul is a realist. He knows that life has its joys and sorrows, that love is tested amid trials, and that hope can falter in the face of suffering. Even so, he can write: ‘We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope’” (Rom 5:3-4). And so, Pope Francis continues, “we learn to practice a virtue closely linked to hope, namely patience. In our fast-paced world, we are used to wanting everything now. Patience, one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, sustains our hope and strengthens it as a virtue and a way of life.

Pilgrimage is a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life. In Rome itself, along with the usual visits to the catacombs and the Seven Churches, other itineraries of faith will be proposed. And, jubilee churches will be designated in (arch)dioceses around the world where pilgrims may obtain the Jubilee Indulgence. The following churches hold shrines where Jubilee Indulgences may be obtained: the Cathedral Basilica of Ss. Peter and Paul, St. Anne, the Miraculous Medal Basilica and St. Rita in Philadelphia, St. Jude, Chalfont, Our Lady of Czestochowa, Doylestown, St. Bede, Holland, and Nativity BVM, Warminster.

Sustained by this great tradition, and certain that the Jubilee Year will be for the entire Church a lively experience of grace and hope, Pope Francis has decreed that the Holy Door of the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican will be opened on 24 December 2024, thus inaugurating the Ordinary Jubilee. He further decreed that on Sunday, 29 December 2024, in every cathedral and co-cathedral, diocesan bishops are to celebrate Holy Mass as the solemn opening of the Jubilee Year. The Ordinary Jubilee will conclude with the closing of the Holy Door in the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican on 6 January 2026, the Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord. I invite you to take advantage of this ancient Church tradition to seek our Lord in love and make his love ever more present in your life and in our world.

~ Msgr. Hans A. L. Brouwers