

Pope Francis launches Jubilee Year of Mercy

by [Rosie Scammell](#) in the [January 6, 2016](#) issue

Pope Francis launched the Jubilee Year of Mercy with the opening of the Vatican Holy Door near the end of a mass in St. Peter's Square, where he was joined by his predecessor pope emeritus Benedict XVI and thousands of pilgrims.

"This extraordinary year is itself a gift of grace," Francis told the faithful in his homily at mass December 8. "To pass through the holy door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them.

"How much wrong we do to God and his grace when we speak of sins being punished by his judgment before we speak of their being forgiven by his mercy. . . . We have to put mercy before judgment."

After addressing the crowds, Francis embraced a frail-looking Benedict, who resigned from the papacy in 2013 and who was invited by his successor to attend the jubilee ceremony.

After opening the Holy Door into the grand basilica, Francis walked slowly through St. Peter's, followed by Benedict and a procession of cardinals, bishops, priests, men and women religious, and laity.

In doing so, they marked the start of a pilgrimage that is expected to see millions pass through the Holy Door, which is opened only during jubilee years. In addition, for the first time Catholics around the world will be able to walk through designated holy doors in cathedrals in other countries.

A holy year usually occurs every 25 years, but Francis chose to call an "extraordinary" jubilee just 15 years after the previous one. While the idea of a jubilee dates to the Bible, the Vatican tradition began in 1300 when Pope Boniface VIII announced the first Christian jubilee.

Before opening the current jubilee year, Francis highlighted the 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, a turning point that sought to engage the Catholic

Church with the modern world.

“Before all else, the council was an encounter,” the pope said. “It was the resumption of a journey of encountering people where they live: in their cities and homes, in their workplace.”

The pontiff then encouraged the same enthusiasm and openness during the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which runs until November 20, 2016.

Tens of thousands of pilgrims underwent tight security checks in order to attend the ceremony. There was a strong police presence around the Vatican and a no-fly zone.  
—Religion News Service

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