

Pope announces extraordinary Urbi et Orbi blessing

At the Angelus on Sunday, Pope Francis invited all Christians to join together in praying the Our Father as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

By Christopher Wells

Pope Francis on Sunday called for all Christians to respond to the coronavirus pandemic “with the universality of prayer, of compassion, of tenderness”, adding, “Let us remain united. Let us make our closeness felt toward those persons who are the most lonely and tried”.

Speaking after the traditional recitation of the Angelus, the Holy Father called on all Christians to join together in prayer. “In these trying days, while humanity trembles due to the thread of the pandemic, I would like to propose to all Christians that together we lift our voices towards Heaven,” he said.

The “Our Father” on the Annunciation

On Wednesday, 25 March, the feast of the Annunciation, he has invited “the Heads of the Churches and the leaders of every Christian community, together with all Christians of the various confessions, to invoke the Almighty, the omnipotent God, to recite at the same time the prayer that Jesus, our Lord, taught us” – the Our Father. “On that day on which many Christians recall the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary of the Incarnation of the Word”, Pope Francis prayed, “may the Lord listen to the united prayer of all of His disciples who are preparing themselves to celebrate the victory of the Risen Christ”.

A special Urbi et Orbi blessing

The Pope also announced that on the following Friday, 27 March, he will preside over a moment of prayer on the *sagrato* of St Peter’s Basilica, the platform at the top of the steps immediately in front of the façade of the Church. “I invite everyone to participate spiritually through the means of communication”, he said.

The ceremony will consist in readings from the Scriptures, prayers of supplication, and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; and will conclude with Pope Francis giving the *Urbi et orbi* Blessing, with the possibility of gaining a plenary indulgence for all those who listen to it live through the various forms of communication. The blessing "to the City [of Rome] and to the World" is normally only given on Christmas and Easter.

The Director of the Holy See Press Office confirmed that the moment of prayer on Friday will be broadcast live from the Vatican, beginning at 6 pm Rome time. He noted that the plenary indulgence attached to the *Urbi et orbi* blessing is subject to the conditions foreseen by the recent Decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary.

Prayers for Croatia

At the close of his remarks following the Angelus, Pope Francis expressed his closeness to the people of Croatia, which was struck by magnitude 5.4 earthquake Sunday morning. The Holy Father prayed, "May the Risen Lord give them the strength and solidarity to face this calamity".

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