

FROM VATICAN NEWS

A special Urbi et Orbi blessing

The Pope 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.

FROM NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER

VATICAN CITY — In response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, Pope Francis said he will give an extraordinary blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) at 6 p.m. Rome time March 27.

The formal blessing — usually given only immediately after a new pope's election and on Christmas and Easter — carries with it a plenary indulgence for all who follow by television, internet or radio, are sorry for their sins, recite a few prescribed prayers and promise to go to confession and to receive the Eucharist as soon as possible.

After reciting the Angelus prayer March 22 from the library of the Apostolic Palace, Francis announced his plans for the special blessing, which, he said, would be given in an "empty" St. Peter's Square because all of Italy is on lockdown to prevent further spread of the virus.

With the public joining him only by television, internet or radio, "we will listen to the word of God, raise our prayer (and) adore the Blessed Sacrament," he said. "At the end, I will give

the benediction 'urbi et orbi,' to which will be connected the possibility of receiving a plenary indulgence."

An indulgence is an ancient practice of prayer and penance for the remission of the temporal punishment a person is due for sins that have been forgiven. In Catholic teaching, a person can draw on the merits of Jesus and the saints to claim the indulgence for themselves or offer it on behalf of someone who has died.

In addition to announcing the special blessing, Francis said that at a time "when humanity trembles" because of the COVID-19 pandemic, he was asking Christians of every denomination to join together at noon March 25 to recite the Lord's Prayer. The Catholic Church and many others mark March 25 as the feast of the Annunciation.

"To the pandemic of the virus we want to respond with the universality of prayer, compassion and tenderness," he said. "Let's stay united. Let us make those who are alone and tested feel our closeness," as well as doctors, nurses, other healthcare workers and volunteers.

Francis also expressed concern for "authorities who have to take strong measures for our good" and the police and soldiers maintaining public order and enforcing the lockdown.

FROM CATHOLIC NEWS AGENCY:

"This Friday, March 27 at 6 p.m., I will preside over a moment of prayer outside of St. Peter's Basilica with the square empty. As now, I invite everyone to participate spiritually through the media," Pope Francis said March 22 in his livestreamed Angelus address.

"Urbi et Orbi" means "To the City [of Rome] and to the World." It is a special apostolic blessing given by the pope from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica every year on Easter Sunday, Christmas, and other special occasions.

Pope Francis said the March 27 prayer broadcast for those suffering from the coronavirus pandemic will include listening to the Word of God and Eucharistic Adoration.

More than 300,000 people have contracted COVID-19 as of March 22, according to Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center. The respiratory disease, which originated in Wuhan, China, has spread to 157 countries, and has led to the deaths of 13,672 people worldwide.

"We want to respond to the pandemic of the virus with the universality of prayer, compassion, tenderness. Let us stay united," Pope Francis said.

"All those who spiritually join this moment of prayer through the media will be granted the plenary indulgence according to the conditions provided for in the recent decree of the Apostolic Penitentiary," Holy See Press Office Director Matteo Bruni told journalists following the pope's announcement.

The Vatican's Apostolic Penitentiary has granted a plenary indulgence for people who pray for an end to the pandemic, healing for the sick, and the eternal repose of the dead. Plenary indulgences, which remit all temporal punishment due to sin, must be accompanied by full detachment from sin.

In this case, the person must also fulfill the ordinary conditions of an indulgence, which are sacramental confession, reception of the Eucharist, and prayer for the intentions of the pope, by having the will to satisfy the conditions as soon as possible for them.

To receive the indulgence, a person may offer at least a half hour of adoration before the Blessed Sacrament or a half hour of prayer with scripture, or the recitation of the rosary or chaplet of divine mercy "to implore from the Almighty God an end to the epidemic, relief for those who are suffering, and eternal salvation of those whom the Lord has called to himself."

Pope Francis asked people to pray for the lonely, the elderly, doctors, nurses, healthcare workers, government authorities and the police. The pope also stressed the importance of praying for the dead during his Sunday morning Mass livestreamed from his residence in Vatican City.

"These days we are hearing the news of so many people who are dying, men and women who are dying alone without being able to say goodbye to their loved ones. Let us think about them and pray for them," Pope Francis said.

"For families as well, who cannot accompany their loved ones on that journey, we pray in a special way for the dying and for their families," the pope said.