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Archbishop Fisichella presents the Jubilee of prisoners and the socially marginalised

This morning in the Holy See Press Office Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelisation, presented the two main events preceding the conclusion of the Holy Year of Mercy: the Jubilee of Prisoners (5 to 6 November) and the Jubilee of the Socially Excluded (11, 12 and 13 November).

During the Jubilee of Prisoners, it will be possible for the first time for many detainees from all over Italy and other countries to be present in St. Peter's Basilica to take part in their own Jubilee with Pope Francis.

Archbishop Fisichella recalled the Holy Father's great concern for prisoners, as reflected in his visits to prisons during his apostolic trips and the celebration of his first Holy Thursday Mass in the Detention Centre for Minors at Casal del Marmo. Pope Francis, after the promulgation of the Bull convoking the Jubilee, *Misericordiae vultus*, wrote a letter for the implementation of the Jubilee programme in which he stated, "My thoughts also turn to those incarcerated, whose freedom is limited. The Jubilee Year has always constituted an opportunity for great amnesty, which is intended to include the many people who, despite deserving punishment, have become conscious of the injustice they worked and sincerely wish to re-enter society and make their honest contribution to it. May they all be touched in a tangible way by the mercy of the Father Who wants to be close to those who have the greatest need of His forgiveness. They may obtain the Indulgence in the chapels of the prisons. May the gesture of directing their thought and prayer to the Father each time they cross the threshold of their cell signify for them their passage through the Holy Door, because the mercy of God is able to transform hearts, and is also able to transform bars into an experience of freedom".

Therefore, the archbishop explained, the Jubilee programme could not neglect prisoners. "What will be experienced next Sunday in St. Peter's will be repeated in many dioceses all over the world, who will join with the Holy Father in celebrating in a solemn way this day with prisoners. In recent months we wrote to all the Episcopal Conferences in the world, inviting bishops to spend this Sunday visiting prisons and celebrating the Jubilee with the detainees. ... We truly are able to think that this celebration will be echoed all over the world".

He invited detainees and their families to participate in the Jubilee in Rome, along with agents of the Penitentiary Police and other prison officials, chaplains and associations that offer their services inside and outside prisons.

So far more than four thousand people have enrolled, of whom more than a thousand are prisoners, from twelve countries: England, Italy, Latvia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Spain, the United States of America, South Africa, Sweden and Portugal. Furthermore, the presence of a Lutheran delegation from Sweden is to be highlighted”.

The most numerous group is from Italy, where, due to an agreement Ministry of Justice and the General Inspectorate of Chaplains, detainees of all categories will be represented at St. Peter’s. There will be minors, people serving alternatives to custodial sentences in the territory, people under house arrest and definitive detainees with various sentences. “It is worth remembering, also, that in recent months, the collaboration with the Ministry of Justice has enabled six detainees to serve as Jubilee volunteers”, added Archbishop Fisichella.

With regard to the programme, on Saturday 5, the participants will have the opportunity to confess in the Jubilee churches and to make the pilgrimage along Via della Conciliazione towards St. Peter’s Basilica, to pass through the Holy Door. On Sunday, before the celebration of the Eucharist presided by the Holy Father, four testimonies will be heard, embracing the range of the world of prisons: a detainee who converted while in prison, who will speak alongside the victim with whom he has been reconciled; the brother of a person who was killed, who has become an instrument of mercy and forgiveness; a minor who is serving his sentence, and finally, an agent of the Penitentiary Police in daily contact with detainees.

Other characteristics will underline the importance of this day. Firstly, the liturgical service will be performed by prisoners. The hosts used in the Holy Mass will be those produced by prisoners of the Opera di Milan prison, as part of the “Meaning of Bread” project. For this celebration, the crucifix recently restored by the Basilica Chapter will be displayed for the first time. A fourteenth-century wooden cross, it has been present at all Jubilees through history up to the present day, with the exception of the first, convoked in the year 1300 by Pope Boniface VIII. Alongside the cross, the statue of Our Lady of Mercy, protector of prisoners, will be displayed. The child Jesus holds in his hands a set of open handcuffs as a symbol of freedom and trust. Before the Holy Mass, the Pope will greet some of the prisoners and others present. As usual, the Angelus will be recited from the Apostolic Palace and the prisoners will participate in a part of the Square”.

The following week, on Friday 11, Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 November, the Jubilee of the Socially Excluded will be held. “That is, those who for different reasons – from economic precariousness to various illnesses, from loneliness to the lack of family bonds – have difficulty in inserting themselves in the social fabric and often remain at the margins of society, without a home or a place to live”, he explained. Around six thousand participants from different countries – France, Germany, Portugal, England, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Croatia and Switzerland – will be present. The intense Jubilee programme will involve, on Friday 11 November, an encounter in the Paul VI Hall with Pope Francis, who will hear some of their testimonies. In some Roman churches there will be the opportunity to listen to their stories on Saturday 12 November at 10 a.m. The churches are: San Salvatore in Lauro (English); Santa Monica (Dutch); San Luigi dei Francesi (Portuguese); Santi XII Apostoli (French); San Giovanni Battista dei Fiorentini (Polish); Santa Maria in Vallicella (Chiesa Nuova) (German); Santa Maria sopra Minerva (Italian); Sant’Andrea della Valle (Spanish); and Santa Maria Maddalena in Campo Marzio (Slovakian). On Saturday at 5 p.m., there will be a Mercy Vigil in the Basilica of St. Paul Outside-the-Walls. Finally, on Sunday, the Holy Father will preside at the celebration of the Eucharist in St. Peter’s Basilica at 10 a.m.

“On Sunday, as you know, the Holy Door will be closed in all the Churches and Shrines in the world”, concluded Archbishop Fisichella. “The Jubilee Celebration in St. Peter’s is intended to remind the Church of Jesus’ words: ‘The poor you will always have with you’. The closing of the Door of Mercy, therefore, does not mark the end of the Church’s commitment, but rather in the light of the Jubilee we have experienced, reinforces her witness”.
