

Holy Year

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Gate on the fringe of the city.

The official program for celebrations in Rome during the holy year was not yet released when NC News spoke with Msgr. Frayne March 15, but he said it will include such events as Friday Stations of the Cross each week in St. Peter's Square and weekly public recitation of the rosary, also in the square.

Already begun before the holy year's official opening was a Thursday morning multilanguage pilgrims' Mass in St. Peter's Basilica.

Ready for publication by the Vatican is a pilgrims' guide to the holy year written in seven languages — Italian, French, German, English, Spanish, Portuguese and Polish.

Papal general audiences, held every Wednesday, will have an added spiritual depth during the holy year, with congregational singing and periods of common and private prayer.

More than 150 volunteers will act as "greeters" and "helpers" at St. Peter's. They will be able to help pilgrims in at least 20 languages.

The staff at the Vatican's Pastoral Office for Tourists has been strengthened so that any pilgrim will be able to find a willing ear to listen to his concerns and a ready heart to share them.

A holy year as a time of spiritual renewal has its biblical roots in the jubilees observed by Jews at 50-year intervals, when debts were pardoned and slaves were freed. The term "jubilee" itself comes from the Hebrew word "yobel," meaning a ram's horn, which was used to make the trumpet that signaled the beginning of such a time of forgiveness.

When the 1983 holy year was announced by the pope last November some skeptics saw it as the Vatican's way to recoup financial losses sustained by the Church's central administration over the last several years.

But Archbishop Mario Schierano, head of the holy year's central committee, told a recent press conference in Rome, "If it had been for that reason, we wouldn't be celebrating it all over the world simultaneously, something which doesn't serve to bring people to Rome. It is a spiritual event, and it will be celebrated as such."

In fact, the Vatican sustained financial losses in celebrating the last holy year in 1975 and expects to do the same this year. In order to display art for its inspirational value, for example, the Vatican museums plan to open up whole new sections and restructure others to facilitate the passage of extra tourists, which means paying extra attendants and guides.

Whatever the extra expense of the year's activities, the

Vatican, and the pope in particular, evidently consider it worthwhile.

One highly-placed Vatican official told NC News, "This pope is an ascetic, and the notion of a holy year fits right into everything he has always said. He often talks about the dignity of the human person as redeemed by Christ and the need for us to recognize our value and the value of everyone else. The holy year will make us think about that."

I'm Sorry

Rome (NC) — Mehmet Ali Agca, the convicted assailant of Pope John Paul II, said in a letter published in his native Turkey that he admires the pope and is sorry for his crime.

Hurriyet, an Istanbul daily, published a front-page photo March 13 of the Turkish-language letter. It was addressed to Hurriyet's editor, Celalettin Cetin.

The contents were widely reported in Italy, where Agca, 25, is serving a life sentence for his attempted assassination of the pope on May 13, 1981. The reports did not question the letter's authenticity.

The letter said Agca wanted to meet with Cetin in order to explain "the sincere admiration which I feel toward the personality of the pope and his truly great humanity."

"At the same time, I will express my repentance and the tragedy of the terrorist and terrorism," he said.

Agca's letter also said he wanted to talk about "the goodness of Italy, which has treated me in a human way for two years, the goodness of the Vatican, and the goodness of the Italian people."

The letter mentioned the possibility of an upcoming appeal of his life sentence, handed down in July 1981 after a three-day trial. Agca refused to file an appeal after his 1981 conviction, thus forfeiting that right.

Agca, who escaped from a Turkish prison in 1979 and faces the death penalty there as the convicted assassin of a prominent Turkish editor, also wrote about the need for a "service for peace and friendship" in the world today.

"But such service can only

be achieved with dialogue, sincere collaboration, the creation of the just and good, starting even from the errors and evils committed," the letter said. "The current pope is one of the rare men who best grasp this reality, and I am convinced that he will do everything possible in this regard."

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John Paul tell us so often of the need to repent and be renewed for our own sake, and to obtain true peace with justice. He especially recommends the rosary and proper devotion to the Blessed Virgin who gave a similar message at Fatima, Portugal, in the predawn of our dangerous nuclear age.

- I desire peace for all, and so resolve to:
- Pray at least a weekly rosary.
 - Do without a "Favorite Thing" for the entire Holy Year.
 - Think about the need to act for Social Justice.

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