

WORLD & NATION

Pope begins jubilee preparations

VATICAN CITY (CNS) — As candles brightened the darkened interior of St. Peter's Basilica, Pope John Paul II urged Catholics around the world "to discover the glory of God that is revealed in Christ."

The pope celebrated a special evening prayer service Nov. 30, the eve of the first Sunday of Advent, to mark the beginning of three years of prayer, study and charitable acts in preparation for the Holy Year 2000.

"This itinerary will lead us to the threshold of the Holy Door which I will open, if it pleases God, on the night of Christmas 1999," the pope said, referring to the practice of opening a bricked-up door in St. Peter's Basilica at the beginning of a Holy Year.

Pope John Paul has asked Catholics to focus their prayer and study in the first year on the person of Jesus Christ.

"Becoming man, the Son of God embraced human time with his humanity to guide men and women ... toward eternity and to lead them to a participation in divine life, the true heredity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit," the pope said.

"The Liturgy of Light," which preceded the prayer service, was designed to invoke the truth that Christ is the light of the world, said Archbishop Sergio Sebastiani, secretary-general of the Vatican's jubilee preparatory committee.

"It is as if we are living in a world of darkness: the darkness of disorder, corruption, violence, hatred, materialism, hedonism," the archbishop told Vatican Radio.

"In this darkness, we become aware that there is a light which can guide us, which can truly give meaning to our lives, and it is toward this light that we must walk," he said.

In his homily during the prayer service, the pope said that Christ's victory over sin and death has made it possible for all people to accomplish good in his name.

That possibility, he said, must become a reality as Christians work for "authentic peace, the fruit of justice and love."

Bishop expresses concerns about federal welfare laws

LAFAYETTE, La. — Bishop Edward J. O'Donnell of Lafayette voiced "grave concerns" over federal welfare reform that took effect Oct. 1 and its impact on Louisiana's poor.

"Time limits and lectures are no substitute for jobs and wages that can support a family," he said in a statement read by Una Hargrave, director of the diocesan Office for Justice and Peace, at a welfare forum held in Lafayette during November.

Bishop O'Donnell said his diocese would work with state officials, but reminded participants that diocesan offices "cannot solve all the needs of the poor."



Pope John Paul II is surrounded by incense during vespers Nov. 30 at St. Peter's Basilica. The service opened three years of preparation for the year 2000.

At the end of the liturgy, the pope led the congregation in reciting a prayer he wrote for Catholics to recite during 1997 as part of their preparation for the jubilee.

Continuing his comments about Advent and the upcoming jubilee Dec. 1 during his midday blessing, the pope said, "the coming three years will be a time of strong spiritual and apostolic commitment for the local churches spread throughout the world."

"With the jubilee, the church intends to appeal to everyone's heart so that they will

grow in listening to God and in the constant search for fraternal solidarity," he said.

"Now is the time to defeat laziness and mediocrity, renewing our entire existence in the light of the Gospel," Pope John Paul said.

"Now is the time to rediscover the value of prayer," he said.

"Along with prayer," he added, "there also must be a strong commitment of charity toward our needy brothers and sisters in whom we encounter and serve Christ."

Vatican group to study delicate historical issues

VATICAN CITY — Anti-Semitism, the Inquisitions and other delicate subjects pertaining to church history are to be examined at length in Vatican-sponsored initiatives leading up to the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Vatican officials said.

"These are of course very difficult topics," papal theologian Father Georges Cottier told CNS Nov. 27. "Especially where the Inquisitions are concerned, because there are so many slogans and fixed ideas involved. So naturally they have to be treated in a deliberate, conscientious way."

Father Cottier, a member of the committee coordinating Jubilee events, said the Vatican would release a study on anti-Semitism next year and hold a seminar on the Inquisitions in 1998.

Priest condemns budget

WASHINGTON — The poor have already paid a disproportionate price in efforts to balance the federal budget, and must not suffer more, a Catholic Charities official said Nov. 26.

"In the name of the 30 million Americans living in poverty, we must insist: Enough is enough! There cannot and must not be more budget cuts to programs that serve poor people," said Father John White, associate director of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Rockville Centre, N.Y.

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