

Open wide the doors to Christ

Pope to use new, old rituals in opening Holy Door

By Cindy Wooden and John Thavis
Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY — Pope John Paul II will push open the Holy Door at St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve, inaugurating the Holy Year for the new millennium with a new ritual.

The most noticeable difference from holy years past will be the absence of a hammer, said Bishop Piero Marini, master of papal liturgical ceremonies. The wall sealing the Holy Door shut was to be dismantled after a brief Dec. 15 ceremony, taking away the symbolic value of having the pope strike the wall with the hammer three times, Bishop Marini said during a Dec. 14 press conference.

"Elements of the old ritual which have become obsolete will be replaced by others which better express the biblical and liturgical significance of the Holy Door," he said.

When Pope Alexander VI opened the Holy Door on Christmas 1499, "he used a mason's hammer, and the blows were not completely symbolic; the pope tried to break through part of the wall," the bishop said.

For centuries, the opening ceremony included a long pause to allow masons to finish taking the wall down before the pope crossed the threshold.

Pope John Paul will push on the huge, ornamental bronze doors with both hands, Bishop Marini said. Because the doors are extremely heavy, workmen inside the basilica will pull on them as the pope pushes.

Another change for the Holy Year 2000, the bishop said, is the end of having the basilica's confessors wipe the threshold and door posts with cloths soaked in holy water.

Instead, Bishop Marini said, Catholics from Asia and Oceania will mark the doorway with perfume and decorate it with flowers while traditional Japanese music plays.

The flowers and perfume are meant to honor Christ — the gate or doorway of salvation — and to be a sign of the joy which was part of the biblical jubilee years, the bishop said.

"The joy expressed by the flowers and fragrances adorning the door replaces

the penitential sign of the purifying water formerly sprinkled on the door-jambs" by the confessors, he said. Like the Catholics from Asia and Oceania, representatives from every continent will have a special role during the ceremony as a concrete sign that Christ's birth, death and resurrection are important for the whole world, Bishop Marini said.

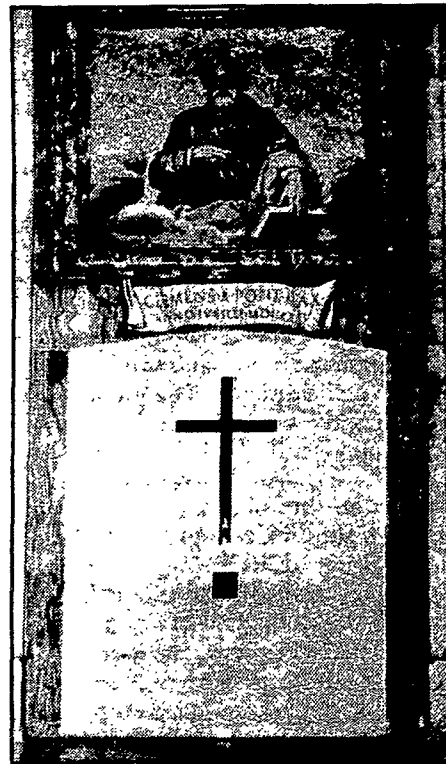
Representing Africa, a group of Catholics from Onitsha, Nigeria, will play traditional horns in a call to all people to join the celebration, he said. Lay men and women from the Americas and Europe will form a procession to carry the Gospel to the basilica's main altar.

Bishop Marini said that as of Dec. 14, the Vatican had received requests for 55,000 tickets to watch the opening of the Holy Door and attend the Christmas Mass at midnight. St. Peter's Basilica, he said, can hold a maximum of 7,000 people.

It is up to officials at the Prefecture of the Papal Household to decide who gets tickets.

While St. Peter's Basilica will hold center stage during Holy Year 2000, Rome's other three patriarchal basilicas — newly cleaned and restored — will host important jubilee events and a steady stream of pilgrims.

Pope John Paul II plans to lead ceremonies at the basilicas of St. John Lateran, St. Mary Major and St. Paul's Outside



CNS

A mosaic of St. Peter hangs over the Holy Door in this view from the interior of St. Peter's Basilica. Pope John Paul II will unseal and open the door on Christmas Eve for the start of the Jubilee Holy Year. The event will be broadcast in tape delay on EWTN.

the Walls during the first month of jubilee activities.

And for the first time in the history of holy years, the pope will open the Holy Doors of all four major basilicas, symbolizing the spiritual passage offered the faithful during a jubilee year.

Traditionally, the basilicas have marked penitential stops on a pilgrimage route through Rome. Although the conditions for gaining jubilee-year indulgences have been expanded, prayer in the basilicas remains a key element for pilgrims seeking an indulgence in Rome.

The basilicas have been spruced up with funds from the church and the Italian government, with the church restoring the inside and Italy cleaning up the areas outside the buildings.

On Christmas Day, the pope will travel across town to St. John Lateran, the cathedral of Rome and the first Christian basilica constructed in the city, where he will open the Holy Door and lead an evening vespers service.

The pope will open the Holy Door at St. Mary Major Jan. 1, then celebrate Mass at its high altar, under which is a shrine believed to contain fragments of Jesus' cradle.

At St. Paul's Outside the Walls, built by the Emperor Constantine in the fourth century and rebuilt after a fire, the pope will open the Holy Door and lead an ecumenical prayer service Jan. 18.

Rochester Diocese to unseal holy doors

By Kathleen Schwar
Assistant Editor

From Rome to Rochester to Hornell, the opening of holy doors will symbolize the start of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000.

As Pope John Paul II opens the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica on Christmas Eve, Bishop Matthew H. Clark will ceremonially open side doors of Sacred Heart Cathedral.

Cathedrals across the country joined in the symbolic gesture of sealing their doors during Advent of 1998 to serve as a reminder of preparations for the Jubilee Year. And a few parishes sealed their doors as well.

In Hornell on Dec. 24, Father James Jaeger will open the doors to St. Ann's Church, which have been covered with

embroidered red cloth.

"The doors really have a certain symbolic nature as far as linking us; we're making this pilgrimage together," said Father Thomas Mull, pastor of Sacred Heart.

Bishop Clark and Father Jaeger will open the doors prior to midnight Mass. Elsewhere in the diocese, symbolically closed doors will be opened on New Year's Eve.

In Penn Yan, St. Michael's Parish has invited the other six communities in its planning group to a New Year's Eve Mass at 5 p.m., before which it will open church doors. A painting by a St. Michael's parishioner had been placed across the inner doors over the past year.

"We'll all come together for the celebration," said Terri Milam, St. Michael's secretary.

Whether on New Year's Eve or New Year's Day, parishes from one end of the diocese to the other will be praying and singing to greet the Jubilee Year 2000.

St. Ann's Church in Hornell will host an ecumenical service at 6:30 p.m. New Year's Eve, following a short candlelight procession through town. The theme for the march is "Jesus is the Light of the World."

At Holy Family Church in Auburn, Father James C. Burke, priest administrator, will preside over a 4:30 p.m. Mass and then proceed to Stella Maris Retreat and Conference Center in Skaneateles, where he'll say midnight Mass for a retreat organized by Deacon John Toman-dl.

"What could be a better way to begin the new millennium than by having a Mass?" Father Burke asked.

Correction

A Holy Redeemer School class was misidentified on Page 1 of the Dec. 16 Catholic Courier. Sylvia Deisenroth, now at Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, Brighton, recognized herself in the front far left, and Father Francis Vogt across from her, far right.

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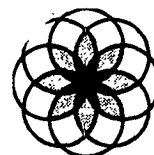
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