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Pope Francis delivers the Regina Coeli noon prayer in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican, Sunday, May 21, 2023. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)

by Associated Press

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Pope Francis will travel to Portugal for World Youth Day in the first week of August and include a stop at the popular Marian shrine in Fatima, the Vatican said May 22.

The Aug. 2-6 visit is longer than originally expected and covers almost the entire week of the big Catholic rally that St. John Paul II inaugurated to try to invigorate young people in their faith.

Francis is staying in Lisbon for the length of the visit but will make a day trip to Fatima on Aug. 5. Francis previously traveled there in 2017 to mark the 100th anniversary of one of the most unique events of the 20th-century Catholic Church: the visions of the Virgin Mary reported by three shepherd children and the "secrets" she told them.

Francis' visit this time around comes as war is raging in Ukraine, providing a comparison to when the original visions were reported at a time when Europe was in the throes of World War I.

The visit comes as the Portuguese Catholic Church is reckoning with its legacy of clergy sexual abuse. Earlier this year, an independent report found that more than 4,800 people may have been victims starting in 1950. Previously, senior Portuguese church officials had claimed only a handful of cases had occurred.

There was no word on whether Francis would meet with victims, as he has done on several occasions elsewhere.

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The Portuguese Bishops Conference expressed "huge joy" at the Vatican announcement of Francis' visit and said hundreds of thousands of young people from around the world are expected in Lisbon. The rally was originally scheduled for 2022 but was postponed a year because of the COVID-19 pandemic; the last international World Youth Day was held in 2019 in Panama.

"We hope that the presence of Pope Francis among us, and which includes a significant pilgrimage to the Fatima shrine, will provide a powerful sense of renewal and grace for the church in Portugal," the bishops’ conference said in a statement.

Francis' other travel this year is expected to include a quick trip to Marseille, France, on Sept. 23 to address a meeting of Mediterranean bishops. Also under study is a proposed visit to Mongolia starting in late August.