News

A white man wearing a white hardhat crouches on a metal platform in the sky and touches th

French President Emmanuel Macron touches the top of the spire of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris Dec. 8, 2023, which was ravaged by a fire in 2019 that sent its spire crumbling down, as restoration works continue a year before its reopening to the public. Macron announced that day he has invited Pope Francis to attend the reopening. (OSV News photo/Christophe Ena, Reuters)

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Paris — December 11, 2023

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A year from the reopening of the Notre Dame Cathedral in the heart of the French capital, the cross is again overlooking Paris from the top of the newly installed wooden spire. On Dec. 8, 2024, the most famous cathedral in the world will welcome the faithful again. The French president said he will extend an invitation for Pope Francis to attend the historic moment.

"Never has anyone alive seen Notre Dame as we shall see it," Fr. Olivier Ribadeau Dumas, rector-archpriest of the cathedral, told OSV News.

On Nov. 28, Parisians saw the spire of the "dame" of the city reinstalled -- its upper part was placed over its wooden structure, 315 feet above the ground. On Dec. 6, its

cross was lifted into the air by a crane, and installed on top.

"It was a spectacular moment," Ribadeau Dumas told OSV News. "Now you can really make out the silhouette of the cathedral. It is the most visible symbol of the cathedral's resurrection."

The rector of the cathedral welcomed President Emmanuel Macron at Notre Dame's reconstruction site on Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, together with Archbishop Laurent Ulrich of Paris. In accordance with the French 1905 law of separation of church and state, the cathedral is the property of the French state, although it is assigned to the Archdiocese of Paris for Catholic worship.

"Since April 2019, the entire nation has been rebuilding," Macron told reporters. "And it's very moving to be here a year before. You can see the extraordinary progress of the work on this nave, the choir and the frames and the spire," he said.

In an interview with France 2 television, Macron said he would invite Francis to attend the cathedral's reopening. "I hope so, in any case we'll invite him," he said when asked about the pope's possible presence. "The invitation will be extended. But it's not for me to answer on his behalf," he added.

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Macron, in his sixth visit to the reconstruction site, climbed to the scaffolding of the newly installed spire. The spire, Notre Dame's iconic topping, collapsed April 15, 2019, amid a fire that shocked France and the whole world. After debates on how it should be rebuilt, French and church authorities decided to rebuild the spire exactly the same as before.

During his visit, the French president paid a special tribute to General Jean-Louis Georgelin, who oversaw the restoration site until his sudden death during a mountain accident on Aug. 18, 2023. His name has been engraved on a beam of the spire. "It is thanks to him that the work will be completed on time," Ribadeau Dumas told OSV News.

A new copper rooster is to be installed over the spire's cross before Christmas. It will contain relics of the patron saints of Paris, a piece of wood believed to be from Christ's crown of thorns, and a roll of paper listing the names of the builders of the

new spire and of all the companies involved in rebuilding the cathedral.

The previous rooster, or cockerel, which was damaged in the fire, will be placed in the future Notre Dame museum, which Macron announced will be created in the Hôtel-Dieu building, a stone's throw from the cathedral.

Inside the cathedral, one last piece of scaffolding remains under the transept crossing. The workmen are reinstalling the stones in the floor, which they had to remove to make way for pipes and electrical cables.

Macron announced the launch of a competition for the creation of six contemporary stained-glass windows for the side chapels, retracing the history of the fire and the restoration work. Based on the Paris archbishop's idea, they will replace current non-figurative stained-glass windows.