Vatican

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Pope Francis smiles as he arrives to celebrate Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican March 24, 2024. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

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Pope Francis' planned visit to Venice will include a Mass in the city's famous St. Mark's Square, a meeting with young people from the archdiocese and a meeting with female detainees at an island prison where the Vatican has set up its pavilion for a major international contemporary art exhibition.

The pope will travel to and from Venice April 28 by helicopter from the Vatican City State heliport and he will move around the Venetian lagoon by boat, according to details released by the Vatican March 25.

The one-day trip will begin with an early morning visit to the Giudecca women's prison on Giudecca Island, south of the historic center of Venice. There he will offer remarks and meet prison officials, staff and personally greet about 80 women detained there.

The pope will then visit the prison's chapel where he will be welcomed by Cardinal José Tolentino de Mendonça, prefect of the Dicastery for Culture and Education and curator of the Holy See's pavilion for the Venice Biennale art exhibition.
The pope will give a speech and greet local officials and artists whose work will be on display.

He will travel by boat from Giudecca Island to the Basilica of St. Mary of Health, a 17th-century church built to honor Mary, invoking her protection and intercession for an end to a devastating plague that killed nearly one-third of the population in the 1630s. The pope will meet with young people and give a speech.

Accompanied by a delegation of young people, Francis will then go to St. Mark's Square by crossing a so-called "bridge of boats," a floating pontoon bridge made from boats linked together and a traditional Venetian way of temporarily connecting opposite shores.

Traditionally, the 170-yard-long floating structure is built every year on Nov. 21, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, allowing the faithful to cross the

Grand Canal from St. Mark's Square to the basilica; the tradition began as thanks for deliverance from the plague.

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The pope will greet local government officials, celebrate Mass and pray the Regina Coeli at noon in St. Mark's Square.

He will make a private visit to St. Mark's Basilica and venerate the saint's relics before going by boat to a naval college's heliport to return to the Vatican by 2:30 that afternoon.

It will be the first time a pope visits the Venice Biennale where the Holy See has had a pavilion since 2013.

This year's pavilion is located at the Giudecca prison, which used to be an ancient convent, and is dedicated to the theme of human rights and to those who live on the margins of society, "where our eyes rarely end up," the dicastery had said in a press release Feb. 8.

The event runs from April 20 to Nov. 24 with the title, "With my eyes," inspired by the pope's insistence that people go outside their comfort zone and pay attention to realities that are ignored and often left out of cultural discussions, it said.

The pavilion will feature works by international artists, including the late Corita Kent, a pop artist and former U.S. member of the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart, and U.S. actress Zoë Saldaña-Perego and her husband, Italian film director and artist Marco Perego-Saldaña.

Francis' last trips in Italy were in 2022 when he visited Matera for the conclusion of the 27th national eucharistic congress, Assisi for an "Economy of Francesco" event and L'Aquila for the opening of the basilica's holy door.