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Crowds gather at Rome's Colosseum for the nighttime Way of the Cross service on Good Friday, April 7, 2023. Released from the hospital just five days before Good Friday 2023, Pope Francis did not go to the Colosseum. (CNS/Chris Warde-Jones)

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Vatican City — March 26, 2024
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For the first time in his 11-year papacy, Pope Francis has chosen to write his own meditations for the Good Friday Way of the Cross service at Rome's Colosseum, the head of the Vatican press office said.

For the service March 29, Pope Francis has chosen the theme "In prayer with Jesus on the way of the cross," Matteo Bruni, the press office director, told reporters March 26.

St. John Paul II began a tradition in 1985 of entrusting the writing of the meditations to cardinals and other church personalities, well-known writers or groups of people, including young people and journalists. However, he wrote the reflections himself for the Colosseum ceremony during the Holy Year 2000.

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote the meditations for Good Friday 2005, less than a month before being elected Pope Benedict XVI. Throughout his pontificate, though, he entrusted the drafting to different people each year.

The meditations in 2023 focused on the theme, "Voices of peace in a world at war." Several dicasteries of the Roman Curia formulated the prayers and meditations drawing from comments made at meetings with Pope Francis by people suffering from a lack of peace.

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Pope Francis has asked Catholics to observe 2024 as a year of prayer in preparation for the Holy Year 2025.

The choice of "in prayer with Jesus" as the theme for the Way of the Cross, Bruni told reporters, is an indication that it will be "an act of meditation and spirituality with Jesus at the center."

Vatican News reported the meditations will have fewer direct references to current events than many previous editions had when migrants and refugees, victims of trafficking or people from countries at war helped write or inspired the reflections.

Bruni also told reporters that as of March 26 Pope Francis was still planning on attending the service. However, the weather and the pope's health will be the deciding factors. Released from the hospital just five days before Good Friday 2023, Pope Francis did not go to the Colosseum.