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Pope Francis blows a kiss to inmates unable to meet him personally during a Holy Thursday v

Pope Francis blows a kiss to inmates unable to meet him personally during a Holy Thursday visit to Rome's Regina Coeli jail April 17. The pope met with about 70 inmates, along with the prison workers and chaplains, for about 30 minutes. (CNS/Vatican Media)



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Pope Francis visited Rome's Regina Coeli prison on April 17, where despite his ongoing recovery from double pneumonia, he continued his Holy Thursday tradition of meeting with inmates.

The pope met with about 70 inmates, along with the prison workers and chaplains, for about 30 minutes on Thursday afternoon, according to a statement released by the Holy See Press Office.

"I like to do every year what Jesus did on Holy Thursday, the washing of the feet, in prison," the pope told the inmates. "This year I cannot do it, but I can and I want to be close to you. I pray for you and for your families."

Despite a doctor-mandated two-month convalescence following his recent five-week hospitalization, Francis has made several public appearances during the last two weeks. He greeted the faithful at the end of Palm Sunday Mass at the Vatican on April 13.

During the closed-door prison meeting, the pope individually greeted each inmate. In photos released by the Vatican, some inmates are seen handing the pope notes and cards. In one photo, the 88-year-old pontiff is seen blowing a kiss to the prisoners as they wave farewell behind closed doors.

Pope Francis speaks to inmates during a Holy Thursday visit to Rome's Regina Coeli jail.

Pope Francis speaks to inmates during a Holy Thursday visit to Rome's Regina Coeli jail April 17. Francis began his Holy Week prison visits just weeks after his election as pope in 2013. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

Francis began his Holy Week prison visits just weeks after his election as pope in 2013, where he scandalized some traditionalist Catholics by washing the feet of at least two Muslims and two women housed in a juvenile detention center.

The pope has frequently visited prisons, both Rome and during his travels abroad. In 2016, he celebrated a special Vatican Mass for inmates and during a July 2021 heat wave in Rome, he sent over 15,000 ice creams to prisoners housed at two of the city's jails.

On Dec. 26, 2024, a day after he opened the Vatican's holy door for the 2025 Jubilee, Francis opened a special holy door at Rebibia Prison on the outskirts of Rome. It marked the first time that a pope had opened a holy door in a prison.

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"Every time I come to a prison, I ask myself: Why them and not me?" the pope said in a 2024 interview. "Because we all can fall, the important thing is to not lose hope, to hold onto that anchor of hope," he said.

"We have to accompany the prisoners," the pope continued. "Jesus says that on the day of judgment we will be judged on this: 'I was in prison, and you visited me.' "

The Vatican's Holy Week celebrations will continue on Good Friday, with a Passion liturgy at St. Peter's Basilica and the Way of the Cross procession at Rome's Colosseum. It will conclude with an outdoor Mass in St. Peter's Square on Easter Sunday.

The Vatican has not confirmed whether the pope will participate in the upcoming liturgies.

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