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Pope Francis greets the crowd before delivering his Easter blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city a

Pope Francis greets the crowd before delivering his Easter blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city and the world) from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican April 20, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)



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A convalescing Pope Francis was greeted by cheers as he appeared on the loggia of St. Peter's Basilica as a stand-in delivered his Easter message – a clarion call that "every life is precious," including the unborn, migrants and the sick and elderly.

"Easter is the celebration of life!," the 88-year-old pope said on April 20 in a message delivered by Archbishop Diego Giovanni Ravelli. "God created us for life and wants the human family to rise again/"

The pope, who is recovering from a five-week hospitalization for double pneumonia where he twice nearly died, did not participate in Easter services, but his unannounced appearance drew sustained applause.

"Happy Easter!," the pope said to the thundering crowd of pilgrims.

Earlier, Francis met briefly with Vice President JD Vance, a Catholic who has tangled with the pope on issues of immigration and theology.

Related: Pope Francis meets Vice President JD Vance on Easter Sunday
Pope Francis meets briefly with U.S. Vice President JD Vance, and his translator, in the papal r

Pope Francis meets briefly with U.S. Vice President JD Vance, and his translator, in the papal residence, the Domus Sanctae Marthae, at the Vatican April 20, 2025. The Vatican said the meeting was an opportunity to exchange best wishes for Easter. (CNS/Vatican Media)

At the conclusion of the remarks delivered by Ravelli, the Vatican's Master of Pontifical Liturgical Celebrations, the pope — with a strained voice — offered his Easter blessing. Shouts of viva il papa! ("long live the pope") rippled through St. Peter's Square.

Francis, who continues to rely on supplemental oxygen on occasion, appeared without nasal tubes for the occasion.

Before the blessing, Ravelli delivered the pontiff’s traditional urbi et orbi (to the city and the world) message.

“The life of a child in the mother’s womb, as well as the lives of the elderly and the sick, who in more and more countries are looked upon as people to be discarded," "What a great thirst for death, for killing, we witness each day in the many conflicts raging in different parts of our world!"



Pope Francis receives U.S. Vice President JD Vance, left, before bestowing the Urbi et Orbi (Latin for to the city and to the world) blessing at the end of the Easter mass presided over by Cardinal Angelo Comastri in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sunday, April 20, 2025. At center the head of the papal houshold Bishop Leonardo Sapienza. (AP, HO/Vatican Media)

"How much violence we see, often even within families, directed at women and children! How much contempt is stirred up at times towards the vulnerable, the marginalized, and migrants!," he said.

For weeks, the Vatican had declined to comment on whether the pope would be able to participate in the celebration. When he finally appeared, just a few minutes after Roman noon, he was met with sustained applause from pilgrims below.

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The pope's annual Easter reflection put the spotlight on a number of current political hotspots, though his most extensive reflections were offered on the ongoing conflict in the Holy Land.

"The growing climate of antisemitism throughout the world is worrisome," the pope said.

"Yet at the same time, I think of the people of Gaza, and its Christian community in particular, where the terrible conflict continues to cause death and destruction and to create a dramatic and deplorable humanitarian situation," he said.

"I appeal to the warring parties: call a ceasefire, release the hostages and come to the aid of a starving people that aspires to a future of peace," Francis said.

The pope also offered a litany of prayers for other countries facing violence, terrorism and war, especially in Ukraine, where he expressed his desire for "a just and lasting peace."

"On this day, I would like all of us to hope anew and to revive our trust in others, including those who are different than ourselves, or who come from distant lands, bringing unfamiliar customs, ways of life and ideas," the pope said. "For all of us are children of God!"



Pope Francis tours St. Peter's Square in his popemobile in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican Sunday, April 20, 2025.(AP/Gregorio Borgia)

After the blessing, the pope made a surprise loop around St. Peter's Square on the popemobile. The pope blessed children and passed out candy during the 10-minute outing, which was his most extensive public appearance since his March 23 release from hospital.

Forty cardinals and bishops, 250 priests and some 50,000 pilgrims from all over the world took part in the Vatican's Easter Sunday celebration. More than 10,000 fresh flowers from the Netherlands adorned the outdoor altar, with temperatures reaching 70 degrees by the conclusion of the liturgy.

Cardinal Angelo Comastri, retired archpriest of St. Peter's Basilica, served as the main celebrant of the Mass.

The 81-year-old Italian prelate delivered the pope's homily, where he encouraged the pilgrims to look for Christ's risen presence in the world.

Pope Francis greets people from the popemobile

Pope Francis greets people from the popemobile after appearing on the central balcony of St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican after Easter Mass April 20, 2025. (CNS/Lola Gomez)

"He is no longer a prisoner of death, he is no longer wrapped in the shroud, and therefore we cannot confine him to a fairy tale, we cannot make him a hero of the ancient world, or think of him as a statue in a museum," Comastri said, reading the pope’s homily. "On the contrary, we must look for him and this is why we cannot remain stationary."

"He is alive and is with us always, shedding the tears of those who suffer and adding to the beauty of life through the small acts of love carried out by each of us," the homily continued.

Although Francis did not attend the Saturday Easter Vigil in St. Peter's on April 19, he made a surprise visit to the basilica about 90 minutes prior to the start of Mass.