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A journalist flips through a faithful reproduction of the 15th century Borso D'Este Bible, comprising two illuminated manuscripts, during its unveiling at the Italian Senate as part of the Vatican's Holy Year celebrations in Rome, Thursday, Nov. 13, 2025. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

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Rome — November 14, 2025
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A 15th-century Bible which is considered one of the most spectacular examples of Renaissance illuminated manuscripts went on display in Rome on Thursday as part of the Vatican's Holy Year celebrations.

The two-volume Borso D'Este Bible, which is known for its opulent miniature paintings in gold and Afghan lapis lazuli, was unveiled in the Italian Senate, where it will remain on display until Jan. 16.

The Bible is usually kept in a safe at a library in Modena and is rarely seen in public. It was transported to Rome under heavy security and its arrival in the Senate was televised, as workers hauled two big red crates from an unmarked van and then extracted the volumes, which were covered in bubble wrap.

The Bible, commissioned by Duke Borso D'Este, was created between 1455 and 1461 by calligrapher Pietro Paolo Marone and illustrators Taddeo Crivelli and Franco dei Russi. The Italian Culture Ministry considers it one of the highest expressions of miniature art "that unites sacred value, historic relevance, precious materials and refined aesthetics."

It will remain behind humidity-controlled plate glass during its Roman sojourn, but visitors can "read" it digitally via touch screen displays featuring ultra-high-resolution images.

Alessandra Necci, director of Gallerie Estense in Modena, where the Bible is usually kept, describes it as the "Mona Lisa of illuminated manuscripts" because of its exquisite artistry and religious inspiration.

Archbishop Rino Fisichella, who is in charge of the Vatican's Jubilee celebrations, told the presentation Thursday he hoped visitors would be inspired to go home and read their own Bibles after seeing the beauty of the Borso D'Este version.

He said the splendor of the text was a "provocation" that forces contemplation not just of its beauty but of the word of God contained in the text.

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The Bible was commissioned by Borso D'Este as part of his celebration of faith and his own prominence, and was kept in the Este family until the last duke, Francesco V of Austria-Este, took it with him when he fled to Vienna in 1859, according to a history of the Bible on the Italian Senate's website.

Necci said Borso D'Este spent what was then an exorbitant amount of money to create the most expensive book of the time. By demonstrating such opulence, the duke "wanted to celebrate not only the sacred book par excellence but also the elevated idea he had of himself and his dynasty," she said.

It remained in the possession of the Habsburgs even after the Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved after World War I. In 1922, after Archduke Charles I died, his widow Zita of Bourbon-Parma decided to sell it to a Parisian antiquarian.

Giovanni Treccani, an Italian entrepreneur and arts patron, learned of the sale and travelled to Paris to buy it in 1923, paying 3,300,000 French francs. Treccani, whose name is famous today as the publisher of top Italian encyclopaedias, then donated it to the Italian state.

The Bible is being kept in a specially regulated display case that employs a conditioning system that maintains constant humidity to protect the parchment pages, which are particularly sensitive to changes in temperature and humidity, officials said.