

## *The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph*

When you think about the future, does it fill you with despair and doubt, or with strength and certainty? Every twenty-five years the Catholic Church remembers the birth of Jesus Christ with a yearlong celebration of his Incarnation. Just as you celebrate 25th anniversaries in your family, so the church marks such milestones. We are entering a 2,025th anniversary, a year of jubilee.

Occasionally, popes declare extraordinary years of jubilee, as Pope Francis did in 2016 with the Year of Mercy, and as Pope John Paul II did in 1983 recalling the 1,950th anniversary of the death and resurrection of Christ. But we have celebrated dozens of ordinary jubilees ever since Pope Boniface VIII started the custom in the year 1300. In my own life, if I live another 25 years for the next ordinary jubilee, I'll be in my upper 90s. I'll confess the thought of that made me think about the future with doubt, not certainty.

But this is what Pope Francis said when he first announced this jubilee: "We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision."

Many people participate in a jubilee with a pilgrimage. Pilgrims to Rome enter its four major basilicas through one of multiple sets of massive doors—one that is literally bricked shut most of the time. The bricks are removed once every twenty-five years so that pilgrims may enter the basilicas through these holy doors. This year Pope Francis opened a fifth door, this one located inside one of the prisons of Rome, so that those who are paying their debt to society may find an aid to their conversion of heart. Prisoners especially need new strength and certainty when looking to the future.

Perhaps Pope Francis is presenting a reminder that each of us lives in a metaphorical prison—sometimes imposed on us by ill health, bad associations or circumstances, and sometimes a prison of our own choosing through bad habits, selfishness, and sin. You don't have to go to Rome to make such a pilgrimage of the heart. This jubilee year invites us to remove any obstacles to hope.

Today's responsorial psalm is one of several pilgrim songs in the bible. It follows the account of young Samuel's pilgrimage to the temple and precedes the account of Jesus' pilgrimage to the same temple at the age of twelve. Psalm 84 preserves a song that ordinary pilgrims sang on their way to that temple in Jerusalem. We sang, "Blessed are they who dwell in your house, O Lord," and our cantor sang for us, "How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts. My soul is longing and yearning for the courts of the Lord.... Blessed the people whose strength is in you, whose heart is set on pilgrim ways."

To enter this jubilee year, we each may benefit from reflecting on some questions: Does the future fill you with despair and doubt, or with strength and certainty? Do you feel imprisoned by something? Is there some path you need to take? Has Christ opened a new door for you? Can you see it? What would it take for you to walk through that door? As Pope Francis said, "The forthcoming Jubilee can contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire."