

JUBILEE YEAR OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

On January 10th, 2026, Pope Leo XIV did something that surprised even the most seasoned Vatican watchers. Just four days after closing the 2025 Jubilee Year of Hope, he announced a new extraordinary jubilee — the Year of St. Francis of Assisi — running from January 10th, 2026 to January 10th, 2027. It marks the 800th anniversary of the death of one of the most beloved figures in all of Christian history, and it comes with a very real spiritual reward: a plenary indulgence. Whether you are a lifelong Catholic or someone just beginning to explore the faith, this is a year you will not want to miss.

What Is a Jubilee Year?

The 2026 Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi

A jubilee year is a special period declared by the Pope during which the faithful are invited to deepen their prayer, seek forgiveness, perform acts of mercy, and receive what the Church calls an indulgence. The concept is rooted in the Old Testament Book of Leviticus, where God commanded Israel to observe a jubilee every fifty years — a time of liberation, restoration, and fresh starts.

In the Catholic Church, ordinary jubilees occur every twenty-five years. However, popes can also declare extraordinary jubilees for special occasions — as Pope Leo XIV has done here to mark St. Francis's eight hundredth anniversary.

Who Was St. Francis of Assisi?

Francis of Assisi (c. 1181–1226) was born into a wealthy merchant family in central Italy. After a period of illness and spiritual crisis, he underwent a dramatic conversion and embraced a life of radical poverty, prayer, and service to the poor. He founded the Franciscan Order, one of the largest religious orders in the world today, and inspired thousands to live the Gospel in a simple, joyful way.

He is perhaps best known for his love of creation — captured in his famous Canticle of the Creatures — and his tender care for the sick and marginalised. He is the patron saint of ecology, animals, and Italy. Pope John Paul II chose Assisi as a site for world peace prayers. Pope Francis, who died in April 2025, famously took his name in Francis's honour.

Eight hundred years after his death on 3 October 1226, Francis remains one of the most recognized saints in the world — admired not just by Catholics but by people of all faiths and none.

What Is the Plenary Indulgence and How Do You Receive It?

An indulgence is a remission of the temporal punishment that remains due to sins even after they have been forgiven in confession. A plenary (full) indulgence removes all such punishment. It is one of the most significant spiritual gifts the Church can offer.

To receive the plenary indulgence during the Year of St. Francis, the Vatican's Apostolic Penitentiary has outlined the following conditions:

Go to sacramental confession (within a reasonable time before or after).

Receive Holy Communion.

Pray for the intentions of the Holy Father (an Our Father, a Hail Mary, and a Glory Be are sufficient).

Be genuinely detached from all sin, including venial sin.

Make a pious pilgrimage to a Franciscan church or any church connected to St. Francis.

For those who are homebound or unable to make a physical pilgrimage due to illness or age, the indulgence is also available by spiritually uniting yourself to the jubilee celebrations and offering your sufferings to God.

Where Can You Go on Pilgrimage?

The most significant Franciscan pilgrimage sites include:

The Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi, Italy — the primary site and burial place of Francis.

The Portiuncula chapel (Santa Maria degli Angeli, near Assisi) — where Francis founded the Franciscan movement.

Any Franciscan church or ministry in your own country or diocese.

You do not need to travel to Italy to receive the indulgence. Franciscan churches can be found in almost every country in the world. Contact your diocese or local Franciscan community for the nearest designated site.

What Does Pope Leo XIV Want Catholics to Take from This Year?

In his letter announcing the jubilee, Pope Leo XIV called on the faithful to take Francis as a 'model of holiness' — not just an admired historical figure, but a living inspiration for how to navigate a divided, anxious world. The Pope highlighted three dimensions of Franciscan spirituality that he believes are urgently needed today:

Simplicity — resisting the relentless pressure of consumerism and finding freedom in less.

Fraternity — building genuine bonds across divisions of politics, class, and culture.

Care for creation — living out the Church's ecological teachings in practical daily choices.

This is a year designed to be more than a historical commemoration. It is a call to transformation.

How Can You Participate If You Cannot Travel?

Not everyone can make a pilgrimage, and the Church understands this. Here are practical ways to enter into the spirit of the Year of St. Francis wherever you are:

Read a biography of St. Francis — Chesterton's 'St. Francis of Assisi' remains a beautiful starting point.

Pray the Prayer of St. Francis ('Lord, make me an instrument of your peace') as a daily offering.

Perform a work of mercy — visit the sick, feed the hungry, or volunteer with the homeless.

Fast from something — social media, meat, alcohol — in the Franciscan spirit of simplicity.

Visit your local Franciscan church and spend time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

In Conclusion

The Year of St. Francis is a remarkable gift — a full twelve months to slow down, look at the life of one of history's greatest Christians, and ask what his radical joy and simplicity might mean for your life today. The plenary indulgence is available, the pilgrimage sites are open, and the invitation is for every Catholic, wherever they live. Eight hundred years on, Francis of Assisi is still pointing the way.