

Ordinary Time, Winter 2025

Reflection

When the song of the angels is stilled, when the star in the sky is gone, when the kings and princes are home, when the shepherds are back with their flocks, the work of Christmas begins...

~~Howard Thurman

The Christmas season has ended; the work of Christmas begins. And what is that work? This year Pope Francis has declared a Year of Jubilee, Pilgrims of Hope. In launching this year, he stated: "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. The ... 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..." So, this year, being Pilgrims of Hope becomes our work of Christmas.

And what does that entail?

First let's consider what a Jubilee Year is. It's certainly nothing new. There have been jubilee years for centuries. We now have them in the Catholic Church every 25 years. Traditionally, they are years to begin anew, to forgive old grievances, to cancel debts, to abandon harmful ways and be converted personally and communally, to re-connect with God in refreshing and deepening ways. As such, a Jubilee Year is a breath of fresh air, freeing, energizing, and filled with joyful anticipation. Understanding jubilee in this way makes it very appropriate to envision it as a very desirable journey, and journey is what a pilgrimage is.



Pope Francis invites us in this Jubilee Year specifically to be Pilgrims of Hope. He is inviting us to join the journey with others that, like all pilgrimages, may sometimes be quite challenging, leading us into new territory, new relationships, new feelings and experiences. It may be necessary to make sacrifices along the way that one would rather not make. The journey may bring us face to face with past sins for which to atone or raise up doubts and fears about which to pray. Pilgrimages are not easy and not meant to be so, but they are also gifts of blessing which can nurture growth in faith, in appreciation of our fellow pilgrims, and in increasing openness to and trust in God.

And how we need trust in God!

Pope Francis, himself, acknowledges "wars, social injustices, and the many forms of violence we are exposed to every day" but adds that they "should not dishearten us nor draw us toward skepticism and discouragement." Rather, we should have hope and, in turn, be "Pilgrims of Hope" for others. He describes hope as a virtue that "does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love." God never abandons us. Pope Francis wants us to be "drawn to this hope" and then, "through our witness," spread hope "to all those who anxiously seek it." He emphasizes hope and kindness as at the very heart of the Gospel, "a form of love that opens hearts," and as our means to becoming "Pilgrims of Hope."

So, our work of Christmas this year is made clear, though not easy: We are to strive to be hopeful and to be bearers of hope to one another, to trust in God to help us through these very difficult times that seem devoid of hope, to embrace and sustain each other in the effort, and to find joy along the way.

The Jubilee Prayer

God in heaven, may the *faith*
you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of *charity* enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed *hope*
for the coming of your Kin-dom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos in
the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished, your
glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, *Pilgrims of Hope*,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.
May that same grace spread the
joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.
To you our God, eternally blessed, be
glory and praise for ever.
Amen

Franciscus

Suggested Actions

Read more about the Jubilee Year at the Vatican and USCCB websites. Learn how your diocese is celebrating the Jubilee Year and participate as you are able. Make your own pilgrimage to one of the sites locally or internationally where Jubilee observances are happening.

Look for signs of hope in your own community and beyond, places where good things are happening, people are being kind against all odds, and evil is being contained, reversed, and defeated.

Be a source of hope, yourself, reaching out to those in need, standing up and speaking out against injustices and violence, and doing acts of kindness right in your own backyard.

Visit the Pax Christi websites for more ways to be a Pilgrim of Hope throughout the year:
<https://paxchristi.net/>, www.paxchristiusa.org, www.paxchristinys.org and www.nypaxchristi.org. Also follow us on social media.