

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ORDINARY JUBILEE YEAR - 2025
IN THE LIGHT OF 'SPES NON CONFUNDIT'**

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INTRODUCTION:

Having been prepared by the important Teachings of the 16th Ordinary Synod of Bishops, the Church now, is marching towards the realization of Kingdom values on earth which is torn by war, violence and consumer culture. Uncertainty about the future caused by the 'here and now' culture, supported by AI technology and its gadgets poses a great threat to the thrust of mission and communion in the church. At this background the quest that challenges the canonists are below: how can we, as the Faithful, live as the people of Hope on this common home, the earth? How can we march towards as the pilgrims of hope! In this paper we will explore Papal guidelines to make our common home a better place for evangelization and mission. Among the two parts of this presentation, the first will focus on the historical overview on the Jubilees in the Church and the second part will study the Bull of indiction by Pope Francis. We will limit the focus on the Papal Bull alone leaving the exploration on the Synodal Document to Fr. Tony.

Biblical Background:

As per Lev. 25 the completion of seven multiplied seven years was celebrated as Jubilee. That is the fiftieth year. The goal of a Jubilee year was i) to leave the land free of cultivation, thus giving rest to the land and the labour; ii) to set the captives free; iii) to cancel the debts of the poor people and to return to one's one land. Because God says that "you are not the owner but I am the owner." Yhwh emphatically says, "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. With me you are but aliens and tenants." (Lev. 25,23.) The year of Jubilee also considered as the continuation of the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). The people of Israel as a community of believers took effort to obtain forgiveness from God and from and another in their community during Yom Kippur festival.

In Lk. 4, 18-19 Jesus, the Silver Jubilarian this year, while beginning his public ministry he announced his manifesto of the Kingdom. He clearly declared his pastoral priorities as the following: Good News to the Poor; liberation to the oppressed; setting free the captives; and the announcement of the year of grace. Based on these biblical priorities the jubilees were celebrated in the Judeo Christian world. The church also in the middle ages continued to celebrate the jubilee years.

Ecclesiastical History of Jubilees:

For the first time in the history of the Church Pope Boniface VII announced the year 1300 ad., as the holy year mercy and forgiveness of sins¹. "Throughout Christendom (the known world at that time) there was great suffering, caused by wars and diseases such as the plague and all kinds of ills: among the people there was a great desire to return to a more holy way of living. So with great faith the Christians determined to travel (on foot) to Rome, to pray at the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul and to receive the Pope's blessing, in order to obtain the grace and strength to carry on. They came in their thousands at Christmas in 1299. Due to their great number, the Pope, having enquired and learned the reason for their coming, full of admiration for their faith proclaimed a "year of forgiveness of all sins"².

A similar year would be held in future every hundred years, he decreed. His other credentials were the publication of the third part of *corpus iuris canonici*, i.e, the *Liber Sextus*, and the publication of the bull *unam sanctam* by which the primacy of the Pope was ascertained among the papal states. From then on every hundredth year was celebrated as the Jubilee Year.

'While the Apostolic See was transferred to Avignon in France (1305-1377) there were many requests for the second Jubilee to be held earlier, in 1350 instead of 1400. Clement VI gave his consent and set a period of fifty years between jubilees. Besides visiting the Basilicas built over the tombs of Peter and Paul the pilgrims were also required to visit to Saint John Lateran, the city's Cathedral, being the first Church of the Bishop of Rome who is the Pope. Later Pope Urban VI decided to reduce the period to thirty three years in memory of the earthly life of Jesus. When Pope Urban died, however, the new Pope, Boniface IX opened the Holy Door on Christmas Eve 1390, but since the numbers of pilgrims were so great he called a second Holy Year at Christmas 1400.³

And in 1343, Pope Clement VI decreed that every fiftieth year will be celebrated as the Jubilee Year⁴ followed by the decree of Pope Paul II, in 1470, who announced that the Jubilee Year will be commemorated in the church, every twenty-fifth year. In 1389, Pope Boniface decreed that every thirty third year will be celebrated as the Jubilee Year⁵. Pope Nicholas also announced that every fiftieth is to be commemorated as the Jubilee Year⁶

¹ Pope Boniface VII, Papal Bull, *Antiquorum habet fida relatio*, On 22nd Feb. 1300, Vatican. Through this bull he also offered plenary indulgence to the pilgrims who visit the Basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul thirty times during this jubilee year.

² History of the Jubilee, *Iubileum Anno domino 2000*, <https://www.vatican.va>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pope Clement VI, Papal Bull, *Unigentius Dei Filius*, 1343, Rome.

⁵ See Pope Boniface IX, Papal Bull, *Salvator noster unigenitus*, 8th April 1390, Rome

⁶ Pope Nicholas V, Papal Bull, *Immensa et innumerabilia*, 19th January 1449, Rome.

and he celebrated the year 1450 as the Jubilee Year. In 1470, Pope Sixtus VI extended the plenary indulgences of Jubilee Year to the other two Roman Basilicas, namely Mary Major and St. John Lateran Basilica.⁷ It is the Pope Alexander VI who began the custom of opening of the Holy Door of the Basilicas to commemorate the Jubilee Year. Pope Clement invited the faithful to celebrate the year 1525 as the Jubilee Year.⁸ In 1574, Pope Gregory XIII through the Bull made efforts to bring back all the Catholics, attacked by the schism of the protestants, into one fold and thus he ordered to celebrate 1575 as the Jubilee year⁹ which focused on the execution of the Teachings of Council Trent.

In 1660 Pope Clement VIII celebrated the year 1600 as the "Peaceful Year of the Lord" and he himself heard confessions of the faithful and all the Cardinals did not wear their baretta that year as a symbol of renunciation in the Jubilee Year¹⁰. In 1625, Pope Urban VIII extended the indulgence to other Cathedrals and Basilicas in the world so that the sick and the poor would benefit from the Indulgences granted during the Jubilee Years.¹¹ He also announced the other seven shrines¹² as the Shrines of Jubilee Year. The year 1700 was begun as the jubilee year by pope Innocent XII¹³ and it was completed by Pope Clement XI. Consequently Popes Benedict XIII, Benedict XIV, Clement XIV, Leo XII and Pius IX announced Jubilee years respectively in 1724¹⁴, 1749¹⁵, 1774¹⁶, 1824¹⁷ and 1874¹⁸. In 1900 Pope Leo XIII¹⁹ announced the year as the Jubilee Year in which a lot of activities were celebrated for the comforts of the pilgrims.

Pope Pius XI announced 1925 as the Jubilee Year²⁰ and the year 1933²¹ as the extraordinary Jubilee year; 1950 was announced as the Jubilee year²² by Pope Pius XII. Paul VI announced the year 1975 as the Year²³ of

⁷ Pope Sixtus VI, Papal Bull, *Ineffabilis Providentia*, 19th April 1470, Rome.

⁸ See Pope Clement VII, Papal Bull, *Inter sollicitudines*, 17 December 1524, Rome.

⁹ See Pope Gregory XIII, Papal Bull, *Dominus ac redemptor*, 10th May 1574, Rome.

¹⁰ Pope Clement VIII, 1600 Annus domini placabilis, 19th May 1599, Rome.

¹¹ Pope Urban VIII, *Pontificia sollicitudo*, 29th April 1624, Rome.

¹² Santa Maria in Trastevere, Santa Maria Del Popolo, Santa Maria in Trastevere, San Lorenzo in Lucina, San Sebastiano, San Paulo and San Lorenzo.

¹³ See Pope Innocent XII, *Regi Saeculorum*, 18th May 1699, Rome.

¹⁴ Pope Benedict XIII, *Redemptor et dominus noster*, on 26th June 1724, Rome.

¹⁵ Pope Benedict XIV, *Peregrinantes a Domino*, 5th May 1749, Rome.

¹⁶ Pope Clement XIV, *Salutis nostrae auctor*, 30th April 1774, Rome.

¹⁷ Pope Leo XII, *Quod hoc Ineunte*, 24th May 1824, Rome.

¹⁸ Pope Pius IX, *Gravibus ecclesiae*, 24th December 1875, Rome.

¹⁹ Pope Leo XIII, *Properante ad exitum saeculo*, on 11th May 1899, Rome.

²⁰ Pope Pius XI, *Infinita dei misericordia*, 29th May 1924, Vatican.

²¹ *Ibid.*, *Quid nuper*, 6th January 1933, Vatican.

²² Pope Pius XII, *Jubilaeum maximum*, on 26th May 1949, Vatican.

²³ Pope Paul VI, *Apostolorum Limina*, on 23rd May 1974, Vatican.

Reconciliation. Pope John Paul II announced the year 2000 as the Great Jubilee Year²⁴ by an apostolic letter²⁵, preceded by a three years of preparation (1997, 1998, 1999) dedicated namely to the Son, Holy Spirit and the Father.

There were also special Jubilee years in the church (Extraordinary Jubilee Year), among which the first one was the year 1933, which Pope Pius IX announced as the 1900th year of Redemption. In 1983, Pope St. John Paul II announced the year as the extraordinary Jubilee year²⁶, the 1950th year of Jubilee of death and resurrection of the Redeemer. In 2015 the present Pope Francis announced as the 'Year of Mercy'²⁷ so as to prepare for this year's Jubilee. He also created the group of priests called 'The Missionaries of Mercy' to whom the faculty was given to absolve certain reserved sins.

The Jubilee Year 2025:

In line with his successors Pope Francis has announced the year 2025²⁸ as the Ordinary Jubilee year which was preceded by the celebration of the Ordinary sixteenth Synod on Synodality. He also decreed that the Jubilee year is to be preceded by the Year of learning (2023) in which all the faithful should know and learn the four major constitutions, (*Dei verbum, Sacrosanctum concilium, Lumen Gentium and Gaudium es spes*) and the year of praying (2024). This jubilee year also commemorates the 1700th year anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council Nicea (325 ad) and the 60th year completion of Vatican II Council. This Jubilee year's goal was i) to celebrate Christ, our Redeemer, ii) to celebrate the Church and iii) to celebrate the Christian Faith. The Holy Doors were opened at the Major Basilicas of Rome, namely on 24th December 2024 at St. Peter's Basilica, on 29th December 2024 at St. John Laterans, on the New Year day 2025, at Mary Major and on 5th January 2025 at St. Paul's Outside the Wall. As a concrete measure of proclaiming mercy and forgiveness to the sinners the Holy Father opened also the Holy Door of Rabibbia Prison in Rome on 26th December focusing forgiveness to the captives. Besides the usual visit to catacombs and the seven churches Pope has also invited the local dioceses to open their specific jubilee churches on 29th December 2024 worldwide. Pope has also invited the oriental churches who are in communion with the Successor of St. Peter to enter into the year of hope and make pilgrimage in order to prepare the entire church for the great jubilee in 2033, the jubilee

²⁴ Pope John Paul II, *Incarnationis mysterium*, 29th November 1998, Vatican.

²⁵ Ibid., *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 10th November 1994, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican, 1994.

²⁶ Ibid, *Aperite portas redemptori*, 6th January 1983, Vatican.

²⁷ Pope Francis, *Misericordiae vultus*, 11th April 2015, Vatican.

²⁸ Pope Francis, The Bull of Indiction, *Spes non confundit*, 9th May 2024, Lateran Basilica, Dicastero per la Comunicazione - Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican, 2024.

of Saviour's redemption of the universe won by his passion, death and resurrection.²⁹

The important aspects of Jubilee 2025:

a) Pilgrimages: Besides the four major basilicas the pilgrims are encouraged to undertake pilgrimages to other three churches namely, Basilica of Saint Lawrence outside the Walls, Basilica of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem and Basilica of Saint Sebastian outside the Walls. Pilgrimage in a biblical setting indicates the crossing of the borders as Abraham after the call journeyed from Mesopotamia to Canaan. Christ himself journeyed throughout Judea, Galilea preaching the good news and healing the sick (Mk. 16,20). Paul also journeyed almost 1000 miles / 1600 kilometers starting from Jerusalem up to Illyricum (Rom. 15,19) to announce the Good News and to establish local churches.

In line with the earlier traditions Pope Francis exhorts the faithful to make pilgrimages in local churches, shrines and cathedrals, and he offered plenary indulgences attached with the usual conditions. The spiritual dimension of pilgrimage, conversion of souls, is to be given much importance while making the pilgrimages to the shrines.³⁰ Entering through the holy doors reminds the pilgrims about the conversion of heart and the entering through Jesus who is the door (Jn. 10,9). As Pope Francis states: for everyone, 'the Jubilee is a moment of genuine, personal encounter with the Lord Jesus, the "door" (cf. Jn 10:7.9) of our salvation, whom the Church is charged to proclaim always, everywhere and to all as "our hope" (1 Tim 1:1)'³¹.

b) Time for Reconciliation:

In the Bull of Indiction, *Spes non confundit*³², Pope calls this jubilee year as the time of reconciliation (2 Cor. 6,2). The Christian faithful are called to reconcile with God, with Nature and with one another. This triple faceted reconciliation would lead us into the other areas of concern. What are those focal points that Pope Francis insists as an action plan for the Jubilee year! Here below given are the areas of Jubilee concern.

Pilgrims of Hope:

1. The Bull while explaining about the present situation states 'uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm

²⁹ No. 5, *spes non confundit*.

³⁰ See Letter of the Holy Father Francis to Msgr. Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Council For the Promotion of the New Evangelization, For The Jubilee 2025, 11th February 2022, Saint John Lateran, Rome.

³¹ Francis, *Spes Non Confundit*, Bull Of Indiction Of The Ordinary Jubilee Of The Year 2025, no.1, 9 May 2024, Rome, at Saint John Lateran, 2024.

³² Ibid., no.1.

conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness.³³ The recent corona pandemic and the consequent wars between countries created an air of fear and desolation in people's minds. But such dark period also awarded to the world a ray of hope through the volunteers, medical persons and organizations that volunteered to help people in sickness and distress. Even amidst wars leaders who work for peace and inter-religious dialogue are showing the seeds of peace in the turmoiled world. In a world influenced by artificial intelligence and social media that force human beings to depend only on the gadgets not the creator, the jubilee year invites all the people to place their trust more in the creator and fellow human beings.

2. Patience: Quoting Paul the Bull says that the trials and tribulations that we experience in the world cannot separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8, 35, 37, 39). And St. Augustine observes that we cannot live without these dispositions of the soul namely to believe, to hope and to love. Personally having experienced hardships and trials in his missionary journeys, Paul enlightens us on the virtue of hope saying, 'We boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope' (*Rom* 5:3-4).

In the fast paced world gripped by the swiftness of internet, there is a mentality that everything is to be obtained instantly and now. Pope says that 'Patience has been put to flight by frenetic haste, and this has proved detrimental, since it leads to impatience, anxiety and even gratuitous violence, resulting in more unhappiness and self-centredness.³⁴ From the nature and its seasons, during this jubilee year, we need to learn the virtue of patience which only will initiate us into the Christian hope.

3. Peace: Pope says that the first sign of hope is Peace, which virtue the Teacher of truth instructed at the shore of Galilee. " Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God" (Mt. 5,9). As humanity is facing brutality and annihilation by war, it is hoped that 'diplomacy be tireless in its commitment to seek, with courage and creativity, every opportunity to undertake negotiations aimed at a lasting peace³⁵.

4. Protection of Life: In this world there is a loss of desire to transmit life due to consumerism and sexual promiscuity. There is an alarming decline in birthrate caused by fears about the future, the lack of job security and adequate social policies.³⁶ It is an urgent call by the creator that young men

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., no. 4.

³⁵ Ibid., no. 8.

³⁶ Ibid., no. 9; See, Francis, *Laudate Si*, no. 50.

and women are to be transmitters of life by giving birth to new sons and daughters as a sign of fruitfulness of their love. Responsible legislations by the nations for promotion of human life should be the priority at this jubilee year.

5. Prison Ministry: During this Jubilee year special attention is to be given to the freedom of prisoners (Lev. 25,10). This is one of the biblical foundations of the Jubilee year (Is. 61, 1-2; Lk. 4: 16-18). The Pontiff reminds that ' in every part of the world, believers, and their Pastors in particular, should be one in demanding dignified conditions for those in prison, respect for their human rights and above all the abolition of the death penalty, a provision at odds with Christian faith and one that eliminates all hope of forgiveness and rehabilitation.'³⁷ As a concrete sign of support to those who are detained in cells Pope himself opened the jubilee door of Rabbiah prison, Rome.

6. Care to the Sick: The rays of hope should be shared with the people who are sick and face difficulties, affected by illnesses or disabilities that severely restrict their personal independence and freedom (Mt. 25, 36).

7. Youth Ministry: The youth, always are to be sustained with hope for the better tomorrow; but they are often lured to fall into desolation due to experiences of meaninglessness of life, unemployment, lack of job opportunity, non-acceptance of family members etc. Unless they are nourished by Christian hope, there is a danger of escaping into drugs, risk-taking and the pursuit of momentary pleasure, which does greater harm to them in particular, since it closes them to life's beauty and richness, and can lead to depression and even self-destructive actions. Special pastoral care is to be shown to the youth during this Jubilee Year. The youth are the hope of the world and the pillars of tomorrow's church.

8. The Migrants: Jesus rewards those who welcome the strangers in their midst (Mt. 25,35). More than ever, the present age witnesses throughout the world people's migrating to other parts of the world in order to escape from war, violence, and those who move for better prospect in life. They should not be attacked with hostility and narrow nationalism, rather they should be supported with employment opportunity and health care benefits.

9. The Elders: The elders and the grandparents whose wisdom and experiences help families, and who represent the passing on of faith and

³⁷ Ibid., no. 10, Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2267.

wisdom to the younger generation are to be given special care at their old age.³⁸

10. The Poor: The Pope appeals during the jubilee year to minister to the poor. He states: *'I ask with all my heart that hope be granted to the billions of the poor, who often lack the essentials of life [...] Each day we meet people who are poor or impoverished; they may even be our next-door neighbours. Often they are homeless or lack sufficient food for the day. They suffer from exclusion and indifference on the part of many. It is scandalous that in a world possessed of immense resources, destined largely to producing weapons, the poor continue to be "the majority of the planet's population, billions of people.'*³⁹ We should never forget the poor like the rich man who was condemned for his non-action (Lk. 16,23).

11. Cancellation of debt: The Christian hope should lead us into sharing of earth's resources with everyone especially with the poor, the landless and those who lack water and food. 'Hunger is a scandal, an open wound on the body of our humanity, and it summons all of us to a serious examination of conscience' declares the Pope. Instead of spending money on arms and weapons it should be spent on alms for the poor.⁴⁰ The global north must forgive the debts of the global south. For the resources of the earth are common to all; the whole earth is the property of God and all of us only aliens and strangers (Lev. 25,23).

12. 1700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicea: As this Jubilee year coincides with the 1700th Anniversary Nicean Council where all the Fathers of the Council from both the east and the west jointly accepted and defined the Creed, with an expression on full divinity of Jesus, 'consubstantial with the Father'⁴¹, we need to celebrate and encourage this oneness of our Catholic faith (Jn. 17,21) during the jubilee year. As the Council also discussed on a common date for Easter, 2025 Easter will be celebrated on a common date and efforts are to be taken to arrive at a common liturgical date for Easter.

13. The Death: Our hope has the basis in the suffering, death and the resurrection of Christ. Therefore "Christian hope consists precisely in this: that in facing death, which appears to be the end of everything, we have the certainty that, thanks to the grace of Christ imparted to us in Baptism, "life is changed, not ended"⁴², forever. Buried with Christ in Baptism, we receive

³⁸ Ibid., no. 14.

³⁹ Ibid., no. 15; Cf. *Laudato si*, no. 49.

⁴⁰ See *Fratelli tutti*, no. 262.

⁴¹ See Nicene Creed: H. DENZINGER-A. SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, 125.

⁴² As mentioned in the Preface for the dead I.

in his resurrection the gift of a new life that breaks down the walls of death, making it a passage to eternity.⁴³

14. Judgement and mercy: After the journey on earth we are destined to meet the redeemer as the judge who will judge the individual life of all. 'The judgement of God, who is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8.16), will surely be based on love, and in particular on all that we have done or failed to do with regard to those in need, in whose midst Christ, the Judge himself, is present (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46).⁴⁴ Pope says that at the definitive encounter of Christ (*Ps.* 17,31) the evil we have done cannot be hidden and they need to be purified. In this context the church during this jubilee year reminds about the indulgence granted for pious acts performed by the faithful both for those who live in human history and for those who await our prayers remaining in purgatory.

15. Sin and Reconciliation: Indulgence is a way of discovering the unlimited nature of God's mercy and forgiveness. Therefore the church should concentrate on the Sacrament of Penance with individual confession where one can experience God's abundant mercy and forgiveness (*Ps.* 103, 3, 12). So Pope Francis exhorts all the bishops in the world to send the Missionaries of Mercy 'wherever hope is sorely tested: to prisons, hospitals, and places where people's dignity is violated, poverty abounds and social decay is prevalent. In this Jubilee Year, may no one be deprived of the opportunity to receive God's forgiveness and consolation.⁴⁵

16. Blessed Virgin: Finally the Pope, as usual, states that our hope is to emulate the hope that the Blessed Virgin nurtured at all her walks of life with her divine son. During the jubilee year the Blessed Mother also will journey with us in order to sustain and strengthen our hope in the Lord amid the toils and tempests of our lives on earth. Pope also in this regard mentions that the Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico city would celebrate the fifth centenary anniversary of the apparition of Blessed Virgin in 2031 and exhorts that the pilgrimages to all Marian shrines should bring forth a lot of conversion and hope and trust in Christ.

17. Hope as Anchor: Finally the Pope concludes with a remark saying that the hope we have in Jesus Christ, will strengthen us in our journey on this earth. This hope like an anchor in our earthly pilgrimage (*Heb.* 6, 18-20) will enable us to become the house built on the rock.

⁴³ *Spes non confundit*, no. 20.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 23.

Conclusion: This Ordinary Jubilee Year that we are in is a period of God's grace and mercy. Following the guidelines of the Pope, the church as a whole has to renew herself in humility and reconciliation, and is to carry out the pastoral ministries that the Holy Father has prescribed for the renewal of the families, the youth, the children, and the liberation of the migrants, the poor, the prisoners, the sick and the poor peasants who are subjected to slavery and bondage (Lk. 4: 16-18). Shedding off their clericalism and anti-evangelical life styles the bishops, the priests and the religious, as a whole have to renew themselves in humility and communion in order to offer hope to the people who are often tossed by the waves of meaninglessness and hopelessness (Ps. 27,14).