



Pope Leo XIV arrives to celebrate a Mass on the occasion of the Jubilee of Prisoners in St. Peter's Basilica, at the Vatican, Sunday, Dec. 14, 2025. (AP/Alessandra Tarantino)

Nicole Winfield

[View Author Profile](#)

Paulo Santalucia

[View Author Profile](#)

Associated Press

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Vatican City — December 15, 2025

[Share on Bluesky](#)[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

[Pope Leo XIV](#) criticized prison overcrowding and insufficient inmate rehabilitation programs on Sunday as he celebrated a special Mass for detainees, guards and their families in the final event of the Vatican's [2025 Holy Year](#).

The Vatican said an estimated 6,000 people signed up to participate in the weekend pilgrimage, including representatives from big detention facilities in Italy and prison volunteers, wardens and prison chaplains from 90 countries.

Included were a few groups of inmates who received special permission to participate, according to the Italian penitentiary chaplain's association.

In his homily, Leo acknowledged the oftentimes poor conditions prisoners face even in wealthier countries. He called for a sense of charity and forgiveness to prevail for prisoners and those responsible for guarding them.

"Here, we can mention overcrowding, insufficient commitment to guarantee stable educational programs for rehabilitation and job opportunities," he said, adding that patience and forgiveness are needed.

"On a more personal level, let us not forget the weight of the past, the wounds to be healed in body and heart, the disappointments, the infinite patience that is needed with oneself and with others when embarking on paths of conversion, and the temptation to give up or to no longer forgive," he said.

As the last big event of the 2025 Jubilee, the Mass in many ways closed out the Holy Year that Pope Francis inaugurated [Christmas Eve 2024](#), which had as its main thrust transmitting a message of hope especially for those on society's margins.

Advertisement

During his 12-year pontificate, Francis had prioritized ministering to prisoners to offer them hope for a better future. On Dec. 26 last year [Francis travelled to Rome's Rebibbia](#) prison to open its Holy Door and include the inmates in the Jubilee

celebrations.

Leo recalled that visit in Sunday's homily, as well as Francis' Holy Year appeal for governments around the world to offer prison amnesties and pardons, which are a mainstay of the Catholic Church's Jubilee tradition.

In Italy, prison overcrowding is a longstanding problem that has been denounced by the European Court of Human Rights and humanitarian organizations.

Antigone, an Italian prisoner advocacy group, said Italian prisons are now at 135% overcapacity, with more than 63,000 people detained in facilities with fewer than 47,000 beds. Italian prison authorities received 5,837 complaints of inhuman or degrading treatment last year, 23.4% more than in the previous year, Antigone said.

The Mass was the final big Jubilee event of the 2025 Holy Year, which Leo will officially close out on Jan. 6 when he shuts the Holy Door of St. Peter's.

This story appears in the **2025 Holy Year** feature series. [View the full series.](#)