

Pope to lead full slate of Holy Week, Easter liturgies

VATICAN CITY – Pope Benedict XVI will lead a full slate of Holy Week and Easter liturgies in Rome and at the Vatican, highlighting a busy papal schedule this spring.

The Vatican announced Feb. 1 that the pope would preside over eight major events in the week leading up to Easter. The liturgies include a Mass April 2 commemorating the second anniversary of Pope John Paul II's death.

The pope's Holy Week activities will begin with a procession and Mass in St. Peter's Square on Palm Sunday, April 1.

As he did last year, Pope Benedict will celebrate a chrism Mass in St. Peter's Basilica on Holy Thursday and that evening will preside over the Mass of the Lord's Supper in the Basilica of St. John Lateran in central Rome.

On Good Friday he will celebrate the liturgy of the Lord's Passion in St. Peter's Basilica in the late afternoon, then will lead a nighttime Way of the Cross at the Rome Colosseum.

On Holy Saturday, the pope will preside over the Easter Vigil in St. Peter's Basilica. On Easter, April 8, he will celebrate Mass in St. Peter's Square and give his blessing "urbi et orbi" (to the city of Rome and the world).

The Vatican also released the pope's Lenten schedule. He will celebrate Mass at the Rome Basilica of Santa Sabina on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 21, and begin his weeklong spiritual retreat Feb. 25.

Italian Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, retired archbishop of Bologna, will preach the papal retreat this year, Vatican Radio reported.

Cardinal Biffi was said to be a strong supporter of the pope in the conclave that elected him in 2005. The cardinal is well-known in Italy for his sometimes provocative statements; in 2000, he suggested that the Italian government should

favor Catholic immigrants to offset the number of Muslim immigrants and protect Italy's "national identity."

The pope's schedule through April also includes a parish visit in Rome March 25, a penitential liturgy with young people March 29, a trip April 21-22 to the northern Italian cities of Vigevano and Pavia, and a Mass to ordain new priests April 29.

On April 15, the pope will celebrate a special Mass in St. Peter's on the eve of his 80th birthday.