

Vatican announces Pope John Paul II beatification events

VATICAN CITY - The Vatican released a three-day schedule of events for the beatification of Pope John Paul II, and warned against people selling counterfeit tickets to the beatification liturgy, which is free and open to all.

Pope Benedict XVI will preside over the beatification Mass at 10 a.m. May 1 in St. Peter's Square, the Vatican said. Immediately after Mass, the faithful can pray before Pope John Paul's mortal remains, which will be set in front of the main altar in St. Peter's Basilica.

The veneration "will continue until the flow of faithful ends," it said.

Distributing the program Feb. 18, Jesuit Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican spokesman, said the deceased pope's remains will be in the casket in which he originally was buried in 2005 and will not be visible.

The casket will be reinterred in the Chapel of St. Sebastian on the main level of St. Peter's Basilica in a "private" ceremony, which will occur only after the large crowds have stopped coming to pay their respects, Father Lombardi said.

The night before the beatification, a prayer vigil will be held in the grassy open space that was the ancient Circus Maximus in Rome, the Vatican said.

"It will be organized by the Diocese of Rome, which had the venerable servant of God as its bishop," the note said. Cardinal Agostino Vallini, papal vicar for Rome, will lead the celebration and Pope Benedict is expected to watch through a video hookup.

The morning after the beatification, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, the Vatican secretary of state, will celebrate a Mass of thanksgiving in St. Peter's Square, the Vatican said.

U.S. Archbishop James M. Harvey, prefect of the papal household, which organizes the non-liturgical side of papal events, also issued a statement Feb. 18 emphasizing

the fact that tickets will not be required to attend the beatification.

The archbishop's statement, distributed in six languages, said he had been "informed of the existence of unauthorized offers by some tour operators, especially on the Internet," claiming that for a fee they could help people get tickets to papal events, particularly the beatification Mass.

"For the beatification Mass of Pope John Paul II, as made clear from the outset, no tickets are required," the statement said.

And for events that require tickets, such as the pope's weekly general audience, the tickets "are always issued free of charge and no person or organization can request any kind of payment," it said.