



The Holy See

**LETTER OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI
ON THE OCCASION OF THE SECOND WORLD CONGRESS
ON THE PASTORAL CARE OF PILGRIMAGES AND SHRINES
[SANTIAGO DE COMPOSTELA, 27-30 SEPTEMBER 2010]**

*To Our Venerable Brothers
Most Rev. Antonio Maria Vegliò,
President of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care
of Migrants and Itinerant People,
and Most Rev. Julián Barrio Barrio,
Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela*

On the occasion of the *Second World Congress on the Pastoral Care of Pilgrimages and Shrines*, to be held in Santiago de Compostela from September 27-30, I wish to express my cordial greetings to you which I extend to our venerable Brothers in the Episcopate, the members of the Fraternal Delegation, the participants in this important meeting, and the civil Authorities who collaborated in the preparation of the Congress. I also express my deferential greetings to His Majesty the King of Spain who has honored this initiative by accepting its Honorary Presidency.

With the theme, "*So he went in to stay with them*" (Lk 24:29), taken from the Gospel passage of the disciples of Emmaus, you are preparing to study in depth the importance of pilgrimages to the shrines as a manifestation of Christian life and a space of evangelization.

With great pleasure I would like to express my spiritual closeness to the congress participants to encourage and accompany them in carrying out a pastoral task of such great importance in ecclesial life. I will personally make a pilgrimage soon to the tomb of the Apostle Saint James, the "Lord's friend", in the same way that I have made my way to other places in the world which many of the faithful visit with fervent devotion. In this regard, from the beginning of my pontificate, I have wanted to live my ministry as the Successor of Peter with the sentiments of a pilgrim who travels over the roads of the world with hope and simplicity bringing on his lips and in his heart the saving

message of the Risen Christ, and strengthening his brothers in faith (cf. Lk 22:32). As an explicit sign of this mission, my coat-of-arms includes the pilgrim's shell, among other elements.

In these historic moments in which we are called, with greater force if possible, to evangelize our world, the riches offered to us by the pilgrimage to shrines should be highlighted. First of all, for its great ability to summon and bring together a growing number of pilgrims and religious tourists, some of whom are in complicated human and spiritual situations, somewhat distant from living the faith and with a weak ecclesial affiliation. Christ speaks to all of them with love and hope. The desire for happiness that is imbedded in the soul finds its answer in Him, and human suffering together with Him has a meaning. With his grace, the noblest causes also find their complete fulfillment. As Simeon met with Christ in the temple (cf. Lk 2:25-35), so too a pilgrim should have the opportunity to discover the Lord in the shrine.

For this purpose, efforts should be made so that visitors may not forget that shrines are sacred places in order to be in them with devotion, respect and propriety. In this way, the Word of Christ, the Son of the living God, can ring out clearly, and the event of his death and resurrection, the foundation of our faith, can be proclaimed completely. Very careful attention should also be given to welcoming the pilgrims, by highlighting, among other elements, the dignity and beauty of the shrine, the image of "God's dwelling... with the human race" (Rev 21:3), the moments and spaces for both personal and community prayer, and attention to devotional practices. In the same way, it can never be stressed enough that shrines should be lighthouses of charity, with unceasing dedication to the neediest through concrete works of solidarity and mercy, and constant readiness to listen, favoring in particular the faithful's reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and taking part worthily in the Eucharistic celebration, making this the center and apex of all the pastoral activity of the shrines. In this way it will be made manifest that the Eucharist is indeed the pilgrim's nourishment, the "Sacrament of the God who does not leave us alone on the journey but stays at our side and shows us the way" (*Homily on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi*, May 22, 2008).

In fact, different from a wanderer whose steps have no established final destination, a pilgrim always has a destination, even if at times he is not explicitly aware of it. And this destination is none other than the encounter with God through Christ in whom all our aspirations find their response. For this reason, the celebration of the Eucharist can really be considered the culmination of the pilgrimage.

As "God's co-workers" (1 Co 3:9), I exhort all of you to be dedicated to this beautiful mission so that through your pastoral care, you will favor in pilgrims the knowledge and imitation of Christ who continues to walk with us, enlighten our lives with his Word, and share with us the Bread of Life in the Eucharist. In this way, the pilgrimage to the shrine will be a favorable occasion to strengthen the desire in those who visit it to share the wonderful experience with others of knowing they are loved by God and sent to the world to give witness to that love.

With these sentiments, I entrust the fruits of this Congress to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Apostle James as I direct my prayer to Jesus Christ, “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6), to whom I present all those who seek His face as they peregrinate through life:

*Lord Jesus Christ, pilgrim of Emmaus,
you make yourself close to us for love,
even if, at times, discouragement and sadness
prevent us from discovering your presence.
You are the flame that revives our faith.
You are the light that purifies our hope.
You are the force that stirs our charity.
Teach us to recognize you in the Word,
in the house and on the Table where the Bread of Life is shared,
in generous service to our suffering neighbor.
And when evening falls, Lord, help us to say:
“Stay with us”. Amen.*

I impart to all the implored Apostolic Blessing, a pledge of abundant celestial graces.

The Vatican, September 8, 2010.

BENEDICT XVI

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