



The Holy See

APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

to CANADA

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HOLY MASS

FOR RECONCILIATION

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS

National Shrine of Saint Anne de Beaupré

Thursday, 28 July 2022

[Multimedia]

The journey of the disciples to Emmaus, at the conclusion of Luke's Gospel, is an icon of our own personal journey and that of the Church. On the path of life and faith, as we seek to achieve the dreams, plans, hopes and expectations deep in our hearts, we also come up against our own frailties and weaknesses; we experience setbacks and disappointments, and often we can remain imprisoned by a paralyzing sense of failure. Yet the Gospel tells us that at those very moments we are not alone, for the Lord comes to meet us and stands at our side. He accompanies us on our way with the discretion of a gentle fellow-traveller who wants to open our eyes and make our hearts once more burn within us. Whenever our failures lead to an encounter with the Lord, life and hope are reborn and we are able to be reconciled: with ourselves, with our brothers and sisters, and with God.

So let us follow the itinerary of this journey. We can call it a journey *from failure to hope*.

First, there is the sense of failure haunting the hearts of the two disciples after the death of Jesus. They had enthusiastically pursued a dream and pinned all their hopes and desires on Jesus. Now, after his scandalous death on the cross, they were leaving Jerusalem and going back to their

former life. They were on a return trip, as a way perhaps of leaving behind the experience that had so dismayed them and the memory of the Messiah executed on the cross, like a common criminal. They were making their way home despondently, “looking sad” (*Lk 24:17*). Their cherished expectations had come to nought; the hopes they had put their trust in had been dashed, the dreams they dreamed had given way to disappointment and sorrow.

That experience also marks our own lives, and our spiritual journey, at those times when we are forced to recalibrate expectations and to cope with our failings and the ambiguities and confusions of life. When our high ideals come up against life’s disappointments and we abandon our goals due to our weaknesses and inadequacies. When we embark on great projects, but then find that we cannot carry them out (cf. *Rom 7:18*). When, sooner or later, all of us, in our daily lives and relationships, experience a setback, a mistake, a failure or fall, and see what we had believed in, or committed ourselves to, come to nought. When we feel crushed by our sins and by feelings of remorse.

This was the case with Adam and Eve, as we heard in the first reading: their sin alienated them from God, but also from each other. Now they can only accuse each other. And we see it in the disciples from Emmaus, whose distress at seeing Jesus’ plan come to nought led only to a dispirited conversation. We can also see it in the life of the Church, the community of the Lord’s disciples, as represented by those two from Emmaus. Even though we are the community of the Risen Lord, we can find ourselves confused and disappointed before the scandal of evil and the violence that led to Calvary. At those times, we can do little more than cling to our sense of failure and ask: What happened? Why did it happen? How could it happen?

Brothers and sisters, these are our own questions, and they are the burning questions that this pilgrim Church in Canada is asking, with heartfelt sorrow, on its difficult and demanding journey of healing and reconciliation. In confronting the scandal of evil and the Body of Christ wounded in the flesh of our indigenous brothers and sisters, we too have experienced deep dismay; we too feel the burden of failure. Allow me, then, to join in spirit the many pilgrims who in this place ascend the “holy staircase” that evokes Jesus’ ascent to Pilate’s praetorium. Allow me to accompany you as a Church in pondering these questions that arise from hearts filled with pain: Why did all this happen? How could this happen in the community of those who follow Jesus?

At such times, however, we must be attentive to the *temptation to flee*, which we see in the two disciples of the Gospel: the temptation to flee, to go back, to abandon the place where it all happened, to try to block it all out and seek a “refuge” like Emmaus, where we do not have to think about it anymore. When confronted with failure in life, nothing could be worse than fleeing in order to avoid it. It is a temptation that comes from the enemy, who threatens our spiritual journey and that of the Church, for he wants us to think that all our failures are now irreversible. He wants to paralyze us with grief and remorse, to convince us that nothing else can be done, that it is hopeless to try to find a way to start over.

The Gospel shows us, however, that it is in precisely such situations of disappointment and grief – when we are appalled by the violence of evil and shame for our sins, when the living waters of our lives are dried up by sin and failure, when we are stripped of everything and seem to have nothing left – that the Lord comes to meet us and walks at our side. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus gently drew near and accompanied the disconsolate footsteps of those sad disciples. And what does he do? He does not offer generic words of encouragement, simplistic and facile words of consolation but instead, by revealing the mystery of his death and resurrection foretold in the Scriptures, he sheds new light on their lives and the events they experienced. In this way, he opens their eyes to see everything anew. We who share in the Eucharist in this Basilica can also take a new look at many of the events of our own history. In this very place, three earlier churches stood; there were always people who refused to flee in the face of difficulties, who continued to dream, despite their own errors and those of others. They did not allow themselves to be overwhelmed by the devastating fire of a century ago, and, with courage and creativity, built this church. And those who share in our Eucharist on the nearby Plains of Abraham can also think of the fortitude shown by those who refused to let themselves be held hostage by hatred, war, destruction and pain, but set about building anew a city and a country.

Finally, in the presence of the disciples of Emmaus, Jesus broke bread, opened their eyes and once more revealed himself as the God of love who lays down his life for his friends. In this way, he helped them to resume their journey with joy, to start over, to pass from failure to hope. Brothers and sisters, the Lord also wants to do the same with each of us and with his Church. How can our eyes be opened? How can our hearts burn within us once more for the Gospel? What are we to do, as we endure spiritual and material trials, as we seek the path to a more just and fraternal society, as we strive to recover from our disappointments and weariness, as we hope to be healed of past wounds and to be reconciled with God and with one another?

There is but one path, a sole way: it is the way of Jesus, the way that *is* Jesus (cf. *Jn* 14:6). Let us believe that Jesus draws near to us on our journey. Let us go out to meet him. Let us allow his word to interpret the history we are making as individuals and as a community, and show us the way to healing and reconciliation. In faith, let us break together the Eucharistic Bread, so that around the table we can see ourselves once again as beloved children of the Father, called to be brothers and sisters all.

Breaking the bread, Jesus confirmed the message brought by women, a testimony that the disciples had already heard, but were unable to believe: that he was risen! In this Basilica, where we commemorate the mother of the Virgin Mary, with its crypt dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, how can we not think of the role that God wished to give to women in his plan of salvation. Saint Anne, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and the women of Easter morning show us a new path to reconciliation. The tender maternal love of so many women can accompany us – as Church – towards new and fruitful times, leaving behind so much barrenness and death, and putting the crucified and risen Jesus back at the centre.

Truly, we must not put ourselves at the centre of our questions, our inner struggles or of the pastoral life of the Church. Instead, we must put him, the Lord Jesus. Let us make his word central to everything we do, for it sheds light on all that happens and restores our vision. It enables us to see the operative presence of God's love and the potential for good even in apparently hopeless situations. Let us put at the centre the Bread of the Eucharist, which Jesus today once again breaks for us, so that he can share his life with us, embrace our weakness, sustain our weary steps and heal our hearts. Reconciled with God, with others and with ourselves, may we ourselves become instruments of reconciliation and peace within our societies.

Lord Jesus, our way, our strength and consolation, like the disciples of Emmaus, we plead with you: "Stay with us, because it is almost evening" (*Lk 24:29*). Stay with us, Lord Jesus, when hope fades and the night of disappointment falls. Stay with us, for with you our journey presses on and from the blind alleys of mistrust the amazement of joy is reborn. Stay with us, Lord, because with you the night of pain turns into the radiant dawn of life. Let us say, in all simplicity: Stay with us, Lord! For if you walk at our side, failure gives way to the hope of new life. Amen.