

Czestochowa Pilgrimage
August 2017

Message from Julián Carrón

Dear friends,

It's truly beautiful that you have these days of pilgrimage to renew your memory of Christ, our companion on the road. And if, in some moments, you're overwhelmed by tiredness, just as in all of life's ups and downs, do not be discouraged, but wield your fatigue as a tool to revive your heart, as an opportunity to deepen the awareness of your true need: "The need for Him," (Pope Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016). That way, you will be able to see erupting inside of you the gratitude for Him who never abandons you. This is the one reason you go to Our Lady, rather than opting for a week at the beach. What's the difference between you and any other young people? The fact that you're "better" than them? No. It's only the journey you've made through the years of high school or college that distinguishes you from them. Those who think they can get by on their own, with their own plans for the future, have nothing for which to ask or to be grateful. But not you; the very desire to participate in this gesture expresses how the journey you have made has shown you that "man doesn't live by bread alone," nor is he content to have a job or a girlfriend, because he needs something more to make his life truly "life."

So many things have happened to you over the years! This makes going to Czestochowa to say thank you a celebration. So many memories! "Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, 'Remember how for these forty years the Lord, your God, has directed all your journeying in the wilderness'" (*Dt 8:2*). It could have been written just for you: the first word for your journey is this invitation to remember. No imagination is needed, just remember. Remember what? Everything that has happened to you. Why? So that you can be even more grateful. In fact, who is it that is most often grateful? The person who most rarely forgets what he or she has received. A person who doesn't realize that he or she has received a gift has no desire to say thank you. There's a saying in Spain: "*Lo olvidado, ni agradecido ni pagado*:" that which is forgotten goes without thanks or repayment. If I let a friend borrow something and he forgets about it, he doesn't thank me for what I gave him, nor does he return it. Seeing as Christ doesn't ask us to pay him back, we have all the more reason to thank Him, but only if we remember to do so.

How many difficulties you've had to go through over the years! This was true for the people of Israel, as well; they experienced trials and humiliations in the desert. Why did the Lord allow it? "To [truly] know what was in your heart. (...) I fed you with manna," God says, "I sustained you on your journey, I didn't leave you alone like dogs in the desert, in the midst of all the ups and downs of that long pilgrimage." You, too, can recall how Christ has accompanied you along the way and has nourished you, sustaining you in a way, "unknown to you and your ancestors." What was the point of this journey, in Christ's companionship, through the midst of all of life's ups and downs? That you might understand. Understand what? That "it is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the Lord" (*Dt 8:2-4*). And how do you know if you've truly made progress? If the awareness of what you truly desire has grown in you. So often, we content ourselves with crumbs because we haven't understood what we need in order to live.

The Mystery has prepared you for the future through a journey, to keep you from repeating silly mistakes and from looking for answers where answers cannot be found. So, if you don't take time to remember, and you don't learn from what has happened to you, from the way God has "guided you through the vast and terrible wilderness" (*Dt 8:15*)—as our days sometimes become—you won't be able to understand the full weight of the encounter with Christ and the promise contained in His words: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you." Even more, Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has

eternal life,” meaning they will begin to experience something that will last long into the future, a life that will endure. In fact, “As the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me.” Jesus invites all of you to make a journey so that you may have a relationship with the Father that is like His. “As the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father” (*Jn* 6:53-56). Within your own experience, you too will learn to live like sons and daughters, because only “those who feed on me will have life because of me” (*Jn* 6:57), as Christ says. What else could we need to be able to face tomorrow, if not this promise? Everything, if it’s lived within the companionship with Christ, will be *for* you. Otherwise, life will truly be tiresome, even if you “snag” a job, or the right man or woman and if the future seems to be in the palm of your hand.

Now, it’s up to you. I’ve given you a general guide to the journey that no one can make in your stead. This pilgrimage is for you to learn to obey and to discover what life in His presence is like.

Keeping your gaze fixed on Our Lady will help you to recognize what is most essential. Imitate the journey she has made, which helped her to understand the nature of her “I” more and more. Because Our Lady is the archetype of the new creature, which we desire to resemble more and more in terms of our posture toward the world and our experience of life. Because she understood who it was that filled her heart, who her Son was, and the significance of her Son for her life. Just think how aware she must have been of the fact that everything would be played out in the relationship with her Son! This is why Our Lady is the model we may keep in front of our eyes as we walk, not only as the destination to reach, but as a presence along the way, to ask her, “How did you do it? What did you do when you saw how they treated your Son? What did you do when you had to face the difficult situations in which you found your Son?”

Just imagine how it would be to live the journey as she did! It’s not just a presence to invoke, but first and foremost a presence to imitate, to become one with to experience Christ’s companionship as the journey unfolds. Just as when she carried her in her womb and couldn’t wake up in the morning without being aware of the new being that she herself was becoming. And then, when Jesus was born, the shepherds came and everyone was astounded at what had happened. And when they lost the boy and they found him in the temple, she didn’t understand, because His life is such a great mystery; and then when the difficulties began, and up to the end. Our Lady wasn’t spared anything. And yet, no one lived this familiarity with Christ like she did. Fr. Giussani said that if it’s not like this for us, as well, “we do not know—in the Biblical sense of the terms—Christ (*The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, pp. 102-103). Not that we don’t know anything about Christ as a formula, a definition, or facts about His life; we don’t know him in the Biblical sense: as one knows a person he or she loves.

Together with Our Lady, the familiarity with Christ can grow in you as well, along with the familiarity among you, becoming “contagious” and spreading to those around you. You will learn—as the Pope says—what it means to be “a Church going out;” anything but closing yourselves off in the same old group of friends! This pilgrimage is to live this tension to share everything with the other young people whom you’ll meet. And this could open up amazing new relationships for you.

This is the beauty and the educational aspect of the pilgrimage: if you see that Christ is victorious in the present, that is what makes it possible for you to face the future. Those who prefer to go to the beach will learn this lesson later; they won’t be spared. For things like this, you either learn them early, or you learn them later in life, but everyone has to learn at some point.

Remember me when you are in front of Our Lady.

Julián Carrón