

Pilgrimage to Czestochowa
August 2019

Message from Fr. Julián Carrón

Dear friends,

Why do we go on pilgrimage to Czestochowa? Only someone who is aware of the nature of this gesture can have the adequate reasons to adhere to it.

It is already significant that this pilgrimage has lasted so long—we don't take this for granted—which means that the gesture has touched and continues to touch a need, at an important and decisive moment in life: the end of high school or university.

It would be difficult for any other gesture to call us back to our true need better than a long walking pilgrimage, because of the commitment and labor that it requires. I always remember a phrase of Father Giussani: “If an individual were to barely live the impact with reality, because, for example, he had not had to struggle, he would scarcely possess a sense of his own consciousness, would be less aware of his reason's energy and vibration,” (*The Religious Sense*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University press, 1997, p. 100).

Someone can adhere to the proposal if he has grasped in some way how it corresponds to his need. But we can only verify this intuition by walking. The Church has always seen the pilgrimage as a paradigm for existence: life is a path, a road. In medieval times, they spoke of *homo viator*, man on the journey. So, going to Czestochowa means becoming aware of the nature of life, as the Pope reminded us in his phone call at the beginning of the Macerata-Loreto Pilgrimage: “To be a pilgrim is to walk. It is to do in one night what we do our whole life: go forward.” Our whole life! What does it mean to go forward? Pope Francis was very precise: it means to go “in search of fullness. The fullness of Jesus” (8 June 2019).

Someone may think: “I am already clear about my intentions, I have a definite path, a girlfriend, my life is practically set.” But then why walk? We walk in order to discover that we are never all set, because our need is so deep that no image made by ourselves is sufficient to satisfy it completely. As we know, the needs of our heart can never be extinguished by our own attempts.

A pilgrimage reminds you that you are not alone, that you are not abandoned to yourselves and your efforts, because there is someone who says: “Let's go, let's go together to discover how we can live.” If you give space to that spark of awareness in you, you will allow Christ and Our Lady to respond to your desire for life and for the future.

Then, you will discover that only Christ can answer the boundless need of your heart. As Father Giussani always said: “Christ proposes himself as the answer to what ‘I’ am and only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of my own self can make me open and lead me to acknowledge, admire, thank and live Christ. Without this awareness, even Jesus Christ becomes just a name.” (*At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University press, 1998, p. 6).

Therefore, look at your need with seriousness, and this will fill you with reasons for walking. The pilgrimage will be for each one of you a great prayer of petition: to be able to live up to the level of that fullness that everyone desires and that Christ brought into the world. To begin, you don't need to have everything in place already; you don't have to be set. You are searching for this fullness because you don't feel settled already.

Recently, I came across a public letter to Bernhard-Henry Lévy, written by the French novelist Michel Houellebecq: “More and more frequently, and it pains me to admit it, I felt a desire to be liked. On each occasion a little thought convinced me of the absurdity of this dream. [...] But thought was powerless and the desire persisted—and, I have to admit—persists to this day.” This author is the face of nihilism, one for whom everything seems to end in nothing; his thought tells him that it is absurd even to think about it, “but thought was powerless”, because “the desire persists—and, I have to admit—persists to this day” (Michel Houellebecq, Bernard-Henry Lévy, *Public Enemies*, London: Atlantic Books, 2011, letter dated February 2, 2008). Time makes it clear that the desire for fullness which constitutes us persists even in a man that thinks that everything ends in nothing. Time makes it ever more clear that our desires are irreducible.

Each person must decide whether to give space to our own thoughts or to that which remains despite all of our limits and our fragility: an irreducible need for life. In the midst of the crumbling of everything there is something that does not fall apart. You are going to Czestochowa to affirm this “irreducible” thing that is in you.

Let us reflect a little on our experience: sometimes we are surprised that certain dynamics, that didn’t belong to us, start to become ours. We are amazed by seeing certain fruits in our life. They are dynamics and fruits that we didn’t give to ourselves; they came to maturity in us by participating in a place, the Christian community, within the life of the Church.

Walking toward the Black Madonna, remember that, in order to help us understand our calling—the fruits He wants to generate in us—the Mystery does not leave us without signs. Sometimes, He is very discreet in His suggestions, and a lot depends on our openness to affirming the signs that He puts in front of us. Therefore, pay attention, and let yourselves be surprised by what you see and encounter.

I thank you for your witness to me by making this decision to conclude your high school and university studies with such a challenging pilgrimage.

Accept the need for fullness that you have—that we all have—in our hearts, and bring it to Our Lady for me as well. Thank you.

Julián Carrón