Holy Father’s Apostolic Visit to Romania

A focal point of Francis’ journey

Every people rediscovers its soul

ANDREA MONDA

Upon landing in Bucharest on Friday, 31 May, in his first discourse before the authorities and diplomatic corps, the Pope spoke about the need for society and politics to have a heart in order for things to function well. Because, Francis stated, “it is not enough to modernize economic theories, or professional techniques and abilities”, but rather, it is a matter of “developing not just material conditions but the very soul of your people”. And, he added extemporaneously, “because peoples have a soul; they have their own way of perceiving and experiencing reality”. According to the Pope, what enables a people to move forward is the ability to hearken back to the soul of that people.

The following day, during his homily at the Marian Shrine of Şumuleu Ciuc, framed by the beautiful landscape of the Carpathian Mountains before a festive crowd of nearly 100 thousand people, including Romanians and Hungarians, the Pope observed that peoples co-exist in the world as a single people made up of the children of God, and that the believer’s conscience must come to recognize everyone as sibling children of the same Father, setting aside their divisions and resentment. The next day, during his private lunch with the Holy Father, Romanian Archbishop Ioan Robu noted that that Mass, which was celebrated in the Romanian and Hungarian languages, was an historical novelty for the peoples of those areas, and a prophetic sign for the future. The Pope ruminated on the concept of “pilgrimage”, of journeying together, and he defined this pilgrimage as real—
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CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

VATICAN BULLETIN

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 3
The Pope recounts his journey to Romania

The ‘Our Father’ is the common patrimony of all the Baptized

The ‘Our Father’ is the common prayer par excellence, the common patrimony of all the baptized. No one can say ‘my Father’ and ‘your Father’, no: ‘Our Father’. This is the common patrimony of all the baptized”, as Pope Francis emphasized at the General Audience on Wednesday, 5 June. Addressing the faithful who had gathered in Saint Peter’s Square, the Pontiff recounted his recent journey to Romania. The following is a translation of his reflection, which the Holy Father shared in Italian.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good morning!

Last weekend, I made an Apostolic Journey to Romania, at the invitation of the President and the Prime Minister. I renew my appreciation to them and I extend it to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities and to all those who cooperated to bring about this visit. Above all I give thanks to God who allowed the Successor of Peter to return to that country, 20 years after the visit of Saint John Paul II.

In sum, as the motto of my journey announced, I encouraged ‘journeying together’. It was my joy to be able to do so not from afar or from above, but by walking myself, among the Romanian people, as a pilgrim in their land.

The various events demonstrated the value and need of journeying together, both among Christians, at the level of faith and charity, and among citizens, at the level of civil commitment.

As Christians, we have the grace of living a season of fraternal relationships among the different Churches. In Romania the majority of the faithful belong to the Orthodox Church, currently led by Patriarch Daniel, to whom go my fraternal and appreciative thoughts. The Catholic community, both ‘Greek and Latin’, is alive and active. The union among all Christians, while incomplete, is based on the one Baptism and is sealed by blood and by the suffering endured together in the dark times of the persecution, particularly in the last century under the atheist regime. There is also another Lutheran community that likewise professes faith in Jesus Christ, and has good relationships with Orthodox and Catholics.

With the Patriarch and the Holy Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church, we had a very cordial meeting in which I emphasized the willingness of the Catholic Church to journey together in reconciled remembrance and toward fuller unity, which the Romanian people themselves prophetically invoked during the visit of Saint John Paul II. This important ecumenical dimension of the journey culminated in the solemn prayer of the ‘Our Father’, in the new, imposing Orthodox Cathedral of Bucharest. This was a moment of deep symbolic value, because the ‘Our Father’ is the Christian prayer par excellence, the common patrimony of all the baptized. No one can say ‘my Father’ and ‘your Father’, no: ‘Our Father’, the common patrimony of all the baptized. We showed that unity does not take away legitimate diversity. May the Holy Spirit lead us to live ever more virtually in the communion of all Christians, while recognizing the one common patrimony of all the baptized. No one can say ‘my Father’ and ‘your Father’, no: ‘Our Father’, the common patrimony of all the baptized. We extend it to the civil and ecclesiastical authorities and to all those who cooperated to bring about this visit. Above all I give thanks to God who allowed the Successor of Peter to return to that country, 20 years after the visit of Saint John Paul II. In that city the Roman people are very numerous, and for this reason I wished to greet them and renew the appeal against all forms of discrimination and for the respect of people of any ethnic group, language and religion.

Dear brothers and sisters, I thank God for this Apostolic Journey. Let us ask him, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, to bear abundant fruit for Romania and for the Church in those lands.

SPECIAL GREETINGS

Next Saturday, 8 June, will be the fifth anniversary of the meeting, here in the Vatican, of the Presidents of Israel and Palestine with me and Patriarch Bartholomew. At 1:00 PM we are invited to dedicate ‘a minute for peace’ – in prayer, for believers, in reflection, for non-believers – everyone together for a more fraternal world. Thanks go to Catholic Action International, which is pursuing this initiative.

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially those from England, Scotland, Malta, China, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Canada and the United States of America. I offer a special greeting to the members of the United Nations Women’s Guild of Rome together with my prayerful good wishes for their 50th anniversary. As we prepare to celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost, I invoke upon all of you and your families a rich outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

I offer a particular thought to young people, to the elderly, to the sick and to neuropsychiatrists. Next Sunday we will celebrate the Solemnity of Pentecost. May the Lord find all of you ready to receive the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. May the grace of his gifts fulfill in you a new vitality of faith, may it reinvigorate hope and give operational strength to charity.

The centre of the Greek-Catholic Church in Romania, with the Beatification of seven Martyred Greek-Catholic Bishops, witnesses to the freedom and mercy that come from the Gospel. One of these new Blesseds, Bishop Filiau Hossu, wrote during imprisonment: ‘God has sent us into this darkness of suffering in order to offer forgiveness and to pray for the conversion of all’. Considering the horrendous torture to which they were subjected, these words are a testimony to mercy.

The meeting with young people and families, held in Iasi – an ancient city and important cultural centre at the crossings of East and West – was particularly intense and festive. It is a place that invites us to open new paths on which to journey together, in the richness of diversity, in a freedom that does not sever roots but draws from them in a creative way. This encounter too had a Marian character and concluded with the entreaty of the young people and families to the Holy Mother of God.

The last stop of the journey was my visit to the Roman community of Blaj. In that city the Roman people are very numerous, and for this reason I wished to greet them and renew the appeal against all forms of discrimination and for the respect of people of any ethnic group, language and religion.

Deo Gratias!
Mr President, Madam Prime Minister, Ye...
Your Holiness, Venerable Metropolitan and Bishops of the Holy Synod,

Cristo è risorto! [Christ is risen!]
The Lord’s resurrection is the very heart of the apostolic preaching handed down and preserved by our Church. They were discussing all that had happened, their fears and uncertainties did not deter them from understanding and to discern in what had happened. Thank God, our roots are not ideological as in the time of individualism that, perhaps no longer persuasive and no less material. The weakening of social bonds, which leads to isolation, has particularly stoked, leads to attitudes of rejection and hate. We need to help the other not to yield to the seductions of a “culture of hate”, a culture of individualism that, perhaps no longer ideological as in the time of the atheist persecution, is nonetheless more persuasive and no less material. Often it takes on the appearance of a path to development that appears fast and easy, but in reality is indifferent and superficial. The weakening of social bonds, which leads to isolation, has particularly repercussions on the fundamental cell of society, the family. It requires us to make an effort to go out and engage with the difficulties faced by our brothers and sisters, especially those very young, not with disengagement and nostalgia, like that of the disciples of Emmaus, but with the desire to communicate the risen Jesus, the heart of hope. Together with our brothers and sisters, we need to listen out more to the Lord, so that our hearts can burn within us and our preaching not grow weak (ibid., vv. 38-40). The Lord who is revealed in the breaking of the bread (cf. v. 30-31), calls us to charity, to mutual service, to “give God”, to goodness that is not passive, but prepared to get up and set out, a service that is active and collaborative (cf. v. 35). We see an excellent example of this in the many Romanian Orthodox communities that cooperate fruitfully with the many Catholic dioceses in Western Europe where they are present. In many cases, a relationship of reciprocal trust and friendship has developed, grounded in fraternity and nurtured by concrete gestures of acceptance, support and solidarity. Through the growth of this reciprocal knowledge, many Catholics and Romanian Orthodox have discovered that they are not strangers, but brothers, sisters and friends.

The bonds of faith that unite us go back to the Apostles, the witness of the risen Jesus, and in particular to the bond between Peter and the Lord, according to tradition brought the faith to these lands. Blood brothers (cf. Mt 16:18-18), they were the exceptional way brothers in shedding their blood for the Lord. They remind us that there exists a fraternity of blood that precedes us and, like a silent and life-giving stream flowing down the centuries, has never ceased to nourish and sustain us on our journey.

Here, as in so many other places nowadays, you have experienced the passerover of death and resurrection of many sons and daughters of this country, from various Churches and Christian communities, know the Friday, of the Pasch, the Saturday of silence and experienced the Sunday of rebirth. How many were the martyrs and confessors of the faith! In recent times, how many, from different confessions, stood side by side in prison to support one another in turn! Today their example stands before us and before the young, who did not experience those dramatic conditions. What they suffered for, even to the sacrifice of their lives, is too precious an inheritance to be disregarded or tarnished. It is a shared inheritance and it summons us to remain close to our brothers and sisters who share it. United to Christ in suffering and sorrows, and united to Christ in the resurrection, so that “we too might walk in newness of life’’ (Rom 6:4).
Recitation of the ‘Our Father’ in new Orthodox Cathedral of Bucharest

Individualism and indifference profane the name of God

Together with them, we wish to hail your name, placing it at the heart of all we do. May your name, Lord, and not ours, be the one that moves and awakens in us the exercise of charity. How many times, in prayer, do we limit ourselves to asking for gifts and listing requests, forgetting that the first thing we should do is praise your name, adore you, and then go on to acknowledge, in the brother or sister whom you have placed at our side, a living image of you. In the midst of all those passing things in which we are so caught up, help us, Father, to seek what truly lasts: your presence and that of our brother or sister.

We wait in expectation for your kingdom to come. We ask for it and we long for it, because we see that the workings of this world do not favour it, organized as they are around money, personal interests and power. Sunken as we are in an increasingly frenetic consumerism that entraps us with glittering but fleeting realities, we ask you to help us, Father, to believe in what we pray for: to give up the comfortable security of power, the deceptive allure of worldliness, the vain presumption of our own self-sufficiency, the hypocrisy of cultivating appearances and sincerity, the face of our neighbour. Help us to recognize in our brothers and sisters, the debts that others have in- and orphaned. He is the one that moves and awakens in us the exercise of charity. How many times, in prayer, do we limit ourselves to asking for gifts and listing requests, forgetting that the first thing we should do is praise your name, adore you, and then go on to acknowledge, in the brother or sister whom you have placed at our side, a living image of you. In the midst of all those passing things in which we are so caught up, help us, Father, to seek what truly lasts: your presence and that of our brother or sister.

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Late Friday afternoon, 31 May, in the Catholic Cathedral dedicated to Saint Joseph in the Archdiocese of Bucharest, Pope Francis celebrated Mass for the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The following is the English text of his homily.

Mary journeys… from Nazareth to the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth. It is the first of Mary’s journeys, as related by the Scriptures. The first of many. She will journey from Galilee to Bethlehem, where Jesus will be born; she will go down to Egypt to save her Child from Herod; she will go up again every year to Jerusalem for the Passover (cf. Lk 2:52), and ultimately she will follow Jesus to Calvary. These journeys all have one thing in common: they were never easy, they always required courage and patience. They tell us that Our Lady knew what it means to walk uphill, she knows what it means for us to walk uphill, and she is our sister at every step of the way. She knows what it is to be weary of walking and she can take us by the hand amid our difficulties, in the most uncertain twists and turns in our life’s journey.

As a good mother, Mary knows that any journey and the little things of life. A mother’s love and ingenuity was able to turn a stable into a home for Jesus, with poor swaddling clothes and an abundance of love (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 886). Contemplating Mary enables us to turn our gaze to all those many women, mothers and grandmothers of these lands who, by their quiet sacrifices, devotion and self-denial, are shaping the present and preparing the way for tomorrow’s dreams. Theirs is a silent, tenacious and unsurpassed sacrifice; they are unafraid to “roll up their sleeves” and shoulder difficulties for the sake of their children and families, “hoping against hope” (Rom 4:18). The living memory of your people preserves this powerful sense of hope against every attempt to dim or extinguish it. Looking to Mary and to all those mothers’ faces, we experience and are nourished by that sense of hope (cf. Aparecida Document, 58), which gives life and opens up the horizons of the future. Let us state it emphatically: in our people there is much room for hope. That is why Mary’s journey continues even today, she invites us, with her, to journey together.

Mary encounters Elizabeth (cf. Lk 1:39-56), a woman already advanced in years (v. 7). But Elizabeth, though older, is the one who speaks of the future and, “filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 41), prophesies in words that foreshadow the last of the Gospel beatitudes: “Blessed are those who believe” (cf. Jn 20:29). Remarkably, the younger woman goes to meet the older one, seeking her roots, while the older woman is reborn and prophetically foretells the future of the younger one. Here, young and old meet, embrace and awaken the best of each. It is a miracle brought about by the culture of encounter, where no one is discarded or pigeonholed, but all are sought out, because all are needed to reveal the Lord’s face. They are not afraid to go out together, and when this happens, God appears and works wonders in their people. The Holy Spirit impels us to go out from ourselves, from all that hems us in, from the things to which we cling.

The Spirit teaches us to look beyond appearances and enables us to speak well of others — to bless them. This is especially true with regard to our brothers and sisters who are homeless, exposed to the elements, people without home — to bless them. This is the culture of encounter; it urges us as Christians to experience the miraculous motherhood of the Church, as she seeks out, protects and gathers her children. In the Church, when different rhythms meet, when the most important thing is not one’s own affiliation, group or ethnicity, but the People that together praises God, then great things take place. Again, let us state it emphatically: Blessed are those who believe (cf. Jn 20:29) and who have the courage to foster encounter and communion.

Mary, as she journeys to visit Elizabeth, reminds us where God desired to dwell and live, where his sanctuary is, and where we can feel his heartbeat: it is in the midst of his People. There he is, there he lives, there he awaits us. We can apply to ourselves the prophet’s call not to fear, not to let our arms grow weak! For the Lord our God is in our midst; he is a powerful saviour (cf. Zeph 3:16-17) and he is in the midst of his people. This is the secret of every Christian: God is in our midst as a powerful saviour.

Our certainty of this enables us, like Mary, to sing and exult with joy.

Mary rejoices. She rejoices because she bears in her womb Emmanuel, God-with-us: “The Christian life is joy in the Holy Spirit” (Gaudete et Exsultate, 122). Without joy, we remain paralyzed, slaves to our unhappiness. Often problems of faith have little to do with a shortage of means and structures, of quantity, or even the presence of those who do not accept us; they really have to do with a shortage of joy. Faith wavers when it just floats along in sadness and discouragement. When we live in mistrust, closed in on ourselves, we contradict the faith. Instead of realizing that we are God’s children for whom he does great things (cf. v. 49), we reduce everything to our own problems. We forget that we are not orphans, for we have a Father in our midst, a powerful saviour. Mary comes to our aid, because instead of reducing things, she magnifies them in “magnifying” the Lord, in praising his greatness.

Here we find the secret of our joy. Mary, lowly and humble, starts from God’s greatness and despite her problems — which were not few — she is filled with joy, for she entrusts herself to the Lord in all things. She reminds us that God can always work wonders if we open our hearts to him and to our brothers and sisters. Let us seek the great witnessing of these lands: simple persons...
With joy and thanksgiving to God, I join you today, dear brothers and sisters, in this beloved Marian shrine, so rich in history and faith. We have come here as children to meet our Mother and to acknowledge that we are all brothers and sisters. Shriines are like “sacraments” of a Church: they keep alive the memory of God’s faithful people who, in the midst of tribulation, continue to seek the source of living water that renews our hope. They are places of festivity and celebration, of tears and supplication. We come to the feet of our Mother, with few words, to let her gaze upon us, and with that gaze bring us to Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life (Jn 14:6).

We have come here for a reason: we are pilgrims. Here, every year, on the Saturday before Pentecost, you come on pilgrimage to honour the vow made by your ancestors, and to strengthen your own faith in God and your devotion to Our Lady, before her monumental wooden statue. This annual pilgrimage is part of the heritage of Transylvania, but at the same time it honours Romanian and Hungarian religious traditions. The faithful of other confessions take part in it, and it is thus a symbol of dialogue, unity and fraternity. It invites us to rediscover the witness of living faith and hope-filled life.

To go on pilgrimage is to participate in the shaping of the country’s future, continue to seek the source of living water that renews our hope, and placing her specific gifts at the service of the entire community. The Catholic Church is no stranger to this; she shares fully in the spirit of the nation, as is demonstrated by the participation of her faithful in the shaping of the country’s future and in the creation and development of the structures of integral education and forms of charitable assistance suited to a modern state. In this way, she desires to contribute to the building up of society and of civil and spiritual life in your beautiful land of Romania.

Mr President,

In offering my prayerful good wishes for Romania’s prosperity and peace, I invoke upon you, your family, upon all those here present, and upon all the country’s people an outpouring of God’s blessings and the protection of the Holy Mother of God.

God bless Romania!

Change resentments and mistrust into new opportunities

Moving forward together

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

leaving behind our security and comfort and setting out for a new land that the Lord wants to give us. To go on pilgrimage means daring to discover and communicate the ‘mystique’ of living together, and not being afraid to mingle, to embrace and to support one another. To go on pilgrimage is to participate in that somewhat chaotic sea of people that can give us a genuine experience of fraternity, to be part of a caravan that can together, in solidarity, create history (cf. Evangelii Gaudium, 87).

To go on pilgrimage is to look not so much at what might have been (and wasn’t), but at everything that awaits us and cannot be put off much longer. It is to believe in the Lord who is coming and even now makes intercession, not only with her Son but also with each of us, asking that we not let ourselves be robbed of our fraternal love by those voices and hurts that provoke division and fragmentation. Complicated and sorrow-filled situations from the past must not be forgotten or denied, yet neither must they be an obstacle or an excuse standing in the way of our desire to live together as brothers and sisters.

To go on pilgrimage is to feel called and compelled to journey together, asking the Lord for the grace to change past and present resentments and mistrust into new opportunities for fellowship. It means turning our gaze to Mary and to the mystery of God’s election: he looks to the lowly and confounds the powerful; he encourages and comforts us in our hope in the world, but in the Lord, and thus they persevered. I would like to give thanks for these humble victors, these saints-next-door, who showed us the way. Their tears were not in vain; they were a prayer that rose to heaven and nurtured the hope of this people.

Dear brothers and sisters, Mary journeys, encounters and rejoices because she carries something greater than herself: she is the bearer of a blessing. Like her, may we too be unafraid to bear the blessing that Romania needs. May you be promoters of a culture of encounter that gives the lie to indifference, a culture that rejects division and allows this land to sing out the mercies of the Lord.

The miracle of the culture of encounter

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

who trusted in God in the midst of persecution. They did not put their hope in the world, but in the Lord, and thus they persevered. I would like to give thanks for these humble victors, these saints-next-door, who showed us the way. Their tears were not in vain; they were a prayer that rose to heaven and nurtured the hope of this people.

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Journeying together is not easy, is it? It is a gift that we have to ask for. A work of art for us to create, a beautiful gift for us to hard on. But where do we start, in order to journey together?
It would like to take up a point made by our elderly couple, Elisabeta and Ioan. It is good to see how long sinks deep roots through sacrifice and commitment, through work and prayer. Love took root in the two of you and it has borne rich fruit. As the prophet Joel says, when young and old meet, the elderly are not afraid to dream (cf. 28: 31). This was your dream: “We dream that they may build a future without forgetting where they came from. We dream that none of our people will forget their roots”. You look to the future and you open the door to it for your children, your grandchildren and your people by offering them the best lesson that you learned from your own journey: never forget where you come from. Wherever you go and whatever you do, don’t forget your roots. It is the same dream, the same advice that Saint Paul gave to Timothy: to keep alive the faith of his mother and grandmother (cf. 2 Tim 1:5). As you continue to grow in every way – stronger, older and even in importance – do not forget the most beautiful and worthwhile lesson you learned at home. It is the wisdom that comes from age. When you grow up, do not forget your mother and your grandmother, and the simple but robust faith that gives them the strength and tenacity to keep going and not to give up. It is a reason for you to give thanks and to ask for the generosity, courage and selflessness of a “home-grown” faith that is unobtrusive, yet slowly but surely builds up the Kingdom of God.

Certainly, a faith that does not show up on the stock exchange, or “sell”, may not appear, as Eduard reminded us, “to be of much use”. Faith, however, is a gift that keeps alive a profound and beautiful certainty: that we are God’s beloved children. God loves with a Father’s love. Every life, and every one of us, belongs to him. We belong as children, but also as grandchildren, spouses, grandparents, friends, neighbours; we belong as brothers and sisters. The Evil One divides, scatters, separates, he sows discord and distrust. He wants us to live “detached” from others and from ourselves. The Spirit, on the contrary, reminds us that we are not anonymous, abstract, faceless beings, without history or identity. We are not meant to be empty or superficial. There is a very strong spiritual network that unites us, one that “connects” and sustains us, and is stronger than any other type of connection. And this network is our vocation: “You are people flourishing when you are truly loved”, Eduard said. We all flourish when we feel loved. Because love draws us out of ourselves and invites us to take root in the lives of others. It is like those beautiful words of your national poet, whose fond wish for your sweet Romania was that “your children might live only in fraternity, like the stars of the night” (M. Eminescu, What I Wish for You, Sweet Romania). Eminescu was a great man, he grew, felt himself to be mature, but more than that: he felt fraternal, and for this reason wants Romania, all Romanians to be brothers and sisters, “like the stars of the night”. We belong to each other and our happiness is meant to make others happy. Everything else is nonsense.

To journey together, wherever you may be, never forget what you learned at home. Don’t forget your roots.

This reminds me of the prophecy of one of the holy hermits of these lands. One day, the monk Galaction Ilia of Sihastria Monastery was walking among sheep grazing on a mountainside when he met a saintly hermit whom he knew. He asked him: “Tell me, Father, when will the world end?”. And the venerable hermit, with a deep sigh, replied: “Father Galaction, do you want to know when the world will end? When there are no more paths between neighbours? That is, when there is no more Christian love and understanding between brothers and sisters, relatives, Christians and peoples! When persons lose all their love, then it will truly be the end of the world. Because without love and without God, no one can live on the earth”.

Life begins to wilt and droop, our hearts stop beating and wither, the elderly no longer dream and young people no longer prophesy when pathways between neighbours disappear... Because without love and without God, no one can live on the earth.

Eduard told us that, like many others in his town, he tried to practise the faith amid numerous challenges. Many indeed are the challenges that can discourage us and make us close in on ourselves. We cannot deny it or pretend that it isn’t the case. Difficulties exist and they are evident. But that cannot make us forget that faith itself offers us the greatest challenge of all: a challenge that, far from enclosing or isolating us, can bring out the best in us all. The Lord is the first to challenge us. He tells us that the worst comes when there are no more paths between neighbours, when we see more trenches than roads. The Lord is the one who gives us a song more powerful than all the sten songs that would paralyse us on our journey. And he always does it the same way: by singing a more beautiful and more attractive song.

The Lord gives us a vacation, a challenge to discover the talents and abilities we possess and to put them at the service of others. He asks us to use our freedom as a freedom to choose, to say yes to a loving plan, to a face, to a look. This is a much greater freedom than simply being able to consume and buy things. It is a vocation that sets us in motion, makes us fill in trenches and open up new avenues to remind us all...
In Romania

Every people rediscovers its soul

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

zing "that we are in a way returning home as a people", and here he also said a few words off-the-cuff, similar to those of the day before: to undertaking a pilgrimage is also to realize "that we are a people.

In a last improvisation during his final discourse on Sunday afternoon in the Rom neighbourhood of Blaj, the Pope emphasized that he had come there "in order to build a bridge between my heart and yours", whom he referred to the Rom people.

This particular emphasis highlights the same very dear to the Pope who, for many years, has in fact returned to the bond among people and the heart and conscience.

Twenty years ago, on 5 May 1999, speaking to educators, the Bishop of Buenos Aires, then Cardinal Bergoglio, emphasized that he had come there "in order to build a bridge between my heart and yours", whom he referred to the Rom people.

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These lands know well how important the freedom of religion is, especially born blind.

It is particularly hard for people who think that “the Sabbath” is more important than the love of their Father who wills all people to be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). The blind man had to live not only with his own blindness, but also with the blindness of those around him. We see the resistance and the hostility that can arise in the human heart when, instead of putting people at the centre, we put special interests, labels, theories, abstractions and ideologies, which manage only to blind our youth and our peoples from their richest cultural and religious traditions. Forms of ideological colonization that devalue the person, life, marriage and the family (cf. Amoris Laetitia, 40), and above all, with alienating proposals as atheistic as those of the past, harm our young people and children, leaving them without roots from which they can grow (cf. Christus Vivit, 78).

With regard to freedom, I cannot help but note that we are celebrating this Divine Liturgy in the “Field of Liberty”. This place, filled with meaning, evokes the unity of your people, which is found in the diversity of its religious expressions. All these things constitute a spiritual patrimony that enriches and distinguishes Romanian culture and national identity. The new Beati endured suffering and gave their lives to oppose an illiberal ideological system that oppressed the fundamental rights of the human person. In that tragic period, the life of the Catholic community was put to a harsh test by a dictatorial and atheistic regime. All the Bishops and faithful of the Greek-Catholic Church and those of the Latin-right Catholic Church were persecuted and imprisoned.

The whole scene and the arguments that follow show how hard it is to understand the actions and priorities of Jesus, who brings someone from the periphery into the centre. It is particularly hard for people who think that the “Sabbath” is more important than the love of the Father who wills all people to be saved (cf. 1 Tim 2:4). The blind man had to live not only with his own blindness, but also with the blindness of those around him. We see the resistance and the hostility that can arise in the human heart when, instead of putting people at the centre, we put special interests, labels, theories, abstractions and ideologies, which manage only to blind everything around them. The Lord’s approach is different: far from hiding himself behind inaction or ideological abstractions, he looks people in the eye. He sees their hurts and their history. He goes out to meet them and he does not let himself be sidetracked by discussions that fail to prioritize and put at the centre what is really important.

These lands know well how greatly people suffer when an ideology takes over, up its self up as a rule for the very life and faith of people, diminishing and even eliminating their ability to make decisions, their freedom and their room for creativity (cf. Laudato Si’, 105). Brothers and sisters, you were forced to endure a way of thinking and acting that showed contempt for others and led to the expulsion and killing of the defenceless and the silencing of dissenting voices. I think in particular of the seven Greek-Catholic Bishops whom I have had the joy of beatifying. In the face of fierce opposition from the regime, they demonstrated an exemplary faith and love for their people. With great courage and interior fortitude, they accepted harsh imprisonment and every kind of mistreatment, in order not to deny their fidelity to their beloved Church. These pastors, martyrs for the faith, re-appropriated and handed down to the Romanian people a precious legacy that we can sum up in two words: freedom and mercy.

As Pope Francis said in his Angelus address last week: “Dear brothers and sisters, today, I would like to encourage you to set aside the immediate interests; people are led to take advantage of others and treat them as mere objects (cf. Laudato Si’, 123-124). Those voices, by sowing fear and division, seek to cancel and bury the best that the history of these lands has bequeathed to you. Regarding this legacy, I think, for example, of the Edict of Torda in 1568, which forbade all forms of radicalism and was one of the first in Europe to promote an act of religious tolerance.

I would like to encourage you to bring the light of the Gospel to our contemporaries and to continue, like these Beati, to resist these new ideologies now springing up. It is our turn to struggle now, as it was theirs to struggle in their time. May you be witnesses of freedom and mercy, allowing fraternity and dialogue to prevail over divisions, and fostering the fraternity of blood that arose in the period of suffering, when Christians, historically divided, drew closer and more united to one another. Dear brothers and sisters, may the maternal protection of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother of God, and the intercession of the new Beati accompany you on your journey.
Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good afternoon!

I am happy to meet you, and I thank you for your welcome. You, Father Ioan, are quite right when you point to a truth as certain as it is often forgotten: in Christ's Church there are no strangers.

I offer a greeting full of affection to the faithful of the Romanian Orthodox Church: the Bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful of Bucharest and Iasi, together with the many pilgrims from Suceava. I thank you for your warm welcome. I have met you, the sons and daughters of the Greek-Catholic Church, who for three centuries have borne witness to your faith with apostolic zeal.

May the Virgin Mary bestow her maternal protection upon all the citizens of Romania who in the course of history have always trusted in her intercession. In entrusting all of you to her, I ask her to guide you on your journey of faith, as you advance towards a future of authentic progress and peace, and contribute to the building of an ever more just, harmonious and fraternal homeland. Regina Coeli...