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"The path of humble and selfless love"

In his 22 September general audience, Pope Francis spoke about his recent trip to Budapest and Slovakia.

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Brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to speak to you about my Apostolic Journey in Budapest and in Slovakia, which came to an end exactly a week ago, last Wednesday. I would summarize it as follows: it was a pilgrimage *of*

prayer, a pilgrimage *to the roots*, a pilgrimage *of hope*. Prayer, roots and hope.

1. The first stop was in Budapest, for the concluding Mass of the International Eucharistic Congress, postponed exactly one year due to the pandemic. There was lively participation in this celebration. The holy people of God, on the Lord's Day, gathered before the mystery of the Eucharist, by which they are continually generated and regenerated. They were embraced by the Cross that stood above the altar, showing the same direction indicated by the Eucharist, namely the path of humble and selfless love, of generous and respectful love towards all, of the path of faith that purifies from worldliness and leads to what is essential in life. This faith purifies us and distances us from the worldliness that ruins us all: it is a

woodworm that ruins us from within.

And the pilgrimage of prayer concluded in Slovakia on the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. There too, in Šaštín, at the Shrine of the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows, the Feast of the Mother, which is also the national religious feast day, was attended by a great number of her children. Mine was thus a pilgrimage of prayer in the heart of Europe, beginning with *adoration* and ending with *popular piety*. Praying, because this is what the People of God are called to, above all: to worship, to pray, to journey, to be a pilgrim, to do penance, and in this to feel the peace and the joy that the Lord gives us. Our life should be like this: to worship, to pray, to journey, to be a pilgrim, to do penance. And this is of particular importance on the European continent, where the presence of God is diluted – we see this every day –

the presence of God is diluted by consumerism and by the “vapours” of a uniform way of thinking – something strange but real – that is the fruit of the mixture of old and new ideologies. And this leads us away from familiarity with the Lord, from familiarity with God. In this context too, the healing answer comes from prayer, witness and humble love. The humble love that serves. Let us reiterate this idea: the Christian is to serve.

This is what I saw in the encounter with the holy people of God. What did I see? A faithful people, that has suffered atheist persecution. I also saw it in the faces of our Jewish brothers and sisters, with whom we remembered the Holocaust. Because there is no prayer without memory. There is no prayer without memory. What does this mean? That when we pray, we must remember our life, the life of our people, the life of the

many people who accompany us in the city, taking into account their stories. When he greeted me, one of the Slovak bishops, already elderly, told me, “I worked as a conductor on the tram, to hide from the communists”. He is good, that bishop: during the dictatorship, the persecution, he was a tram conductor, then he carried out his “profession” as a bishop clandestinely, and no-one knew. This is what it is like, under persecution. There is no prayer without memory. Prayer, the memory of one’s life, of the life of one’s people, their history: committing to memory and recalling. This is good for us, and helps us pray.

2. Second aspect: this journey was a pilgrimage *to the roots*. In meeting my brother bishops, both in Budapest and in Bratislava, I was able to experience directly the grateful remembrance of these roots of faith and of Christian life, vivid in

the shining example of witnesses of faith such as Cardinal Mindszenty and Cardinal Korec, and the Blessed Bishop Pavel Peter Gojdič. Roots that reach as far back as the ninth century, back to the evangelizing work of the saints brothers Cyril and Methodius, who accompanied this journey with their constant presence. I perceived the strength of these roots in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy in the Byzantine rite, in Prešov, on the feast of the Holy Cross. In the hymns I felt the tremor of the heart of the holy people of God, forged by their many sufferings for the faith.

On several occasions I insisted on the fact that these roots are always living, full of the vital lymph that is the Holy Spirit, and that as such they must be conserved: not like museum exhibits, not ideologized and exploited out of interests of prestige and power, to consolidate a closed

identity. No. This would mean betraying them and making them barren! Cyril and Methodius are not, for us, people to commemorate, but rather models to imitate, masters from whom we can always learn the spirit and method of evangelization, as well as civil commitment - during this journey to the heart of Europe I often thought of the fathers of the European Union, of how they dreamed of it not as an agency to spread fashionable forms of ideological colonisation, no, as they dreamed it to be. Understood and lived in this way, the roots are a guarantee of the future: from them, thriving branches of hope can grow. We too have roots: each one of us has his or her own roots. Do we remember our roots? Those of our parents, our grandparents? And are we connected to our grandparents, who are a treasure? "But they are old...". No, no: they give you lifeblood, you must go to them so as

to grow and to go forward. We do not say, “Go, and hide from your roots”: no, no. “Go to your roots, take your lymph from them and go forward. Go and take your place”. Do not forget this. And I repeat to you, what I have said many times, that verse which is so beautiful: “Everything that blooms on the tree comes from what it has underground”. You can grow to the extent that you are united with your roots: your strength comes from there. If you cut the roots, so that everything is new, new ideologies, this will lead you nowhere, it will not let you grow: you will end up badly.

3. The third aspect of this journey: it was a pilgrimage *of hope*. Prayer, roots and hope, the three features. I saw great hope in the eyes of the young, in the unforgettable encounter in the stadium in Košice. This gave me hope too, seeing so many young couples and so many children. And I thought of the

demographic winter that we are going through, and those countries are blooming with young couples and children: a sign of hope. Especially in the time of the pandemic, this moment of celebration was a powerful and encouraging sign, also thanks to the presence of many young couples with their children. Equally strong and prophetic is the witness of Blessed Anna Kolesárová, a Slovak girl who at the cost of her life defended her dignity against violence: a testimony that is unfortunately more relevant than ever, as violence towards women remains an open wound everywhere.

I saw hope in many people who silently care for and are concerned about their neighbour. I think of the Missionary Sisters of Charity of the Bethlehem Centre in Bratislava, good sisters, who receive those who are rejected by society: they pray and

serve, pray and help. And they pray a lot, and help a lot, without pretence. They are the heroes of this civilization. I would like us all to acknowledge Mother Teresa and these sisters: all together, let us applaud these good sisters! These sisters give shelter to the homeless. I think of the Roma community and all those who work with them on a path of fraternity and inclusion. It was moving to share in the feast of the Roma community: a simple feast with the perfume of the Gospel. The Roma are our brothers and sisters: we must welcome them, we must be close to them like the Salesian Fathers there in Bratislava, who are very close to the Roma.

Dear brothers and sisters, this hope, this hope of the Gospel that I was able to see in the journey, can only be realised and made concrete if it is expressed in another word: *together*. Hope never disappoints, hope goes

not alone, but *together*. In Budapest and Slovakia we found ourselves *together* with the different rites of the Catholic Church, *together* with our brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations, *together* with our Jewish brothers and sisters, *together* with the believers of other religions, *together* with the weakest. This is the path, because the future will be one of hope if we are together, not alone: this is important.

And after this journey, there is a big “thank you” in my heart. Thank you to the bishops, thank you to the civil authorities, thank you to the President of Hungary and the President of Slovakia, thank you to all those who cooperated in the organization [of the journey]; thank you to the many volunteers; thank you to each person who prayed. Please, add yet another prayer, that the seeds sown during the Journey

may bear good fruit. Let us pray for this.

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