

Along the track

Pilgrims of Hope

We are almost halfway through the 2025 Jubilee Year in which Pope Francis has asked us to be Pilgrims of Hope. Each of us. I wonder why he chose hope? Why pilgrims?

It has become a bit of a cliché to say that life is a pilgrimage, but it is. A pilgrimage asks us to step out of the ordinary for a while, to be more alert to our journey. We are all on a journey to see where and how God is calling us, what God is asking of each of us. A pilgrim is more than just being a tourist or traveller, just sightseeing. Being a pilgrim takes openness, courage, a willingness to trust. Everything about pilgrimage interrupts this temptation to mindlessly pass through life, a pilgrim makes time to step aside from the hectic pace of life, even if only for a short time, a pilgrim is one who seeks to become more sensitive to God's presence.

Being such a pilgrim of hope is a very timely challenge because, in the vision of Pope Francis it can "contribute greatly to restoring a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire; that is why I have chosen as the motto of the Jubilee, Pilgrims of Hope." This is a moment, said the pontiff, "to recover lost hope, to renew that hope in our hearts, and to sow seeds of hope amid the bleakness of our time and our world." The Chinese philosopher Lao Tse had this to say way back in the sixth century BCE:

"If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbours.
If there is to be peace between neighbours,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart." Lao Tse

That could well apply to hope. Have a read of it again and just change the word peace to hope. Hope starts with each of us, in our heart and mind, in the way we think, in the way we respond to life's ups and downs. And then spreads. Without hope, confidence and trust are in short supply and that colours the way we look at things. Lack of hope can make us very negative about the present and for the future. Lack of hope can make us miss the possibilities that are part of every life, no matter how desperate they may seem to be at times. That's why Pope Francis adds:

"Christian hope does not deceive or disappoint because it is grounded in the certainty that nothing and no one may ever separate us from God's love." Sometimes we need reminding about that.

Hope is not just blind optimism but a reminder that God's gifts and graces, however unrecognised they may have been at the time, were there with us in the past and will be offered in the future. Being a pilgrim of hope is a reminder that we journey together through life, we are not alone. We are the bearers of hope for others as well. We can do that every day, "to sow seeds of hope amid the bleakness of our time and our world." And our world can appear to be bleak and hopeless for so many. What a timely invitation being such a pilgrim offers, what a challenge to look again for the signs of God's presence and invitation in my own life and help others to do the same in theirs.

We can do that by being a person who sometimes takes a slower pace, who takes time to appreciate the beauty of the world around us, who listens, who is curious, continuing to learn and grow alongside one another. We can be the one who forgives, the person who in word and in action works for unity rather than divisiveness, the one who seeks to be positive rather than one who judges rather than forgives, a person who can encourage mercy in the way we think and speak.

So how are you going in your pilgrimage? Do you think you have been a pilgrim of hope to those around you, to your family and friends, the communities or groups that you belong to? Making the world a better place starts within, it starts in the home, it spreads.

What will you hope for today? To win tattslootto (don't we all?) or to be able to look back on this day and know that I have left the world a little better place today, that someone I met today was glad, that he or she went away a little more hope-filled, a little more sensitive to the world that God had given us.

Regards
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