

Along the track

Pilgrims of Hope II

On the Camino pilgrimage some years ago, it took a couple of days to work out what was missing. In the villages we walked through in a particular area, the silence was very loud. It took us a while, but we slowly realised there were no children. Schools were closed because families had moved away. There was no employment. In some cases, the big conglomerates had taken over the family farms. In these villages in Spain, there was a sense of depression about the future. A similar problem is faced by many of the more remote communities in Australia but even closer to home in rural areas too.

Some of those towns have made a concerted effort to reverse the trend, to keep the young people at home, to create other industries, other opportunities. Many of their initiatives have borne fruit. Perhaps that is what being a pilgrim of hope is about too, reaching out to the world we live in to bring back hope, opportunity, a vision for the future. Pope Francis has invited us to embrace the theme "Pilgrim of Hope," a call to journey with trust in God's promises and to be a beacon of hope in a rather fragmented world, often marked by poverty and inequality, division, and uncertainty. We can let ourselves be overwhelmed by that or we can do something about it. We can look at our community and do something.

The Jubilee Year invites us to vision and give witness to the kind of world we want to live in, what kind of future we want. Not just individually but with others too. We are witnesses to that vision every day – whether we like it or not. Our conduct, the way we live our lives, the way we relate to each other, care for one another, the way we think and talk about what is just and right, the way we use this world's goods, the way we are stewards of creation – all these make us witnesses to those around us, to our children, to the next generation. What do we want them to see? What will they see us committed to? Working for? What will they know of our dream, our vision? What will they know of Jesus and his vision? We cannot simply leave that up to others. Nothing is more powerful, no message is more potent than seeing it in the flesh, seeing what a vision, a dream might look like. Jesus' ministry put flesh and bones on the vision of God for our world. People could see it, hear it, feel it.

The Jubilee is not simply about individual spiritual renewal, however important that is, however difficult we may find it to be. Pope Francis reminds us: *Everyone knows what it is to hope... In the heart of each person, hope dwells as the desire and expectation of good things to come, despite our not knowing what the future may bring. Even so, uncertainty about the future may at times give rise to conflicting feelings, ranging from confident trust to apprehensiveness, from serenity to anxiety, from firm conviction to hesitation and doubt. Often we come across people who are discouraged, pessimistic and cynical about the future, as if nothing could possibly bring them happiness.*

Change, renewal, transformation can be painful. They take courage, openness and trust in where God is calling us.

But Jubilee is also about the transformation of the world we live in, the social structures, so that they reflect God's vision of justice and compassion. Jubilee calls us to actively participate in building a world where all are treated with dignity and respect, where violence has no place, where the lonely find companionship, where the refugee finds a welcome, where the dispossessed and those who have few of this world's riches find justice and hope. Jubilee asks us to take some action to make God's vision a reality. Is that too much or can we decide that we can do something.

Hope is not just some dream that things might get better, that all will be well in the end. Hope can transform a situation. Hope lives in peaceful places, places where we find joy and purpose in life, but it also lives in noisy places, where there is trouble, where things do not go well, where there is division and disagreement, where the work is hard and there seems no reward in sight. Hope can be stubborn, it does not give up, just like God does not give up on us.

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. Pope Francis

Regards
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