

We adventure in the Spirit as pilgrims together with Jesus and our brothers and sisters

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We have that which we seek. We just have to search for Him. And He donates himself always and if we are patient He will be revealed to us (Thomas Merton).

No one can halt on his journey, for life pushes us from within (C. Maria Martini).

1. Introduction: the reference context

- a) The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, pushes us to reflect about one of the most thought about and thoroughly searched spiritual categories: the life of the faithful as a journey, as a pilgrimage towards heaven.
- b) Today's culture does not reject using the theme of pilgrimage, in the trail of classic literature.
- c) In the same way, the cultural theology today pays a lot of attention to the times when the Church has had a clear pilgrim conscience and a strong scatological tension.
- d) We should read the pilgrimage experience from a different perspective, with the pastoral criteria that characterizes the New Evangelization.
- e) The Strenna of the rector Mayor underlines "a way of interiority and spirituality that will allow us to live accompanied by the Spirit", a way that will enlighten us to understand what does it mean adventuring in the Spirit, a way that will see us journeying "together".

2. The experience of the biblical man

The whole faith experience as described in the texts of the Holy Scripture is crossed by the category of the pilgrimage experience, the walking together, the travelling towards a place.

a) *The Old Testament*

The journey of Adam and Even after the original sin.

The story of Abraham, "wandering Aramean" (*Dt 26,5*).

The long pilgrimage of the old People of God on their journey during the exodus.

The very same pilgrimage experience on the 3 most important liturgical festivities of the Hebrew calendar: Easter, Pentecost and the Feast of the Huts (called Feast of the pilgrimage) (*2Re 23 e Dt 16,1-17*),

b) *The New Testament*

The prologue of St John affirms the belief that God walks amongst us and guides the way of those who wish to contemplate the light and the glory of God.

The Evangelist Luke writes about the great journey that Jesus undertakes towards Jerusalem.

The book of Apocalypse views discipleship as a great journey.

3. The pastoral image and the concept of pilgrimage

The biblical image of the shepherd that guides in the fields is a paradigm to understand the idea of the pilgrimage of the disciples.

The God of our fathers is the Shepherd who looks after them always, the God faithful to the promise made to the fathers.

Psalm 23, expresses not only the certainty that God guides his People, but also that God is the Savior who preserves from the constant dangers to which the flock is continually exposed.

Psalm 80 starts: «You shepherd of Israel, listen, you who guide Joseph like a flock » (*Psalm 80,1*). It reveals the praying attitude of the People of God, that recognizes the faithfulness of God and that entrusts itself to Him totally, while it dramatically expresses the difficult situation the People is going through. The image of the «shepherd» recalls expressly the journey of the Exodus.

On *Mark 6*, , after the story of John the Baptist's martyrdom, and before the first multiplication of loaves, we find the love of the Teacher who sees the crowd following Him along the way. The Evangelist underlines the coming of the final time for salvation. Jesus, new Moses, guides the new Israel towards salvation with his word and the bread of life.

On *John 10*, John applies to himself the image of the Shepherd journeying with his flock: "I am the Good Shepherd". The disciples follow in his footsteps with faithful hope.

4. Being pilgrims today

4.1. Pastoral Perspectives

Many authors have written about different kinds of pilgrimages, identifying some features that can be summarized as follows: the willingness to follow the ways in which the history of salvation has taken place; the desire to celebrate the wonders of God and to revive them in the liturgical celebrations or in the popular devotion; the need to accomplish a penitential way able to renew one self's life, to strengthen the desire to renew; the exigence to operate charity in a simple and efficient way; the aim to live in solitude to rediscover the Only One needed; the need to live an experience of solidarity, of communion and fraternity with whoever shares part of this journey.

Today's pastoral sensitivity suggests some attitudes the pilgrim will have to adopt. First of all the awareness of his own humanity. Secondly a clear vision of the goal. Likewise it is fundamental the need to break with the past. Also the willingness to share with the others. And finally he should pay a lot of attention to the return to the ordinary life.

4.2. Salesian perspectives

We can recall here some aspects of our Salesian charism underlined by the theme of pilgrimage:

4.2.1. The historical experience of our Father Don Bosco

We do like to contemplate Don Bosco not as a static figure, hieratic, sure of his own convictions... but as a man of dialogue, of the tenacious journey even if not always clear.

4.2.2. The offer of an itinerary of education in the faith having experience as the starting point.

Our pastoral praxis is particularly sensitive to the proposal of journeying, of itineraries of education in the faith.

4.2.3. The discovery of a fundamental exigence: the opening to the transcendent, the interest for the inner self.

We cannot forget that the pilgrim looks to the horizon, contemplates the absolute, dreams, escapes from the rigidity, from the all programmed mentality. The strenna of the Rector Mayor, according to the journeying proposed, obliges us to value the symbolic language. This allows us to talk about God from the experience, to talk about love; it reminds us the need to look at the inner self, the certainty that God lives in the deep of our heart. A way opens that ends with the encounter with God and that recalls the need to be coherent witnesses.

4.2.4. The community dimension of our faith as journeying disciples

The pilgrim discovers "brothers", "traveling companions" who do not belong to his bloodline: they are brothers in the faith, in the dreaming... his fraternity experience is not a passive one but rather a fraternity that builds up, for which it is easy to feel passionate, that makes worthy any sacrifice.

5. Conclusion