



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO ARCHBISHOP JULIÁN BARRIO BARRIO
FOR THE INAUGURATION
OF THE JUBILEE YEAR OF COMPOSTELA 2004**

To Archbishop Julián Barrio Barrio of Santiago de Compostela

1. On the occasion of the opening of the Holy Door that ushers in the Jubilee Year of Compostela 2004, the first in the third Christian millennium, I address a cordial greeting to the Pastors and faithful of this Archdiocese of Santiago de Compostela and to all the beloved sons and daughters of Galicia. Likewise, from this very moment I join in spirit the pilgrims travelling in very different ways who, motivated by a deep desire for conversion, will be setting out for the tomb of the Apostle St James from other parts of Spain, from Europe and from the most remote locations on earth.

Down through history, countless men and women have made their way to the so-called "Finis terrae" (end of the earth) in a spirit of prayer and sacrifice. The anonymous travellers who followed the *Vía Láctea* were converted by their journey to Santiago de Compostela. The Santiago pilgrimage speaks to us of the spiritual and cultural origins of the Old Continent, as the Church and Europe are two realities whose existence and destiny are closely connected (cf. *Ecclesia in Europa*, n. 108). Consequently, despite the current cultural crisis, certain aspects of which are having repercussions in the lives of some Christians, we must reaffirm that the Gospel continues to be a fundamental reference for the Continent. I myself have twice been on pilgrimage to this city, aptly called "the spiritual capital of European unity". I treasure indelible memories of it.

2. The Church of Compostela, which has been privileged from time immemorial to protect the tomb of the Friend of the Lord, feels called to generously welcome and pass on the deep sense of life inspired by the faith that St James "Boanerges" (cf. Mk 3: 17) proclaimed.

Thus, the Santiago Way, on which so many pilgrims throughout history have purified and

increased their faith and which has given human culture a clearly Christian stamp, cannot ignore its spiritual dimension. The Santiago phenomenon, which refers solely to the age-old pilgrimage to Compostela, cannot mask its identity because of concomitant cultural, economic and political factors. Any initiative intended to distort or dilute its specifically religious character would misrepresent its authentic origins. In this regard, the pilgrim is not only a traveller: he is first and foremost a believer who desires to follow Christ faithfully through that experience of life, keeping the Apostle's daring example before him.

"Pilgrims through Grace: What do you talk about on the way?". This, the theme of the current Holy Year, refers to the Gospel account of the disciples of Emmaus. It is an image of the Christian pilgrimage well suited to pilgrims of the new millennium.

3. Down the centuries, the essence of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela has been conversion to the living God through the encounter with Jesus Christ. The celebration of this Jubilee is also a journey of conversion. In fact, people from all Continents will be meeting in Compostela to confess their Christian faith and to implore and receive God's merciful pardon; its fullness is expressed in the grace of the Jubilee Indulgence that provides for the total remission of the temporal punishment due to sins. The pilgrim, gradually turning away from his former way of life, is called to put on "the new man" and take on the new mindset proposed by the Gospel. Moreover, the incense rite of "Botafumeiro" represents his purification, as his new being is offered like the incense that rises to the presence of the Lord.

The pilgrimage to the Basilica of Compostela during the Jubilee Year is also intended to give a new impetus to the Christian community through the commitment to revitalize the faith. For this, the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist are essential.

The traditional gesture of embracing the Apostle, a witness and martyr of Jesus Christ, symbolizes joyful acceptance of the faith that St James the Greater preached without flagging to the point of giving up his life. Therefore, the Santiago Way is more than a road that leads to a destination. Crossing the threshold of the imposing "Gate of Glory" and modelling their lives on the light of the Scriptures, pilgrims return to be living and credible witnesses of the Lord at home.

In this way the lintel of this portal of Grace, evocative of the heavenly Jerusalem, will witness to the daring of those who fear neither the future nor the obstacles that have yet to be overcome, so that the new humanity can take place and remind us that life itself is a path through Christ to God the Father in the Spirit.

4. And so, although the pilgrimage is arduous and demanding, it is a joyful proclamation of faith. It is a personal journey in which all pilgrims, following the example of the "son of thunder", are converted into bold and zealous apostles. Pilgrims are asked to proclaim the Kingdom of God with their meditative journey, surrendering to intimacy with the Lord in prayer and in silence, leaning on

the staff of his Word, contemplating the wonders of nature formed by the Creator with personal asceticism and with few provisions, avoiding the perils of the gnostic experience of the disturbing pseudo-religious and cultural movements.

The Way to Santiago, then, is also a place and time for dialogue, reconciliation and peace; a journey of spiritual brotherhood and an incentive to ecumenical commitment in accordance with the universal vocation of the Church. Hospitality, an inherent feature of people on pilgrimage, also implies an important contribution to the European society of our day, where the phenomenon of migration demands special attention.

5. This Holy Year offers us a favourable opportunity to give new and forceful dynamism to our commitment to the values of the Good News, presenting them persuasively to the new generations and imbuing our personal, family and social life with them.

The various pastoral activities planned for the Jubilee are geared to this, especially the meeting of the Commission of Episcopates of the European Community (COMECE) and the European Youth Meeting. These events demonstrate the vitality of the Church's faith, founded on apostolic preaching, which must reach out in a brotherly way to America and the other Continents.

Compostela must continue to be a prophetic voice, a shining beacon of Christian life and hope for the new forms of evangelization (cf. *Address in Obradoiro Square*, 19 August 1989, n. 2; *ORE*, 28 August 1989, p. 2.).

6. To St Mary of the Way, the Pilgrim Virgin, icon of the Church on her path through the desert of history who will accompany the pilgrims on their penitential journey, and to the protection of St James who will greet them smiling on their arrival at the Gate of Glory, I entrust this Year of St James, confident that the abundant fruit of the Jubilee celebration will help to revitalize Christian life, keeping us steadfast in faith, certain in hope and constant in charity.

Together with these wishes, as a pledge of benevolence I gladly impart my Apostolic Blessing to you.

From the Vatican, 30 November 2003, the First Sunday of Advent

JOHN PAUL II