27 Ano Santo Compostelán

Pastoral Letter

on the occasion of the Compostela Holy Year 2027



✠ Francisco José Prieto Fernández

Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela

INTRODUCTION. Looking again at the star

“On seeing the star, they were filled with immense joy” (Mt 2:10)

Dear brothers and sisters:

With these simple and luminous words, the evangelist Matthew describes the inner experience of the Magi from the East when, after long days of searching and uncertain paths, they once again discover the star that was leading them towards Bethlehem. That light did not remove the hardship of the journey nor spare them the questions along the way, but it restored to them the certainty that they were not walking without purpose, that reality was not an absurd labyrinth, and that there was a goal capable of fulfilling their hope: “Where is the King of the Jews? For we have seen his star rising and have come to worship him” (Mt 2:2). As Saint Leo the Great comments, “the sign that effectively set the distant Magi on their way and led them, without faltering, to the Lord, this sign was, without doubt, a sacrament of this grace and the beginning of this vocation, which would ensure that the Gospel of Christ would be preached not only in Judea but in the whole world”[1].

For this reason, I wish to announce to you with immense joy the coming celebration of the Compostela Holy Year 2027, a Year of grace and forgiveness. The opening of the Holy Door in the Cathedral of Santiago, where the remains and the memory of the Apostle Saint James the Greater are preserved and venerated, is an invitation to feel the need to lift our gaze once more towards the star that shows us the Way. Our time is marked by deep contradictions. Humanity today possesses enormous scientific and technological capacities; yet, alongside the advances that improve the lives of millions of people, new forms of fragility, loneliness and spiritual disorientation are emerging. We live in an age marked by wars and polarisation, by the weakening of community bonds, by economic and cultural uncertainty, and by a

growing difficulty in answering the ultimate questions about the meaning of existence.

Contemporary man seems to have conquered many external spaces, yet he often remains bewildered before his own interior. The development of artificial intelligence, technological acceleration and the new possibilities of intervening in human life open unprecedented horizons and, at the same time, raise profound anthropological and ethical questions. As Romano Guardini warned, contemporary man has acquired immense power over the world and over himself without yet having attained the moral and spiritual maturity needed to direct it properly[2]. The decisive question is not only what we can do, but who we are and where we direct our freedom. As Pope Francis already warned: "Human beings are not completely autonomous. Our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and of violence. In this sense, we stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. We may have superficial mechanisms at our disposal, but we can maintain that we lack a sound ethics, a culture and a spirituality which can genuinely set limits and contain us in a lucid self-denial"[3].

In the midst of this historical situation, the Camino de Santiago and the Compostela Holy Year appear as a providential sign. Not simply as a religious or cultural event of great historical importance, but as a spiritual call addressed to the heart of our time. The Compostela Jubilee wishes to be an open space where contemporary man can find himself again, and find others and God.

The Camino continues to call believers and non-believers, men and women who seek answers and others who barely perceive an inner restlessness that is hard to name. And it is precisely here that one of the great spiritual strengths of the Jacobean pilgrimage lies: the Camino becomes a place of encounter and of questions, a space where the superficiality of everyday life breaks down and the fundamental

question about the meaning of life re-emerges: “pilgrimage plays an important role in our life of faith, because it gives us the time and the space for a deeper encounter with God. It takes us away from the routine and bustle of daily life and offers us the space and the silence needed to hear the voice of God more clearly”[4].

For man, even when he tries to forget it, remains a being in search. As Saint Augustine of Hippo wrote at the beginning of his Confessions: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you”[5]. No technical progress, no material well-being and no promise of self-sufficiency can completely quench that restlessness that dwells in the human heart.

The Compostela Holy Year 2027 therefore wishes to be a great invitation to hope. A call to walk again. To step out of our securities and routines. To pass through the personal and collective nights with our gaze fixed on the star that leads to Christ.

The Compostela Holy Year 2027 wishes to present itself as a true call addressed to the heart of contemporary man and to the conscience of our society. In a time often marked by uncertainty, inner weariness and fragmentation, the Compostela Jubilee wishes to offer a horizon of meaning and a renewed experience of hope.

It wishes to be an invitation to walk again in the face of one of the great temptations of our time, which consists precisely in settling into comfort, disenchantment, individualism, superficiality or even resignation. Contemporary man has the means to travel quickly, but he has often lost, inwardly, the reason for the journey. He moves a great deal, but knows less and less where to direct his existence. The Jacobean pilgrimage recalls, on the contrary, that to live is to walk, that to exist is to seek, and that human beings fully understand their lives only when they experience them as a vocation and as an itinerary.

The Holy Year wishes to help us leave behind our securities and routines. The call addressed by God to Abraham — “Leave your country” (Gen 12:1) — runs through the whole of biblical history and

retains a surprising relevance. We too often need to abandon the false securities with which we try to protect ourselves: self-sufficiency, consumerism, religious indifference, the absolutisation of well-being, or the illusion of completely controlling our life and our future. The Camino de Santiago has precisely this capacity to unsettle: the pilgrim soon learns that he does not control everything, that he needs others, that he must accept his frailty, and that life is also sustained by gratuitousness, trust and gift.

For this reason the Compostela Jubilee also wishes to be a call to recover interiority. We live in a culture often dominated by noise, distraction and acceleration. Contemporary man runs the risk of losing the capacity to contemplate and to listen: "the temporal crisis will be overcome only when the *vita activa*, in the midst of crisis, welcomes the *vita contemplativa* back into its bosom"[6]. Saturated with stimuli, he often ends up disconnected from himself and from the essential questions of existence. The Camino offers, instead, a pedagogy of silence and slowness. The weariness of walking, the austerity of the pilgrim, the contemplation of nature and the gratuitous encounter with other walkers gradually purify the inner gaze and allow the great questions of the human heart — about God and about oneself — to emerge once more.

The Holy Year also wishes to be an invitation to pass through personal and collective nights without succumbing to despair. For we cannot ignore the shadows of our time. There are deep wounds in the lives of many people: silent loneliness, family fragility, job insecurity, psychological suffering, wars, forced migration, poverty and new forms of exclusion. To this is added a certain spiritual darkness that affects wide sectors of our culture and leads them to live "as if God did not exist"[7]. Contemporary man often experiences an existential weariness that is hard to name.

Precisely for this reason, the motto of the Holy Year carries such significant force: "On seeing the star, they were filled with immense

joy" (Mt 2:10). The Magi found joy not because the difficulties of the journey had surprisingly vanished, but because they had discovered anew a light that guided their steps. The star did not remove the night, but it enabled them to cross it. In the same way, Christian faith does not automatically remove suffering or the contradictions of history; but it offers a light capable of giving meaning to the journey and of sustaining hope even in the midst of darkness: "The light of faith does not dispel all our darkness, but, like a lamp, guides our steps in the night, and this suffices for the journey"[8].

In this sense, the Compostela Holy Year wishes to help us rediscover that Christian hope is neither naivety nor mere optimism. Hope is born of the encounter with Jesus Christ, dead and risen, victor over sin and death: "the Christian life is a journey that also needs strong moments to nourish and strengthen hope, the irreplaceable companion that allows us to glimpse the goal: the encounter with the Lord Jesus"[9]. Only a hope greater than our own capacities can fully sustain human existence: "by virtue of the hope in which we have been saved, as we look at the passing of time, we have the certainty that the history of humanity and of each of us is not heading towards a blind alley or a dark abyss, but is directed towards the encounter with the Lord of glory"[10]. Man needs a "great hope" that goes beyond the partial and fragile achievements of history, and "this great hope can only be God, who encompasses the universe and who can propose and give us what we alone cannot attain"[11]. For this reason, the Compostela Jubilee is called to be a profoundly spiritual and evangelising event. An opportunity to meet God again, to experience mercy, to be reconciled with oneself and with others, to rediscover the beauty of faith and to open one's life anew to the horizon of transcendence.

The Camino de Santiago has historically been a path of conversion. Pilgrimage always involves an inner transformation. The pilgrim arrives in Compostela somehow different from the one who began the journey, for he has learned something about himself, about others and about God. He has experienced his frailty and also the strength of

fraternity; he has discovered that life is not sustained only by efficiency and performance, but also by gratuitousness, beauty and hope.

In this context, the Compostela Holy Year 2027 also wishes to be a call addressed to the Church. An invitation to renew her evangelising impulse and her capacity to welcome. The Camino offers the Church an extraordinary opportunity to approach contemporary man not from imposition but from accompaniment; not from nostalgia but from the humble and joyful witness of the Gospel. As Saint Paul VI urged us, "let us preserve the delightful and comforting joy of evangelising, even when it is in tears that we must sow. May it mean for us — as it did for John the Baptist, for Peter and Paul, for the other Apostles and for a multitude of splendid evangelisers throughout the Church's history — an interior enthusiasm that no one and nothing can quench. May it be the great joy of our consecrated lives. And may the world of our time, which is searching, sometimes in anguish, sometimes in hope, be enabled to receive the Good News not from evangelisers who are dejected and discouraged, impatient or anxious, but from ministers of the Gospel whose lives glow with fervour, who have first received the joy of Christ, and who are willing to risk their lives so that the kingdom may be proclaimed and the Church established in the heart of the world"[12].

Many pilgrims carry in their "rucksacks" invisible wounds, unformulated questions, spiritual searches or even a vague nostalgia for God. The Church is called to accompany these searches with closeness and mercy: a simple conversation, a fraternal welcome, a liturgy celebrated with beauty and depth, a church open to silence, the sacrament of reconciliation offered with patience and humanity, or the simple witness of a community of believers can become places where the person experiences once more that God continues to come out to meet him.

For this reason, the Compostela Holy Year also wishes to be a school of fraternity. In a polarised and fragmented world, the Camino reminds

us that no one is saved alone[13]. Pilgrims often move forward sustained by small gestures of mutual help, by shared hospitality, by an unexpected conversation or by the solidarity born of common weariness. The Camino teaches that the human being does not fulfil himself by isolating himself, but by learning to walk with others.

Finally, the Compostela Jubilee wishes to point once again to Christ as the ultimate horizon of the human journey. The star leads to Bethlehem, as the Camino leads to an encounter. Every authentic Christian pilgrimage is, at bottom, a pilgrimage towards Christ, in whom man fully discovers his truth, his dignity and his hope.

As Saint John Paul II wrote, Jesus Christ is "the centre of the universe and of history"[14]. And only from Him, the incarnate Word, can man fully understand who he is and where he is going (cf. GS 22), for "in Jesus Christ, this magnificent humanity finds the way, the truth and the life, opening for each of us the path to grow towards fullness"[15]. The Compostela Holy Year wishes to help precisely with this: to lift our gaze once more to the star so as to rediscover the joy of walking towards a hope that does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5), Christ, "our hope" (1 Tim 1:1).

Notes

1. Saint Leo the Great, Sermon XXXV, 1. On the Epiphany of Our Lord Jesus Christ 5 (BAC 291, p. 140).
2. R. Guardini, *El ocaso de la Edad Moderna* (Madrid 1958), p. 112.
3. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* (Rome 2015), no. 105.
4. Leo XIV, Address to pilgrims from Latvia (24 November 2025).
5. Saint Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* I, 1, 1 (BAC 11, p. 6).
6. Cf. Byung-Chul Han, *El aroma del tiempo* (Barcelona 2020), p. 11. See also by the same author *La sociedad del cansancio* (Barcelona 2021^2).
7. Benedict XVI, General Audience (14 November 2012).
8. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen fidei* (Rome 2013), no. 57.
9. Francis, Bull of Indiction of the Ordinary Jubilee 2025 *Spes non confundit* (Rome 2024), no. 5.
10. Francis, *Spes non confundit*, no. 19.

11. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe salvi* (Rome 2007), no. 31.
12. Saint Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (Rome 1975), no. 80.
13. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Fratelli tutti* (Rome 2020), no. 32.
14. Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (Rome 1979), no. 1.
15. Leo XIV, Encyclical Letter *Magnifica humanitas* (Rome 2026), no. 1.

I. Man, the pilgrim

The experience of the journey belongs deeply to the human condition. Life is not a static reality, nor a mere remaining in place. Man is a being on the way, for every human existence has the structure of a pilgrimage. Without doubt, one of the most fruitful images of the Christian tradition has always been that of the *homo viator*, man the pilgrim. We are not beings definitively settled. We dwell provisionally in time and history while we seek a fullness that always exceeds us: "The Camino of Compostela, like every creation of man, is a sign, and thus the Camino ultimately signifies human life. To walk and to make pilgrimage without a homeland, in the exile of this world. The fatigue of the road shows us that every man is, in essence, *viator*, a pilgrim, created by God and set free by Christ, whose affirmation of creaturehood is the pillar of the Camino, which finds its greatest grandeur in the foundation of dignity, in the sacredness of each and every human being"[16].

This intuition runs through both Sacred Scripture and Christian thought. Abraham hears the voice of God telling him: "Leave your country" (Gen 12:1). Israel crosses the desert in an exodus towards the promised land. The disciples follow Christ by walking behind him (cf. Mk 1:17; 8:34), who reveals himself as the way that leads us to the Father (cf. Jn 14:6). For this reason, the believer walks his path aware that he is making a pilgrimage towards the definitive encounter with the Father: "Jesus is the way and the Father is where the way reaches its end. Jesus is not only the way insofar as, by his teaching as master, he leads to life; he is the way that leads to the Father insofar as he himself is the truth and the life. He is the way of life and of truth. To go to the Father one must follow Jesus. He is also the door (Jn 10:9), because to go to God is to enter into him, to pass through him"[17].

The Church herself is born as a pilgrim people in history, as the Second Vatican Council itself reminds us, citing Saint Augustine: "The Church 'goes forward on her pilgrim way amid the persecutions of the world

and the consolations of God,' announcing the cross of the Lord until he comes (cf. 1 Cor 11:26)" (LG 8). The *Letter to Diognetus* (V, 5.9) admirably describes this Christian condition: "They dwell in their own countries, but as sojourners; they take part in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners; every foreign land is their homeland, and every homeland a foreign land… They spend their lives on earth, but have their citizenship in heaven."

Contemporary men and women, even when they often live distracted by noise and acceleration, continue to experience this pilgrim condition within themselves. The question of meaning, of destiny, of truth and of happiness persists. This walking is not something incoherent, but is deeply related to transcendence and the beyond.

In this context, the Camino de Santiago appears as a great existential and spiritual metaphor. The pilgrim soon discovers that walking transforms the gaze, slowness purifies, and effort unsettles. Silence gives depth back to our questions, and living alongside strangers reveals the need for fraternity. For this reason, "pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago know well that in the rucksack one must carry only what is essential"[18].

It is no coincidence that so many men and women, even those explicitly distant from faith, feel drawn to the experience of pilgrimage. The Camino precisely invites us to slow down, to listen, to inhabit time in a different way. In it, fundamental questions reappear which ordinary life frequently silences: what truly sustains my existence? What do I hope for? What do I love? What endures? For this reason, "a pilgrim is one who leaves his house, leaves his homeland and sets out for a distant land in order to change his situation. It is the choice to put being before having… It is not possible to set out on the Camino, to be a pilgrim, without the sense nesting in the soul that, being a stranger, one can reach a better reality than the one left behind"[19].

In one of his last audiences, Pope Francis, before more than 5,000 Italian pilgrims and volunteers of the Camino de Santiago in Saint

Peter's Basilica, reminded us of the authentic meaning of the pilgrimage to Santiago in three signs:

> "The first is silence. The journey lived in silence lets you listen, listen with the heart, and so find, as you walk, through effort, the answers your heart is seeking, because your heart asks itself questions… Second, the Gospel… Pilgrimage is made by rereading the path that Jesus travelled, to the extreme gift of himself. The path is all the more true, all the more Christian, the more it leads us to go out of ourselves and to give ourselves freely in the service of others. And this is what the Holy Spirit does when we read the Gospel every day… The third element of pilgrimage is what I have called the 'Matthew 25 protocol': 'Whatever you did for one of these least of my brothers, you did for me' (Mt 25:40). Silence, the Gospel and doing good to the least, to the most disadvantaged. Always doing good. On the way, be attentive to others, especially to those who struggle most, to those who have fallen, to those who are in need"[20].

All this makes the Camino de Santiago a true spiritual pedagogy for our time: it slowly educates in essential dimensions of existence that have often been weakened or set aside, such as silence, interiority, patience, effort, contemplation, gratuitousness and openness to the other.

The true journey also takes place within the person. Step by step, day after day, the Camino dismantles false securities and compels us to meet ourselves again. Weariness, the simplicity of everyday life, the reduction of needs, contact with nature and the slow rhythm of the march help to recover a more authentic relationship with time, with the body and with one's own interior life. In the words of Benedict XVI: "The weariness of walking, the variety of landscapes, the meeting with people of other nationalities, open them to what is deepest and most common in all of us human beings: beings in search, beings in need of truth and beauty, of an experience of grace, of charity and peace, of forgiveness and redemption. And in the innermost depths of all those men the presence of God and the action of the Holy Spirit resound. Yes,

to every man who is silent within and keeps his distance from immediate appetites, desires and concerns, to the man who prays, God gives light so that he may find him and recognise Christ. Whoever makes pilgrimage to Santiago does so, at bottom, above all to meet God who, reflected in the majesty of Christ, welcomes and blesses him upon arriving at the Portico of Glory"[21].

In this sense, the Jacobean pilgrimage is a deeply countercultural experience. While contemporary society constantly pushes towards productivity, immediacy and the accelerated consumption of experiences, the Camino teaches us to stop, to listen and to contemplate, in the face of a permanent hyperactivity that fragments attention, makes inner silence difficult and ends up weakening the capacity to perceive what is essential. Like the prodigal son of the Gospel, the pilgrim can find himself again precisely when he abandons paths of self-sufficiency and sets out once more towards the Father's house (cf. Lk 15:18).

The Camino, on the contrary, obliges us to look differently. The pilgrim learns to be reconciled with silence, and discovers the value of slow conversations, of gratuitous encounters, of small gestures of mutual help. The Christian knows that silence is not emptiness, but the space where the Word of God can resound. The pilgrim who walks calmly learns little by little to listen not only to the sound of his footsteps, but also to the questions of his heart and to the discreet voice of the Lord who continues to speak in the midst of history. The Camino thus fosters a spiritual experience similar to that of the disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13ff): Christ himself becomes a companion on the road, sheds light on the life of man and rekindles hope in the weary heart.

Moreover, the Camino educates spiritually in the awareness of frailty. The pilgrim experiences his physical limits, his weariness and vulnerabilities. All of this is part of authentic Christian pilgrimage. In a culture that seeks to eliminate immediately every discomfort and every suffering, the Camino recalls that spiritual maturation also passes

through perseverance, patience and the capacity to cross the night sustained by hope.

The pilgrim thus discovers that the cross is part of the Christian way, for Jesus himself called his disciples to take up their cross and follow him (cf. Lk 9:23); he learns that it is precisely in frailty that the grace of God can be manifested: "Pilgrims usually set out at night, and often that initial darkness of the journey can frighten them. We might recall the hymn of Vespers, *The night is a time of salvation*, to say that, if we go in good company, the difficulties of walking and the danger of going astray are reduced. It is the Lord who leads us; he is the master of history and of each of our histories; he determines the times. We walk behind him, even more, we walk with him as members of one body"[22].

The pilgrim also discovers that he needs others and that no one reaches the goal alone. At a time when self-sufficiency and individualism are so often exalted, this experience has an enormous humanising force. The Camino reminds us that the human being is constitutively relational and that only in fraternity can he fully understand his own dignity. Moreover, pilgrimage educates in a deeply evangelical truth that we have already recalled: no one is saved alone[23]. The pilgrim needs help, hospitality, welcome and company. He learns to receive and he also learns to share. The experience of the Camino often breaks down social, cultural or ideological barriers and gives rise to a simple fraternity born of shared vulnerability. In this something essential of the Gospel is revealed. The Church is a pilgrim people who walk united towards the Kingdom of God, sustaining one another in faith and in charity.

For this reason the Camino de Santiago is not only an ancient pilgrimage route nor a valuable cultural itinerary. It is also a spiritual school for the man of today. A pedagogy of faith and of humanity, a vital route where one can still learn that to live does not simply mean to advance faster, but to walk with purpose; not to accumulate experiences, but to discover a direction; not to shut oneself up in

oneself, but to open oneself to God, to others and to the hope that neither fades nor disappoints (cf. Rom 5:5).

The arrival in Santiago de Compostela and the passage through the Holy Door symbolically express this inner transformation. The pilgrim understands that every Christian pilgrimage is, at bottom, an image of the whole of life directed towards the definitive encounter with God. Santiago de Compostela is not simply the end of a journey; it is a sign of the ultimate destiny of man, called to communion with Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:9): "This union of Christ with man is in itself a mystery, from which the 'new man' is born, called to participate in the life of God, created anew in Christ, in the fullness of grace and truth"[24].

Therefore, the Camino de Santiago can become today a true itinerary of evangelisation and spiritual renewal. Not only because it preserves an immense historical and cultural wealth, but because it continues to offer a deeply human and Christian experience: the experience of discovering that life is a journey, that Christ accompanies the pilgrim and that, even in the midst of the nights of history, the star that leads to the joy of the encounter with God continues to shine. For this reason, "another treasure that we cannot forget in our satchel [as pilgrims] is the Viaticum of the pilgrim. The Bread of the Word and of the Eucharist are even more necessary to us than material food, because they open for us the path of salvation"[25].

Notes

16. Eugenio Romero Pose, *El hombre como peregrino* (Madrid 2021), p. 11.
17. Ysabel de Andía, *Homo Viator. Antropología del camino espiritual* (Madrid 2017), p. 10.
18. Leo XIV, Greeting at the meeting with the bishops of Spain (Madrid, 8 June 2026).
19. Eugenio Romero Pose, *El hombre como peregrino*, p. 12.
20. Francis, Address to the Italian pilgrims of the Camino de Santiago assisted by the Opera Don Guanella (19 December 2024).
21. Benedict XVI, Homily at Holy Mass in the Obradoiro square (Santiago de Compostela, 6 November 2010).
22. Leo XIV, Greeting at the meeting with the bishops of Spain (Madrid, 8 June 2026).

23. Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, nos. 32, 54 and 137.
24. Saint John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, no. 18.
25. Leo XIV, Greeting at the meeting with the bishops of Spain (Madrid, 8 June 2026).

II. On the Camino de Santiago, joy is reborn

The immense joy that floods the Magi (cf. Mt 2:10) expresses one of the deepest and most luminous feelings of every authentically Christian experience: the joy that is born of the encounter with God. The Magi from the East, after travelling uncertain paths and passing through the darkness of the night, experience an overflowing joy when they discover once more the star that guides their steps towards Bethlehem. It is not a superficial or passing emotion, but the deep certainty that their search has meaning, that they are not walking alone, and that there is a light capable of leading them to the truth.

Today too, many men and women live in search. Perhaps they cannot always name what they long for, but they remain inwardly restless. Amid so much noise and so many excesses that fragment us inwardly, the human heart continues to seek a true joy, one that is neither ephemeral nor deceptive. Today we have countless possibilities for entertainment and consumption, but we do not always find deep reasons to hope and to live fully. Offers of immediate well-being multiply, but a silent thirst for depth, for reconciliation and for inner peace persists. In this context, the Camino de Santiago continues to appear as a singularly meaningful experience, because it is, above all, a human and spiritual setting where many men and women find again the joy of walking towards a goal that gives meaning to life.

Many pilgrims come to the Camino carrying with them inner weariness, invisible wounds, unformulated questions or spiritual searches that are still confused. Some come explicitly moved by faith; others simply seek silence, rest or a new beginning. But the Camino de Santiago has the capacity to open inner spaces where the human being listens to himself again and where the great questions of existence can be reborn. For this reason, in this Holy Year, making our own the words of Pope Leo XIV, “we wish to enter into dialogue with all the men and women of our time, with whom we share the events, the questions and the aspirations of humanity”[26].

And it is precisely there that an unexpected experience of joy often begins. Not the superficial joy that depends solely on favourable circumstances, but a deeper joy, born of the rediscovery of what is essential. The pilgrim soon learns that true joy does not spring from the accumulation of goods, from success or from self-sufficiency, but from the capacity to live reconciled with oneself, with others and with God.

The Christian tradition knows well that joy is one of the most authentic signs of the Gospel. When a person truly meets Christ, something new is born within him. Faith does not shut a person up in sadness or fear, but widens the heart and gives hope back. For this reason Pope Francis recalled from the beginning of his pontificate that "the joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus. Those who accept his offer of salvation are set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness. With Christ joy is constantly born anew"[27].

In the silence of the Camino, many pilgrims rediscover the beauty of prayer, the value of a sincere conversation, the depth of a friendship born of shared frailty, or the inner peace that springs from feeling accompanied. The experience of walking together creates simple and true bonds. On the Camino the usual social masks often disappear and the person appears as he is: vulnerable, in need of help and open to the welcome of others.

This simple fraternity is also a source of joy, for the one who makes pilgrimage needs to be helped and can himself become a help to others. In a world often marked by individualism and indifference, the Camino teaches once again that human life reaches its deepest truth in communion and in self-gift. For this reason, "the Church considers as companions on the way all those who sincerely seek 'truth, goodness and beauty,' regarding them as 'precious allies' in the defence of the dignity of every person and in the care of creation"[28].

Moreover, the joy of the Camino has a properly spiritual and Christian dimension that finds its fullness in the encounter with the Lord. Like the Magi guided by the star, contemporary man also needs signs that

orient his path amid the uncertainties of history. And the Camino de Santiago continues to offer that possibility: the possibility of meeting Christ again, the light that illumines every human existence, for "the mystery of man becomes clear only in the mystery of the incarnate Word" (GS 22).

The star that the Magi contemplated did not remove the difficulties of the journey, but it enabled them to recognise that they were not walking aimlessly. Today too, Christian faith does not automatically suppress the trials and darknesses of life, but it offers a light capable of sustaining hope and of opening the heart once more to joy.

In this sense, the Compostela Holy Year 2027 wishes to be a great invitation to recover the joy of faith. A humble and serene joy, compatible with the difficulties of the journey, yet stronger than fear and disenchantment. It is the joy of experiencing that life has meaning and that the ultimate horizon of existence is not darkness, but communion with God.

For this reason the Camino de Santiago remains today a true school of hope and of Christian joy. In the midst of a humanity that is often weary and disoriented, it continues to remind us that there is a star capable of guiding our steps, and that whoever lets himself be led by it can experience, today too, the immense joy of the encounter with Christ: "To make pilgrimage is not simply to visit some place in order to admire its treasures of nature, art or history. To make pilgrimage means, rather, to go out of ourselves to meet God where he has revealed himself, where divine grace has shone with particular splendour and has produced abundant fruits of conversion and holiness among believers"[29].

Notes

26. Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, no. 2.
27. Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (Rome 2013), no. 1.
28. Leo XIV, *Magnifica humanitas*, no. 23.

29. Benedict XVI, Address on the visit to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (6 November 2010).

III. A Church that welcomes and accompanies

The great evangelising task of the Compostela Holy Year will not consist mainly in multiplying strategies or activities, but in letting the face of Christ shine through living, welcoming and merciful communities. This obliges us to ask ourselves how to proclaim the Gospel today in a culture that often lives as if God did not exist and which, at the same time, shows signs of a renewed search for a transcendent horizon, especially among the younger generations. We find ourselves before a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, we are witnessing a process of secularisation that has profoundly transformed the consciousness of our societies. For many, God no longer appears as a necessary reference for understanding the world, guiding conduct or giving direction to existence. As Saint John Paul II warned, our culture is passing through "a kind of eclipse of the sense of God and of man"[30]. When God disappears from the horizon, the truth about the human being, his dignity, his vocation and his destiny is also darkened.

On the other hand, precisely in the midst of this eclipse, a search persists that surfaces in so many pilgrims who walk the Caminos de Santiago. This same apparently self-sufficient culture also manifests symptoms of a deep spiritual restlessness. Beneath the surface of a society that seems satisfied with material well-being, questions emerge that find no adequate answer in the dominant discourses. Uncertainty about the future, the fragility of human bonds, suffering, the experience of loneliness, the awareness of one's own limits and the desire for authenticity continue to awaken in many people the search for something that transcends the immediate.

Particularly significant is the phenomenon we observe in many young people. Although many of them have grown up far from regular religious practice and have little knowledge of the Christian tradition, not a few show a new sensitivity to spiritual questions and to the question of faith. They seek authentic experiences, reject merely ideological discourses, and show interest in silence, interiority,

prayerful contemplation and the Christian meaning of life. This is a direct call to the Church, to our communities and movements, to rethink how we welcome and accompany these young people.

Pastoral strategies and ready-made answers are not enough: the men and women of our time need witnesses. They need to find communities capable of letting reconciled humanity, serene joy and credible hope shine through. How can we go on speaking of Jesus Christ in a world that seems to have lost the capacity to listen? How can we evangelise people who often live with their backs turned to God? The answer will come not mainly from strategies or methods, but from the authenticity of witness.

Let us make our own the questions that Saint Paul VI put to those of us who are called to be evangelisers: "Do you truly believe what you proclaim? Do you live what you believe? Do you truly preach what you live? Today more than ever the witness of life has become an essential condition for real effectiveness in preaching. Without beating about the bush, we can say that to a certain extent we make ourselves responsible for the Gospel we proclaim." Without forgetting the questions he addressed to the Church herself: "Is she anchored in the heart of the world, and sufficiently free and independent to challenge the world? Does she bear witness to her own solidarity with men and at the same time to the Absolute God? Has she grown in contemplative fervour and adoration, and does she show more zeal in missionary, charitable and liberating activity?"[31].

The Camino de Santiago is a privileged observatory for perceiving this reality. Those who walk its paths represent, in some way, an image of contemporary humanity. Many pilgrims arrive without explicitly religious motivations, but they carry with them deeply spiritual questions. Some seek to be reconciled with their own history. Others wish to find guidance for important decisions in their lives. Others seek silence in the face of the constant noise of society. Others simply feel the need to stop and ask themselves who they are and where they are

heading. And precisely there a privileged space opens for evangelisation. Not because the Church possesses ready-made answers to all human problems, but because she guards the proclamation of the One who is the definitive answer to the restlessness of the human heart: Jesus Christ.

The Camino de Santiago is an extraordinary opportunity for a simple and profound evangelisation, in which many pilgrims will come closer to Christ not through an elaborate apologetic argument but through the witness of a lived faith. The welcome of a *hospitalero*, a priest's availability to listen, the simple prayer of a community, the beauty of a liturgy celebrated with dignity or charity exercised discreetly can become the first proclamation of the Gospel. As Saint Paul VI recalled, "contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses" (EN 41)[32]. For this reason the great evangelising task of the Camino consists, above all, in witness.

Today's pilgrim does not need to meet a Church concerned mainly with herself, with her structures or with the mere preservation of her spaces. He needs to meet a Church capable of coming out to meet him, of sharing his questions and of accompanying his searches. Some come explicitly seeking God; others simply seek to put down deeper roots in their lives; others, perhaps without knowing it, seek a word of hope capable of illuminating their uncertainties.

For this reason, the Holy Year is a privileged opportunity for the Church to exercise one of the most necessary ministries of our time: the ministry of closeness. Even before proclaiming a doctrine, the Church is called to become a companion on the way. The risen Jesus Christ himself revealed himself to the disciples of Emmaus by walking with them, first listening to their disappointments and frustrations, sharing their questions and then helping them to reread their history in the light of the Word of God (cf. Lk 24:13-35). Before explaining, Jesus

accompanies; before teaching, he listens; before correcting, he shares the road.

Today too the Church is called to reproduce this pedagogy of the Risen One. The Camino de Santiago offers a privileged space for it. Every parish, every hostel, every Christian community situated on the Jacobean routes should see itself as an extension of that inn at Emmaus where the Lord continues to meet pilgrims.

The parishes of the Camino are called to become true houses of hospitality. In a society where many people experience loneliness, indifference or the lack of meaningful bonds, Christian welcome acquires an extraordinary evangelising force. For this reason priests, religious, volunteers, *hospitaleros* and pastoral workers must understand that their presence on the Camino is a genuine evangelising mission. They are not simply organisers or service providers but, above all, witnesses of the Gospel and servants of hope. They are called to accompany processes, to respect rhythms, to listen to wounds, to sustain searches and discreetly to sow the seed of faith in the hearts of those who draw near. Often the task will not consist in offering immediate answers but in helping the right questions to be reborn. It is not a matter of convincing: it is rather a matter of making visible, through one's own life, the merciful closeness of God.

This mission is especially necessary in the current cultural context. We live in societies where information and opinions abound, but where spaces of deep listening are scarce. Many people carry within them questions they have never been able to formulate, sufferings that no one has listened to and spiritual searches that remain hidden beneath the noise of everyday life. The Church that makes pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago is called to offer precisely that listening which dignifies, accompanies and opens horizons.

The Church is not a sum of individuals walking parallel paths, but a people summoned by God to walk united. As the Second Vatican Council reminds us, the Church is the pilgrim People of God in history,

called to be a sign and instrument of communion for all humanity (cf. LG 1). And this "requires of the Church, in this time of ever harsher polarisations and oppositions, a witness of unity in plurality: a communion capable of welcoming the richness of the gifts, the charisms and the sensitivities that the Holy Spirit raises up in the People of God. The image of Christ allows itself to be recognised in the living mosaic of the Church, where many tesserae, without being confused, converge to manifest the beauty of the one Lord"[33].

On the Camino this reality becomes visible in a particularly eloquent way: people of very different languages, cultures and conditions discover that they can walk together because they share the same condition as pilgrims: as a fruitful redundancy, it is synodality on the Camino that leads us, through the Apostle Saint James, to full communion with God and with our brothers and sisters, in the manner of a renewed Pentecost in which the multitude, each in his own language (cf. Acts 2:6-11), listens to and proclaims the greatness of God: "To this place [Santiago] come the barbarian peoples and those who dwell in all the climes of the world... and the other innumerable nations of every tongue, tribe and people come to him in caravans and phalanxes, fulfilling their vows in thanksgiving to the Lord and bearing the prize of praises"[34].

In short, the Compostela Holy Year offers the Church today an exceptional opportunity to show one of the most beautiful faces of the Gospel: that of a community that accompanies, listens, welcomes and walks alongside the humanity of its time. A Church that does not set herself over against the world as a strange or distant reality, but shares the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties of humanity, in order to lead them, with humility and confidence, towards the encounter with Christ, companion on the way and source of all hope (cf. GS 1).

The men and women of our time perhaps do not expect from the Church great intellectual constructions or abstract answers. They hope to find witnesses; they hope to discover communities where faith is

lived with authenticity; they hope to find places where it is possible to experience forgiveness, mercy, fraternity and hope: they hope to find men and women whose lives reflect something of the joy that is born of the Gospel.

For this reason, the Camino de Santiago represents today an extraordinary opportunity for the mission of the Church. In it converge the search of man and the initiative of God. In it the questions of our time meet the ever-new proposal of the Gospel. In it, as happened to the Magi from the East, many can lift up their eyes once more (cf. Jn 4:35), recognise the star and set out towards Christ, the source of true joy.

Perhaps the great pastoral task of the Compostela Holy Year 2027 consists precisely in this: helping our contemporaries to recognise that star which leads us to the Lord, the joy of men, as is beautifully sung in the well-known tenth movement of Cantata 147 by Johann Sebastian Bach. But not by imposing it, rather by showing it; not by replacing the search, but by accompanying it; not by offering hasty answers, but by walking alongside those who seek. For, as happened in Bethlehem, God continues to come out to meet those who seek him with a sincere heart, even when they do not yet know how to name what they truly long for (cf. Lk 2:8-17).

Notes

30. Saint John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* (Rome 1995), no. 21.
31. Saint Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (Rome 1975), no. 76.
32. These words of Saint Paul VI were originally spoken in his Address to the members of the *Consilium de Laicis* (2 October 1974).
33. Leo XIV, Greeting at the meeting with the bishops of Spain (Madrid, 8 June 2026).
34. *Codex Calixtinus*, Sermon *Veneranda dies*, book I, chap. XVII.

IV. Hospitality, sacrament of encounter

Hospitality is one of the oldest, most constant and theologically densest features of the Christian experience. In the context of the Camino de Santiago, this virtue acquires particular prominence, for the pilgrim is not simply a traveller but a *homo viator*, someone who is searching, in an inner and outer transit towards God. The welcome of the pilgrim, therefore, is not an accessory or merely social gesture, but a concrete expression of the Gospel lived out, a mediation of grace and a privileged place of encounter with Christ: "Whatever you did for one of these, my least brothers, you did for me" (Mt 25:40).

From Scripture onward, hospitality appears as a sacred obligation. In the Old Testament, the foreigner is the object of special protection: "You shall not oppress or afflict a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex 22:20). This command does not respond only to a historical memory, but to a theology of election: Israel, having experienced the mercy of God, is called to reproduce it in its dealings with the other. Hospitality thus becomes a reflection of the divine action and a response to God's election.

The episode of Abraham at Mamre (cf. Gen 18:1-8) is paradigmatic: the patriarch welcomes three unknown men with generosity and promptness, and in that act of hospitality the presence of God is revealed. The Christian tradition has read this passage as a Trinitarian epiphany (the icon of Rublev) and as a permanent teaching: in the guest, God himself can be manifested. This intuition will be taken up with force in the New Testament.

Indeed, Jesus Christ identifies his own person with the needy: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Mt 25:35). This statement is not metaphorical but ontological on the plane of charity: the neighbour, especially the vulnerable one, is like a sacrament of Christ. Hospitality, then, stands at the core of the final judgement. It is not a secondary option, but a decisive criterion of Christian authenticity.

The Lord himself lived as a pilgrim and a guest. “The Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Lk 9:58), which reveals his itinerant condition and his dependence on the welcome of others. In the account of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-35), the disciples recognise Jesus precisely in the context of shared hospitality: they invite him to stay, they break bread with him, and their eyes are opened. Hospitality thus becomes a place of revelation.

Saint John Chrysostom insists forcefully on the obligation of hospitality: “Do you truly want to honour the body of Christ? Do not allow it to be naked”[35]. For him, liturgy and charity are inseparable: one cannot venerate Christ at the altar and neglect him in the poor person or the stranger. This perspective is especially illuminating in the celebration of the Holy Year, where piety and sacramental practice must be accompanied by the concrete welcome of the pilgrim and of every neighbour in need of our help and Samaritan closeness.

Saint Augustine, for his part, stresses the spiritual dimension of hospitality. In one of his sermons, devoted to the welcome of Christ in the house of Martha and Mary (cf. Lk 10:38-42), he recalls that we are all pilgrims on this earth: “We are still pilgrims, who have not arrived at a stable dwelling; we are still on the way, not yet in the homeland”[36]. This awareness relativises possession and opens us to sharing. Whoever welcomes the pilgrim recognises in him his own condition and anticipates the definitive communion in God.

Saint Benedict of Nursia, in his Rule, establishes a fundamental principle concerning guests: “They will adore Christ in them, whom they receive… special care is to be shown to the poor and to strangers, showering them with attention, because in them Christ is received in a particular way”[37]. This norm is not a mere ascetic recommendation, but a theological formulation that gathers up the evangelical teaching. The monastery becomes a space of welcome where the pilgrim finds not only a roof and food, but also a visible sign of God’s love.

In the Jacobean tradition, hospitality has been a structural element from its origins. Hospitals, hostels, monasteries and parishes dotted the routes, offering material and spiritual assistance. Welcome was not limited to the provision of basic goods, but included pastoral care, listening, reconciliation and the celebration of faith. The pilgrim was seen as a bearer of blessing, someone who, in his frailty, made Christ present. Let us recall what the first guide to the Camino, the Codex Calixtinus, exhorts us: "pilgrims, both poor and rich, must be charitably received and venerated by all peoples when they go to or come from Santiago. For whoever receives them and diligently shelters them will have as guest not only Saint James but also the Lord, according to his own words, when he says in the Gospel: 'Whoever receives you receives me'... Therefore, let it be known that the pilgrims of Saint James, both poor and rich, must be justly received and diligently cared for"[38].

And the Second Vatican Council, in the Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, "inculcates respect for man, so that everyone, without exception, should consider his neighbour as another self" (GS 27), overcoming every form of exclusion. This universal fraternity takes concrete form in the welcome of the other, especially of the one who is on the road, uprooted or in need.

Saint John Paul II, deeply bound to the Camino de Santiago, emphasised its spiritual and ecclesial dimension. In his well-known address in Santiago de Compostela (1982), he recalled that Europe was also built through these pilgrim routes, where faith was transmitted through the experience of encounter and hospitality[39]. The Camino is not only a cultural route, but above all a way of faith and of communion. In this context, hospitality appears as a sign of the Church that accompanies, sustains and orients. It is not a closed institution, but a community going forth, open to encounter: a Church as the open house of the Father (cf. EG 47). Hospitality thus becomes a concrete form of evangelisation.

In *Fratelli tutti*, Francis proposes the parable of the Good Samaritan as the paradigm of our relationship with the other[40]. The Samaritan does not ask about the identity of the wounded man, but makes himself a neighbour to him (cf. Lk 10:25-37). In a similar way, the welcome of the pilgrim must not depend on his origin, motivation or beliefs, but spring from a universal charity that recognises the dignity of every person.

In the present context, marked by mobility, globalisation and also by new forms of exclusion, Christian hospitality on the Camino de Santiago takes on renewed relevance. Today's pilgrim may be moved by various reasons — spiritual, cultural, sporting — but in every case he is a valid interlocutor for Christian witness. Welcome becomes an understandable language, a "grammar" of faith that needs no translation.

However, this hospitality cannot be reduced to the provision of services. There is a risk of a "touristification" of the Camino that empties the experience of its spiritual content. Christian welcome must be distinguished by its gratuitousness, its personalisation and its explicit reference to Christ. It is not only a matter of managing flows, but of accompanying persons. This implies adequate formation of pastoral workers and *hospitaleros*, who must integrate professional competence and spiritual sensitivity. Hospitality requires time, attention and a certain willingness to be vulnerable: to welcome the other means letting oneself be affected by him, entering into relationship.

In short, hospitality on the Camino de Santiago is a privileged expression of Christian charity. To welcome the pilgrim is to welcome Christ; to serve him is to take part in the mission of the Church; to walk with him is to anticipate the definitive communion. In a fragmented world, this practice becomes a prophetic sign of unity and hope, an invitation to rediscover that, deep down, we are all pilgrims towards God and need to be welcomed along the way.

As Pope Leo XIV invites us, we must stress "the desire to learn more about the art of hospitality. The holiday industry wants to sell us every kind of experience, but perhaps not what we are looking for. Indeed, every true encounter cannot be bought; it is free: whether the one we have with God, or the one we have with others, or even with nature. All that is needed is to become a guest: to make room and also to ask for it; to welcome and to let oneself be welcomed"[41].

Notes

35. Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew* 50, 3 (BAC 146, pp. 80-81).
36. Saint Augustine of Hippo, Sermon 103, 1, 1 (BAC 441, p. 859).
37. Saint Benedict of Nursia, *Rule* LIII, 7.15 (BAC 406, pp. 155-156). Leo XIV, Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi te* (Rome 2025), no. 55: "Benedictine monastic hospitality remains to this day a sign of a Church that opens its doors, that welcomes without asking questions, that heals without demanding anything in return".
38. *Codex Calixtinus*, On how the pilgrims of Saint James must be welcomed, book V, chap. XI.
39. Cf. Saint John Paul II, Address at the European act in Santiago de Compostela (9 November 1982).
40. Cf. Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (Chapter Two: A stranger on the road), nos. 55-86.
41. Leo XIV, Angelus (20 July 2025).

V. Pilgrims towards joy

The words of the evangelist Matthew — “they were filled with immense joy at seeing the star” (Mt 2:10) —, chosen as the motto of the Compostela Holy Year 2027, place us at the very heart of the Christian experience. The Magi from the East do not experience a superficial joy or a passing enthusiasm. Their joy is born of having found again the light that guides their steps, of discovering that their search has not been in vain, and of sensing that the end of their pilgrimage is ever closer. After the uncertainty, the questions and the night, the star reappears as a sign of God’s fidelity and as the promise of an encounter that will transform their lives for ever: the language of the star is a message of hope. The Magi experience the joy of one who understands that he is not walking in vain, that there is a goal, and that God himself comes out to meet him: they were “men with an inner restlessness, men of hope who were expectantly seeking the true star of salvation”[42].

The joy that springs from contemplating the star is, in reality, the joy of one who discovers that existence has a direction and a meaning. It is the joy of one who ceases to walk in the dark. It is the joy of one who perceives that God does not remain distant or indifferent before the human search, but comes out to meet man and offers him a light capable of guiding his steps.

Perhaps few words are as necessary today as the word joy. We live in a society that has innumerable means to produce well-being, entertainment and immediate satisfaction, but which often seems unable to offer deep reasons for joyful hope. The data and studies on loneliness, anxiety, depression and various forms of existential unease reveal a disturbing paradox: while material possibilities increase, many hearts continue to experience a profound inner fragility.

This situation especially affects the younger generations. Many young people have grown up in a culture characterised by uncertainty, the breakdown of bonds, technological acceleration and the difficulty of

formulating stable plans for the future. Not a few experience a kind of existential weariness, a difficulty in finding solid reasons to sustain hope. And yet, precisely among them, there also emerges a renewed search for authenticity, meaning and fulfilment, with a strong centrality of affective bonds — family and friendship — and a clear aspiration to have time for leisure and personal care, together with an increase in the importance attributed to religious and spiritual beliefs[43].

In the face of this reality, the Church is called to rediscover and proclaim anew the Gospel of joy. This is not a secondary matter. Joy belongs to the very core of Christian revelation. From the first pages of the Gospel we find the announcement of "good news of great joy for all the people" (Lk 2:10). The incarnation of the Son of God inaugurates a history of salvation destined to fill the human heart with gladness.

Saint Paul VI understood with extraordinary lucidity the importance of this message when he published, in the Holy Year of 1975, the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete in Domino*, one of the most beautiful texts of the contemporary magisterium on Christian joy: "a kind of hymn to divine joy is what We would wish to sing, so that it may find an echo in the whole world and above all in the Church: that joy may spread in hearts together with the love from which it springs, through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (cf. Rom 5:5)"[44]. He observes that modern man seeks happiness incessantly and yet finds great difficulty in attaining it. For this reason, he acknowledges that joy is a universal aspiration inscribed in the human heart: "the exultant joy of existence and of life; the joy of honest and sanctified love; the reassuring joy of nature and of silence; the sometimes austere joy of careful work; the joy and satisfaction of duty done; the transparent joy of purity, of service, of sharing; the demanding joy of sacrifice"[45].

Pope Montini acknowledges the shadows, sufferings and contradictions that accompany human existence. He does not propose a naive or sentimental joy. He knows well the wounds of the contemporary world. Nevertheless, he affirms firmly that there is a joy

that no adverse circumstance can completely destroy: the joy that is born of communion with God: "Christian joy is by its very nature a spiritual sharing in the unfathomable joy, at once divine and human, found in the Heart of the glorified Jesus Christ"[46]. This statement has enormous theological depth. Christian joy is not simply an emotion or an optimistic attitude towards life. Its ultimate source is Christ himself. The believer shares in the joy of the Risen One. For this reason, it can subsist even in the midst of suffering, trial or uncertainty. It does not depend exclusively on favourable circumstances, but on a presence: the living presence of the Lord. This intuition will be taken up decades later by Pope Francis at the beginning of *Evangelii gaudium*: "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and lives of all who encounter Jesus" (EG 1).

Christian joy is always born of the encounter with Christ. Where Christ is welcomed, hope is reborn; where hope revives, joy flourishes anew.

For this reason, the question of joy is not simply an affective or emotional matter. It has a profound anthropological dimension. Joy humanises. A truly joyful person does not live shut up in himself. Joy opens the heart, widens the gaze, strengthens the capacity to love and generates bonds of communion. Conversely, permanent sadness, resentment or despair tend to shut a person up in himself and to impoverish his relationships. Saint Paul VI perceived this deeply human dimension of joy when he wrote: "man experiences joy when he finds himself in harmony with nature and above all in encounter, participation and communion with others"[47].

Joy thus appears intimately linked to the capacity to go out of oneself, to open oneself to the other and to experience the beauty of gift, a teaching of extraordinary relevance in a culture often marked by individualism and isolation.

The Camino de Santiago offers precisely a privileged experience of this humanising joy. The pilgrim discovers that the deepest joys are usually also the simplest: the welcome received, the unexpected friendship, the shared conversation, the beauty of a sunrise, the help given in a

moment of difficulty, the silence of an open church or the prayer said at the end of the day. Little by little he learns that happiness does not consist mainly in possessing more, but in living differently.

The very dynamic of pilgrimage educates in this truth. The pilgrim travels light. He learns to distinguish between the necessary and the accessory. He experiences the joy that is born of gratuitousness and fraternity. He discovers that life finds its fullness when it ceases to revolve exclusively around oneself.

But there is a still deeper dimension. Every Christian pilgrimage is, at bottom, a parable of human existence on its way towards God. The Camino de Santiago does not lead only to a geographical goal: it responds first to a universal human aspiration — the desire for joy — and then leads to its ultimate source, which is Christ. And it is precisely this encounter that is the ultimate source of all authentic joy: "No holy city constitutes such a goal [the final goal of our earthly pilgrimage]. It lies beyond this world, in the depths of the mystery of God, still invisible to us; because we walk by faith, it is not a clear vision, and what we shall be has not yet been revealed to us"[48].

Like the Magi, the men and women of our time also continue to seek a star to orient their path, they too pass through uncertainties and nights, they too need signs of hope. The mission of the Church, in this Compostela Holy Year, consists precisely in helping them to discover that this star is still shining, in recalling precisely this fundamental truth: Christ continues to come out to meet man. And that whoever lets himself be led by him can experience, today too, the immense joy of knowing himself loved, accompanied and saved (cf. EG 264).

Therefore, the joy we propose is not a passing emotion or a superficial optimism. It is the joy of the pilgrim who discovers that he does not walk alone. It is the joy of one who knows himself loved by God. It is the joy of one who experiences forgiveness, reconciliation and hope. It is the joy of one who finally finds what he was seeking, even when he did not yet know how to put a name to it.

In a humanity often marked by weariness, insecurity and disenchantment, the Holy Year 2027 is called to become a great pilgrimage of joy. Not an evasive joy that ignores the problems of the world, but a paschal joy, born of the certainty that Christ has conquered sin and death and continues to walk beside us. How could we not recall the words of Dante in the *Divine Comedy*, when, referring to Saint James, both to the memory of the Apostle and to the Cathedral that houses his remains, he exclaims: "Look, look; behold the lord for whom, down there, Galicia is visited… Glorious soul, through whom the generosity of our basilica was exalted: make hope resound in this height"[49].

Like the Magi from the East, we too are called to lift up our eyes (cf. Jn 4:35). And when we once more discover the star that leads us to Christ, we will be able to experience again that immense joy that filled the hearts of the first pilgrims of Bethlehem and that remains, today and always, the most beautiful gift of the Gospel. For Christian joy is not simply a consequence of faith. It is one of its most beautiful fruits. It is the sign that the Gospel has truly reached the heart. And it is, perhaps, one of the most convincing witnesses that the Church can offer to a humanity that is weary but still thirsting for hope.

CONCLUSION. Lifting our gaze once more

The Compostela Holy Year 2027 wishes to be a great invitation to lift our eyes once more to the star. In the midst of so many doubts, we need to rediscover that life is not condemned to emptiness or absurdity, that God continues to walk with humanity, and that the Gospel remains a new and necessary word for our time.

The Camino de Santiago reminds us that human existence is a pilgrimage, that no one is saved alone, that we need companions along the way, hospitality, silence, reconciliation and hope: "Let us lift up our eyes! Let us learn from Jesus to look at our neighbour, people, the world, 'with the eyes of God,' that is, with love, respect and compassion"[50].

Preserving the proper identity of the Camino de Santiago — religious and Christian in its origin, its spirit and its goal — is a challenge and a responsibility. Preserving this genuine identity is a task to which all of us, from the parishes of the Camino, are summoned. Let us care for the Camino de Santiago as an expressive symbol that encourages and sustains the meaning and joy of making pilgrimage — even if with effort and sacrifice — through the world, society and life.

Walking towards the Compostela Jubilee 2027 may seem like a route through the desert. We know that we must travel it carrying with us what is essential: the gift of the Holy Spirit, the closeness of Jesus, the truth of his Word, the Eucharistic Bread that nourishes us, the fraternity of ecclesial communion and the impulse of charity. It is the water of the well that makes the desert bloom, and as in the desert night the stars grow brighter, so in the sky of our journey the light of Mary shines with strength, Mother of Welcome (she welcomed in her womb the Son of God) and of the Pilgrim (the Word came to dwell among us), to whom, trusting, we entrust ourselves.

May the Apostle Saint James accompany all the pilgrims who, during the Holy Year 2027, will arrive seeking light for their lives, so that they

too may experience the immense joy of seeing the star again and of meeting Christ anew.

Notes

42. J. Ratzinger, *Jesús de Nazaret. Los relatos de la infancia* 103 (BAC Maior 118; Obras Completas VI/1, p. 69).
43. Cf. Fundación SM – Observatorio de la Juventud Iberoamericana, *Informe jóvenes españoles 2026*.
44. Saint Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* (Rome 1975), no. 4.
45. Saint Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 12.
46. Saint Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 16.
47. Saint Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 6.
48. Saint Paul VI, *Gaudete in Domino*, no. 63.
49. Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*. Paradise. Canto XXV 17-18. 29-30.
50. Leo XIV, General Audience (17 June 2026).