

From Pontiff to Pew (continued):

Pilgrims, brothers and sisters, you will not leave Lourdes as you arrived. You will leave as missionaries of hope. Indeed, the miracle of Lourdes is that it can awaken the joy of hope in the very midst of suffering and hardship. The Virgin Mary heals our outlook and changes our hearts, giving them peace. In your countries, dioceses and families, become living witnesses to this divine strength and tenderness, which help us to persevere towards our goal. Sustained by the prayers of the sick and the love of our Mother, walk with confidence into the future. Do not be afraid of the storms of the world, for the holy Mother of God watches over your journey, she shelters the Church beneath her mantle of tenderness and, as the radiant Morning Star, guides your steps, so that with joy she may bring you to new birth in the very life of her Son Jesus. Amen.

In his weekly **Wednesday Audience**, Pope Leo wanted to address his most recent apostolic journey to France. Here it is in its entirety:

Brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today I would like to talk to you about the Apostolic Journey I made to France in recent days. It was a great gift for me and for the people of God in that country, and I give thanks to the Lord for it. I wish to express once again my gratitude to all those who welcomed me, the civil authorities and the Pastors of the Church, and to the many people who wished to meet the Pope or even just to greet him in the streets, as an apostle of Christ and a messenger of peace. Thank you to everyone!

I would like to gather my thoughts and impressions – still very vivid – of this pastoral Visit centred on a single great symbol: the Cathedral of Notre-Dame of Paris. There, in the afternoon of the first day, we celebrated Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a solemn yet at the same time joyful liturgy, in which music, song and the beauty of the temple stirred the hearts of those united in prayer.

It is precisely Notre-Dame, with the tragedy it has endured, that can symbolically shed light on this entire Apostolic Journey, offering a perspective that I would summarize in one word: rebirth.

The Cathedral of Paris, which just seven years ago seemed mortally wounded by a devastating fire, has now been rebuilt and is more splendid than ever. That disaster sparked a positive reaction at every level, some more visible and practical, others more hidden and of a spiritual nature.

Its restoration was a test of the possible collaboration between the Church, the State, public institutions and civil society. This approach made it possible to make the most of both the generosity of benefactors and the expertise of professionals and skilled workers. The synergy for the common good should be the norm for institutions, political and social forces, and all those with civil and economic responsibilities. This is the message I wished to convey to the French authorities, as well as to the members of

UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which has its headquarters in Paris, highlighting the fundamental criterion upon which such collaboration must be based: the dignity of the human person.

But above all, Notre-Dame is the image of the Church made up of living stones, of the holy people of God.

It is interesting to draw a parallel between the celebration of Vespers in the Cathedral with the vigil of young people which took place the same evening in the huge Stade de France in Paris. Two completely different locations, yet two complementary events, almost united spiritually. What united them? The Church, which is not made up of stones or cement, but of people who love Jesus Christ because they have been loved by Him. At Notre-Dame there were priests and deacons, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers; at the stadium there was the new French generation. New, I would say, not only in terms of age, but even more so in spirit, in the freedom of heart and faith. Young people who sang and shouted, but who also remained silent, listening. Attentive and emotional faces, which revealed hearts yearning for truth and love. To them I said with joy: "You are the saints of France!". The Vigil was a great sign of hope.

The same was true – in the smallness that God favours – of the meeting at the Maison Bakhita, a shelter for various people in need: one of the many places, fruits of the Gospel, where people commit themselves every day to serving the dignity of the human person with love.

There is, however, a sign of renewal within the Church in France that has been evident for some years now, namely the remarkable and growing number of young people and adults seeking Baptism. In response to this beautiful "surprise" from God, a provincial synodal assembly is currently underway in Paris, at which I was able to speak, encouraging the journey of the catechumens and neophytes, together with the communities to which they belong.

The climax of my visit to the Capital was the Mass in Place de la Concorde. There, the sign of rebirth appeared in a surprising way: the liturgical assembly, which in the vast Square brought together the priests, the choir and a remarkable crowd, extended all the way along the Avenue des Champs Élysées up to the Arc de Triomphe and beyond. At the moment of Communion, everyone was able to receive the Eucharist, which was distributed everywhere. This is the true reconstruction, the restoration of the Church that only God can bring about, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary.

And so it was natural and proper that, after Paris, I should make a pilgrimage to Lourdes to venerate the Mother of the Church, Mary, she who, in the hour of passion and death, keeps alight the lamp of faith and hope. In Lourdes, the Lord, through the maternal care of the Virgin Mary, conveys to everyone, pilgrims and especially those who are sick in body and spirit, a message of hope and rebirth. A message that I wished to openly reaffirm: every human life, in whatever condition, even in the most extreme frailty, retains its inviolable dignity and deserves to be cared for, accompanied and

relieved of suffering with human compassion and with the aid of the means offered by science. For this reason, Lourdes represents for the entire world a sanctuary of the civilization of love. In this context I met some people who were victims of abuse, and I asked them to help me express to other victims too my own wish, and that of the whole Church, to listen to them and walk alongside them as they seek healing, acknowledging the pain inflicted upon their lives and working to prevent abuse.

The third and final stage of the Apostolic Journey was the city of Metz, in a region of France and Europe ravaged by the Second World War. It was there that Robert Schuman, one of the principal inspirers of the process of European unification, carried out his work. Contemporary Europe was indeed born as a project for peace in the wake of the destruction wrought by war. We might say that what happened to Notre-Dame in Paris with the fire was what had happened to Europe during the Second World War. And Europe was reborn, founded on those principles of democracy, solidarity and fraternity amongst peoples, which owe much to its Christian roots. Even today, it is on these foundations and with this vital "lifeblood" that the European project can be renewed, in a far more globalized world, where interreligious dialogue plays a role of primary importance. For this reason, at Metz, I met with the representatives of various religious traditions, who read and signed in my presence the "Metz Appeal" for dialogue and peace.

Dear friends, the theme of my pastoral Visit to France was "Pour que le monde ait la vie", "That the world may have life" (cf. Jn 6:51). They are Jesus' words, which encapsulate His entire mission of salvation and which, during the Journey, fully expressed the Gospel meaning of every encounter. May they now inspire our prayer, as we ask God that this event of grace may bear abundant and lasting fruit.

Public Rosary – There will be a public rosary praying for Honoring Our Lady of the Most Holy Rosary & Praying for Respect for Life on Saturday, October 10th, at noon in Central Park in downtown Johnstown.

Saint Patrick Church Basket Party - St. John Gualbert will be having a basket party in the St. John Gualbert Activity Center at 110 Adams St. on Saturday, October 17th Walk through from 6 PM-8 PM with 25 Chances for \$5 (only available at the door) and on Sunday, October 18th Basket Party with Meal at 12 PM with 25 chances for \$10. Tickets are available at St. John Gualbert Church office. If you have any questions, please call Christine, their secretary, at (814) 536-0117 to pick up tickets.