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Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father Francis in the form of a Motu Proprio “Sanctuarium in Ecclesia”

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Apostolic Letter of the Holy Father Francis in the form of a Motu Proprio

transferring competence for Shrines

to the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization

1. The Shrine has a “great symbolic value”[1] in the Church, and making a pilgrimage is a genuine profession of faith. Through the contemplation of sacred images, in fact, one affirms the hope of feeling more strongly the closeness of God that opens the heart to the confidence of being heard and answered in one’s deepest desires.[2] Popular piety, which is a “true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God”, [3] finds in the Shrine a privileged place where you can express the fine tradition of prayer, of devotion and trust in God’s mercy inculturated in the life of every people.

Since the first centuries, in fact, there existed the first pilgrimage to the places where Jesus Christ lived, announced the mystery of the Father and, above all, where there was a tangible sign of his Resurrection: the empty tomb. Pilgrims then made their way to the places where, according to different traditions, the tombs of the Apostles were found. Over the centuries, finally, pilgrimages were also extended to those places, now the majority, where popular piety has witnessed first hand the mysterious presence of the Mother of God, the saints and the blessed.[4]

2. The shrines remain to this day in every part of the world as a distinctive sign of the simple and humble faith of believers who find in these holy places the basic dimension of their existence as believers. Here they experience

deeply God's closeness, the tenderness of the Virgin Mary and the company of the Saints: an experience of true spirituality that can not be underestimated, at risk of mortifying the Holy Spirit and the life of grace. Many Shrines have been perceived as part of the life of people families and communities to the point of shaping the identity of generations, and even affecting the history of some nations.

The great influx of pilgrims, the humble and simple prayer of God's people alternating with liturgical celebrations, the fulfilment of so many graces that many believers affirm they have received and the natural beauty of these places enable us to see how the Shrines, in their various forms, express an indispensable opportunity for evangelization in our time.

3. These places, despite the crisis of faith that engulfs the contemporary world, are still perceived as sacred spaces to which pilgrims go to find a moment of rest, silence and contemplation in today's often hectic life. A hidden desire gives rise to a nostalgia for God in many of them; and shrines can be a true refuge for rediscovering oneself and regaining the necessary strength for conversion. In the Shrine, finally, the faithful can receive support for their ordinary path in the parish and in the Christian community. This osmosis between the pilgrimage to the Shrine and everyday life is a great help to pastoral ministry, because it permits the rekindling of commitment to evangelization through a more convinced testimony. Therefore, walking towards the Shrine and participating in the spirituality that these places express is in itself an act of evangelization which deserves to be valued for its intense pastoral value.[5]

4. By its very nature, then, the Shrine is a sacred place where the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the Sacraments, especially Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and the witness of charity express the Church's great commitment to evangelization; and it is therefore characterized as a genuine place of evangelization, where from the first proclamation up to the celebration of the sacred mysteries, the powerful action with which God's mercy works in people's lives is made manifest.

Through the spirituality proper to each shrine, the pilgrims are conducted with the "pedagogy of evangelization"[6] to a more responsible involvement both in their Christian formation and in the necessary witness of charity that flows from it. The Shrine also makes a significant contribution to the catechetical efforts of the Christian community;[7] indeed, transmitting in a way consistent with the times the message that initiated its foundation, it enriches the lives of believers, offering them the reasons for a more mature and aware commitment to faith (cf. 1 Thess. 1:3). Finally, in the Shrine, the doors are wide open to the sick, the disabled, and above all, the poor, the marginalized, refugees and migrants.

5. In light of these considerations it is clear that the Shrines are called to play a role in the new evangelization of society today and that the Church is called to evaluate in pastoral terms the motions of the heart that are expressed through pilgrimages to Shrines and places of devotion.

Therefore, to encourage the development of pastoral work being performed in the Shrines of the Church, I have decided to transfer to the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization the competences that, pursuant to art. 97.1 of the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, were hitherto assigned to the Congregation for the Clergy and also those provided in the art. 151 of the Constitution concerning the same trips for reasons of piety, without prejudice, however, the tasks of the legitimate ecclesiastical authorities and those who, by virtue of special laws, belong to other bodies with regard to certain Shrines.

Therefore, I establish that in the future the following will be the responsibility of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization:

- a) the establishment of international Shrines and the approval of their respective statutes, in accordance with canons 1232-1233 of the Code of Canon Law;
- b) the study and implementation of measures to promote the evangelizing role of the Shrines and the cultivation of popular piety therein;

- c) the promotion of an organic pastoral ministry of Shrines as powerhouses of the new evangelization;
- d) the promotion of national and international meetings to promote the joint task of renewal of the pastoral ministry of popular piety and pilgrimages to places of worship;
- e) the promotion of specific training for workers in Shrines and places of piety and devotion;
- f) the supervision so that pilgrims may be offered, in the places they stay, a coherent and sustained spiritual and ecclesial service that enables a greater personal outcome of these experiences;
- g) the cultural and artistic enhancement of the Shrines following the *via pulchritudinis* as a particular mode of evangelization of the Church.

I decree that what has been set out in this Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* be observed in all its parts, notwithstanding anything to the contrary, even if worthy of special mention, and that it be promulgated by publication in *L'Osservatore Romano*, coming into effect fifteen days after promulgation, and thereafter published in the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*.

Given in Vatican City on 11 February 2017, liturgical memory of Our Lady of Lourdes, the Fourth year of my Pontificate.

FRANCIS

[1] Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory of popular piety and liturgy. Principles and guidelines* (2002), 263.

[2] Cf. Fifth General Conference of the Conference of Latin American and Caribbean Bishops, *Aparecida Document*, 29 June 2007, 259.

[3] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*.

[4] Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, *The pilgrimage in the great Jubilee of 2000* (25 April 1998), 12-17.

[5] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 124, 126.

[6] Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 48.

[7] Cf. Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples, *The Shrine, memory, presence and prophecy of the living God* (8 May 1999), 10.