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Apostolic Journey of the Holy Father Francis in Budapest for the concluding Holy Mass of the 52nd International Eucharistic Congress, and in Slovakia (12-15 September 2021 – Holy Mass at the National Shrine in Šaštín

Holy Mass at the National Shrine in Šaštín

After the moment of prayer in private with the Bishops of Slovakia, and following a tour in the popemobile among the 60,000 faithful present, at 10.00 this morning the Holy Father Francis presided at the Holy Mass on the Solemnity of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Seven Sorrows, Patroness of Slovakia.

During the Eucharistic Celebration, after the proclamation of the Gospel, the Pope delivered his homily.

At the end of the Holy Mass, Archbishop Stanislav Zvolenský, metropolitan of Bratislava and president of the Bishops' Conference of Slovakia, addressed a greeting and an expression of gratitude to the Holy Father.

Before the final blessing, Pope Francis addressed a few words of greeting to the faithful and pilgrims present and made a gift of the Golden Rose to the Blessed Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows.

The Holy Father then transferred by car to Bratislava International Airport to take leave of Slovakia.

The following are the homily and the final greeting given by the Pope during the Holy Mass:

Homily of the Holy Father

In the Temple of Jerusalem, Mary offers the baby Jesus to the aged Simeon, who takes him in his arms and acknowledges him as the Messiah sent for the salvation of Israel. Here we see Mary for who she truly is: the Mother who gives us her son Jesus. That is why we love her and venerate her. In this National Shrine of Šaštín, the Slovak people hasten to her with faith and devotion, for they know that she brings us Jesus. The logo of this

Apostolic Journey depicts a winding path within a heart surmounted by the cross: Mary is the path that guides us to the Heart of Christ, who gave his life for love of us.

In the light of the Gospel we have just heard, we can contemplate Mary as a model of faith. And we can discern three dimensions of faith: it is *journey*, *prophecy* and *compassion*.

First, Mary's is a *faith that sets her on a journey*. The young woman of Nazareth, after hearing the message of the angel, "went with haste into the hill country" (Lk 1:39) to visit and assist Elizabeth, her cousin. She did not consider it a privilege to be chosen as the Mother of the Saviour; she did not lose the simple joy of her humility after the visit of the angel; she did not keep thinking about herself within the four walls of her house. Rather, she experienced the gift she had received as a mission to be carried out; she felt urged to open the door and go out; she became completely caught up in God's own "haste" to reach all people with his saving love. That is why Mary set out on her journey. She chose the unknowns of the journey over the comfort of her daily routines, the weariness of travel over the peace and quiet of home; the risk of a faith that makes our lives a loving gift to others over a placid piety.

Today's Gospel likewise presents Mary as she sets out on a journey: this time towards Jerusalem, where together with Joseph her spouse, she presents Jesus in the Temple. The rest of her life will be a journey in the footsteps of her Son, as the first of his disciples, even to Calvary, to the foot of the cross. Mary never stops journeying.

For you, the Slovak people, the Blessed Virgin is a model of faith: a faith that involves journeying, a faith inspired by simple and sincere devotion, a constant pilgrimage to seek the Lord. In making this journey, you overcome the temptation to a passive faith, content with this or that ritual or ancient tradition. Instead, you leave yourselves behind and set out, carrying in your backpacks the joys and sorrows of this life, and thus make your life a pilgrimage of love towards God and your brothers and sisters. Thank you for this witness! And please, always persevere on this journey! Do not stop! And I would like to add something else. I said: "Do not stop", for when the Church stops, it becomes sick. When the Bishops stop, they make the Church sick. When priests stop, they make the people of God sick.

Mary's faith is also *prophetic*. By her very life, the young woman of Nazareth is a prophetic sign pointing to God's presence in human history, his merciful intervention that confounds the logic of the world, lifts up the lowly and casts down the mighty (cf. Lk 1:52). Mary embodies the "poor of the Lord", who cry out to him and await the coming of the Messiah. She is the Daughter of Sion proclaimed by Israel's prophets (cf. Zeph 3:14-18), the Virgin who was to conceive Emmanuel, God-with-us (cf. Is 7:14). As the Immaculate Virgin, Mary is the icon of our own vocation, for, like her, we are called to be holy and blameless in love (cf. Eph 1:4), images of Christ.

Israel's prophetic tradition culminates in Mary, because she bears in her womb Jesus, the incarnate Word who brings to complete and definitive fruition God's saving plan. Of Jesus, Simeon says to Mary: "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel... a sign that will be opposed" (Lk 2:34).

Let us never forget this: faith cannot be reduced to a sweetener to make life more palatable. Jesus is a sign of contradiction. He came to bring light to the darkness, exposing the darkness for what it is and forcing it to submit to him. For this reason, the darkness always fights against him. Those who accept Christ in their lives will rise; those who reject him remain in the darkness, to their own ruin. Jesus told his disciples that he came to bring not peace but a sword (cf. Mt 10:34): indeed, his word, like a two-edged sword, pierces our life, separating light from darkness and demanding a decision. His word demands of us: "Choose!" Where Jesus is concerned, we cannot remain lukewarm, with a foot in both camps; we cannot. When I accept him, he reveals my contradictions, my idols, my temptations. He becomes my resurrection, the one who always lifts me up when I fall, the one who takes me by the hand and lets me start anew. He always lifts me up.

Slovakia today needs such prophets. I urge you, the Bishops: be prophets who follow this path. This has nothing to do with hostility toward the world, but with being "signs of contradiction" within the world. Christians who can demonstrate the beauty of the Gospel by the way they live. Christians who are weavers of dialogue where

hostility is growing; models of fraternal life where society is experiencing tension and hostility; bringers of the sweet fragrance of hospitality and solidarity where personal and collective selfishness too often prevails, protectors and guardians of life where the culture of death reigns.

Mary, the Mother of the journey, set out on the journey. Mary is also the Mother of prophecy. Finally, Mary is the Mother of compassion. Her faith is *compassionate*. She, “the servant of the Lord” (cf. *Lk* 1:38) who, with a mother’s care, ensured that the wine at the wedding feast of Cana would be sufficient (cf. *Jn* 2:1-12), shared in her Son’s mission of salvation, even to the foot of the Cross. At Calvary, in her overwhelming grief, she understood the prophecy of Simeon: “And a sword will pierce your own soul too” (*Lk* 2:35). The suffering of her dying Son, who had taken upon himself the sins and infirmities of humanity, pierced her own heart. Jesus suffered in the flesh, the man of sorrows, disfigured by evil (cf. *Is* 53:3ff). Mary suffered in spirit, as the compassionate Mother who dries our tears, comforts us and points to Christ’s definitive victory.

Mary, Mother of Sorrows, remains at the foot the cross. She simply stands there. She does not run away, or try to save herself, or find ways to alleviate her grief. Here is the proof of true compassion: to remain standing beneath the cross. To stand there weeping, yet with the faith that knows that, in her Son, God transfigures pain and suffering and triumphs over death.

In contemplating the Sorrowful Mother, may we too open our hearts to a faith that becomes compassion, a faith that identifies with those who are hurting, suffering and forced to bear heavy crosses. A faith that does not remain abstract, but becomes incarnate in fellowship with those in need. A faith that imitates God’s way of doing things, quietly relieves the suffering of our world and waters the soil of history with salvation.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord always preserve in you wonderment and gratitude for the great gift of faith! And may Mary Most Holy obtain for you the grace of a faith that ever sets out anew, is deeply prophetic and abounds in compassion.

Greeting of the Holy Father

The time has now come for me to take leave of your country. In this Eucharist I gave thanks to God for having allowed me to come among you and to conclude my pilgrimage in the devoted embrace of your people, celebrating together the great religious and national feast of your Patroness, the Virgin Mother of Sorrows.

Dear brother Bishops, I offer you my heartfelt thanks for all of your preparations and your welcome. I renew my gratitude to the President of the Republic and the civil authorities. And I am grateful to all who, in different ways, have cooperated in this pilgrimage, above all by their prayers.

I carry you in my heart. *Ďakujem všetkým!* [Thank you all!]
