

FAITH  
IS A JOURNEY



Pope Francis



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Meditations for  
Pilgrims and Wayfarers

**NCP**  
NEW CITY PRESS

Published in the United States by New City Press  
136 Madison Avenue, Floors 5 & 6, PMB #4290  
New York, NY 10016  
[www.newcitypress.com](http://www.newcitypress.com)

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Faith Is a Journey – Meditations for Pilgrims and Wayfarers

First published as *La fede è un viaggio:*  
*Meditazioni per pellegrini e viandanti*

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Libreria Editrice Vaticana  
00120 Città del Vaticano  
[www.libreriaeditricevaticana.va](http://www.libreriaeditricevaticana.va)  
[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

Cover Photo: © Xantana | Dreamstime.com

Library of Congress Control Number: 2024945524

ISBN: 978-1-56548-654-6 (paper)  
ISBN: 978-1-56548-655-3 (e-book)

2nd Printing, December 2024

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Chapter titles are by the editor

Printed in the United States of America

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# Introduction

When I was a priest in Buenos Aires (and I continued this habit as a bishop in my hometown), I loved walking through the various neighborhoods to visit fellow priests, visit a religious community, or talk to friends. Walking is good for you: It puts us in touch with what is happening around us; it makes us discover sounds, smells, and noises in the reality that surrounds us; in brief, it brings us closer to the lives of others.

To walk means to not stand still: To believe means having within us a restlessness that leads us toward a “more,” toward a step forward, toward a height to reach today, knowing that tomorrow the road will take us higher—or deeper—in our relationship with God, which is exactly like the relationship with the beloveds of our life, or between friends: never finished, never taken for granted, never fulfilled, always searching, not yet satisfying. It is impossible to say with God: “Done; everything is fine; it is enough.”

For this reason, the Jubilee of 2025, together with the essential dimension of hope, must push us to an ever-greater awareness of the fact that faith is a pilgrimage and that we on this Earth are pilgrims,

not tourists or wanderers: We do not move randomly, existentially speaking. We are pilgrims. The pilgrim lives their journey under the banner of three keywords: risk, effort, and destination.

**The risk.** Today we struggle to understand what it meant for Christians of earlier times to complete a pilgrimage, accustomed as we are to the speed and comfort of our travels by plane or by train. But, to go on the road a thousand years ago meant to take the risk of never returning home due to the many dangers that could be encountered on the various routes. The faith of those who chose to set out on the journey was stronger than any fear. The pilgrims of years ago teach us to trust in the God who called them to set out toward the tomb of the Apostles, the Holy Land, or a sanctuary. We, too, ask the Lord for a small portion of that faith, to accept the risk of abandoning ourselves to his will, knowing that it is the will of a good Father who only desires for his children what is appropriate for them.

**The effort.** To walk effectively means to put in effort. The many pilgrims who today have returned to crowd the ancient pilgrimage routes know this well. I think of the journey to Santiago de Compostela, the Via Francigena, the various paths that arose in Italy that recall some of the most famous saints or witnesses (Saint Francis, Saint Thomas, but also Don Tonino Bello) thanks to a positive synergy between public



institutions and religious bodies. Walking involves the effort of getting up early, preparing a backpack with essentials, and eating something frugal. And then there are one's feet that hurt and the thirst that becomes pungent, especially on sunny summer days. But this effort is rewarded by the many gifts that the walker encounters along the way: the beauty of creation, the sweetness of art, and the hospitality of the people. Those who make a pilgrimage on foot—many can testify to this—receive much more than the effort made. They establish beautiful bonds with people they meet on their itinerary; they experience moments of authentic silence and fruitful interiority that the frenetic life of our time often makes impossible; they understand the value of the essential compared to the glitter of having all the superfluous.

**The destination.** To walk like a pilgrim means that we have a landing place, that our movement has a direction, a goal. To walk means to have a destination and to not be at the mercy of chance. Those who walk have a direction; they do not wander aimlessly; they do not waste time zigzagging from one place to another. This is why I have often recalled the similarities between walking and believing: Those who have God in their hearts have received the gift of a North Star to strive for—the love we have received from God is the reason for the love we must offer to other people.

God is our goal, but we cannot reach him as we reach a sanctuary or a basilica. In fact, anyone who has made a pilgrimage on foot, finally reaching their desired destination—I am thinking of the Cathedral of Chartres, which has long been the object of a renaissance in terms of pilgrimages thanks to the initiative, which dates back a century, of the poet Charles Péguy—knows well that this does not mean to feel fulfilled. Rather, if outwardly we know well that we have arrived, inwardly we are aware that the journey is not over, because God is just like that—a milestone that pushes us further, a goal that constantly calls us to continue—because God is always greater than the idea we have of him. God himself explained it to us through the prophet Isaiah: “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Is 55:9). We have never arrived with God; we have never arrived at God. We are always on the move; we are always searching for him. But precisely this walking toward God offers us the inebriating certainty that he is waiting for us to give us his consolation and his grace.

Francisco

Vatican City, October 2, 2024

## Editor's Note

Pope Francis often reminds us that faith “is a road to be traveled, without ever losing the goal,” and this is the theme that forms the background to the meditations contained in this brief anthology. It is a collection of significant passages from the Pontiff’s speeches, given on various occasions of meetings with the faithful, and is intended to offer food for thought in light of the Jubilee 2025 in particular, as its motto is “Pilgrims of Hope.”

The anthology opens with a reference to the Second Vatican Council, recalling that “the Church is not a static reality, but is continually on a journey in history, toward the ultimate and wonderful goal that is the Kingdom of Heaven” (cf. p. 13). It then dwells on the daily commitment of the People of God and each believer in the search for and attainment of the common spiritual horizon, which Pope Francis affirms “means feeling called and impelled to walk together and also means disengaging from our securities and comforts in the search for a new land that the Lord wants to give us.”

Believing, therefore, requires a constant, daily commitment made up of an interior search that must be accompanied by a renewed trust in one’s neighbor,

in order to make a common journey that leads to happiness and salvation. Those who walk, having the Lord as their traveling companion, are sure of the path they take and the goal they will reach.

# Pilgrimage

*Pilgrimage* is of course a fundamental element of every Jubilee event. Setting out on a journey is traditionally associated with our human quest for meaning in life. A pilgrimage on foot is a great aid for rediscovering the value of silence, effort and simplicity of life. In the coming year, *pilgrims of hope* will surely travel the ancient and more modern routes in order to experience the Jubilee to the full. In Rome itself, along with the usual visits to the catacombs and the Seven Churches, other itineraries of faith will be proposed. Journeying from one country to another as if borders no longer mattered, and passing from one city to another in contemplating the beauty of creation and masterpieces of art, we learn to treasure the richness of different experiences and cultures and are inspired to lift up that beauty in prayer to God, in thanksgiving for his wondrous works. The Jubilee Churches along the pilgrimage routes and in the city of Rome can serve as oases of spirituality and places of rest on the pilgrimage of faith, where we can drink from the wellsprings of hope, above all by approaching the sacrament of Reconciliation, the essential starting point of any true journey of conversion....

In a particular way, I would like to invite the faithful of the Eastern Churches, particularly those already in full communion with the Successor of Peter, to take part in this pilgrimage. They have suffered greatly, often even unto death, for their fidelity to Christ and the Church, and so they should feel themselves especially welcome in this City of Rome that is also their Mother and cherishes so many memories of their presence. The Catholic Church, enriched by their ancient liturgies, and the theology and spirituality of their Fathers, monks and theologians, wants to give symbolic expression to its embrace of them and their Orthodox brothers and sisters, in these times when they endure their own Way of the Cross, often forced by violence and instability, to leave their homelands, their holy lands, for safer places. For them, the hope born of the knowledge that they are loved by the Church, which does not abandon them but follows them wherever they go, will make the symbolism of the Jubilee all the more powerful.

The Holy Year of 2025 is itself in continuity with preceding celebrations of grace. In the last Ordinary Jubilee, we crossed the threshold of two millennia from the birth of Jesus Christ. Then, on 13 March 2015, I proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee for the sake of making known and encouraging an encounter with the “merciful face of God,” the core message of the Gospel for every man and woman of every time and

place. Now the time has come for a new Jubilee, when once more the Holy Door will be flung open to invite everyone to an intense experience of the love of God that awakens in hearts the sure hope of salvation in Christ. The Holy Year will also guide our steps towards yet another fundamental celebration for all Christians: 2033 will mark the two thousandth anniversary of the redemption won by the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are about to make a pilgrimage marked by great events, in which the grace of God precedes and accompanies his people as they press forward firm in faith, active in charity and steadfast in hope (cf. 1 Thess 1:3).

Sustained by this great tradition, and certain that the Jubilee Year will be for the entire Church a lively experience of grace and hope, I hereby decree that the Holy Door of the Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican will be opened on 24 December 2024, thus inaugurating the Ordinary Jubilee....

The coming Jubilee will thus be a Holy Year marked by the hope that does not fade, our hope in God. May it help us to recover the confident trust that we require, in the Church and in society, in our interpersonal relationships, in international relations, and in our task of promoting the dignity of all persons and respect for God's gift of creation. May the witness of believers be for our world a leaven of authentic

hope, a harbinger of new heavens and a new earth (cf. 2 Pet 3:13), where men and women will dwell in justice and harmony, in joyful expectation of the fulfilment of the Lord's promises.

Let us even now be drawn to this hope! Through our witness, may hope spread to all those who anxiously seek it. May the way we live our lives say to them in so many words: "Hope in the Lord! Hold firm, take heart and hope in the Lord!" (Ps 27:14). May the power of hope fill our days, as we await with confidence the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and glory, now and forever.



# The Pilgrim Church to the Kingdom

In presenting the Church to the men and women of our time, the Second Vatican Council kept in mind a fundamental truth, one we should never forget: the Church is not a static reality, inert, an end in herself, but is on a continual journey through history, toward that ultimate and marvelous end that is the Kingdom of Heaven, of which the Church on earth is the seed and the beginning.<sup>1</sup> When we turn to this horizon, we discover that our imagination falls short, hardly able to intuit the splendor of a mystery that surpasses our senses. And several questions spontaneously arise in us: When will that final step happen? What will the new dimension that the Church enters be like? What will become of humanity then? And of Creation around us? But these questions are not new; the disciples had already asked Jesus about them at that time: “When will this come to pass? When will the Spirit triumph over creation, over creatures, over

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1. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 5.

everything....” These are human questions, time-old questions. And we, too, are asking these questions.

The Conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, faced with these questions that forever resonate in the hearts of men and women, states, “We do not know the time for the consummation of the earth and of humanity, nor do we know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away; but we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart” (n. 39). This is the Church’s destination: It is, as the Bible says, the “new Jerusalem”—Paradise. More than a place, it is a state of soul in which our deepest hopes are fulfilled in superabundance and our being, as creatures and as children of God, reach their full maturity. We will finally be clothed in the joy, peace, and love of God, completely, without any limit, and we will come face to face with him! (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). It is beautiful to think of this, to think of heaven. We will all be there together. It is beautiful, it gives strength to the soul.

In this perspective, it is good to grasp the kind of continuity and deep communion there is between the Church in heaven and that which is still a pilgrim on earth. Those who already live in the sight of God can indeed sustain us and intercede for us, pray for

us. On the other hand, we, too, are always invited to offer up good works, prayer, and the Eucharist itself, in order to alleviate the tribulation of souls still awaiting never-ending beatitude. Yes, because in the Christian perspective, the distinction is not between who is dead and who is not, but between who is in Christ and who is not! This is the point of determination, what is truly decisive for our salvation and for our happiness.

At the same time, Sacred Scripture teaches us that the fulfillment of this marvelous plan cannot but involve everything that surrounds us and comes from the heart and mind of God. The Apostle Paul says it explicitly when he says, “Creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). Other texts utilize the image of a “new heaven” and a “new earth” (cf. 2 Pet 3:13; Rev 21:1), in the sense that the whole universe will be renewed and will be freed once and for all from every trace of evil and from death itself. What lies ahead is the fulfillment of a transformation that, in reality, is already happening, beginning with the death and resurrection of Christ. Hence, it is the new creation; it is not, therefore, the annihilation of the cosmos and of everything around us, but the bringing of all things into the fullness of being, of truth, and of beauty. This is the design that God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, willed from eternity to realize and is realizing.

Dear friends, when we think of this magnificent reality awaiting us, we become aware of how marvelous a gift it is to belong to the Church which bears in writing the highest of vocations! So, let us ask the Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church, to keep constant watch over our journey and to help us to be, as she is, a joyful sign of trust and hope among our brothers and sisters.



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