



Jubilee 2025: pilgrims of hope

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5 Pilgrimage and other routes

The pilgrimage in the proper sense is animated by the faith of the one who “decides in his heart the holy journey” (Ps. 84,6). The pilgrim’s journey rests on a solid belief, in the name of which a defined goal and a goal of their own are identified. The pilgrim moves towards a precise geographical destination (a sacred place, a sanctuary) with the intention of fulfilling a commitment, even onerous, supported by faith: he thus becomes an allegory of a condition that transcends the earthly one and enters a universe symbolic no longer terrestrial, but sacred, i.e. reserved for God.

Yet, the religious pilgrimage, in times closer to us, have added aspects that are not always connected to a religious faith. It is lived and studied as a phenomenon of human activity, in which a multitude of uses and customs converge, dictated by the territorial typicalities which, in a certain way, have contaminated the original identity of the pilgrimage, to make it not exclusive to the man of faith. Thus, it happens that on pilgrimage routes you meet people who travel it with motivations “other” than faith. However, these are not trivial reasons, since the underlying dimension is that of a search for meaning and values, which are difficult to find in today’s daily life, so complex and tiring, often empty of values that can only be found by distancing oneself from it to question oneself and rediscover a more “sense” life orientation.

In recent decades, particular attention must be paid to pilgrimage and its social impact, as a condensation of a very rich historical and cultural heritage, particularly in the Western European world. If one thinks of the importance that pilgrimage had throughout the European Middle Ages, the sentence of the writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) seems well founded, and still significant today: “Europe was born on pilgrimage and its language is Christianity.”

In this context, it is worth mentioning the project of the Council of Europe on Cultural Routes which, for their history and socio-cultural impact, receive its certification. Well, from 1987 to today, ancient pilgrimage routes have also received this certification: starting with the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Route, the first to be certified; and then the Via Francigena (1994), The Route of Saint Olav Ways (2010), the Via Romea Germanica (2020), the Cyril and Methodius Route (2021). In a few months the candidacy of the Romea Strata will also be examined, and we trust that it will also receive European certification: this would be the third Via Romea recognized by the Council of Europe.



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