

MESSAGE FOR THE OPENING OF THE COMPOSTELA HOLY YEAR

VATICAN CITY, 31 DEC 2009 (VIS) -



The Pope has sent a Message to Archbishop Julian Barrio Barrio of Santiago de Compostela, Spain, for the solemn opening of the Compostela Holy Year which took place this evening in the cathedral of Santiago. The Holy Year is celebrated in years in which the feast of the Apostle James (25 July) falls on a Sunday.

In the message, which Archbishop Barrio read out during the course of the Eucharistic celebration that followed the opening of the Holy Door, Benedict XVI writes that the theme of this latest Compostela Holy year - **"On pilgrimage towards the light"** - and the pastoral letter written for the occasion - "

Pilgrims of faith and witnesses of the risen Christ

" - are in faithful keeping with tradition and "re-present that tradition as a call to evangelisation to the men and women of today, recalling the essentially pilgrim nature of the Church and of Christians in this world".

"Pilgrims, open to wonder and to transcendence, must allow themselves to be instructed by the Word of God so as to divest their faith of ungrounded beliefs and fears", the Pope writes. "This is what the Lord did with His disciples who, dazed and discouraged, travelled the road to Emmaus".

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The Holy Father asks God "to accompany pilgrims, to make Himself known and enter their hearts. ... This is the true goal, the grace which the mere physical journeying of the Way cannot achieve alone, and which leads pilgrims to become witnesses before others to the fact that Christ lives and is our undying hope of salvation".

"During this Holy Year, in keeping with the current Year for Priests, a decisive role falls to the clergy, whose spirit of welcome and commitment to the faithful and to pilgrims has to be particularly generous", writes Pope Benedict. In this context he calls on priests to pay particular heed to "the administration of the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, because the most sought-after, valuable and characteristic element of the Holy Year is forgiveness and the encounter with the living Christ".

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Benedict XVI likewise expresses his "particular closeness to the pilgrims who are arriving and will continue to arrive in Santiago", inviting them "to treasure the profound experiences of faith, charity and fraternity they encounter on their journey, and to seek especially to live the Way as an interior experience, responding to the call that the Lord makes to each one of them".

"I invite them too", he concludes, "as they say their prayers, not to forget those who were unable to accompany them, their families and friends, the sick and the needy, emigrants, those whose faith is fragile and the People of God with their pastors".

