

Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell will preside over the Eucharistic celebration at the start of the 39th Macerata-Loreto Walking Pilgrimage on 10 June 2017.

QUESTIONS

1) Pope Francis defines the crisis that the Western world is going through as a “change of epochs.” In your experience during these first months at the head of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, what do you consider urgent for a new construction?

In Florence, at the meeting with representatives of the 5th National Ecclesial Convention, Pope Francis not only said that we are experiencing a change of epochs (“Situations that pose new challenges that are even difficult to understand”), a real turning point in human history, but he also insisted that the problems be faced “as challenges and not as obstacles,” as objectives to reach and not walls that block the path. This makes us understand his constant invitation to leave the enclosure, to go to the geographical peripheries, and even more to the existential suburbs, to welcome and gather (re-welcome and raise up) all those we meet on the road, to widen our spaces, not to close them. The March from Macerata to Loreto is a collective and stimulating gesture that can be a visual representation of this underlying challenge. The condition for doing so is faith in the Lord, in believing that he “is active and working in the world.”

2) In what spirit are you preparing to live, for the first time, the novelty of a gesture involving about a hundred thousand people, including many young people? And what testimony will these young people—who choose to spend Saturday night in a different way, by walking in faith with hope in their hearts—give?

I am living this new experience with emotion and awareness. We all know that getting on the road belongs to man’s nature. Technology has made us lose the experience of walking long distances on the road, a metaphor of the mystery that moves man’s intelligence and will, that of reaching a goal. Our way, however, is not aimless wandering but the path of disciples who follow in the footsteps of Christ, for He is our life and our destiny. I would like every young person to find the significance of being on the way in the humble and dignified act of following Jesus, supported by the trust in his company. That is the other name of faith. The word “pilgrim” (per-egrinus) is also very meaningful because it refers to someone who crosses fields or borders. The pilgrim travels outside the city; he is the stranger, the foreigner, who comes from afar and goes elsewhere. The pilgrim can get lost, and he needs guidance and hospitality. This is the condition of so many people, and it is ours too.

3) How can the experience of a walking pilgrimage, lived throughout the night, concretely help the young person who, today, is faced with the dramatic challenges in daily life?

The long itinerary, during the hours of the night, the fatigue, and the discouragement, regaining our mutual confidence, knowing that we will reach our goal, that we are expected... This is life: walking without ever stopping, always on the go. No matter how long it is, the only thing that matters is doing it fully, doing something good and just, going forward with friendship and joy for the good news of the Gospel that reaches us and goes further. Last year, Pope Francis joined the young people on the march, encouraging them as he does so well: “I’m with you tonight, I’m close by my prayer; I am accompanying you, and I wish you a night of prayer and joy. Even a little bit of suffering is overcome, with the hope of meeting tomorrow, with Jesus in the Eucharist. I bless you!” I would like to address the same words to every young person, with the awareness given by *Gaudium et Spes*, Vatican II’s Constitution on the Church in the contemporary world: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man.”