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A LETTER TO TOURISTS AND HOLIDAYMAKERS - 2017

TOWARDS THE “TENT OF MEETING”
(Ex. 33,7)

May all the visitors who spend your summer holidays in our Diocese of Orihuela-Alicante be welcome. Your well-deserved time to rest and relax has finally come; After the hard work a time of leisure comes. We need it and so God wants it. So enjoy your holidays! However, in this regard, we should not confuse this leisure with "idleness", since it would mean to waste the wonderful potential that God has placed in each one of us. So let us emphasize self-realization, which can only be fully accomplished with the help of God.

Holidays are an appropriate way to achieve this goal. To do so, we must look for moments and places to retreat in order to reflect and pray. In this sense, holidays provide us free time. And regarding proper places for introspection, Pope Francis suggests us in his recent Motu Proprio "Sanctuarium in Ecclesia", the visit and pilgrimage to religious places, specifically to Shrines, hermitages or other sacred places of Christian pilgrimage and popular devotion.

This custom of visiting holy places is very old and widespread. From the beginnings of Christianity believers went on pilgrimage to places where the Lord had been, then it spread to the tombs of the Apostles and finally to where a special presence of the Lord, the Virgin or the Saints is or has been felt.

“Becoming a pilgrim is a genuine profession of faith”. The Pope stresses here the attitude of going as pilgrims, that is: in search of God. Thus “Popular piety finds in the Shrine a privileged place to express the fine tradition of prayer, devotion and trust in God’s mercy inculturated in the life of every people” (n1). “Here, in a profound way, they experience the closeness of God, the tenderness of the Virgin Mary and the company of the Saints: an experience of true spirituality that can not be underestimated, at the risk of mortifying the action of the Holy Spirit and the life of grace” (n2).

Moreover, “Shrines can be a true refuge for rediscovering oneself and to find anew the necessary strength for conversion... So as to find a moment of rest, silence and contemplation in today’s often hectic life” (n3).

This is especially valid and to be taken into account by priests and other pastoral agents since “by its very nature... the Shrine is a holy place where the proclamation of the Word of God, the celebration of the Sacraments, in particular, of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, and the witness of charity... express the Church’s great commitment to evangelization...” (n4). So “Shrines are called to play a role in the new evangelization of today’s society and... the Church, in pastoral terms, is called to consider the importance of the heartfelt motivation expressed through pilgrimages to Shrines and places of devotion...” (n5).

This message from Pope Francis is endorsed by his personal testimony in his own recent pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal. And by the participation fostered for the whole Church with the possibility of gaining the Plenary

Indulgence, during this summer, the thirteenth of each month, when visiting a Church, Sanctuary or Hermitage where the image of the Virgin of Fatima is solemnly exposed, provided we meet the conditions required to gain it.

So, together with the Pope, I also encourage you to include in your summer program the visit to some of the Shrines or Hermitages located in the towns and cities of our Diocese, as well as to churches or sacred places where there is an image with the invocation of Our Lady of Fatima. And if it is a family "pilgrimage", Christian parents may consider it a lovely occasion to teach your children an unforgettable catechesis.

In order to make your work easier, in the Bishop's Website, <http://www.diocesisoa.org/pastoral-del-turismo/> Rutas de Fe (Routes of Faith), you will find a list of Shrines, Hermitages and Chapels in our land, so that you can make your own "Route of faith".

I would also like to offer you our usual summer pilgrimage, with the Hospitality of Lourdes and the Secretariat for Vocational Guidance, inviting young people to work and share their faith with the sick from July 6th to 12th. Likewise, this Secretariat and General Catholic Action are jointly organizing the Portuguese Camino de Santiago, this year, from July 27th to August 2nd.

And to conclude, I would like to give a very special blessing to all the workers in the tourist and services sector who make holidays and tourism possible with your work. "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hb 13,2). God will reward you.

May Saint Mary, Mother and model of the "homo viator", make every human life a pilgrimage to the final Shrine of Heaven. To her I commend you all.

Pilgrim Holidaymakers, Happy Holidays!

✠ Jesús Murgui Soriano.
Bishop of Orihuela-Alicante.