

Be as a tree bearing virtue
Bishop Milan Lach, SJ, of Parma

We are beginning our pilgrimage in Rome in thanksgiving for the 50th anniversary of the Eparchy of Parma and also to pray for our eparchy and its faithful.

We will be in blessed and sacred places in Rome that are connected with our faith and with our Byzantine Catholic Church, with our identity.

You are certainly tired right now, but you can offer up this tiredness for our church.

To be pilgrims is not easy. It's not a trip, it's a pilgrimage. This is important to discern. Pilgrimage also means sacrifice. It means not having all that we would wish for on a trip; on pilgrimage, sometimes, we need to compromise with each other.

We need, step by step, to forget ourselves more, in order to see Christ, to see Jesus Christ in our neighbors, in our brothers and our sisters.

In today's Gospel (Jn 7:1-13), Jesus' brothers wanted him to go ahead to Judea and to reveal himself to the people there. Jesus responded, "My time is not yet here, but the time is always right for you. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me, because I testify to it that its works are evil" (6-7).

We are in the right place, here, at the Basilica of St. Clement, this saint who also was hated by this world. As you know, he was one of the first popes of the church, and he suffered for the church. He lived the consequences of these words of Jesus, and the world always will hate those who witness to the truth.

You need to be humble to accept the truth. You need to accept that you can make mistakes and that others want to help you grow in Christ, not to grow in your career or in your pride.

So, we can really pray on these relics of St. Clement, as well as on the relics of St. Cyril, who is also buried here and who were real witnesses to Jesus Christ. This world really needs witnesses and, with our lives, we need to be a testimony to Jesus.

Maybe, as you live your Christian life, you experience the hatred of others: your neighbors, friends, colleagues, at your work or school, and sometimes you don't know what to do. It's easy: just follow Jesus, be with him, because after the cross, after suffering, is the resurrection. The cross is not the end. Death does not have the last word; life has the last word.

(Pointing to the mosaic in the basilica) Look, around this cross we see a tree with many fruits. These fruits are virtues. Every Christian is invited, through the cross, through suffering, to bring virtues into their life. This is also the goal of our pilgrimage, to be close to Jesus Christ, to really, with time, put fruits on this tree and to share them with everybody around us.

+Bishop Milan

This column is from a homily Bishop Lach preached May 14, during the first Divine Liturgy of the Horizons pilgrimage to Rome, on the occasion of the eparchy's jubilee at the Basilica of San Clemente.

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