

Accompany is a Verb
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To accompany, like Jesus himself, is a verb. It is not a noun. And in the action of this verb, we find entrance to the mystery of Jesus and his Kingdom.

When Pope Francis suggests that we be disciples capable of *accompanying*, he encourages us to contemplate the style of Jesus and to learn again the lessons of the Gospel.

In the Gospel, the good news is revealed as a mystery of God's closeness. When we profess our faith in the Creed we use the beautiful, simple and profound phrase: "For our salvation he came down from heaven."

God who sustains everything that exists with his power, wanted to meet us in person. In other words, he wanted to relate to us by pure grace. He came down from heaven so that we could know the truth, and the truth is that in love we were created, that the God of truth and love accompanies us in person, and wants to lead us towards a communal and eternal love.

Our hope and joy depends on this definitive gesture of the Incarnation. He is the God who unites himself to our journey; he becomes a pilgrim to straighten the paths of those who wanderer.

His mere presence attracted people: the fragrance of his holiness, the lovable way of his goodness, and the clear light of his truth insinuated themselves into the hearts of those who encountered him in the course of his travel.

If people looked for him, it was because he first made himself accessible, and they felt a confidence, a welcome pronounced in the very fact of he drew near to us in person, in flesh and blood.

He directed himself to everyone so he could be accessible to all: to the poor, the afflicted, the blind and the deaf; the rich young man, Nicodemus the Pharisee (visiting by night), the widows, and those who lived with demons

among the tombs. "If only we could touch his cloak," they said. God came near to encourage us to approach him.

In a particular way, Jesus' closeness was manifested in his desire to accompany his disciples. In the time he spent with them, they came to know the lovable mystery of his identity and mission.

He listened to their questions and disquiets, corrected them, explained the parables to them, and above all gave them the grace of his time. We could say that he accompanied his disciples so that later they could accompany those whom they would meet on the paths of their missionary lives.

And after the resurrection he opened the meaning of the scriptures to them, revealed the mysteries of his crucified and risen body at the Paschal Sacrifice, and sent them the grace of the Holy Spirit. In this way, he continues to accompany us.

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And here we are, Lord. Stay with us because it grows late.

Teach us again how to be accompanied by you, and how to accompany one another in the itinerary of the pilgrim Church today. And teach us to accompany those who have not met you, so that through our poor presence they might feel your closeness, and know that you are the one who wants to accompany them on the path of life, towards the fullness of life.

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If we have experienced what it means to be accompanied, we can better understand the call to accompany others. First, we must admit that there are no accidents or luck on this road, only the providence of God.

When I was 18 years old and I was preparing to go to college, my grandmother told me she would pray that God put good people on my path, people who are compassionate, just and generous. People who could help me if I encountered any difficulty. We believe in this, in the God who has moved hearts to accompany us when we have felt alone, confused or isolated. I believe the prayers of many grandmothers have accompanied us so that we could reach this *Encuentro*.

In my diocese, the Diocese of Brownsville, I have learned from so many of our faithful people what it means to accompany. Since 2014, thousands of immigrants from Central America have crossed the border between Mexico and Texas. After living the fear and sometimes the terror of a dangerous and frightening journey, as strangers, and after finding the high gates of immigration law of the United States, they managed to find people of faith who are willing to stop their lives and their ordinary routines to accompany mothers and children, fathers and young people in their moments of pain and uncertainty. So many people have presented themselves on the path of the recently arrived immigrants to give them a smile, a welcome, an ear and an embrace.

From them I have learned that Christian love accompanies, helps, listens, respects, encourages, and above all perseveres.

Volunteers who come to detention centers to pray with those held there. Teams that go in to listen to their fears and hopes; religious who come to sing to the Virgin with them. Committed priests go to hear the confessions of those who feel the enormous weight of what they have lived since they left Honduras or Guatemala.

Listen, encourage, cry with those who mourn, and laugh with those who previously thought they had forgotten how to smile. This is to accompany.

To walk with those whom God places on our paths cannot lack the dynamism of the Lord's grace; he always invites us to want to heal, to encourage the discouraged to carry their burdens with hope. We encourage one another to embrace the Cross, to leave everything for the sake of Jesus.

"The Church needs," says the Pope, "a close gaze to contemplate, to be moved and to stop before the other person."

This is Jesus' style and it is the mission of the disciples: in a world where no one wants to stop to hear the weeping, and to touch the wound, the Lord asks of us for the testimony of closeness, respect, patience and of compassion. The encounter with Jesus continues coming into to the world

through disciples capable of opening their lives to the personal encounter with those whom God has placed on our paths.

The God who became flesh asks us to stop on the road, with all our responsibilities, and to contemplate the face of Christ in the flesh and blood of the invisible ones of the world, and to extend our lives to embrace the Christ present among us.

Jesus' style is God's style. The Lord asks us to "disrupt the quiet condition of being spectators," as the pope also tells us.

This way of living leaves space for human spontaneity, to be able to respond to the concrete reality that a neighbor lives. It invites us to take a risk, to cross the street and knock on the door of the neighbor who has not been to Mass for a long time. Interest in a person is the first step to evangelize. And if in the first encounter we find resentment or despair or fear, that is fine, because the second step is to listen with respect. And if we find signs of stubborn evil, be patient and take the case to prayer before the Blessed Sacrament. What interests us is the well-being of the one who suffers; we know that this requires discernment, time and patience.

Love waits and prays and perseveres. Charity is not a strategy, it is the closeness of Jesus. The Lord acts through the disciple who loves without having another motive or personal interest.

Charity expresses with total sincerity the reason of our living. The one who knows how to accompany another evangelizes before mentioning the name of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will teach us when it is time to express in words the name of the One who sent us.

We accompany our children and our elderly parents. We accompany the members of our parishes and communities of faith. We accompany neighbors and our coworkers at school and at work, whether they are believers or not. They all cross our paths every day.

But we need to find time to go out and find ways to accompany the poor. The Church goes out or she becomes atrophied. "I want to express," says the

Pope, "with pain that the worst discrimination suffered by the poor is the lack of spiritual attention."

Who are the poor? Pregnant girls who do not want to have an abortion but who need someone who has time and space in their lives to accompany them along the difficult path. Immigrants who live in the shadow of society, who need human attention, who need God and the Gospel, and the sacraments. They are the young people without hope, or who are trapped by drugs, gangs, or are tempted by suicide.

The people who know Jesus and his love sense the need to go out to find the encounter with Jesus in the poor. He waits for us among them, and when we accompany them, with humility and sincerity, we discover that it is the Lord who accompanies us.