



March 5, 2025, Ash Wednesday

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As Lent begins we recall that this Jubilee Year calls us to set out on a sacred journey - a pilgrimage toward a very specific destination. The Season of Lent gives us an opportunity to make a spiritual pilgrimage to grow in our spiritual life and be fed by the Eucharist. And so in this Jubilee Year, I invite you to consider making a pilgrimage either to St. Mary's Cathedral Basilica in Halifax or St. Ambrose Co-Cathedral in Yarmouth. And if you have the means you may consider a pilgrimage to a sacred site like Jerusalem, Rome or Fatima. Sacred journeys focus our hearts, minds, bodies and souls on what matters most.

Life is a pilgrimage. In the Bible, Abraham and Sarah were described as persons on a journey. The Jewish people journeyed for forty years wandering in the desert, being formed as a people and being nourished on the manna from heaven. Jesus spent forty days in the desert as he prepared for his ministry. Jesus' ministry was seen as a journey, from Galilee to the Holy City of Jerusalem. These examples witness to the power that the act of pilgrimage has to help us rediscover life.

Making a pilgrimage reminds us that we are all just passing through this world and that we are the pilgrim people of God in search of God and God's will. A pilgrimage is gradual: there are various routes to choose from and places to discover; circumstances to encounter, moments of teaching, and sacred rites. The journey helps us contemplate all of God's creation and the care for that creation that is an essential expression of our faith in God.

We do not journey alone. We journey together with companions toward a deeper experience of God and our relationship with Him. Our companions can encourage and challenge us to listen attentively to the Lord calling us. Along the way our traveling companions enrich us with new ways of understanding things and fresh perspectives. During our pilgrimage, we also share in the experience of those who, for various reasons, are forced to leave their homelands to seek a better life for themselves and their family.

As a pilgrim, we look at the events of our lives and ask ourselves: "What message is God trying to give to me?" In this Jubilee Year, we attune our selves to messages of hope. Pope Francis invites us to be Pilgrims of Hope, because "*hope does not disappoint*" (Romans 5:5) What hope can we bring to a loved one who is sick? How does hope help us to seek clarity about a decision to be made? A pilgrimage can help us rediscover the true meaning and purpose of our lives.

During these 40 days, may God give you the grace to adopt the heart and mind and spirit of a pilgrim so that you can see, hear, and recognize the hope that God has for you and calls you to share during this Lenten pilgrimage.

Sincerely in Christ,

†Brian J. Dunn
Archbishop of Halifax-Yarmouth