

Editorial

**From the reconstruction of Notre Dame wishes of hope
for the New Year**

The restoration and reopening of Paris Cathedral for worship after the devastating fire five years ago was full of an important symbolic significance. In a world 'on fire' ravaged by war, polarizations, hatred and poverty, being able to save Notre Dame and hand it back to the world shining and untouched has become a metaphor of hope on the eve of the 2025 Jubilee.

Why and how was it possible to hand back the precious Cathedral to Parisians and the world? We can find help in such a reflection in Jean-Jacques Annaud's beautiful film 'Notre Dame in flames', shown many times these days on TV and social media all over the world. It is a film and not a technical-scientific documentary or a report by an enquiry commission. Therefore, a pure artistic creation, the product of the creativity of a capable filmmaker. But it is not just fiction or unreal and certainly not false. In 'Dilexit Nos' Pope Francis teaches us that to get to the truth there is not only the way of reason, science and technology. There is also the way of the 'heart', of emotions and love, the 'reasons of the heart', as the Pope calls them. The ways of reason and those of the heart can contradict each other - this happens with a certain frequency when emotion takes over, or reason limits and contains passions, but not always, indeed the two should integrate. This is confirmed to us by the extraordinary works of art, music, literature, etc. produced by faith and nourished by Christian charity, of which we find ample testimony in the world, starting with those in Rome, created for example by the great Popes of the Renaissance, which will inspire and sustain the pilgrims' journey during the forthcoming Jubilee.

The film is a well-documented and merciless indictment of the sloppiness, irresponsibility and carelessness that contributed to the catastrophic fire. The film narrative reminds us that there were no evil conspiracies, but the accumulation of small mistakes, negligence and ineptitude. These, when not countered with sufficient determination, can lead humanity to a collapse. Society, power, science and institutions in the case in question proved incapable of understanding, preventing and facing up to the risks to which they were exposed, a specific incapacity that is, however, emblematic of a broader and more general incapacity that too often leaves citizens in a condition of insecurity and vulnerability. Indeed, in the tragic events in Paris, the cathedral becomes the embodiment of the whole of humanity, with its wealth, values, history, identity and aspiration to eternity.

When finally, belatedly, relief, remedies and the most advanced technologies are deployed, it is too late. In the film we see the top decision-makers in consultation who, after examining the available options, conclude that there is no escape: the fire can no longer be

extinguished, the Cathedral is doomed, what can be saved (the most precious relics) has been saved, everything else will be destroyed. As the Fire Chief says: 'you can risk human lives to save other human lives, but not to save stones'. Such reasoning is impeccable. There are insurmountable limits to what science, technology, economic and financial power, the ruling classes, etc., can do in the darkest hours when grave threats loom over ailing humanity. But this is only part of the story.

In fact, the film shows how other forces and factors come into play that will ultimately save Notre Dame. An unknown young firefighter sergeant conceives a high-risk plan and proposes to carry it out. The young man is endowed with a sharper vision and above all 'love'. 'I love the Cathedral!' - he says. A small team of heroic volunteers joins him in a burst of generosity. It is decided to take the risk and let them try.

In the anguished darkness of the Parisian night, amidst the flashes of fire and the flashing lights of police and ambulances, spontaneous choruses of prayer and song begin to rise. It is the devout people who believe in prayer. Other groups of citizens, Parisians from Europe and all nations, stand by mute and distraught, but not resigned to the loss of their cathedral. A little girl imprudently runs to light a lamp to Our Lady of Notre Dame to whom she entrusts her favorite teddy bear. Prayers and liturgical songs are joined by the multi-voiced Gospel of African American choirs.

In a crescendo of suspense, action and emotion, the film shows how the volunteers, amidst a thousand risks and difficulties, finally manage to put out the fire, save the Cathedral and its artistic and monumental treasures, thus making possible the subsequent restoration and reconstruction until the solemn reopening on Saturday, 7 December 2024.

The message of the film is strong and clear: where the State, science, technology and the authorities prove insufficient, individual and collective heroism, the aspiration to holiness, popular devotion come to the rescue. Prayer comes to the rescue, especially that of the most innocent and vulnerable. For, as the Angel said to Mary at the Annunciation, 'Nothing is impossible to God' (Luke 1:37).

Of course, this is just a film, a product of artistic creation. But it is no less true and meaningful for that. It recalls a similar, and much more developed message of Pope Francis in the Bull of the Jubilee 'Spes non confundit' ('Hope does not disappoint'), from St Paul's Letter to the Romans 5:5). A message that encourages us to confidently exchange good wishes for the coming festivities, illuminated by the light of peace and fraternity.

In expressing my sincere good wishes, I would like to thank each one of the Centesimus Annus community, the local Groups and the Ecclesiastic Counsellors, the collaborators and all those who follow and participate in our initiatives for the precious service dedicated to the Foundation and its mission of spreading and promoting the Social Doctrine of the Church.

Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and Happy 2025 Jubilee!

Paolo Garonna,

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