



Homily in the Vigil and Mass of the Impression of the Stigmata of St. Francis

La Verna, 16th September 2026

Gen 12:1-9; Heb 11:8-12; Lk 9:51-62

You have come this far on foot. To walk, and even more so to walk at night, you have to leave something: lighten your backpack, and not just your backpack. Those who walk soon learn this: you can only reach a goal by letting go of a weight.

What have you left behind to be here, tonight, ready to cross the darkness with the only light of the Eucharist? The Word we have heard lights up that light and comes to meet us.

Abraham is a rich man, full of security. A word is enough to set him in motion again: a word that resounds as on the morning of creation, and that while it is spoken already fulfills what it promises. Abraham leaves without knowing where he is going. The Letter to the Hebrews says it without ornamentation: he obeyed and left, without knowing where he was going. It is the beginning of a self-emptying that will last a lifetime, until he puts all certainty back in God. This is faith: setting out on a journey towards a promise that is not yet seen, and that is already real.

At the centre of the Gospel, Jesus sets out on his way to Jerusalem. Luke uses a harsh expression: he hardened his face. He concentrates his whole self on the road. Before him is Easter: not only the goal, but the strength that makes him set out and brings him to completion. It is precisely on the journey that he calls us to follow him. To those who follow him he asks what Abraham was asked to do: to leave, and not to look back. Going with him towards Easter means letting oneself be freed from everything, to find one's own richness in God.

St Francis arrives at La Verna after many nights like this, and in each one he had let go of something of his own. He finally arrives here free: free from what he possessed, and above all from that part of himself that at any cost wanted to succeed and assert itself. Free, and delivered.

It is then that the love of Christ can reach him in a new way, which he did not expect. St Francis had always sought that face: in the leper embraced along the plain, in the Crucifix of San Damiano that had spoken to him. He had opened the Gospel in the church of San Nicolò and had found in it the words that call us to leave everything, to take up the cross, to follow; and he had placed those words at the head of his Rule, as a seal of his freedom.

Here, on the mountain, that love reaches him in the flesh. The stigmata are not the reward of a holy life: they are the imprint of a love that was able to touch him because he finally found himself free.



He who watches, watches. And he who looks for a long time becomes, little by little, what he is looking at. Clare understood this at San Damiano, before the Crucifix itself: in her last letter to Agnes of Prague she invites her to fix her gaze every day in that mirror, and to let herself be transformed into the image of the One who shines there. St Francis is transformed in the flesh, St Clare in her gaze: it is the work of Love itself. You too, tonight, keep watch. And to watch also means this: to learn to look, to let oneself be transformed by the One you look at.

Then St Francis descends from La Verna, and continues to walk. He brings with him a new word, that of the cross, which he will proclaim through villages and cities as a word of peace. That journey does not stop here. Eight hundred years ago, in these same days, it will lead him until the 3rd October, 1226, to the Portiuncula, the womb from which it all began. And in the flight of larks that accompanies his passage to the Father, that journey seems to continue to continue.

This year we close the centenary of that *Transitus*. The new life that continues to flow from its wounds does not end.

Dear young people, you have ascended this mountain in a night of your time. It is a time that often causes fear: the future seems uncertain, the world is wounded, and sometimes even the heart becomes heavy.

But you are here. You have walked in the dark. And perhaps this is already a word for you.

Not the whole journey can be seen before beginning. Abraham left without knowing where he was going. Francis climbed up through the woods to this mountain without being able to imagine what he would receive here. You too do not have to have everything clear to put yourselves in God's hands.

Let us reach you.

Do not be afraid to leave what weighs you down. Do not be afraid to look at Christ. Do not be afraid to give yourselves to him: those who give themselves to him do not lose their life, they receive it new.

Watch, then. And look.

From these wounds, in the Spirit, new life continues to flow.

Tomorrow you will resume your journey. Perhaps with some questions still open. Perhaps without knowing fully where the road will lead you. But, if you have let his gaze enter your heart, you will leave freer, poorer, more open to the promise.

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