

Back To Our Roots

A number of years ago, on one of my visits to Lourdes, I engaged in a conversation with a Frenchman from Paris, who like myself was coming to that sacred shrine of the Mother of God to refresh his spirit and renew his soul. The man was active in the lay apostolate in his country. From our conversation it was apparent that he was well read and well informed about his church, its life and activities. France has frequently shown initiative and imagination in various movements within the church. Many religious communities and numerous apostolic groups have been born in France. As an active member of the lay apostolate the man remarked, that of the various groups, those laity who belonged to an ancient third order, such as of the Franciscans, Dominicans, or some other religious family that goes back a long way, those laity had a decided advantage over the more recent groups. Those who belonged to an ancient order had a tradition that has withstood the test of time. They had a heritage that has proven itself. It has produced saints and spiritual heroes. That patrimony is a safe and sure thing.

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As we celebrate the millennium of our Christianity, we instinctively offer thanks to God for a tradition that has been unbroken for a thousand years. And if we are going to renew ourselves in the course of these millennium celebrations, we must go back to the roots of that heritage.

In his apostolic letter of March 19, 1979, which announced the Millennium of Christianity in Ukraine, Pope John Paul II suggested that all should do that precisely. This letter provides us with an overview and a keen perspective of the one thousand years of our Christianity. In the picture that he offers, the Pope takes us back to the very beginning.