
Msgr. Chauvet (rector): “From the flames to resurrection, Notre Dame is a message of hope for all”

“Of course I was there and so was the Archbishop of Paris”. French President Emmanuel Macron was accompanied by the Archbishop of Paris, Michel Aupetit, and the rector of the cathedral, Patrick Chauvet this morning. “We visited the construction site with him to take stock of the situation two years after the fire, to assess all the work that has been done so far”, Msgr. Chauvet told SIR. “The President thanked all the workers involved in the repair and restoration efforts. He said he was very impressed by the progress of the works. We also spoke about future prospects, given that the entire renovation project is set to be completed in three years.” **President Macron has promised to return the cathedral to the faithful and visitors by 2024. Do you think it will be completed by then? I hope so, I really do. The President has actually announced that date. It's his promise. All the conditions are in place for this promise to come true. Two years have passed. What do you remember about that day?** I prefer not to remember. Seeing the cathedral engulfed in flames was a harrowing ordeal for me which I would rather not remember and move on. Even footage of the fire is too much to bear, it causes me great pain. During these days I have been saying that I am not celebrating the two-year anniversary of the Notre-Dame fire but rather the Resurrection of the cathedral. I am focusing on the future. **This future was made possible also by as many as 340,000 donors all over the world, who collected some €833 million. In your opinion, why has Notre-Dame elicited such a broad and widespread participation?** I believe that this is an important question that we must ask ourselves. If so many Parisians, so many people in France and overseas were moved by the fire, it's because Notre Dame represents the history of France. Notre-Dame is Saint Louis with the Crown of Thorns, it is the place where France was consecrated by Louis XIII, where Napoleon was crowned; it's Charles De Gaulle entering the cathedral at the end of the Second World War, it's where our country comes together whenever it is confronted with tragedy. It is therefore a place of communion. While travelling, I realised that people no longer say Notre-Dame of Paris, but simply Notre-Dame. That's because *the cathedral now belongs to everyone. This explains the emotional attachment and the love shown by people through their donations. Our Lady is ancient, she has been wounded but she is still there, still standing.* **Has the Paris Church been reflecting on ways to use the cathedral so that people can gain a renewed enthusiasm for the Christian message?** That's our main concern once people will again have the opportunity to enter the cathedral. There will certainly be an aesthetic shock for visitors, because the cathedral is an artistic and architectural wonder, and they will find it restored and repaired. But we hope that the aesthetic shock will become a spiritual shock, prompting visitors to embark on a visual journey to the discovery of the Bible, from the first page to the Resurrection. We would like to accompany people on an encounter with the invisible. The soul of the cathedral is Mary, and Mary leads us to Jesus. **It's the language of arts and soul conjoined.** That is correct. Cult and culture have the same root. The cathedral was built to glorify God. It will never be a museum. *Although it contains precious works of art, the cathedral as a whole will never be a museum.* **In a world tried by the pandemic, what is the message of this potential Resurrection of Notre-Dame?** Hope. We are living in a world deeply wounded by the tragedy of the epidemic. People are starting to surrender, many are tired and discouraged. Tensions are mounting and, in this context, hope is the only thing that helps us avoid a complete collapse. *All means must be sought to stop the spread of the virus. But this battle will be won only if we continue nurturing hope.*

M. Chiara Biagioni