

Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees

18 January 2015



Church Without Frontiers, Mother to All

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Jesus is “the evangelizer par excellence and the Gospel in person” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 209). His solicitude, particularly for the most vulnerable and marginalized, invites all of us to care for the frailest and to recognize his suffering countenance, especially in the victims of new forms of poverty and slavery. The Lord says: “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me” (Mt25:35-36). The mission of the church, herself a pilgrim in the world and the mother of all, is thus to love Jesus Christ, to adore and love him, particularly in the poorest and most abandoned; among these are certainly migrants and refugees, who are trying to escape difficult living conditions and dangers of every kind. For this reason, the theme for this year’s World Day of Migrants and Refugees is: *Church without frontiers, mother to all*.

The church opens her arms to welcome all people, without distinction or limits, in order to proclaim that “God is love” (1 Jn4:8,16). After his death and resurrection, Jesus entrusted to the disciples the mission of being his witnesses and proclaiming the Gospel of joy and mercy. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples left the Upper Room with courage and enthusiasm; the strength of the Holy Spirit overcame their doubts and uncertainties and enabled all to understand the disciples’ preaching in their own language. From the beginning, the church has been a mother with a heart open to the whole world, and has been without borders.

This mission has continued for two thousand years. But even in the first centuries, the missionary proclamation spoke of the universal motherhood of the church, which was then developed in the writings of the Fathers and taken up by the Second Vatican Council. The Council Fathers spoke of *Ecclesia Mater* to explain the church’s nature. She begets sons and daughters and “takes them in and embraces them with her love and in her heart” (*Lumen Gentium*, 14).

The church without frontiers, mother to all, spreads throughout the world a culture of acceptance and solidarity, in which no one is seen as useless, out of place or disposable.

When living out this motherhood effectively, the Christian community nourishes, guides and indicates the way, accompanying all with patience, and drawing close to them through prayer and works of mercy. Today this takes on a particular significance. In fact, in an age of such vast movements of migration, large numbers of people are leaving their homelands, with a suitcase full of fears and desires, to undertake a hopeful and dangerous trip in search of more humane living conditions. Often, however, such migration gives rise to suspicion and hostility, even in ecclesial communities, prior to any knowledge of the migrants' lives or their stories of persecution and destitution. In such cases, suspicion and prejudice conflict with the biblical commandment of welcoming with respect and solidarity the stranger in need.

On the other hand, we sense in our conscience the call to touch human misery, and to put into practice the commandment of love that Jesus left us when he identified himself with the stranger, with the one who suffers, with all the innocent victims of violence and exploitation. Because of the weakness of our nature, however, "we are tempted to be that kind of Christian who keeps the Lord's wounds at arm's length" (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 270). The courage born of faith, hope and love enables us to reduce the distances that separate us from human misery. Jesus Christ is always waiting to be recognized in migrants and refugees, in displaced persons and in exiles, and through them he calls us to share our resources, and occasionally to give up something of our acquired riches. Paul VI spoke of this when he said that "the more fortunate should renounce some of their rights so as to place their goods more generously at the service of others" (*Octogesima Adveniens*, 23).

The multicultural character of society today, for that matter, encourages the church to take on new commitments of solidarity, communion and evangelization. Migration movements, in fact, call us to deepen and strengthen the values needed to guarantee peaceful coexistence between persons and cultures. Achieving mere tolerance that respects diversity and ways of sharing between different backgrounds and cultures is not sufficient. This is precisely where the church contributes to overcoming frontiers and encouraging the "moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization ... towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world" (Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014).

Migration movements, however, are on such a scale that only a systematic and active cooperation between states and international organizations can be capable of regulating and managing such movements effectively. For migration affects everyone, not only because of the extent of the phenomenon, but also because of "the social, economic, political, cultural and religious problems it raises, and the dramatic challenges it poses to nations and the international community" (*Caritas in Veritate*, 62).

At the international level, frequent debates take place regarding the appropriateness, methods and required norms to deal with the phenomenon of migration. There are agencies and organizations on the international, national and local level which work strenuously to serve those seeking a better life through migration. Notwithstanding their generous and laudable

efforts, a more decisive and constructive action is required, one which relies on a universal network of cooperation, based on safeguarding the dignity and centrality of every human person. This will lead to greater effectiveness in the fight against the shameful and criminal trafficking of human beings, the violation of fundamental rights, and all forms of violence, oppression and enslavement.

Working together, however, requires reciprocity, joint-action, openness and trust, in the knowledge that “no country can singlehandedly face the difficulties associated with this phenomenon, which is now so widespread that it affects every continent in the twofold movement of immigration and emigration” (Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2014).

It is necessary to respond to the globalization of migration with the globalization of charity and cooperation, in such a way as to make the conditions of migrants more humane.

At the same time, greater efforts are needed to guarantee the easing of conditions, often brought about by war or famine, which compel whole peoples to leave their native countries. Solidarity with migrants and refugees must be accompanied by the courage and creativity necessary to develop, on a world-wide level, a more just and equitable financial and economic order, as well as an increasing commitment to peace, the indispensable condition for all authentic progress.

Dear migrants and refugees! *You have a special place in the heart of the church, and you help her to enlarge her heart and to manifest her motherhood towards the entire human family.* Do not lose your faith and hope! Let us think of the Holy Family during the flight in Egypt: Just as the maternal heart of the Blessed Virgin and the kind heart of Saint Joseph kept alive the confidence that God would never abandon them, so in you may the same hope in the Lord never be wanting. I entrust you to their protection and I cordially impart to all of you my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 3 September 2014

Franciscus