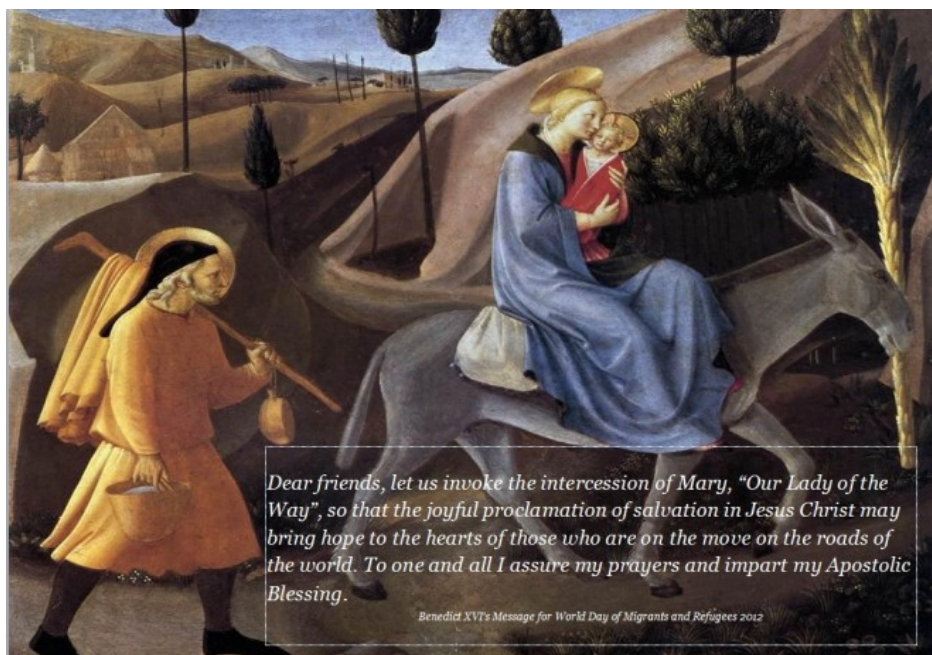


Message of Pope Benedict XVI for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees

Migration and the New Evangelization



Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Proclaiming Jesus Christ the one Saviour of the world “constitutes the essential mission of the Church. It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent” (Evangeliu Nuntiandi, 14). Indeed, today we feel the urgent need to give a fresh impetus and new approaches to the work of evangelization in a world in which the breaking down of frontiers and the new processes of globalization are bringing individuals and peoples even closer. This is both because of the development of the means of social communication and because of the frequency and ease with which individuals and groups can move about today. In this new situation we must reawaken in each one of us the enthusiasm and courage that motivated the first Christian communities to be undaunted heralds of the Gospel’s newness, making St Paul’s words resonate in our hearts: “For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” (1 Cor 9:16).

“Migration and the New Evangelization” is the theme I have chosen this year for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees, and it arises from the aforesaid situation. The present time, in fact, calls upon the Church to embark on a new evangelization also in the vast and complex phenomenon of human mobility. This calls for an intensification of her missionary activity both in the regions where the Gospel is proclaimed for the first time and in countries with a Christian tradition.

Blessed John Paul II invited us to “nourish ourselves with the word in order to be ‘servants of the word’ in the work of evangelization ... [in] a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and

demanding, in the context of ‘globalization’ and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures” (Novo Millennio Ineunte, 40). Internal or international migration, in fact, as an opening in search of better living conditions or to flee from the threat of persecution, war, violence, hunger or natural disasters, has led to an unprecedented mingling of individuals and peoples, with new problems not only from the human standpoint but also from ethical, religious and spiritual ones. The current and obvious consequences of secularization, the emergence of new sectarian movements, widespread insensitivity to the Christian faith and a marked tendency to fragmentation are obstacles to focusing on a unifying reference that would encourage the formation of “one family of brothers and sisters in societies that are becoming ever more multiethnic and intercultural, where also people of various religions are urged to take part in dialogue, so that a serene and fruitful coexistence with respect for legitimate differences may be found”, as I wrote in my Message last year for this World Day. Our time is marked by endeavours to efface God and the Church’s teaching from the horizon of life, while doubt, scepticism and indifference are creeping in, seeking to eliminate all the social and symbolic visibility of the Christian faith.

In this context migrants who have known and welcomed Christ are not infrequently constrained to consider him no longer relevant to their lives, to lose the meaning of their faith, no longer to recognize themselves as members of the Church, and often lead a life no longer marked by Christ and his Gospel. Having grown up among peoples characterized by their Christian faith they often emigrate to countries in which Christians are a minority or where the ancient tradition of faith, no longer a personal conviction or a community religion, has been reduced to a cultural fact. Here the Church is faced with the challenge of helping migrants keep their faith firm even when they are deprived of the cultural support that existed in their country of origin, and of identifying new pastoral approaches, as well as methods and expressions, for an ever vital reception of the Word of God. In some cases this is an opportunity to proclaim that, in Jesus Christ, humanity has been enabled to participate in the mystery of God and in his life of love. Humanity is also opened to a horizon of hope and peace, also through respectful dialogue and a tangible testimony of solidarity. In other cases there is the possibility of reawakening the dormant Christian conscience through a renewed proclamation of the Good News and a more consistent Christian life to enable people to rediscover the beauty of the encounter with Christ who calls Christians to holiness wherever they may be, even in a foreign land.

The phenomenon of migration today is also a providential opportunity for the proclamation of the Gospel in the contemporary world. Men and women from various regions of the earth who have not yet encountered Jesus Christ or know him only partially, ask to be received in countries with an ancient Christian tradition. It is necessary to find adequate ways for them to meet and to become acquainted with Jesus Christ and to experience the invaluable gift of salvation which, for everyone, is a source of “life in abundance” (cf. Jn 10:10); migrants themselves have a special role in this regard because they in turn can become “heralds of God’s word and witnesses to the Risen Jesus, the hope of the world” (Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 105).

Pastoral workers – priests, religious and lay people – play a crucial role in the demanding itinerary of the new evangelization in the context of migration. They work increasingly in a pluralist context: in communion with their Ordinaries, drawing on the Church’s Magisterium. I invite them to seek ways of fraternal sharing and respectful proclamation, overcoming opposition and nationalism. For their part, the Churches of origin, of transit and those that welcome the migration flows should find ways to increase their cooperation for the benefit both of those who depart and those who arrive, and, in any case, of those who, on their journey, stand in need of encountering the merciful face of Christ in the welcome given to one’s neighbour. To achieve a fruitful pastoral service of communion, it may be useful to update the traditional structures of care for migrants and refugees, by setting beside them models that respond better to the new situations in which different peoples and cultures interact with one another.

Asylum seekers, who fled from persecution, violence and situations that put their life at risk, stand in need of our understanding and welcome, of respect for their human dignity and rights, as well as awareness of their duties. Their suffering pleads with individual states and the international community to adopt attitudes of reciprocal acceptance, overcoming fears and avoiding forms of discrimination, and to make provisions for concrete solidarity also through appropriate structures for hospitality and resettlement programmes. All this entails mutual help between the suffering regions and those which, already for years, have accepted a large number of fleeing people, as well as a greater sharing of responsibilities among States.

The press and the other media have an important role in making known, correctly, objectively and honestly, the situation of those who have been forced to leave their homeland and their loved ones and want to start building a new life.

Christian communities are to pay special attention to migrant workers and their families by accompanying them with prayer, solidarity and Christian charity, by enhancing what is reciprocally enriching, as well as by fostering new political, economic and social planning that promotes respect for the dignity of every human person, the safeguarding of the family, access to dignified housing, to work and to welfare.

Priests, men and women religious, lay people, and most of all young men and women are to be sensitive in offering support to their many sisters and brothers who, having fled from violence, have to face new lifestyles and the difficulty of integration. The proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ will be a source of relief, hope and “full joy” (cf. Jn 15:11).

Lastly, I would like to mention the situation of numerous international students who are facing problems of integration, bureaucratic difficulties, hardship in the search for housing and welcoming structures. Christian communities are to be especially sensitive to the many young men and women who, precisely because of their youth, need reference points in addition to cultural growth, and have in their hearts a profound thirst for truth and the desire to encounter God. Universities of Christian inspiration are to be, in a special way, places of witness and of the spread of the new evangelization, seriously committed to contributing to social, cultural and human progress in the academic milieu. They are also to promote intercultural dialogue and enhance the contribution that international students can give. If these students meet authentic Gospel witnesses and examples of Christian life, it will encourage them to become agents of the new evangelization.

Dear friends, let us invoke the intercession of Mary, “Our Lady of the Way”, so that the joyful proclamation of salvation in Jesus Christ may bring hope to the hearts of those who are on the move on the roads of the world. To one and all I assure my prayers and impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 21 September 2011

BENEDICTUS PP. XVI

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Pope Benedict XVI