

## **Presentation of the Holy Father's Message for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees 2024**

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Each year the Holy Father offers a special message to celebrate the World Day of Migrants and Refugees. This year's celebration, the 110th, takes place on Sunday 29 September, and the theme is "God Walks with his People."

Pope Francis highlights the pilgrim nature of the Church. The people of God is always journeying towards the heavenly homeland. Hoping for heaven is real hope today, but it contrasts sharply with the desperate and perilous quest of so many for a place of survival, security and well-being.

The Church is now on its synodal journey, a kind of migration. The Holy Father opens his Message: "The emphasis placed on the synodal dimension permits the Church to rediscover its own pilgrim nature, as the People of God on the way through history, on a pilgrimage, 'migrating' as it were towards the Kingdom of Heaven."

The Church is on its way, like the people of Israel in the book of Exodus liberated from the land of bondage and thereupon free to seek the Promised Land. This long exodus from slavery to freedom takes a lifetime, and prefigures each one's path towards the kingdom of God.

The well-known Exodus story is instructive. For the people of Israel, both the push factor – forced labor, slavery, repression – and the pull factor – the Promised Land – were irresistible. Nothing could dissuade them from setting out on their hazardous journey.

Today, rather than rejecting and repressing those on the move, we should pay attention to the push and pull factors behind forced migration. If we experienced similar pressures, we would flee, too. So let's see the migrants as brothers and sisters, whether they are forced to flee, blocked from entering, or both. Their journeys of despair and hope could be ours. Further, as Pope Francis declares in his concluding Prayer, it is wrong to become selfishly possessive of our God-given corner of temporary earthly dwelling.

People on the move, the exiled and displaced, refugees and victims of trafficking, and many migrants, are cruelly tested by adversities. They can be tempted to lose hope. Yet, on the brink of despair, so many of them carry bibles and other religious items. They put their trust in the only real anchor of salvation – God who accompanies them on their journey. The fundamental meaning of the book of Exodus, and of every exodus, is that God precedes and accompanies his sons and daughters of every time and place who call on him.

This year's message says that the Lord is present in his people and in every vulnerable person on the move who knocks at the door of our heart and hopes to meet us, to meet God in us. Echoing the words of Jesus, "I was a stranger and you took me in" (Matthew 25:35), the Holy Father tells us that encounters with migrants are moments of divine revelation (theophany): "An encounter with a migrant, as with any brother and sister in need, is also an encounter with Christ. He himself has told us this."

Pope Francis concludes with an invitation to all to walk together: this is the shared journey, the "synodal" path. We have just one common home together, this unique planet, so each of us inevitably shares the paths of the migrants and refugees of our time. Welcoming the many wayfarers on earth is how we progress together on pilgrimage toward the heavenly homeland.