

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

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The two icons presented for our reflection are challenging. The first is a reminder of the synodal journey being undertaken by all the people of God walking together with their different vocations, charisms, cultures and ministries in service of the reign of God in our current world reality. This reminds us of the biblical journey, the Exodus, with all its challenges, difficulties and hardships until the people of Israel reached the promised land.

The second icon recalls another contemporary journey - that of migrants crossing challenging and hostile landscapes today. The statue in St. Peter's square shows us the pain and struggle of the journey of men, women and children as they strive to reach their own promised land. Some of the obstacles they face are geographic - deserts, seas, mountain ranges, extensive plains -while others are physical barriers erected by human hands - high walls, barbed wire fences and steel barriers. Still others are the barriers of rejection, hostility, xenophobia and even hatred.

These are our sisters and brothers in need of our help. They deserve our respect, acceptance and recognition. But that will only happen when we draw close and encounter them. At borders and frontiers they arrive with great expectation, despite the dangers and travails of the journey. They are fleeing wars, terrorism and conflicts, they have been exploited and excluded economically because of corrupt political and economic systems. Many have lost their homes and their livelihood as a result of climate change and environmental destruction.

The synod points again and again to the link between the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth and the need to urgently tackle the ecological crisis if we are to protect the lives of the most vulnerable and indeed confront the threat to the whole of humanity. Many migrants are young men and women seeking better educational opportunities. They come carrying the hopes of their families and extended communities for a better life. The synod urges us to hear their cries and to enable them "to determine their own means of growth." 4a.

We need to be there to welcome them and to help them in a multitude of small practical ways. All are traumatised in some way. Some are grieving deeply - I'm thinking in particular of mothers and fathers whose children have slipped from their grasp in rough and high seas and who are inconsolable at the loss of their sons and daughters or the many who have seen their family members and friends die along the way, overcome by the demands of the journey.

The synod reminds us that in meeting our migrant brother and sister we encounter "the face and the flesh of Christ, who though he was rich became poor for our sake that we might become rich through his poverty." (2 Cor 8:9). We need to meet these brothers and sisters of ours, to get to know them, to hear the story of their lives. They have direct knowledge of the suffering Christ and they call us to conversion, to a change of mind and heart. They have much to teach us and we have much to learn - this will only happen if we truly walk together and listen deeply and help them to realise their hopes and dreams, just as we hope to realise our own.

The synod calls for radical inclusion of those on the margins and peripheries and this applies particularly to these our sisters and brothers coming to seek a more fulfilling life. The synodal image of the tent reminds us to open spaces in our hearts and in our lives for encounter, for exchange and for deep listening. When we hear the story of the other person, we become responsible for him, for her and they in turn become responsible for us. This is the mutuality of participation, communion and mission which is at the heart of our synodal way of walking together, of living together. May we seek to have "the same mindas Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5) and in journeying together, find answers to each other's needs and understand in a new way the Gospel beatitude "Blessed are the poor in spirit." (Mt. 5:3).