

1988

Message

**I Entrust to Mary the Difficult Personal
Situation of Migrants**

For World Migrants' Day 1988

John Paul II

4 October 1988

Reverend Brothers,

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Dear Sons and Daughters

1. Once again, on the occasion of World Migrants' Day. I wish to direct my thoughts to all those who are in one way or another influenced by this phenomenon, which has assumed such a great importance in contemporary society. With the memories of the recently concluded Marian Year still warm within my heart. I wish to consider migrants in the light of Mary, who, "having entered deeply into the history of salvation, in a way unites in her person and re-echoes the most important doctrines of the faith" (Lumen Gentium, 65)

By the way she lived her human vicissitudes, the Blessed Virgin is indeed a point of [1145] reference for migrants and refugees. Her earthly life was marked by a continual pilgrimage from one place to another: going in haste to her cousin Elizabeth: travelling to Bethlehem for the census, where she gave birth to her son in a cave, since no other place was available: the trip to Jerusalem for the presentation of Jesus in the temple: following Jesus attentively and discreetly in his apostolic activities in Palestine; being present, coparticipating in suffering, on Mount Calvary.

Besides all this, Mary knew by personal experience the pains of exile in a foreign [1146] land. She was forced to do so by the impending threat on Jesus' life. "The Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said. 'Get up, take the child and his mother with you, and escape into Egypt . . . , because Herod intends to search for the child and do away with him'" (Mt 2:13). It was a sudden flight, done in the heart of the night, in dramatic circumstances. The tribulation and anguish that you migrants and refugees unfortunately know very well, was surely not absent on that occasion. The trauma of detachment from persons and things, leaving behind precious hopes, travelling through unknown places, the difficult search for shelter in a foreign land where everything is unfamiliar, the uncertainty of finding a job that would assure the means of subsistence, the air of suspicion, discrimination and rejection that the refugee often feels around him, the instability of situations which render uncertain any plan for his life or for his family's, particularly that of his children.

In the life of the Blessed Virgin, many aspects of our personal life seem to be

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anticipated and almost reflected, in the light of her experience, you can grasp the singular relationship between your experience and the history of salvation itself.

Migration a symbol of God's plan of salvation

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“The Second Vatican Council, as we know, makes an analogy between the Church, the travelling people of God, and the people of Israel wandering in the desert (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 9). But that journey had already started with God's command to Abraham, telling him to leave for an unknown land: “Leave your country your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you. So Abram went as Yahweh told him” (Gen 12:1). His going and his believing: obedience makes him the father of all believers. Following in the steps of Abraham, the Patriarchs set out, sustained by the hope of giving birth to a new people, the people of the Alliance. The Chosen People, in Exodus, follow their example, journeying towards the Promise Land.

With time, the language related to geographical movement has come to assume a spiritual significance: walking along the roads of the world is seen as a symbol of correct morality and the journey in faith, of the search for God.

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The Church, which takes pride in calling herself the new people of God, pilgrimaging through history, assumes and applies this meaning to herself and uses the same language. For St. Paul, Christians are exiles travelling towards their country. In their life, a new light is shed on the elements which played a part in the Exodus: the cloud, the passage through the sea, the water from the rock, the bronze serpent (1 Cor 10). St. Peter addresses Christians as its perseverance against difficulties, endurance against temptations and courage in the profession of the faith.

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From among all human experiences, God chose that of migration to symbolize his plan of salvation of man, within the limits of his transitoriness, and in order to understand him in his struggle towards definitive freedom.

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3. The figure of Mary is interwoven, so to speak, with the threads of the history of salvation. She summarizes in herself all the expectations and most mature dispositions of her people. She comes from a people and makes her commitments for a people. In this way, both the continuity of the alliance between God and men, as well as the novelty introduced by Christ, are shown. She belongs to the humble and the poor of the Lord who walk with faith towards him in order to be saved. “Mary –I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*— advanced in the pilgrimage of faith.

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The twofold bond which unites the Mother of God with Christ and with the Church takes on historical significance. Nor is it just a question of the Virgin Mother's life-story, of her personal journey of faith ...; it is also a question of the history of the whole people of God. Of all those who take part in the same pilgrimage of the People of God passes through arduous ways, the traces of which often become faint and uncertain, until they at times get lost in dark tunnels and oppressive situations which have no visible way out. Faith then remains the only guide, and prayer the

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only support. Such was the way of faith along which Mary travelled. She was told that, without knowing man, she would give birth to her son, Jesus, the Saviour of her people, heir of the throne of David, Son of the Most High. But such an assurance does not mean that her task will be an easy one, nor is it a safe conduct against adversities. On the contrary, those promises were the starting point of her journey in faith. In Bethlehem, there was no room for her son. Later on, it was revealed to her that the circumstances under which he is to fulfill his mission would be those of contradiction and incomprehension, and that in this destiny of suffering, she too will be involved: a sword will pierce her heart. Other painful steps mark her way: the flight to Egypt and the loss of Jesus at the temple. But sustained by her faith in the fulfillment of the Lord's promises, she lives all this trusting in, and in conformity to, the Lord's will. "As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Lk. 2:19).

4. The beatitude of Mary's faith achieves its full meaning at the foot of the Cross, where she, with a motherly spirit, joins the sacrifice of Jesus: The Blessed Virgin advanced in her pilgrimage of faith and faithfully persevered in her union with her Son unto the cross" (*Lumen Gentium*, 58). Here Jesus confirms Mary's function as a Mother who worries over her children, as she showed at the wedding feast in Cana. Here we find "the reflection and extension of her motherhood of the Son of God" (*Redemptoris Mater*, 24). Mary is presented as a point of reference for the Church and for individuals travelling in faith towards the Lord. For this reason she shines as "a sign of certain hope and comfort" to the Pilgrim People of God (*Lumen Gentium*, 68). [1154]

Therefore, dear migrants, have faith in her. Entrust to her all those sufferings inherent in your condition. Believed in the love of God for you, even when it is difficult to see or feel it in the events of your lives or in the behaviour of men. Always have recourse to Mary; have recourse to Mary with firm trust! And remember that this does not mean seeking understanding from her only in times of emergency, waiting to regain human security in order to seek comfort in it, almost blind to your higher destiny and indifferent to a union with God. On the contrary, having recourse to Mary and entrusting yourself to her means expanding your hope to such an extent that God may have space in which to enter and act. Mary is the first of a people who receives the Saviour. She knows that every evil, including sin, does not have the last say where man is concerned. She experienced the Cross, and she knows that it is possible to "stay on your feet", under it. For this reason, she sings the joy of those who have given God a place in their own lives. Proclaimed blessed because she believed in the realization of the promises of the Lord, she breaks into that song of exultation and joy that is the Magnificat, that wonderful profession of faith in the power of the faithful and merciful God. *The Magnificat* is the summary of the Gospel, of which it serves as an introduction. It is the good news proclaimed to the poor. Acting in the history of men, God opposes the conceit of the proud who marginalize the miserable, to the arrogance of the powerful who oppress the weak, and to the greed of the hoarder of riches who harms the poor. He intervenes to give courage to the unhappy, to comfort the humble and to fill the needy with goods. He is "the God of the humble, the help of the oppressed, the support of the weak, the refuge of the forsaken, the saviour of the despairing" (Jn 9:11). [1155]

5. Besides, Mary symbolizes all people who believe and are pilgrims among the vicissitudes of this world. In her, too, the whole community proclaims the reality of the Kingdom of God and shows its dynamic strength. Because of this, her song becomes a prophecy. What took place in her will come about in all those who believe in the coming of the Kingdom of God. In today's world, the proud, the powerful and the rich still have the better of the weak and the poor who suffer in misery and marginalization. The commitment to change this situation completely to fit the logic of the Gospel constitutes a true ethical programme for believers. [1156]

Yet, God's promise cannot be fulfilled as a salvific event without man's cooperation. It is not enough merely to believe in the good cause of migrants. It is necessary to do something seriously in its defence and support. [1157]

This plan of action has multiple implications, from what is personal and interior to what is collective and even structural, Today's experience rather tells us that structures have a great importance in mankind's pilgrimage towards fullness. In my recent *Encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, I defined as "structures of sin" all those negative factors that operate against common good, obstruct mankind's way towards its development, and humiliate the dignity of the human person. Removing them forms part of the permanent conversion of Christians. "In the Magnificat, Mary appears to be the model of those who do not passively accept the adverse circumstances of personal and social life, nor are victims of alienation, as it is called today, but proclaim with her that God exalts the humble, and, if necessary, puts down the mighty from their thrones". I said this on 30 January 1979 at the Shrine of Zapopan in Mexico. And in the previously mentioned *Encyclical Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, I added: "Mary's maternal solicitude extends to all personal and social aspects of the life of men on earth" (n. 49). Mary, who intones her song to the Lord, becomes an extraordinary model for mankind today. She commits all men of good will engage in this task of overcoming situations of sin "Drawing from Mary's heart, from the depth of her faith expressed in the words of the Magnificat, the Church renews ever more effectively in herself the awareness that the truth about God, who is the source of every gift, cannot be separated from the manifestation of his love and preference for the poor and humble" *Redemptoris Mater*, 37). [1158]

Welcome migrants and refugees [1159]

6. I wish to entrust the difficult personal situation of many marginalized persons to Mary, so that by interceding with her Son, she may obtain comfort and help for them. I entrust to her the difficult international situation, whose lack of economic and social balance forces a lot of people to look for better conditions of life abroad. A peculiar aspect of migration today consists in "the millions of refugees who have been deprived of their home, work, family and country by means of war, natural calamities, and all types of persecution and discrimination" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 24). I am inviting everyone to reflect on, and be actively engaged in, removing the root causes of the uprooting of many millions of people from their lands of origin; may everyone practise Christian welcome towards migrant, and refugees, as an efficacious fulfillment of the Liturgical prayer: "O Father, you sent your Son to share in our labour and our hopes, you placed in him the centre of life and of history. Look with goodness at those who, for reasons of work, migrate along the roads of the world, so that everywhere they may find that fraternal

solidarity which is freedom, peace and justice in your love” (Collect of the Mass of Migrants).

To all of you, reverend brothers and dearest children, my greetings and blessings in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

From the Vatican, 4 October of the year 1988, Tenth of the Pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

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