

1989

Message

**Because of Migration, People Who Had No Heard the  
Good News, Learned About the Faith and  
Often Appreciated and Embraced It**

*For World Migrants' Day 1989*

*John Paul II*

10 September 1989

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

[1160]

1. The annual World of Migrants Day gives me the opportunity to address you once again and to invite you to reflect on one of the many aspects of this phenomenon. In the light of faith, aided by that of reason, migration is not only a sad event because of the suffering and humiliation which are involved, but it is also an important human reality which can and must be understood within the context of the history of salvation. While, in fact, it reminds the Church of her nature as a pilgrim people on earth in search of the Future City (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium* n. 9), migration can also help her in fulfilling her mandate from the Lord to announce the Good News to all creatures (Cfr. Mt 28, 18-20). This similarity between the experience of migrants and the vocation of the Church should persuade us therefore to consider the specific contribution which migrants, because of their particular condition, are called to give to the diffusion of the Kingdom of God in the world.

2. All believers, whatever their age, social condition or cultural level may be, must share in the commitment to build the Kingdom of God: "You go and work in my vineyard too" (Mt. 20, 4). Their involvement is realized under the two-fold form of prayer and action. Whoever really believes and feels involved in the work of the transformation of the world according to God's plan does not limit himself to praying in the words of Jesus: "Your Kingdom come," but in consequence of the sincerity of this prayer, feels it is his duty to actively promote those values which pertain to it. [1161]

Many migrants have played an important role in this mission right from the very beginning. Migrants were the first missionaries who supported the work of the apostles in the regions of Judea and Samaria. Migration, has always served as a vehicle for transmitting the faith throughout the history of the Church and in the evangelization of whole countries. Often, flourishing Christian communities started out as small colonies of migrants which, under the leadership of a priest, met in humble buildings to hear the Word of God and to beg Him for courage to face the trials and sacrifices of their difficult life. [1162]

3. The contribution that migrants can offer even today to the work of the expansion of the Kingdom of God varies according to the places, times and conditions of the [1163]

society that receives them.

Today, many Catholic migrants work in countries where the seed of the Gospel was [1164] sown a long time ago. It is obvious that testimony to the faith is made within the framework of the pastoral plan of the local Church. In order to achieve this, pastoral agents should, first of all, insist on the catechesis of adults, which favours Christian formation and a growth in the faith of the migrants; on active participation in the celebration of the Sacraments starting with baptism; on formation in prayer of the migrant community as a whole; on a coherent commitment to giving testimony to love. These are the necessary means by which migrants build communion in diversity and collaborate effectively in the work of salvation.

There are also countries wherein the Catholic community consists almost [1165] exclusively of migrants. They should remember that they are not alone, because they form part of the Universal Church, and, though her, are united to Catholics of every continent and nation. I would therefore like to exhort particular Churches of the migrants' countries of origin to offer concrete evidence of this ecclesial unity, by sending among them well-prepared priests, willing to be "a migrant among migrants" in order to be able to help them.

With regard to those countries where the majority belong to other churches or [1166] Christian denominations, while I am happy that the presence of migrant Catholics has contributed to more serene reciprocal understanding and consequently, to the ecumenical movement, I would like to express the wish that this process continue till we achieve full communion.

4. Because of migration, people who have not heard the Christian message have [1167] learnt about, appreciated and often embraced the faith, thanks to the testimony of their own people who emigrated to Christian countries, and who, after having received the Gospel, on their return, have become apostles in their country of origin.

This phenomenon is assuming ever vaster proportions. It is important therefore that [1168] migrants who are not Christians are offered clear witness of the love of God in Christ. The welcome given to these people should be so hearty and disinterested that it brings them to reflect on the Christian religion and the reason of such exemplary charity, thus, helping the Church fulfill its duty to make known to all people the riches of "the mystery hidden for ages in the mind of God" (Eph 3,9; Cfr. 3,4-12), in which they can find the fullness of the transcendental truth for which they seek. (Cfr. Acts 17, 27)

5. Technico-economic development, mutual relations between citizens and nations, [1169] ever increasing interdependence, the search for new economic horizons, the desire for greater union in the human family and the growth of the mass media have opened up wider horizons and introduced new forms of progress. Besides, collaboration realized in the field of scientific research even among people in developing countries, and the foundation of numerous cultural institutes offer many young students an opportunity to frequent foreign universities.

Modern human mobility which promotes reciprocal knowledge and international collaboration is working towards unity and the consolidation of fraternal relations between peoples ensuring a two-way traffic in development. Within the framework of these more frequent and profound relationships, people are discovering new perspectives opening up in precisely that field of their commitment: the constitution of a society capable of applying the principles of interdependence and solidarity in working toward the solution of serious international problems. [1170]

This new perspective which is consoling even for migrants is in agreement with the spirit of the Gospel whose message, based on its moral values, knows no bounds. [1171]

6. The advantages and positive results obtained, mentioned above, should not make us forget the aspects of suffering, of insecurity which characterize even today and maybe even more drastically than in the past – migration undertaken for different motives including economic motives. Several nations tend to close their boundaries. The countries of destination are rigidly structured and stratified, leaving little space where the migrant can find an opening other than the most humble, tiresome and least-paid jobs. In this situation, they, even when they succeed in solving their economic problems, always remain poor in terms of welcome, of rights, of security and of openings for social and professional advancement for themselves and for their children. This situation has immediate consequences in the search for a job, for housing and for access to higher education. [1172]

This is a situation which the believer, strong in his sense of justice and his duty of solidarity, rejects and opposes. He does this in a Christian spirit without indulging in violence and hatred. He remembers that, just as there is no person who is useless because all, made in the image of God, participate in the life of Christ, so also there is no suffering which is useless because the son of God has made suffering a means of redemption and of life. One can combat in justice by suffering for justice. The building up of a civilization of love, where the migrant, too, must offer his contribution, is founded on constant and patient effort in the face of evil; “It is better, in fact, if God so wills it, to suffer for doing good rather than for doing evil” (1 Pt 3, 17). Migrants can, in this way, offer testimony to the cross of Christ which has assumed up in itself all human pain and has conferred on it a redemptive value. [1173]

7. Another important aspect concerning the testimony of migrants to the Kingdom of God emerges from their condition: they develop trust in superior values as a necessary perspective in viewing human life whatever be the condition of the individual. Migrants usually look for work in rich countries. Their *raison d’être* is not always compatible with their material prosperity. By bearing testimony to their faith, migrants can draw attention to the transcendental dimension of human life thus channelling the aspirations of the community principally towards those goods in which humanity finds its full justification. [1174]

The sensitive Christian, when he moves in a rich and varied world such as that which faces the migrant, is offered ways and means of spreading this very evangelical message. His efforts will be successful in the measure by which they are effected in communion with that sacrament of unity with God which is the Church of Jesus Christ. (Cfr. *Lumen Gentium* n. 1) The evangelical apostolate that [1175]

he accomplishes will be all the more fruitful in proportion to vitality of his links with the Church.

8. Dear migrants, always be aware that God loves you. He wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (Cfr. 1 Tim 2,4); to be aware of Christ's work of redemption, merited by his sacrifice offered for all people without distinction of race or religion; to be aware of the universal brotherhood of men by which all are called to cooperate in finding solutions for the immense and difficult problems which face the human family. [1176]

May Mary, who was the first to receive the Word of God and who is the image of the Church and mother of our faith, bring you to the full knowledge of God. She is the model after whom all of us should measure the authenticity of our Christian life. "At the basis of what the church has been from the beginning, and of what she must continually become from generation to generation, ... we find Mary" (Redemptoris Mater n. 27). [1177]

Invoking her protection on all migrants and their families, I impart to all my cordial Apostolic Blessing. [1178]

Given in the Vatican on the 10th September in the year 1989, eleventh of our Pontificate.

**John Paul II**

---

Source: *The Holy Father's Message for World Migrants Day 1989. "Because of Migration, People who had no heard the Good News, Learned about the Faith and Often Appreciated and Embraced it."* OR-EE (October 30, 1989): 8.

---