

1991

Message

Love is the Most Powerful Force in Society

For World Migration Day 1991

John Paul II

21 August 1991

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

[1234]

1. Migration is more and more becoming a massive movement which involves the five continents and almost all countries. It is situated in and combined with a very broad tendency which cuts across the entire world community. In addition to migration for economic reasons, considered as a relocation of the workforce, we see the development of an intense, vast interchange of persons who migrate to undertake a journey of human advancement, thus bringing about a type of osmosis in cultural, social and political values. In this message for World Migration Day, I especially want to reflect on the meaning and on the ethnical and religious implications of this new fact, which is an event of social growth and unity for the human family.

2. The reasons for this transformation are almost all positive signs. Among these I would like to mention the broadening of social relations at the level of individual persons and groups, greater protection afforded to foreigners by civil authorities a greater availability of free time, more widespread prosperity, the efficiency and speed of the communications media, the development and improvement of transportation. I cannot fail to mention a higher level of education, a greater interest in the culture of other peoples, Love is the Most Powerful Force in Society a heightened sense of solidarity with the human family and greater efforts at uniting it, not to mention the greater awareness of the human person's dignity and his inalienable rights, and a keener sense of responsibility in the face of international problems.

With its characteristic attractiveness the spread of prosperity has, on the one hand, caused the greatest streams of migrants from developing countries but, on the other hand, it has motivated ever larger groups in the industrialized countries to seek new forms of employment and more agreeable patterns of life beyond the borders of their own nations. Thus we have the creation of an extensive network of international cooperation in which the activities of government workers, scientists, merchants, technicians, businessmen, educators and media personnel are combined. There is a similar development of international organizations and cultural institutes which offer young people especially opportunities for many educational trips to universities in various countries.

The Church looks kindly and favourably upon this growing movement of people not only because she sees in it her own image, that of pilgrim people, but especially because she considers it a significant impulse towards the unification of many

[1237]

cultures and a fact of universal fraternity.

3. Migration always has two aspects: diversity and universality. The former comes from the meeting between diverse individuals and groups of people, and involves inevitable tension, latent rejection and open polemics; the latter is constituted by the harmonious meeting of diverse social subjects who discover themselves in the patrimony that is common to every human being, formed as it is by the values of humanity and fraternity. Thus there is mutual enrichment when diverse cultures come into contact. Under the first aspect migration accentuates the divisions and difficulties in the host society'; under the second it makes a striking contribution to the unity of the human family and to universal happiness. The dream of unifying the human family has always been a part of man's history and his progress has been marked by many efforts to attain that objective. However, it is a question of attempts which did not fully respect the cultural differences of individuals and peoples. [1238]

It should not be forgotten that cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity is part of the natural order of creation and that, as such, it cannot be eliminated. Thus the human family's road to unity will have as its criterion of authenticity respect for and the development of the part played by multiple differences. [1239]

4. This multi-ethnic and multi-cultural structure was ruined at the dawn of human history by the sin of Babel. Against the background of this sin, cultural and linguistic differences cease to be a gift of God but become a source of misunderstanding and conflict; differences become rigid divisions rather than variety and enrichment in unity. Since, however, ethnic and linguistic diversity is part of the order of creation. God has begun a process of restoration within the context of his saving plan. Migration enters into this divine plan as an element of doubtless significance, it bears within itself the effort of meeting the Lord and other individuals. This is the journey on which Abraham set out when he was called to emigrate immediately after the dispersion caused by Babel, and it has its endpoint in Jesus, in Christ this journey has its complete fulfillment through the mystery of the Redemption. "I came from the Father and have come into the world. Now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father" (Jn 16:28). [1240]

On Pentecost, then, the legitimacy of ethnic and cultural pluralism was restored. The apostles, standing in front of representatives from "every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem", "began to speak in different tongues as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim" and "each one heard them speaking in his own language" (Acts 2:4-6). Linguistic diversity, the manifestation of ethnic and cultural difference, is no longer a source of confusion and opposition but, because all men are called to form one people of God in one Holy Spirit, it becomes an instrument of unity and communion in multiplicity. [1241]

5. The Pentecost event determines a true ethic of encounter which must prevail in the construction of the new humanity begun by Pentecost itself. Every person must have his dignity recognized and his cultural identity respected. This principle finds its individual and specific application in the area of migration. The migrant is to be considered not merely as an instrument of production but as a subject endowed with full human dignity. His status as a migrant cannot threaten his right to be fulfilled as a person, and the host society has the precise duty of helping him in that regard. [1242]

“Human work, by its nature, is meant to unite peoples, not divide them” (Centesimus annus, n.27). The migrant, even when he is a single individual, cannot be disassociated from the people to whom he belongs, but should rather be seen within the context of his own cultural identity. In him the nation in which he has his roots is to be respected, since it is a community of people, joined by various ties, by a language and especially a culture, which constitutes the horizon of life and integral progress. In regard to migrants, it is necessary to formulate a true statute which, by recognizing every natural right, will assure them of legitimate room for the social and cultural growth which is indispensable for their human and professional fulfillment.

In this context, we should emphasize the attention to be given the poor and the marginalized, frequently the ones who emigrate. In its effort to grow, society cannot be insensitive to those who, because of their weak social position, tend to remain on the fringe; rather, it must involve and assimilate them. “It will be necessary above all to abandon a mentality I which the poor – as individuals and as peoples – are considered a burden, as irksome intruders trying to consume what others have produced... The advancement of the poor constitutes a great opportunity for the moral, cultural and even economic growth of all humanity (Centesimus annus, n.28). [1243]

6. Besides, however, restoring legitimacy to plurality in diversity, Pentecost introduces a specifically Christian element: the unity of peoples through faith in the one Christ, who came “to gather into one the dispersed children of God” (Jn 11:52). In the perspective of salvation, Christ is not simply one way among many, but an obligatory route: “I am the way... and no one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). “Christ died for all and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal Mystery” (Gaudium et spes, 22). [1244]

All men are loved by God and potentially saved by Christ; therefore they are equally worthy of being respected, loved, served, protected, because there is no discrimination in the face of the supreme criterion by which people must be evaluated, that is, in their relationship with God and their brothers and sisters. If this relationship is forgotten or denied people can claim apparently valid reasons to justify all kinds of discrimination and to compromise the fundamental basis of human fraternity. “The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person’s dignity and responsibility” (Centesimus annus, n.13). The collapse of material walls must be a sign of the collapse of spiritual ones. [1245]

Migration, which promotes mutual knowledge and universal collaboration, attests to and brings about the unity of the human family and confirms the relationship of fraternity among peoples. The hearts of people unified in the Father will be the new heavens and the new earth which will come to pass in the final age. [1246]

The solution to the problem of the human person on the move will take place when hearts are dominated by the firm conviction that all people are brothers and sisters and that love is the most powerful force for transforming individuals and society. [1247]

7. “Nothing is impossible for God” (Lk 1:37). The Christian knows that in the work of renewing humanity the Lord acts powerfully. He trusts him as did the Mother of the Redeemer, who was called blessed because she believed in the fulfillment of the divine promise. In the pattern of the Virgin Mary’s life the Church understands herself and can continue on her apostolic journey. She looks to Mary as a shining example and powerful support in times of trial, aware of her own mission in the world, that of being “a sign and instrument... of communion with God and of unity among all men” (Lumen gentium, n.1). May Our lady lead the Christian people towards a renewed fidelity to Christ; may she support them in their missionary task so that everywhere they may proclaim Jesus as the one true “salvation” and that “through him we... have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). [1248]

With these wishes I impart my Apostolic Blessing to all those who are involved in the vast field of migration: in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. [1249]

From the Vatican, 21 August 1991, the thirteenth year of my Pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP II

Source: *Papal Message for World Migration Day “Love is the Most Powerful Force in Society.”*, OR-EE (September 16, 1991): 1, 2.
