

1993

Message

Problems of the Migrant Family

For World Migration Day 1993-94
John Paul II

10 August 1994

Dear Brothers and Sisters, [1272]

1. The phenomenon of migration involves a considerable part of humanity, forced for various reasons to leave their loved ones, homes and traditions in search of a better future. In our day, it has assumed a complex and unheard-of character, giving rise to new problems making the difficulties typical of those affected even more acute.

Migrants require specific pastoral attention on the part of the ecclesial community, [1273] which is not only sensitive to their personal suffering but also to the negative repercussions which their difficult living conditions can have, especially on their own families. The phenomenon of migration has in fact a considerable effect on the family nucleus.

On the occasion of the next world Migration Day and in the context of the [1274] International Year of the Family, I would like to ask those who at all levels are concerned with promoting the authentic well-being of the family, to consider carefully the problems of the immigrant family, precisely in the light of the particular difficulties which it faces today, sometimes tragically.

It is certainly a positive factor that in most countries the migrant's right to live with [1275] his or her own family is recognized, and that many international institutions have reaffirmed this, stressing its relevance and value. Nevertheless it must be remarked that recognition of this right is often hindered by obstacles of various kinds that sometimes prevent it from being exercised.

Taking into account their particular needs, the State's task is to ensure that [1276] immigrant families do not lack what if ordinarily guarantees its own citizens. In particular, it is the State's duty to protect them from any attempt at marginalization or racism, promoting a culture of convinced and active solidarity. For this purpose it provides the most appropriate and concrete measures for their acceptance, together with those social services likely to foster for them too, a peaceful life and a development that respects their human dignity.

All kinds of discrimination should be avoided [1277]

2. Believers are called in a special way to cooperate in this work of high civil and spiritual value. It is a particularly demanding and delicate commitment which, even before long-term social and financial provisions, implies creating an atmosphere which is fostered by a spirit of solidarity and service. Migrants do not only need

“things”: they seek brotherly and effective understanding above all. Being at their service requires us to be tuned in to their natural and legitimate anxiety for liberation, supporting their aspiration to new and improved opportunities of life.

As the Second Vatican Council teaches, “All kinds of discrimination in wages and working conditions should be avoided in regard to workers who come from other countries or areas and contribute their work to the economic development of a people or a region. Furthermore, no one, especially public authorities, should treat them simply as mere tools of production, but as persons; they should facilitate them in having their families with them...” (Gaudium et spes, n.66). [1278]

The problems linked in various ways to the phenomenon of migration should be faced in this perspective, especially those related to housing, work, security, as well as to differences in language, culture and education. [1279]

Raising children should be inspired by faith [1280]

3. The ecclesial communities should therefore find in the common profession of faith yet another reason to welcome the Christian families of migrants, recognizing their responsibility for their spiritual welfare. Let them remember however, that “it is not possible to fulfill effectively this pastoral care if the spiritual patrimony and the special culture of the migrants is not taken into account” (Paul VI, *Motu proprio Pastoralis migratorum cura*).

Therefore, this pastoral care should be considered in the light of the principles of utilization and discernment that govern the relationship between the one faith and different cultures. “The families of migrants..., should be able to find a homeland everywhere in the Church. This is a task stemming from the nature of the Church, as being the sign of unity in diversity” (*Familiaris consortio*, n.77). [1281]

This will happen more easily if the pastoral care of migrants is able to make use of the contribution of the various ethnic communities, avoiding the risk of giving life to a “marginalized” pastoral care for “the marginalized”. [1282]

This is why the Bishop are anxious to from ethnic or linguistic communities, creating personal parishes or missions for the care of souls where, in their judgment, advantageous pastoral conditions or opportunities exist (cf. *Pastoralis migratorum cura*, n. 33, 1-2). [1283]

Integration into the receiving community is certainly a natural and desirable process for migrants; however prudence insists that it should not be hurried. A specific pastoral programme for them, safeguarding the respect due to their different cultural identities and specific spiritual heritage, serves to guarantee their legitimate links with their homeland as they gradually become a part of society. [1284]

4. Being concerned that this occurs harmoniously means working for the well-being of the family, which should be helped to esteem the values on which it is based, above all safeguarding its unity and fostering communion within it. For this end one must strive to create among its members a climate of devotion and seriousness, of morality and prayer, of constant listening to the word of the Lord, of the daily exercise of virtue, of assiduous participation in the sacraments and trusting [1285]

adherence to God's will.

In the context of emigration, bringing up children also remains a point of fundamental importance for a healthy approach to family life. In the light of the Church's teaching, pastoral care will help migrants not to get involved in work activities detrimental to those values on which the true peace and happiness of the family and its spiritual progress depend. [1286]

Furthermore, due attention should be paid to mixed marriages and to those with a dispensation from disparity of cult, encouraged and facilitated by today's phenomenon of migration as well as by the modern climate of easy cultural exchange among peoples. [1287]

Young people should not underestimate the role which faith is called to play in the process of spiritual and emotional integration which, by its nature, is the goal of every marriage. [1288]

The Church is a home and family for everyone [1289]

The conscious and prudent celebration of a mixed marriage requires knowledge of the basic elements which define the features of both the one and the other Church or ecclesial community, of what unites them and what distinguishes them. When possible prejudices have been overcome, both parties will contribute their own human and ecclesial sensitivity to the marriage, with the intention of enriching their common life and the very upbringing of their children, which should always be inspired by faith. The Catholic spouse is committed to cultivating these duties in accordance with the Church to which they belong (cf. Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism, nn. 150-151).

5. Today there is considerable increase in the number of marriages between Catholics and members of non-Christian religions. The respect due to such religious experiences on the basis of the principles indicated by the Declaration Nostra Aetate of the Second Vatican Council, should never obscure the fact that "in these marriages there is a need for Episcopal Conferences and for individual Bishops to ensure that there are proper pastoral safeguards for the faith of the Catholic partner and for the free exercise of his faith, above all in regard to his duty to do all in his power to ensure the Catholic Baptism and education of the children of the marriage. Likewise the Catholic must be assisted in every possible way to offer within his family a genuine witness to the Catholic faith and to Catholic life" (Familiaris consortio, n.78). This duty is more compelling and urgent whenever the Catholic party has to follow the non-Christian party to a country where the predominant religion makes its own influence felt throughout the social fabric, limiting in fact, every opportunity for the freedom to profess other faiths. [1290]

6. Dear migrant brother and sisters! It is to you above all that I now turn my thoughts with affection: to you who live far from your family, forced to spend a long time alone, uprooted from your family and social background. The Lord is near you! [1291]

May the Christian community, through the spirit of acceptance which animates it, [1292]

make you concretely feel that “no one is without a family in this world: the Church is a home and a family for everyone, especially those who ‘labour and are heavy laden’” (Familiaris consortio, n.85).

May the home of Nazareth, also tried by poverty, persecution and exile, be a shining example for your families. Forced by the danger which threatened the Redeemer’s life, the Holy Family experienced an unexpected flight, in dramatic conditions, harassed with anxieties and worries well known to you by direct experience. [1293]

May the Family of Nazareth help you. Jesus supports you in your effort to be faithful to your Christian vocation and serenely to accept God’s will. May St. Joseph, a “just man” and a tireless worker, enlighten and guide you. May Mary, Mother of the Church, also be a caring mother to those “domestic Churches” that are your families: may she watch over you, your efforts and your hopes; may she help you to follow the Christian way with courage, dignity and faith. [1294]

With these sentiments and hopes, I renew the expression of my heartfelt solidarity towards you all, confirmed by a special Apostolic Blessing. [1295]

From the Vatican, 6 August 1993, the Feast of the Transfiguration of the Lord, the 15th year of my Pontificate.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

Source: *Message of Pope John Paul II for World Migration Day 1993-94*
“*Problems of the Migrant Family.*” OR-EE (November 29, 1993): 4.
