

1994

Message

May You Reach the Goals You Have Chosen

For World Migration Day 1995

John Paul II

10 August 1994

Dear Brothers

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1. The International Year of the Woman, proclaimed by the United Nations - an initiative which the Church cordially welcomes - has persuaded me to assume as the theme of the Message for next World Migration Day that of the woman involved in the migrant phenomenon. The increasing ground she is gaining in the world of work has resulted ever greater involvement in problems associated with migration. The extent of this involvement varies considerably within the different countries, but the overall number of migrating women tends to equal that of men.

This has echoes of great relevance on the female world. One thinks first and foremost of the women who are experiencing the heartbreak of having left their own family behind in their native country. This is often the immediate consequence of laws that delay or even refuse to recognize the right to family reunion. While one can understand a temporary delay in the reunion of families in order to favour their subsequent, better acceptance, one must reject the attitude of those who refuse it almost as though it were a claim with no juridical basis. On this subject the teaching of the Second Vatican Council is explicit: "that in emigration regulations family life [should be] perfectly safeguarded" (Apostolicam actuositatem, n. 11).

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Then how can we possibly overlook that, in the case of emigration, a large part of the burden of the family often falls on the woman? For their own members the most sophisticated societies, which mostly attract the flows of migrants, have already created an atmosphere where both spouses often feel obliged to work. Those who come among them as migrants are even more subject to this fate. They have to submit to a great pressure of work in order to provide for the family's daily sustenance so as to achieve the goals for which they left their native country. Such a situation generally imposes the heaviest tasks on the woman who in fact, is forced to do a double and an even more demanding job when there are children to care for.

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2. Particular pastoral attention must be given to unmarried women, who are increasingly more numerous within the migratory phenomenon. Their condition demands from those in charge not only solidarity and acceptance, but also protection and defence from abuse and exploitation.

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The Church recognizes that everyone has "the right to leave [their] native land for various motives ... in order to seek better conditions of life in another country" (Laborem exercens, n. 23). Nevertheless, while she declares that "the more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner

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in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2241), she does not deny public authorities the right to control and limit the flow of migrants when for the common good serious and objective reasons exist which affect the migrants’ own interests.

Public authorities cannot forget the many and often grave reasons that force so many women to leave their native land. Their decision is not only based on the need for greater opportunities; they are frequently driven by the need to flee cultural, social or religious conflicts, inveterate traditions of exploitation, unjust or discriminatory laws, to give only a few examples. [1301]

3. As is well known it is unfortunate that regular migration has always been accompanied, like an umbra, by that which is irregular. A growing phenomenon, with negative aspects which conspicuously affect women in particular. Not infrequently elements of degeneration, such as the drug trade and the scourge of prostitution, filter in through the streams of clandestine immigration. [1302]

In this respect, proper vigilance should also be exercised in the countries of origin, since, profiting from the limited lawful emigration channels, unreliable organizations force young women onto the ways of clandestine emigration, enticing them with the prospects of success not without previously despoiling them of their hard-earned savings. The fate many of them face is well-known and sad: turned back at the frontier they are often dragged into the dishonour of prostitution, despite themselves. [1303]

The concerted action of the Governments concerned to identify and penalize those responsible for such offences to human dignity of this kind is essential. [1304]

4. The recent phenomenon of a more widespread presence of women emigrants thus requires a change of perspective in the formulation of the relevant policies, and there emerges the urgent need to guarantee women equal treatment, both with regard to remuneration as well as to working conditions and security. Thus it will be easier to obviate the tendency to discriminate against migrants in general which might nevertheless continue to target women. It is also necessary to set up means to facilitate women’s integration and cultural and professional training as well as a fair share of the social benefits such as the provision of housing, schooling for children and adequate tax reductions. [1305]

5.1 now address a pressing invitation to the Christian communities which migrants are joining. By a cordial and fraternal welcome they witness by deeds even more than words, that “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 a sign of unity in diversity” (Familiaris consortio, n. 77). [1306]

My affectionate wishes are addressed in a special way to you women, who courageously face your condition as emigrants. [1307]

I am thinking of you, mothers, who struggle with daily problems, sustained by love for your dear ones. I am thinking of you, young women, who are on your way to a new country, eager to improve your condition and that of your families by [1308]

alleviating their financial difficulties. May you be supported by the assurance of leading your life in contexts where greater material, spiritual and cultural resources enable you to implement your choices of life with greater freedom and responsibility.

My wish, accompanied by constant prayer, is that in carrying out the difficult and delicate role which falls to you, you may attain the just goals you have set yourselves. The Church is close to you with the care and support that you need. [1309]

I am thinking of you, Christian women, who in emigration can do a great service to the cause of evangelization. Continue with courage and trust what love and the sense of responsibility suggest to you, to acquire ever greater wisdom about your vocation as wives and mothers. [1310]

When you are entrusted with the task of looking after children in the families for whom you work, without forcing and in complete harmony of intention with the parents, make the most of the great opportunity that is given you to help the religious formation of these children. The common priesthood, rooted in baptism, is expressed in you in the typical endowments of femininity, such as the capacity to serve life with a commitment which is deep, unconditional, and above all, inspired by love. [1311]

6. The history of salvation reminds us how divine Providence acted within the unpredictable and mysterious interactions of peoples, religions, cultures and different races. Among the many examples offered by the Bible, I like to recall one in particular which centres on the figure of a woman. It is the story of Ruth, the Moabite, the wife of an Israelite who emigrated to the country of Moab, because of the famine afflicting Israel. After she was widowed, she decided to go and live in Bethlehem, her husband's native city. To her mother-in-law, Naomi, who urged her to go back to her own mother in the land of Moab, she replied: "Do not ask me to abandon or forsake you! for wherever you go I go, wherever you lodge I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Wherever you die I will die, and there be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17). Thus Ruth followed Naomi to Bethlehem, where she became the wife of Boaz, from whose descendants David was born and later Jesus. [1312]

In this perspective the words the Lord addressed to his people exiled in Babylon, through the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, are very appropriate and meaningful. "Build houses to dwell in; plant gardens, and eat their fruits. Take wives and beget sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters. There you must increase in number, not decrease. Promote the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you; pray for it to the Lord, for upon its welfare depends your own" (Jer. 29:5-7). This is an invitation addressed to people full of nostalgia for their own native land, to which they were bound by memories of people and family events. [1313]

May Mary who, supported by faith in the fulfillment of the Lord's promises, was always careful to interpret events in the light of the fulfillment of the Lord's word, accompany and enlighten your journey as emigrant women, mothers and wives. [1314]

May she, who in her pilgrimage of faith also experienced exile, fortify in you the [1315]

desire for good, sustain your hope and strengthen you in love. Entrusting your commitments and hopes to the Mother of God, the Virgin of the wayside, I bless you with all my heart, together with your families and all those who are working to promote a respectful and fraternal welcome for you.

From the Vatican, 10 August 1994, the sixteenth year of my Pontificate.

Joannes Paulus II

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